New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes
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In this European Year of People with Disabilities, a year in which the world spotlight will fall on Ireland as host to the Special Olympics, the publication of this report is timely. While there have been many improvements in special education over the years, we are far from having a special education system of which we could be proud. Special education is indeed in crisis. Official policy which promotes increased inclusion and integration could grind to a halt in the near future without a serious indepth review of policy and practice. However, it is also a time of great change, challenge and opportunity. In the first place, the publication of a new Disability Education Bill is imminent. Secondly, the first steps have been taken towards establishing a National Council for Special Education as an agency as allowed for in the Education Act 1998. This Council will have both research and executive functions. Thirdly, a curriculum for special education – focusing on the needs of pupils with general learning disabilities – is now in schools in draft form. It will be revised in the light of experience and feedback, following a consultation process.

Teachers would agree that in determining special education provision for pupils with special educational needs, the focus must be on the pupil. Pupils should not have to fit into a system, rather the system must adapt to meet the children's needs. However, to date special education provision – whether in special schools or in mainstream schools – has depended too much on the goodwill, commitment and enthusiasm of teachers to do their best for the pupils in their care.

The lack of co-ordination of special education, the difficulties associated with accessing clinical and other support services, the extra administrative responsibilities associated with providing education for pupils with special needs and the particular challenges in special schools given the changing nature of special education provision, are some of the issues that need to be addressed, if educational provision for pupils with special needs is to improve. In addition, the appalling lack of professional development opportunities for teachers in special education – including teachers in special schools, in special classes and in mainstream classes – is a matter of concern.

This report is presented in two parts. A discussion paper on The Role of the Special School, which is presented in part one, arose from a concern raised by teachers in special schools about the future of such schools in the context of the Government's policy on integration or inclusion. The views of members in special schools were sought, following a notice in Intouch inviting submissions on the relevant issues. This part of the report, therefore, is the compilation of these submissions with the inclusion of additional points.
and comments arising from subsequent consultations. A list of submissions received is outlined in Appendix I.

Part two of the report consists of the proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Special Education, which was held in Newbridge in March 2002. The Organization is very grateful to Professor Sheelagh Drudy of the National University of Ireland, Dublin, who chaired the government’s Task Force on Autism, for her keynote address, which is included in this publication. I would also like to thank those who gave presentations in the discussion groups during the conference. Some of these presentations have also been included. I wish to take this opportunity to record the Organization’s appreciation of Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official/Education who guided and directed the publication of this report with the support of Claire Garvey and Ann McConnell.

It is appropriate that all the parties concerned should engage in real and meaningful planning for the future of special education provision in Ireland. The publication of this report is part of the INTO’s contribution to that process.

John Carr
General Secretary
March 2003
Part II

The Role of the Special School

DISCUSSION PAPER

The number of special schools in Ireland has increased steadily since the early 1960s, and has now reached a total of 122, as shown in the Graph below.

Figure 1 Increase in Number of Special Schools, 1963 – 1998

Most special schools cater for pupils of a particular disability group, although some cater for pupils with different disabilities. Even within particular disability groups, schools are not homogenous.

Some special schools are part of a multi-service corporation; others are attached to and run by religious orders; and some are independent, run on the same basis as national schools. This has implications for the availability of funding and support services.

Enrolment patterns in special schools have changed in recent years, with a greater number of children presenting with a variety of secondary disabilities or with multi-
New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes

ple disabilities. It is not uncommon to find children with speech and language difficulties, hearing or vision difficulties, or children in the autistic spectrum, enrolled in special schools for pupils with general learning disabilities. The client population of special schools today includes pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. New aetiologies that are associated with socio-economic status, education levels, access to healthcare, nutrition, living conditions, and access to preventative care and health information, are being included in the general category of disability. Some special schools feel they are obliged to diversify their intake of pupils without adequate planning, consultation, or discussion regarding the implications for their schools.

Recent court cases (specifically, the O’Hanlon and Barr judgements) highlight the educational neglect of children with certain disabilities: namely, children with severe and profound disabilities and children with autism. Special schools have for many years sought to provide an appropriate education for children with special needs, often with little recognition or support. Such recent judgements have also contributed to the changed clientele in special schools creating additional challenges for the teachers.

Many special schools feel uncertain about their future. There is a high level of support for the current policy of facilitating and encouraging integration. It needs to be noted, however, that many teachers in special schools are of the view that there is also a role for special schools as part of the continuum of special education provision. This view has been supported by the INTO in Accommodating Difference (1993), by the Special Education Review Committee Report (1993), and in the White Paper on Education Charting Our Education Future (1995).

Teachers in special schools often feel that parents are not made fully aware of the benefits that special schools can offer. They also maintain that research on international experience does not conclusively support mainstreaming of the majority of pupils with special needs. Yet, mainstreaming continues to be supported by the Department of Education and Science. Given both the research and the high quality of work carried out in special schools, it is of great concern that some special schools feel that, because their future is uncertain, the Department of Education and Science is reluctant to invest in new special schools. On the other hand, the Department of Education and Science has invested in the construction of new school buildings and renovations in some existing special schools. There is, however, a need to define the rationale for special schools and to outline the role they should play in the education of pupils with special needs.

The Structure of Special Education

One of the greatest difficulties experienced by special schools is the total lack of co-ordination of special education provision. No central authority appears to have responsibility for continuous planning for, and evaluation of, their needs within special
education. Schools making legitimate requests for necessary resources experience delay in receiving responses from the Department of Education and Science. The establishment of a central authority to plan for and to evaluate provision for special educational needs is urgently required. The Department of Education's Inspectorate, along with the principals of special schools, are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the special education system works at local level. This creates additional burdens on the professionals at school level, who operate without a cohesive back-up support system. Provision for the professional development of teachers is inadequate. There is a need for a more systematic approach to the delivery of special education services at local level. At present, there is no mechanism for parents to access all information regarding provision in their locality. A child or family may, at different times, come to the notice of the Department of Education and Science, their health board, the ISPCC, the Gardaí/JLO, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, or the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. A lack of co-ordination between Departments and agencies may result in children ‘falling between stools’ and not receiving the services that they need. Lack of a formal structure of co-ordination between the education and health services also causes major headaches for special schools. Health boards vary from region to region in their provision of health-related support services to special schools. Special schools that are not linked to a voluntary agency depend entirely on health boards for the provision of such support services as speech therapy, physiotherapy, and access to psychiatric and psychological services. In many cases, the services available are not adequate. The proposals in the ‘Cromien Report’ (Department of Education and Science 2000) to establish a National Council for Special Education and to appoint special needs organisers (SNOs) on a regional basis, if implemented effectively, will go a long way towards meeting the needs for co-ordination and structuring of special education provision.

All special schools operate under the Rules for National Schools. Accordingly, they have boards of management, which are responsible for the management of the school on behalf of the patron. While most national schools are under the patronage of local bishops, this is not the case for all special schools. Many schools are attached to voluntary organizations, which are usually the patron body. Voluntary organizations receive most of their funding from the state and operate under a voluntary structure. Special schools under the patronage of such organizations often benefit from the support service available under the auspices of the voluntary organization. However, tensions sometimes arise from the different management cultures associated with voluntary organizations where education is not the primary focus of that organization.

In the interests of maintaining good relations with management authorities the INTO meets with the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE), which is the representative body for those boards of management involved in special education. The INTO raises with NABMSE issues pertaining
to the implementation of national agreements involving teachers, which are negotiated between the INTO, the Department of Education and Science, and management authorities. Recent agreements include the arrangements for appointing teachers to posts of responsibility and procedures to deal with complaints and grievances within the school.

**Referral to Special Education**

There is a need for the referral, assessment, advisory, and placement/enrolment procedures for children with special needs to be revised. It is current practice that children are usually assessed by a psychologist. The psychologist then makes a recommendation regarding enrolment and placement in a school, often without any further assessment by other appropriate professionals taking place. This situation is unsatisfactory, as psychologists are not always aware of school contexts that might affect the educational progress of a child. Where clinical psychologists assess pupils, recommendations are not always made regarding the suitability of educational programmes.

Teachers feel frustrated that they do not have a role at referral stages, as they believe their input would play a valuable part in ensuring that placements are appropriate to the child’s educational needs. Another important factor in the referral process is the need to ensure that parents are aware of all the options available for their child. It may also be appropriate to involve other professionals at referral stage or at case conferences. Multidisciplinary assessment prior to referral to a special school was recommended in the 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap' (1965) in order to provide diagnostic, assessment and advisory services. The White Paper on Education Charting Our Education Future also stressed the importance of multidisciplinary consultations, to review the educational provision for each student (1995:23). The Report of the Planning Group on A National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (1998) also recognised the need for a holistic approach to the assessment of pupils, and recommended that psychologists in NEPS co-ordinate their provision with other psychological and related services in the health sector. A multidisciplinary assessment and referral team would be in a better position to provide a detailed description of a pupil’s educational and related needs, with recommendations as to how best to meet these needs. Personnel with interactive sign language skills would be required where pupils with hearing impairment are concerned. At present, however, there is no mechanism for ensuring that the resources and facilities required to meet the needs of the pupils are available locally. This indicates that there is a need for local co-ordination of provision for pupils with special needs.

The administration of the referral process requires reconsideration. While officially, referrals need to be sanctioned in June for a child to be allocated a place for the following September, some special schools report that it is normal for enrolments to
arrive throughout the first term. This situation can have a negative effect on the administrative life of special schools and is disruptive to both teachers and pupils.

Special schools are now expected to cater for pupils with special needs above and beyond the category that the school was set up to deal with. Because of a lack of trained personnel and resources, these schools are consequently not in a position to provide an appropriate education for those pupils. In these circumstances, schools are becoming increasingly concerned about their capacity to meet their obligations under the Education Act 1998, to provide an appropriate education for students under their care.

- that multidisciplinary teams be involved in referring pupils for special education;
- that teachers play a key role as members of multidisciplinary referral team and that appropriate professional development and training be available to them in order to enable them to fulfill this role;
- that the administration of the referral process be reviewed with a view to ensuring the timely enrolment of all pupils;
- that a code of practice for dealing with challenging behaviour be agreed.

A Continuum of Provision

Arising from the increase in the number of pupils with special needs being integrated to mainstream schools, and the appointment of resource teachers for special needs to mainstream schools, many special schools have been approached by mainstream schools for support on such issues as resources, materials, and teaching methods. While teachers in special schools are willing to support their colleagues in mainstream schools, it is becoming very difficult to meet the demand for this support as it exists under the current informal arrangements. The absence of any recognition of the role of special schools as a resource for mainstream schools is also problematic. The recommendation in the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) report that special schools could become a resource, training, and support school in their catchment areas has not been progressed. The recommendations in the SERC Report, could, if properly implemented, enhance the status, viability and professionalism of the special school. However, if special schools were to become resource schools in their areas, full consultation would have to take place with the teachers in these schools, as the work involved would constitute a major change in their current roles – a change that may not be welcomed by all staff.

Current enrolment regulations do not facilitate dual enrolment or part enrolment in special schools and mainstream schools. Some schools have managed to work out a local solution to enable some pupils who are enrolled in a special school to spend some time in a mainstream school. In other situations, pupils attending mainstream schools
are facilitated by spending some time in special schools. However, if a continuum of provision is to be a reality for pupils for special needs, procedures for dual enrolment and part enrolment need to be put in place. The implications of flexible enrolment on matters such as insurance and school transport need to be addressed. Pupils who are unlikely to benefit from full integration would, therefore, be in a position to integrate partially with their peers in mainstream schools, while availing of the educational programmes and supports they require in a special school setting.

Teachers in special schools perceive that teachers in mainstream schools are often unaware of the work of teachers in the special school. Little opportunity exists for teachers from mainstream schools to visit special schools. Teachers in special schools, consequently, often feel isolated in the profession. Some teachers in special schools also feel isolated within the INTO, because of their perception that the Organization focuses largely on the needs of teachers in mainstream primary education. If links between special and mainstream schools are to develop, funding, training, and appropriate administrative support need to be put in place.

- that discussions take place with the staff of special schools regarding their potential role as a resource centre for special education;
- that procedures be put in place to facilitate dual enrolment and part enrolment for pupils with special educational needs;
- that the staffing, resource and transport implications of dual or part-enrolment would not disadvantage schools that opt to participate in such schemes;
- that steps be taken by the Organization to increase the level of awareness among teachers in mainstream schools of the work of teachers in special schools.

**Curriculum**

Special schools provide for the personal, social, educational, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of their pupils. Access to appropriate curriculum is a core issue. Curriculum guidelines based on the general characteristics of each disability group are required. The current work of the NCCA in developing curriculum guidelines is welcomed.

Teachers in special schools recognise the need to develop programmes that address the educational needs of individual children with special needs. A variety of names for such programmes are used by teachers, such as individual education programmes, individualised education programmes, individual priority programmes. Such programmes are prepared by the class teacher, as they consider appropriate, and based on their own experience, but in consultation with others. Teachers in special schools support the need to address the individual educational needs of their pupils. However,
in the light of the recommendation in recent Court judgements that Individual Education Plans (IEPs) be introduced for specific pupils, it is extremely important that a precise definition of such plans – relevant to the Irish context – be developed. The role of other professionals in contributing to the development and implementation of individual education plans also needs to be clarified. Advice, training and support will also be required in order to maximise the effectiveness of such plans. The implications for schools that do not have access to the support of other professionals would need to be addressed in situations where the schools are expected to develop IEPs that involve the provision of support from other professionals. If education plans were to be introduced as a result of recent court cases and/or legislation, training for teachers in developing such plans would also be required. However, the appropriateness or otherwise of introducing a formalised concept of IEPs needs to be fully discussed. In the absence of debate on the matter, the tendency of courts to be directing the future direction of special education is worrying. It is the view of the INTO that it is the failure of the Department of Education and Science to address issues pertaining to special education in the past that has brought this situation about.

Many teachers in special schools are being pressurised into quasi-nursing and care roles – feeding, dressing, toileting, and dispensing medication. The precise role of the teacher and the boundaries of that role need to be examined in the context of providing educational programmes for pupils with special needs. In many cases, nurses and care-workers are required to complement the work of teachers in special education settings.

There is a shortage of inspectors available to provide advice to special schools. The Inspectorate appear to be occupied with operational issues, such as resources and provision, leaving them with little time for advising schools on curriculum and related matters. There is a need for additional inspectors with expertise in the area of special education to be available to provide support for special schools. It is noted, however, that many experienced special education teachers are not eligible to apply for posts in the Inspectorate as they do not hold the Irish Language qualification. Nevertheless, the rich experience of the teachers within special education is an under-utilised resource at present.

- that the Curriculum Guidelines for Special Education be circulated to all schools, and to all teachers in special schools as soon as possible;
- that pupils in special schools would have access as of right to appropriate mainstream curriculum and examinations;
- that full consultation take place with teachers in special schools regarding individual education plans;
- that appropriate support personnel be available in schools in order to assist in the planning and implementation of the curriculum;
that additional inspectors with expertise in special education be made available to provide support for special schools.

Early Childhood Education

At present, some 4% of children in special schools are aged between three and five. The White Paper on Early Childhood Education acknowledges the benefit of early childhood education for all children, though particularly for children with special needs. As stated in the White Paper, there is a possibility that quality early childhood educational interventions may prevent additional problems, particularly for children with severe disabilities in whom the development of language, communication and social skills are affected. For children identified with special needs, there needs to be link-up between postnatal service, health boards, social services and education. It is estimated that 4% of an age cohort will require special education. The White Paper states that quality, intensive, and clearly articulated programmes, delivered by highly skilled and carefully trained personnel in contexts of small group and individual instruction, is required for intervention to be effective. This statement creates a challenge for resourcing and for pre-service and in-service education of teachers and other personnel working in the field of early childhood education.

At present, the Visiting Teacher Service for Special Needs provides a service to preschool children with Down Syndrome, visual or hearing impairment. Very little, in terms of advice and support, is available to parents of preschool children with other disabilities. Some agencies involved in special education provide a preschool service for children with special needs. Children with special needs are also welcome in the Early Start project. However, provision is far from comprehensive. Consideration may need to be given to setting up designated centres for pre-school provision for children with special needs - centres which could also provide opportunities to parents to interact with each other and the community.

- that the Visiting Teacher Service for Special Needs be extended to include a service for all preschool children who have been identified as having a special need;
- that special preschool facilities be established for all children with special needs;
- that such preschools operate under the DES.

Post-primary Education

Most special schools cater for children from age 3/4 to 18. The number of children aged twelve or older in special schools has increased steadily, so that it is now the case that almost 60% of pupils in special schools fit this age profile, as illustrated in the Graph below.
It is a measure of the success of special schools that the majority of pupils remain in school until their eighteenth birthday. In recent years, the curriculum in the post-primary sector has broadened extensively and accreditation is being introduced. These and other changes in special education at post-primary level have led to an increased administrative workload. There is a great emphasis on non-academic subject areas such as crafts, housework, woodwork, metalwork, and sports. Some special schools are offering certification courses to pupils of post-primary age, where pupils are in a position to benefit from such courses. The Junior Certificate Schools' Programme, modules from regular Junior Certificate programmes, Leaving Certificate Applied and NCVA courses are available to some extent in many schools. Special schools also offer pre-vocational and work experience programmes. In many cases, these courses are taught by primary qualified teachers, though post-primary qualified teachers are eligible to be appointed in special schools that offer post-primary school programmes. Some pupils of post-primary age may have been integrated at primary level, but moved to special schools where their local post-primary school did not have suitable provision for their needs.

The current arrangements for the provision of specialist subject teaching, such as Home Economics or Woodwork, are unsatisfactory, according to many schools. The Department of Education and Science needs to be more flexible and more responsive to the special needs of children. To enable special schools to work towards certification at an appropriate level for each pupil, provision and availability of part-time subject teachers would need to be addressed. Co-operation with mainstream post-primary schools could be considered in this context. An important issue in this context is the provision of resources and equipment to facilitate the teaching of such subjects in special schools.
Some special schools ensure that their senior pupils are identified as post-primary pupils. In some cases, senior pupils are separated physically from junior pupils. In other cases, different uniform arrangements may apply. The differentiation between primary and post-primary pupils is important, according to teachers, for the self-esteem of the pupils who are aware that their peers in mainstream post-primary schools are treated differently to primary pupils. Issues that remain contentious include, the length of the school year and of the school day for post-primary age pupils and the provision of an additional deputy principal in special schools catering for children of post-primary school age.

**Recommendations**

- that specialist subject teachers be appointed in special schools, on a fulltime basis, where numbers warrant such a post;
- that arrangements for the allocation of a number of specialist hours for special schools be improved;
- that resources and facilities for the teaching of such subjects as Home Economics, Woodwork, Art, etc. be provided;
- that appropriate inservice and professional development opportunities be provided for these teachers.

**Transition to Adult Living**

Special schools also have a responsibility to prepare pupils for transition to the adult world of work. A formal transition framework needs to form part of the curriculum in special schools. This framework would prepare pupils and their families for the adult world and aid the integration of the pupil into their own community. The Bridge Project, which was piloted by four voluntary agencies and funded through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, successfully outlined a framework that could serve as a model for a transition programme in special schools.

Senior pupils in special schools are involved in a variety of transition programmes, locally organised, which involve work experience. At present, class teachers and principals are finding it increasingly difficult to organise their class commitments while also ensuring the smooth running of this valuable aspect of the pupils' education. Consideration would need to be given to the appointment of a liaison person or co-ordinator with responsibility for transition programmes. This has become particularly important since the break-up of the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) as there is an element of confusion in relation to roles of the different agencies such as FÁS, Comhairle, Department of Health and Children.
The Role of the Special School

- that a liaison person be appointed to all special schools, either on a full-time or shared basis, in order to facilitate the organization and co-ordination of transition programmes;
- that a resource teacher be appointed to work on Life Skills and Independent Living programmes.

The Principal Teacher

Principal teachers in special schools are of the view that the extent of their current workload, the complexity of their role, and the level of pastoral care they provide are underestimated by the Department of Education and Science and not reflected in their remuneration.

Many special schools believe that the abolition of the 'points system' for the determination of posts of responsibility and principals' allowances, has put special schools at a disadvantage. The 'points system' favoured special schools, as a majority of pupils were of post-primary school age, and were, therefore, given a higher points rating. The revised system is based on the number of teachers in a school. As the number of staff can be more than double the number of teachers in special schools, the revised system is perceived to militate against special schools. It has created a situation where the remuneration of the principal teacher does not reflect the complexity of the role in the special school system. Non-teaching members of staff are not taken into account when determining the allowances of the principal teacher or deputy principal teacher. The management of a wide range of different professionals clearly places a large responsibility on principals. It must be noted, however, that there is also an increase of non-teaching staff in mainstream schools, due to the integration of pupils with special needs. Under Section 23 of the Education Act, the principal teacher is responsible for the guidance and direction of teachers and other staff and shall provide leadership to the teachers and other staff. It may, therefore, be time to move away from relating the principal and deputy principal teachers' allowance to the number of teachers in the school towards relating it to the number of staff.

The principal teacher in a special school has a major role in co-ordinating provision of special education at local level. They are charged with forward planning for additional resources and facilities. Their management role extends beyond their role as instructional leaders, given the diverse nature of personnel working in special schools. Special school principal teachers also need to be constantly updated on developments and new programmes in special needs education in order to be able to offer the best service to the pupils in the school. They need skills in participating in, and leading, multidisciplinary teams. The system does not currently respond adequately to the professional development needs of principal teachers in special schools.

The role of the teaching principal in special schools needs to be reconsidered.
The duty of the teaching principal to carry out his or her administrative and other non-teaching duties is difficult to reconcile with the duty of providing full-time education to the pupils in the care of the school. Whereas an administrative principal is appointed when there are four or more class teachers, there needs to be flexibility in order to cater for the specific needs of schools that may arise. In addition, principal teachers need the support of high quality clerical/administrative/secretarial staff to enable them to carry out their leadership role effectively.

- that due to the increased number of ancillary staff in schools, particularly in special schools, the issue of principal and deputy principal allowances be reviewed with a view to considering the total number of employees in a school;
- that professional development opportunities, appropriate to their needs, be provided for all principal teachers of special schools;
- that release time for teaching principals in special schools must be increased with a view towards ensuring that no principal of a special school should have teaching duties;
- that an administrative deputy principal be appointed to schools with large numbers of teaching and ancillary staff;
- that highly qualified administrative/secretarial support be available in all special schools.

**Teachers and pupils**

The total number of pupils attending special schools has fallen in recent years, as shown in the Graph below.

*Figure 3* Number of Students in Special Schools, 1963 to 1998
In addition, the gender profile of children in special schools shows an increasing proportion of male students being enrolled.

Table 1  **Gender of Students in Special Schools, 1980 – 1998**

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Male</strong></td>
<td>4788</td>
<td>5013</td>
<td>4965</td>
<td>4645</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Male as % of Total</td>
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<td>59.0%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female as % of Total</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional statistical information is available in Appendix 2.

The nature of the pupil intake of many special schools is changing, as a greater number of parents opt for integration into mainstream or choose to enrol their child in a special school regardless of the disability group traditionally served by the school. The profile of pupils attending special schools is therefore quite diverse. The pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) in special schools needs to be adjusted in recognition of this fact. The current PTR is outlined in Appendix 3. Additional teachers are required in special schools to cater for the diverse, multiple disabled profile of children attending.

A significant number of pupils from disadvantaged, socio-economic backgrounds are enrolled in special schools. However, no special school is designated as disadvantaged, and therefore special schools do not receive additional resources to meet the needs of their disadvantaged students. At present, for example, special schools are not entitled to the services of a Home-School-Community-Liaison (HSCL) teacher. Many special schools are of the view that they would benefit from the services of a HSCL teacher in order to enhance the support they are able to offer to parents. Many special schools offer support to parents, who, in many cases, find it difficult to cope with having a child with disabilities. Some schools are able to avail of health board social work departments for home liaison, though the service provided is inadequate in meeting the needs of teachers and of the school.

It is also of concern to teachers that an increasing number of pupils with serious disabilities—many with behavioural difficulties—are enrolling in special schools. There is a corresponding increase in concern regarding health and safety issues, in many cases involving teachers in additional supervision duties. This is a source of strain and dissatisfaction in many schools. In some schools, teachers may need to be trained in 'restraint techniques', but they also require support from additional personnel who are trained in 'restraint techniques' when the need to use 'restraint techniques' arises.

- that the PTR in special schools and classes be further reduced;
- that a HSCL co-ordinator be appointed to special schools as appropriate;
that courses in challenging behaviour be provided for both teachers and special needs assistants where required;

that enhanced grants be made to boards of management to provide for extra substitution/supervision.

**Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)**

The increase in the number of special needs assistants available to both special and mainstream schools has been welcomed. However, this increase also brings new challenges and responsibilities. In some cases SNAs are appointed to work with individual children; in other cases they are appointed to work in classrooms, or to take on responsibilities throughout the school. Some SNAs also serve as bus escorts. Where bus escorts also have classroom responsibilities, it can be frustrating trying to meet the demands of the two roles. According to teachers in special schools, special needs assistants are required in most classrooms, in the light of a changing and more complex pupil cohort.

It can be difficult for teachers who have traditionally worked in isolation to adapt to working with other adults in the classroom. Teachers often find too that they are involved in training SNAs, as many have no relevant training. It is of concern that no qualifications, other than the Junior Certificate or its equivalent, are required for appointment as a SNA. This has implications for schools in relation to providing training for SNAs. As many SNAs are trained on the job, this burden often falls on the class teachers and the principal teachers. This extra responsibility is not recognised by the system. Without training in relation to their role, many schools will not benefit fully from the provision of SNAs.

Teachers may also have a management function, in that SNAs based in classrooms work under the direction of the class teacher. In many cases, teachers have no input in the selection of the SNA who will work in their classroom. The provision of inservice for teachers in support of their role in working with SNAs is needed. Opportunities for the continuing professional development of the SNAs are also a necessity.

- that SNAs be appointed to all classes in special schools, as required;
- that appropriate training be provided for all SNAs pertaining to their role in the school and taking into account the various categories of disability;
- that inservice be provided to teachers regarding their role in working with SNAs;
- that appropriate qualifications for appointment as an SNA be introduced.

**Multi-Disciplinary Teams**

Many special schools work side-by-side with medical/paramedical personnel in hospitals, clinics and care centres. In other cases, schools need to access therapy services
The Role of the Spedol School

from other providers. The Education Act (1998) specifically includes psychological and speech and language therapy as part of the support services that schools may offer. Many schools currently liaise and work closely with a range of personnel, such as psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and nurses. Working with multi-disciplinary teams creates additional challenges for teachers in special schools. However, teachers and special needs assistants are employed under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science (DES), whereas therapists and other support workers are employed under the auspices of the Department of Health and Children (DOHC). This may at times create such difficulties as arranging timetables and schedules, though schools try to ensure that the children avail of therapy and medical needs within the school context and that their educational needs are to the fore.

Working with other personnel is an important aspect of teachers’ work in special schools. There is no doubt, however, that there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach between support provided by the Department of Education and Science, and support provided through the auspices of the health boards. It may, perhaps, be more appropriate that support services be provided directly by the Department of Education and Science.

- that all necessary support services be provided, as of right, by the DES;
- that inservice be provided to teachers regarding their role in working with multidisciplinary teams.

Professional Development

Teachers in special schools need to have comprehensive information and an understanding of the educational and related needs of children with different disabilities. In addition, teachers need to be familiar with assessment procedures, appropriate to the children for whom they are responsible. Skills in developing and implementing individual programmes and in working in multidisciplinary teams are also required. Special needs assistants (SNAs) also need access to inservice opportunities and professional development. Courses in various aspects of special education need to be continuously available for all teachers. Dealing with challenging behaviour and working with multidisciplinary teams are two areas that have been identified as priority areas for inservice.

Many teachers have expressed dissatisfaction that the Diploma in Special Education is only available in Dublin on a fulltime basis. Many teachers wish to avail of higher level qualifications in the area of special education, but they are not in a position to move to Dublin for an academic year. The diploma, which attracts an additional
allowance, needs to become more accessible for teachers throughout the country. The development of a modular approach and the delivery of the course through the Education Centre network could be considered. The current Diploma has also been criticised for not meeting the needs of all teachers in special education. For example, the needs of teachers of pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities and of pupils with autism have had to be met separately. In addition, teachers who availed of the Special Education Diploma many years ago feel the need to upgrade their qualifications and skills in the area of special education. There is also an anomaly in the system where those teachers who have undertaken a Diploma in Special Needs Education in UCD do not qualify for an additional allowance. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in the context of a review of teachers’ qualification allowances.

The recruitment of suitably qualified staff is an ongoing problem for special schools. Working in special schools is perceived to be difficult and this is reflected in the small numbers applying for posts. It is also difficult to recruit substitute teachers as many teachers who have no experience and little information regarding special schools are hesitant to accept substitute work. The fact that the Department of Education and Science will recognise the qualifications of certain Montessori trained teachers, (St. Nicholas Diploma/Degree, AMI 3-year diploma) for appointment in special schools, but will not recognise these qualifications for mainstream teaching, creates an impression that lesser qualifications are required for teaching in special schools.

- that the Special Education Diploma be available, in a variety of centres throughout the country;
- that accreditation of qualifications not currently recognised by the DES (such as those provided by the Open University and UCD) be pursued;
- that a modular and distance learning approach to accessing the Diploma be implemented;
- that the Diploma be reviewed with a view to developing a generic module in special education, which would be followed by modules in various specialisms, such as Autism, Speech and Language, Severe and Profound Learning Disabilities, Young Offenders;
- that appropriate funding and resources, including substitution, be put in place to facilitate the professional development of teachers of children with special needs.

**Funding and Resources**

Many anomalies exist in the funding of special schools. Some schools benefit from Section 65 of the Health Act, where health boards provide funding to schools in recognition of services of a health nature provided in the schools. Amounts of funding provided vary between health board areas and within health board areas.
Some special schools also experience difficulty regarding the provision of school furniture, though this issue is often resolved through the co-operation of their local inspector. Primary school furniture to which they are entitled is not appropriate for the older pupils in the school. This situation arises as special schools are administered by the primary section of the Department of Education and Science.

**The Recommendations**

- that the provision of funding and resources for special schools be co-ordinated centrally, in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of funds;
- that age appropriate resources and equipment be provided to special schools.

**Transport**

Many schools have also expressed dissatisfaction with transport provision. For example, seats on school buses are allocated on the basis of three pupils per two seats. Given that more than half of the pupils currently enrolled in special schools are aged 12 or older, this situation is far from satisfactory for older pupils. The provision of bus escorts on school buses for pupils with special needs is vital for the safety and welfare of the pupils, as is the provision of harnesses where required. Schools have welcomed recent improvements in such provision. However, management issues pertaining to the escort service remain unresolved. Some principals of special schools are also unhappy that they are drawn in to discipline issues on school buses. (See also Appendix 4.)

**The Recommendations**

- that age appropriate transport provision be available to all special schools;
- that safety harnesses and equipment be made compulsory;
- that appropriate training be provided for escorts.

**Autism**

Pupils with autism, or within the autistic spectrum, should not be disadvantaged by their attendance at a special school. According to teachers in special schools, current supports for children with autism tend to focus on supporting children attending mainstream schools. Special supports are also required for such children attending special schools. In many cases, such children require one-to-one attention. This is not reflected in current staffing ratios. The INTO has published a separate report on educational provision for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
The Extension of the School Year

Recent court judgements regarding the need for a continuum of care and education for children with special needs will undoubtedly lead to significant changes in the provision of special education. This matter is of great concern to staff currently employed at special schools, as well as to staff at mainstream schools in which children with special needs are enrolled. Many special schools describe the issue of the extension of the school year as being their main area of concern.

A wide range of views on this issue exists. There is widespread recognition of the right of children for a continuum of care, just as there is also recognition that children in special schools are entitled to the same summer holidays as other children. Many parents of children with severe and profound learning disabilities are seeking an extension of the school year. Many special schools point out that, while the delivery of a summer programme is an issue of serious consequence for teachers’ conditions of employment, many other matters require consideration before such a programme could be delivered. These include issues such as:

- capitation grants,
- provision and induction of suitably-qualified staff,
- transport arrangements, and
- funding for the full range of services required (e.g., caretaking, secretarial, maintenance, etc.).

While some special schools believe that this service should be provided on a voluntary basis, others are of the view that it should not take place at all, because they feel that the provision of a summer programme in one school puts pressure on other schools to follow suit. There is also a view that summer programmes should not come under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science, and that they should not take place in schools. This issue is considered further in the INTO Report on Educational Provision for Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Conclusion

The Report of the Review Body on Special Education is now eight years old. The focus, since its publication in 1993, has been on the implementation of its recommendations. However, it may be time for another radical review of special education, in the light of recent court judgements regarding the provision of special education. The context in which the SERC recommendations were made has changed, and many of the recommendations made at that time may no longer be appropriate.

Special schools are experiencing particular difficulties at present in recruiting teachers. It is totally unacceptable that personnel without teaching qualifications are employed in teaching positions for our most vulnerable population, children with special needs. The difficulties young teachers experience in finding affordable
accommodation is leaving many special schools in urban areas with vacancies unfilled.

Recent court judgements, together with increasing integration of children into mainstream schools, are changing the role of special schools within the Irish education system. Nevertheless, it is clear that special schools are currently playing an important but under-acknowledged role in Irish education. That role could, with proper consultation, be developed for the benefit of teachers, children and their families. It is vital, therefore, that special schools be given the recognition that their work deserves. This recognition needs to be at the level of resourcing, by providing appropriate equipment, facilities and transport, as well as the provision of funding for a greater availability of professional development. This recognition also needs to be directed towards the professionalism of teachers in special schools, who are performing an important role within the Irish education system while facing an uncertain future and poor supports. The role that special schools are playing, and that which they may play in the future, is of vital importance.
Submissions from the following schools and individuals were received and inform the content and recommendations in this report.

- St Hilda’s Services for the Mentally Handicapped
- Little Angels’ School
- Breda Dolan, St Joseph’s Special School, Galway
- Siobhan de Paor, Acting Principal, CPI Marino School
- St Patrick’s School, Enniscorthy
- Holy Family School, Cavan
- Tom Walsh, Principal, St Raphael’s, Celbridge
- St Vincent’s National School, Dublin 7
- Aileen Broderick, Principal, St Laserian’s School, Carlow
- Elizabeth Mackey, Staff Rep, Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, Delvin, Westmeath
- Sean Andrews, St. Raphael’s Special NS, Celbridge
- St Francis’ Special National School, Kerry
- Padraig McCabe, St Mary’s Junior School, Clondalkin
- St Killian’s Special School
- Teresa McHale, Mary O’Hara, Noelle King, St Joseph’s Special School, Galway
- St Bernadette’s Special School, Letterkenny
- Bernie McVeigh, Mullingar

- Rosaleen O’Halloran, Principal, St Mary’s Hospital and Residential School, Baldoyle
- Carmel Wynne, Staff Rep, St Joseph’s Special School, Sligo
- Peter Donohue, Mother of Fair Love School, Kilkenny
- Noel Brennan, Principal, St John’s Special School, Dungarvan
- Maree Vaughan, St Anne’s Special School, Ennis
- Fidelma Broderick, Holy Family School, Cavan
- Jan O’Brien, St Patrick’s NS, Enniscorthy
- St. John of God School, Islandbridge
- Holy Family School, Charleville
- Scoil Eanna, Cork
- School of the Divine Child, Ballintemple, Cork
- St. Ita’s & St. Joseph’s School, Tralee
- St. Declan’s School, Ballsbridge, Dublin
- St. Gabriel’s School, Bishopstown, Cork
- Cheeverstown School, Templeogue, Dublin
- St. Francis’ Clinic Special School, Temple Street, Dublin
APPENDIX 2

Additional Statistical Information

Table 2  Number of Special Schools

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of National Schools</td>
<td>4864</td>
<td>4012</td>
<td>3585</td>
<td>3295</td>
<td>3266</td>
<td>3202</td>
<td>3181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Number of Special Schools</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>122</td>
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<td>Special Schools as % of overall number of schools</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
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Gender of Students in Special Education

There are proportionally more males than females in special schools. In the early 1980s, the ratio of male to female was 3:2. This ratio has now increased to the present level of nearly two males for each female student. This is illustrated in the tables below:

Figure 4  Male/Female students in Special Schools

![Male/Female students in Special Schools](image)
Table 3  **Pupils in Special Schools, by Age Group, 1980 to 1998.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>3 – 5</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 11</td>
<td>3615</td>
<td>3456</td>
<td>2931</td>
<td>2644</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 – 18</td>
<td>4184</td>
<td>4656</td>
<td>4719</td>
<td>4344</td>
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<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8168</td>
<td>8495</td>
<td>8059</td>
<td>7386</td>
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</table>

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 – 5 as % of total</td>
<td>4.49%</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>4.49%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 – 11 as % of total</td>
<td>44.26%</td>
<td>40.68%</td>
<td>36.37%</td>
<td>35.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 18 as % of total</td>
<td>51.22%</td>
<td>54.81%</td>
<td>58.56%</td>
<td>58.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+ as % of total</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>0.58%</td>
<td>0.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5  **Increase in Number of Pupils aged 18+ in Special Schools, 1980 to 1998**
APPENDIX 3

Pupil/Teacher Ratio

Table 4 Special Schools and Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of school/class</th>
<th>Current No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visually Impaired</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impaired</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly Deaf</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild General Learning Disability</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate General Learning Disability</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe and Profound General Disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severely Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Handicapped</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Speech and Language Disorders</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of Traveller Families</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4

Information Note on Bus Escorts

1. In the current school year, (2001 – 2002) the Department allocated in the region of €4.17 million for the provision of escorts on transport routes for special needs pupils attending special schools and special classes in mainstream national schools.

2. There are, at present, a total of 637 special transport routes serving 156 schools.

3. In the current school year, a total of 124 schools, involving 532 individual routes/escorts have indicated their intention to proceed with the scheme.

4. 15 schools involving 72 routes/escorts have indicated that they are not prepared to take on responsibility for operating the scheme.

5. A further 17 schools with 33 routes have not yet indicated whether they will implement the scheme.

6. The Department issues an annual escort grant of €6,553.06 based on an assumed escort duty of 6 hours per day at a rate of €5.97 per hour for 183 school days.

7. (The duration of many special transport routes are less than 6 hours per day thereby creating excess funding which can be utilised for the payment of holiday pay, Employer's PRSI and other administration expenses.)

The boards of management of the schools to which the escort grants are paid are the employers of the escort(s) and are responsible for the deduction of tax, PRSI and all other statutory employers' responsibilities.
Bibliography


Proceedings of the
Special Education Conference

Newbridge, March 2002

OPENING ADDRESS
New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Education Provision and Support for Persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Brief Presentations

Rapporteur Reports

Open Forum

Evaluation of Conference
New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes

Mr John Carr, INTO, General Secretary Designate

I wish to take this opportunity, in the limited time available to me, to highlight a "Special Education System in Crisis" – a crisis which has been precipitated by the State’s unwillingness to provide costly services to our most vulnerable citizens, particularly our children with special needs. To understand why the provision of special education services is in deep crisis, particularly in the context of our current economic climate, requires a brief look at the hypocrisy that currently prevails in our affluent society.

Here we are, about to be beamed into the homes of over one hundred and fifty countries as we prepare to host the Special Olympics in June 2003, yet, we continue to condone basic human rights injustices against people with disabilities in our own country.

Here we are, about to commit billions of Euro towards upgrading existing football stadia, or erecting a showpiece sporting bowl if necessary, so as to co-host the 2008 European Championships, yet, we stand idly by as our Government continually drags vulnerable parents through the Courts in order to uphold the Minister for Education and Science’s right to have regard to public finances when providing appropriate educational services to children with special needs.

Here we are, calling for the elimination of human rights abuses world-wide, yet, people with disabilities had almost single handedly to challenge the Government’s recent Disability Bill because it lacked any means for its enforcement, containing instead escape hatches which would enable public bodies to renege on their responsibilities to people with disabilities.

Here we are, enveloped in a ferocious and divisive constitutional debate on the rights of the ‘unborn’, yet, the many inequities perpetrated against children with special needs go unheeded as Governments constantly invoke the state of the public finances when faced with demands for more services from concerned parents of children with special needs.

Here we are, abolishing fees for students attending our Universities, yet, many of our children with special needs cannot even gain access to a psychological service and those that eventually do, are given a miserly 2.5 hours of additional teaching time.

Our hypocrisy, our complacency as a nation, knows no bounds when it comes to
providing for children with special needs. Is it any wonder then that special education is in crisis.

But what do I mean by a Special Education Service in crisis? The following issues, which have attracted recent publicity, seem to highlight the present difficulties experienced by people in special education.

The Department of Education and Science (DES) has no coherent strategy to provide proper services to children with autism. Because of a lack of resources it is forced to react to pressure from different sources, seeking a variety of educational provisions. It is so bereft of policy that it reverts to fighting vulnerable people with disabilities on two main fronts: the legal and the political. For example, faced with inevitable defeat on the Disability Bill recently, the Government sounded a tactical retreat, while giving soothing assurances regarding the introduction of an amended Bill that we all know all too well will never see the light of day in the lifetime of this Dáil. And all the while, despite the numerous Court defeats, the Government steadfastly continues to challenge requests from parents for appropriate educational provision for their children through the legal system. As a consequence of the sequence of Government defeats, the Courts have now effectively subsumed the functions of the DES when it comes to deciding the appropriate level of services for children with autism. Worse still, we have now reached the ludicrous situation whereby even the Report of the Task Force on Autism, which was commissioned by the DES to enlighten Government policy, has been deemed inadmissible in recent court proceedings. It is time to stop challenging the rights of children with disability and invest money instead in providing resources to enable them to reach their full potential. What children with special needs require is surely not legal challenges, but legal provision, both statutory and constitutional which is based unequivocally on the inalienable nature and inprescriptible rights of the human person. In my view, the Courts and the legislature should not be allowed to usurp the responsibilities of the DES nor should their judgements override sound educational and psychological judgements. This madness must stop. It is imperative that responsibility for the development and implementation of services for children with autism should be returned forthwith to the DES. Give Department administrators, inspectors, teachers and educational psychologists the necessary means and resources and together they will deliver a first class education service to children with autism. At the moment, their efforts are being strangled by legal interventions brought about by Government unwillingness to commit the necessary resources to provide a quality service to children with disabilities. It is incumbent on all of us who work with children with disabilities to force Government to have their existence recognised and honoured and their rights upheld.

For that reason, I have written to the Department of Education and Science, demanding the re-establishment of the Review Committee on Special Education so that we can plan an appropriate response for all children with disabilities in the main-
stream and special schools. Because of the urgency created by recent developments, I call today on the Department of Education and Science to enter into immediate discussions with the INTO and management authorities regarding the provision of appropriate educational services for children of all levels of ability within the autistic spectrum before educationalists lose complete control over the provision of services to children with autism and before we set up alternative structures which may or may not work.

Our priority must be to ensure cohesiveness and proper strategic control in the area of the provision of educational services for children with autism. The movement towards the establishment of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) units within or outside primary schools without primary teacher involvement or without proper liaison with, or involvement in, the rest of the school population requires careful consideration in the context of meeting the individual requirements of children with special needs. The emergence of such units tend to be Court driven without input from experts in the primary sector. Our primary teachers are already providing a high quality service to children with autism using a variety of teaching techniques based on each child's needs. They require, however, access to additional resources in order to provide a more comprehensive and individualistic service. Providing intensive or alternative opportunities for certain children with autism may well prove to be discriminatory unless all children within the autistic spectrum disorder are given equal educational opportunities. Questions are being asked regarding who now decides which children with autism, in a special or mainstream class, should have access to intensive tuition? Is it now more likely that parents of children with autism will demand access to psychologists who are sympathetic to certain methodologies in order to access more intensive services? Or are we fast reaching the stage where it will be necessary for each individual child to go to court to establish equal opportunities and rights with his or her peers? Perhaps the Government should now be prepared, in the light of recent court experiences, to enable each child with special needs to be assessed for the purpose of providing appropriate and fair access to a variety of services based on each child's individual assessment reports. Are we fast approaching a situation whereby each individual educational programme will be used in future to access appropriate resources?

These, and many other questions, must be addressed without delay. We must acknowledge that there are no easy solutions. However, the DES must be properly resourced by Government in order to enable its dedicated officials to establish a comprehensive and wide-ranging service for all children within the special education spectrum. Failure to do so will result in continuing chaos.

Another priority on our agenda in discussions with the DES will be the implications of the O'Donoghue and Synnott Judgements. The relevant judges concluded that the evidence, as presented, gave rise to a strong conviction that primary education for children with severe and profound learning disabilities and for children with autism
requires a new approach in respect of age of commencement, duration of primary education and continuity of education throughout the entire school year. The judgements set legally binding precedents that place the onus on the state to automatically provide opportunities for education for all children with severe and profound learning difficulties and for children with autism. Not alone did the judges direct that the children concerned be given an education, but they also specified, in precise detail, the form that such an education should take in terms of pupil teacher ratio, early intervention, facilities and the provision of summer programmes. The judgements have far reaching consequences for schools catering for children with severe and profound learning disabilities and for children with autism. Many questions, however, remain unanswered. For example, how is the continuation of education to be provided and by whom? What types of programmes would best suit the needs of the children concerned? For example:

- Summer Projects/Camps;
- Summer Schools;
- Extension of existing Programmes.

What would the level of teacher involvement be (if any)? How best to address the appropriate level of remuneration and conditions of employment issues for those teachers willing to participate in the provision of Summer Programmes.

These, and other issues, are currently under consideration by the INTO and a final decision on them will be made at Congress. It would appear that there is an emerging acceptance of the concept of the continuity. For example, teachers of children with autism are supportive of the concept of the continuity of some form of educational provision for children with certain categories of disabilities. However, while there may be tacit acceptance, for example, that some children with autism would particularly benefit from a continuation of education, the significance of the numbers involved and the type of provision remain, as yet, undetermined. Whereas the Department of Education and Science accepts INTO demands that teacher involvement in summer programmes must strictly be on a voluntary basis, I wish to categorically state here today that the INTO will not countenance subtle, covert or overt pressures being exerted on our members to engage in the provision of summer programmes. It is imperative that discussions are held with the Department of Education and Science before Easter to ensure that issues surrounding the provision of summer programmes can be resolved. Failure to do so will result in industrial chaos. Radical measures, which will inevitably prove costly, will have to be put in place by the Department of Education and Science if we are to make progress in respect of the provision of summer programmes. Such measures must include satisfactory remuneration arrangements, the provision of appropriate professional working conditions and flexibility regarding the type of programme. The appointment of additional teachers, to facilitate the staggering of holiday arrangements might have to be given full consideration in any review
of the arrangements for the provision of summer programmes.

There are other emerging crises areas within the Special Education system, but time does not permit me to elaborate further. For me, the urgency of reconvening the Special Education Review Body is imperative in the light of the foregoing and following issues:

- The Visiting Teacher Service is coming under severe strain as the Department of Education and Science procrastinates in relation to the implementation of agreed management structures;
- There are inordinate delays in accessing resource teacher services;
- Newly appointed resource teachers have little or no access to appropriate career development opportunities;
- Access to proper psychological services is denied to many of our children;
- Reduced hours for special needs assistants in Infant classes is scandalous;
- The lack of recognition in respect of ancillary staff is a growing concern amongst principal teachers of special schools;
- The lack of appropriate weighting for special needs pupils is causing severe difficulties in multi-grade class situations;
- There are still outstanding difficulties surrounding the establishment of the Bus Escort Scheme in all schools;
- Post-primary provision, both in special schools and mainstream schools, is not being addressed in any meaningful way.

Lest I appear to be totally critical, I'd like to acknowledge the many strides which have been made in special education in recent years, particularly in respect of the reduction in pupil teacher ratios, the sanctioning of approximately 2,000* special needs resource teachers, the appointment of 4,000 SNAs, 118 psychologists and 1,531 learning support teachers. Great credit is due to Department of Education and Science officials in the Special Education section who, despite difficult circumstances created by low staffing levels, have been superb in delivering so many innovations in recent years.

The theme of today's Conference is New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes. I wish to reiterate my position regarding the provision of special education services which should, in my view, be provided along a continuum which involves mainstream classes, special classes or units or special schools. Children should be facilitated to move in and along the continuum as their needs dictate, involving dual enrolment if necessary. I wish to also take this opportunity to reiterate my continued commitment to the development of special schools which must remain a central feature of our special education provision.

Special schools enable the services of specialist teachers, and the provision of appropriate learning resources, to be concentrated in a secure and caring teaching learning

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1. Figures as at October 2002
environment. While the movement towards the integration of children with disabilities has gathered considerable momentum in recent years, based upon a philosophy of inclusion, social acceptance, justice, equity and choice, I wish to state emphatically on your behalf, and on behalf of special schools and specialist teachers who are not here today, that issues like equality, justice, mutual respect, concern, acceptance, being valued, and belonging are, and have always been, nurtured by teachers, and experienced by children in special schools. Special schools are specialist schools, staffed by specialist teachers, providing a specialist service in a special environment. Perhaps we should become more assertive in extolling their virtues.

So serious is the current crisis in special education today that the Government has been forced to establish a Special Education Council, separate from the Department of Education and Science, because of its consistent failure to deploy sufficient numbers of personnel to supplement the work of the existing small band of dedicated and caring officials in the Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Science. While the establishment of such a Council is to be welcomed, its true potential will only be realised if the Government is prepared to release the necessary funding to provide a comprehensive and quality service to all children with special needs. The culture of penny pinching and mean bureaucratic control must be replaced by a willingness and a generosity to ensure that each individual child with special needs is given every opportunity to reach his/her full potential. Blank cheques are useless unless there is sufficient money put into the bank to provide a fair and adequate service. Let’s stop counting the cost when it comes to providing services for children with special needs. Let’s remove the hypocrisy that pervades society in relation to the establishment of rights for children and adults with disabilities.

The Chinese word for crisis is an amalgam of two pictographs, one depicting danger, the other opportunities. There are many dangers looming in the special education sector, not least regarding potential threats in our conditions of employment. But, there are also many opportunities which will present themselves in the context of the Special Education Council and future direct talks with the Department of Education and Science. Not alone should we avoid the dangers, but we should grasp the opportunities to provide the best possible education service to all our children with special needs, irrespective of their category of disability, their geographical location or their potential abilities.

Churchill once remarked:

*The appreciative eye apprehends what is, rather than what is not.*

Let’s appreciate, celebrate and develop the potential of each unique child.

Today, let’s ignite collective images of a competent and caring profession dedicated to providing a top quality education service to all children but especially to those with special needs.
First of all, I would like to thank the Central Executive Committee of the INTO, the General Secretary and the President, Ms. Joan Ward, for inviting me here this morning to address you on this extremely important issue. I am grateful to the INTO for the opportunity to talk with you and present an overview of the Report of the Task Force on Autism. I am very conscious that the critical factor in the success, or otherwise, of the implementation of support for persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders is the teacher in the classroom – in the primary classroom and indeed in the second level classroom. In whatever kind of setting the mainstream or special class, or in a special school, the teacher is the fundamental person who will provide education for the child. All recommendations of the Report of the Task Force, are designed to support that relationship: assessment, support services, resourcing, implementation structure and liaison between Health and Education. All these recommendations are designed to be a support to the teacher. Other forms of support, which I will refer to later, include continuing education and training for those who are involved in special education.

I have had the benefit, in preparing for today, of two very fine documents produced by the INTO. I was very delighted to see a strong coincidence between the INTO discussion document on autism and many of the issues that are raised and reflected in the Task Force Report. The only thing that was incorrect in the INTO Report was that the Task Force Report had not been published. I’m very happy to tell you that it now has been published. It is telephone directory size and it will cost €10. I think I can say without any fear of contradiction that it is the best value that you will get for a long time. I’m hoping also that the Department of Education and Science will distribute it to all special schools and classes and will make it available freely for anybody who is working directly or indirectly with autism in their schools. It is available from the Government Publications Office and if you put your request in writing to the Special Education section in the Department’s office in Athlone, they would also assist you. It is also
available in electronic format on the Department of Education and Science website.

What I would like to do in this presentation, is pick out a number of issues which I hope will be of interest to you in the Report of the Task Force. It is a very large document. I am simply providing an overview and introduction to it.

First of all may I explain the basis of the document. The types of evidence on which we made our evaluations and recommendations were three fold. They were based, very importantly, on the submissions we received from individuals and from groups. The individuals consisted of a variety of different people. Parents, of course, gave us quite a number of recommendations - many were really insightful. Sometimes parents gave quite heartrending insights into the everyday life of parents and their children with autism. We also had submissions from representative groups. Overall we had 108 submissions - some of them consisted of groups representing more than 400 families and some of them represented groups of professionals. Another source of recommendations were from teachers, psychologists and a range of other professionals. The submissions themselves formed a very central part of our deliberations.

The second very important element in our deliberations was a view of international research on autism and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and we have provided a very extensive bibliography in the report. This includes a very wide range of current research in the area. The Task Force itself consisted of a variety of people - parents, advocates, professionals of various kinds, psychologists, psychiatrists and of course teachers. So the expert views of the Task Force itself forms the third element of our evidence.

**Principles Underpinning the Report**

The Task Force adopted a number of principles. The first principle was the principle of rights, equality and participation. While our terms of reference were to review the range of provisions, to assess them adequately and to make recommendations with specific reference to autism, we were very conscious all the time that, although those were our terms of reference and our focus was on autism, when reference is made to ASDs there are implications for Special Education as a whole. The Report of the Task Force has implications for the whole Special Education system. In the chapter on the review of legal and constitutional issues we set out what we feel to be the need for a comprehensive, rights based Education Bill which would emphasise the civil rights aspects and the requirements of children with ASDs and with other forms of disability.

The second fundamental principle that the Task Force enunciates in the Report is that school placement, support services and educational intervention should be based upon the need of the child, as assessed by a multi-disciplinary team.

The third principle is that educational intervention should be empirically defensible. There has been some very heated debate among professionals and parents dealing with the issue of ASDs concerning a whole range of different forms of intervention.
We recommend that, in the interests and well-being of the child, any interventions proposed for children with autism within the educational system should be empirically defensible. In other words, interventions should be well researched and well supported by research evidence. They should be flexible, adaptable and in line with international good practice.

Fourthly, and this I think is a particularly important point, we emphasise that special education is a service not a place. For far too long we have been inclined to think that specialist interventions for children with special educational needs should take place in a more or less segregated school or class. But we know now, that if we are to have inclusive or integrated education that special educational services will have to be available right across the continuum of provision - so special education is a set of services rather than a place to go.

Finally, we operated on the principle that parents should be fully involved in all educational intervention. Research shows that dealing with any kind of child, whether disabled or not, good educational outcomes depend on partnership between parents and teachers. This finding is true for all children, but it is especially true of children with any kind of special needs or disability.

Definitions of Autism

The Task Force on Autism first had to define what it meant by “autism”. We took the broadest definitions that were appropriate. We accepted the term “Autistic Spectrum Disorders or ASDs” – the abbreviation is everywhere in our report – as defined by the main international assessment instruments the DSM-IV-TR, ICD10. (Also Gillberg and Gillberg 1989 – for Asperger’s Syndrome). In using those instruments – particularly the first two – there are five disorders, but the three which the expert group within the Task Force felt were most appropriate to define as being within the Autistic Spectrum were as follows:

The first one is Autistic disorder itself, often known as Kanner or classic autism. This is what most people think of when they think of autism, where communication disorders are combined with a learning, and sometimes severe learning disability.

The second one is probably less well understood in the community at large – Asperger’s Syndrome (AS). It is a disorder where the children have a communication disorder, but not combined with a learning disability. It is usually combined with normal cognitive functioning or indeed sometimes, in a lesser number of cases, a very high level of cognitive functioning.

A third and much smaller category is known as Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Not Otherwise Specified) (PDD-NOS). One of the problems with autism or ASDs, is that you are trying to cater in the education system for a hugely diverse range of children with a very complex set of disorders within the category of ASDs.
The Triad of Impairment, however, is fundamental to all the above definitions within the autistic spectrum. The Triad of Impairment includes difficulties in:

- Social relationships
- Communication
- Social imagination and thought, including restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviour and interest

The triad of impairments refers to the problems children have in establishing and getting to know the normal rules and regulations of social relationships such as "picking up the signals" (verbal and non-verbal). They will typically have difficulty in communicating with others. That doesn't necessarily mean that they will not have language – some don't and some do – particularly those on the higher end of the cognitive functioning. However, they may use language inappropriately or they may not get meanings which are evident to the ordinary child or adult. So the communication disorder can mean a lack of language function, but it can also refer to non-verbal types of communications – picking up on things and so forth. The third dimension of the triad refers to the lack of social imagination, the restricted, repetitive and sometimes obsessive interest of the child, stereotyped patterns of behaviour and interest and difficulties in coping with change. All these are the key factors that determine whether a child is on the Autistic Spectrum.

Current debates have suggested that Autistic Disorder is on the increase. The following diagram relates to the prevalence of those diagnosed with Autistic Disorder in the Eastern Region Health Authority study in 2001 and I think the graph speaks for itself, even though it only refers to diagnosed cases of autism and does not include Asperger’s Syndrome.

Table 5  **Prevalence of those already diagnosed with Autistic Disorder**

(ISA and ERHA 2001)
The number of diagnosed cases is very much on the increase. One of the major issues that was identified in the Task Force Report is the difficulty that surrounds the area of diagnosis and the need for awareness, and for training, among health professionals in relation to the diagnosis of classic autism. The term AS/HFA refers to the higher functioning group – Asperger’s Syndrome, High Functioning Autism. There is a need for major research in this area. It is estimated – from a review of the international findings where there has been a lot more research done than in Ireland – that the occurrence rate may be in the region of 20 per 10,000 children for Autistic disorder and 36 per 10,000 for Asperger’s Syndrome. This is a great deal higher than what would have been estimated previously. There is a need for research to establish the precise prevalence in Ireland. In order for the State to plan for the future and know what level of provision is needed and what kind of resources will be required, it is really necessary to establish adequate databases.

Parents as Partners

One of the issues of key importance is the issue of relationships with parents. I have chosen a quote from the Report that illustrates this point very well:

‘Professionals choose their careers, and have a formal training in preparation for their work. They are expected to be knowledgeable and are paid (more or less) accordingly. These are factors which give power to professionals that parents do not have. Parents do not choose to have a child/adult with special needs, and they do not have a formal training to prepare them. The rewards are not monetary; they are intangible. Parents have limited choices and may experience difficulty in gaining the information they need’.

We all need to be very conscious about the sentiments expressed in this quote. Some parents are extremely knowledgeable and have made themselves very aware of international research and findings. But many parents haven’t got that kind of knowledge. The parents that teachers have to deal with range from those who are extremely knowledgeable and could probably give seminars on Autistic Disorder to those who are completely confused and need a great deal of support and encouragement with their children. The following quote is from one of the submissions, from a mother:

‘I have spent my life trying to find a place for him in our educational system. It must be appreciated how different children with autism are from each other and no one recipe will work for all children simply because they have a diagnosis of Autism/Asperger’s.

This quote illustrates that the system must be very flexible and must provide a variety of choices in the continuum of provision.
The recommendations of the Task Force regarding parents start from the position of parents in the constitution – where parents have primacy in relation to the education of their children. Secondly, parents will often be the first to spot a problem. As stated previously, some of them become very knowledgeable. Therefore it is essential, whether they are knowledgeable or otherwise, for them to be involved in any decisions about their children’s education or therapy. But all parents, no matter how knowledgeable, need support. Autistic Spectrum Disorders create a lot of challenges for the parents in the home, so support is essential. In Chapter 3 of the Report, on parents, we have proposed the setting up of a Parent-School Partnership Scheme. We have taken as the model for our proposal, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, because we felt that it is a very supportive model. Something similar is required for children with ASDs and for their families. Finally, the Task Force acknowledges the parental entitlement to attend meetings and case conferences, in relation to the education and support of their children.

**General Educational Issues**

We address a number of general educational issues in the Report. As primary teachers, you will all be aware of the need for early intervention. Most children will now be served by the diagnostic services and there are a whole range of recommendations in the report regarding identification and referral. Many children will be identified with Autistic Disorder around the age of one and a half to two and a half years. That is the point at which intervention should come into play. There is enough material, and well validated research internationally, to indicate that children who receive intensive and appropriate intervention as early as possible do best and, in fact, can significantly improve their social and intellectual functioning. There is no cure for autism, this must be emphasised, but early intervention is critical in reducing the level of support which may be required in later years.

The Task Force also suggests that a process is needed, similar to the process in Northern Ireland, where there is a system of Statutory Statements of Educational Need. Such a Statement of Need would be a legal instrument based on multi-disciplinary assessments and co-ordinated by the Special Needs Officers proposed in an important Department of Education and Science internal Report. It is envisaged that the National Council for Special Education – its establishment was recommended in the aforementioned internal Departmental Report (the Stack Report) – would appoint Special Needs Officers/Organisers located within regions. The Task Force felt that this recommendation would provide – if sufficiently resourced and funded and it has sufficient powers – a mechanism for the delivery of services at local level. The Task Force observed that there was great variation in provision around the country. It believes that Special Needs Officers should have the capacity, and would have the duty, to ensure health as well as educational supports. As you all know, if you are working in Special Education, the
support services have been, up to now, provided by the Department of Health. You will
also know that actually accessing delivery of health support services is often quite diffi-
cult. We need a mechanism – and that is the mechanism which is recommended in the
Department’s own internal report – which would be an effective mechanism to ensure
delivery of service at local level and co-ordination between Health and Education.

We also strongly felt the need for a speedy and effective appeals procedure which
does not involve going to the Courts. The Courts are very expensive. If we consider
the urgency of intervention for a child with ASD, or any kind of special need, but
particularly autism, it is incompatible with the slowness of legal proceedings. Court
cases take a very long time and the child’s life is very short. An immediate, accessible
and easy procedure, in which disagreements can be vented, and interventions and
recommendations made quickly, is needed. There are plenty of models around the
world and many are very effective.

We recommend the need for Individual Education Plans (IEP). This is also
recommended in the INTO report. The INTO recommends the issue of training. The
Report of the Task Force also supports that and makes strong recommendations. We
understand and agree that teachers and other professionals, and indeed parents
themselves, need to develop their understanding and to address behaviour.

We were conscious that children with ASDs have had a bad press in lots of ways. Some
have behaviour that is challenging because of the problems that they experience
in social communications. Many children don’t, in fact a majority of them don’t, but
where it occurs we all – parents, teachers and other professionals – need to have train-
ing in appropriate responses and behaviour management. In the Report we have
included some guidelines from the Irish Society for Autism on the management of
behaviour of children with autism. The Psychological Society of Ireland has also some
very good documentation on behaviour management and there has been quite a signif-
icant amount of development in this area internationally. We need to understand, in
particular, children with Asperger’s Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism and their
special social and emotional needs. We have made a strong recommendation in the
report that a Visiting Teacher Service for children with ASDs be established and
supported, both in terms of training, education and resources, to provide advice for
parents, initially when the child is diagnosed, and to see the child through the various
levels of the school system. The Visiting Teacher Service could also provide advice and
support for teachers – especially, and most importantly, within the mainstream system.

**Educational Approaches**

We reviewed the various teaching approaches available for children with ASDs. These
are also very well outlined in the INTO document so I won’t dwell on them. The main
ones are ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) particularly for younger children with classic
autism. Another is TEACCH - a method that many of you will be familiar with. Others which focus on communication issues are programmes such as Hanen and PECS. We also reviewed a range of supports for children with Asperger's Syndrome, as they are the children that mainstream teachers are most likely to encounter in their classrooms. We also considered issues such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and indeed the whole issue of inclusion itself. We felt again that it is a very important concept to have a good understanding of as it doesn't necessarily mean any particular type of placement - it's more of a philosophy and approach. I quote from Ginott, on being a teacher:

"I've come to the conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized". (Haim Ginott)

It is a very powerful statement about the role of the teacher. Maybe you might say to me that life is more complex than that. But I think it is a very interesting statement about the role of the teacher in the classroom. It is my belief that the role of the primary teacher, and the level of responsibility - even in the ordinary classroom with so-called normally functionally children is central to the development of the child. Therefore, it is essential that the primary teacher, whether he/she is in special education, in a special class or school, or in the mainstream classroom, is resourced and supported.

A Continuum of Provision

We have suggested a range of options on this continuum. For some children, full-time placement in the mainstream class with appropriate support may be the best option. For many children with an ASD, however, this may not be sufficient. The Task Force introduced a new concept - an inclusion class. This class would be a small mainstream class with a maximum of 15 children in it, which would have maybe 1-3 children (a small number) with special educational needs, together with 8-12 normally developing children. The class would be taught by 2 teachers - one a regular mainstream teacher and the other a teacher who might be a specialist with qualifications in special education. That class doesn't exist at the moment but we propose it in the report for consideration as one element within the spectrum. I think it is an interesting concept and merits serious considerations. Then there are the other well known types of placements:

- full-time placement in a mainstream class, with appropriate support;
- part-time placement in a mainstream class with appropriate support, part-time in a special class for children with classic autism or AS/HFA;
- full-time placement in a special class (located in a mainstream school) for children with classic autism or for children with AS/HFA;
- full-time enrolment of children with classic autism (with appropriate autism
specific support or with access to a special class for classic autism) in a special school for children with general learning disabilities;

- home-based tuition programmes if required;
- full-time enrolment in a special school for children with classic autism;
- residential classic autism schools and AS/HFA schools for a minority who may have additional special needs.

The Task Force in its deliberations gave a lot of time to this issue. It felt that putting children with low levels of cognitive functioning, in other words children with learning disability and classic autism, together with children with higher levels of cognitive functioning in the same small class of 6 children is not an appropriate arrangement. If there is a special class, it is probably better to differentiate them. Although the Task Force supports the concept of inclusion, grouping together children who are at very different ranges within the spectrum and who will have – especially the children with Asperger’s Syndrome – a high level of sensitivity to their disability, is not an appropriate arrangement. After a great deal of deliberation the Task Force opted for the differentiated model for the special class, with no prejudice whatsoever to the concepts of inclusion or mainstreaming. Then there are additional possibilities, as already indicated, of being in a special school for children with classic disorder, being in a residential school, being in a school for general learning disabilities or of opting for home-based tuition programmes.

**Curriculum**

With regards to primary education, just to summarise, we need a statement of need, incorporating parental agreement. This must be adequately resourced and supported. Individual Education Planning is necessary. The children need access to the primary curriculum to the maximum extent possible but of course, it has to be modified according to the needs of the child. A curriculum for children with ASDs, in the view the Task Force, should be child-centred not subject-centred both at first level as well as second level. It should:

- prioritise communications and interpersonal relations;
- teach cultural norms and meaning because that is a major problem for children with ASD;
- include functional and life skills from the start – even for the high functioning children with Asperger’s Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism;
- incorporate physical activity periods daily;
- teach the students how to observe and imitate, because they don’t know sometimes how to respond.

Children with ASDs should be able to have access to normally developing peers. Social communication is their greatest problem and, to improve, they need to be able to access
normally developing peers. The following are also required – and it is a big agenda:

- school planning,
- training,
- guidelines for teachers, other professionals and carers,
- Visiting Teacher support,
- appropriate pupil-teacher ratios,
- physical resources,
- integration and transport,
- quality assurance,
- research on the various models of provision,
- assessment at transfer to 2nd level,
- Clinical and Support Services.

Conclusion

If there was a recurring theme right throughout the debates of the Task Force, it was the need for co-ordination between the Departments of Health and Education. That has just not been happening, particularly with children accessing special education outside the special school. In the special school it may or may not be such a problem, but in the mainstream schools and in the special classes it has emerged as being a very significant difficulty. And of course we need education and training. Awareness training is required for all professionals and indeed ancillary staff. A whole school approach for the special classes assigned to ordinary mainstream schools is essential – the whole school must be involved. Significant prior and on-going training for specialist teachers and other professionals is required in the areas of early, primary and second level, in understanding autism and Autistic Spectrum Disorders, and in the appropriate interventions. Targeted funding from the Department of Education and Science is needed to support education and training. It is therefore a big agenda. There are many other issues raised in the Report which I have not covered but I am very grateful indeed for your attention. Thank you very much.

OPEN FORUM

At the end of Professor Drudy’s presentation, delegates were given an opportunity to ask questions from the floor. Some of the questions and Professor Drudy’s answers are included here.

QUESTION

A huge amount of your recommendations and content in your Report deal with the area of primary education and related matters. Could you tell me why the Organization which
represents primary education was not officially represented on the Task Force which drew up the report?

ANSWER
Well I suppose I am the wrong person to ask. The assignation of people to the Task Force was the Minister’s call. I, as Chairperson, did not really have anything to do with it. We did have, and we were delighted to have a primary teacher from one of the special classes, Ms Rita Duffy. She made an excellent contribution to the work of the Task Force. No union group was represented on the Task Force at all. In a sense, I cannot answer your question, and it is a fair question, but you would have to ask the person who appointed people to the Task Force.

QUESTION
Just to comment on one small item in the presentation which was excellent and I look forward to the book and video. You mention the changes in Irish society and that we have got to take account of those. You also mention the teaching of cultural norms. Well, Tralee is now one of the centres for asylum seekers, there is quite a wide spectrum of cultures and it is just a point that was not mentioned. Irish society is changing – even as the Report was being written these changes were taking place. It is something that we will have to take note of in future.

ANSWER
I think your question is a really good one. The only group of non-English speakers that were dealt with in the Report are Irish speakers. I really do appreciate your comment because I just can not even imagine how difficult it must be for families who do not speak English, if they have a child with autism or Asperger’s Syndrome in the family. It is a social communication disorder. I think we are going to have to adapt and that probably will be the next issue for the Department to deal with. One of the things we say in the Introduction of the Report – and we really mean this – is that the publication of this report is not an end to the debate and identification of issues. It is actually the beginning of it. Because we all know, and the public in general knows that children with autism, were not really seriously considered in the development of policy up till the mid 1990s. So it is a huge issue and you are absolutely right. It must be so difficult if you have a child with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and where your main language is not English. I just feel that it is going to be a serious issue at some stage.
QUESTION

Children diagnosed with Fragile X Syndrome display Autistic like traits and characteristics, would you agree that this syndrome should be included in the ASDs Range?

ANSWER

As far as my understanding goes, (it would be other members of the Task Force who would be experts in diagnosis and assessment,) Fragile X doesn't fall, technically speaking, within the Autistic Spectrum although it has comparable characteristics. So technically speaking, it lay outside of our terms of reference. But, if you had a system that is designed to address the needs all children with disabilities and special education requirements, then Fragile X children would be included anyway.

QUESTION

With regard to your earlier discussion on Statement of Needs for children, what is your response when a Statement of Need is done up by a group of professionals and then a parent completely ignores the recommendations of that Statement and how does the Task Force respond to those kind of issues? How legally binding is a Statement of Need from either the school's point of view or of the parents' point of view.

ANSWER

What we have tried to identify is the mechanism whereby there would be justice and fairness on all sides. First of all, the terms "independent" and "multi-disciplinary" are there. The Task Force felt that it was necessary that the multi-disciplinary group should be independent of the main provider in a locality, and that there should be an appeals mechanism. This can be with independent adjudication. An appeal would normally be made by parents but it can be made by the school. But once that appeal process was completed by the independent adjudication, then the school has a legal requirement to provide, and the State would have a legal requirement also to provide the support services necessary. Basically, if you go back to our principles of equality, participation and rights, children have a right to an education. The Task Force strongly supported the view that children have the right to an education appropriate to their needs. Sometimes, even among the rights that are outlined in the 1998 legislation, while very strong, there are some discretionary elements, which means that they are still untested. One of the foremost experts on education, Dympna Glendenning, in her book on Education Law has suggested that the 1998 Act may have to be tested in the Courts. We got excellent advice from Professor Gerard Quinn, which is acknowledged in the Report, that there is a need for a civil rights piece of legislation, in relation to children with special educational needs and other disabilities.
QUESTION

You mention that the curriculum should be child centred and not subject based, which I entirely agree with. In my own school, we did a lot of work on the curriculum and it being child centred. But on a recent visit from the Inspector from the Department, we were told to bring our curriculum in line with primary school and have it subject based, which we were not very pleased about but now this is what we have been told to do. I am wondering what is your response to that?

ANSWER

Well, I suppose we feel there is a need for flexibility, that the curriculum should relate to the primary curriculum or to the second level curriculum as much as possible, but that it may need to be adjusted to meet with the requirements of the child. One of the elements in our Report, and again this is internationally accepted, is the concept of Individual Education Planning – particularly for children with significant disabilities. Adjustments have to be made to allow them to access the curriculum as far as possible. Obviously, I could not comment on any individual case and it is a matter you would have to debate yourselves in your own school and with your own Inspectors. All I can outline are the principles that the Task Force have suggested in the Report itself. They are based on the expert views of the Task Force, and are also grounded in the international research.

QUESTION

I just want to ask a question about the pre school provision for children with ASDs. Had you made any special recommendations regarding a particular method or types of provision for young children?

ANSWER

There is a full chapter on early education. Again it was the collective view that early intervention, early education, is fundamental to a good prognosis and improvements in the functioning of children with ASDs. Your question concerns the type of intervention. There are two major ones for which there is empirical research support – although there are still different views between experts. These are the ABA and TEACCH models. There are also others, and there are emerging ones as well. Our view about the types of intervention was that you can not prescribe a type of intervention for all children. It has to be based on the needs of that particular child and there has to be a certain flexibility and also constant review of that child and his/her needs. The view that you can prescribe one type of intervention for life is not right, your progress should be reviewed and further recommendations for proceeding with a particular type of intervention or for changing to another mix or another type is important. The Task Force also took the view that whatever the type of intervention, teachers need to be
adequately trained. Indeed, there are also recommendations in the Report for the need to train special needs assistants - a whole new area in Irish education. There is also a need for training in how people work with each other. This was mentioned in the INTO Report as well. There is no single prescription. Interventions should be based on multi-disciplinary assessments.

QUESTION
I would just like to comment on the excellent report. But I would also like to point out that there's nothing in this report, that if you take out the word Autistic, you couldn't apply to all aspects of special education. It's just one aspect. We feel it's unfortunate that still in special education, it seems to be those who shout the loudest get the most. I would also just like to comment on something you said - that support services, especially those provided by the Health Board, seem to be more freely available to special schools. I would actually disagree with that 110%. The Health Board do not seem to have a priority of providing services to school children, no matter what they need and I think we can have all the Task Forces we like but I think that really needs to be addressed immediately.

ANSWER
As I said, one of the things that we came back to again and again was the need for delivery of service from both the major Departments of State and the need for co-ordination. I know what you're saying. If you take the issue of speech therapy, it doesn't matter what kind of school you're in, it's very difficult to access it. In reply to the first part of your question, that was something we were aware of. Our terms of reference were autism, but we were very aware that most of what we were recommending - if you substitute the word autism for something else - would be just as relevant. The matter of the complexity of the condition and the need for different types of therapy, that was specific to us.

QUESTION
If and when the training is provided, will it be provided for the class room teacher as well as the resource teacher because as far as I can see, most of the training is being provided for the resource teacher? And all the shouting is being done for the resource teacher but it is the classroom teacher who is dealing with the child for at least 4 hours a day and there should be training for all classroom teachers. Because in our own situation we have a child coming in September, who has a parent hollering at us since last September, telling us to get trained and go on training courses. Where is the training, first of all for classroom teachers, and who is going to pay for it? Secondly, in Castlebar, somebody is providing training for resource teachers at the moment but there is nothing for our classroom teacher who is going to deal with that child in
September. She was not allowed to go on that course and I think that is very unjust both for the teacher and for the child that she is going to teach in September.

ANSWER

Again you are raising very important issues. It is of course important and vital that the classroom teacher that has a child with ASDs in the class has relevant training. We are starting from the beginning in Ireland. There has been little or no training up until now. According to the survey which is mentioned in the INTO document – which was conducted in my Department in UCD, and was a very valuable North/South survey of teachers in special schools and classes dealing with autism – the vast majority of teachers had not had any type of ASDs specific training. The Task Force Report highlighted these issues and the need for training. The Department of Education and Science has actually begun to train the teachers for the special classes by sending them on a course to the University of Birmingham. They are now looking for the Universities to provide some level of training for classroom teachers but it going to have to be much more widespread than that. We have suggested a range of ways in which it can be done. The problem with dealing with an issue like this – and this was part of our own deliberations in the Task Force – is when you are dealing with a system in which there are many, many problems, you are not going to get instant solutions. Yet you have a child coming in tomorrow or you may have a child now in your class. In the context of a child's life, you can't wait. But in terms of setting up the structures to do it, there is a bit of investment and time, so there will be an awful lot of catching up to be done over the next number of years. I personally would like to see a situation where all teachers who have children with ASDs have access to some form of preparation and training before they have to deal with the children in the classroom.
St. Paul's Special School, Beaumont, Dublin 9

Angela Leonard

Historical background

Prior to 1970, two teachers were accommodated with rooms in St. Loman's Hospital, Palmerstown, Co. Dublin, providing a service to pupils with autism and language difficulties. This service took two routes. The main route seemed to lead to Beechpark services and the other route led to St. Paul's Special School where, in 1974, the Sisters of Mercy formally established St. Paul's Special School in Beaumont, funded by the Department of Education, now known as the Department of Education and Science (DES). This school was to provide education and care for pupils, which we now refer to as having autistic syndrome disorders. The assessment facility, which is multi-disciplinary and comprehensive, has always been and remains part of the Mater Child Guidance Clinics in the Mater Hospital, Eccles Street, Dublin 1.

St. Paul's Special School at present

St. Paul's Special School is a recognised school under the Department of Education and Science. It has nine full-time teachers plus a walking principal, Ms Marie Cantwell and four part-time teachers. The school caters for approximately 50 children ranging from age 4 to 18 years. A very high percentage of children have been diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders. A former principal of St. Paul’s Special School, has described the pupils in St. Paul’s as having autism and related disorders; such as having a hearing or visual impairment as well as having autism, along with emotional disturbance and learning disabilities. She further stated that the children demonstrate a wide variety of ability levels from those with higher intelligence in specific areas to those with a marked bias towards the lower levels of intelligence and many children would have accompanying learning disabilities.¹

¹ Educating Autistic Children, Reach Magazine (Journal of the National Association of Teachers in Special Schools) Year:1987-1988 p.12, p. 45.
The school, through the medium of the curriculum, embraces all primary school subjects, with particular emphasis on personal development, communication, life skills and social training at levels appropriate to individual needs. The education programme is individualised to meet the needs of each child with the aim of meeting the needs of the pupils and maximising each child's strengths. Progress is monitored at regular case conferences by a multidisciplinary team to ensure a uniform and consistent approach in all aspects of education and development. A variety of teaching systems is used in St. Paul's by an experienced team. Such systems include, visual strategies, Derbyshire language systems, Froebel and Montessori methods. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) of teaching has also been introduced in St. Paul's in recent years with great success.

The challenges faced by St. Paul's over the past 10 years

- Dealing with difficult behaviour without adequate training but with the use/availability of time-out rooms.
- No suitable curriculum – teachers having to devise their own without the help of the Department of Education and Science.
- Pupil intake went from entrance age of 4 years to approximately 10 years. This was mainly due to the setting up of the outreach classes in mainstream schools. Usually the pupils aged 10 years come with many added behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities.
- Lack of proper resources. Insufficient classrooms, including Gym, Home Economics room and Woodwork room.

The challenges for the future

- Increased attendance on courses such as Birmingham Distance course, PECS course, CPI, ABA and TEACCH courses. We feel that time should be allowed by the DES to facilitate all the staff together, where practical.
- Staffing ratio has changed dramatically in 10 years. There are now 9 teachers, a principal and 19 classroom assistants. We need in-service support to deal with this situation which is very slow coming on stream.
- New curriculum offers much more to special schools. In particular, the in-service training, we have found of great benefit.
- Since October 2001, the intake entrance age of pupils is returning to 4 years, but the school has a very large percentage of pupils in the age range 12 – 18 years – 64% overall.

2. The 'Extension' is now complete and comprises of 3 large classrooms, plus a new Gym, a large Home Economics room, Art/Pottery room and a separate woodwork room. The building also includes new toilets, showers and medical room and numerous storage rooms. (Feb 2003)
Individual Planning for Pupils with Special Needs

Anita Prunty, Department of Special Education, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra

Planning for teaching and learning is vital for all pupils, but in particular for pupils with special needs. Each school will have to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for (Education Act, 1998, Section 9). Identifying the needs of pupils and providing appropriately for these needs require careful planning, teaching, recording and monitoring of progress. The Revised Primary School Curriculum emphasises entitlement and access to the best quality of education for each child. This education must be appropriate to their needs and in the context of a broad, relevant and flexible curriculum. To facilitate this level of access and participation, the importance of planning at all levels is emphasised. As an integral part of this planning process, schools must ensure that there are procedures in place for individual planning for pupils with special needs. This careful, regular planning for teaching and evaluation of progress are a priority in a school's provision for pupils with special needs. An approach to individual planning for students with special needs is the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

What is an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

- An IEP is a mechanism for ensuring careful planning and accountability. It should be part of the school's overall plan for assessment and record keeping.
- An IEP is a written plan for a particular pupil. It is not an alternative curriculum. It epitomises the 'additional and extra' that pupils need as well as their entitlement to the general school curriculum.
- An IEP focuses on the priority needs of the pupil. Teachers must also plan for development and differentiation in other curriculum areas, in the classroom environment, in methodologies and teaching strategies, and in materials and equipment. Consideration must also be given to how assistance for these pupils is utilised.
Collaboration is implicit in the IEP model (Fig. 6).

The 1993 definition of collaboration by Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb and Nevin is still widely accepted:

'Collaborative consultation is an interactive process which enables people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems. The outcome is enhanced, altered, and produces solutions that are different from those that the individual team members would produce independently. The major outcome of collaborative consultation is to provide comprehensive and effective programs for students with special needs within the most appropriate context' (p. 1).

Parents, pupil, teachers and other professionals work as a team in developing and implementing the IEP. This IEP process is equal in importance to the IEP format. Collaboration in some schools may be an extension of existing practice. For others it presents a challenge to the school organization and culture and thus a phased approach is recommended. Awareness and knowledge of the IEP process by all participants is essential. This can be achieved by workshops, meetings, written information and brochures.

**Planning for the Collaborative Team Meeting**

Planning for the team meeting is important so that informed decisions are made with and on behalf of the pupil. A key person is required to co-ordinate the process. Prior
to the meeting, detailed information is gathered on the pupil from all those involved, including the pupil. Further or updated assessment is conducted if necessary. Where assessment is carried out, the results are discussed with the parents prior to the team meeting. The pupil’s strengths and needs are identified and priority needs for the IEP are determined. It is recommended that parents and all other participants be sent information about the pupil’s strengths and needs and their priority needs prior to the meeting. Participants add to/modify this information and bring it to the IEP meeting.

**The Team Meeting**

Prior to the meeting, a person is nominated to chair the meeting. The team should include all those involved with the pupil on a regular basis. At a minimum this would be the class teacher, the parents, the pupil (if appropriate) and the resource teacher. The principal, learning support teacher, special needs assistant, psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist and others may also be involved. With careful preparation and a well planned agenda, the IEP meeting lasts about one hour. The agenda might include:

- Welcome and introductions;
- An explanation of the IEP process;
- Reports from teachers;
- Input from parents/pupil;
- Reports from other professionals;
- Strengths and needs of pupil (based on information gathered);
- A consensus is then reached regarding priority needs (long-term goals);
- Targets/objectives are generated from long-term goals;
- Appropriate instructional strategies, materials and resources are discussed;
- Monitoring procedures and review arrangements are made.

A copy of the IEP is sent to all those involved. It is important to remember that the Individual Education Plan focuses on the priority needs of the pupil. Teachers must also plan for development and differentiation in other curriculum areas, classroom environment, materials, teaching strategies and assistance.

**What are the essential elements of an IEP?**

The IEP is a 'live' planning document which describes a pupil's long and short-term learning needs and the special teaching arrangements made to meet those needs. It also describes the arrangements made to regularly monitor and review the student's progress and further provision.

The format for the IEP will vary from one school to another. However, the essential elements of an IEP include:
**New Challenges for Special Schools and Classes**

- Description of the student's strengths and needs (information gathered from parents, pupil and all those involved with the pupil);
- Current level of performance;
- Priority learning needs (3-4);
- Long-term goals (based on priority needs);
- Targets/short term goals to be achieved in a given time;
- Preferred teaching methods, strategies, equipment and materials;
- Links to the curriculum;
- Staff involved and frequency of support;
- Parental involvement;
- Monitoring, assessment and recording arrangements;
- Special provision (e.g. medical);
- Review arrangements and date.

**Writing Targets (short-term learning objectives)**

An IEP is a working document which specifies precisely the action to be taken in order to meet a set of learning targets.

- Students should be involved in target setting to the full extent of their ability rather than setting targets for the students.
- It is important to link targets with the wider curriculum. Adherence to a 'targets' model with a focus on splinter skills in isolation from the wider curriculum, may lead to narrowing of learning opportunities for the student.
- Targets need to be realistic, observable and achievable. Sometimes targets need to be broken into small steps (task analysis) so that the pupil experiences success at each step in the process of moving towards the target.
- A target should be a statement of what the pupil will learn not what the teacher wants to teach the pupil.
- Targets need to be written in such a way that at the end of the targeted time, it is possible to identify from the pupil's performance, if the targets have been achieved.
- Targets using words such as 'improve' and 'appreciate' are almost impossible to measure. Targets using words such as write, say, list, name, describe, draw, place in sequence are easier to measure.
- It is important that the targets:
  - Identify the behaviour the pupil is expected to learn;
  - Specify the conditions under which the pupil will demonstrate the behaviour. Conditions include the environments or activities where the behaviour will occur or the use of particular equipment/materials (e.g. Given a visual prompt, with the aid of Dienes blocks, after reading a story, when presented with an object of reference, without a prompt, using a plastic mould on a pencil to assist
tripod grip, when presented with a flashcard, when biscuits are placed in front of Child;
Set the criterion or standards that will be used to determine whether or not the behaviour has been learned (e.g. time limits, number/percentage correct).

**Target = Behaviour + Condition + Criterion**

**EXAMPLE:**
*Target = Given a visual prompt, Child will follow simple directions the first time they are given.*

*Behaviour = Child will follow simple directions.*

*Condition = Given a visual prompt.*

*Criterion = The first time they are given.*

*Remember to link targets with the broader curriculum – Strict adherence to a target model may lead to a narrowing of learning opportunities for pupils with special needs* (Tod, Castle and Blamires, 1998).

‘The Individual Education Plan (IEP) tells
- where the child is,
- where s/he should be going,
- how s/he’ll get there,
- how long it will take and
- how you will know when s/he has arrived’.

(Arena, 1978).

**The IEP format**

The format of the IEP will vary but the essential elements of an IEP stay the same. On the following page is a sample IEP format which is used by the Department of Special Education, St. Patrick’s College in the training of teachers. This format can be adapted to suit individual needs.
Figure 7 Individual Education Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IEP for term</th>
<th>(dates)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Class:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Class Teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People involved in constructing this IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone:</td>
<td>Commencement date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>Review date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Information:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Information/Concerns:

Summary of information available (formal and informal assessment; summary information for example from parents, class teacher, psychologist, speech and language therapists, etc.)

Summary of Strengths (including attainments, preferences, interests, learning style) and Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Priority Learning Needs (identify the curriculum area(s) into which the need falls)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Learning Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Targets for the Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teaching Strategies

Materials/Resources

Other Staff Involved

Home

Timetable relating to Targets: Group (G) Individual (I) Whole Class (C)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>G I C</td>
<td>G I C</td>
<td>G I C</td>
<td>G I C</td>
<td>G I C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Right to an Individual Education Plan

The concept of formalised individual planning for pupils with special needs emerged in the USA in the 1970s out of twin concerns for accountability and parent empowerment in educational decision making. The IEP or Individual Education Plan is now the right of every student with a disability in the USA. This was established by law, (Public Law: 94-142), and mandates that children with disabilities be provided with an appropriate education. This law was updated by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997). The IEP now has to include a section on the degree to which the child with any disability is involved in the general curriculum, is integrating with non-disabled peers, and is working with a mainstream teacher. These were included to honour the principle of the least restrictive environment.

Other countries too have adopted the IEP model. In Britain, under the 1993 Education Act and Code of Practice (1994) and the recently revised Code of Practice (2000), the process of producing an official 'statement' indicating a pupil's special needs also leads to an individual education plan.

In Ireland, as yet, there is no legislation or mandatory requirement regarding IEPs. The Learning Support Guidelines (2000) from the Department of Education and Science offer comprehensive and detailed guidelines on individual assessment and planning for effective provision for pupils with learning difficulties. Learning support teachers are developing and implementing Individual Profile and Learning Programmes (IPLPs) for pupils. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have developed curriculum guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities. These include specific guidelines on planning for individual educational needs using individual education plans. Samples of IEP formats are included in these curriculum guidelines. The Education for People with Disabilities Bill (2002) declares the right of people with disabilities to assessment of needs and to an individual education plan. Details of the roles of the participants in the IEP process are given. This Bill is on the present government’s agenda.

There is a possibility then that IEPs will become a mandatory aspect of teaching pupils with special needs in Ireland. Whether or not this happens, it is important to keep in mind that careful, systematic individual assessment and planning is good practice, educationally sound and vital for pupils with special needs. There are important decisions to be made with these pupils regarding appropriate learning outcomes which will determine their future quality of life.

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Positive Outcomes from IEP Planning

What Teachers Say

(Tod, Castle and Blamires, 1998)

- Vehicle for addressing diversity, for collaboration and involvement with parents;
- Mechanism for enabling students to become more involved in their own learning plans;
- Direct attention of all involved toward setting and re-setting of clear, educationally relevant targets;
- Involve staff in the development and implementation of strategies to meet those targets;
- Harness available resources to meet those strategies;
- Provide a system of monitoring student learning;
- Provide clear evidence of effectiveness of provision for meeting students’ needs;
- Provide opportunities for staff development and support for all those involved.

Problems with IEPs as identified by teachers in America and Britain

(Huefner, 2000; Cornwall and Tod, 1998)

- Difficulty with team process;
- Excessive time demands;
- Lack of adequate teacher training;
- Failure to link assessment data with instructional goals and objectives;
- Failure to include social/emotional goals;
- Lack of evaluation procedures (legal problems);
- Paperwork burdensome;
- Emphasis on measurable short-term objectives and criteria for evaluating their effectiveness;
- Computer-generated IEP using formulae and strategy banks could lead to remediation based on deficits rather than addressing individual needs;
- Written IEP not translated into practice;
- Adherence to objectives model may lead to narrowing of learning opportunities for students – objectives should reflect the wide range of learning opportunities within the school;
- Objectives often focus on specialised materials and/or splinter skills in isolation from Core Curriculum;
- Danger that targets might be dictated by available resources rather than by need of students;
- With the wider curriculum, targets can be selected to show slow progress, demonstrate the behaviour or alternatively, easy targets can be selected to speed progress;
- Over reliance on IEP as the only indicator of educational progress to the exclusion of more general accountability systems.
WORKSHOP

In a workshop which followed, involving 50 participants in six groups, the following questions were addressed:

**Group 1**
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANNING FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?
- Accountability
- Good educational practice
- To identify needs and concerns (educational, emotional, physical, social)
- To encourage shared responsibility (class teacher, learning support teacher, resource teacher, parents, other professionals)
- Built-in review
- Planning document
- Who has responsibility for initiating the IEP?

**Group 2**
HOW IS INDIVIDUAL PLANNING MANAGED IN YOUR SCHOOL SETTING?
- Principal facilitates
- Parents, teachers, speech therapist work together. A holistic view of the child with special needs is important
- Meet three times a year
- Time is a problem
- Collaboration is not happening, lots of informal collaboration
- Health and Education need to work more collaboratively
- In one situation, individual planning is managed very well – team work.

**Group 3**
WHAT FACILITATES EFFECTIVE INDIVIDUAL PLANNING FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?
- Multidisciplinary whole-staff approach
- Regular review
- Achievable, realistic and relevant goals
- Whole-school approach
- Time-tabled time for planning and collaborative meetings
- Careful gathering of information from those concerned
- A strengths and needs model.
Group 4

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE INDIVIDUAL PLANNING FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

- Getting the relevant team together
- Lack of time to meet, liaise, collaborate
- Lack of training to write an IEP, to read reports
- Lack of training to write targets, task analysis (breaking tasks into smaller steps)
- Lack of parental involvement – expectation conflicts
- Uncertainty re institutional ownership of the process and product.

Group 5

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN FOR A PUPIL WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

- Relevant background information, team collaboration, multidisciplinary team, diagnostic assessment, long-term goals, short-term targets, strategies, methods and materials, review, TIME!

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THESE PLANS?

- Parents, class teacher, psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, resource teacher, principal, special needs assistant, others.

Who is responsible for writing the Individual Education Plan?

- Class teacher? Resource teacher? Principal teacher? Teachers working together?

HOW SHOULD THESE PLANS BE MONITORED AND REVIEWED?

- Checklists, comments on weekly notes, monthly progress records, team meeting once a term if practical, parent/teacher meetings.

Group 6

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANNING PROCESS?

- Partners
- To provide information
- To assist teachers to prioritise needs
- Implementers
- Support – this is the ideal but it does not always happen
- Planners
- Parents are not trained – meeting can be daunting for them
- Parents can have unrealistic demands and take over a meeting.
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN THE PROCESS?

- Giving information and advice
- Developing strategies and targets
- Support
- Assessment
- Providing materials and resources
- Providing specialist knowledge and expertise

Individual Planning for Pupils with Special Needs: Issues for the Irish Context

- Need for direction/guidelines for teachers on individual planning for pupils with special needs
- Roles of participants in the process need to be clearly defined
- Collaborative approach (Are parents seen as partners in the IEP process? Is the pupil involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and review of the IEP?)
- Need to shift focus away from compliance to external pressures, from bureaucracy and the courts towards teaching and learning
- Individual planning should be part of the school’s overall plan for assessment, record keeping and implementation of the curriculum.
- Individual plan: educational or administrative? There is concern in Britain and the USA about the amount of paperwork involved in the development of the IEP (Tod, 1999; Hart, 1998; Gross, 2000).
- We need to be wary in Ireland that the IEP does not become a cumbersome paper exercise with little educational benefit for the pupils involved.
- Does individual planning equate with 1:1 teaching?
- Problems with ‘targets’ model?

Conclusion

Individual planning for teaching for pupils with special needs is essential. A collaborative, multidisciplinary approach is important to ensure that there are real learning outcomes and educational progress based on the strengths and needs of pupils and linked to the broader curriculum. Where possible, it is important to involve pupils. Pupil involvement means that they can learn to analyse their own learning needs, to plan for their own futures and to develop self-advocacy skills. While pupils are the ultimate beneficiaries of this individual planning process, in a collaborative approach there is much to be gained in the way of professional development and support for participating teachers and other professionals.
Bibliography – Related Reading

(Series of IEP books published by David Fulton for pupils with Speech and Language difficulties, Physical and Medical problems, Learning Difficulties, Dyslexia).
Sean Carey, Department of Special Education, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra

Approaches to Overcoming Challenging Behaviour

Dr Sean Carey of St. Patrick’s College presented a workshop on managing behavioural difficulties in schools. In outlining possible approaches to overcoming challenging behaviour in the classroom, he suggested the following:

- Help the student to establish positive relations with one adult.
- Formalise judgements about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour using a system of rewards.
- Introduce planned activities matched to pupils’ strengths and weaknesses.
- Focus on teaching language and communication.
- Encourage language and communication for meeting needs in everyday settings.
- Help each child to anticipate the sequence of daily events and activities.
- Provide opportunities for children to opt out of activities.
- Convey adult expectations clearly and provide consistent feedback.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of new methods of working.
- Provide a written protocol that describes how to respond to each challenging behaviour.

(Harris, 1995)

Each of these approaches was discussed and teachers gave their experiences of using them. Most present found them useful to varying degrees and all were agreed that the adoption of these approaches requires a lot of work on the part of all the staff in the school. The teachers from special schools stated that there were many examples of unpredictable behaviour from pupils, particularly older ones, for which no planning can prepare a teacher.

The Research-lead Teacher (RLT) Model

Dr Carey outlined the Research-Lead Teacher (RLT) model which he had experience of using in America. It is a model that provides a mechanism for supporting general education teachers in dealing with classroom behaviour problems (Logan & Stein

3. This is a combination of the presentation given by Dr Seán Carey and the rapporteur report taken by Brendan Harron, Education Committee.
This model requires a teacher, the RLT, to be available at all times, to be called on when challenging behaviour presents itself in the classroom and the classroom teacher needs immediate help. The RLT is a specialist on effective behaviour intervention. Case studies show that this approach can be very effective in giving immediate help to the classroom teacher. The RLT also has a role in training the classroom teachers on strategies for dealing with the various types of challenging behaviour that may present themselves. These include: teacher study groups, which examine research-based strategies, functional analysis, and positive behaviour support. Teachers would then apply what they had learnt to the classroom situation, with the RLT observing, modelling and coaching, as required. One teacher from Waterford talked about a similar project that his school was involved in and agreed that there was an enormous amount of work involved in such a scheme.

COMPONENTS

The components of this model include:
- Teacher study groups: research-based strategies, functional analysis, positive behaviour support etc.
- Teachers applying what they had learned in their classrooms.
- Observation, modelling and coaching by the RLT in the classroom.
- Classroom consultation by RLT at the teacher's request, to deal with specific problem behaviours.

RESEARCH-LEAD TEACHER

The Research-lead teacher would be expected to have the following knowledge and skill:
- Knowledge of the research on effective behaviour intervention strategies and positive behaviour support.
- Knowledge of both special and general education classroom structures.
- The ability to facilitate teacher learning by modeling, coaching, and collaborating with teachers in their classrooms and during teacher study groups, as both a "peer" and an "expert".

RLT MODEL OUTCOMES

- The model had been implemented for 3 years.
- Teacher study groups. A total of 38 teachers implemented 108 interventions. Half of these involved the RLT as observer, model, coach. A high percentage (87%) were rated as successful by teachers.
- Classroom-teacher requesting RLT assistance. A total of 16 teachers applied 46 interventions. Children with autism, educational behaviour disorder (EBD), and moderate general learning disabilities were involved. A high percentage (89%) were rated as successful.
**Functional Analysis and Positive Behaviour Support**

In analysing difficulties and designing positive behaviour support, Dr. Carey suggested the following steps be taken:

1. **Describe problem behaviour(s) clearly.**
2. **Analyse:**
   - Environmental influences that affect occurrence/non-occurrence of the behaviour.
   - Function (motivation) for behaviour.
   - Relevant skills deficits, needs and strengths.
3. **Develop a plan to address these issues and a system to monitor the plan.**
4. **Implement, evaluate and revise the plan.**

**Resources**

In the afternoon session, Dr Carey focussed on the problems which teachers are faced with and where they might find resources to help them. Teachers present gave examples of resources that they had found useful:


**Summary**

The following are the main points, on which there was consensus in the group.

- The state needs to take on responsibility for the 'underclass' of pupils, who display the same types of behaviour as autistic and other EBD pupils.
- INTO needs to take on the issue of ensuring that teachers have a safe working environment – this is not always the case.
- It is extremely difficult to get children assessed (psychologically).
- Teachers themselves often need psychological support.
- Boundaries/limits must be set on the teacher's responsibilities.
- INTO should issue a clear definition of the legal position on physical restraint of pupils.
- Teachers need to be given the multi-disciplinary support that they need, when dealing with pupils who have serious behavioural problems. INTO must pressurise the Government to ensure that this happens.
- Teachers need opportunities to share their ideas/experiences. Could INTO organise inservice courses on this?
- Teachers need support services, including guidelines on dealing with these types of pupils.
• There needs to be more flexibility in the curriculum. A teacher from Limerick gave an example of how sport can often give these problem pupils an opportunity to achieve success.

• Many of the problems of these pupils stem from poverty.

• Suspension/expulsion of problem pupils does not deal with the pupils’ problems and is an admission of defeat. In any case, many parents simply ignore the suspension and present the pupil at school, leaving the school with a duty of care problem.

There was an interesting discussion on whether more boys than girls present behavioural problems, however, there was no consensus on the issue.

References


Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities

Margaret O'Donnell, Emer O'Connor and Paul Brennan, NCCA

The development by the NCCA of draft guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities represents the first initiative in the provision of curriculum support materials that will address learning needs in this area of special education irrespective of the context in which these students are being educated. The NCCA through its representative structures and through a process of consultation with interests in this area has endeavoured to include in the guidelines the different elements that will satisfy the curriculum and learning needs of these students.

However, because of the range and complexity of those needs the NCCA considers it essential that this draft of the guidelines be used as a basis for a wide process of consultation with parents, teachers, management and others in the area of special education. The consultation will be designed to elicit opinions on the structure, content and resource implications of the guidelines.

Briefing meetings will outline the background to this initiative, the aims and function of the guidelines and the key principles underpinning them. They will explain the structure of the guidelines as they address the needs of students with severe and profound, moderate, and mild general learning disabilities at primary and post-primary levels. They will also outline details of the wider consultative process.

Who are the Pupils?

* 3 settings: special schools, special classes, and mainstream.
* 3 groups/characteristics: severe and profound, moderate, and mild.
* Primary and post-primary.
Aims of the Guidelines

- To provide all students with relevant, age-appropriate and challenging educational experiences at each stage of their development.
- To enable students to become independent learners who can use a variety of skills in both leisure and work activities.

Purposes of the Guidelines

- To develop curriculum provision in a way that is relevant to the needs of the students and consistent with the general principles of education for ALL students.
- To support teachers in enabling students access a broad and balanced curriculum.
- To support teachers in enabling students to access mainstream curricula through differentiated approaches and methodologies.
- To outline teaching strategies, best suited to the learning needs and styles of these students.

Who are the Guidelines For?

These guidelines support the work of all those concerned with meeting the needs of these students:
- Teachers.
- Support staff.
- Parents/carers.
- Professionals from other disciplines.

Using the Guidelines

The guidelines may be used by individual teachers, groups of teachers and whole-school staffs in special schools, mainstream primary and post-primary schools to:
- Reflect upon their current practice.
- Identify areas for development.
- Review curriculum plans.
- Plan for individual learning needs.

The three books are presented as a continuum of provision.

Introduction to Each Book Contains

- Introduction.
- Structure of the guidelines.
School planning.
Approaches and methodologies.
Information and communication technology.
Assessment.
Curriculum content in six areas at primary level and in three areas of experience at post-primary (junior level).

Subject Areas

Communication and language.
Mathematics.
Social, environment and scientific education (SESE): history, geography, science.
Arts education: music, visual arts, drama.
Physical education.
Social, personal and health education (SPHE).

Post-Primary

Language, literature and communication.
Mathematical applications and studies.
Social, political and environmental education.
SPHE – Work to commence on addressing the needs of a specific group of students who will not access the exam systems (JCSP) etc.

Learning Needs of Students

Very individual needs, display a wide range of disabilities and learn in different ways.
Definition tends to highlight the ways in which they differ from others.
The fact that they may follow the same developmental continua as others is often insufficiently recognised.
While some do progress through the same developmental milestones in the same order as others, it must be stated that the rate is slower and the level reached would generally be lower than that attained by their peers.
Not a homogenous group.
Even those of the same apparent developmental age will not progress at the same rate.

Learning Characteristics

Difficulty in remaining focused on tasks.
Difficulties in processing multi-sensory input.
Limited ability in generalising and transferring knowledge gained in one context to a new and unfamiliar situation.

Delayed oral language development/different patterns of development.

Difficulty in adapting to the environment.

These are the characteristics of a group of students who differ from one another in many important respects. Each student has his/her individual needs.

Consultation

These guidelines will initially be sent to all schools as part of the consultation process.

Feedback will be sought from all the partners through different methods.

Final documents will be reviewed and drafted.
Individual Education Plans

The consensus from the discussion groups was that IEPs will become mandatory for all children attending resource teaching. While considered a useful tool, a number of concerns were voiced about their formulation, standardisation and implementation.

Chief among the concerns was the fact that IEPs were considered to be time-consuming for the teacher. Consultation with the class teacher, parents and principal is essential and on an on-going basis this could prove difficult. IEPs, one delegate affirmed, have hitherto been done "in the back of the mind somewhere", but to do them in the fashion being now designated was hugely time-absorbing, and distracting from the forward thrust of class work.

The issue of standardisation of IEPs was also a major cause for concern. It was felt that a framework and/or guidelines should be standardised and approved by the DES. In addition, training should take place for all teachers who are expected to be involved in completing the IEPs. Support should also be provided for parental input. Those in the groups who had attended a week's training for newly appointed resource teachers in Mary Immaculate College of Education had been given a clear framework and guidelines for drawing up IEPs at this training.

Generally it was felt that IEPs should be simple, not overly specific and some delegates felt that each school should devise their own.

IEPs were ideally supposed to be compiled by a multi-disciplinary team but due to cutbacks or lack of funding this did not happen in practice. How often IEPs should be reviewed was an area that needed clarification.

Another concern voiced by the group was the possibility of legal action in future years by parents if appropriate provision was not made for their children. This possibility leads to a feeling of isolation in the resource teacher - with no perceived psychological back up provision by any authorised educational advisors. It was argued that it was unjust that ultimate responsibility rests with class teachers given that they have no specific training in relation to teaching children with special needs and that there is no official time provided for effective collaboration with parents and/or the resource teacher.

It was widely felt that there should be a whole school policy on the issue of IEPs and that the Board of Management take ultimate responsibility.

One suggestion made was that a Weighting System be introduced in relation to class size for classes with children who have learning disabilities. Also, the appointment of an ex quota teacher could help too with the provision of time for collaboration.
Preservice training of teachers was considered to be vital and should be obliged to include modules for all students on special educational needs and dealing with parents and educational disadvantage. Finally, many more Speech and Language Therapists need to be appointed.

Continuous Education Provision

From the outset, the group agreed that this is a very complex issue, and some confusion and tension prevailed throughout the discussion.

The group agreed that teachers were the best placed to provide a summer educational programme. Teachers should retain ownership of such programmes for the educational provision of pupils in their care. Should non-teachers be employed, it was felt that this would lead to one-month contracts which overall would be a backward step. It was felt that DES was not concerned whether non-teachers run classes and comparisons were drawn with outside personnel supervising in second-level schools.

Concerns were raised in particular about the following aspects of continuous provision:

- The lengthening of the school year and the resulting implications for conditions of employment for all teachers.
- The fact that in some residential schools only a percentage of school enrolment falls within the category for continuous summer provision – will children in the moderate disability category be discriminated against?
- It is essential that models of summer programmes be flexible e.g. extra teachers in place to work for July instead of another month during year etc.
- An ‘opt-out’ clause would be necessary i.e. it should not be compulsory for teachers to get involved.

Special Needs Curriculum

Following an overview of the new special needs curriculum presented by Education Officers from NCCA, a discussion group focused on the potential of this development. It was noted that a very inclusive consultative process had been used in drawing up these guidelines involving all the partners.

The availability of the curriculum was greeted with great enthusiasm by the group. One suggestion made was that children should not be labelled talented or gifted as this could be a put down for other children or parents, rather children be referred to as children with special ability. Again it was noted that working in collaboration with parents in drawing up IEPs and in support provision for them is essential. As with the IEP discussion, whole school planning involving the principal and staff was felt to be essential for the implementation of this new curriculum. Assessment also emerged as an
issue, as the group noted that assessment was the starting point for all good teaching. Lack of training for mainstream teachers arose as an issue here, with some delegates arguing for a 4-year degree course to include training for all teachers in Special Needs Education. Mary Immaculate College have a team looking at inservice/preservice, but there is a lack of funding to do a follow-on. In terms of training, the Birmingham Course was cited as a good example of where teachers can access the expertise – but at a price – the teacher’s workload.

Resource Provision

Many delegates felt that it was nearly impossible to recruit teachers to cover designated resource hours. In relation to special needs assistants, mixed feelings were expressed. One teacher remarked that the special needs teacher not only had their own teaching and organizational responsibilities, but also had to take on the organising and directing of the SNA. Another delegate was loudly applauded when she said that, as often as not, the SNA was like an extra pupil – needing direction, support and organization. There was broad support for the concept of Whole School Training for teachers and their SNAs, but the matter of SNA qualifications was a real Pandora’s Box, bringing with it the possibility of conflict with other unions and attendant grievances. As well as on the job training for SNAs, it was felt that it would be very desirable if there was a standardised qualification course established and accredited, so that their role could support and augment the work of the special needs teacher. SNAs had to be directed to the care needs of the child and it was felt that the Professional Development Unit (PDU) of the INTO should be proactive in establishing job description parameters for all SNAs. Role clarification was an issue that needed to be resolved.

Secondary School Pupils

The discussion group felt that adolescents with special needs had huge difficulty coping with changes in their lives, in addition to their educational challenges. Parents were voluble in highlighting the young people’s problems and were resolute, in general, in fighting for rights.

Problems arise in behaviour at about 15 years, when often it is found that pupils just cannot cope. Delegates felt that secondary schools were abdicating from their responsibilities of inclusion. The removal of Technical Schools from the education scene was perceived by delegates as being a backward step. On the other hand, there was much praise for the Applied Leaving Certificate, although resources were not as freely available as they might ideally be. Special school children were being prepared for second level education but there was no provision for special subject teachers as in mainstream second level schools.
The issue of the transition from primary to post-primary school is one that needs further discussion, in addition to the careful planning that is needed for the transition of pupils from special schools to workshop placements with adult service providers.

**Enrolment in Special Schools**

The issue of enrolment provoked a heated discussion with most delegates agreeing that the dual enrolment idea was a good one. Many felt that having to explain to parents the limitations of mainstream schools and inform parents that their child couldn’t attend the school was a difficult task, and it was not always clear who was responsible for this task. Parents have been given the information that they can send their children into mainstream but may not be aware of the pitfalls.

One delegate felt that children were allowed to stay in mainstream schools provided they didn’t create problems. As soon as they did, the mainstream school wanted the child back in the special school. It was felt that sometimes children were being referred by people who didn’t know the system.

Special schools seem to be seen as the last resort. Mainstream schools will be looked upon as the first option for special children in terms of inclusion.

The problem of children arriving to school without letting the school know of learning difficulties was highlighted. During the nurses’ visits from the time the child was born to the time they finish, difficulties noticed should be noted. Children were now arriving at school with an element of their special needs itemised. Psychological assessment must be made on entrance to the school, it was argued, and then constant reviews should take place. Educational psychologists must be provided for special schools.

The role of the health boards was discussed, with delegates acknowledging that problems arose frequently with jurisdiction. For example children with severe disabilities used to be under the ambit of the health board. Some principals have to deal with up to three health boards. Some health boards feel they have been taken over by the Education sector while teachers felt overburdened by nurses seeking training.

There was a feeling in the group that there was a certain amount of ignorance as to what goes on in a special school. It was felt that the media gave a mixed portrayal of special schools. One suggestion made was to hold an open day to allow parents to visit and make their choice.

One delegate noted that in relation to travelling children, that there was a ‘one size fits all’ mentality and questioned whether integration in mainstream schools was always possible.

While it was argued by delegates that special schools must be preserved at all costs, it was noted that isolation was a problem for special schools. It was suggested that a database of facilities in special schools be established to counteract this feeling of isolation. It was agreed that special needs teachers must interact with other teachers in
special schools. It was reiterated that special schools need special attention from the INTO and it was suggested that an annual conference for teachers in special schools or forum for teachers in special schools be set up.

It was argued that teachers in special education must get involved at branch level in the INTO in order to receive support at branch level to move the agenda forward. Top priority should be given to funding for special education. All special needs teacher issues should be brought forward together.

**National Council for Special Education**

The creation of a national council for special education was the subject of some debate. While some delegates saw it as being heartily welcomed by teachers and parents alike, others felt that it might create an additional level of Inspectorate. This council, if constituted properly, could be good, provided it just didn't become a political football. However it was noted that there had been no consultation with special schools regarding such a national council. A bill of rights would include those with special needs and the resources necessary for special schools. Some delegates felt that one central body might help with the resources that are so badly needed.

On the other hand, it was argued that there was no use having a council if the expertise was not there. The option of supporting teachers to become educational psychologists with full pay while they are in training was mooted. It was underlined that it was not feasible to do training at weekends and be back in school on Monday morning. It was noted that the DES were committed to supplying the resources to the special schools in light of 'parent power' and court cases. The appointment of special needs organisers (SNOs) was considered as a proactive mechanism for ensuring that resources would be available to special needs children.

It was agreed that it was vitally important to look after the special needs teacher. The problems of staffing, resources and extending the school year results in teachers being worried and could lead to teacher 'burnout'. It was agreed that these issues would be noted and raised at Congress.
The final session of the conference was a plenary session at which delegates were given an opportunity to ask questions of the panel comprising:

John Carr, General Secretary, INTO;
Catherine Byrne, General Treasurer, INTO;
Páid McGee, St. Patrick's College;
Don Mahon, Department of Education and Science.

The following includes an edited transcript of some of the main questions and responses.

QUESTION

We in St. Columba's Special School for Travellers with exceptional problems welcome the recently published guidelines on Traveller Education, which states in the foreword "Travellers should be fully integrated into mainstream schools". However, whilst we welcome this ideal there will always be a percentage of children – Traveller and settled – who because of their exceptional problems and psychological profiles can not be integrated successfully into mainstream. Does the INTO agree that one size does not fit all?

RESPONSES

John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO

There are three special schools for Traveller children in this part of Ireland. I believe in choice. Parents want to have the choice of either mainstream or special schools. Many parents prefer to have the safety or the sanctuary of a special school and it is my view that special schools for Travellers should continue. Parents should have access to an ordinary or mainstream class or access to a unit or a special class in a school or a special school. Those options continue to be available. There are children of Travellers presenting with exceptional problems. Parents should have the option of a special school which is equipped to cater for those exceptional problems. St. Columba's School should not be closed down but provided with additional resources so that the school can provide a comprehensive service to those parents of Travellers who choose to send their children to the school.
Don Mahon, Department of Education and Science

Children who are Travellers receive additional educational support. The scheme of Visiting Teachers for Travellers and Resource Teachers for Travellers is in place to support their educational needs in the area of enrolment and to provide for their needs within schools. Children are enrolled in mainstream schools because it is their parents' wish. The Traveller advocate groups and Travellers themselves wish their children to be in mainstream and not segregated into separate special schools. However, if and when Travellers are in mainstream schools, they are entitled to exactly the same support services to which all other children in mainstream schools are entitled. If they have special educational needs arising from a disability, they are entitled to additional support on the basis of those special needs.

QUESTION

What campaign is the INTO prepared to undertake to ensure that special schools with severely emotionally disturbed pupils will have access to mental health services? At present, St. Columba’s Special School for Traveller Children with exceptional problems receives no mental health services. Our pupils have no psychological services.

RESPONSE

John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO

First of all, it is our view that all children, irrespective of location or their level of special needs, should have access to a psychological service. We have 118 psychologists in the system at the moment, two hundred psychologists will be required before NEPS has its full complement. The educational psychologist should be the one to decide whether or not a child should be referred to a clinical psychologist and on to psychiatric services if such is deemed necessary. Unfortunately, some special schools do not have access to the current educational psychological service, and have lost the services previously provided by the Health Services. The Psychological Service is now seen as the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science by the Department of Health.

QUESTION

Does the INTO accept that the Special Needs Assistance Service does not go far enough to meet the needs of emotionally disturbed pupils? Extra teaching personnel, learning support and support teachers need to be put in place.
RESPONSE

Catherine Byrne, General Treasurer, INTO

A special needs assistant for children who are emotionally disturbed is of some support to the class teacher in a class of 25 – 30 children but it is not sufficient. A classroom assistant cannot, in any way, replace the teacher. One needs to look at the range of other teaching supports that are available to the school – the learning support teacher, the resource teacher, the visiting teacher and any other source where advice may be available. The number of children that are emotionally disturbed presenting in ordinary classrooms today is increasing all the time creating enormous pressures on teachers. The idea that either a part-time classroom assistant who is shared with other classes or indeed one full-time assistant can respond to the needs of children who are emotionally disturbed and enable the teacher to continue teaching the rest of the class is not sufficient. The organization’s policy and position is that the resources that are needed to meet that child’s needs should be put in place – based on psychological assessment and the identification of learning needs.

QUESTION

I have 17 pupils who have been assessed through funding from People in Need for whom it was recommended to have special needs assistants (SNAs). I have not yet got one special needs assistant for those 17 pupils. But even if I did have special needs assistants for these severely disturbed pupils, they would not go far enough. I would need trained personnel that could work in tandem with my class teachers.

My application is in since Autumn. People In Need money paid for these assessments and I was told by the inspector, in the short-term, we won’t be providing you with anything because in the long-term we’re hoping to phase you out. We may want to re-categorise you to High Support Unit – I never heard this word. I am a high support unit, without the resources at present and have been since I’ve been there – 14 years.

RESPONSEES

Don Mahon, Department of Education and Science

It is difficult to comment as I don’t know the specific situation in the school in relation to the needs of the pupils or the details of the application. There are certainly wider issues concerning the whole SNA scheme – the role of the SNAs, training for SNAs and their function in the classrooms. It would seem from my experience in classrooms that some SNAs are going beyond the role of care support for children. They are actually involved in the educational provision for children within the classrooms. The role of the SNAs is an issue that needs to be debated by the Department, by the schools and by the Union.
John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO

The Department of Education and Science responds to requests for SNAs where that request is supported by the Inspectorate. They don’t respond as quickly as one would like, but in fairness to the Department Officials they do react in a positive way as soon as is practicable given the large number of requests for SNAs. In fact we have 2,800 SNAs in the system since 1999. I gave a guarantee that I will fully support the continuation of St. Columba’s School. We need to ensure that the resources are put into the school, so that the school can continue. I believe that the school has an important role to play – particularly with children of travellers who have emotional and psychological difficulties.

QUESTION
Would the panel agree that the current provision for continuous education programmes is inherently flawed as it fosters State driven inequality for pupils functioning within the moderate range of learning disability?

RESPONSES
John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO

This was a major issue for us at Congress – the continuation of the school year/the provision of summer programmes. In the O’Donoghue case there is no ambiguity in the wording of the judgement, "the lengthy holidays/breaks which take place in the life of the ordinary school appear likely to cause serious loss of grounds which may never be recovered in case of children with severe or profound handicap. Accordingly, to deal adequately with their needs appears to require the teaching process should as far is practicable be continuous throughout the school year." That judgement was handed down in respect of children with severe and profound learning disabilities. In relation to the Synnott case, the same issues arise. Those two judgements are now legally binding and the Department is obliged to provide for the children concerned during the month of July.

As you are aware the CABAS Programme located in schools in Kill, Co. Kildare and in Killbarrack, Dublin, operate 236 days per school year. The children are educated from 9.00 – 4.30/4.45 in those particular settings. The ABALTA group in Galway also had success in the High Court although it is my understanding that provision in the Galway case will be on the basis of 183 days. The normal length of the school day will also apply. This provision is, in my view, the way forward.

The INTO subcommittee on education for pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities, stated that these children should be entitled to summer holidays
on the same basis as other children. They should be entitled to care during the months of July and August with an entitlement to a summer camp/project type of service. I believe that children will benefit enormously from a more prolonged service. In relation to children with autism, it is clear from the subcommittee's deliberations that they value the continuous provision of education for these children. We haven't defined how that education will be provided as most schools are already providing summer camps or summer projects. Why can't the Department of Education and Science support those programmes by providing funding to schools so that they can provide alternative types of educational programmes for the children concerned? We are in this dilemma, because the Department was not prepared to solve the issue due to the expense involved in providing a proper service during the months of July and August. I talked to people from Co-Action, who were prepared to run the summer programmes for these children but the Department refused to give them adequate funding. We must ourselves put together a programme for those children that will satisfy the needs of the children, the parents and the teachers while at the same time complying with the judgements in the Court.

I believe that we can take control of this issue. I don't think the judgements are flawed. These judgements pertained particularly to two categories - children with severe and profound general learning disabilities and children with autism. We should argue from a professional viewpoint that these children would benefit from additional supports, particularly during the month of July. There is a growing concern, however, that parents of children with moderate general learning disabilities might go to the Courts seeking the same provision for their children during the summer months. This may or may not happen. In the meantime, we need to ensure that children with severe or profound general learning disabilities or autism receive the services they deserve rather than spending money on lawyers and the courts.

_Catherine Byrne, General Treasurer, INTO_

There is no doubt that the long-term interests of teachers, including health and conditions of employment, have to be protected. A comprehensive policy position, which will have been debated and discussed with members at a consultative conference and further discussed by our Executive, will be put to Congress, which will either adopt, amend, adjust or accept that policy. There are a couple of very important aspects of which members should be aware. First of all, the Organization will oppose the extension of the school year beyond the existing contractual period of 183 days for all teachers. That is not necessarily in conflict with the possibility of continuous provision. Secondly, we will seek to define and clarify what the content of the summer programmes might be and to whom these programmes would apply. Thirdly, and most importantly, in respect of teachers who voluntarily participate, their salaries and
conditions of employment must be protected. There is still a lot of debating to be done, but I would like to re-assure you that conditions of employment and salary rights will be protected.

QUESTIONS

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the latter issue. I was at a Conference here at this hotel in relation to the education of pupils in the severe and profound category. Joe O'Toole had to robustly defend the right of teachers to be involved in developing curriculum which I thought was a sad reflection on who was there. Secondly, I'm quoting him here, when he was asked about the issue of extending the school year, he said and I'm quoting "it was merely a difficulty to be resolved". It is a huge issue and there is a lot of confusion about it.

... Our school caters for teenage travellers between 12 and 15 years of age. We have been operating for 20 years. They are not subtly trying to close us down. What is happening in traveller education at the moment is a sledge-hammer of integration. Now believe you me, if they get away with it with us, you're next. There is no doubt about it. There is no traveller parent that is going to take a court case but I can tell you, that each and every one of the students in my school will not be in any school if that school closes down. We have targeted students for Junior Certificate success. We are going towards integration. Parents should have choice even if those parents don't have power. I would really appeal to the INTO to not allow the most vulnerable sector in society to be trampled upon. We all are striving towards integration but it has to be based on the needs of the students in our care.

... I have been to Congress over the last few years, unfortunately I'm not going this year. I am really cross because this is the year that the future of my school and whether I am going to work in July is going to be determined.

RESPONSE

John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO

As far as I'm concerned there is no confusion. We will present the report of the subcommittee on education provision for children with autism to Congress. We have already published the report of the subcommittee on education provision for pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities. The deliberations of the committee on education provision for children with autism would suggest that these children would benefit from a continuity of education provision. The issue for us then is to determine how that is to be provided. We stated in our policy document on the education of pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities that these children should be entitled to summer holidays like everybody else. They should have
access to summer camps or projects. We will strive to implement that policy. We will not accept, under any circumstances, any teacher being subtly, covertly or overtly pressured into working more than 183 days. Under no circumstances will we accept any change in the conditions of employment of our teachers. But we are now faced with the dilemma of how to interpret the court finding in a way that protects our conditions of employment while at the same time guaranteeing the rights of the child and the parents. It will involve a lot of difficult talking and negotiations over the next couple of months. Principal teachers and class teachers are unhappy with the present impasse. There is no strategy or cohesive policy available from the Department. Our particular difficulties centre around the fact that we won’t have a cohesive policy until Easter.

QUESTIONS

In relation to the July issue it is my belief as a paying union member that the INTO is there to represent, to protect and to support teachers. I think that they should listen to what we have to say and I know John Carr is going to protect the 183 days. But I would like to know how he has negotiated in the past, and for last July, teachers’ salaries for that month and is therefore supporting it. How can he justify that?

... It is nearly like a mantra saying that we are going to protect the 183 days. But the fact is that there was negotiation done and salary negotiated with the Department of Education and Science for the teachers who are now working in July in some schools for children with severe and profound learning disabilities. It’s not a subtle hint but an overt hint that it is part of the school year. The other issue is the notion of ‘voluntary’ which is in the CEC motion for Congress. I don’t think it is going to be voluntary as there is going to be all sorts of pressures put by the Department, the Board of Management and by teachers in your school.

... My question is about the treatment of qualified teachers outside of the State. To be allowed to teach in special schools, teachers trained outside the State must have done a course in special education or have three years experience in special education. Teachers trained in Ireland need no such qualification or experience. And salary – a special allowance should be paid to teachers of special schools, similar to island and Irish allowance.

... I’d like to comment on the difference between special education being provided in primary schools as opposed to special schools. Firstly, there are also emotionally disturbed children in special schools. Such children are also a major disruption in special schools and we don’t have the facilities or SNAs in special schools. Secondly, about resources, the report we got in our file on autism, stated that mainstream schools with a class for children with autism got a start up allowance of £3,000 to £5,500 (€3,809 to €6,984). I was given staffing for three classes for children with autism in my school in Galway, and £500 (€635) per class to set them up. The third
point I would like to direct to Páid McGee, as director of Special Education in St. Patrick’s College. Would he comment on the role of the special school from now on. At every conference we come to, special education all of a sudden seems to be just happening because it is in mainstream. And we’ve been here for over 21 years, doing very good programmes and we’re beginning to feel we are just being completely thrown by the board.

... I would like to ask the executive whether it would be possible to make this conference an annual event because this is the only forum whereby teachers from special schools and teachers from mainstream schools with an interest in special needs get together. At Congress there is generally not enough time. The issues are not really high enough on the agenda to discuss. In the present climate where we are all teaching special needs children, we need to be able to draw on experience from both sides. It is the only way that we can provide proper and adequate service for the children.

... As a resource teacher, I would like to ask the panel’s opinion on what has been done to address training for resource teachers. It was mentioned earlier that there are 2,000 resource teachers and that training must be provided for them. I wonder if the DES is really committed to online learning in an age of video conferencing and all that. I’d like to know what provisions are being made for resource teachers please?

RESPONSES

Páid McGee, St. Patrick’s College Drumcondra

There are a few different points, I just wonder where to begin. If I made one very general point. I can see that this is a very intense discussion about working in July and I can see why there are good reasons that it should be. It is unfortunate that the issue arises by a statement by a Judge who would not be expected to be an expert in education. Secondly, he was concerned with his interpretation of the rights of a child in that particular case, that’s as it should be. But when it comes to the issue of the system providing – the INTO is part of that system because it is one of the partners – the system not only has to take account of the provision that it might make for that group of children but of the repercussions of that decision for other groups of children.

A lot of things have been happening lately. As you all know, there has been an explosion in special education – many things are to some extent out of control – except there has been a lot of money deployed and a huge number of people appointed. But there are some groups that have been very good at getting very extensive and intensive provision for their pupils/children. There has not been much consideration of what the ramifications are for other children and there are serious inequalities in our special education system now, including a whole lot of children who are not in school at all. There are as many children not in school from the severe and profound disability group as would make up the population of a small town in Ireland.
So, we have huge inequalities and it has got a lot to do with the people who are best organised. To elaborate on that point, there are some situations where teachers are very concerned that they don’t seem to have enough teaching resources. But there are also situations which are extremely resource-rich – if you look at it in the context of international practice and countries which are richer and have longer traditions than ours. I think there are provisions where there are more adults than children. But what people forget is that, ultimately, these situations ramify to the rest of the spectrum, because other parents are eventually going to look at the provisions that are made for some children and say, “Hold on, what about my child?” Across the special education spectrum parents are doing that; they say, “Look at the resources that that child has got; my child has very serious needs too and he is only getting half or third of that level.” But also, you can be sure that this reaction will go further. Parents of children attending learning support teachers will eventually begin to say, “My child has a pretty serious difficulty and his life chances are really in jeopardy because of the level of reading that he has, and yet he gets a half an hour a day in a group of 5, 5 days a week or perhaps in a small school only 2-3 days per week. And I think that this is disproportionate.” Beyond this point, parents of children who are below average, who don’t come into any category, but who are not doing very well at school may eventually say “I recognise that that child over there who has all these supports has very serious needs, and is entitled to serious support. But I don’t believe that the balance is right when he gets all this support and my child gets none.” So, in other words, individual differences are a fundamental reality among children. In education, if you accept the principle, it has serious repercussions across all our work. One of the major issues raised in a question/issue this morning about the ordinary class and training for all teachers, is the question of the teacher’s ability to provide for that child. What is implied here is an extension of the classroom teacher’s ability and, before that, the classroom teacher’s disposition, because without that nothing happens – the classroom teacher’s disposition to regard all those children as individuals and different and therefore entitled to the differentiated teaching that the children’s difference warrants.

Breda asked me about the role of special schools. The short answer to that is that I don’t know. I glanced through the document that you have about the role of the special school and I thought it looked quite an informed document. But, with no disrespect to whoever wrote it, I don’t think it addressed the issue of the role of the special school. I would not blame the writer for not addressing it because it is a very serious issue and nobody has addressed it yet. As we know, we have had huge changes in the last few years and there are major questions about just what role should the special school play. Somebody could simply argue that it should be for children with more serious needs. Should it? It could have several other possibilities and I think that the system, and hopefully the union, will give some serious thought to it. There is a lot of uncertainty for people in special schools. I think, around the country, that there will be
a lot of uncertainty when a child comes up for referral, whether he should be referred here or there. Has the answer got to do with the preference or maybe the prejudice of a psychologist? Or are there some criteria for recommending a child to this or that or the other context.

Training teachers: we spend all the time we can training teachers. We spend some time that we could spend training teachers talking about how to deal with the situation that has erupted in the past few years. One of the things that we have discovered in education in the last few years - as in other areas of life - is the limits of money. If you have money you can appoint a teacher next Monday but money doesn’t guarantee that you can give specialist training to that person because for that you need expertise and, as you know, expertise in not a ‘fás aon oiche’. Our system, unfortunately did not think ahead and we live with the consequences of that now. We have an explosion of demand and of need and particularly the need for training. Our system, in fact, to an extent let the leadership level of special education run down rather than have it develop over the last 20 years and we suddenly find ourselves with a situation which is very hard to manage. We have been running induction courses for teachers working in resource positions. I think we have had nearly 300 teachers on those courses over the last couple of years and I know that Mary Immaculate College in Limerick have been running courses and they have as many or maybe more. We know the limits of induction courses. We have been thinking for a while – and we’re actually working on it fairly seriously – of trying to develop a distance learning version of our one-year course so that nobody should be disadvantaged by where they live. But in the middle of trying to do that you can be paralysed by the thought that this is only going to reach a limited number of people. Should you be seeking another way which would reach large numbers of people? We don’t know the answer to that question yet.

**John Carr, General Secretary Designate, INTO**

I would like to address the remaining issues where possible. I give a guarantee to Angela that the INTO’s job will be to protect and support its members. We may consider someday changing our slogan from serving education to serving teachers. I would like to say also that as a profession we have always balanced the interests of teachers and the rights of pupils. We have always prided ourselves in providing a professional service. In reality, we put the interests of our children, in front of our own interests particularly those of us dealing with children with special needs. Therefore, it is important for us to get involved in the debate on education about the continuation of education and for the July provision for the children concerned, so that we can influence the discussion and influence the balance of rights. In relation to dealing with children with severe and profound disabilities, we entered into discussions last year at the request of the teachers concerned who were being offered the paltry sum of £19
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(€24.13) per hour for involvement in summer provision. It was in that context that we negotiated with the DES. This is a policy issue which has to be debated at this year's Congress. The treatment of teachers coming from abroad has been resolved. In relation to Brid’s question, yes we believe that every teacher in a special school classroom should have an SNA. And we also believe that in relation to principals and deputy principals we have to start reviewing the post of responsibility allowances in schools where there are large numbers of support teachers. We have a situation where some of you have 30 teachers and 16 support staff, while others have more support staff than teachers, but you are getting no recognition for the management of those extra people. We will have to pursue this issue at the first available opportunity. These issues will always be on our agenda. As you are probably aware 2003 is Special Rules Congress year. The organization will have an opportunity to look at itself going forward and the CBC will present a motion to congress seeking to review the structures and operation of the Organization with a view to bringing this union into the next century. The issue of the annual congress will be addressed. We have looked at extending the remit of the Equality Committee to include the 9 elements of the Equality Act which includes the question of inclusion and children with disabilities. We now have a permanent committee of the Organization dealing with not alone gender equality but also with equality provision relating to children with disabilities. In going forward I would like to encourage the Equality Committee to progress special education issues. I spent from 1989 to 1995 dealing with special education issues myself. I have responsibility for this area again and more so than ever, special education will feature more strongly on my agenda.

Joan Ward, President

We have now run out of time, we’re just past our deadline. Thank you all for coming. Thanks to Professor Sheelagh Drudy, guest speaker and to presenters in discussion groups namely Ena Fitzpatrick, Angela Leonard, Anita Prunty, Sean Carey, Margaret O’Donnell, Emer O’Connor, Paul Brennan and Tom O’Sullivan. Thanks also to the members of the Education Committee who facilitated the discussion in the groups; to the members of the panel, Don Mahon, DES, Páid McGee, St. Patrick’s College of Education, Catherine Byrne, John Carr and Austin Corcoran; to the hotel staff and to Head Office staff.
Evaluation of the Conference

Evaluation forms were distributed to all Special Education Conference delegates, who were asked to complete and return them. In all, 85 evaluation forms were returned, which represents a quarter of the total number of delegates.

The results of the evaluation are discussed under four headings:

- Profile of Respondents
- Evaluation of the Conference
- Future Topics to be Addressed
- Overall Opinion

Profile of Respondents

62% of the delegates were attending a Special Education Conference for the first time and 38% had attended a Special Education Conference before. 15% of the delegates were male and 85% were female.

Evaluation of the Conference

The three aspects of the conference format that proved to be most popular with delegates were:

- The Discussion Groups – the afternoon discussion groups on specialised topics were rated very highly by the participants. A number noted that the pre-set questions were useful in structuring the discussion.
- The Keynote Speech – the presentation by Prof. Sheelagh Drudy on the Task Force on Autism was very well received by the delegates to the conference.
- The opportunity to meet with other teachers – affording teachers involved in the area of special education the opportunity to network with those in similar classroom situations is rated as one of the most important aspects of the conference. On the other hand, a certain amount of frustration was expressed at the length of the conference with many delegates suggesting that the conference be held over 2 days. It was also suggested that the conference become an annual event.

Future Topics to be Addressed

Participants were asked to suggest three issues that they would like to see addressed at future Special Education Conferences. While the suggestions varied widely, there were a number of themes suggested repeatedly:
The need for training – this included suggestions for training and professional development for principals, mainstream teachers, special needs teachers but in particular SNAs. The whole area of further training was also the most pressing theme to emerge from the evaluations of the Special Education Conference in Maynooth two years previously.

Integration – the integration of the special needs child in the mainstream school and establishing a balance in the classroom.

Access to and working with other professionals involved with the special needs child – speech therapists, occupational therapists etc. – while maintaining the centrality of the teacher.

Many teachers voiced concern about the issue of the extension of the school year and summer provision.

Support/legal advice for teachers dealing with behavioural problems.

Drawing up IEPs.

Overall Comments

In general, the reaction to the conference was very positive. With current discussion on the extension of the school year and summer provision, debate was lively and often heated. This led to an element of frustration at the length of time given over to the question and answer session at the end of the conference programme, with many delegates disappointed there was not more time to continue the exchange.

The choice of venue was, in the main, a popular one although some felt that if was not easy to get to. While the level of organization for the conference was highly praised by most delegates, some delegates requested the background papers be circulated earlier to facilitate detailed reading of the material.