



NCSE, ISS and NEPS

Submission on behalf of the INTO

13 Márta 2015

The INTO supports the principle of inclusive education. Primary teachers have risen to the challenge of including children with special needs in schools and classrooms, often without sufficient resources and support.

The establishment of an Inclusion Support Service provides an opportunity to develop a coherent and unified support service that ensures that teachers can avail of the necessary supports in a timely manner in order to promote inclusive education.

The new Inclusion Support Service should be a comprehensive support service. It should include personnel with specialist qualifications, who can support and advise teachers regarding the education of children with special educational needs. Support should include assessments, mentoring, coaching, advice regarding interventions, assessment and teaching, therapy services and professional development. Substitute cover should be available for all teachers participating in professional development supporting inclusive education.

The INTO notes the proposal to bring together under the NCSE current support services such as Special Education Support Service which provides professional development for teachers, the National Behaviour Support Service, which supports teachers and pupils at post-primary level in relation to behaviour, and the Visiting Teacher Service, who provide teaching support and advice to parents, pupils and teachers regarding children with sensory impairments. The INTO recommends that support available from the National Behaviour Support Service should be extended to primary schools as part of the new Inclusion Support Service.

Consideration needs to be given to including therapeutic support services in the Inclusion Support Service. Many pupils cannot access speech and language therapy, occupational therapy or physiotherapy when needed. Often there are expectations that teachers or special needs assistants can replace therapists by engaging in therapeutic activities with pupils when they are not qualified to do so. The current system of providing therapy services to school-going children is unsatisfactory. The establishment of an Inclusion Support Service provides an opportunity to address this shortcoming.

Education psychologists also provide a valuable support to schools. Regrettably, when NEPS was established, the estimated target of 200 educational psychologists required to provide a service as envisaged in the report of the planning group (DES, 1998) has not yet been reached, though we have an increased population in our schools. The role of educational psychologists is supposed to include support and preventative work in addition to assessments and casework. The appointment of additional educational psychologists is required in order to support schools with inclusion.

A new Inclusion Support Service should be about supporting all pupils in inclusive environments, focusing both on prevention and intervention, in addition to providing direct support services and professional development for teachers and special needs assistants.