

Planning for the Future

INTO Symposium on Special Education 2024

Ag Pleanáil don Todchaí

Siompóisiam CMÉ ar an Oideachas Speisialta 2024

Fáilte

Dear Delegate,

We are delighted to welcome you to Portlaoise for the *INTO Special Education Symposium*. This year, following discussions at CEC which reflected the opinions and concerns of members at branch and district meetings around the country we have repurposed our conference to a symposium to discuss the future of special education in Ireland.

The last 10 years have seen enormous investment in special education as we move towards a more inclusive education system. Currently, almost one in every four teachers in a primary school is employed in a special education role. The number of special classes has increased from approx. 500 in 2012/13 to almost 4,000 this year. The number of SNAs in our schools has increased to almost twenty thousand.

Yet many schools feel that they are ill equipped to meet the needs some of their pupils, many families struggle to find the placement of choice for their children and both teachers and parents decry the lack of therapeutic supports available for children in need.

Our discussions this year take place during a comprehensive review of the *EPSEN Act*, ongoing issues surrounding the Assessment of Need process and the recent publication of NCSE policy advice on special schools and classes – *An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society*.

This year we will forgo our more traditional workshop format and focus more on discussion groups, giving you, our members and guests, an opportunity to have your voice heard and to contribute to the development of an INTO policy on the future of special education.

We look forward to your participation and engagement with our speakers and discussion groups.

Yours sincerely,



Dorothy McGinley

Dorothy McGinley
INTO President



John Boyle

John Boyle
INTO General Secretary

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Saturday 24 February

9am	Registration
9.45am	Opening address Dorothy McGinley, INTO President Dr Brian Fitzgerald, NCSE Niamh Harris, INTO District 5 Caroline McCarthy, INTO Northern Committee Mary McKenna, Autism Consultant
11am	Discussion groups
12.15pm	Delegate lunch
1.30pm	Panel discussion Carmel Browne, INTO Vice President John Kearney, NCSE Carmel O'Shea, National Parents Council Anne Tansey, NEPS Martina Mannion, Department of Education
2.30pm	Críoch

General Information

Car park

There are 500 complimentary car parking spaces on site. Hotel car park tickets will need to be validated prior to departure. This can be done throughout the day at the hotel reception.

INTO communications policy

Please be advised that photography and videography will be taking place at this event. These materials may be used by the INTO and included in publications, media materials, promotional materials, digital platforms and social platforms. If you do not wish the INTO to use your image, please go to the registration desk and inform staff.

The INTO can then take reasonable steps to comply with your wishes.

Symposium evaluation

Delegates will be contacted after the symposium with a link to a short online questionnaire for the purposes of evaluating this event..



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Speaker Biographies

Dr Brian Fitzgerald - Specialist Lead for Therapy Supports, National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Dr Brian Fitzgerald has been working as a school-based occupational therapist for 14 years. He completed a PhD in 2019 that studied the development of occupational therapy interventions in mainstream post primary schools as part of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). Since 2018 he has been leading teams of occupational therapists in further developing inclusive, collaborative practices in schools as part of the *Demonstration Project on In-School and Early Years Therapy Support*, and more recently the School Inclusion Model (SIM).

Niamh Harris - Teacher, HSCL, INTO District 5 Secretary and Mother to Oisín and Aoife

Niamh has been a teacher for over 20 years and is currently the home school community liaison (HSCL) in St Louis Girls' NS in Monaghan. Niamh is also a busy mother to Oisín and Aoife. Oisín was diagnosed with autism when he was four years old. Since Oisín's diagnosis, life has been full of love and happiness, along with a multitude of challenges from a parenting and lack of support services perspective.

Niamh will speak about her experiences, as she ensures the best life possible for her son, including the many obstacles that she faces on a daily basis.

John Kearney – CEO, National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

John Kearney was appointed CEO of the NCSE in 2022 after working as Chief Executive of the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board. John has a wide-ranging wealth of experience in education developments at national level, having implemented programme learning initiatives with the DE and representing the sector on the Tertiary Education System (TES) Steering Committee.

John previously served as Principal of Breifne College, Cavan Town. The Cork-born native joined County Cavan VEC in 2002 from his teaching position in St Colman's College, Fermoy.

Martina Mannion – Assistant Secretary in the Department of Education for Social Inclusion, Special Education, NEPS and Early Years

Martina Mannion is an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Education. Martina has worked in the education sector for over 20

years both within the Department itself and in the State Examinations Commission (SEC). In her current role she is responsible for policy formulation and delivery of related operational supports for children with additional educational needs. She also has responsibility for the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) which is a front-line service supporting primary and post primary students and schools in the area of wellbeing and social/emotional development.

Her previous roles within the Department included working in the Special Education Litigation Unit, Pension Unit and with responsibility for Education and Training Boards. During her time in the SEC she was involved in corporate services and in numerous operational areas of the national examinations system. Martina is a graduate of University College Dublin.

Caroline McCarthy - INTO Northern Ireland Committee, represents the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Board

Caroline has been teaching for over 25 years in the special school sector primarily working in a school for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties and most recently with children with moderate learning difficulties.

She has been on the Northern Committee for 11 years and has always pushed the SEN agenda. Caroline firmly believes if we get it right in special schools it will help mainstream schools too.

Mary McKenna - Teacher, Lecturer, Author, and Early Years Autism Consultant with The Children's Clinic, Sandycove

Mary was a mainstream teacher from 1982-1999 when she set up and taught in Ireland's first early intervention class for autistic children. Over the course of her career Mary has worked as an autism lecturer, giving a *Teaching Young Autistic Children* seminar for the SESS/NSCE, written and presented summer courses and facilitated bi-termy support workshops for teachers working in autism support in the Dublin West Education Centre. Mary has a book coming out with Orpen Press in 2024.

Carmel O'Shea - Advocacy Services Manager with National Parents Council (NPC)

Carmel is currently the Advocacy Services Manager with the National Parents Council. In this role she manages projects which

support parents' involvement in their children's educational lives. Prior to this she was a helpline officer for the NPC, a role which gave her first hand experience of the issues parents are facing. Prior to joining the NPC she was a teacher for 12 years.

Anne Tansey - Director of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Anne Tansey has been Director of the National Educational Psychological Service, the psychological service of the Department of Education since 2015. She has overall responsibility for leading the provision of educational psychology services to schools through the NEPS casework service for children and young people and the support and development service for teachers/school staff. Anne also supports the development of policy within the department, most notably in relation to wellbeing, where she plays a central role, but also special education and inclusion. Anne was a member of the board of the NCSE for two terms, having been appointed as minister's nominee.

Anne has worked as an Educational Psychologist with NEPS since 2002. She was formerly a primary school teacher, working in a DEIS school as class, resource and special class teacher. She is a member of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and of the Division of Educational Psychology of the PSI.

Discussion groups

Please refer to your name badge (A-G) to find your assigned discussion group.

Room	Discussion group
Heywood	A
Emo Court	B
Timahoe	C
Brittas	D
Barrow	E
Dunamais 3	F
Dunamais 4	G