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An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs

A better and more equitable way

An NCSE Working Group Report

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March 2014

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National Council for Special Education

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Foreword

The National Council for Special Education advised the Minister, in its May 2013 policy advice paper, *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools*, that the current allocation model was inequitable because teaching posts were not allocated to schools in line with their students' needs. The NCSE also advised the Minister that a model should be developed based on the profiled need of each school, without the need for a diagnosis of disability.

Based on this advice, I was pleased to accept the invitation of Minister Ruairí Quinn T.D. in May 2013, to chair a working group to develop a proposal for a new model for allocating additional special educational teaching resources to mainstream schools.

This report sets out the working group's proposal for a new model.

The working group took great care to ensure that meeting the needs of students with special educational needs was kept at the centre of our work. It was concerned that any new system would be fair and would ensure that schools with the greatest need for additional teaching support were provided with more resources than schools with relatively less need. The working group made sure that our proposal was informed by current national and international research findings and took into account the views of the education partners expressed through a widespread consultative process. The working group acknowledges the good work already undertaken by dedicated teachers in primary and post-primary schools throughout the country and it was conscious of the need not to increase the administrative burden on them.

Any change in how resources are allocated has the potential to cause anxiety to parents, schools and other stakeholders. However, what is most important is that all available resources are used to greatest effect to support students with special educational needs. The current system must be changed. It is unfair to continue to require a diagnosis of disability before allocating teaching supports as many students are placed on lengthy waiting lists before being able to access diagnostic services. It is inappropriate to continue to allocate teaching supports to schools without considering the educational need for such posts in those schools.

The working group is confident that its proposed new model is a better and more equitable way of delivering additional teaching supports for students. In turn, this will give a greater capacity to schools to support students with special educational needs and help them to achieve their potential.

In undertaking this work, I was fortunate to have a working group comprising people with a wide range of experience and knowledge in special education. The working group formed a smaller advisory group from its members to guide and support its work and to draft documentation. I wish to thank each member of these groups for their individual contributions and dedication, for their assistance in preparing drafts of documentation and for the professional and generous manner in which they engaged with the work of the group. The full list of group members is provided in Appendix 1.

I would like to thank Minister Quinn for giving us the opportunity to advise him on these matters. I recommend the working group's proposal to him and hope this report is of assistance to him and his officials in planning for the future education and inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

Eamon Stack

Chairperson of the Working Group
March 2014

List of acronyms

CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSP	Co-ordinated support plan
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EAL	English as an additional language
EBD	Emotional disturbance/behavioural disorder
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
ERC	Educational Research Centre
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
GAM	General allocation model
HSE	Health Service Executive
IEP	Individual education plan
IT	Information technology
ISS	Inclusion Support Service
LS/R	Learning support/resource (teacher)
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEC	State Examination Commission
SENO	Special educational needs organiser
SEN	Special educational needs
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SNA	Special needs assistant
SSP	School support programme
STen	Standard Ten

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Background and context

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., the NCSE undertook a comprehensive, strategic review of special education supports in schools and published its findings in a policy advice paper, *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools*, in May 2013 (NCSE, 2013).

The policy advice paper contained 28 recommendations which, if implemented, would improve how students with special educational needs were supported in schools. A clear finding was that the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) still represented the most effective blueprint for delivering resources to this cohort through its emphasis on individualised assessment processes, educational planning and monitoring of student outcomes. The NCSE recommended the full implementation of the Act as soon as resources permitted.

Another key finding was that the current model for allocating the 10,000 additional learning support and resource teacher posts to schools was inequitable at best and potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage. The NCSE concluded that the current model needed to be changed because:

- A substantial component of the current model is based on the availability of a diagnosis of special educational need but access to professionals who can make this diagnosis is not readily available to all students. Some families can afford to pay for private assessments and, where eligible, these students can immediately access additional teaching resources. The allocation of additional State educational resources should not depend on a parent's ability to pay for professional assessments or the proximity to HSE supports.

- There is a real risk that children are being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for health reasons.

- There is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need. The current system allocates the same level of support for students within certain categories of special educational needs even though one student may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability. A diagnosis of a disability, of itself, does not necessarily inform the level of need for additional teaching support.

- Additional learning support resources are allocated to schools on the basis of enrolment (post-primary) or number of class teachers (primary) and are not linked to the level of need for such support in schools.

- Under the current model, there is no systematic attempt to assess outcomes achieved by those to whom resources are allocated.

The NCSE advised the Minister for Education and Skills that, pending the full implementation of EPSEN, a better way had to be found to deliver additional teaching supports – one linked to educational need for such supports in schools, rather than one that linked such supports to the number of teachers or students in a school. The Minister acknowledged the potential for improvement and requested the NCSE to set up a working group to develop a proposal for a better way to allocate these supports.

The working group engaged in a widespread consultation process with the education partners, including parents, teacher representatives, unions, management bodies, advocacy groups, health and educational professionals. While each group consulted had its own focus and concerns, there was a general consensus across the consultation groups about the need to find a more equitable way to allocate additional teaching supports to schools. While consultation groups recognised that the current system was flawed, they were very aware that any new model – no matter if it was more equitable – could result in anxiety for parents/guardians and schools who would be worried about the potential impact on their child or their school.

A broad consensus emerged across consultation groups that a new model should:

- Ensure that additional teaching supports are available to students in a timely and efficient manner and that students with the greatest level of need can access greater levels of support.

- Be sufficiently balanced to provide stability to schools in terms of staffing but allow flexibility in response to changing school profiles; newly developing schools; and/or unplanned and exceptional circumstances that can arise in schools.

- Provide schools with resources to facilitate prevention strategies and early and appropriate interventions for students who require such support.

- Use a school's educational profile as the main basis for resource allocation. The school's educational profile should capture the school's requirements without the need to count each student, and should include those with the most complex needs.

- Ensure that the school's educational profile is based on indicators that are equitable, transparent and appropriately weighted to reflect their individual contribution to the overall school profile.

- Provide schools with support and guidance to develop their capacity to identify and respond to, the learning needs of students, to utilise resources to best effect and to record and measure outcomes for students with special educational needs.

- Ensure external oversight of the use of resources allocated.

The working group examined international approaches to supporting students with special educational needs. Absence of consensus on a single 'best' model (each approach is seen to have advantages and disadvantages) means that a combination of models appears to be the most desirable approach.

Useful general principles have been identified in the literature to underpin the development of inclusive models of support. These include allocating resources where they will do most good, for example to early identification and intensive education for students

who struggle with learning; allocating resources in ways that support students with complex learning needs; allocating resources in ways that promote inclusivity, improve equity and the performance of all students; and putting in place arrangements to ensure that supports are effectively contributing to improved student progress and outcomes (Mitchell 2010).

Guiding principles

The working group adopted four guiding principles to underpin its work:

- All students, irrespective of special educational need, are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools.

- Additional teaching supports are allocated to schools in line with the school's educational profile and are utilised by schools to support the meaningful education and inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

- Additional teaching supports are deployed and managed effectively by schools to support students with special educational needs, in line with their assessed learning needs.

- A whole-school approach is adopted by schools to the education of students with special educational needs, including programme planning and the implementation of early intervention and prevention programmes.

The working group considers that the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream school is an important principle, while at the same time recognising that some students with complex needs may require a more supportive special school or special class placement.

The working group understands a whole-school approach as the cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these.[1]

The working group also considers that the use of additional teaching supports and their impact on student learning outcomes should be evaluated and monitored at both school and system level.

Proposal for a new model to deliver additional teaching resources for students in a better and more equitable way

There are two key steps involved in the working group's proposed new model for delivering additional teaching resources to students with special educational needs in schools. These are the allocation of additional resources to schools and the deployment of these resources by schools for students with special educational needs.

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1   http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/definitions/whole-school-approach.en?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.GlossaryItem-id-4565247 Department of Education, Western Australia – site accessed September 24, 2013

Step 1: Allocation of additional teaching supports to schools

There are **two components** to this:

A   School educational profile component; and

B   Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention.

A   School educational profile component

The working group selected three elements on which to establish a school's educational profile, based on what each element contributes to building this profile. Consensus was general across the consultation groups that the following would be the most effective elements.

• Students with complex special educational needs.

• Percentages of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised test results.

• Social context of school which includes gender, primary school location and educational disadvantage.

Research studies indicate that additional resources should target those students with the greatest level of need (Mitchell, 2010). Students with complex special educational needs will be used to establish the school's educational profile because this element represents students with the greatest levels of need. This element of the profile refers to a small number of students with enduring conditions that significantly affect their capacity to learn. These students need additional teaching support because they require highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are significantly different to what is being provided to their peers. Their special educational needs may arise from any one or more of the following:

• Very significant difficulties in physical and/or sensory functioning.

• Very significant difficulties in cognitive and adaptive functioning.

• Very significant difficulties in social communication and social interaction, combined with rigid and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

The identification of students with complex special educational needs, as defined above, will require the development of clear and agreed protocols operated with an appropriate level of oversight, by the relevant State agencies (NEPS, HSE and NCSE) and the development of clear descriptors for use by NEPS psychologists and health professionals.

The results of standardised tests will be used in building the educational profile of schools because they link directly to the educational achievement of students in schools. While recognising that standardised tests have their limitations, the working group nevertheless considers that the use of standardised test data provides a broad and objective basis to establish differences between schools in relation to relative overall student educational achievement. With appropriate safeguards in place, the working group is confident that

standardised tests results are sufficiently robust to show real differences between schools in terms of student achievement levels.

A school's social context will be used because it can contribute strongly to the level of learning needs that students have. On the basis of available research evidence, the use of a school's social context is valid in developing an educational profile as socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with the incidence of certain types of special educational needs, including low achievement in academic learning and emotional or behavioural disorders. A school within a disadvantaged social context may have a higher share of students presenting with emotional or behavioural disorders. While some of these needs are likely to be reflected in low test scores, others may not as students with relatively high levels of educational achievement can have emotional and behavioural disorders. The potential existence of a 'social context' effect also needs to be acknowledged. This suggests that schools with large concentrations of students living in educationally disadvantaged areas are likely to require additional resources to raise achievement levels of all students in the school.

Finally, international evidence demonstrates a gender imbalance in the incidence of disabilities, special education enrolments and academic achievement (OECD, 2003, Mitchell, 2010, Banks & McCoy, 2011).

Weighting of elements

Weightings will be attributed in the following order of priority:

- The highest weighting will be assigned for students with complex needs.
- The second highest weighting will be assigned on the results of standardised tests.
- The third highest weighting will be assigned on the social context of the school (educational disadvantage, primary school location and gender).

The attribution of numerical values to the elements of the model, to ensure precise and rational weightings, will be finalised when all relevant and current data are gathered from schools. The final weighting of the elements will take current staffing allocations into account, and will avoid extreme or anomalous outcomes. It is recognised that it may be necessary to put in place transitional arrangements for schools where the new allocation model brings about significant changes to their staffing allocations.

Appeals process

An independent appeals process will be put in place whereby schools can appeal if they consider an error has been made in compiling their educational profile and/or parents can appeal the deployment of additional teaching resources by schools to their children. The grounds under which an appeal can be lodged and procedures to be followed, will be carefully devised and clearly outlined for schools and parents.

B   Baseline component

The second component of the proposed new model is an allocation to ensure that every school is an inclusive school and able to enrol and support students who may have addi-

tional needs. Research findings consistently support the importance of inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention for students with special educational needs. The baseline component will support schools in having whole-school policies and practices in place to prevent and minimise the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. It will also enable schools to put in place early intervention programmes for all students. This baseline allocation will support the work of the school and class teacher in including students with special educational needs and will provide some scope for co-ordination of special education within a school.

The baseline allocation under the new model cannot be compared to the learning support allocation received under the old system. This is an entirely new and different model and not simply a revision of the old model. The baseline allocation forms a part of the new model and must be looked at in conjunction with the school's educational profile to have a complete understanding of how the new model works. For a total view of additional teaching allocations under the new model, schools must consider their baseline allocation alongside the allocation that they receive under the educational profile component.

Subject to testing and validation, the baseline allocation of teaching posts will be graduated in line with school overall enrolment.

Review of schools' allocations

Additional teaching supports will be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years. Developing schools will be reviewed every year.

For that fixed period of time, each school will be expected to cater for the special educational needs of its students from their overall allocation. Schools will then deploy these resources in a way that ensures that students with the greatest levels of need receive the greatest levels of support. Student learning needs will be determined and monitored by effective school-based assessment data in line with the NEPS continuum of support process. This is a three-stage process (continuum of assessment and support) that schools and teachers may use for identifying and assessing special educational needs and for planning interventions (Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2007b, 2010).

Reducing administrative burden on schools

The proposed new model will provide some reduction in administrative work for schools as schools will no longer be required to submit individual applications for additional teaching support for high or low incidence disabilities. They will only be required to submit information every two or three years rather than annually and will not be expected to submit information already reported to the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

A central online data system will be developed to facilitate schools in collecting and submitting the same information on one occasion only.

Under the new model the current learning support and resource teaching schemes will be discontinued and a new single scheme for allocating additional teaching resources to schools will be put in place. The current distinction between 'high' and 'low' incidence special educational needs will no longer apply. Similarly the distinction between learning

support and resource teachers will end. Additional teachers who are allocated under the new scheme will instead be known as "support teachers".

Step 2: Deployment/utilisation of additional teaching resources by schools

The second step in delivering additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs is the deployment/utilisation of the additional teaching resources by schools. Schools are to be supported in this process by:

- NEPS psychologists using a problem-solving framework to support schools in identifying students with special educational needs across the continuum and in devising appropriate, evidence-based interventions.

- A system for advising schools on how to develop appropriate goals for students receiving additional support and for recording outcomes.

- Guidelines to support schools to identify students requiring additional support and to use and allocate additional teaching posts to best effect.

- An NCSE Inclusion Support Service (see below).

Inclusion Support Service (ISS)

The existing advisory and intervention supports available to schools are provided by a number of different bodies and organisations. The NCSE has previously highlighted the need to ensure cohesion across service provision (NCSE, 2013). In order to avoid fragmentation the working group recommends that existing support services for students with special educational needs be combined into one unified support service for schools.

This one coherent service will improve the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students with additional learning needs and to ensure they are included in mainstream classroom and school life to the maximum extent possible.

The Inclusion Support Service (ISS) will fulfil its role through:

- Building professional capacity in schools; and

- Supporting schools in responding to exceptional circumstances.

There will be a facility for schools to apply to the Inclusion Support Service for additional support, where required, to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. This support need not always be in the form of additional teaching resources but could involve the promotion of effective teaching strategies, assisting teachers in developing a classroom environment to promote positive behaviour and/or developing capacity to respond to challenging behaviour.

Responding to exceptional circumstances

Unplanned and exceptional cases may arise between the periods when a school is profiled, such as students with complex needs entering a school at a point during the year. The ISS will provide immediate assistance to schools in unplanned and exceptional

circumstances, where this is indicated and as needs emerge within the school. Such additional support could take the form of out-reach teaching support, the promotion of inclusive teaching methodologies or the development of effective assessment and planning strategies. There will also be a facility for schools to apply to the Inclusion Support Service for such additional support, where required, to meet the needs of students with extremely challenging behaviour, who are receiving support at the level of School Support Plus on the NEPS Continuum of Support.

Outcomes for students with special educational needs

Schools will be required to record and report baseline information, goals set and progress made for students with special educational needs who receive additional teaching support. The level of detail recorded should be graduated in accordance with the level of the student's learning need and the intensity of support provided.

Following discussion with the relevant stakeholders, schools will be required to provide annual reports to the NCSE on how additional resources were deployed, student progress made and student outcomes achieved through the learning plan process. Students with special educational needs availing of additional support in primary and post-primary schools will be included. A template will be devised for schools to use in returning this data to ensure administrative work is kept to a minimum.

Implementing the new model

There is considerable work to be completed before the new model for allocating additional teaching supports can be implemented. This work includes piloting systems for data collection and weighting of elements to establish an educational profile for each school.

The following data will be collected in relation to each school:

- Enrolment
- Results of standardised tests
- Social context of school:
    a. Socio-economic data
    b. Gender of students
    c. Students for whom English is an additional language (EAL)
- Students with complex special educational needs, as earlier defined in this paper.

Other work to be completed in implementing the model includes:

- Development of protocols by NCSE, NEPS and HSE for the collection of information on students with complex special educational needs.
- Descriptors for complex special educational needs to be agreed between the DES, NCSE, NEPS and HSE.
- An IT package to be developed for the return of standardised tests and other information from schools.

- DES to provide information to and consult with stakeholders on the operation of the new model.

- A circular to be prepared and issued to schools on the operation of the new model.

- Guidelines for schools to be prepared and issued on the deployment of additional teaching resources at school level.

- A template to be devised for reporting of student learning outcomes by schools.

- Principals and teachers to receive training in the deployment and utilisation of additional teaching resources.

- An independent appeals process to be developed and agreed which clearly specifies the grounds for making appeals and the procedures to be followed.

- Allocation of additional teaching supports under the new model to be made to schools for the academic year 2015-16, in line with normal DES arrangements for teaching allocations.

Impact of new model

Impact on students

The working group is confident that if accepted, the introduction of the proposed new model will generate a better and more equitable resource allocation system with tangible benefits for students with special educational needs. These students will have immediate and timely access to the additional educational resources they require, rather than having to await a professional diagnosis, which can involve lengthy waiting lists. The need for students to receive a lifelong label (sometimes from an early age) from a limited diagnostic process will be reduced. The greatest level of teaching support can be provided to those with the greatest need. Students will continue to have access to prevention and early intervention to minimise the potential for the emergence of learning difficulties. Finally, the new model will link the deployment of additional teaching supports with student learning plans so as to identify and address their individual learning needs and assess the impact of interventions on their learning outcomes.

Impact on schools

The proposed model addresses fundamental flaws identified in the current system by tailoring resources allocated to school profile, by breaking the link that makes diagnosis a prerequisite for resource allocation and by placing greater emphasis on monitoring educational outcomes. The proposed model will provide a greater measure of certainty to schools on resourcing and will help to focus the professional assessment process on the identification of learning needs rather than on diagnosis for the purpose of resource allocation where such diagnosis may not be indicated for health reasons.

Some changes necessitated by the new model will need to be carefully managed. Under the new model, some students will no longer have an automatic entitlement to a specified level of additional teaching hours, linked to disability category. However, this is counterbalanced by other students who will gain access to additional teaching hours because

they have a greater need for them. There will be no reduction in the overall allocation of additional teaching resources to schools, additional teaching resources will be allocated in accordance with the educational profiles of schools, and schools will have responsibility and flexibility in deploying their additional teaching resources in accordance with the special educational needs of their students. NCSE research findings clearly indicate that this is a better way to allocate additional resources because it allocates according to students' needs rather than purely by disability category (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010).

The proposed allocation model could result in widespread change for schools and needs to be carefully planned and implemented. The balance of distribution between primary and post-primary schools is likely to shift, certain schools may receive reduced additional teaching support if they have fewer students scoring at the lowest percentile levels and as already stated, parents and schools may be concerned about the loss of defined levels of support for students with special educational needs, previously classed as 'low incidence'. The working group therefore recommends that any changes to the level of teaching supports allocated to individual schools must be properly managed and it may be necessary to consider transitional arrangements as required.

The working group is confident that the model being proposed is a better and more equitable means of allocating available additional teaching resources to schools. However, any proposal to change the current system for allocating additional resources has the potential to cause real anxiety in the system. Genuine concerns were expressed that any proposal for a new model would simply be a means of delivering savings to the Exchequer rather than as part of a process of incremental improvement in responding to need or a way of using available resources to best effect. Schools are concerned that a new model could result in an additional administrative burden. The working group wishes to reassure parents and schools that its proposal for a new model for allocating additional teaching supports is not intended to bring about a reduction in the level of additional resources available to schools for students with special educational needs or to result in increased bureaucracy for schools.

The working group strongly recommends therefore that sufficient time is allowed for further consultation to take place with the education stakeholders before the new model is implemented in schools. This process is necessary to build confidence that the new system will be equitable, transparent and efficient in delivering resources to students with special educational needs. Time is also required to collect and analyse current school based data on which educational profiles will be established. Finally, schools will need specific advice on how to deploy and use available resources to support students with special educational needs, without a professional diagnosis of disability.

Introduction

1 Introduction

Background and context

In 2012, the Minister for Education and Skills requested the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to provide policy advice on how students with special educational needs should, in the future, be supported in schools. The terms of reference governing this policy advice specifically asked the NCSE to advise on the appropriate basis for allocating a quantum of supports to schools and the appropriate allocation model through which available supports could be efficiently provided. In preparing this advice, the NCSE was to take into account the needs of students in the various school settings, the existing supports in place and the need for flexibility, given constrained resources.

The NCSE undertook a comprehensive, strategic review of special education supports in schools and published its findings in a policy advice paper, *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools*, in May 2013 (NCSE, 2013).

This review made 28 recommendations which, if implemented, would improve how students with special educational needs were supported in schools. A clear finding was that the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) still represents the most effective blueprint for delivering resources to this cohort through its emphasis on individualised assessment processes, educational planning and monitoring of student outcomes. The NCSE recommended the full implementation of the Act as soon as resources permitted.

Another key finding was that the current model of allocating up to 10,000 additional learning support and resource teacher posts to schools was inequitable at best and potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage. The NCSE advised the Minister that, pending the full implementation of EPSEN, a better way had to be found to deliver additional teaching supports – one linked to educational need for such supports in schools, rather than the current model that links such supports to the number of teachers in a primary school or the number of students in a post-primary school.

The NCSE therefore recommended that a new model be developed for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools based on the profiled need of each school, without the need for a diagnosis of disability (NCSE, 2013:50). Following the publication of the policy advice paper, the Minister for Education and Skills acknowledged the potential for improvement and requested the NCSE to set up a working group to develop a proposal for a better way to allocate additional teaching supports to schools.

The Minister appointed Eamon Stack, Chairperson, NCSE, as chairperson of the working group which met on seven occasions between July 2013 and February 2014. A sub-group, composed entirely of members of the working group, was established to prepare draft documents and advise the working group. This advisory group met on eight additional occasions between July 2013 and February 2014. The membership of the working group is outlined in Appendix 1 – an asterisk denotes those who belonged to both working and advisory groups.

Term of reference

The term of reference set out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for the working group is to:

> '…Develop a proposal for a model for allocating teaching resources to mainstream primary and post-primary schools that is reflective of recommendations in NCSE policy advice and takes account of factors that identify the educational profiles of schools and the recording of outcomes for students with special educational needs.'

The relevant NCSE recommendation (22.1) referred to in the above term of reference sets out that the allocation of additional teaching supports should be in line with the profiled educational need of each school. Additional teaching supports should only be sanctioned on the basis that planning is in place for the students concerned, as part of the learning plan process. The deployment of these resources should be linked to the student's learning plan process, be time-bound and outcome focused (NCSE, 2013).

The working group's proposal for a new model for allocating additional teaching resources to schools is set out in Section 3 of the report.

Current allocation process

Every mainstream school is allocated class/subject teachers in line with specific pupil-teacher ratios at primary and post-primary levels. These posts are allocated to the school to enable them to educate all enrolled students. The class/subject teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all students in his/her class (DES, 2000:42, and 2007a:71). Along with class/subject teachers, mainstream schools have access to over 10,000 teacher posts to provide supplementary educational support for students with low achievement and special educational needs. Since 2012/13 students requiring English Additional Language (EAL) Support have been included under this provision. These posts are allocated under two separate schemes.

The learning support/resource teacher scheme provides additional learning support/resource teachers to primary schools to assist in the education of students with low achievement levels on standardised tests, students with certain special educational needs more frequently found in schools (known as high incidence special educational needs) and students with other learning difficulties. These posts are allocated on the basis of the number of class teachers in every primary school. At post-primary, learning support teacher posts are allocated based on the number of students in every school. Post-primary schools receive further additional teaching support, based on historical information, in respect of students with certain special educational needs that are more frequently found in schools. Since 2012/13 the learning support scheme for primary and post-primary schools has included provision for EAL Support.

The resource teacher scheme provides additional teaching support to primary and post-primary schools that have enrolled students diagnosed with certain special educational needs found less frequently in schools (known as low incidence special educational

needs). Examples include students with a moderate general learning disability and students who are blind/visually impaired and students who are deaf/hard of hearing. Each student needs a formal diagnosis from a relevant health or educational professional. The school then applies to the NCSE for additional teaching support accompanied by the relevant professional diagnosis.

Why the NCSE recommended change

The current model for allocating teaching supports has flaws and is inequitable. Every school has a different educational profile. All students in one post-primary school may progress to third level education while in another school, with exactly the same number of students, only a small number may do so. Yet under the current model both schools receive the same level of learning support.

The situation is mirrored in primary schools. Two primary schools can have the same number of class teachers but one school could have high concentrations of students with low attainment while the other might only have a small number. Yet both schools receive precisely the same amount of learning support.

The current system means that some schools do not receive the learning support they require whereas others may have resources not warranted or required relative to other schools.

In relation to resource teaching support, students must await a professional diagnosis of disability before they can access additional teaching resources for a low incidence disability.[2] There can be long waiting lists for such professional diagnosis. Students whose families or schools can afford to pay for private assessments can access additional teaching supports immediately, where eligible. Those who cannot are deprived of such supports until they can be assessed through the public system.

The NCSE was also advised by both health and educational professionals that they were being put under tremendous pressure to diagnose a child with a particular disability simply to ensure that the school was allocated additional teaching supports. Health professionals were concerned that much of their time was being diverted to diagnosing children so they could gain access to educational support rather than because such a diagnosis was indicated for health reasons. This meant that often they could not find time to provide appropriate therapeutic interventions for children on their caseloads. Health and educational professionals also advised that a diagnosis, by itself, did not necessarily inform teaching and learning. They considered their time and expertise would be more effectively used in providing interventions and support as well as advising parents and schools on how best to support the child's development and learning.

The NCSE emphasised that students with special educational needs should have access to individualised assessment to inform their teaching and learning programme. However they were concerned that some students were receiving a diagnosis of disability purely to

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2 A low incidence disability includes the following categories: physical, emotional disturbance, severe emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, visual impairment, moderate general learning disability, severe/profound general learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, assessed syndrome, speech and language disorder, multiple disabilities.

satisfy criteria for the allocation of resources. This may result in the unnecessary or premature labelling of children with a disability which may not always be in a child's best interest.

In addition, the NCSE is aware that the basis for providing some of the additional teaching support to post-primary schools is becoming out of date and there is no means, other than commencing a formal diagnosis of a large number of students, to update this information.

The Constitution requires the State to provide for free primary education for all children (Article 42.4, Bunreacht na hÉireann). It follows that access to additional teaching supports should be available to all children on an equitable basis and should not depend on a parent's ability to pay for private assessments.

Based on findings from research and the consultation process, the NCSE concluded that the current model for allocating teaching support to schools needs to be changed because:

• A substantial component of the current model is based on the availability of a diagnosis of special educational need. Access to professionals who can diagnose special educational needs is not readily available to all students. The allocation of additional State educational resources should not depend on a parent's ability to pay for professional assessments or the proximity to HSE supports.

• Additional learning support resources are allocated to schools on the basis of enrolment (post-primary) or number of class teachers (primary) and are not linked to the level of need for such support in schools.

• There is a real risk that children are being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for health reasons.

• There is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need. The current system allocates the same level of support to students within certain categories of special educational needs even though one student may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability. Of itself, a diagnosis of a disability does not necessarily inform the level of need for additional teaching support.

• Under the current model, there is no systematic attempt to assess outcomes achieved by those to whom resources are allocated.

These are the compelling reasons to change the current system for allocating additional teaching resources to support students with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Research Findings
and Consultation Process

2 Research Findings and Consultation Process

Research findings

International approaches to providing support

A short overview of international approaches to supporting students with special educational needs is provided in Appendix 4. Section 1 of this overview highlights issues raised in the literature on various models for providing support and Section 2 provides summary examples of models in place in a selection of seven countries.

Summary points from this overview are outlined below.

1. **There are difficulties comparing international data on special educational needs provision and expenditure**

   Despite international convergence on a commitment to inclusive education and the provision of supports to students with special educational needs or disabilities, it remains difficult to compare data on students with special educational needs or the costs of special educational needs provision across countries for a number of reasons (see OECD 2007; EADSNE 2011).

2. **Three main approaches to the provision of support have been identified**

   A review of international trends in the education of students with special educational needs identified three main approaches to providing them with additional supports (Mitchell 2010). These are: demand (or input or categorical) driven approaches based on allocating individual funding to identified students based on the student's degree and type of disability; supply type approaches provide a set amount of funding to cover the costs of provision for the proportion of students estimated to have special educational needs; and output funding, described in the literature as a 'theoretical possibility' in which schools are rewarded for effectiveness and excellence and are retrospectively funded for tasks completed, rather than 'tasks to be done' as is mostly the case at present.

3. **Each approach has advantages and disadvantages**

   There is an absence of a consensus on a single 'best' model as each of these approaches is seen to have advantages and disadvantages. Every model is said to have strengths and weaknesses, incentives and disincentives, and positive and negative outcomes that may affect different students differentially, so a combination of models has been said to be desirable.

   Some useful general principles have been identified in the literature to underpin the development of inclusive models of support. These include for example allocating resources to early identification and intensive education for students who struggle with learning; allocating resources in ways that support students with complex learning needs; allocating resources in ways that promote inclusivity, improve equity and the performance of all students; avoiding undue perverse incentives

and disincentives; and putting in place arrangements to ensure that supports are effectively contributing to improved student progress and outcomes (Mitchell 2010).

4. **The use of diagnosis to allocate additional resources has limitations**

Limitations associated with the use of diagnostic categories to allocate additional resources to students with special educational needs (the basis for a significant component of the current Irish model) have been identified in the literature. Recommendations emerging from different areas of work at the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education advocate a move away from classification systems that lead to the labelling and/or placement of students based on categories (and can have negative consequences, such as segregation and low expectations), towards an understanding of what actually benefits students (see EADSNE 2013).

An international review of practices and procedures for the diagnosis of a disability and the assessment of special needs education commissioned by the NCSE (Desforges and Lindsay 2010) also raised questions about how reliably people with disabilities can be classified into the categories of disability that underpin resource allocation models, the validity of the categories used and the reliability of the assessments to place children in these categories. Findings showed no uniformity across countries on how categories of disability were defined, the methods of assessment required to make the diagnosis or the professional groups involved in making the diagnosis.

The report notes that definitive categories create dilemmas as students often exhibit a range of difficulties characteristic of more than one category, and it may not be clear which one offers the best fit. Furthermore, categorisation often does not reflect the complexity of the special educational needs of an individual child, nor does it necessarily inform educational interventions. For example students assigned to the same disability category often have different needs in terms of school based learning, as a wide range of ability or disability can be represented within categories. Other authors have raised similar concerns about the limited value of categorisation for informing teaching and learning or resource allocation.

A *Response to Intervention* framework, i.e. a graded approach to assessment and support, has been identified as a possible alternative to categorisation (Mitchell 2010; EASDNE 2013). The type of staged assessment and intervention envisaged in Ireland through the NEPS continuum of support also draws on the principles which underpin Response to Intervention (DES 2010b).

5. **The provision of support needs to be linked to improved outcomes**

Some studies reported here provide useful evidence that the provision of specific supports, interventions and resources can be linked to improved outcomes for students experiencing educational disadvantage (e.g. DEIS in Ireland – see Weir 2011; Weir & Denner 2013) and for students with special educational needs (e.g. the AFA programme in England; see Humphrey & Squires (2011)).

These studies highlight how additional support can contribute to improving student outcomes, and also underline how important it is to ensure that provision of interventions or support is carefully monitored over time to assess effectiveness and impact on student outcomes.

International examples

A number of features can be identified from across the seven examples of approaches in place in seven countries (England, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Scotland, Denmark and New Zealand – selected on the basis of the availability of relatively comparable published information). The examples illustrate how countries struggle with issues around funding and use a variety of approaches which are distinct in some ways and similar in others, and to some extent are embedded in their own country's particular historical and provision contexts. Key features identified across the seven countries include:

- The allocation of funding to schools is either done centrally as in New Zealand or decentralised to regional or local authorities responsible for education (as in Italy, Norway, England, Denmark, the Netherlands and Scotland). As noted earlier, there is a mix of approaches throughout the EADSNE countries.

- Disadvantage/socioeconomic disadvantage indicators are incorporated into systems of general school funding so as to target or compensate for educational disadvantage in a number of the countries reviewed, i.e. Norway, England, Scotland, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

- Systems for supporting students with special educational needs are undergoing change in efforts to improve the provision of funding support in England, the Netherlands, Denmark and New Zealand. All countries have experienced increases in numbers of students identified with special educational needs in recent years.

- Additional provision for lower level needs requires no formal diagnosis in six of the seven countries examined (England, Norway, the Netherlands, Scotland, Denmark and New Zealand.) Additionally, in both Scotland and New Zealand extra support for higher level needs is not reliant on a diagnosis. Scotland takes a common approach to extra support for children with a variety of additional needs identified through a staged intervention process; in New Zealand students with special educational needs are defined as learners with a disability, sensory or physical impairments, learning difficulty, communication or behaviour difficulty that require one or more of the following: extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or regular education settings.

- In Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands higher level needs provision is dependent on a diagnosis or a formal pedagogical assessment. Norway uses a pedagogical assessment of students to decide entitlement to special teaching and/or to advise schools about students 'not benefiting from' the ordinary curriculum; in Denmark students who need 'special education' undergo individual assessment through pedagogical and psychological services, with the involvement of the parents; and in the Netherlands diagnosis is required under the current 'backpack' system of personal

budgets and carried out by assessment committees regionally. However, in 2014 Passend Onderwijs (literally an 'education that fits the needs of the pupil') will come into effect in the Netherlands and it will no longer be necessary to diagnose disorders to get funding for extra support.

- In Italy additional provision for students with any special educational needs requires a clinical or functional diagnosis carried out by a regional service. But additional resources arising are allocated to the student's school, or the student's class, often in the form of a second teacher, rather than the student – with a cap on the number of assessed students in a class and on the size of a class with such students.

- Additional provision for higher level, more complex needs is allocated on the basis of the level of provision (e.g. number of hours) required in Denmark, where these are students who have been assessed and are referred by their schools to segregated education (e.g. special classes) or who need more than nine hours support per week in mainstream classes. In England it has been proposed that higher needs be defined as those whose support costs are over a certain threshold.

- Scotland takes a common and integrated approach to providing for all students with additional support needs causing a barrier to their learning, whether arising from the learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need and social and emotional factors. For a few students with more complex needs a co-ordinated support plan can be agreed across agencies. Identification is through a staged intervention process whereby schools assess children with additional support needs, consider the support they require and demonstrate their efforts to provide this support from within the school, before seeking additional funding.

- Personal budgets – the Netherlands is now moving away from this form of provision as it has been linked with increasing numbers of students referred to special education. Personalised budgets are envisaged as part of future arrangements under the special education review taking place in England. According to EADSNE Latvia and Lithuania, among other countries, also operate a backpack or 'student basket' system.

- Attainment can be used as an indicator for special needs provision in the new funding arrangements in England.

Consultation process

A summary of the key points emerging from the consultation process is summarised below. A more detailed account of the findings of the consultation process is provided in Appendix 3. The education partners consulted included parents, students, teachers, principals, school management bodies, teacher union officials, NEPS psychologists, Special Educational Needs Organisers, HSE professionals, and advocacy groups.

While each group consulted had its own focus and concerns, there was a general consensus across the consultation groups regarding the necessity to find a more equitable way to allocate additional teaching supports to schools. Groups recognised that the current system was flawed. Consultation groups were aware that any new model – no matter if it

was more equitable or better – could result in anxiety for parents and schools who would be worried about the potential impact on their child or their school.

Broad consensus emerged across consultation groups on the following points:

A new model should

- Ensure that additional teaching supports are available to students in a timely and efficient manner and that students with the greatest level of need should access greater levels of support.

- Be sufficiently balanced to provide stability to schools in terms of staffing but allow flexibility in response to changing profiles of schools or newly developing schools.

- Be sufficiently flexible to cater for unanticipated and exceptional circumstances. (Consideration should be given to establishing a supplementary pool of teachers who would be available to provide support to schools in these exceptional circumstances, when required).

- Ensure that schools have the resources to facilitate prevention strategies and early and appropriate interventions for students who require such support.

- Use a school's educational profile as one basis for resource allocation. The school's educational profile should capture the need for support in each school without the need to count each student, including those with the most complex needs.

- Ensure the school's educational profile is based on indicators that are equitable, transparent and appropriately weighted to reflect their individual contribution to the overall school profile.

- Include the following elements (many others were also listed by various groups):
  - Results of standardised tests;
  - Socioeconomic indicator;
  - Gender;
  - Total student enrolment;
  - Information available at entry to primary school on learning needs;
  - Information about significant difficulties that emerge during school which have an impact on learning.

- Ensure that outcomes (comprising academic, social, emotional and behavioural aspects) are recorded, measured and monitored and relate to targets set in the student's learning plan.

- Provide schools with the support and guidance to develop their capacity to identify and support the learning needs of students, to utilise resources to best effect and to record and measure outcomes for students with special educational needs. Continuing professional development for teachers is seen to be critical to the success of the new model and will need to be embedded from its introduction.

- Emphasise the importance of individualised planning for students with special educational needs and ensure that learning targets set out in a student's learning plan are clear, realistic, measureable and not too narrowly focused.

- Ensure that the reporting of outcomes takes place as part of the normal process of whole-school self-evaluation.

Proposal for a New Model to Deliver Additional Teaching Resources for Students

3 Proposal for a New Model to Deliver Additional Teaching Resources for Students

What the proposed model is intended to achieve

The NCSE working group acknowledges the significant investment made by successive Governments to provide supports for students with special educational needs and the progress made by schools in including these students in school programmes and activities.

The working group engaged in a process of widespread consultation and requested written submissions from those consulted. It made sure its proposal was informed by national and international research studies and used its members' own expert knowledge to craft a proposal on how the current system could be improved.

The multi-faceted proposal for a better model addresses:

- How the educational profile of a school will be established.

- How the educational profile will be used to allocate additional teaching supports to schools.

- How additional teaching resources will be used by schools to ensure students with the greatest levels of need are well supported and to drive improved outcomes for students.

Guiding principles

The working group adopted four guiding principles to underpin its work:

- All students, irrespective of special educational need, are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools.

- Additional teaching supports are allocated to schools in line with the school's educational profile and are utilised by schools to support the meaningful education and inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

- Additional teaching supports are deployed and managed effectively by schools to support students with special educational needs, in line with their assessed learning needs.

- A whole-school approach is adopted by schools to the education of students with special educational needs, including programme planning and the implementation of early intervention and prevention programmes.

The working group considers that the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream school is an important principle, while at the same time recognising that some students with complex needs may require a more supportive special school or special class placement. The working group understands a whole-school approach as the cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the

conditions that support these.[3] The working group also considers that the use of additional teaching supports and their impact on student learning outcomes should be evaluated and monitored at both school and system level.

Summary of the new model to deliver additional teaching resources for students in a better and more equitable way

Delivery for students with special educational needs
Two key steps involved

Step 1: Allocation provided to schools

Two components to this:

A   School educational profile component

    – three elements to this:

       1.   Complex special educational needs

       2.   Standardised test results

       3.   Social context of school

B   Baseline component

    – provided to every mainstream school

Step 2: Deployment/Utilisation by schools

Supported by:

- Guidelines for schools
- NCSE Inclusion Support Service
- Responding to exceptional circumstances
- Recording and reporting outcomes

Proposal for a new model to deliver additional teaching resources to students in a better and more equitable way

The working group considered all the issues brought to its attention during the consultation process. In addition, the group considered:

- Potential sources of information which contribute to establishing the educational profile of schools.

- Risks associated with such information.

- Possible outcomes which could be measured.

- How the educational system could support schools better in enabling improved outcomes for students with learning and special educational needs.

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3   http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/definitions/whole-school-approach.en?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.GlossaryItem-id-4565247 Department of Education, Western Australia – site accessed September 24, 2013

Implementation of this model may result in teaching posts being re-allocated to schools with greater levels of need for such posts and away from schools that are relatively better resourced under the current model. This could be a source of concern in those school communities. The Minister's over-riding duty of care, however, is to ensure that resources are provided to schools with the greatest level of educational need. This is about a better and more equitable way for all students with special educational needs.

Change to any system is challenging and even more challenging when change involves how students with learning and special educational needs are supported. The task the working group faced was to propose a better way to allocate teaching supports to schools pending the full implementation of EPSEN. The working group is confident that its proposal provides a better, fairer and more equitable basis to allocate teaching support than the current model.

Two key steps are involved in the working group's proposed new model for delivering additional teaching resources to students with special educational needs in schools. These are the allocation of additional resources to schools and their effective deployment to students with special educational needs.

Step 1: Allocation of additional teaching supports to schools

Recommendation 1

The working group recommends that the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools has two components:

A   School educational profile component based on three elements: students with complex special educational needs; standardised test results; and the social context of the school.

B   Baseline component based on an allocation of teaching resources being made to every mainstream school to support inclusion, to minimise the emergence of learning difficulties and to facilitate early intervention.

Both are outlined below.

A   School educational profile component

The primary objective of the resource allocation model is that students with the greatest levels of need get the teaching supports they require to enable them to achieve appropriate educational outcomes, in accordance with their ability. In addition, the model should enable the best use to be made of State resources. To achieve this, the NCSE recommended that the allocation of all additional teaching resources to support students with special educational needs should be in line with the educational profile of a school.

The working group's definition of the term 'educational profile of a school', in the context of allocating additional teaching resources to mainstream schools is:

'a combination of weighted elements which are taken to represent the learning needs of students and the school's requirement for additional teaching resources to meet those needs'.

The combination creates the overall educational profile of a school and removes the need to count each individual student with special educational needs in every school.

Data from special classes in mainstream schools will not be included in building up the school profile for the purpose of allocating additional teaching supports as these classes are allocated their supports through a different mechanism. Special classes have smaller class sizes – some as low as six students – to assist the school in meeting the educational needs of students who attend. Increased funding is also paid to mainstream schools with special classes.

A range of different elements that could, in combination, signal a school's need for additional teaching resources to address special educational needs was considered. The working group selected three elements on which to establish the educational profile, based on what each element contributes to building that profile. There was also a general consensus across the consultation groups that these would be the most effective elements. These elements are:

- Students with complex special educational needs.

- Percentages of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised tests.

- The school's social context which includes educational disadvantage, gender, and primary school location.

These three elements are explained further in the following three sub-sections of the report.

1   Students with complex special educational needs

This element of the profile refers to a small number of students with enduring conditions that significantly affect their capacity to learn. These students require additional teaching support because they need highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are significantly different to those of their peers. Their special educational needs may arise from any one or more of the following:

- Very significant difficulties in physical and/or sensory functioning.

- Very significant difficulties in cognitive and adaptive functioning.

- Very significant difficulties in social communication and social interaction, combined with rigid and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

These students are mainly identified by HSE professionals either at birth or by entry to primary school and are linked into HSE early services. They may also be identified through their pre-school placements. Currently the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is developing a protocol for the transfer of information between pre-school placements and primary schools. The NCSE will liaise with the NCCA and the Department of Education and Skills in developing a form, as part of this process, to ensure that SENOs receive information about children with complex special educational needs who are identified at the pre-school level.

Recommendation 2

The working group recommends that, as part of their work, special educational needs organisers (SENOs) will return information on children with complex special educational needs at the pre-school level, from their local areas on a two-year cycle and that a protocol will be developed between the NCSE and the HSE to ensure that the information is consistently gathered at a local level.

While most of these students are generally identified before school entry, some may be identified after school entry.

Recommendation 3

The working group recommends that data on students identified after school entry, will be based on information supplied by the relevant professionals to the schools (e.g. NEPS psychologist, HSE services, audiologists, child and adolescent mental health teams (CAMHS) teams etc).

Students to be included in this element of the profile will be identified through the use of agreed descriptors to be developed by NCSE, NEPS and HSE, for use by NEPS psychologists and relevant HSE professionals. The use of descriptors, rather than disability category, will ensure that students are included on the basis of their educational needs rather than category of disability. This is important because:

- Students within any one category of disability will not necessarily have the same level of need.

- Students will not have to await a professional diagnosis to access additional teaching resources.

- Access to additional resources will not depend on a family or school's ability to pay for private assessments.

- Students will not have to be labelled to access additional supports.

Descriptors for students with complex special educational needs include:

- A student who is unable to communicate basic needs.

- A student with extremely delayed cognitive development and adaptive functioning such that at age five their developmental level and overall functioning is at that of a child aged one or two.

- A student that relies totally on sign language for all communication.

- A student that relies totally on Braille for reading.

- A student whose communication and social behaviours are extremely unusual and inappropriate and who has rigid, repetitive behaviours that appear to be meaningless. These difficulties almost totally exclude the student from meaningful interaction with peers.

- A student who, on his/her own, is unable to move, change position, sit, eat, dress, grasp or release or manipulate objects.

When the school is being profiled for the first time, this indicator will include students identified with complex special educational needs who require additional teaching

support in each class from those who entered junior infants the previous September to those in sixth class.

When school profiles are being updated, any students whose complex needs, as set out above, emerged in the intervening period and who require additional teaching support because they need highly individualised learning programmes will be included in the school profile.

Those identified at second class level will contribute to the profiling of a senior primary school where children are transferring from a junior to senior school.

Those identified at sixth class level will contribute to the profiling of the post-primary school they are transferring to.

Why use complex needs as an element in establishing the educational profile of a school?

The school's educational profile should reflect the level of its students with complex special educational needs as this element represents those with the greatest levels of need. In addition, Mitchell's review recommends that funding should be flexible enough to meet the needs of 'children who experience complex needs' (Mitchell, 2010). There was general consensus across consultation groups that the profile should include complex needs as an element.

Consultation groups expressed concern that there could be a perception that it is open for some schools to seek to place students inappropriately into this category in an effort to guarantee additional resources. However, the working group considers that this process will be transparent and fair because:

- Most of these students are already well known in the system before they come to school.

- Clear and agreed protocols will be operated with an appropriate level of oversight, by the relevant State agencies (NEPS, HSE and NCSE).

- Clear descriptors will be developed for use by NEPS psychologists and HSE professionals in identifying students with complex needs

The working group therefore considers that the level of risk attached to including complex special educational needs, as defined above and with appropriate agreed protocols, is low.

2.   Percentages of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised tests

For the purposes of devising a school's educational profile the NCSE will use standardised test results data for mathematics and for Irish or English. Standardised test data from Irish tests will be used for schools in which Irish is the language of the home for most students. The working group proposes that under the new model, low achievement should refer to students who achieve a standard score of 85 or below (16th percentile or STen 3[4]) on standardised tests.

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4   The results for some standardised tests are returned as STen scores rather than percentile ranks or standard scores. STen is an abbreviation for Standard Ten. A STen score is calculated by reference to the standard normal distribution and it indicates a person's approximate position (as a range of values) with respect to other people in that population.

Currently all primary schools submit standardised test results to the Department for all students in second, fourth and sixth classes. Primary schools also report the total number of students:

- enrolled in the class
- tested
- exempted
- absent and not exempted

From 2017 onwards all post-primary schools will be required to submit similar standardised test data to the Department for all second-year students.

Currently all primary school principals are required to forward standardised data for each student to the student's secondary school principal, once s/he has been enrolled.

Recommendation 4

The working group recommends that the NCSE be given access to test results submitted from all mainstream schools to the Department of Education and Skills and that the Department require schools to report the number of students who register at each of the STen scores.[5]

As an interim measure the NCSE will request schools to submit required standardised test results directly to the NCSE. Section 53 of the Education Act (1998) restricts access to certain information in relation to the comparative performance of schools. The NCSE will work with the Department of Education and Skills to establish what, if any, implication Section 53 has for the collection by NCSE of information from schools on the academic performance of students, and to examine if any legislative change in respect of Section 53 is required.

The minimum number of students for whom standardised test results are required from any one school is 15. Thus small primary schools with fewer than 15 pupils in second, fourth and sixth classes combined, will be asked to submit standardised test data for third and fifth class pupils also.

Post-primary schools will be required to make an online submission to the NCSE indicating the number of students in first-year and numbers in second year that score at each of the STen scores. This data will be based on the standardised test results received from primary schools and will include information on the number of students exempted from taking the standardised tests on grounds of special educational needs.[6] Once all post-primary schools administer standardised tests to second year's students, as required by circular 0025/2012, consideration will be given to using this data and to accessing this information directly from the Department.

Data from each school for a three-year period will be combined by the NCSE.[7] Using data over a three-year period allows trends to be established which reduce the likelihood that a

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5   Currently schools report the number of students in STens 1 − 3 combined, STen 4, STen5, STen6, STen7 and STens 8-10 combined.

6   Circulars 56/11 (primary) and Circular 25/2012 (post-primary) require all primary schools to forward results of standardised test of students to the post-primary school in which they have enrolled.

7   Initially data from each post-primary school for a two-year period will be combined, as all schools may not have data for a three-year period on all second-year students.

school's results will be skewed by a particular cohort of students either performing exceptionally well or poorly on the tests in a given year.

Recommendation 5

The working group recommends that the aggregated test data for a three-year period should be used.

The percentage of students scoring at or below a certain level on standardised tests (cut-off point) will be included in building the school's educational profile. The cut off-point for the establishment of the profile will be:

1 Standard Deviation below the mean = Standard score of 85 = Percentile 16 = STen score 3.

Henceforth in this document reference will only be made to STen scores. STen scores range from one to ten, and the table below describes what the different STen scores indicate about student's achievements on standardised tests.

Table 1: Explanation of STen scores

STen Score	What does the STen score mean?	Proportion of students with this score
8 – 10	Above average	Almost 16%
7	High average	Almost 17%
5 – 6	Average	Almost 34%
4	Low average	Almost 17%
1 – 3	Below average	Almost 16%

(Source: Adapted from NCCA: Information for parents on STen Scores)

STen score 3 has been selected as the cut-off point as students in this category are generally performing below average, and a STen score of 3 or lower in a standardised test is an indicator of a possible learning difficulty in the area tested.

As Table 1 indicates, almost 16 per cent of the population register a STen score 3 or less. This figure can be further broken down as follows: around 2.3 per cent of students get a STen score of 1, 4.4 per cent of students get a STen score of 2 and 9.2 per cent of students get a STen score of 3.

The selection of this score as a cut-off point should ensure that schools receive sufficient resources to enable them to ensure that those students with the greatest level of need are well supported and to improve outcomes for them.

It is important to stress that the selection of STen 3 as a cut-off point does not mean that schools cannot provide support to students who register at or above STen 4, nor does it mean that all students who register at or below STen 3 must automatically receive support from additional teaching resources assigned under this model. Rather, the total number of students registering at or below STen 3 contributes to the educational profile of a school. However once resources are allocated, it is the school authorities who will determine how the resources are distributed within the school in accordance with the learning needs of the students.

A school may therefore decide that a student with a STen score of 4 or 5 in English has a specific learning difficulty that would best be dealt with through the provision of additional instruction for a defined period of time until his/her progress could be reviewed again. Equally a school may decide that support is best provided to a particular student, or group of students, who are registering at or below STen 3, in the context of differentiated group teaching mediated by the class or subject teacher.

In developing the school's educational profile weighting will be assigned as follows:

- Initial weighting will be assigned for the percentage of students who register a STen score of 3.

- Increased weighting will be assigned for the percentage of students who register a STen score of 2.

- Further increased weighting will be assigned for the percentage of students who register a STen score of 1 or who were exempted from the test.

All students registering at or below STen 3 in English (or in Irish, where appropriate) will be included in calculating the percentages at each STen score for English or Irish irrespective of how many also register at or below STen 3 in mathematics.

Equally all students who register at or below STen 3 in mathematics will be included in calculating the percentages at each STen score for mathematics irrespective of how many also register at or below STen 3 in English or Irish.

Recommendation 6

The working group recommends that the Department issue a circular that provides schools with guidance on the current circumstances under which students can be exempted from standardised tests.

This circular should advise schools to retain the following information in respect of each student who was exempted from standardised tests:

- Name.

- Date of birth.

- Reason for exemption.

- Were the child's parents informed that he / she was exempted from the test?

- Did the parents give their informed consent to the exemption?

- What other alternative assessment data are available for this student.

It should also advise that data retained by schools will be randomly reviewed by SENOs and/or by officials from the DES.

Why use the results of standardised tests as an element in establishing the educational profile of a school?

While recognising that standardised test results have their limitations, the working group nevertheless considers that standardised test data provides a broad and objective basis to establish differences between schools in levels of relative overall student educational achievement. Standardised test results should be used in building the educational profile

of schools as they link directly to the educational achievement of students in schools. The report on the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (DES, 2010c) found that student achievement was significantly negatively correlated with the percentages of students the school expected to score at or below the 12th percentile on standardised tests of English reading and mathematics.

With effect from June 2012, as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, standardised tests in reading and numeracy are administered by every primary school in the country to all students in second, fourth and sixth classes. These tests are norm referenced on an Irish population. Primary schools are required to report aggregate standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills once annually. Standardised tests are administered and in general, corrected by teachers in the school setting (some schools have standardised tests machine scored). The principal of each primary school is required to send a copy of the end-of-year report card (including the information from standardised test at sixth class in primary school) to the post-primary school a student is transferring to.

Students may be excluded from standardised testing if the school principal believes they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required would make attempting the test inappropriate (DES, Circular Letter 0056/2011). The number of students exempted from standardised testing can therefore be used as an indicator of more complex learning or physical disabilities to the extent that the school exempted these students from taking standardised tests, on these grounds.

The results provide a valuable and current source of information on overall achievement levels in reading and numeracy in Irish schools. Schools already use standardised tests to identify students with learning difficulties so that appropriate support and intervention can be put in place for them. In determining eligibility for learning-support teaching, priority is currently given to students whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics. The working group is proposing that under the new model, low achievement should refer to students who achieve a standard score of 85 or below (16th percentile or below) on standardised tests.

Standardised tests results were also previously used by the DES to inform the allocation of learning support hours to schools based on the number of students achieving scores at or below the 10th percentile in standardised tests.

The use of standardised test scores will ensure that the school's educational profile includes students with low achievement in reading and numeracy and all other students whose special educational needs affect their achievement levels, including those with general and specific learning disabilities. Principals have the responsibility to ensure that additional resources are targeted at those students with the greatest levels of need. Once additional teaching resources are allocated to a school, it is not intended that only those students who perform at or below STen 3 should be eligible for accessing these supports in school. The principal and teachers are well placed to determine which students would benefit from additional teaching.

There are of course potential risks involved in using the outcomes of such tests. Standardised test data are subject to measurement error and can sometimes yield results

for individual children that are better or poorer than might normally be expected. It is necessary that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that that schools administer and score the tests strictly in accordance with the procedures set down in the test manuals so that the results obtained through standardised tests are an accurate reflection of achievement levels in schools.

Recommendation 7

The working group recommends that, to counteract any potential difficulties associated with the use of standardised tests in establishing the educational profile of the school, the following measures will be taken:

- Mandatory training for teachers in the administration, scoring and interpretation of standardised tests will be provided.

- The Department will issue a circular that provides schools with guidance on the current circumstances in which students can be exempted from standardised tests.

- NEPS will support schools to process and analyse test results, in order to inform intervention and deployment of teaching resources, if required.

- Early transfer of results of standardised tests to post-primary schools will be in place.

- The basis for the returns will be maintained in schools and available for periodic random review by DES or NCSE officials.

- The DES will consider what sanctions it is possible to put in place to reduce the likelihood of inaccurate reporting.

With such appropriate supports and safeguards in place, the working group is confident that standardised tests results are sufficiently robust to show real differences between schools in terms of student achievement levels. As an additional safeguard, the working group has recommended that standardised data over a three-year period will be used to establish the initial school profile – thereby establishing a trend – to provide an increased level of confidence in the robustness of the data.

The use of results of standardised tests in building the educational profile of a school is consistent with the recommendations of NCCA in 2005 (NCCA, 2005). The NCCA recommended that reporting of national standardised testing data be developed to provide details of progress by school type/size/socio-economic context and other criteria (NCCA, 2005). The NCCA envisaged that a programme of national testing would serve a number of purposes, including assisting in the efficient allocation of resources to schools to target the needs of individual children and groups of children, including those with special educational needs and those who are educationally disadvantaged.

The use of more than one type of standardised test – as is currently the case in Ireland – also has implications. Most schools use one of two standardised tests. While both tests have been standardised for an Irish population, they generate different kinds of results which makes comparison of results difficult. Studies have not as yet been conducted to establish if there are any significant differences in the set of results yielded by the two tests. However, in the interests of consistency, it might be better to have one test and so

the working group recommends that in the future, the DES considers specifying one test to be used for all schools.

In summary, the working group considers it appropriate and essential to use standardised test results as an element in compiling a school's educational profile because:

- The tests are validated and standardised for the Irish population and completed by every student in second, fourth and sixth class. Thus they provide the only standardised test data available to the system. It would be unwise therefore to disregard these data in creating an educational profile for a school.

- The test data are not being used to indicate actual STen scores of individual students, but rather as an indicator of the overall educational profile of a school relative to other schools. While the test data received may be more positive than anticipated, it is most likely more positive for all schools – thus increasing confidence in the use of the current standardised test data for contributing to the profile of a school.

- The fact that the working group is recommending that test data for a three-year period will be used, and not test data for a single year, also increases confidence in the robustness of the standardised test data provided.

- Currently standardised test data are submitted to the Department as a requirement of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. When schools become aware that this data will also be used to contribute to the school's educational profile, any potential incentive to inflate scores for the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will be offset by the need to ensure that scores reflect the reality of a school's population.

- There was general consensus across consultation groups that standardised test results should form part of the school's educational profile.

Recommendation 8

Over time, if standardised tests continue to be used as an element in establishing the educational profile of a school, the working group recommends that the DES will:

- Ensure that standardised testing is introduced in post-primary schools as soon as possible.

- Ensure that standardised tests are regularly updated. This will include frequent changes to test content, so that students do not become overly familiar with test items. The development of computer-based assessments should also be supported. Thus over time the robustness of the standardised tests will continue to increase.

- Ensure random, thorough review of actual results at school level, by DES officials or NCSE SENOs, to counteract any inaccurate reporting.

- Consider specifying one test to be used for all schools.

Having analysed the use of standardised test data for this purpose, the working group considers that, on balance, the level of risk attaching to the use of standardised tests is low as the data are being used to distinguish between schools rather than between individual students. The risk will be further reduced as the working group's advice about administration and future use is implemented.

3. Social context of school including gender and educational disadvantage

There is clear international evidence of a gender imbalance in the incidence of special educational needs and academic achievement. The overall male to female ratio in special education is between 2:1 and 3:1 (Mitchell, D. 2010, Banks, J. & McCoy, S 2011). Thus the number of boys enrolled in a school will be included in establishing the educational profile of a school. Information on gender is collected each year by the DES and is easily accessed by the NCSE either through DES records or directly from schools.

A number of sources of information for social context for primary and post-primary schools was considered.

In the case of post-primary schools, certain data are centrally accessible and reliable:

- Percentage of students who avail of the fee waiver for State examinations, which is based on medical cards (this information is available from the SEC).

- Junior cycle retention rates (refers to the number of students who complete the Junior Certificate examination or complete three years of Junior cycle at school. This information is available from the DES).

In the case of primary schools, up-to-date information is not readily available and would need to be collected.

Recommendation 9

The working group recommends that the DES proceeds to bring about a situation in which an objective source of information on the social context of schools (for example through a pupil database or through linkage with relevant data from the Census of Population) is available as soon as possible.

Recommendation 10

The working group recommends that pending the availability of an objective source of information on the social context of schools, robust data on educational disadvantage will be gathered for primary schools through a survey of all primary schools. The data currently available for post-primary schools (exam fee waiver and junior cycle retention rates) will be strengthened by a similar survey of post-primary schools.

Mainstream primary and post-primary schools will be asked to complete a questionnaire for a single cohort of students or for the entire school population.

The survey will ask principals to estimate, for a single grade level, the percentage of students who come from a family dependent on social welfare or from a family on low income from employment. 'Dependence on social welfare' would include for example, families in which the main source of income is unemployment benefit. Families on low incomes from employment would be expected to hold a medical card or supplementary welfare benefits such as Family Income Supplement, and/or Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

The incidence of one parent families will be surveyed and the survey instrument will include questions about the level of parent and community engagement with the school. Studies consistently show that the level of the mother's education is an important factor in predict-

ing educational outcomes for their children. It is not intended to include this question in this edition of the school survey as principals may not currently have this information available to them. However consideration should be given to including this factor in future surveys.

The social context of a school will also include data relating to numbers of students from the Travelling Community and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). EAL students are those whose command of English is so limited as to serve as an impediment to accessing the curriculum and participating meaningfully in mainstream classroom life. In identifying these students schools should use the primary and post-primary assessment kits available online from the NCCA (www.ncca.ie) and referenced in DES Circular 15/2009.

Schools will be asked to include the number of students at levels 0; A1 and A2 on the primary and post-primary assessment kits (see DES Circular 0015/2009). All documentation on test administration must be retained by the school for audit/inspection purposes.

School location, in the case of primary schools, will also be taken into account.

Subject to approval from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the data provided by schools could be independently verified by reference to data on the socio-economic profile of schools, now available from the 2011 annual census, should the DES see fit to do so.

Why use a school's social context as an element in establishing the educational profile of a school?

A school's social context can contribute strongly to the level of learning needs that students have in a school.

Gender

The DES annually collects and publishes information on numbers of students in full-time education by type of institution, year, gender and age, based on annual school returns. Gender is an important factor in determining the educational profile of a school for the purpose of allocating additional resources to support students with special educational needs.

Clear international evidence exists of a gender imbalance in the incidence of disabilities, special education enrolments and academic achievement (OECD, 2003, Mitchell, 2010, Banks & McCoy, 2011). Since the 1960s, the overall male to female ratio in special education has been 2:1 to 3:1. Reviews of US literature show boys predominating in every disability category except for deaf/blindness.

Studies in various parts of Europe have also highlighted the over-representation of boys among those identified as having special educational needs. For example, Kivirauma et al (2006) note that in one Finnish city three out of four students in classroom-based special education are boys.

Scottish analysis has explored the intersections between gender and particular types of difficulty. Boys outnumber girls in all types of difficulty, but the discrepancy is most marked in non-normative categories such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, where there are also strong associations with social deprivation (NESSE, 2012).

Data from the Growing Up in Ireland study showed that 17 per cent of boys were reported by their teachers to have special educational needs compared to 11 per cent of girls. This differential was in the main driven by higher levels of emotional and behavioural disorders among boys (Banks J & McCoy, S, 2011). The inclusion of gender in the educational

profile is also useful in reflecting the greater number of boys diagnosed with autism/ASD which the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention estimates is almost five times more common among boys (1 in 54) than among girls (1 in 252) .

Preliminary data from the NCSE show that over the 2013-2014 school year, 25,572 boys and 9,429 girls were allocated additional teaching resources for low incidence disabilities in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. This is a ratio for boys to girls of 2.7:1.

Educational disadvantage

The working group's recommendation to take account of educational disadvantage in constructing the school profile derives from the Education Act (1998, Section 32(9) which defines it as '…the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'.

These barriers can be financial, family and health related, social/communal, cultural and geographic or a combination of any of these (DES, 2005 DEIS Action Plan).

Research studies make clear that social context is recognised as a key contributing factor in educational achievement. In a number of the countries reviewed for this report i.e. Norway, England, Scotland, the Netherlands and New Zealand, disadvantage/ socioeconomic disadvantage indicators are incorporated into systems of general school funding so as to target or compensate for educational disadvantage. Evidence also exists that the educational achievement of students in schools with high concentrated levels of disadvantage is lower than that of students in schools with small levels.

Studies show that socioeconomic status of students is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs. Analysis of the identification of additional support needs in Scotland (Riddell et al, 2010) shows that children living in areas of social disadvantage are much more likely to have additional support needs identified than those living in more affluent areas. While normative difficulties such as hearing impairment and physical or motor impairment are only slightly more likely to be identified in areas of deprivation, non-normative difficulties, in particular social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, are more than four times as likely to be identified in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived.

Drawing on Growing Up in Ireland data, the ESRI analysed how the prevalence of special educational needs varies across social class and income groups. They found that the percentage of students reported by teachers to have special educational needs was significantly greater for those in what they described as 'economically inactive households (25 per cent) or 'semi/unskilled manual '(18 per cent) groups as opposed to the 'professional' group (7 per cent). A similar relationship existed for students from what was described as 'lowest income quintile (22 per cent) as opposed to middle income quintile (12 per cent) and highest income quintile (9 per cent) (ESRI, forthcoming).

On the basis of available research, the use of a school's social context is valid in the development of a school's educational profile as the socioeconomic status of students is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs. A recent UK report claimed that by the age of seven nearly 80 per cent of the difference in GCSE results between rich and poor children has already been determined (Save the Children Fund, 2013).

While some areas of special educational needs are likely to be reflected in low test scores, some students with relatively high levels of educational achievement may have emotional and behavioural disorders.

The potential existence of a 'social context' effect also needs to be acknowledged. This suggests that schools with large concentrations of students coming from educationally disadvantaged areas are likely to require additional resources to raise achievement levels of all students in the school (Sofroniou, N., et al, 2004).

The long-standing Government policy of positive discrimination towards schools serving disadvantaged areas would be continued by the inclusion of educational disadvantage as an indicator. It should be noted that DEIS schools already have additional teaching resources on the basis of their disadvantaged status.

Sources of information

Information required for post-primary schools (exam fee waiver and Junior Cycle retention rates) is already centrally available. A combination of the information on Junior Cycle retention rates and exam fee waiver provides an important and relevant indicator of educational disadvantage as it identifies those students who did not stay in school to complete Junior Cycle and those who sat for the Junior Certificate exam but availed of a fee waiver.

It could be argued that linking additional teaching resources to junior cycle retention rates, could potentially provide less incentive for schools to improve retention rates and/or to inaccurately report results under these criteria. This type of argument must be balanced against schools sense of integrity and professionalism and the positive incentive that exists for schools to improve retention rates through reporting these to the DES.

Data on socio-economic status could be collected in the following ways:

- A primary student database, when it exists, could be used if it contained socioeconomic data on students. For example, parents could be asked to complete a short questionnaire in which they were asked about key socioeconomic variables, when their child enrolled in school. However, this information is unlikely to be available on such a database in the near future.

- Area-based statistics (e.g., the Haase Index[8]) could be used to create a profile of the areas in which schools are located. However, this could not be relied on to describe the school's enrolment because students often do not live in the area of the school, with some travelling large distances from home. Therefore, all student addresses would be required for this exercise and it would be time-consuming

- Census data could be used to profile schools as information is now sought on the school attended by any children in the household. These data are being examined with this exercise in mind.

- A schools survey could be conducted in which principals are asked to indicate the number of students from economically disadvantaged families on the basis of a measure of socioeconomic status.

Concerns could be raised about the reliability of self-reported data from school principals as a basis for resource allocation. However, despite its limitations, this approach has

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8   http://trutzhaase.eu/deprivation-index/the-2011-pobal-hp-deprivation-index-for-small-areas/

worked on other occasions in this country. It is also the case that currently there is no readily available alternative. As the exercise involves ranking schools in relative order of disadvantage, it is not necessary to have absolutely precise data.

Pending the availability of a more objective source of information, the working group is confident that self reporting by primary school principals will produce robust data on school context. This confidence is supported by the previous experience of the Educational Research Centre (ERC) which is that principal self-reporting provided an accurate rank order of schools, according to educational disadvantage, in the setting up of DEIS and earlier initiatives (see Appendix 2 for an account of the DEIS process and outcomes).

Recommendation 11

The working group recommends that the DES consider putting in place measures to promote transparency in the reporting of social context data from schools. Such measures could include schools being required to maintain the basis for the return; random checking of data in school to counteract any inaccurate reporting; and validation of schools' returns against socioeconomic data collected through the annual census of population.

The working group is not recommending the use of existing DEIS rank orders constructed in 2005 because this information is now outdated and economic circumstances have changed considerably in the intervening period. For this reason, the working group favours a data collection exercise to provide information for a current ranking order for schools based on social context.

There was general consensus across consultation groups that it is essential to include information on school social context in the establishment of the school's educational profile.

The working group considers the risk attached to use of social context is low to moderate because the collection of self reported data from schools is seen as an interim measure only. The working group considers the level of risk will be greatly reduced in the future as more objective census based data collection alternatives become available.

Weighting of elements

Each of these three elements will be differentially weighted, so that relative need between schools for support can be determined, and considered in the context of the overall number of students in each school.

Recommendation 12

In relation to the weighting of elements to establish the school's educational profile, the working group recommends that weightings will be attributed in the following order of priority:

- The highest weighting will be assigned for students with complex needs.
- The second highest weighting will be assigned on the results of standardised tests.
- The third highest weighting will be assigned on the social context of the school (educational disadvantage, gender and primary school location).

The weightings attached to the different elements of the educational profile will provide a rational and transparent basis for the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools, taking current staffing allocations into account, and avoid any extreme or anomalous outcomes.

The attribution of numerical values to elements of the model will require precise and rational weightings which will only be finalised when all the relevant and current data are gathered from schools.

It may be necessary to put in place transitional arrangements for schools where the new allocation model brings about significant changes to their existing staffing allocations.

Appeals process

Occasions may arise where a school considers that an error was made in compiling its education profile, for example, the results of standardised tests were incorrectly recorded. Every effort should be made to clarify this information at a local level. Where difficulties with the educational profile arise, schools should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their local SENO.

Occasions may also arise where parents want the school to give their child a greater level of teaching support. Schools should have in place a process to review the information provided to ensure the appropriate level of support is being given to the child. Where parents continue to believe their child requires additional support they can raise this first with the principal and, if necessary at a later point, with the chairperson of the board of management.

In a small number of cases every effort to find a local solution may prove unsuccessful. For these problematic cases, it will be necessary to have an external appeals process in place.

Recommendation 13

The working group recommends that an independent appeals process be put in place whereby a school can appeal its educational profile and/or parents can appeal the deployment of additional teaching resources by schools.

Schools will have grounds for an appeal where they consider that an error has been made in the application of the resource allocation model to their school. Parents will have grounds for an appeal where they consider that an error has been made in the application of the school's policy on the deployment of additional teaching resources. Disagreement with the policy that underpins the model will not constitute grounds for appeal.

The grounds for an appeal and the procedures to be followed will be carefully devised and clearly stated, as part of the implementation phase.

B   Baseline component: an allocation to schools for inclusion and for prevention and early intervention

The second component of the proposed new model is an allocation to every school for inclusion and for prevention and early intervention.

Recommendation 14

The working group recommends that a baseline allocation of teaching resources to all mainstream schools, graduated in line with overall enrolment numbers, will be a core component of the new model.

This baseline allocation will ensure that all schools have a minimum allocation of teaching resources irrespective of the need for resources manifested by the other elements used in establishing the school's educational profile. The baseline allocation will enable schools to have whole-school systems and supports in place in a timely manner for students with special educational needs.

Every school needs to be inclusive and able to enrol and support students with additional needs. A baseline allocation of teaching resources to all primary and post-primary schools will ensure that all schools are able to:

- Welcome and include all students, irrespective of their special educational needs.

- Provide enrichment programmes in literacy and numeracy to students, especially students in junior and senior infants in primary schools and to first year students in post-primary schools with a view to preventing and minimising the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties.

- Put in place early intervention programmes for students, especially students in infants and first class in primary schools and in Junior Cycle in post-primary schools.

The allocation of teaching resources for inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention will enable schools to put into effect the working group's first guiding principle that all students irrespective of special educational needs are welcome and enabled to enrol in their local schools. This will enable schools to demonstrate that they welcome students with special educational needs through their admission policies and other school-related documentation.

Principal teachers, as leaders of learning, have a responsibility to develop a whole-school approach based on a firm commitment to the inclusion of students with special educational needs. The class/subject teacher retains primary responsibility for the progress of all students in his/her class (DES, 2000:42, 2007a:71) and for differentiating lesson plans to enable all students to access the curriculum. Learning support or resource teachers complement the work of the classroom teacher in providing additional teaching support to students with special educational needs. It is not always necessary for students with special educational needs to have access to an additional support teacher. The baseline allocation will support the work of the school and class teacher in including students with special educational needs. It will also allow some time for necessary co-ordination work related to special education, where this is required.

The baseline allocation under the new model cannot be compared to the learning support allocation received under the old system. This is an entirely new and different model and not simply a revision of the old model. For a complete overview of their additional teaching allocation under the new model, schools must consider their baseline allocation alongside the allocation that they receive under the educational profile component.

Subject to testing and validation the baseline allocation will in the first instance be determined in the following manner:

Primary schools with less than 50 students receive 0.2 additional teaching posts (598 schools); schools with 50-99 students receive 0.3 posts (783 schools); schools with 100-199 students receive 0.4 posts (805 schools) and schools with greater than 200 students receive 0.5 posts (966 schools). This amounts to approximately 1160 teaching posts.

Post-primary schools with less than 300 students receive 0.3 additional teaching posts (176 schools); schools with less than 800 students receive 0.4 posts (460 schools) and those with 800 or more students (85) receive 0.5 posts (85 schools). This amounts to approximately 280 posts.

The overall number of posts between primary and post-primary schools amounts to approximately 1440 posts (approximately 15% of available posts). These figures are estimates as the baseline allocation can only be finalised when current data are collected from schools.

The above intervals could be further reduced to bring the formula closer to a sliding scale so that the 'cliffs' between bands are less steep as for example, under the above formula, primary schools with 101 and 199 students will receive 0.4 posts. This difference could be adjusted by reducing the intervals. The baseline allocation should be calculated in such a way as to make sense and be workable for schools.

Why have a baseline component provided to every mainstream school?

The baseline component is intended to ensure that every school has a baseline level of additional teaching supports so that every school is inclusive and able to enrol and support students with additional needs. This is in line with the first guiding principle of the model which states that all students, irrespective of special educational need, are welcome and enabled to enrol in their local schools.

Research findings consistently support the importance of early identification and intervention for students with special educational needs. The baseline component will support schools in having whole-school policies and practices in place to prevent and minimise the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. It will also enable schools to put in place early intervention programmes for students who are experiencing difficulties in their learning.

It is intended that schools will particularly target early intervention programmes at students in the early years of primary school and in the Junior Cycle of post-primary schools. The baseline component should particularly assist schools in supporting students in the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Reviewing school allocations

Recommendation 15

The working group recommends that additional teaching supports will be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years. Developing primary schools, as defined by DES Primary Circular 13 / 2013, will be reviewed every year.

During that fixed period of time, each school will be expected to cater for the special educational needs of its students from its overall allocation. Schools will then deploy these resources to ensure that students with the greatest levels of need receive the greatest levels of support (see Section 4). Students' learning needs will be determined and monitored by effective school-based assessment data in line with the NEPS continuum of support process. This is a three-stage process (continuum of assessment and support) that schools and teachers may use for identifying and assessing special educational needs and for planning interventions (DES, 2007b, 2010).

Unplanned and exceptional circumstances, relating to special educational needs, will arise in some schools during the periods of time that their allocations are fixed. One of the functions of the proposed Inclusion Support Service (see under Step 2 of this proposal) is to provide support for schools when such unplanned exceptional circumstances arise which have not been included in the school's educational profile.

Reducing administrative burden on schools

The proposed new model will provide some administrative relief to schools as schools will:

- No longer be required to submit individual applications for additional teaching support for high or low incidence disabilities.

- Be required to submit information every two or three years, rather than annually.

- Not be requested to submit information they have already reported to the DES.

Recommendation 16

The working group recommends that a central online data system be developed to facilitate schools in collecting and submitting the required information on one occasion only.

It is important to clarify that under the new model the current learning support and resource teaching schemes will be combined into a single scheme for allocating additional teaching resources to school.

Recommendation 17

The working group recommends that under the new model, there will no longer be a distinction between learning support and resource teachers who will instead be known as support teachers. The distinction currently made between 'high' and 'low' incidence special educational needs will no longer exist.

Recommendation 18

In line with the new model and previous NCSE policy advice (NCSE, 2013), the working group recommends that any teacher assigned a support role in a school should be trained and equipped to assess and teach all students with special educational needs and to advise and assist other teachers in devising and implementing particular interventions.

Step 2: Deployment/utilisation of additional teaching resources by schools

The second step in delivering additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs is the deployment/utilisation of the additional teaching resources by schools.

Recommendation 19

The working group recommends that the deployment/utilisation of additional resources by schools will be supported by:

- NEPS psychologists using a problem-solving framework to support schools in identifying students with special educational needs across the continuum. They will also support schools in devising appropriate, evidence-based interventions which are workable within the context of the particular school and class.

- A system for advising schools on how to develop appropriate goals for students with additional support and for recording and reporting outcomes (see Section 3).

- Guidelines for schools (See Section 4): The purpose of the guidelines (to be developed) is to support schools to identify students requiring additional support and to use and allocate their additional teaching posts to best effect. Main points that need to be addressed in these guidelines are outlined in Section 4 of this report.

- An NCSE Inclusion Support Service (see below) which will provide one coherent service to improve the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students with additional learning needs and to ensure that these students are included in mainstream classroom and school life to the maximum extent possible.

Inclusion Support Service (ISS)

The existing advisory and intervention supports available to schools are provided by a number of different bodies and organisations. The NCSE has previously highlighted the need to ensure cohesion across service provision (NCSE, 2013). In order to avoid fragmentation the working group recommends that existing support services for students with special educational needs be combined into one unified support service for schools.

The introduction of a new model for the allocation of teaching supports will necessitate a level of change in schools. Schools will be required to deploy and use additional teaching supports, in line with students' assessed learning needs, and without the historical diagnostic classification as the basis. Continuing professional development and support is required to assist schools in developing the necessary professional competencies for managing this change.

Recommendation 20

The working group recommends that a national Inclusion Support Service for schools be established, under the management of the NCSE to provide a coherent service to schools.

The NCSE is the body with certain statutory responsibilities for assessment, planning and monitoring progress for students with special educational needs and for the dissemination of information to parents and educational institutions regarding best practice in the education of these students. It is logical therefore that the Inclusion Support Service should be managed by the NCSE. The development of such a service will advance the commitment contained in the Programme for Government to achieve greater integration of special needs-related services.

Role of the Inclusion Support Service

The focus of this service will be to improve schools' capacity to meet the needs of students with special educational needs and to ensure that these students are included in mainstream classroom and school life to the maximum extent possible.

Recommendation 21

The working group recommends that teacher posts will be retained (from the overall quantum of additional teaching posts) to afford this service the capacity to support schools and to complement existing supports available in the system.

This will allow for a pool of posts to be available, through a regional structure, to support schools. The ISS will work closely with other education and health structures on a national and local level.

The role of the ISS will be to provide:

- Advice and support to schools on the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs, e.g. the development of individualised planning for students; the development of language, literacy and motor skills; and so on.
- In-school support for support teachers (formerly learning support and resource teachers).
- Continuing professional development for teachers on the education of students with special educational needs.
- Support to schools on the management of challenging behaviour.
- Support to individual students, where necessary and appropriate.
- Outreach teaching support for schools where unanticipated exceptional circumstances arise (e.g. enrolment in a school of a significant number of students with complex needs during a school year).
- Promote and fund evidence-based whole-school educational programmes.
- Enhance the multi-disciplinary capacity of the education system through providing access to expert knowledge in areas such as speech and language, deafness/hard of hearing, visual impairment and occupational therapy.

Fulfilling its role

The ISS will fulfil its role through:

- Building professional capacity in schools.
- Supporting schools in responding to exceptional circumstances.

Building professional capacity in schools

A guiding principle of the new model is that schools adopt a whole-school approach to the education of students with special educational needs including the implementation of preventative and early intervention programmes and the deployment of additional teaching supports in line with assessed learning needs of students. Continuing professional development and support is essential for this work.

Schools should be supported to build professional capacity to enable teachers to:

- Assess students using the NEPS continuum of support model, i.e. a response to intervention model which involves an ongoing process of assessment, intervention and review.

- Administer, score and interpret standardised tests.

- Undertake curriculum based assessment.

- Identify students learning needs.

- Plan and implement learning programmes, based on these assessed needs and using evidence based teaching methods and programmes.

- Engage in team teaching and other forms of cooperative teaching.

- Deploy and use additional teaching supports, in line with students' assessed learning needs, without a professional diagnosis of disability.

Continuing professional development should also be specifically designed for principals who will require support in managing the process.

The specification of the role of the teacher working within the ISS needs to encompass:

- What is the added value of this service for students with special educational needs?

- What is the added value of this service for schools?

- How does the service relate to what SENOs, NEPs psychologist are already doing?

- Does the service allow for a more regional approach?

- How should the service be linked into other existing support structures?

Before schools make contact with the Inclusion Support Service, they should first, as a general rule, have attempted to resolve the difficulty themselves within their existing resources, by using the problem-solving approach advocated by NEPS in their continuum of support process. If, through this process, schools identify a gap in their knowledge or expertise or a need for additional support, they should then proceed to contact the support service.

A meeting will then be arranged between the school, parents, students (where appropriate), NEPS, ISS and NCSE to explore what the school has put in place to date through the NEPS continuum of support and to make further plans which build on that process.

Responding to exceptional circumstances

Unplanned and exceptional cases may arise between the periods when a school is profiled, such as students with very complex needs entering a school at a point during the year. Such exceptional circumstances must be sensitively dealt with on an individual basis. However the immediate solution does not always lie in the provision of additional resources, particularly where additional teaching supports have already been frontloaded into schools.

Recommendation 22

The working group recommends that the Inclusion Support Service will be used to provide immediate assistance to schools in unplanned and exceptional circumstances, where this is indicated and as needs emerge within the school.

Such additional support could take the form of out-reach teaching support, consultation and guidance for school staff on the implementation of specific teaching approaches, the promotion of inclusive teaching methodologies and the development of effective assessment and planning strategies. Such advice may be sustained for a fixed period, or be on-going, through a series of regular visits.

There will be a facility for schools to apply to the Inclusion Support Service for such additional support, where required, to meet the needs of students with challenging behaviour, who are receiving support at the level of School Support Plus on the NEPS Continuum of Support.

Outcomes for students with special educational needs

Recording outcomes at school level

In recent policy advice on supporting students with special educational needs in schools (NCSE, 2013) the NCSE stated that schools should have an appropriate system in place to track student outcomes in line with goals and targets set through learning plan processes and the efficient use of additional resources.

The NCSE commissioned an overview of how educational engagement, progress and outcomes (formal and informal) are tracked and measured internationally and in Ireland (Douglas et al, 2012). This research report identified a range of different outcome measures to evaluate how students are progressing in school. The report concluded that educational outcomes for students can usefully be grouped into:

- Academic achievement-related outcomes (such as literary, numeracy, examination results).

- Attendance related outcomes (such as school attendance, early school leaving).

- Happiness-related outcomes (such as confidence, self esteem, quality of life indicators).

- Independence-related outcomes (such as socialisation skills, independence skills).

  (Douglas et al, 2012)

The working group suggests that:

- 'Happiness and independence-related outcomes' might usefully be included under quality of life outcomes.

- 'End of school outcomes' should also be measured.

Schools should consider how information for each measure would be captured as part of their record-keeping system. Progress is measured by observing changes in these measures over time against the baseline information.

Recommendation 23

The working group recommends that schools will be required to record baseline information, goals set and progress made for students with special educational needs. The level of detail recorded should be graduated in accordance with the level of the student's learning need and the intensity of support required.

Table 2: What information could be recorded by schools as a measure of each outcome?

Outcome	Possible Measure
Achievement	Communication and language skills Literacy and numeracy scores Teacher tests of 'core curriculum' Cognitive ability tests Motor skills
Attendance	Days attended Days absent School exclusion Retention rates
Independence	Independent living skills (through care plans) Social development Mobility Use of assistive technology
Happiness related	Self esteem Developing positive relationships with others Attitude to school Attitude to learning Engagement in extra-curricular activities Results of State examinations
End of school outcomes	Transition to further or higher education Transition to employment Transition to vocational education and training programmes Transition to adult health services

Outcome information already being collected for students with special educational needs

Much of the above information is already collected in schools as part of their normal record keeping systems. This information includes:

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) school report cards: teacher judgements of the child's progress and achievement in relation to:
  - Curricular areas or subjects
  - Personal and social development
  - Child as a learner
- Proposed NCCA special educational needs transfer form (2014)
  - School-based assessments
  - Professional assessments
  - Identified learning needs
  - In school supports
- Standardised test scores: literacy and numeracy scores, cognitive ability tests
- Results of State examinations
- Attendance, exclusions and retention rates
- Happiness and independence measures: Some measures of happiness and independence are likely to be collected as part of the learning plan process – through individual education and care plans. Guidelines on standardising this information will be required.
- End of school outcomes: Results of state examinations – already available in system.

While information on end-of-school outcomes is not generally collected by schools, this information could be collected in the future. Examples include progression into employment, further and higher education, health services etc. This would improve data collection on outcomes for students with special educational needs.

External oversight

Schools already plan for the inclusion of students with special educational needs. In line with guidelines already published (DES, 2000, 2007a) students in receipt of learning support or resource teaching have learning plans in place where aspects of their education needs are identified for intensive support. Teachers set targets or identify desirable outcomes with the students and sometimes with parents and other teachers. Teachers note progress on the areas targeted and report outcomes of such progress to students, parents and other teacher as required. Aspects of education included in learning plans may include social, emotional, cognitive or behavioural aspects of the student's education.

The work of the learning support and resource teacher is inspected as part of whole-school evaluation. The use of additional teaching is commented on in inspectors' reports. The work of the special educational needs team is also included in schools' self-evaluation processes.

It is, of course, important that schools can account for additional resource allocated to them but the level of support, intervention and recording of outcomes must be graduated in line with the intensity of the individual student's needs. It is logical to expect that reporting will be more detailed for the student who is getting small group or individualised attention and less detailed for the student receiving in-class support only.

The NCSE previous policy advice (NCSE, 2013) makes a number of recommendations that are pertinent to recording and reporting outcomes for students with special educational needs. It states that:

- The deployment of additional teaching resources should be linked to the student's learning plan process, should be time-bound and outcome focused (Recommendation 22).

- Schools should be required to provide annual reports to the NCSE on progress made and student outcomes achieved through the learning plan process (Recommendation 24).

Recommendation 24

The working group recommends that to ensure external oversight, the NCSE will be responsible for monitoring the use of resources allocated under this model and the impact of these resources on students' learning outcomes.

Recommendation 25

The working group recommends that following discussion with the relevant stakeholders, schools will be required to provide annual reports to the NCSE on how additional resources were deployed, student progress made and student outcomes achieved through the learning plan process. Students with special educational needs, who are availing of additional support, in primary and post-primary schools will be included.

This annual report will be based on existing work undertaken routinely by teachers and will not involve another bureaucratic layer or additional work on the part of teachers. Recording will be kept administratively simple so as not to add to schools' administrative burden. Means through which the validity of a sample of these reports can be verified will be explored with the education partners.

Each school is also advised to explore the possibility of providing its own community with an account of how it utilised additional resources allocated by the NCSE to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes.

Questions about aspects of the proposed new model answered

How is this a better model?

The working group is confident that if accepted, the introduction of the proposed new model will generate a better, fairer and more equitable resource allocation system with tangible benefits for students with special educational needs. These benefits include:

- Students with special educational needs will have immediate and timely access to the additional educational resources they require, rather than having to await the outcome of a professional assessment which can involve lengthy waiting lists.

- Students will continue to have access to prevention and early intervention to minimise potential for the emergence of learning difficulties.

- The greatest level of support can be provided to those students with greatest need. Additional support will be linked to the student's actual level of need rather than to their category of disability which does not necessarily provide a true indication of need.

- A more equitable resource allocation system will be in place for students as there is less potential for some individuals to gain access to additional resources on the basis of private assessments when other individuals have no access to such assessments.

- The reduction in professional assessments required to establish access to additional educational resources will result in more professional time available for assessments to inform educational planning and for necessary intervention.

- The necessity for students to receive a lifelong label (sometimes from an early age) from a limited assessment process is reduced. Such a diagnosis, even if the underlying condition is fully remediated, can have ongoing difficult implications for the individual's future employment prospects.

- The new model will link the deployment of additional teaching supports with student learning plans so as to identify and address their individual learning needs and assess the impact of interventions on their learning outcomes.

The proposed model maintains positive aspects of the current system by providing a measure of certainty to schools regarding levels of resourcing and facilitating increased access to those professional assessments which are necessary and beneficial to children. It also addresses fundamental flaws identified in the current system by reducing the need for professional assessments before students can access additional teaching resources, by tailoring resources allocated to school profile, and by placing greater emphasis on monitoring educational outcomes.

How will students with challenging behaviour be supported under the new model?

As with many special educational needs, challenging behaviour occurs on a continuum ranging from mild and transient to difficulties which are severe and persistent. The inclusion of students at the severe end of this continuum can be particularly challenging for schools, and there are instances where schools may need additional teaching supports to meet the needs of this cohort of students.

Under the new model, schools will be allocated additional teaching resources, on the basis of their educational profile, to assist them in catering for the needs of these students. The inclusion of standardised test results and social context as elements in establishing the educational profile are particularly relevant in this regard. The new model will also allow schools the flexibility to deploy resources in line with the NEPS Continuum of Support so

that students with the greatest need receive the greatest support. Thus, students presenting with challenging behaviour can access additional teaching support, where required, even in instances where they register a score above STen 3 on a standardised test.

The working group is strongly of the opinion that the NEPS Continuum of Support process provides the most effective way of supporting students with challenging behaviour as it is specifically designed to support teachers in responding to the needs of these students. These guidelines provide a well-developed problem-solving approach to understanding and developing interventions for students with challenging behaviour. Students presenting with challenging behaviour in schools should therefore receive supports in line with the principles of the Continuum of Support and schools should systematically use the resources and assessment documents available for each stage of the continuum.

As a further support to schools, NEPS psychologists can work with schools to develop whole-school approaches to promoting positive behaviour as well as strategies suited to individual classes or groups of students.

Following implementation of the Continuum of Support process in schools, there should be a facility for schools to apply to the Inclusion Support Service for additional support, where required, to meet the needs of students with challenging behaviour. This support need not always be in the form of additional teaching resources but could involve the promotion of effective teaching strategies, developing capacity to respond to challenging behaviour or assisting teachers in developing an environment in the classroom to promote positive behaviour.

Such advice may be sustained for a fixed period, or be ongoing, through a series of regular visits. It would also be contingent on the school having systematically gone through the first two stages of the Continuum of Support and all resource and assessment documents, for each of the stages, being available to the ISS.

The NCSE has previously advised the Minister that it should be mandatory for all teachers to attend CPD programmes on the management of challenging behaviour (NCSE, 2012). The Inclusion Support Service could assist with the design and delivery of these programmes over a period of time.

Are there risks associated with maintaining the current model?

While there is a certain level of risk associated with the introduction of any new model, considerably greater risks attach to maintaining the system in place because we know that it:

- Does not provide all students with special educational needs with equitable access to available additional teaching resources which in turn means they do not have equitable access to education.

- Is partially dependent on a parent's ability to pay for professional assessments.

- Reduces professional time available for delivering intervention and support.

- Allocates the same level of resources to every student within a particular category of disability rather than in line with the needs of the student.

- May cause unnecessary labelling of students for the purpose of triggering additional resources.

- Does not represent the best use of State resources because some schools have a relatively greater level of learning support than they require while other schools have less than they need.

Further risks identified through the research literature (Mitchell, 2010) are the unintended negative effects of reliance on demand driven (or categorical) models such as: perverse incentives to over identify and/or play the system resulting in reduction in funds for each student; a strong focus on disability, difference and deficit which can be upsetting for parents and inhibit inclusive culture and practice; and the 'medicalisation of diversity' to attract funds.

In practice, this means that if the current system remains in place, Irish professionals will be under increasing pressure to diagnose more and more children with certain disabilities in order to trigger access to educational supports. The increased demand for additional teaching hours will continue to rise, leading to a dilution of support for students with the greatest levels of need. Finally, it will continue to be necessary to label students, many at a very young age, for them to access additional educational supports, when otherwise the label may be unnecessary.

For all of these reasons the working group considers that the risk attached to maintaining the current model is high.

Implementing the new model

There is considerable work to be completed before the new model for allocating additional teaching supports can be implemented in schools. The working group recommendations concerning the implementation of the new model are outlined below:

Piloting data collection and weighting of elements

Weighting of elements requires the collection and analysis of up to date school-based information.

Recommendation 26

The working group recommends that the framework for the model will first be agreed in principle before the collection and analysis of data are commenced. As part of the implementation phase, the collection and analysis of data will first be conducted on a small sample of schools before all schools are required to return the information.

This exercise will allow the data to be examined and weightings devised before proceeding to apply the model to all schools. Weightings could be refined, if necessary, during the full data collection process to ensure that the model is implemented in an equitable manner.

Data collection from all schools

Data to be collected include (detailed on Table 3 below):

- Number of students enrolled in school.

- Standardised test results for primary students in second, fourth and sixth class that score at each of the STen scores and those exempted from taking the tests on grounds of special educational needs.

- Standardised test results for post-primary students in first and second year that score at each of the STen scores and the names of those exempted from taking the tests on grounds of special educational needs.

- Social context of school:

  a. Gender of students.

  b. Socio-economic data.

Primary schools

Information on social context questionnaire, including school location (urban/rural).[9]

Post-primary schools

- Information on social context questionnaire

- Students who availed of the fee waiver for State examinations (available centrally from the State Examination Commission (SEC))

- Junior Cycle retention rates (available centrally from DES)

- Students for whom English is an additional language (EAL)

- Students with complex special educational needs, as earlier defined in this report.

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9   Information on school location is included as an indicator for primary schools but not for post-primary schools. This is because the distinction between rural and non-rural locations is important in relation to educational disadvantage but very few post-primary schools are located in rural settings.

Table 3: Information required for new allocation model

Baseline component				
	Information required	**How acquired**	**Collected from**	**Collected by**
Baseline allocation	Enrolment numbers	Information already collected by DES		**DES**

School educational profile component				
Element	**Information required**	**How acquired**	**Collected from**	**Collected by**
Standard test results	No of students scoring at each of the STen Scores and those exempted on grounds of SEN		Primary and post-primary schools	DES /ERC
Social context	Gender	Information already collected by DES		DES
Social context	Post-primary: Fee waiver Junior Cycle retention rates Data on educational disadvantage	Information already collected by DES Survey to all post-primary schools - based on principal estimates	Post-primary schools	DES DES/ERC
Social context	Primary: Data on educational disadvantage	Survey to all primary schools - based on principal estimates	All primary schools	DES/ERC
Complex SEN	Pre-school children - significant levels of difficulty in functioning	SENOs with HSE	HSE	SENOs/NCSE
Complex SEN	School-going children	Agreed descriptors to be used by NEPS and HSE	Schools	SENOs

In relation to the collection of data, it should be noted that under the new model:

- Primary schools will be required to return the number of students scoring at each of the STen Scores, rather than banded scores, as is currently the case. It is intended that three years' data will be used in establishing a school's educational profile: 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 (available September 2014). For the pilot phase, it is likely that only two years' data will be available for use.

- Post-primary schools will be required to return results of standardised scores for students currently in first and second year post-primary. This information transferred across from the relevant primary schools in September 2012 (pertaining to the school year 2011-12) and in September 2013 (pertaining to the school year 2012-13). Post-primary schools will be required to return data on incoming first year students when these data become available in September 2014.

- Primary and post-primary school principals will be requested to complete and return a survey on social context

- SENOs will be requested to return information on children with complex needs who are entering primary school in September 2014.

- Schools will be requested to return information on students with complex needs whose needs were identified after school entry. This return will need to be prepared with NEPS and NCSE.

Implementation phase

In addition to data collection and analysis, there is further work to be completed before the model can be implemented in schools.

- To ensure consistency and accuracy, protocols will be developed between the NCSE, NEPS and HSE for the collection of information on students with complex needs before school entry.

- Descriptors for complex needs will be agreed between the DES, NCSE, NEPS and HSE.

- An IT package will be developed for the return of standardised tests and other information from schools.

- A circular will be prepared and issued to schools on the operation of the new model.

- Guidelines will be prepared and issued on the deployment of additional teaching resources at school level.

- The DES will provide information to and consult with stakeholders about the working of the new model in advance of implementation.

- A template will be devised for the reporting of outcomes by schools.

- Teachers will receive training in the deployment of additional teaching resources.

- An appeals process will be developed and agreed which clearly specifies the grounds under which an appeal can be made and the procedures to be followed.

- Finally, the allocation of additional teaching supports will be made to schools under the new model for the academic year 2015-16, in line with normal DES arrangements for teaching allocations.

Impact of the new model

The main purpose of the proposed new model is to provide a more equitable basis for the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools and through that to improve the educational participation and outcomes for students with special educational needs in school by directing resources where they are most needed – at both a school and individual level.

The proposed new model is supported by NCSE-commissioned research studies which suggest that diagnosis of disability should not be the prerequisite determinant of additional resource allocation for students with special educational needs. These studies

advise that such allocation should instead be based on identified learning needs rather than disability category. The benefits of the proposed model have been outlined in the previous section entitled: Why is this a better model?

Some changes necessitated by the new model will, however, require careful management. Under the new model, some students will no longer have an automatic entitlement to a specified level of additional teaching hours, linked to disability category. These students will now receive supports in line with their identified learning needs, as determined under the NEPS Continuum of Support. The model will also provide flexibility for other students to gain greater access to additional teaching hours because they have a need for them. NCSE research findings clearly indicate this is a better way to allocate additional resources because it allocates according to student need rather than purely by disability category.

Under the proposed new model, additional teaching resources are allocated in line with the school's educational profile without the need for a diagnosis of disability. However, diagnosis of disability will continue to provide the basis for placement in special schools/classes as it is important to ensure that only those students with the most complex needs are placed in special settings. It will therefore be necessary to examine the interplay between these two different systems where for example a special class for students with autism continues to have a pupil teacher ratio of 6:1.

Recommendation 27

The working group recommends that the DES consider making the allocation of additional teaching resources dependent on schools' compliance with the following conditions:

- Implementation of a fully inclusive enrolment policy which clearly states that all students are welcome to enrol, irrespective of learning need.

- Implementation of the NEPS Continuum of Support model, including staged assessment of learning needs and the implementation of early intervention programmes.

- Students with special educational needs are supported to participate, to the greatest extent possible, in school activities.

The proposed allocation model could result in widespread change for schools and needs to be carefully planned and implemented. The balance of distribution between primary and post-primary schools is likely to shift, certain schools may receive reduced additional teaching support if they have fewer students scoring at the lowest percentile levels and as already stated, parents and schools may be concerned about the loss of defined levels of support for students with low incidence special educational needs.

Recommendation 28

The working group therefore recommends that any changes to the level of teaching supports allocated to individual schools must be properly managed and it may be necessary to consider transitional arrangements as required.

The working group is confident that the model being suggested is a better and more equitable means of allocating available teaching resources to schools. Given the flaws in the current model, there is no alternative but to find a better way forward, pending the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004. The working group also considers that the proposed model will move the system towards the full implementation of the EPSEN Act by allocating additional resources to schools in line with their educational profile, by deploying those resources in line with the assessed needs of students and by its emphasis on individualised planning and monitoring outcomes for students with special educational needs.

Any proposal to change the current system for allocating additional resources has the potential to cause real anxiety. Genuine concerns were expressed that any proposal for a new model will simply be a means of delivering savings to the Exchequer rather than forming part of a process of incremental improvement in responding to need or a way of using scarce resources to best effect. Schools are also concerned that a new model could result in an additional administrative burden. The working group wishes to reassure parents and schools that the proposal for a new model is not intended or designed to reduce the level of additional resources available to students with special educational needs or result in increased bureaucracy for schools.

Recommendation 29

The working group strongly recommends, therefore, that sufficient time is allowed for further consultation to take place with the education stakeholders before the new model is implemented in schools.

This process is necessary to build confidence that the new system will be equitable, transparent and efficient in delivering resources to students with special educational needs. Time is also required to collect and analyse the current school-based data on which the educational profile will be established. Finally schools will need specific advice on how, without a professional diagnosis of disability, to allocate and use available resources to support students with special educational needs.

Guidelines and Advice for Schools

4 Guidelines and Advice for Schools

Guidelines for schools on the deployment of additional teaching supports at school level, in line with identified needs

The system for allocating additional teaching supports to schools is separate from the system of deploying these supports to students with special educational needs in schools. Once the additional supports are allocated, schools must use the additional teaching supports to cater for the full cohort of these students. The school is also responsible for deciding how the additional resources should be deployed in line with the needs of students as identified through the NEPS Continuum of Support process. Deployment will need to reflect the spectrum of ability/disability and the range of difficulties present within the school population. The NEPS Continuum of Support guidelines outline how schools can identify needs across the continuum from mild to severe and from transient to enduring and intervene accordingly.

Before the new model is implemented in schools, the DES should issue guidelines to schools on how to deploy additional teaching supports in line with identified needs and in the possible absence of diagnosis of disability. The ISS should assist schools to implement these guidelines which should include the following considerations:

1. Meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools

Teaching resources allocated under this model should be deployed and utilised by schools to promote the meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Inclusive schools accommodate the diverse needs and learning differences of all students and adopt appropriate structures and arrangements that enable each student to derive maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school. Inclusion of students with special educational needs reduces the sense of isolation and the impact of negative labelling often associated with these needs. It can also increase their opportunities to communicate and interact with their peers in and out of school, expand their personal interests and knowledge of the world and prepare them for better post-school experiences and for adulthood. Inclusion is also effective in helping all students overcome misconceptions about people with special educational needs and learn to accept and value individual differences.

At primary level, Circular 02 / 05 (DES, 2005) aimed to 'make possible the development of truly inclusive schools'. Guidelines provided to post-primary schools (DES, 2007a) stated that, as a fundamental principle 'all students should learn together, where possible, and that ordinary schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students while also having a continuum of support and services to match those needs'.

Resources allocated under this model should therefore be utilised to promote further the development of truly inclusive primary and post-primary schools.

To achieve this, schools should ensure that teaching resources allocated under this model are utilised to maximise student potential to participate in purposeful learning activities within mainstream classes, under the direction of the class teacher.

Schools are also advised that particular methodologies are viewed as especially effective in promoting inclusive education. These include:

- Co-operative teaching within mainstream classrooms.

- Co-operative learning within mainstream classrooms.

- Collaborative problem-solving within mainstream classrooms.

- Heterogeneous grouping within mainstream classrooms.

- Differentiation within mainstream classrooms.

- Effective individualised planning for students with special educational needs.

It is expected, therefore, that teaching resources allocated under this model would be utilised to develop and promote these methodologies within schools.

It is also recognised that, at times, small groups of students require specific or targeted interventions best provided through withdrawal sessions in small groups or individually. It is important, however, that these arrangements are flexible in nature and are not the only model of intervention undertaken. It is also important that withdrawal sessions, where necessary, are not confined to students with special educational needs, but are used occasionally for other students in the classroom to teach specific skills, bridge 'gaps' in learning, provide opportunity for practice or reinforcement of skills and so on.

2. Whole-school approach

All schools should devise and implement a whole-school approach to special educational needs. This approach is 'cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these'.[10]

This model aims to support the meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. To realise this aim, school policies and approaches to special educational needs must be agreed and implemented at whole-school level and must also be fully integrated into the overall school plan.

In particular schools are advised to devise and implement whole-school policies in the following key areas:

- Prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention programmes.

- Assessment and identification of students' learning needs.

- Effective teaching of literacy and numeracy.

- Effective teaching to promote social/emotional competence.

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[10] http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/definitions/whole-school-approach.en?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.GlossaryItem-id-4565247 Department of Education, Western Australia – site accessed September 24, 2013

Other areas for consideration include:

- Educational planning.

- Anti-bullying programmes as many children with special educational needs are vulnerable to bullying.

- Attending to professional development of class and support teachers.

- Appropriate structures in place to support collaboration and co-ordination i.e. putting in place a SEN team or SEN co-ordinator.

- Parental involvement.

In devising these policies/structures, schools are advised to take cognisance of the clear guidelines offered to schools in these areas by bodies such as NEPS, the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the Inspectorate. Schools should therefore ensure that their whole-school approaches to these key areas reflect the guidance offered by these bodies.

3. Assessment of learning needs

Assessment of learning needs should be the basis for the allocation of resources within schools to support students with special educational needs rather than on the basis of a once-off diagnosis of a specific disability.

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Using assessment strategies directed towards the identification of student's needs, and providing evidence informed learning experiences that will meet these needs is central to effective teaching and learning. Monitoring of outcomes and review is an essential part of the assessment process as it informs ongoing intervention targeted at individual and group needs.

NEPS can provide support to schools in the process of assessment and intervention for students at all levels of need using the Continuum of Support approach. NEPS psychologists can support teachers, parents and students in planning for effective interventions and outcomes using a problem solving framework that ensures appropriate identification of need, intervention and review.

Assessment should identify a student's learning strengths and abilities and provide information on the areas of learning in which s/he is experiencing difficulties. It should include reference to the skills and objectives of the curriculum that the student has mastered, and those that s/he is experiencing difficulty in mastering. The process of assessment should lead to the identification of specific learning targets, based on the curriculum that should be used to inform teaching and learning activities. The monitoring of progress of students should then be based on the extent to which these targets have been met and what adaptations, if any, need to be made to the learning plan.

Under Section 9 (k) of the Education Act (1998) schools are required to establish and maintain systems whereby the efficiency and effectiveness of the school's provision can be assessed, including the quality and effectiveness of teaching and the achievements levels and academic standards of students.

Circular 0056 / 2011 (DES, 2011b) requested primary school management and staff to review their assessment policies and practices in the light of the NCCA publication,

Assessment in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools (NCCA, 2008) and the requirements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Assessment, with a particular emphasis on learning outcomes, plays a significant role in school self-evaluation, which all schools are expected to engage in.

This model of resource allocation seeks to reinforce the statutory responsibility of schools and the good work commenced by many schools through the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and School Self-Evaluation.

The process of assessment for students with special educational needs should be linked to the NEPS Continuum of Support process (DES, 2007b, 2010b). The process of developing individualised planning for students at stage 3 of the continuum should also reflect the guidance offered to schools in Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006).

4. Responsibility for use of the resources allocated under the proposed new model

Ultimate responsibility for the use of resources allocated to a school under this model rests with the management authorities of that school.

Section 9 of the Education Act (1998) sets out the obligations of a recognised school. These include the obligation to provide an education to students appropriate to their abilities and needs and to use its available resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for. Thus, once the NCSE allocates resources to a school to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs, the management authorities of that school are responsible for the correct deployment of those resources.

In fulfilling this responsibility management authorities are advised that the principal has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school and this includes the guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school. As a consequence, the principal has the general responsibility for establishing and promoting whole-school policies and procedures that are supportive of the learning of all students, including those with special educational needs. To fulfil these responsibilities the principal should:

- Work with the management authorities, teachers, parents and, where appropriate, students, in the development, implementation and review of whole-school policies that promote the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

- Ensure that all such policies are described in the school plan.

- Continuously monitor whole-school policies and provision for students with special educational needs.

- Consult and liaise, as required, with relevant external bodies and agencies such as NEPS, NCSE, SESS.

- Endeavour to ensure that students with special educational needs have access to experienced teachers with expertise and knowledge about their particular learning requirements.

Depending on the context of the school the principal may convene a special educational needs support team within the school or delegate specific responsibilities to other staff members. Teacher collaboration and joint planning is recommended as an effective way of providing effective response to students with special educational needs.

A crucial factor in promoting inclusion and in successfully implementing this model is that mainstream class teachers have first-line responsibility for ensuring that all students in their class, including those with special educational needs, are provided with a learning programme and environment that enables them to access the curriculum and advance their learning. This responsibility is best achieved through differentiation and through the provision of appropriate learning activities to all students. The NEPS guidelines outline ways that teachers can respond at classroom support level through data gathering, putting simple plans in place and so on.

The model allows for the appointment of extra teaching hours/posts to schools for students with special educational needs. The core task of extra teachers allocated under this model is to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. Core activities of support teachers should involve the planned implementation of shared teaching approaches within mainstream classes, which sometimes should involve all students. This involves a continuum of teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students ranging from team teaching to group to individual teaching. The current distinction between resource teachers and learning-support teachers is now discontinued and schools should build and maintain a team of teachers with the necessary experience and training to support inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes.

5. Guidelines for schools

Recommendation 30

The working group recommends that the DES develop guidelines to support schools to deploy resources in a consistent and transparent manner.

These guidelines should take into account the above advice and include information on:

- Enhancing the capacity of the system by emphasising quality learning experiences for all students, including students with special educational needs.

- Identifying students who require support by using the NEPS Continuum of Support.

- Factors to be taken into account in deciding on support for students, including level of parental support.

- Making decisions about the level and quantity of additional support to be deployed.

- Individualised planning for students, including review of plan.

- Effective use of additional teaching supports.

- Setting up appropriate internal structures in schools to meet the needs of students with special educational needs, e.g. SEN team, SEN co-ordinator.

Guidelines should also outline a mechanism to ensure that quality assurance and the effective use of resources are supported through:

- NEPS supporting the effective deployment of resources.

- Inspectorate supporting schools in self-review.

- SENOs auditing use and deployment of resources.

Main Recommendations

5 Main Recommendations

List of Recommendations

There are two key steps involved in the working group's proposed new model for delivering additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs. Step 1 involves the allocation of additional resources to schools and step 2 involves the deployment of these resources by schools to students with special educational needs. The report's recommendations in relation to the proposed new model are listed below under Step 1 and Step 2. Recommendations in relation to the future implementation of the model are separately recorded under the heading 'implementation'.

Step 1: Allocation to schools

The working group recommends that the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools has two components:

- **A school educational profile component** based on three elements: students with complex special educational needs; standardised test results; and the social context of the school.

- A **baseline component** based on an allocation of teaching resources being made to every mainstream school to support inclusion, to minimise the emergence of learning difficulties and to facilitate early intervention [Recommendation 1].

In relation to complex special educational needs, the working group recommends that:

- As part of their work, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) will return information on students with complex special educational needs (identified either at birth or before school entry) in their local areas on a two year cycle and a protocol will be developed between the NCSE and the HSE to ensure that this information can be consistently gathered at a local level. [Recommendation 2]

- The data on students whose complex needs are identified after school entry, will be based on information supplied by the relevant professionals to the schools (e.g. NEPS psychologist, HSE services, audiologists, CAMHS teams etc.). [Recommendation 3]

In relation to standardised tests results, the working group recommends that:

- The working group recommends that the NCSE be given access to test results submitted from all mainstream schools to the Department of Education and Skills and that the Department require schools to report the number of students who register at each of the STen scores.[11] [Recommendation 4]

- Aggregated test data for a three-year period will be used [Recommendation 5]

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11 Currently schools report the number of students in STens 1 – 3 combined, STen 4, STen5, STen6, STen7 and STens 8-10 combined.

- The Department issue a circular that provides schools with guidance on the current circumstances under which students can be exempted from standardised tests. [Recommendation 6]

- To counteract any potential difficulties the following measures will be taken:

  – Mandatory training for teachers in the administration, scoring and interpretation of standardised tests will be provided

  – The Department will issue a circular that provides schools with guidance on the current circumstances in which students can be exempted from standardised tests.

  – NEPS will support schools to process and analyse test results, in order to inform intervention and deployment of teaching resources, if required.

  – Early transfer of results of standardised tests to post-primary schools will be in place

  – The basis for the returns will be maintained in schools and available for periodic random review by DES or NCSE officials.

  – The DES will consider what sanctions it is possible to put in place to reduce the likelihood of inaccurate reporting.
  [Recommendation 7]

- If standardised tests results continue to be used as an element in establishing the educational profile of a school, the DES should:

  – Ensure that standardised testing is introduced in post-primary schools as soon as possible

  – Ensure that standardised tests are regularly updated.

  – Ensure random, thorough checking of actual results in school, by DES officials or SENOs, to counteract any inaccurate reporting.

  – Consider specifying one test to be used for all schools.
  [Recommendation 8]

In relation to the social context of schools, the working group recommends that:

- The DES brings about a situation in which an objective source of information on the social context of schools (for example through a primary pupil database or through linkage with relevant data from the Census of Population) is available as soon as possible.[Recommendation 9]

- Pending the availability of an objective source of information on the social context of schools, robust data on educational disadvantage will be gathered for primary schools through a survey of all primary schools. The data currently available for post-primary schools (exam fee waiver and junior cycle retention rates) will be strength-ened by a similar survey of post-primary schools. [Recommendation 10]

- The DES considers putting in place measures to promote transparency in the return of social context data from schools. These measures could include schools

being required to maintain the basis for the return; random checking of data in school to counteract any inaccurate reporting; and validating schools returns against socioeconomic data collected through the annual census of population. [Recommendation 11]

In relation to the weighting of elements to establish the school's educational profile, the working group recommends that:

- Weightings will be attributed in the following order of priority:
  - The highest weighting will be assigned for students with complex needs
  - The second highest weighting will be assigned on the results of standardised tests
  - The third highest weighting will be assigned on the social context of the school (educational disadvantage, gender, and primary school location) [Recommendation 12]

In relation to an appeals process, the working group recommends that:

- An independent appeals process will be in place whereby a school can appeal its educational profile and/or parents can appeal the deployment of additional teaching resources by schools. (Recommendation 13]

In relation to the baseline component, the working group recommends that:

- A baseline allocation of teaching resources to all mainstream schools, graduated in line with overall enrolment numbers, will be a core component of the new model. (Recommendation 14]

In relation to reviewing schools allocations, the working group recommends that:

- Additional teaching supports should be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years. Developing primary schools, as defined by primary circular 13 / 2013, will be reviewed every year. [Recommendation 15]

In relation to reducing administrative burden on schools, the working group recommends that:

- A central online data system will be developed to facilitate schools in collecting and submitting the required information on one occasion only. [Recommendation 16]

- Under the new model, there will no longer be a distinction between learning support and resource teachers who will instead be known as support teachers. The distinction currently made between 'high' and 'low' incidence special educational needs will no longer exist. [Recommendation 17]

- In line with the new model and previous NCSE policy advice (NCSE, 2013), the working group recommends that any teacher assigned a support role in a school should be trained and equipped to assess and teach all students with special educational needs and to advise and assist other teachers in devising and implementing particular interventions. [Recommendation 18]

Step 2: Deployment of additional resources by schools

In relation to the deployment of additional teaching resources by schools, the working group recommends that:

The **deployment/utilisation** of additional teaching resources by schools will be supported by:

- NEPS psychologists using a problem-solving framework to support schools in identifying students with special educational needs across the continuum and in devising appropriate, evidence-based interventions which are workable within the context of the particular school and class.

- A system for advising schools on how to develop appropriate goals for students in receipt of additional support and for recording outcomes.

- Guidelines to support schools to identify students requiring additional support and to use and allocate their additional teaching posts to best effect.

- An NCSE Inclusion Support Service
  [Recommendation 19]

In relation to the NCSE Inclusion Support Service (ISS), the working group recommends that:

- A national Inclusion Support Service for schools be established, under the management of the NCSE to provide a coherent service to schools. [Recommendation 20]

- Teacher posts will be retained (from the overall quantum of additional teaching posts) to afford this service the capacity required to support schools and to complement existing supports available in the system. [Recommendation 21]

- The Inclusion Support Service will be used to provide immediate assistance to schools in unplanned and exceptional circumstances, where this is indicated and as needs emerge within the school. [Recommendation 22]

In relation to recording and reporting outcomes for students with special educational needs, the working group recommends that:

- Schools will be required to record baseline information, goals set and progress made for students with special educational needs. The level of detail recorded will be graduated in accordance with the level of the student's learning need and the intensity of support required. [Recommendation 23]

- To ensure external oversight, the NCSE will be responsible for monitoring the use of resources allocated under this model and the impact of these resources on students' learning outcomes. [Recommendation 24]

- The working group recommends that following discussion with the relevant stakeholders, schools will be required to provide annual reports to the NCSE on how additional resources were deployed, student progress made and student outcomes achieved through the learning plan process. Students with special educational needs,

who are availing of additional support, in primary and post-primary schools will be included. [Recommendation 25]

In relation to implementation, the working group recommends that:

- The framework for the model should first be agreed in principle before the collection and analysis of data is commenced. As part of the implementation phase, the collection and analysis of data will first be conducted on a small sample of schools before all schools are required to return the information. [Recommendation 26]

In relation to the impact of the new model, the working group recommends that:

- The DES considers making the allocation of additional teaching resources dependent on schools' compliance with the following conditions:

   – Implementation of a fully inclusive enrolment policy which clearly states that all students are welcome to enrol, irrespective of learning need.

   – Implementation of the NEPS Continuum of Support model, including staged assessment of learning needs and the implementation of early intervention programmes.

   – Students with special educational needs are supported to participate, to the greatest extent possible, in school activities [Recommendation 27]

- Any changes to the level of teaching supports allocated to individual schools under the new model must be properly managed and it may be necessary to consider transitional arrangements as required. [Recommendation 28]

- Sufficient time must be allowed for further consultation to take place with the education stakeholders before the new model is implemented in schools. [Recommendation 29]

In relation to guidelines for schools, the working group recommends that:

- Guidelines will be developed by the DES to support schools to deploy resources in a consistent and transparent manner. [Recommendation 30]

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of working group

(Referenced main text: Section 1: Background and Context)

Members of the working group, with Teresa Griffin, CEO, NCSE

Back row L to R: Don Mahon, Pat Kinsella, Anne English, Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig, Maureen Costello, James O'Grady, Peter Archer, Mary Byrne

Front row L to R: Áine Lynch, Eithne Fitzgerald, Teresa Griffin (CEO), Eamon Stack (Chairperson), Katherine O'Leary, Antoinette NicGearailt

- Eamon Stack* (Chair), Chairperson of NCSE and former Chief Inspector, DES
- Don Mahon*, Assistant Chief Inspector, DES
- Maureen Costello*, NCSE Council Member, Director of the National Educational Psychological Service
- Peter Archer*, Director, Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra
- Brian Mac Giolla Phadraig*, Inspector, DES.
- James O'Grady*, NCSE Council Member, former National Manager for Disability Services in the HSE and policy adviser to the Department of Health and Children.
- Áine Lynch, Director, National Parents Council, Primary
- Katherine O'Leary, Director, Inclusion Ireland, Parent of two children with disabilities and former member of NCSE Consultative Forum
- Anne English, Principal, primary school
- Antoinette Nic Gearailt, Principal, post-primary school
- Pat Kinsella, NCSE Council Member and former Principal, post-primary school
- Eithne Fitzgerald, NCSE council member and Head of Policy and Research at the National Disability Authority
- Albert O'Donoghoe, Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Mary Byrne*, Head of Special Education, NCSE
- The work of the group was assisted by Clare Farrell, Assistant Principal Officer, NCSE

* *An asterisk denotes those members who belonged to both the working and advisory groups*.

Appendix 2: Assessing levels of disadvantage in primary schools for DEIS

(Referenced main text: Educational disadvantage)

Assessing levels of disadvantage in primary schools for DEIS

As was the case with previous initiatives to address educational disadvantage in primary schools, the allocation of resources under DEIS was based on information about the socio-economic profile of the school supplied by the school principal, in what became known as the 'DEIS survey'. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) carried out a survey of all primary schools in May and June of 2005. Principals were asked to report on the number of pupils from families with a variety of socioeconomic characteristics associated with poverty. A policy decision by the Minister had been made at an early stage that no measure of learning outcomes in a primary school should contribute directly to the assessment of that school's level of disadvantage. Therefore, the variables to be taken into account in ranking schools for the identification of primary schools for DEIS would be confined to the socio-economic and demographic context. However, it was agreed that the choice of particular variables and the weight to be assigned to these variables would be determined by their association with an educational measure (an estimate provided by school principals in the survey of the percentage of pupils in the school at or below the 10th percentile in reading).

Following procedures that are described in Archer and Sofroniou (2008), a formula was devised based on statistical modelling using mixed logistic regression. While that formula was regarded as having many strengths (e.g. it took schools' gender composition and the particular characteristics of disadvantage in rural settings into account), its use would have resulted in difficulties in terms of policy implementation. Accordingly, an alternative (resource allocation) formula was developed and tested. Two criteria were used in selecting this alternative: 1) The correlation between the score generated by the resource allocation formula and the model-based scale score should be maximised and 2) the correlation between the score generated by the resource allocation formula and the educational measure should be maximised.

Several possibilities were explored before a satisfactory formula was identified. That formula uses six variables (unemployment, lone parenthood, Travellers, large families, free book grants and local authority accommodation). All six variables are percentages and each is given equal weight.

This formula yielded a points total for each school with a theoretical range of 0 to 600 (Archer & Sofroniou, 2008). This DEIS points total was used to produce an overall rank order of schools in terms of level of assessed disadvantage and two separate rank orders were constructed for rural and other schools. These rank orders were then used to assign schools to three categories of participation in the School Support Programme (SSP): urban Band 1, urban Band 2 and rural.

This assessment method is unsatisfactory in several respects, including those mentioned above, when comparing the resource allocation formula with the model-based one. The

method also uses educational variables only indirectly, relies solely on the estimates of principals for measures of socioeconomic variables, and the setting of cut-off points for assigning schools to the SSP was based on resource availability rather than schools' needs (see Weir & Archer, 2005). However, schemes to address disadvantage at primary level have always relied heavily on such procedures. For example, from 1990 onwards admission to the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DAS) was dictated largely by principals' estimates of the percentages of pupils from poor backgrounds (eg, from homes in which the breadwinner was unemployed, that lived in local authority housing). Insofar as it was possible to establish, these self-reports tended to lead to the same schools being categorised as requiring extra resources. Weir and Archer (2005) found a good degree of overlap in terms of participating schools between four schemes aimed at addressing disadvantage. Furthermore, the indices such as that used in DEIS have been found to correlate very highly with an estimate of the percentage of needy pupils in the school provided by principals in their application to the Department of Education and Science for free books. For example, Weir and Archer (2005) reported a correlation of 0.86 between the book grant variable and total points for Giving Children an Even Break (the immediate predecessor of DEIS). However, while these findings indicate that procedures involving principals' estimates are reliable (in that they tend to identify the same schools) questions remain about whether the indicators and the estimates associated with them are valid in terms of the identification of disadvantage.

In assessing questions about whether or not the estimates represent valid measures of disadvantage, a couple of points may be made. The data appear to provide accurate estimates of aggregated school achievement. This can be seen in data from the first report of the independent evaluation of DEIS (Weir & Archer, 2011). The measured achievements of pupils attending schools participating in the SSP were found to be well below those of pupils on whom the tests were standardised. Furthermore, within the SSP, the average achievements of pupils in schools in Band 1 were consistently below those of pupils in schools in Band 2. While it arises indirectly from data gathered for the evaluation, this represents supportive evidence of the validity of the method used to assess disadvantage, and ultimately of the means of identifying schools for inclusion in the SSP.

More significantly, perhaps, are the results of an exercise in which school average achievement for schools participating in the 2004 national assessment of English reading were matched with and then plotted against DEIS points totals for these same schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average achievement of fifth class pupils in the 2004 National Assessment of English Reading, and schools' DEIS points
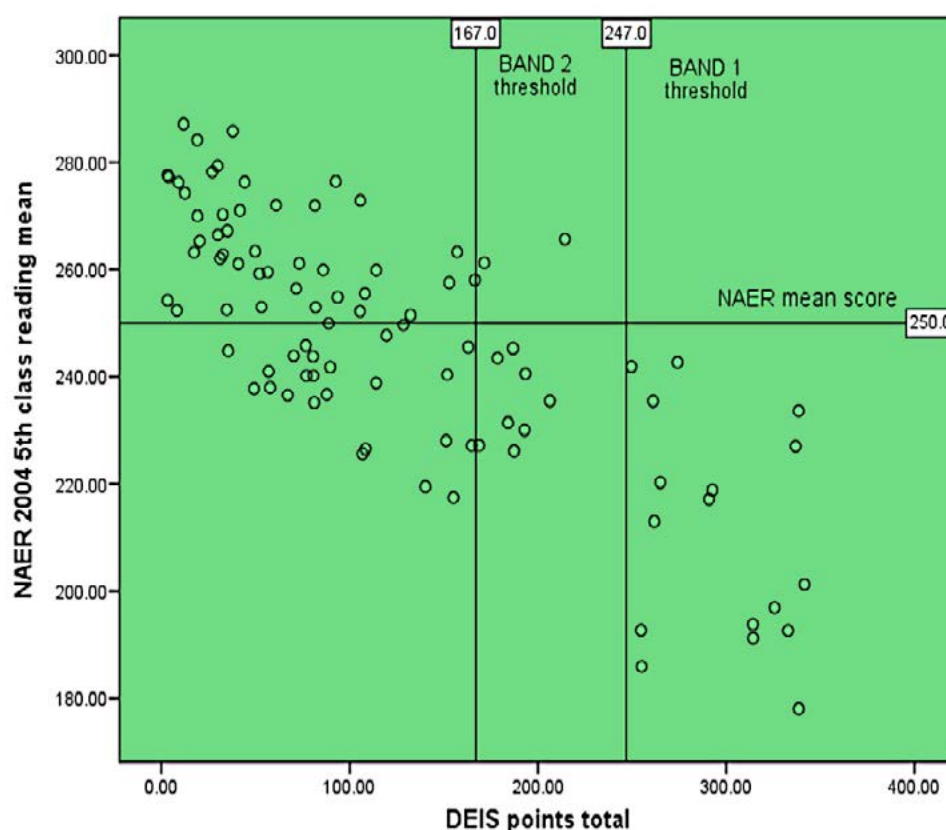
Each circle in Figure 1 represents a school. The horizontal line in the figure represents the national average of 250 for the reading test. The two vertical lines represent the relevant cut-off points for participation in the urban SSP (schools with 167 to 247 points were invited to participate in Band 2; schools with points over 247 were invited to participate in Band 1). The close association between points total and average achievement is evident in the strong correlation between the two measures (-0.79) indicating that as the points total rises, average achievement falls. This pattern can also be seen from the proximity of most schools to an imaginary diagonal line from the top left corner to the bottom right corner. There are, of course, deviations from this pattern such as the two Band 2 schools with above average achievement and others. In this regard, it is worth noting, however, that all Band 1 schools in the sample scored below average on the test.

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Appendix 3: Consultation process

(Referenced in main text: Section 2: Research and Consultation Process)

Introduction

The NCSE conducted a wide-ranging consultation with key education partners to assist the working group in developing its proposal for a new model for allocating additional teaching supports to schools. These stakeholders included parents, teachers, principals, health professionals, school management bodies, Department of Education and Skills staff (NEPS, inspectors), special educational needs organisers (SENOs), advocacy groups, teacher union officials.

A series of group discussions with these education partners was held in September and October 2013. A meeting of the NCSE Consultative Forum was held in October 2013.

Each group was asked to discuss the following questions:

A. Educational profile of a school:

   – How can a school's educational profile be built up to ensure that all students with special educational need are included, without need for a diagnosis of disability?

   – What information is available in the system to contribute to this profile?

B. Recording and measuring outcomes for students with special educational needs:

   – What outcomes should be recorded?

   – How should these be measured?

   – How should they be reported?

Participants received the discussion questions before the meeting and were invited to discuss these with their colleagues. The questions were based on the terms of reference set out for the working group. At the conclusion of each consultation, participants were invited to discuss with their colleagues any further issues raised during the discussion and to submit written proposals to the NCSE for consideration.

A summary of the main views expressed during this process is summarised below.

General points regarding the proposed model

A general consensus emerged across consultation groups on the following:

The new model must be equitable, transparent and flexible

- There was agreement that all schools should be inclusive schools and that it is necessary to find a more equitable way to allocate additional teaching supports to schools to reflect that principle. The NCSE recommendation that a new model be developed for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools, based on the profiled need of each school, was generally welcomed by the educational stake-

holders. Health professionals also welcomed the intention of the proposed model as it supports the HSE's new policy for progressing disabilities services for children. If accepted it will mean that future health and education assessments will have a common focus – to establish the health and educational needs of children – rather than to trigger additional educational supports.

- The core principles – that resources should be provided to schools based on the identified needs of students and that available resources should be directed at those students with the greatest level of need – were accepted by all groups.

- Any new model must be seen to improve on the current system. While there are undoubtedly drawbacks with the current allocation system, as identified in the NCSE policy advice paper, the system is known and familiar to schools and parents. The general allocation model in particular has provided stability to schools in terms of staffing.

- One member of the teachers group felt particularly strongly that all schools should receive some level of core teaching resources to support students with special needs, learning support needs and students with EAL, in a way that is similar to the current GAM model in primary schools.

- The indicators used in the establishment of the school's educational profile must be seen to be equitable, transparent and must provide clarity to schools on the basis for staffing allocations. Indicators should be appropriately weighted to reflect their individual contribution to the overall school profiles.

- The new model must be fully tested before implementation to ensure that its impact on schools' resourcing levels is fully understood. In particular, the model must be 'proofed' to examine its impact on small schools, junior schools, urban and rural schools and so on.

- The model must be sufficiently balanced to provide stability to schools in terms of staffing but allow flexibility in response to changing profiles of schools or newly developing schools.

- The importance of psychological assessment in informing teaching and learning programmes was highlighted in a number of groups.

- The management bodies for post-primary schools strongly emphasised the importance of psychological assessment as a basis for the allocation of additional teaching supports. While the group appreciated that certain inequities relating to differential cognitive abilities within the low incidence cohort exist, the group believes that the model nonetheless:

  – Provides for independent professional psychological assessment of students and brings with it not just a resourcing recommendation but also a set of other child-specific recommendations applicable to the school setting.

  – Supports greater clarity of focus and certainty in individual education planning.

  – Acknowledges that accessing learning is not solely a cognitive but also a highly affective, social and kinaesthetic phenomenon and that schools must have the

capacity, in terms of teacher time, to provide for the multitude of needs demonstrated by any particular student with such enduring conditions.

- – Allows for flexible and nuanced deployment of overall special educational needs resources within the school.

- – Supports a whole-school approach to the management of special educational needs.

- – Provides future-planning certainty.

- • A number of groups suggested that it may be necessary to introduce an appeals process for schools which are not satisfied with the level of additional support that they have been allocated.

Prevention and early intervention are important

- • Prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention were seen to be critically important. All schools should be provided with resources to provide prevention strategies and early and appropriate interventions for students who require such support, given research evidence for their importance in determining outcomes for students with special educational needs.

- • In light of this, consideration should be given to allocating additional weighting in line with the number of junior infants in a school.

Supports for students and parents

- • The new model should ensure that additional teaching supports are available to students in a timely and efficient manner and that additional support is targeted at those students with the greatest level of need.

- • The school profile should capture all students with special educational needs, without the need to count each student. This includes students with the most complex needs and also those whose needs may not manifest in terms of low achievement on standardised tests, for example students with Asperger syndrome.

- • Supports to students should be time-bound and regularly reviewed to respond to a change in their levels of learning need.

- • Parents may perceive the school profile to be less child centred than the previous low allocation model and will wonder where their child 'fits into' the new system. It is important therefore that parents understand that the school profile is based on the needs of children.

- • The model must provide parents with reassurance that their child is going to be supported in school. Parents must be kept informed of developments and included in the process through ongoing consultation.

- • The importance of individualised planning, with parental involvement, for students with special educational needs was repeatedly emphasised across groups. Any

student in receipt of additional resources should have individualised planning in place.

- All schools are now involved in school self evaluation. Recording, monitoring and reporting outcomes for students with special educational needs should be undertaken as part of this process.

Support for schools

- There is good work being undertaken by schools on inclusion of students with special educational needs. Parents reported that once their child was included in school, they did make progress and they were generally happy in school.

- Schools will require support to develop their capacity to move towards a greater emphasis on identifying the learning needs of students, to utilise available resources to best effect and to record and measure outcomes for students with special educational needs. Continuing professional development for teachers is seen to be critical to the success of the new model and will need to be embedded from its introduction.

- Under the new model, schools will have responsibility for the deployment of resources to students with special educational needs. While this is to be welcomed, schools will require clear guidance in the exercise of this responsibility, including what evidence and data should be used to assess students' level of needs.

- NEPS should be adequately resourced to support schools in the implementation of the Continuum of Support as this is the mechanism through which the identification of student learning needs and support requirements will happen.

- The model should be sufficiently flexible to cater for unanticipated and exceptional circumstances. Consideration might be give to having a supplementary pool of teachers who would be available to provide support to schools when required. Teachers providing such support would need to be trained in special education.

- The consolidation of guidance documents from the DES and its agencies would improve the accessibility of the advice for teachers.

- The extent and range of current new initiatives under way in schools and their impact on staff workloads needs to be acknowledged by the working group.

Oversight of use of resources by schools

- Oversight of how schools use the resources allocated is important and must be in place under the new model.

Unintended consequences should be avoided

- Significant concern was expressed that the introduction of a new model should not bring about a reduction in the level of additional teaching resources available to support students with special educational needs.

- Concern was expressed by a number of groups that diagnosis will continue to form the basis for the allocation of additional care supports and entry to special schools

and classes. The interplay between the two systems of allocation could potentially result in an increased demand for SNA support or referrals to special settings.

- While the idea of establishing an educational profile for the purpose of resource allocation was generally welcomed, concern was also expressed that the creation of an education profile could have the unintended effect of accentuating differences between schools.

- Indicators used to build a school's educational profile should not penalise schools that have been successfully addressing low achievement levels and low retention rates in the past.

Establishing educational profile of a school

How can the educational profile of a school be built up to ensure that all students with special educational need are included, without need for a diagnosis of disability?

The profile of a school should be build upon the learning needs of the students enrolled in the school. The following indicators should be considered for use in building the school's profile:

- Standardised tests, including those exempted from taking standardised tests on grounds of special educational needs/disability.

  Standardised tests were recognised as a reliable and available indicator in building a school's educational profile. However it was acknowledged that the results should be treated with caution because they measure a specific type of intelligence only; they provide a snapshot in time of a student's achievement and they are not always inclusive of students with special educational need.

- Gender.

- Total student enrolment.

- Information transferring from pre-schools (noted that 95 per cent of children now access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme).

- Information from HSE Assessment of Need or early intervention teams.

- Weighting numbers of children in infant cycle, in line with early intervention as best practice.

- School's previous history of enrolling children with special educational needs.

- Number of children from the Traveller community.

- Socioeconomic indicator, for example, employment status, medical cards, children registered with child protection services, level of parental education, Pobal index of deprivation (Haase index).

- Number of students with complex needs enrolled.

  The question about how to capture children with complex needs before they enter primary school or those whose needs emerge during primary school – in the absence of diagnosis – was raised. It was suggested that students at stage 3 of the

NEPS continuum could possibly be included in the school profile. However it was emphasised that it is important not to create an incentive to progress students too quickly to stage 3 of the Continuum of Support. It was also acknowledged that the continuum is not yet embedded in all schools. It was noted that NCSE data might be useful as historic data in this context.

- Results of State examinations.

- Numbers taking foundation level papers.

- Programmes available or recommended for use in schools, for example LCA, JCSP, Incredible Years Programme and so on.

- Number of students with English as a second language.

- Level of parental involvement in child's education.

- Attendance.

- Retention rate.

- Prevalence rates where known for certain disability categories.

- Involvement of NBSS in post-primary (although only a finite number of schools is involved in this programme).

- Presence of behaviour support teacher.

Recording and measuring outcomes for students with special educational needs – Individualised planning

- The importance of individualised planning for students with special educational needs was emphasised across all groups. Learning targets set out in a student's learning plan should be clear, realistic, measureable and not too narrowly focused.

- Information on students' strengths, difficulties and learning styles should be included. The SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) was specifically recommended as one of a suite of measures which could be used. It is a short 25-item measure which has both parent and teacher versions and is free to download and free to use. Both English and Irish versions of the questionnaire are available to download.

- Progress should be measured in relation to the individual child.

Outcomes to be recorded measured and monitored

Outcomes to be recorded, measured and monitored should relate to targets set in the student's learning plan, and should comprise academic, social, emotional and behavioural aspects including:

- Independent living skills.

- Adaptive skills/awareness.

- Play skills for the younger child.

- Language and communication skills.

- Successful transfer to school or to mainstream.

- Student engagement, participation and progress.

- Results of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy.

- Results of State examinations.

- Destination outcomes.

- Attendance.

- Peer relationships.

- Emotional wellbeing.

- Satisfaction of the child/parents with the education of children.

- Reduction in disciplinary markers, for example, suspensions.

- Happiness.

- Confidence.

- Self-esteem.

- Participation in extracurricular activities.

Reporting of outcomes

Reporting of outcomes could take place as part of whole-school evaluation. Suggestions in regard to reporting of outcomes included the following:

- Records on outcomes for students getting additional support should be retained in schools and made available to inspectors, NCSE and NPES, upon request.

- Student reports on their outcomes should be included.

- Schools could be asked to submit a sample of reports anonymously for data collection purposes.

Appendix 4: International perspectives on models for supporting students with special educational needs

(Referenced in main text: Section 2: Research and Consultation Process)

Introduction

Over the last 25 years there has been growing international agreement that all children, including children with special educational needs (SEN) have the right to be formally educated. This is enshrined in UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), and a commitment to inclusive education for children with special needs is addressed in several international declarations such as the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994). It is also widely accepted that the education of disabled students could not be achieved without additional resources being made available for them if they are to access the curriculum on anything like an equal basis with non-disabled students (OECD 2003:12).

However, despite this international convergence on a commitment to inclusive education and the provision of supports to students with special educational needs or disabilities, it remains difficult to compare data on these students or the costs of special educational needs provision across countries for a number of reasons.

A recent policy brief for the European Commission (European Commission 2013:4[12]) on support for children with special educational needs notes this political consensus on the importance of inclusive education. But it also notes a 'marked absence' of pan European data on the prevalence of special educational needs given varying definitions of SEN and different approaches to identification across countries.

Difficulties generating comparable international data in this area have been highlighted in the work of the OECD and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education[13] (EADSNE). In 1996 the OECD began work with member countries to develop internationally comparable data on students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages and reports from this process have highlighted the complexity of the task (see OECD 2003; 2007). A recent report from an EADSNE project on mapping the implementation of policy on inclusive education across member countries has also highlighted the need for more harmonised international data, both quantitative and qualitative, on special educational needs and inclusive educational provision (EADSNE 2011). The EADSNE report sets out a framework for making further progress on these issues in the future, building on its own work in this area as well as previous work by others such as the OECD and Eurostat.

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12   European Commission (2013) Support for Children with Special Educational Needs http://europa.eu/epic/studies-reports/docs/eaf_policy_brief_-_support_for_sen_children_final_version.pdf (accessed September 2013).

13   The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is an independent and self-governing organisation established by member countries to act as their platform for collaboration regarding the development of provision for learners with special educational needs. The EADSNE is maintained by the Ministries of Education in the participating countries (member-states of the European Union as well as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) as well as supported by the European Union Institutions via the Jean Monnet programme under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme.

Given the difficulties comparing prevalence and provision data, there are difficulties comparing levels of expenditure on special educational needs across countries, as countries may target different cohorts of students for additional support and funding may come from different sources (across departmental lines for instance or from regional or central authorities).

For these reasons it is not easy to compare systems of support or provision, and it has not been possible to find published data on the comparative spend on supporting students with special educational needs internationally. Nevertheless this background paper attempts to provide an international perspective on how students with special educational needs are supported in other countries and lessons arising from the various approaches to provision in place.

Section 1 draws from the international literature to outline:

- Three to five main approaches to providing additional supports that have been identified across countries.

- The advantages and disadvantages associated with these approaches and the difficulty identifying a single a 'best' model.

- Some general principles that have been identified to underpin the development of inclusive models of support and are relevant to policy makers – for example allocating resources to early identification and intensive education for students who struggle with learning; allocating resources in ways that promote inclusivity, improve equity and the performance of all students, particularly those in the bottom quartile; avoiding undue perverse incentives and disincentives; and putting in place arrangements to ensure accountability, including monitoring the effective use of resources and associated outcomes for children.

- Limitations that have been linked in the literature to the use of diagnostic categories to allocate additional resources for students with special educational needs (the basis for a significant component of the current Irish model).

- Some insights from research about the need to understand more fully the effectiveness of the provision of additional support or resources and its impact on student progress and outcomes over time.

Section 2 provides brief illustrative examples of models of support in a selection of countries. The selection of countries was pragmatic, driven mainly by the ready availability of published information and covers systems in place in:

- Norway
- Italy
- England
- Scotland
- The Netherlands
- Denmark and
- New Zealand.

Section one: Issues from the literature

Approaches to providing supports

Mitchell (2010) in a review of international trends in the education of students with special educational needs points out that for the past decade or so models for supporting these students have been under review in several countries and that the factors driving such reviews include rising costs, concerns over efficiency and equity in the use of resources, and concerns about the possibility that some models incentivise poor practices such as exclusion from mainstream education and over referral into 'special education' (Mitchell 2010: 79 citing Ferrier et al 2007).

Mitchell identifies three broad approaches to the provision of support: (i) demand; (ii) supply; (iii) output. Each is said to have advantages and disadvantages identified in the literature. These broad types are described as follows (Mitchell 2010: 81-84)

- **Demand** *(or input or categorical)* driven approaches are based on allocating individual funding to identified students, the amount based on the student's degree and type of disability or need for support. A recent report commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (and produced by the NESSE network of experts) makes the point that classifying a child as different from others may be beneficial if this leads to reasonable adjustments and additional resources as a means of promoting more equal outcomes – though notes that on the other hand it may lead to stigmatisation (NESSE 2012:25). From the literature Mitchell identifies unintended negative effects of a reliance on demand driven models such as: perverse incentives to over identify and or play the system resulting in a potential reduction in funds for each student; a strong focus on disability, difference and deficit which can be upsetting for parents and inhibit inclusive culture and practice; and the 'medicalisation of diversity' in order to attract funds.

- **Supply** type approaches provide a set amount of funding to cover the costs of provision for the proportion of students estimated to have special educational needs. This approach is said to permit control over levels and patterns of expenditure and usually caps the number of students who can be considered eligible for additional support. The literature notes that advantages of this approach include reducing the incentive to over identify students with special educational needs; being able to address these needs in the general education context; and being able to quantify the resources required. On the other hand disadvantages are said to be linked with equity, as the approach may not take account of higher prevalence rates in particular areas or among particular groups. Such census-based funding was also said to have increased administrative burdens for school districts – though one author cited by Mitchell concluded that such census-based models could be improved by introducing a weighting formula to compensate schools with higher students with special educational needs enrolments and to allow funding of prevention programmes.

- **Output funding** is described in the literature as a 'theoretical possibility' in which schools are rewarded for effectiveness and excellence and are funded for tasks completed, retrospectively rather than 'tasks to be done' as is mostly the case at

present. While the problem of potential 'perverse disincentives' (eg a school may be so successful that it no longer qualifies for additional funding) – Mitchell notes that the approach deserves further attention as part of the funding mix, because in focusing on quality outcomes, it aligns special education with the mainstream accountability agenda.

Mitchell's review also notes that earlier work in this area (Ferrier et al 2007) had identified a taxonomy of five approaches some of which contain elements of the three basic approaches outlined above (see Mitchell 2010:87). These included:

- **Discretionary** resource allocation models provide separate funds for supporting students with special educational needs. Resources might be allocated as a set percentage of the school's overall budget or they might be received from an external source. They enable individual schools to make decisions about the types of services and programmes to support, within broad guidelines on the use of the funds.

- **Categorical** models allocate resources to each student with an identified disability, with the level of support based on the degree and type of disability (as in demand driven approach) and resources can be allocated to the school or to the child's parents.

- **Voucher-based** models provide direct public payments to parents to cover their child's school costs, aimed at increasing parental choice and promoting competition between schools.

- **Census-based** approaches resource on the basis of the number of students possibly with certain weighted characteristics such as socio economic status or the type and degree of disability. This aims to simplify the overall resourcing mechanism and make it independent of classification and placement decisions, thus removing incentives for over identifying students as having a disability, which as noted earlier, can be associated with more categorically-based models.

- **Actual cost funding** models include features of categorical and census-based approaches as resourcing is based on student numbers and the actual costs involved of providing services.

Drawing on the findings from his international review Mitchell (2010) sets out the following general principles that could be taken into account by policy-makers considering these issues (Mitchell 2010: 89/90).

- The funding of education and special education is extraordinarily complex.

- In efforts to resolve issues, the starting point should not be with how to fund special education, but rather with how to fund education generally.

- There is no single, 'best' resourcing model. Every model has strengths and weaknesses, incentives and disincentives, and positive and negative outcomes that may affect different students differentially, so a combination of models seems desirable.

- From an economic efficiency viewpoint, it is best to allocate resources where they will do the most good, for example, to early identification and intensive education for students who struggle with learning; and in ways that support system or school policy for example improvements of students functioning at the lowest quartile.

- Resources should be allocated in ways that are coherent with, and promote, system policy, for example, towards greater inclusivity, lifting the performance of all students and particularly those functioning in the bottom quartile and improving equity. There are sound pedagogical and financial rationales for using resources to further integrate special and regular education.

- Funding should be flexible enough to meet the needs of children who experience complex needs.

- Undue perverse incentives and disincentives should be avoided.

Resources should be directed to approaches for which there is evidence of

effectiveness in improving students' learning outcomes.

- Arrangements to ensure accountability, including the monitoring of the use of resources and outcomes for children, should be included.

- Funding should be transparent and equitable, with individual schools clear about the resources available to them.

- Funding should be allocated in ways that give schools the flexibility, within

appropriate accountability frameworks, to implement practices that work for them and assist teachers to meet the learning needs of students with special educational needs in the context of accountability for a quality education for every student.

Limitations associated with using categorical approaches

The problems Mitchell (2010) highlighted in the literature as being associated with categorical approaches (or the demand/input models) are also reflected in a recent literature review from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE 2013a).

This literature review was undertaken to support an EADSNE project on the organisation of provision to support inclusive education in member countries and makes the point that many agency member countries use national systems of classification/categorisation to identify problems, assess student educational or support needs, allocate resources, make placement decisions and inform policy making.

Yet in common with the NCSE policy advice to the Minister, recommendations emerging from different areas of EADSNE work advocate a move away from classification systems that lead to the labelling and/or placement of students based on categories, towards an understanding of what actually benefits students. The review of the literature outlines how the use of diagnostic categories is linked by various authors to dividing practices or the generation of (sometimes stigmatising) labels that may not usefully inform educational provision (EADSNE 2013a). It also outlines how inclusive systems of support need to address the capacity of the whole school to respond to the needs of different learners:

> This requires a move away from the allocation of resources linked to categories which can have negative consequences, such as segregation and low expectations. Increasingly, debate centres on approaches based on human rights and a

focus on early intervention in order to allocate support without labelling learners... These approaches should avert the struggle to obtain ever-increasing resources for small numbers of learners and seek to re-allocate them to system re-organisation and improved accountability in order to provide a more equitable and inclusive education for all learners (EADSNE 2013a:61)

Specifically, the review maintains a human-rights approach to disability and underlines the need to provide resources to all learners without the need for categorisation or labelling, often linked to medical diagnoses. The conceptual framework also supports the view that 'a move towards inclusive practice requires the transformation of the school system as a whole, in particular through collaborative practice at all levels and between all agencies, putting learners' views at the centre of all developments' (EADSNE 2013a:63). The review also attempted to highlight common issues from different contexts which could contribute to helping all learners to succeed. These issues include:

- Inclusion as a process that requires changes in the whole education system, rather than simply where learners with disabilities are educated.

- The need to increase the capacity of regular schools and develop their competence to benefit all learners, which may include developing the role of special schools to provide training, support and specialist resources.

- The importance of listening to learners and their families in the organisation of any additional support.

- The development of 'inclusive' attitudes and beliefs in teachers and the will to take responsibility for all learners.

- The importance of distributed leadership to ensure a positive culture and ethos in all schools.

- The importance of networking and collaboration in providing support at all levels, including school-to-school collaboration (mainstream and special schools) and partnerships with other agencies to provide support to individual learners in the local school and community.

- The development of equitable funding approaches which aim to improve the school system for all learners through collaboration, rather than providing an incentive to identify and label learners.

An international review of practices and procedures for the diagnosis of a disability and the assessment of special needs education commissioned by the NCSE (Desforges & Lindsay 2010) also raised questions about how reliably people with disabilities can be classified into the categories of disability that underpin resource allocation models, the validity of the categories used and the reliability of the assessments to place children in these categories. Findings showed there was no uniformity across countries on how categories of disability are defined, the particular methods of assessment required to make the diagnosis or the professional groups involved in making the diagnosis. The number and nature of categories used also varied between jurisdictions, with the US listing 13 and Queensland using six for example.

The report notes that definitive categories create dilemmas as students often exhibit a range of difficulties characteristic of more than one category, and it may not be clear which one offers the best fit. Furthermore, categorisation often does not reflect the complexity of the special educational needs of an individual child, nor does it necessarily inform educational interventions. For example students assigned to the same disability category often have different needs in terms of school-based learning, as a wide range of ability or disability can be represented within categories.

Other authors have raised similar concerns about the limited value of categorisation for informing teaching and learning or resource allocation. Florian considers that students placed in the same category of disability may have very different learning needs, and classification can lead to stereotypes, limited expectations of the students so labelled, and exclusion (cited in Desforges & Lindsay, 2010). Florian questions the need to categorise in this way, and can find little evidence that disability diagnosis leads to improvements in educational provision and outcomes.

Desforges and Lindsay (2010) suggest that different factors interplay at various stages of a child's life to affect learning. These include factors intrinsic to the child (e.g. genetic, neurological); factors in the child's home and school environment; and factors within wider society such as housing or societal attitudes to disabilities. This interactionist/ecological model acknowledges 'that the needs of any child may be considered as comprising the needs (a) common to all children (b) common to children who share a disability or condition and (c) unique to each child' (Desforges et al, 2010:116). While students may therefore have overlapping needs, important variations exist among students within any given disability category that reflect individual factors. This places limits on the usefulness of disability diagnosis.

Despite these limitations, the authors acknowledge that diagnosis may be useful in providing some information on the student's special educational needs and may inform effective interventions. The report acknowledges that although it should not be a requirement for assessment of special educational needs, diagnosis can be helpful in planning how to meet the student's needs and in providing information to parents.

A final concern noted by the authors is that there can be under- and/or over-identification of students from minority groups within certain categories of disability (Desforges & Lindsay, 2009, Lindsay et al, 2007). In a 2007 study, after controlling for the effects of socio-economic disadvantage, gender and year group, Lindsay et al found significant over- and under-representation of different minority ethnic groups within certain disability categories relative to white British students. The nature and degree of this disproportionality varied across both category of special educational needs and minority ethnic group.

As an alternative to using categorisation to drive the provision of support the EASDNE highlights a couple of examples of providing 'graded' support to students in Belgium and Finland. The framework of graded learning in Belgium is described as seeking to move away from a medical model of disability (Lebeer et al 2010 cited in EADSNE 2013a) and provide individual learners (grouped into four clusters) with support at five levels; and in Finland support for learning is provided along three levels.

Mitchell (2010) identifies Response to Intervention (RtI) as a possible alternative to categorisation, a framework that adopts a graded approach to the provision of support. This involves (a) tracking the rate of progress in core subjects for all students in the class; (b) identifying students whose levels and rates of progress are significantly below their peers; and (c) systematically assessing the impact of evidence-based teaching adaptations on their achievement. The approach, he says, above all focuses on outcomes and on the evaluation of interventions, integrating student assessment and intervention. The RtI framework provides a system for delivering interventions of increasing intensity and is widely used in the US and Canada. According to Mitchell (2010: 55) it bears a close resemblance to the Graduated Response model of intervention in England, as outlined in the 2001 Code of Practice.

In England the graduated response recognises there is a continuum of special educational needs along which support may be required from lower level to higher level needs. First classroom teachers provide an appropriate education for their students through differentiated teaching. If progress is not as expected, then 'school action' is implemented which involves additional interventions over and above the differentiated curriculum. If the interventions are not helping sufficiently the school can request support from external services through 'school action plus'. The next step for those with the greatest need is for the school to request a 'statement of need' through an assessment process. The new Children and Families Bill (February 2013) proposes to replace special educational needs statements and learning difficulty assessments (currently for young people over 16 years) with an integrated assessment and a single Education, Health and Care Plan for children and young people with special educational needs, aged 0 to 25 years.

The type of staged assessment and intervention envisaged in Ireland through the NEPS Continuum of Support also draws on the principles which underpin Response to Intervention (DES 2010). The NEPS continuum refers to three levels of support: Support for all, which is a process of prevention, effective mainstream teaching and early identification available to all students; School support (for some) which involves assessment and intervention processes directed to some students or groups of students who require additional input; and School support plus (for a few) which involves more intensive and individualised supports. This level of intervention is for students with complex and or enduring needs and it is said that relatively few students will need this support. On the basis that the current model of resource allocation in Ireland provides additional resources on a differential basis linked to SEN categories, the NCSE Implementation Report to the DES in 2006 also identified the use of the staged assessment process as a potential alternative to using diagnostic categories (NCSE 2006).

The impact of resources on student outcomes

Fazekas (2012) provides an overview of general school funding formulas as distinct from other forms of school funding, in an OECD working paper. Formula funding relies on a mathematical formula containing a number of variables (e.g. number of students) each of which has attached to it a cash amount to determine school budgets. Four main groups of variables in school funding formulas tend to be used across OECD countries which use this approach to funding schools. These are (i) student number and grade level-based; (ii)

needs-based; (iii) curriculum or educational programme-based and; (iv) school characteristics-based. Sometimes output and outcome-related variables are also used. Fazekas notes that formula funding systems typically 'advance transparency and accountability at low administrative costs and in combination with matching complementary policy tools they can also contribute to equity and efficiency' (Fazekas 2012:3).

Fazekas points out a clear trend in how formulas are devised, with countries moving away from simple, student number-based formulas towards taking into account differences in learning needs of students as well as varying curriculum goals and costs of school sites. Needs-based variables are described as being included in school funding formulas in order to take into account the additional resource needs of teaching students with learning disabilities or those who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The additional resources are intended to provide further help for such students by offering them, for example, additional teaching time, specialised learning material, and smaller classes. The aim of using needs-based variables is to address educational disadvantage and promote equity and adequacy of education – though a difficulty highlighted in the paper is that little is said to be known about the causal relationship between education costs and student performance.

Sigafoos et al (2010) undertook a review of studies that investigated the impact of various models for supporting students with special educational needs. Noting difficulties with classifying funding models, the authors conceptualised the five broad categories (discretionary, categorical, voucher-based, census-based and cost-based) in terms of a continuum with census-based models at one end and categorically-based models at the other. In a purely census-based approach, schools receive funds based only on the number of students, whereas in a purely categorical approach, the size of the special education budget depends on the number of students identified as having this or that type of disability (Sigafoos et al 2010:31). Many of the models they reviewed could be placed between the two ends of a continuum in that funds were allocated based on the population, but the amount of funding per pupil was influenced by various demographic and other variables, such as family socioeconomic status or the child's type of disability.

The findings suggest a variety in the literature – a variety of funding models, a variety of research methodologies and a variety in the results found in the ten studies – which made it difficult to compare and contrast outcomes across studies or to draw any firm conclusions about the relative impacts of the various models. The authors could find no evidence that 'any of these funding reforms were associated with any better (or any worse) outcomes in terms of educational achievement for children with SEN. There may be some meaningful and causal associations between outcome and funding reform, but studies demonstrating any such associations were not located' (Sigafoos et al 2010: 33).

Whether school expenditure can be directly and positively linked to improved educational outcomes is said to be a contentious issue (Holmlund, McNally and Viarengo 2008) and some of the literature suggests there is weak evidence of such a link. Holmlund et al (2008) however, highlight the existence of some high quality studies indicating a positive link. Their own analysis of expenditure and attainment data in England shows that in contrast to much of the literature, they found 'good evidence of positive effects of school resources on attainment', with higher positive effects on attainment for economi-

cally disadvantaged students (Holmlund et al 2008). Their analysis was based on census data available on all pupils completing state primary school between 2001-02 and 2006-07 (and included measures of academic achievement on of English, mathematics and science at age 11; similar measures of prior attainment (on the basis of tests at age seven); and indicators of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic deprivation) – and these data were linked to school-level census data for relevant years, which included school expenditure.

Another English study (drawing on national data for 11-year-olds) examined the impact of the differential funding to schools with similar student intakes, on student attainment (Gibbons, McNally and Viarengo 2011). These schools were in neighbouring local authorities (usually with a high intake of disadvantaged students) and received different levels of funding based on an 'area cost adjustment' in the national funding formula at the time.[14] The analysis found that increased resources were associated with improved student outcomes, particularly in schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students – 'an important result because convincing evidence on the effects of expenditure increases has been hard to come by' (Gibbons, McNally and Viarengo 2011).

Focusing specifically on the impact of additional supports on the outcomes of students with special educational needs, Crawford and Vignoles (2010) note that 'one in five children in England are recorded as having some kind of special educational need, meaning that they receive additional help in school; yet there seemed to be little evidence of the effect of such assistance on students' academic progress' (Crawford & Vignoles 2010:3). A key aim of their paper was to provide robust quantitative evidence on the academic progress of children with special educational needs to inform policy makers about the likely effectiveness of additional resources to support students with special educational needs. One difficulty with generating evidence of the effect of programmes is that it is usually difficult to define an appropriate control group for students with special educational needs. To address this difficulty, Crawford and Vignoles drew on data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) and compared the progress of children formally identified as having non-statemented (less severe) needs with the progress of children without a SEN label, but whose class teacher reported that they 'exhibit behaviour which suggests that they might have special educational needs'. Crawford and Vignoles (2010) found that children identified as having non statemented special educational needs made significantly less progress between key stage 1 and key stage 2 (age seven and 11) than otherwise identical children whose class teacher reports that they may have special educational needs. They noted that:

> this is perhaps not an entirely unexpected result, given that there is no compulsion in the system for school action and school action plus funding to be spent on children with special educational needs, and there is some evidence that teachers expect children with SEN labels to make less progress than those without (Ofsted 2010) (Crawford & Vignoles 2010:26)

The authors acknowledge a number of caveats in relation to the findings – the results may not be generalisable across England as the study focuses on a relatively small area; the measures used to define the control group focused on behavioural rather than physi-

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14   This adjustment was intended to compensate for differences in labour costs between areas.

cal needs, so the results may not be representative of the academic progress of students with all types of special needs; and additional support or interventions may have been having a positive effect on outcomes they did not measure (such as behaviour or attendance). However they also point out that available data allowed them to investigate the impact of SEN support on academic achievement more carefully than had been possible before and noted that if schools are provided with resources to help these children and these resources are not improving outcomes as the findings suggest, then this should be a concern for policy makers.

On the other hand a large scale evaluation of the impact of the Achievement for All (AfA) programme in England showed noticeable improvements in academic attainment for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the schools participating in the programme (Humphrey & Squires 2011). The evaluation involved a longitudinal assessment of student outcomes through teacher surveys, parent surveys and academic attainment data. The AfA pilot involved ten local authorities and 454 schools and involved £31m in funding over a two-year period. The pilot initiative was designed to support schools and local authorities to provide better opportunities for learners with special educational needs and disabilities to fulfil their potential.

The pilot comprised three main strands: assessment, tracking and intervention which included tracking progress, setting targets and implementing appropriate interventions; structured conversations which provided a framework for home school dialogue; and provision for developing wider outcomes which involved schools developing home school approaches and key actions in two of the following areas: attendance, behaviour, bullying, positive relationships and participation in extended service provision.

The evaluation found that AfA had a significant impact on progress in English and maths among students with special educational needs and disabilities. In addition all four year groups in the target cohort made significantly greater progress during the pilot compared to other pupils nationally with SEND, and in several of the analyses the progress of the AfA cohort was also significantly greater than that made by pupils without SEND nationally. In this sense the authors note 'the AfA pilot proved to be very successful in narrowing the well established achievement gap between pupils with and without SEND' (Humphrey & Squires, 2011: 13).

In relation to wider outcomes the evaluation found that the pupils in pilot schools had also made significant improvements in positive relationships, and there had been reductions in bullying and behaviour problems.

In the Irish context recent evaluations at the Educational Research Centre (ERC) of the impact of the School Support Programme element of the DEIS scheme operating in schools with the highest levels of disadvantage showed clear evidence of improved achievement in reading and mathematics between 2007 and 2010 in sampled urban primary schools (Weir 2011). Further analysis showed that not only were these gains maintained, they were built on between 2010 and 2013 (Weir & Denner 2013). The 2011 report noted that the differences appeared small in 'absolute terms', but were statistically significant, and the improvement was found at all grade levels. Progress was most marked among students with lower levels of achievement, and improvements were most evident in junior grades. While the ERC was cautious about attributing these improvements with

certainty to the programme inputs, some alternative reasons for the change were reasonably ruled out. It was also noted in the evaluation reports that these outcomes from DEIS were consolidating or building on previous programmes targeted at educational disadvantage in which most schools in DEIS had participated.

The 2013 DEIS evaluation report (Weir & Denner 2013) showed the attainment gains in urban primary schools were particularly evident in the junior grades and in schools that had high levels of disadvantage:

> While there has been a striking reduction in low-scorers (as evidenced by very large decreases in the percentages of pupils scoring at or below the 10th percentile in both reading and mathematics) the percentage of high achievers in both subject areas has been maintained and in some cases, increased (Weir & Denner 2013: 20)

Given the absence of a control group the authors note there is no certainty that the improvements were an outcome of DEIS supports rather than a reflection of a general improvement in reading and maths over the period nationally. However, they also note that national assessments in the past couple of decades indicate no major changes in reading standards. If such a change has occurred more recently it should be clear when the result of the national assessments to take place in 2014 become available. In addition the authors note that a number of factors during that period might have been expected to generate disimprovement. These factors included a reduction in school absences in DEIS schools between 2007 and 2013 (with the possibility that greater number of potentially poorer performing students took the tests as they years went on); fewer exemptions based on inability to take the test over the period; and a possible increase in the level of socioeconomic disadvantage given the impact of the recession.

Some of the studies reported here provide useful evidence that the provision of specific supports, interventions and resources can be linked to improved outcomes for students experiencing educational disadvantage (e.g. DEIS) and for students with special educational needs (e.g. the AFA programme schools in England). These studies underline how important it is to ensure that the provision of interventions or support is carefully monitored over time in order to assess its effectiveness and impact on student outcomes.

Summary Points

There are difficulties comparing international data on special educational needs provision and expenditure

Despite international convergence on a commitment to inclusive education and the provision of supports to students with special educational needs or disabilities, it remains difficult to compare data on students with special educational needs or the costs of special educational needs provision across countries for a number of reasons (see OECD 2007; EADSNE 2011).

Three main approaches to the provision of support have been identified

A review of international trends in the education of students with special educational needs identified three main approaches to providing additional supports to these students have been identified in the literature (Mitchell 2010). These are: demand (or input or categorical) driven approaches based on allocating individual funding to identified students based on the student's degree and type of disability; supply type approaches type approaches provide a set amount of funding to cover the costs of provision for the proportion of students estimated to have special educational needs; and output funding which is described in the literature as a 'theoretical possibility' in which schools are rewarded for effectiveness and excellence and are funded for tasks completed, retrospectively rather than 'tasks to be done' as is mostly the case at present.

Each approach has advantages and disadvantages

Each approach has advantages and disadvantages, and there seems to be an absence of a consensus on a single 'best' model. Every model is said to have strengths and weaknesses, incentives and disincentives, and positive and negative outcomes that may affect different students differentially, so a combination of models has been said to be desirable.

Some useful general principles have been identified in the literature to underpin the development of inclusive models of support, however. These include for example allocating resources to early identification and intensive education for students who struggle with learning; allocating resources in ways that promote inclusivity, improve equity and the performance of all students, particularly those in the bottom quartile; avoiding undue perverse incentives and disincentives; and putting in place arrangements to ensure that supports are effectively contributing to improved student progress and outcomes (Mitchell 2010).

The use of diagnosis to allocate additional resources has limitations

Limitations associated with the use of diagnostic categories to allocate additional resources to students with special educational needs (the basis for a significant component of the current Irish model) have been identified in the literature. Recommendations emerging from different areas of work at the EADSNE advocate a move away from classification systems that lead to the labelling and/or placement of students based on categories (and can have negative consequences, such as segregation and low expectations), towards an understanding of what actually benefits students (see EADSNE 2013a).

An international review of practices and procedures for the diagnosis of a disability and the assessment of special needs education commissioned by the NCSE (Desforges & Lindsay 2010) also raised questions about how reliably people with disabilities can be classified into the categories of disability that underpin resource allocation models, the validity of the categories used and the reliability of the assessments to place children in these categories. Findings showed no uniformity across countries on how categories of disability were defined, the methods of assessment required to make the diagnosis or the professional groups involved in making the diagnosis.

The report notes that definitive categories create dilemmas as students often exhibit a range of difficulties characteristic of more than one category and it may not be clear which one offers the best fit. Furthermore, categorisation often does not reflect the complexity of the special educational needs of an individual child, nor does it necessarily inform educational interventions. For example students assigned to the same disability category often have different needs in terms of school-based learning, as a wide range of ability or disability can be represented within categories. Other authors have raised similar concerns about the limited value of categorisation for informing teaching and learning or resource allocation.

A Response to Intervention framework, that is a graded approach to assessment and support, has been identified as a possible alternative to categorisation (Mitchell 2010; EASDNE 2013a). The type of staged assessment and intervention envisaged in Ireland through the NEPS continuum of support also draws on the principles which underpin Response to Intervention (DES 2010).

The provision of support needs to be linked to improved outcomes

Some studies reported here provide useful evidence that the provision of specific supports, interventions and resources can be linked to improved outcomes for students experiencing educational disadvantage (e.g. DEIS in Ireland – see Weir 2011; Weir & Denner 2013) and for students with special educational needs (e.g. the AFA programme schools in England; see Humphrey & Squires (2011)).

These studies highlight the way in which additional support can contribute to improving student outcomes, and also underline how important it is to ensure that the provision of interventions or support is carefully monitored over time in order to assess its effectiveness and impact on student outcomes.

Section Two: International examples

Introduction and overview of EADSNE countries

According to materials drafted for a European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) 'organisation of provision' project meeting (EADSNE 2013b) most member countries receive funding for the education of learners with disabilities from central government (e.g. Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia).

In some countries funding is devolved to local authorities or municipalities (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. In others (e.g. Finland) there is a mix of central and local funding. The EADSNE also notes (EADSNE 2013b) that for learners with disabilities, resources are usually linked to the assessment of learners and in most countries a statement or formal decision is written by a specialist/ multi agency team or resource centre in order to secure additional funding.

In addition the EADSNE outlines how following assessment, most countries allocate a number of additional 'special educational needs (SEN) hours' or learning support assistant time (e.g. Belgium). In Ireland teaching support is allocated to all schools based on

teacher/student numbers for those with lower level needs, whereas for those with greater needs (in Ireland known as 'low incidence' SEN) schools must make applications based on individual student diagnoses/assessments. The materials also outline how:

> In Denmark, nine hours additional support is now included in regular provision, with those needing more support being assessed and referred to 'special education' either in mainstream or special settings. In Finland, pedagogical assessment takes place and support is allocated as part of the regular system. In Portugal, to increase permeability special funding is only for learners with autism, those who are deaf or blind, or who have multiple disabilities. In Sweden, an amount is allocated to schools for special education to be used at the school's discretion. In many countries additional funding may be provided by the Municipality for aids, equipment or additional staff. In order to support inclusion, a small number of countries reduce student numbers in classes where there are learners with disabilities (Estonia, Hungary, Italy) (EADSNE 2013b).

Latvia and Lithuania were reported to operate a backpack or 'student basket' system via municipalities where funding follows the learner, while the Netherlands formerly had such a system but this was being changed with funding to regional cooperatives of schools / special centres.

In terms of the effect of different resourcing models, the EADSNE materials cite a recent Austrian study which points out that input-oriented support, i.e. support at a flat rate to schools based on the number of learners recognised as having special educational needs – may not be sufficiently responsive as needs vary among students and over time. The same study noted that an output model was also seen as problematic as resources are withdrawn if a programme is successful; and that there was a need to move from a system that rewards lack of success to a model of early support and intervention.

Two further issues in relation to the organisation of provision noted in the EADSNE material are:

i.   That support to individual learners does not necessarily improve the quality of the school system, and that if a school focuses on quantity rather than quality of resources they are unlikely to make the necessary changes to the way that mainstream systems and school staff respond to learners (Frattura & Capper 2007, cited in EADSNE 2013b); and

ii. Rather than struggling with the limited additional resources available for them, schools could develop cost-effective networks of support and professional development involving a collaboration between local stakeholders and local schools/support centres.

Country examples

Overview

A comprehensive review of existing models is beyond the scope and timescale of the task set for this working group. Nevertheless the following section provides summary informa-

tion on models in place to support students with special educational needs in seven countries (England, Scotland, Italy, Norway, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Denmark).

The selection of the countries was primarily pragmatic in that there was relatively comparable published information readily available on each of them (sources are noted after each summary). Feedback and advice was also obtained from EADSNE representatives in member countries. The selection also endeavoured to ensure the inclusion of some countries undergoing changes in their arrangements for providing support. Of the seven countries covered, systems in place in four of them (the Netherlands, Denmark, England and New Zealand) are currently undergoing change to address issues arising from previous arrangements.

A number of features can be identified from across these seven countries. Bearing in mind however that this is a selection based on the availability of relatively comparable published information, these features cannot therefore be taken to represent any particular trend. They are summarised here for the sake of brevity.

As the previous section highlighted, it is difficult to identify a single 'best' model in place, and countries use a variety of approaches which are distinct in some ways and similar in others, and to some extent are embedded in their own country's particular historical and provision contexts. Main features identified across the seven countries include:

- The allocation of additional support to schools is either done centrally as in New Zealand or decentralised to regional or local authorities responsible for education (as in Italy, Norway, England, Denmark, the Netherlands and Scotland). As noted earlier, there is a mix of approaches throughout the EADSNE countries.

- Disadvantage/socioeconomic disadvantage indicators are often incorporated into systems of general school funding so as to target or compensate for educational disadvantage in a number of the countries reviewed.

- Systems for supporting students with special educational needs are undergoing change in England, the Netherlands, Denmark and New Zealand.

- Additional provision for lower level needs does not require any formal diagnosis in six of the seven countries examined (England, Norway, the Netherlands, Scotland, Denmark and New Zealand.) Additionally, in both Scotland and New Zealand extra support for higher level needs is not reliant on a diagnosis. Scotland takes a common approach to extra support for children with a variety of additional needs identified through a staged intervention process; in New Zealand students with special educational needs are defined as learners with a disability, sensory or physical impairments, learning difficulty, communication or behaviour difficulty that require one or more of the following: extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or regular education settings.

- In Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands higher level needs provision is dependent on a diagnosis or a formal pedagogical assessment. Norway uses a pedagogical assessment of students to decide whether they are entitled to special teaching and/or to advise schools about students 'not benefiting from' the ordinary curriculum; in

Denmark students undergo individual assessment through pedagogical and psycho-logical services, with the involvement of the parents; and in the Netherland diagnosis is required under the current 'backpack' system of personal budgets and is carried out by regional assessment committees. However, it is anticipated that in 2014 Passend Onderwijs (which translates as 'an education that fits the needs of the pupil') will come into effect in the Netherlands and bring about changes.

- In Italy additional provision for students with any special educational needs requires a clinical or functional diagnosis carried out by a regional service. But additional resources arising are allocated to the student's school, or the student's class, often in the form of a second teacher, rather than the student – with a cap on the number of assessed students in a class and on the size of a class with such students.

- Additional provision for higher level, more complex needs is allocated on the basis of the level of provision (e.g. number of hours) required in Denmark, where these are students who have been assessed and are referred by their schools to segregated education (e.g. special classes) or who need more than nine hours support per week in mainstream. In England it has been proposed that higher needs be defined as those whose support costs are over a certain threshold.[15]

- Scotland takes a common and integrated approach to providing for all students with additional support needs causing a barrier to their learning, whether arising from the learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need and social and emotional factors. For a small number of students with more complex needs a co-ordi-nated support plan can be agreed across agencies. Identification is through a staged intervention process whereby schools assess children with additional support needs, consider the support required for them and demonstrate their efforts to provide this support from within the school, before seeking additional resources.

- Personal budgets – the Netherlands is now moving away from this form of provision as it has been linked with increasing numbers of students referred to special educa-tion. Personalised budgets are envisaged as part of future arrangements under the special education review taking place in England. According to the EADSNE Latvia and Lithuania among other countries also operate a backpack or 'student basket' system.

- Attainment can be used as an indicator for special educational needs provision in the new funding arrangements in England.

Italy

- Pupils with disabilities generally attend mainstream schools and classes at all educa-tion levels.

- The national ministry allocates an annual support budget to schools, calculated on the basis of the number of students certified by the local health system as having a special need, who attended school during the previous school year.

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15 The proposal of a financial threshold to define a student or student with high needs, as opposed to an assess-ment-based threshold such as having a statement of special educational needs (SEN), is according to the Department for Education because perverse incentives can be created if assessment is linked directly to addi-tional funding (for example, by creating additional pressure for unnecessary statutory assessments).

- The regional offices of the Ministry set the number of support teachers and assign them to schools according to the number of pupils with disabilities and the typology of disabilities, and allocate remaining resources for particular projects and resources identified by school principals, on the basis of the needs identified at the provincial level, and within the provinces at a commune level.

- A clinical and functional diagnosis, applied for by the family and drawn up by a health specialist or social services, is a precondition for access to dedicated resources. The support teacher is assigned to the class where the student with disability is enrolled, not to the single student. Support teachers are part of the team of regular teachers and participate in all the activities, planning and assessment. Support teachers are also resources to facilitate integration. No special resources are offered to the class without this kind of certification of disability or until the diagnostic process is activated.

- No more than two students with certification can be enrolled within the same class. (Exceptionally a maximum of three is permitted if students have slight functioning difficulties). The maximum number of students per class is 25 if one student enrolled has a disability and 20 students per class if there are two students with disability. Given economic constraints a financial law in 2008 prescribed to raise the number of students per class in the following three years, but this does not apply to classes with students with disabilities.

Sources

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Eurydice/Eurypedia information http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/ accessed September 2013

Norway

- Local authorities allocate what is needed to schools based on calculations which take into account student numbers, socio-economic prerequisites, challenges that schools face and so on. There are local variations, but essentially local authorities provide schools with an annual budget for all teaching activities including special education. Schools are obliged to provide education adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of all individual students.

- Students unable to benefit satisfactorily from ordinary tuition have the right to special education. Special education (the need for which is identified following assessment) is seen as distinctive from that provided as part of the regular adapted curriculum.

- No specific difficulty or medical diagnosis automatically gives a right to special education. The assessment of students to decide whether they are entitled to special teaching and/or to advise schools about students 'not benefiting from' the ordinary curriculum is undertaken by the Pedagogical Psychological Service (PPS). Based on this evaluation PPS will submit a written report with recommendations in the form of an expert assessment of the particular needs of the child/pupil. This evaluation

will (i) state whether the child/pupil needs special educational assistance pursuant to sections 5-7 of the Education Act or special education/training pursuant to section 5-1 (ii) provide advice about what kind of help/learning is needed and available.

- The school owner (often delegated to a school head) writes a resolution based on the report from the PPS and designs an appropriate individual education plan for the learner.

- If an assessment from PPS states that a child needs special education, the school often has to deal with these individual needs from within their annual budget. There are few examples of communes that grants schools with extra economical resources depending on locally made criteria, that is if a student has a high level of need. A school owner cannot reject an application for special education for economic reasons.

- If an assessment from PPS states that a child needs special education, the school often has to deal with these individual needs from within their annual budget. There are few examples of communes that grant schools with extra resources depending on local criteria, that is if a student has a very high level of need. A school owner cannot reject an application for special education of economic reasons

- The PPS relies on the health service for medical diagnoses for conditions such as autistic spectrum disorder and focuses itself on pedagogical assessment. The PPS might be contacted to assess a child by the health service, day care institutions and schools but only with the permission of parents or parents can approach the service directly. Special education is therefore recommended by the PPS. If the PPS assesses a student's needs and awards an additional resource (usually additional teacher time), then the student is in special education. Allocations are made on an individual basis – not by formula.

- Local authorities provide schools with an annual budget for all teaching activities including special needs education. School budgets are then divided between special and ordinary funding. While the boundary between the two is flexible, the overall budget is not. So more resources going into the school special education budget may mean less in the general education budget. Policy change may see a shift in funding to classes rather than to individuals, and from special back to ordinary school budgets.

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England

- The system of school funding in England, including funding for special needs provision, is currently under reform (see DfE, March 2012), with major changes introduced in 2013. Local authorities receive their schools' funding through a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), a ring-fenced grant paid by the Department for Education. The DSG provides most of the funding for special educational needs provision in schools, and

some funding for those with SEN in colleges up to the age of 24. It is for each local authority to distribute funding to schools – in consultation with a local schools forum – using locally agreed formula, which include a disadvantage indicator, often eligibility for free school meals.

- Currently local authorities distribute funding to schools for pupils with special educational needs in a number of ways. All use a combination of proxy formula factors such as prior low attainment, free school meals and student mobility. They can also use a lump sum element but under the new school funding arrangements most school funding is distributed by local authorities through a basic per-pupil entitlement and other pupil-related factors, including funding targeted at students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Under the new arrangements local authorities are still be required to identify a notional SEN budget as part of mainstream schools' budgets. This is only a notional amount because it is not intended to specify how much schools spend on special needs support: that is their responsibility, in line with their duty to do their best to make special educational provision for all their pupils. From their budget mainstream schools are expected to meet the needs of all their pupils with special needs where the additional support required costs up to £6,000. Costs exceeding this threshold are met by the local authority that has overall responsibility for meeting the child's needs, and this is paid to the school in the form of top-up funding from the local authority's high needs budget. This top-up funding is based on the pupil's assessed needs and how much it costs the school to meet those needs, and the amount is agreed between the local authority and school.

- Special schools and provision for students aged 16 to 24 is funded in a slightly different way: these providers get place funding of around £10,000 (which is roughly equivalent to what mainstream schools get for pupils with high needs through their formula). And, as with mainstream schools, top-up funding is provided by the local authority commissioners on a per-student basis.

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Scotland

- In Scotland local authorities receive funding from the Scottish government and then each local authority will estimate how much it needs to spend from its revenue on education to ensure statutory duties are met. Funding allocated to local authorities is based on the relative need of each local authority including indicators of levels of disadvantage (e.g. take-up of free school meals and income support).

- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places duties on education authorities and other agencies to provide additional support to children and young people who have an additional support need which is causing a barrier to their learning. Additional support needs fall broadly into four overlapping themes: learning environment; family circumstances; disability or health need and social and emotional factors. Education authorities must identify, plan and make provision for the support to be provided and review that support to ensure it is appropriate. For some students, whose needs are complex or multiple and who need significant support from more than one agency, a co-ordinated support plan (CSP) may be required. This is a statutory plan which co-ordinates and records the support to be provided and has specific rights attached to it.

- Funding for ASN is included in the block grant which the Scottish government provides to all local authorities. The distribution formula used to allocate this funding to local authorities is based on the relative need of each local authority using a number of indicators including population, student numbers, or disadvantage. Each local authority is responsible for allocating financial resources available to it on the basis of local needs and priorities. Funding allocations to schools are calculated on a per capita (per student) basis, with additional support needs attracting extra funding.

- This extra funding is accessed through a process of staged intervention, which requires schools to assess children with additional support needs, consider the support required for them and demonstrate their efforts to provide this support from within the school, before seeking additional funding. Assessment identifies what is required to maximise development and learning and is a dynamic process with the child or young person at the centre. Additional support falls into three overlapping, broad headings: approaches to learning and teaching, support from personnel and provision of resources. The Act also provides for parents and young people to request the education authority to establish whether their child has additional support needs or requires a co-ordinated support plan (CSP).

- In 2012 around 18% of all students were identified as having an additional need. Of those 36% had an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP), 6.1% had a child's plan and 2.9% had a co-ordinated support plan (CSP). Students with CSPs represent 0.51% of all students in local authority schools. More boys (63%) than girls (37%) are identified as having additional support needs.

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Denmark

- The Folkeskole Act (1994) obliges schools to differentiate education in order to offer students relevant and efficient education in accordance with their development, background and needs. Schools can also use class formation, two teacher plans and teaching assistants. If necessary, supplementary education can be given, in the form of more lessons, (in groups or individually), of teacher support or of pedagogical and practical assistance. The school, together with the parents, decides on students' participation in supplementary education and there is no need for assessment or referral by experts, if the need for support is sufficiently clear.

- Special needs education is also provided for under the Folkeskole Act, if students' educational needs cannot be met within the general education. A Ministry of Education study which examined special needs expenditure in the school year 2008-09 showed about 30 per cent of all costs for schools were used for special need education and related systems, and the main reason for the steady growth in costs for this area was identified as the transfer of students to special classes and special schools. This led to an agreement between the government and the local government association to work for greater inclusion in public schools and to new legislation which provides that since May 2012 the concept of special education has been restricted to students in segregated education in special classes and special schools, and to students with a need for support in mainstream class for more than nine hours per week.

- The new legislation allows local authorities greater flexibility in organising the education of students with special needs, for example through differentiated teaching and grading, as mentioned above. The aim is to strengthen general education and create a more inclusive learning environment and to reduce special needs education in special schools and special classes to a maximum of 4 per cent of all students in public schools. Students who are given support in mainstream class for more than nine hours per week are considered as included in the mainstream schools.

- A main objective of the new rules is to optimise resource allocation to the benefit of all children and young people. One task for the municipalities is to direct resources released from special needs education into the area of inclusion and to strengthen mainstream education to the benefit of all students. The government with the local government association conducts a representative survey, where 12 municipalities must submit an annual review to the Ministry of the results of the readjustments in terms of less segregation, better academic skills and improved well-being among all students. They must also report on the agreements to enhance teacher competencies and to promote inclusive management and support for inclusion.

- These reviews will be supplemented by national data on segregation, academic results in tests and final exams, expenditures per student, student-teacher ratio, and the boroughs efforts on strengthening inclusion and supplementary tutorial courses.

The annual reviews are part of the political follow-up activities to enhance inclusion in line with the agreements on financial management within the municipalities. Furthermore, a national panel survey has been initiated in order to follow students' inclusive development, engagement in learning communities etc. over the next three years. The panel consists of 16,000 students from the fifth and seventh form in the Folkeskole.

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The Netherlands

- Mainstream primary and post-primary school authorities receive a block grant related to the number of students, weighted to address educational disadvantage (based on having a certain percentage of parents with lower levels of education at primary or a percentage of students coming from disadvantaged neighbourhoods or areas at post-primary level).

- Under current arrangements students who need extra support may receive support for lower level needs in mainstream schools, or more substantial support for higher level needs through student specific funding (backpack) for special education support. If a student meets certain criteria for this student-bound budget, parents can choose whether they spend this budget either in a special school or a regular school. Regional Expertise Centres cater for students with higher level needs. There are 34 of these centres which were set up as consortiums of special primary and post-primary schools within a district. Each centre has a committee that assesses whether students can be admitted to special needs education on the basis of diagnostic criteria.[16]

- A number of problems have been identified with the current system. These include: different assessment procedures taking up a lot of time and effort for both schools and parents; in the last decade the number of children in special needs education and with student specific funding in mainstream education has increased; many teachers in mainstream experience difficulties adapting teaching to different needs in the classroom (Bosscher 2013).

- In 2012 the Act on Passend Onderwijs (which translates as 'an education that fits the needs of the pupil') was adopted, to come into effect in 2014. Mainstream and special schools will collaborate in 234 new regional alliances or partnerships in primary

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16 Criteria for the visually impaired are a visual acuity: <0.3 or a visual field: < 30 and limited participation in education as a result of the visual impairment. For deaf/hard of hearing students a hearing loss > 80 dB (or for hard of hearing students 35 -80 dB) and limited participation in education are required. The decision to provide extra funding for students with learning disability will be based largely on IQ < 55, for students with a physical disability and chronically ill students medical data showing diagnosed disabilities and illness are needed. The criteria for students with emotional and behavioural problems require a diagnosis in terms of categories of the DSM-IV, problems at school, at home and in the community and a limited participation in education as a result of the behaviour problems.

education and 84 in post-primary education. These alliances will receive their own budgets for educational support which will make them responsible for offering and bearing the costs of both lower and higher level needs support.

- It will not be necessary to diagnose disorders to get funding for extra support or a learning place at a special needs school. Schools will compose an educational support profile in which they outline the educational support that they can offer to students. A school's board must offer a suitable learning place at its school or at another school for mainstream or special needs education within the regional alliance, and extra educational support at school if needed. The starting point will be targeting the removal of students' educational limitations rather than diagnosing the disorder.

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3.8   New Zealand

- Education in New Zealand is a national responsibility and government funds schools that are integrated into the state system and provides partial funding for private schools. A component of that funding is determined by the decile rating of the school. The decile rating is determined by the socio-economic status of the area from which a school draws its students.

- Support provided by the Ministry of Education to assist schools falls into two broadly defined categories. The first is not related to individual students but is rather supplied to the school based on a roll and decile formula, or related to the number of students identified as having moderate special needs. The second category allocates resources to the school based on the number of high or very high needs individual students attending that school (Powell 2013).

- Diagnosis of a disability is not required in order to access support. Students with special educational needs are defined as learners with a disability, sensory or physical impairments, learning difficulty, communication or behaviour difficulty that require one or more of the following: extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or regular education settings.

- A key challenge in the current fiscal and economic environment is said to be the aim to balance available resources against the ever-increasing demand for services and expectations for achievement. Launched in 2010, Success for All: Every School, Every Child represents a vision for achieving a fully inclusive education system. This underpins initiatives such as additional support for learners aged five to eight, the transformed Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service, work to develop more effective transitions from school, efficient use of specialist teaching resources, and enhanced outreach services. Schools will also be asked to include evidence of how they are supporting learners with special education needs/disabilities in their regular planning and reporting.

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