



Primary Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive and Special Education

INTO Report
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Abbreviations

CA	Classroom Assistant
CDNT	Children's Disability Network Team
CNS	Community National School
DE/DES/DEY	Department of Education/Department of Education and Skills/Department of Education and Youth
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EA	Education Authority
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OT	Occupational Therapy
POD	Primary Online Database
SD	Standard Deviation
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
Sp&L/SLT	Speech and Language Therapy
TSN	Targeting Social Need

Introduction

This INTO report, *Primary Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive and Special Education*, explores the confidence, self-efficacy, and lived experience of teachers and principals in the areas of inclusive and special education. It draws on both qualitative reflections and quantitative measures of confidence and self-efficacy.

While government policy consistently reaffirms Ireland's commitment to inclusion, this report's findings reveal a system constrained by inadequate resourcing, inconsistent professional supports, and escalating administrative and workload demands. Many teachers describe feeling underprepared, under-resourced, and overburdened, with limited influence over the decisions that shape their daily work. Despite this, the survey results show that teachers retain a deep commitment to their pupils and a continuing, though fragile, confidence in their ability to meet diverse needs.

Inclusive education is said to be one of Ireland's priority educational commitments. It promises that every child, regardless of ability or background, can participate fully in the life of their school and community. However, inclusion requires a system that is adequately staffed, resourced, and guided by coherent inter-sectional collaboration across government departments. Teachers and principals are being asked to deliver a world-class inclusive education system without the time, training, or supports required to make it work.

This report draws on literature that situates teacher confidence and self-efficacy as cornerstones of effective inclusion. The studies referenced note that teachers' sense of efficacy depends not only on individual skill but also on environmental support, manageable class sizes, access to multidisciplinary teams, and ongoing professional learning. When these conditions are absent, teacher confidence erodes, burnout increases, and children with additional needs are the first to lose out.

As you read through this report you will see teachers are not rejecting inclusion, they are calling for it to be done properly. They want a system that values them and recognises the complexity of teaching in inclusive classrooms. They want smaller classes, predictable access to special education teachers and SNAs, and realistic expectations about what can be achieved within the working day. Ultimately, the findings of this report highlight a simple truth: inclusion cannot rely on goodwill alone. Teachers' confidence in their capacity to deliver inclusive education is directly tied to whether the system supports them to do so. Where that confidence falters, it is not due to lack of belief in the principle of inclusion, but to the steady erosion of professional trust and practical support. The message from teachers is clear, they remain committed to inclusion, but they can no longer sustain it unsupported. To secure the right of every child to a high-quality, inclusive education, Ireland must now invest in the people who make that right a reality.

Survey Report

Primary Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive and Special Education

1. Overview of Member Survey

1.1 Outline of Project

This study employed a mixed methods design to examine primary teachers' confidence, self-efficacy, and perceptions of preparedness, resources, workload, and professional voice in the context of inclusive and special education. The study aimed to generate an understanding of how teachers experience special education and inclusion within their current environments.

Member Survey

This study involved a large-scale quantitative survey distributed to members of the INTO between May and July 2025. The online questionnaire, developed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), explored five core domains: (1) Professional Preparation, (2) Resources and Support, (3) Workload and Planning, (4) Confidence and Self-Efficacy, and (5) Professional Voice.

234 respondents completed the survey, representing a broad section of the primary teachers across the island of Ireland (a response rate of 5.3% from 4,375 members surveyed). Participants included mainstream class teachers, special education teachers, principals and others. The survey captured both the perspectives of teachers in special schools, mainstream schools with special classrooms and mainstream schools without special classrooms.

Responses were coded numerically (1-5) and analysed using descriptive statistics, generating mean, median, and standard deviation values for each item. This facilitated the identification of overall trends and areas of strength or concern.

Focus Groups and Open-Ended Survey Question

To enrich the quantitative data, focus groups were conducted with seven schools. These included a small rural school in the northwest, a large urban DEIS Band 1 school in the south, a special school in the southeast, a large urban school in Northern Ireland, a medium-sized Midlands school with a special class, a Gaelscoil in Dublin, and an Educate Together school in the west.

Six focus groups were held online, with one conducted in person. Semi-structured questions explored teachers lived experiences of special education and inclusion, confidence in supporting pupils with additional needs, and perceptions of system supports.

In addition, the member survey included an open-ended qualitative question, which received 85 written responses. The answers here provided further insight into the quantitative trends

Together, these qualitative sources provided rich, contextual insights into the patterns emerging from the survey, particularly around workload pressures, resourcing gaps, and the complexity of inclusion in education.

2. INTO Survey: Primary Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive and Special Education

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Profile of Respondents

A total of 234 teachers participated in the study, representing a broad cross-section of the primary teaching profession.

Most respondents (83.8%) identified as female, with 15.8% identifying as male, and one respondent (0.4%) preferring not to state their gender. This distribution reflects the wider demographic pattern of the Irish primary teaching workforce.

Of the teachers surveyed, 31.6% reported working in schools that receive DEIS or Targeting Social Need (TSN) funding, while 68.4% did not.

Respondents represented a wide range of teaching experience. Almost one quarter (23.9%) had between 16 and 20 years of experience, with a further 19.2% teaching for 11-15 years. Teachers with over 31 years of experience accounted for 17.1%, while those in their first 10 years of teaching comprised 12.4% of the sample. This distribution reflects a predominance of mid- to late-career teachers, meaning that participants brought substantial experience to their responses.

In terms of school location, almost one-third (32.1%) of respondents were teaching in rural schools, while 28.6% worked in town settings. City-based teachers represented 21.4% of the sample, and suburban teachers 17.9%. This demonstrates a broad geographical spread, with strong representation from both rural and urban school contexts.

With regard to school type, nearly half of respondents (47.9%) were teaching in mainstream schools, while a further 43.6% were based in mainstream schools with special classes. Special schools accounted for 6% of respondents, and a small proportion (2.6%) selected "Other," which included teachers on supply panels, substitute teachers working across multiple settings, and those based in Gaelscoileanna, Steiner schools, or preschools attached to mainstream settings.

2.1.2 Limitations of Survey

Participation in the survey was voluntary. Teachers who chose to respond may have had a stronger interest in inclusive or special education, resulting in a sample that may not fully represent the broader teaching population.

Although 234 responses constitute a meaningful dataset, they represent only a small proportion of the INTO's overall membership. Findings therefore offer indicative rather than generalisable trends.

2.1.3 Likert Scale Scoring

Responses in this survey were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Lower mean scores (closer to 1) indicate greater disagreement or lower confidence, while higher mean scores (closer to 5) indicate greater agreement or higher confidence. A score around 3 represents a neutral or mixed response. The median represents the middle value of all responses and reflects the typical response among teachers, reducing the impact of any extreme scores.

The standard deviation (SD) shows how spread-out responses are. An SD close to 0 means most teachers answered similarly, while an SD around 1.0 or higher indicates a much wider spread of views, suggesting differing experiences or opinions among respondents.

2.2 Findings

The survey findings show that primary teachers generally feel underprepared, under-resourced, and overburdened, with limited influence in decision-making. Despite these challenges, many retain a degree of confidence in their teaching and ability to support all learners.

Professional Preparation

Question	Mean	Median	SD
My initial teacher training adequately prepared me to teach pupils with SEN	1.85	2	1.03
I have been provided with high-quality professional development that meets my needs for teaching inclusively	2.62	2	1.19
I feel well prepared to support all learners, including those with special educational needs, within our education system	2.82	3	1.19

These responses show that most teachers feel their initial teacher education did not adequately prepare them to teach pupils with special educational needs. With an average score of 1.85, suggesting that many teachers left their colleges feeling underprepared for inclusive teaching.

There is, however, some improvement when it comes to professional development. The mean score of 2.62 indicates that teachers find ongoing training somewhat better but still below what they would consider sufficient. The fact that the median response remains at 2 reflects that this is a shared view among many respondents.

When asked whether they feel well prepared to support all learners in the current education system, teachers gave an average rating of 2.82. This suggests some progress over time from initial ITE training, perhaps as experience and additional learning build confidence, but the overall picture remains one of uncertainty and limited preparedness.

Resources and Support

Question	Mean	Median	SD
I have sufficient access to resources (materials, equipment, assistive technologies etc) to support inclusive teaching in my classroom	2.44	2	1.15
The allocation of support staff (SNAs, CAs etc) in my classroom is sufficient to meet my pupils' needs	2.10	2	1.13
Government policies and guidelines on special and inclusive education are clear and practical enough for me to implement in my teaching	2.22	2	0.95

Teachers' responses in this section highlight ongoing challenges in accessing the resources and supports needed for inclusive teaching. The average score of 2.44 for access to

materials, equipment, and assistive technologies suggests that many teachers feel they do not have what they need to fully support all learners. While some teachers may have adequate access, the median score of 2 indicates that the majority still disagree that current resourcing is sufficient.

The lowest score in this area, 2.10, relates to the allocation of support staff. This points to a clear concern that staffing levels are not meeting pupils' needs. Teachers appear to be finding it difficult to manage diverse classrooms without enough in-class support.

Finally, teachers rated the clarity and practicality of government policies and guidelines at 2.22. This suggests that many find existing policy frameworks and guidelines difficult to apply in their everyday settings.

Across all three items, the results indicate a consistent sense of inadequate resources and support at system, school, and classroom levels.

Workload and Planning

Question	Mean	Median	SD
I have enough planning time during the school week to differentiate for the pupils I teach	1.55	1	0.78
I have sufficient time during the school week to collaborate and communicate with colleagues, and other support professionals to support inclusive teaching for all pupils I teach	1.63	1	0.88
My workload remains manageable while meeting the needs of all pupils I teach	1.71	1	0.90
Assessment and reporting requirements for pupils with SEN are manageable and contribute meaningfully to pupil learning	2.16	2	1.06

The results for this section show a strong sense of pressure among teachers when it comes to managing workload and planning for inclusion. The average scores across all items are notably low, with medians of 1, indicating that most teachers disagree with the statements presented.

The lowest score of 1.55 related to planning time during the week suggests that teachers feel they simply do not have the time within their schedules to adapt lessons or materials to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms.

Looking at opportunities to collaborate, with a mean of 1.63, teachers report that they lack sufficient time to work with colleagues or external professionals to support inclusive teaching. This lack of collaborative time limits opportunities for coordinated approaches to pupil support.

Teachers also express concern about workload in general. The mean score of 1.71 indicates that most find it difficult to balance inclusive teaching with the volume of planning and preparation duties expected of them.

Assessment and reporting for pupils with SEN, scores slightly higher at 2.16 but still falls below neutral.

Overall, these findings paint a clear picture of teachers feeling overstretched when trying to plan effectively for inclusion.

Confidence

Question	Mean	Median	SD
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I feel a strong sense of professional confidence teaching within an inclusive education system	2.87	3	1.12
I feel confident teaching in a special education setting	2.90	3	1.22
I feel confident managing behavioural issues that arise from the diverse needs of all pupils I teach	2.70	3	1.21
I feel confident in my ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of all pupils I teach	3.17	3	1.09

Teachers' responses in this section suggest a moderate level of confidence in their ability to teach inclusively, though not without hesitation. The overall pattern shows that many teachers fall around the midpoint of the scale, indicating neither strong confidence nor complete uncertainty.

The highest score, 3.17, relates to teachers' confidence in differentiating instruction to meet diverse learning needs. This suggests that, in practice, teachers feel most capable when it comes to adapting lessons and materials to suit individual pupils. Differentiation appears to be the area where teachers have developed the most confidence, likely because of classroom experience and professional learning over time.

Confidence is somewhat lower when it comes to managing behavioural issues, with a mean of 2.70. This suggests teachers still find it challenging to respond effectively to the complex behaviours that can emerge in inclusive classrooms.

Confidence in teaching within a special education setting (2.90) and within the broader inclusive system (2.87) are similar, suggesting a generally cautious sense of competence.

Overall, while teachers demonstrate reasonable confidence in adapting teaching approaches, their responses show that confidence in managing behaviour and navigating inclusive school contexts remains mixed.

Professional Voice

Question	Mean	Median	SD
I feel my voice and experiences are considered by the Department of Education/Education Authority when developing inclusive education policies	1.67	1	0.81
I am satisfied with the availability of specialist support services (e.g., psychologists, therapists) for pupils with SEN in my school	1.31	1	0.71

The findings in this section show that teachers feel largely unheard and unsupported when it comes to shaping and delivering inclusive education. The mean score of 1.67 for having their professional voice considered by the Department of Education (DE) or Education Authority (EA) indicates that most teachers strongly disagree that their experiences influence policy decisions. The median of 1 confirms that this view is widely shared, suggesting a significant disconnect between classroom realities and national policymaking.

The lowest score across all sections of the survey, 1.31, relates to satisfaction with access to specialist support services such as psychologists and therapists. This highlights a major area of concern. Teachers feel they are unable to access these services consistently or in a timely way. The low SD in responses also shows strong agreement among teachers on this issue indicating it is not just an isolated frustration but a common experience across schools.

These results underline a strong sense of professional isolation. Teachers want to be heard and supported but feel that both policy processes and specialist services are falling short.

3. Teachers' Experiences in Inclusive and Special Education Settings

This section draws together teachers' lived experiences from the open-ended survey responses and focus groups, offering a deeper look at the realities behind the survey findings presented in section 2. The reflections reveal teachers are deeply committed to inclusive education but constrained by limited time, inadequate supports, and growing system pressures. The voices captured here bring to life the practical and systemic challenges that shape teachers' confidence and their capacity to deliver on the promise of inclusion.

3.1 Classroom Realities and Workload Pressures

Feedback in this area reveals a profession under immense strain. Teachers consistently describe the emotional and physical toll of working in increasingly diverse classrooms with limited supports. One respondent captured the mood succinctly, *"far too much pressure and expectations placed on teachers to perform miracles and to put out fires so to speak. We are humans too; there is only so many times you can go to the well as they say. Please think of the teachers."*

Teachers' feedback exposes a widening gap between Ireland's inclusive education policies and the day-to-day realities of classrooms. While legislation such as the EPSEN Act 2004, the NCSE and the Department articulate a strong commitment to inclusion, teachers describe a system that feels fragmented, and under-resourced. One participant remarked that *"to have a really inclusive classroom a teacher should have access to advice from other professionals and resources for the particular class they are teaching that year and not a theoretical child or class."*

Many respondents criticised what they see as a paper commitment to inclusion, where enrolment figures are prioritised over meaningful support. One teacher observed that *"putting children with significant additional needs into mainstream school classrooms, including special classes, without Sp&L, Behavioural, OT, Psych supports is just a cop-out by DES so they can state that these children are 'catered for'."* This echoes the INTO's long-standing concern that, without investment in specialist supports and staff, schools are being forced into the untenable position of warehousing children rather than educating and including them.

Another major frustration concerns the expanding administrative burden linked to inclusion. Teachers spoke of *"mountains of paperwork"* and constant documentation to justify existing supports, describing how *"paperwork obviously trumps teaching at all levels and classes."* As one teacher put it, the system is *"failing the most vulnerable"* while overwhelming teachers. At this point, bureaucracy has become a barrier to inclusion rather than a support for it.

A further systemic weakness identified is the persistent fragmentation between education, health, and social care systems. Teachers reported long waiting times for assessments, followed by recommendations *"with no follow-up support."* Many noted that the absence of joined-up therapeutic services forces schools to support students well beyond their remit of teaching and learning.

Teachers describe a bureaucratic and fragmented system that prioritises accountability over support. Their criticism is not of inclusion itself, but of its under-resourced and paperwork heavy implementation. Rebuilding teacher confidence requires providing trust, and tangible investment so inclusion can be realised in practice. As one respondent put

starkly about the DEY's understanding of the reality in schools, *"standards continue to drop and the motivation amongst many of its workforce focuses solely...to get through the week. I'm proud of my work but ashamed of the people who are employed in the DES to support our children."*

3.2 Professional Learning and Development Needs

The relationship between teacher confidence and access to quality training is one of the most consistent themes in this study. Across responses, teachers highlight that while they are committed to inclusion and have undertaken significant self-directed learning, the professional development structures provided by the DEY/EA fall short of what is needed. As one teacher wrote, *"all teachers with School Support Plus pupils should be given special in-person training. It is a very different type of teaching from school support, and most teachers in SET have been thrown in at the deep end and expected to upskill online in their own time."*

Many teachers report being assigned to SET or special classes with minimal preparation or formal guidance. One respondent noted, *"teachers are being placed in classes...without adequate training."* Others described being *"landed"* in classrooms with complex needs and having to rely on instinct rather than training. Such experiences echo the findings of Mahony (2016), who identified pre-service and continuing professional development as key predictors of teacher confidence in inclusive practice. Mahony's study found that teachers with prior SEN training reported significantly greater self-efficacy, while those without such training expressed anxiety and frustration about meeting diverse pupil needs.

Another feature of teachers' comments in this area is the extent to which professional learning in special and inclusive education is self-funded, voluntary, and conducted outside school hours. One teacher stated plainly, *"any training I have done I have undertaken voluntarily in my own time..."*, while another explained, *"I have completed several courses...All of these courses were done in my own time after work and sometimes during the holidays."* These accounts reflect a culture of personal commitment compensating for systemic neglect.

The overarching sentiment from members is one of disillusionment due to the lack of training supports. Teachers feel that while inclusion is promoted at policy level, little investment is made in equipping them to enact it. As one respondent observed, *"I have the skills and knowledge, but this is because of my own learning, taken on in my own time and at my own expense."*

3.3 Inadequate Supports

Teachers' confidence in inclusive and special education is deeply shaped by the level of resourcing and access to support available within their schools. Across this study, the message from respondents is consistent and emphatic, inclusion is impossible to deliver without the appropriate human, professional, and material supports. Teachers describe working in conditions that make genuine inclusion impossible.

Teachers repeatedly report that children with additional needs are not receiving the support they need. Many of our members comments point to the structural inequities within the current system, where the aspiration of inclusion is not matched by adequate provision of human or material supports.

The reality as described by respondents depicts a system under strain. One teacher summarised it as *"access to supports, SNAs, other professionals, professional development within school time, appropriate resources is absolutely shocking... We just want to teach*

and help our students properly.” Teachers describe a daily reality in which “class sizes are too big and there are so many needs, I cannot adequately prepare for it.”

This frustration is echoed across research. Drudy and Kinsella (2009) note that the inclusiveness of individual schools is shaped by the broader education, social, and legislative systems in which they operate. They argue that an inclusive education system depends on the timely availability of resources, coordinated inter-agency supports, and a statutory rights-based frameworks. Hanley and Garrity’s (2024) national survey of ECCE teachers also concluded that positive attitudes towards inclusion are strongly linked to perceived adequacy of supports and funding.

When teachers are placed in impossible contexts, without adequate staffing, resources, or support, their confidence inevitably declines, regardless of personal competence. The evidence from our respondents paints a picture of an inclusive education system constrained by chronic under-resourcing. Teachers’ willingness to include and support every child is unquestionable, but goodwill alone cannot sustain inclusion. As one participant put it, *“it is disheartening working in a broken system. I am beyond frustrated and disappointed in the Dep of Education.”* For inclusive education to be realised, it must be grounded in real investment.

3.4 External Services and Agencies

Several teachers highlighted the absence or inconsistency of professional services, describing *“long waits for outside services.”* Members noted that *“services are less available now than 20 years ago,”* while *“children are suffering and parents’ mental health is being tested to the limit.”*

Teachers described limited contact with NEPS, NCSE, CDNT etc, and the near absence of multidisciplinary collaboration. One teacher explained, *“our education system is not inclusive... Children that I work with who require access to OT, SLT and psychologists cannot get appointments and are on waiting lists for years.”*

When such supports are missing, teachers are left to fill the gap, often acting as therapists, counsellors, and behaviour specialists without training or time. As Egan and Kenny (2022) note, this expectation places unsustainable emotional and professional demands on teachers. One of their studies participants captured the overwhelming nature of this role: *“you’re trying to learn each of the children, so you can best help them...And then you’re also trying to help the adults...You’re teaching kids, teaching adults, teaching yourself, and it’s overwhelming.”*

3.5 Professional Time

One of the most consistent themes is the absence of protected time for planning, collaboration, and reflection. Teachers describe long hours spent outside of the school day planning for and meeting the administrative demands of special education and inclusion. As one respondent stated, *“there is no time allocated for planning, collaboration, report writing... Everything is done on the teacher’s own time.”* Another wrote, *“the question about having enough planning time in the week is bizarre as we have no planning time at all.”*

The INTO echoes these concerns, calling for six annual non-contact days to enable collaborative curriculum design and planning for inclusion. These planning days are, in the union’s opinion, essential for maintaining, quality teaching and learning, professional efficacy and teacher wellbeing. Inclusive practice depends on collective capacity, not individual endurance. Without time to plan and coordinate, teachers will be left to work reactively, with limited opportunity for schools to develop consistent whole-school approaches.

3.6 Aggression, Safety, and Emotional Toll

Several teachers described confronting aggravated or unsafe situations in special and inclusive settings, often without adequate support or training. Accounts told a story of repeated physical and verbal assaults, unsafe classrooms, and incidents requiring Garda intervention. Another respondent wrote simply, *“there is an alarming rate of violence and disruptive behaviour in SEN/special classes that the education system is struggling to manage. It takes its toll on staff.”*

Teachers who experience such conditions say they face lasting emotional and physical effects. The INTO calls for trauma-informed responses, improved behaviour management training, and increased access to NEPS and external therapeutic teams. As one teacher in this study concluded, *“we are doing our best, but physical assaults on a daily basis cannot be seen as normal.”*

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The findings of this report reveals that INTO members believe deeply in inclusive education but feel wholly let down by the systems meant to support them and their pupils. Teachers remain committed to every child in their care, but they are being asked to deliver inclusive and special education in conditions that are unsustainable including large classes, scarce resources, excessive paperwork, little time to plan and limited access to specialist and professional supports.

Teachers' experiences make clear that confidence and self-efficacy cannot flourish in a system that is stretched to its breaking point. Many described the emotional toll of managing complex needs without sufficient access to SETs, SNAs, or therapeutic supports. What has emerged is a portrait of teachers who are skilled and dedicated, but trapped in a structure that demands more than it gives.

Beyond schools, the findings point to a wider systemic failure of coordination between education, health, and social care. Inclusion cannot succeed when children wait years for assessments, when schools act as the last resort for unmet needs, or when teachers shoulder responsibilities that rightly belong to multidisciplinary teams. A genuine inclusive and special education system must be planned, funded, and delivered across departments, guided by rights-based legislation and a shared vision.

If Ireland is serious about developing the most inclusive education system our government must move from rhetoric to reality. Investment in teachers, through time, training, trust, and adequate staffing and resources is the only way to protect the right of every child to a meaningful quality education. The INTO and its members remain ready to work constructively with government to achieve this, but the message is clear, goodwill will not last forever. If words do not become action, that goodwill may soon turn to action of another kind to secure the supports our members, and their pupils, urgently need.

4.2 Recommendations

Infrastructure and Resourcing

- All special education placements must be appropriate to the needs of the pupil.
- A continuum of special education provision (from class-based support to special schools) must be available to children in every part of the country.
- Schools should be properly funded and resourced to accommodate children with special education needs in mainstream classrooms where appropriate. This will require smaller class sizes (19:1 in non-DEIS schools, 15:1 in DEIS schools). Class sizes in special schools and special classes should also be reduced.
- The SET allocation model must be reviewed to ensure that the current criteria are refined, and the results of standardised tests are de-emphasised. Issues that must be taken into account when allocating special education teaching supports include: a weighting for pupils in junior classes; support for children whose home language is not English or Irish but who do not meet the current criteria for EAL support; multi-grade classes; Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna; and the number of children with multiple additional needs. The DEY should also ensure that the Primary Online

Database (POD) is updated to reflect the relevant data needed to facilitate the implementation of this improved model of allocation.

- Accommodation must be fit for purpose, and new builds must be sanctioned wherever necessary. Schools must be supported to adapt mainstream classrooms as needed to accommodate pupils with additional needs.
- All new and refurbished buildings must meet universal educational design standards for accessibility (access and egress, corridors, toilets, showers, changing facilities).
- Appropriate means of transport must be made available for children with additional educational needs to access their school place.

Training and Professional Development

- All initial teacher education (ITE) programmes should provide student teachers with the opportunity to complete at least one school placement in a special education setting.
- All teachers should receive comprehensive training on the teaching of pupils with SEN across the continuum of teacher education. This training should be available to teachers as needed throughout their careers from ITE onwards. A flexible suite of delivery methods to meet the needs of teachers in all settings must be provided.
- Training should be provided to teachers and other relevant school staff in a timely manner, ideally before they take up their roles in the special class, and regularly thereafter.
- The number of places on the postgraduate certificate/diploma programmes for teachers working with students with SEN should be increased substantially.
- All teachers must receive training on the *Guidelines on Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations* and *NCSE Relate* as a matter of priority.
- A health and safety support unit within the DEY must be established to provide guidance to school staff and members of boards of management.

Other School Supports

- Targeted wellbeing support must be provided for principals, teachers and other staff members, recognising the growing complexity and workload associated with their roles.
- Discrete in-school time must be ring-fenced for teacher collaboration and planning, and the development of inclusive practices.
- Assistant principal posts must be provided to ensure that at least 40% of every teaching staff are promoted, thereby providing strong middle management structures in schools to support inclusion.
- A special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) must be appointed to every primary school in addition to the allocation of posts of responsibility.
- Allowances must be paid to all primary teachers working in both special schools and special classes.

- Allowances of school leaders must reflect all staff members for whom they are responsible.

Therapeutic and Counselling Supports

- Multi-disciplinary teams (including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists and nursing staff) must be available to all schools, and children must have timely and appropriate access to the relevant professional supports. Special schools and schools with special classes must be guaranteed priority access to these professional supports.
- The provision of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists and SENOs must be increased until a case-load ratio of not more than 25 schools per professional is reached.
- Play, art, music and other relevant therapies and in-school counselling must be provided where appropriate.

Early Intervention and Transitions

- A national early intervention programme to identify and support pupils with additional needs from early years must be developed, with all necessary supports continuing from primary education through to the end of tertiary education.
- Protocols must be put in place around the transfer of information on SENs between pre-schools, primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools.
- All students attending special schools must have the choice to complete the transition year programme and the Leaving Certificate programme.
- A national framework for transitions, ensuring continuity of care and learning, must be developed, implemented and resourced.

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