

The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland

Policy Advice

**Submitted to the Tánaiste and Minister for
Education & Skills on 3rd February, 2011**

National Council for Special Education

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FOREWORD

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is pleased to submit its policy advice on the future role of special schools and classes to the Minister for Education and Skills. This paper sets out:

- current policy and provision for the education of children with special educational needs
- pertinent research findings
- Council's advice in relation to the future role of special schools and classes and
- the implications of this policy advice for the resources available to the State.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 states that a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated. Following enactment, this commitment to education in an inclusive environment gave rise to questions within the educational community concerning what future role special schools and classes might have in the education of children with special educational needs, within the context of the Act.

The policy advice presented in this paper is based on evidence from national and international research, including the findings of a research report compiled following a review of special schools and classes in Ireland which was conducted by a team of researchers from St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. In developing its policy advice, the Council sought advice from a number of sources including, in particular, its Consultative Forum established under the EPSEN Act, 2004. The Consultative Forum is comprised of representatives of parents, voluntary bodies, school management organisations, trade unions, the National Disability Authority, the Psychological Society of Ireland and others who have a special interest in or knowledge of the education of children with disabilities. Council would like, in particular, to acknowledge the contribution of the members of the Consultative Forum whose views have shaped and influenced the direction of this policy advice.

The vision contained in the EPSEN Act, 2004 is of an education system in which people with special educational needs are, where possible, educated in an inclusive

environment with those who do not have such needs and in which they have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs. The Council's policy advice is informed by this vision and by its obligation under the Act to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available as required in relation to each type of disability. In this paper, Council sets out its recommendations for the role that special schools and classes should continue to play, as part of the continuum of provision, within the educational system as envisioned under the EPSEN Act, 2004.

Council would like to acknowledge the significant contribution that special schools and their patrons have made to the education of children with special educational needs in this country over many years. For a long period, special schools represented the main educational support that was available to children with special educational needs.

Council is submitting this advice to the Minister to assist the development of future policy and practice in relation to the education of children with special educational needs so that over time the vision and ambitions contained in the EPSEN Act 2004 for an inclusive education system can be further realised.

Sydney Blain,
Chairperson

The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland

Executive Summary

1. Development of Policy Advice

This paper sets out policy advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in relation to the future role of special schools and classes for children with special educational needs arising from a disability. The NCSE prepared this advice following a request from the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The policy advice is based on evidence from national and international research, including the findings of a research report commissioned by the Council entitled the 'Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland' (Ware et al, 2009), consultation with stakeholders and experts and the experience of NCSE Council members and NCSE staff. Council particularly sought advice from its Consultative Forum in the formulation of this policy advice, as provided for under Section 22 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004.

The policy advice paper is structured as follows;

- Section 1: Introduction.
- Section 2: Current policy and provision for the education of children with special educational needs in Ireland. The background to the development of this current policy and provision is provided in Appendix 1.
- Section 3: Main findings of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) and other relevant studies.
- Section 4: Policy advice from the National Council for Special Education.
- Section 5: Implications of this policy advice for the resources available to the State for the provision of education and a consideration of the practical implementation of the recommendations.

2. Current Policy and Provision for the Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Ireland

Current Policy

The Department of Education and Skills has responsibility for the development and determination of policy in relation to the education of children with special educational needs (SEN). The term 'special educational needs' covers a very broad spectrum of conditions including those ranging from mild general learning disability to the most severe disabilities. The current system of provision is designed to serve the needs of children within this broad and diverse range of special educational needs.

Inclusive Education

The EPSEN Act, 2004 (Section 2) explicitly states that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs unless to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (Gov. of Ireland, 2004).

Continuum of Provision

In Ireland, pupils with special educational needs are served by a continuum of provision, the span of which stretches from full-time enrolment in mainstream classes to full-time enrolment in special schools with a range of options in between, as outlined in the paper.

Continuum of Support

A continuum of support (DES, 2007) is in place for pupils with special educational needs. This approach involves the use of a problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools whereby pupils are offered support along this continuum depending on the nature and extent of their learning needs. It starts with extra support being provided by the class teacher in the regular classroom, followed by learning support and/or resource teaching interventions if necessary, and finally, the involvement of external services such as psychologists. (DES, 2007)

Current Provision

In the school year 2009-2010 there were approximately 856,685 pupils enrolled in schools aided by the DES (DES, 2010). Of this number, 505,998 pupils were enrolled in primary schools and 350,687 pupils were enrolled in post-primary (DES, 2010).

There are 105 special schools in Ireland for children with special educational needs arising from a disability (Source: DES 2010). In addition to these 105 schools, the DES has recently granted recognition, as special schools for children with autism, to thirteen centres which were previously part of the Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) pilot scheme funded by the DES. According to NCSE figures approximately 6,340 children attend special schools for children with disabilities. Approximately 3,000 pupils are enrolled in special classes for children with special educational needs arising from a disability, of which approximately 2,630 children are at primary level and 369 pupils are at post-primary level (Source: NCSE, December 2010).

In the school year 2009-2010 there were approximately 16,600 (3.3% of total primary school population) children with low incidence disabilities in primary schools whose schools were sanctioned resources by the NCSE. (Source: NCSE Special Education Administrative System (SEAS))¹. It is currently not possible to state the numbers of children with high incidence special educational needs being supported under the General Allocation Model (GAM) in primary schools, as the model supports both children with high incidence special educational needs and children with low achievement in literacy and numeracy who are eligible for learning support. A full description of the GAM is provided in Section 2.3.1 of this paper.

¹ The NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS) is a computerised administrative system to support the efficient review, management and implementation of local NCSE services including the provision of data for management, policy and research purposes.

In the school year 2009-2010 there were approximately 17,500 (5% of total post-primary school population) pupils with both low and high incidence special educational needs in post-primary schools whose schools were sanctioned resources by the NCSE (Source: NCSE (SEAS)).

There are over 9,000 whole time equivalent (WTE) special needs teacher posts in mainstream primary and post-primary schools for teachers working directly with children with special educational needs and over 1,100 teachers employed in special schools. There are 10,575 WTE special needs assistant (SNA) posts in schools to assist in the support of children with care needs (Source: DES, 2010).

Educational supports for children with special educational needs include:

- **Early Education Supports**
 - Assessment of Need 0-5 years under the Disability Act 2005
 - Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme: This is a general scheme which allows eligible children to avail of a free pre-school place in the year before they commence school.
 - Visiting Teacher Service of the DES
 - Early intervention classes
- **Education supports provided to children with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools**
 - General Allocation Model (primary schools only)
 - Individual Allocation of Additional Support
- **Education supports provided to pupils in special schools and classes**
 - Standard staffing schedule for special schools and special classes
- **Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) Scheme**
- **Home Tuition Scheme**
- **Other supports services for children with special educational needs include:**
 - Assistive Technology
 - Special Equipment
 - Enhanced Capitation Grants
 - Special Transport Scheme
 - Extended School Year

Health supports for children with special educational needs include:

- Pre-school inspection service
- Assessment of need for health and education services for the 0-5 years age group
- Health Service Executive (HSE) Teams
- Primary Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) Services

3. Examination of Research Studies and Other Documentation

This section examines recent research evidence and other documentation relating to the role of special schools and classes in the education of children with special educational needs. It includes findings from national and international research, including particularly the findings of a research report compiled following a review of special schools and classes in Ireland which was conducted by a team of researchers from St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. The main findings are summarised below.

Continuum of Provision

The EPSEN Act, 2004 explicitly states (Section 2) that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs unless to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for the other children with whom the child is to be educated. This commitment to an inclusive education, as stated in the Act, is consistent with international agreements such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990) and the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (2006).

In line with the EPSEN Act, 2004 it is current Government policy that children with special educational needs are included in mainstream schools and classes to the greatest extent practicable. In order to achieve this, the NCSE is required to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available as required in relation to each type of disability (EPSEN Act 2004, section 20 (1) (g)).

This policy position is in accordance with the findings of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (DES, 1993) and international practice in the education of children with special education needs which calls for inclusion in the mainstream to be regarded as the norm, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994, p.11).

Future Role of Special Schools within the Continuum of Provision

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) illustrates the increasing complexity of pupils' profiles in special schools. The authors of the report suggest that the term 'complex needs' can usefully be thought of as encompassing both breadth and depth of need (citing Rosengard, Laing, Ridley and Hunter, 2007).

The report concludes that special schools are catering for a group of pupils with complex needs and appear to have some success in doing so. The authors acknowledge that the evidence for this finding is limited in the study. However, they recommend that special schools should be enabled to continue to cater for this group of pupils in the absence of current evidence that mainstream schools could provide a better education for these pupils.

A secondary role emerging from the research findings is that special schools might be developed as centres for the provision of support and advice to mainstream schools (Ware et al, 2009, p.38).

Special Classes in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

The Research Report (Ware et al, 2009) found that the proportion of pupils with more complex needs in special classes appears considerably lower than in special schools. Special classes were perceived as an effective form of provision by parents, teachers, principals and those who made submissions. The lack of continuity in provision of special classes between the primary and post-primary sector emerged as a major issue for participants (teachers, parents and principals) in the study (Ware et al, 2009).

The report (Ware et al, 2009) recommended that special classes should continue to be part of placement options, in the absence of evidence that the needs of all pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools can be met through the GAM and resource teacher service.

There is little evidence in the national or international literature that supports one model of special educational provision as being more effective than another (Ofsted, 2006, 2010, Myklebust, 2006, Parsons et al, 2009, Marschark and Spencer, 2009). However, there may be some research evidence emerging which indicates that resourced mainstream provision offers certain advantages to pupils with special educational needs over and above full-time placement in special school or class provision (Ofsted, 2006, Myklebust, 2006).

Designation of Special Schools and Classes

There is evidence that special schools in Ireland have already expanded their remit to cater for a wide range of special educational needs in addition to those categories specified according to their designation (Ware et al, 2009). The Research Report on Special Schools and Classes is equivocal about whether special schools should cater for a wide range of categories of need, rather than cater exclusively for pupils from a specific category (Ware et al, 2009). The authors do acknowledge that it may be over-simplistic to think in terms of schools catering only for specific categories of need, given the findings of their study in relation to the population of pupils enrolled in Irish special schools.

The report did not directly address the question as to whether special classes should cater for specified categories of special educational needs or for a broader/full range of special educational needs.

Linkages between special and mainstream systems

Internationally there has been a trend towards special schools providing out-reach and in-reach support for mainstream schools (Ware et al, 2009). About half of the Irish special schools surveyed had links with mainstream primary and post-primary schools but the nature of these

links varied significantly from school to school. The majority of the links involved visits by adults or mainstream pupils **to** the special school (Ware et al, 2009).

The report (Ware et al, 2009) concluded that one aspect of the future role of some Irish special schools could be to provide out-reach and in-reach support for mainstream schools to enhance the provision that these schools might make for pupils with special educational needs. The review found that not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role. Two areas in particular were mentioned in this regard, the availability of a multi-disciplinary team and the training and expertise of the staff in at least some special schools.

Dual Placement

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found a mixed response to dual placement with principals, parents and those making submissions being the most positive. The finding that pupils were the least positive was significant, although it should be noted that none of the pupils concerned had directly experienced dual placement. The authors make a number of recommendations in relation to dual placement.

Research findings and documentation in relation to the following topics were also examined in this section of the paper:

- Placement of children with special educational needs
- Identification and assessment
- Role of parents in the choice of school
- Equitable access to curriculum and certification options
- Range and nature of supports required for children within special schools and classes
- Models for resourcing special schools and classes
- Professional training requirements
- Educational and social outcomes for children with special educational needs
- Co-operation between health and education
- Linkages between special classes and mainstream classes in mainstream schools

4. Policy Advice: Special Schools and Classes

Vision Statement:

Council is resolved that the intention of the EPSEN Act, 2004 should be honoured where it states that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs while taking into consideration the two exceptions cited in the Act. Towards this end, Council recommends that further research be conducted on what needs to be in place to maximise the capacity of mainstream schools to include children with special educational needs in an effective and beneficial manner.

Council recognises that there are children with complex special educational needs of such nature and degree that it would not be in their best interests to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream settings. Council also recognises that there are children whose inclusion in a mainstream class would, despite the provision of additional supports, be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated. Council recommends that special schools and classes have an ongoing part to play within the continuum of provision catering for the needs of these children.

Council is also of the opinion that, in the spirit of the EPSEN Act, 2004, future educational provision for children with complex special educational needs that cannot be met within mainstream classes should in so far as is possible, be available locally, either as an integral part of a mainstream school (special classes) or be situated on the same campus as mainstream schools (special schools or units) so that the opportunity for inclusion can be maximised.

Council is aware that it will take some time to realise this vision. In the intervening period, it recommends that special schools should be retained in order to continue to serve the needs of the children within the communities served by them. The role of special schools will change in accordance with the policy proposals set out below in this section of the paper.

Principles

In accordance with the EPSEN Act, 2004 and other relevant international agreements, Council proposes six principles to serve as underlying guidelines for the development of future policy in relation to special schools and classes in Ireland. In developing their principles Council reaffirms and elaborates the principles set out in the Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993 (DES, 1993).

Policy Advice: Recommendations

Continuum of Provision

The concept of a continuum of provision should be understood to imply a fluid approach to pupil placement, where pupils should be enabled to access the different types of provision and should be able to move along the continuum as their individual needs change over time and in accordance with their best interests. Special schools and classes should continue to play a role in the continuum.

Placement in Special Schools and Classes

Children placed in special schools and classes should be those with complex needs, as defined in Section 4.3.2 of the policy advice paper.

Special Classes

1. Research should be immediately undertaken to explore the efficacy of special classes as a model of provision in the Irish context.

2. While awaiting the findings of such research and in the absence of current evidence regarding their impact, special classes should continue to exist as part of the continuum of provision for pupils with special educational needs.
3. Special classes should be organised on a flexible basis to provide for specialist interventions and supports specific to pupils' needs and to facilitate an inclusive approach which allows pupils to join mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible.
4. Access to special classes throughout the country should be provided on a planned, equitable and transparent basis.
5. All schools should be required to develop a formal policy regarding how children, placed in special classes, will also be included in mainstream classes for set periods of time as appropriate. In addition, it should be explicitly stated, within the child's individual education plan, how each child, in accordance with their learning needs and abilities, will access learning opportunities in the special class and in mainstream classes in the school.
6. The quality of provision and outcomes for children with special educational needs in both special class and mainstream settings should continue to be regularly monitored and reviewed by the schools themselves and through external inspection and review processes.

Designation of Special Schools

The designation of all special schools as primary schools needs to be examined particularly in light of evidence which suggests that an increasing number of pupils are transferring to special schools at or before post-primary age (See section 4.3.5)

The expansion in the remit of special schools, to meet the needs of their communities, by enrolling children with a wide range of special educational needs should be formalised and should continue. In the future, special schools should be designated and resourced to serve those pupils within the community who require special school placement rather than be limited to any specific category of disability.

Consideration must be given to children of average or above average ability, with special educational needs, who may require educational interventions to be provided, on a temporary basis, in separate specialist settings.

Transfer of post-primary aged pupils to special schools

1. The pattern of transfer of pupils of post-primary age to special schools warrants further investigation.
2. Appropriate programmes and certification options must be available in all schools that enrol post-primary aged pupils with special educational needs.

3. Post-primary aged pupils in special schools who are following programmes of work leading to State examinations should be taught by teachers registered with the Teaching Council.

Patronage of Special Schools

The funding structures for service provision to children attending special schools should be examined by the relevant departments. Any such examination will require a consultation process involving the DES, HSE, NCSE, and the patrons of special schools.

Designation of Special Classes

The composition of special classes should be determined in response to the needs of children with special educational needs within particular local communities, taking into account local demographics and the ongoing feasibility of maintaining the special class. Council recognises that there are advantages to having special classes with a specific designation and 'mixed' base classes.

Identification and Assessment of pupils for placement in special schools and classes

The Department of Education and Skills should initiate the development of a Code of Practice, with NCSE as the leading Agency, to guide parents and professionals in making decisions regarding the placement of individual children with special educational needs.

Range and nature of supports required by children within special schools and classes

Schools should continue to be provided with additional educational and health supports, as outlined in Section 2, to assist them in making appropriate provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Staffing arrangements for special schools and classes

Staffing levels and pupil/teacher ratios should reflect the complexity of need that exists within individual schools and should not be solely determined by a special school's designation

Model for Resourcing Special Schools and Classes

Council proposes to prepare a further policy advice paper to examine the links between diagnosis of disability, the assessment of the special educational needs of children and models for resourcing children once these needs have been identified. The need to avoid the duplication of assessments to access health and education supports will be taken into account.

Curriculum and Certification

Council recommends that a review of programmes and certification offered to pupils with special educational needs, of post-primary age, in both special and mainstream schools should be undertaken by the NCCA to ensure a range of choices for pupils and their parents.

Professional Development of Staff in Special Schools and Classes

1. Council recognises that it is the responsibility of the Teaching Council to establish standards of teaching in relation to the knowledge, skills and competence necessary for teaching pupils with special educational needs.
2. A strategic programme of professional development should be designed and offered to teachers in special schools with particular emphasis on the profile of children enrolled in the school.
3. All teachers of children with special educational needs in both mainstream and special schools should continue to have access to continuous professional development on an ongoing basis in order to develop specialist skills appropriate to particular groups of pupils and collaborative working skills.
4. Council requests that the TES ensures that current programmes of initial teacher education and continuous professional development incorporate modules which are focussed on the particular needs of children with special educational needs, including those with multiple and complex needs. In particular the specific requirements of post-primary teachers should be considered in the development and provision of programmes for initial teacher education and continuous professional development.

Location of Special Schools

1. Planning for the location of special schools and classes should ensure appropriate access to education for children with special educational needs on a geographic and demographic basis.
2. In the future, educational provision for children with special educational needs should generally be provided on the same site as mainstream schools, where this is seen to be consistent with their best interests and the effective provision of education to the children with whom they are to be educated.
3. Planning of new mainstream schools should take into account the needs of pupils with special educational needs in the community, including demographics and distances from other services.
4. Major building programmes for new schools should consider locating special schools on-site.
5. Special schools should be a central element in the planning of the DES building programme in order to ensure that the existing stock of schools is replenished and that future special schools are located in buildings which are fit for purpose.
6. Special classes should continue to provide support to children in areas where the demographics would not sustain the establishment of a special school.
7. School building programmes, in areas where special schools are located, should consider the desirability and feasibility of including the special schools requirements in any new school being built.
8. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of special schools in a single management structure for new schools.

Collaborative Linkages between the Special and Mainstream System

Council recommends that:

1. Opportunities are provided for a two-way exchange of expertise between teachers in mainstream and special schools concerning good practice in the education of children with special educational needs.
2. Special schools are supported to cater for those pupils with the most complex needs and that their progress in doing so is monitored and evaluated.
3. Special schools are afforded the resources, time and opportunity to develop their new modified role so that in the future they will be in a position to offer support to other mainstream schools.
4. Providers of CPD (including third-level institutions and the SESS) be informed of the importance of continuing to develop expertise in supporting special schools in the education of children with the most complex needs.

Linkages between Special Classes and Mainstream Classes

Council recommends that all schools are required to develop a formal policy regarding the inclusion in mainstream classes and activities of children with special educational needs who are enrolled in special classes. In addition, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) should specify how this will be achieved for individual children with special educational needs who are placed in special classes.

Dual Placement

Council proposes that a further examination of the possible impact of dual enrolment for the individual child (including both educational and social outcomes) be undertaken before a formal policy is adopted in this regard. Schools should be allowed to continue to operate informal dual placement arrangements as currently these do not have resource implications for the State. These informal arrangements should be subject to the agreement of parents and pupils and the appropriate planning and monitoring of arrangements until such time as more evidence becomes available concerning the outcomes of dual enrolment for children with special educational needs.

Co-operation between Health and Education

- A unified system for the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs should be agreed and implemented.
- Protocols between the health and education sectors should be developed and approved, at the highest levels, to establish the most efficient and effective way to provide multi-disciplinary support to pupils with special educational needs who attend special schools, special classes and in mainstream classes.
- Such protocols should establish the nature and extent of the cooperation required between the health and education sectors for the delivery of an efficient and

coordinated multi-disciplinary service to children with special educational needs in special schools and classes

- Formal institutional mechanisms for collaboration at local service planning/provision level be agreed and established.

5. Implications of Policy Advice

In preparing policy advice Council is obliged to provide an assessment of its implications for the resources, including financial resources, available to the State and have regard to the practical implementation of that advice (Section 20(3) (b), EPSEN Act, 2004). Council believes that the policy advice outlined in this paper, if adopted, will bring about further improvements in the quality of education being provided for children and young people with special educational needs in Ireland, will result in a streamlining of the provision of special education and will offer parents a range of appropriately resourced and supported options for educational placement, centred on the needs of children.

Council recognises that the current economic circumstances dictate that new policies will have to be implemented within the level of existing resources or within a re-prioritisation of existing expenditure. Council believes that a key issue for policy advice in relation to the future role of special schools and classes is the structure and nature of the provision to be put in place rather than solely the level of resources available.

If adopted, it should be possible to adopt a phased approach to the implementation of these proposals thereby allowing the State to manage the timeframe in which change is brought about and spreading the full cost over a number of years. Council is of the opinion that in a number of instances, the cost of the proposals can be managed within the parameters of existing budgets and financial planning.

The practical implications of NCSE policy advice and an assessment of the implications of that advice for the resources, including financial resources, available to the State are examined under two headings:

1. The Terms of Reference for the policy advice as specified by the Department of Education and Skills and
2. Cross-cutting issues for the future development of special schools and classes which arise from the policy advice.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Applied Behavioural Analysis
ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
AO	Assessment Officers (HSE)
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Management Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GAM	General Allocation Model
GLD	General Learning Disability
HSE	Health Service Executive
IATSE	Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ILSA	Irish Learning Support Association
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
IRIS	Inclusive Research in Irish Schools
IVEA	Irish Vocational Educational Association
JMB	Joint Managerial Board

NABMSE	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NFVB	National Federation of Voluntary Bodies
PCCC	Primary Community and Continuing Care
SCPA	Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments
SEAS	Special Education Administration System
SEC	State Examination Commission
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser (NCSE)
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SES Skills	Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills
SESE	Social, Environmental and Scientific Education
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
TES	Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WTE	Whole Time Equivalent

The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland

1 Development of Policy Advice

1.1 Policy Advice

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), as part of its statutory functions under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, is required to provide advice to the Minister for Education and Skills² concerning matters relating to the education of children and others with disabilities (Section 20 (j), EPSEN Act, 2004). Following a request from the Department of Education and Skills, the NCSE has now prepared such policy advice for the Minister in relation to the future role of Special Schools and Classes for children with special educational needs arising from a disability.

This policy advice was developed within the context of the NCSE's vision of a special education system that is person-centred, family focused and responsive to the needs of all (NCSE Strategy Statement, 2008-2011). It is based on evidence from national and international research, including the findings of a research report commissioned by the Council entitled the 'Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland' (Ware et al, 2009), consultation with stakeholders and experts and the experience of NCSE Council members and NCSE staff who have been working intensively in this area since the establishment of the Council.

Under the terms of the EPSEN Act 2004, the NCSE is required to appoint a national Consultative Forum to consult on matters relating to the performance of its functions. The membership of the Forum is representative of the stakeholders in Special Education and the term of office of the current Forum is 2010-2012. Council particularly sought advice from the Consultative Forum in the formulation of this policy advice, as provided for under Section 22 of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

The shape of the report and its final recommendations are influenced by the views and findings expressed during the above consultation process and take particular account of the advice received from the NCSE Consultative Forum.

² The Department of Education and Science was renamed the Department of Education and Skills with effect from May 2010.

In preparing policy advice Council is obliged to provide an assessment of its implications for the resources, including financial resources, available to the State and have regard to the practical implementation of that advice (Section 20(3) (b), EPSEN Act, 2004). In providing this assessment, Council is conscious of the need to recognise the particularly difficult economic circumstances in which the policy advice is being developed and the reality that expenditure on education over the next four years must be planned in line with the National Recovery Plan, 2011 – 2014 (Gov. of Ireland, 2010).

1.2 Inclusion and Future Role of Special Schools and Classes

The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (Gov. of Ireland, 2004) was enacted in 2004 to make further provision for the education of people with special educational needs. Section 2 of the Act states that:

‘A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with –

- (a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or***
- (b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.’***

This commitment to education in an inclusive environment raised questions within the education community concerning what future role special schools and classes might play within such a system.

In 2005, the then Minister for Education and Science, Ms Mary Hanafin, signalled that she would be asking her Department, in consultation with the NCSE and other partners, to consider how the role and potential of special schools could be optimised (INTO Congress, 2005). In Feb 2006, the Minister reported to the Seanad that preparations for a review of special schools were in the final stages of planning (Seanad Éireann - Volume 182 - 15 February, 2006).

This review was conducted in two phases. The first phase comprised a survey of special school and special class provision and was commissioned by the Special

Education Section (SES) of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). In response to a request from the DES, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned phase two, a more in-depth review which was to build on the above preliminary analysis. Both phases were conducted by the Special Education Department of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

The first phase was conducted between December 2005 and January 2007 and involved a questionnaire-based census of special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes. The second phase of the review commenced in December 2007 and was intended to build on the report from Phase 1. The final report was submitted to the NCSE in October 2009, following feedback from both external consultants and the NCSE Council. It incorporates information from both phases of the review in order to give as full a picture as possible within the constraints of time and budget.

1.3 Terms of Reference for Phase 2

The Terms of Reference for the second phase of the review were:

- to review the role of special schools in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs and in particular to examine ways in which special schools can act in a co-operative way with mainstream primary and post-primary schools to provide enhanced service to pupils with special educational needs and their parents
- to review the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education as described in Section 2 of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

As part of the review to examine:

- i) the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools,
- ii) the issues related to dual enrolment,
- iii) whether special schools should cater for specified categories of special educational needs or a broader/full range of special educational needs and what implications changes in the spectrum of special educational needs over time has in this regard and
- iv) whether special schools should be used/developed as centres of excellence and if so, in what areas and how they should be used.

The review was required to:

- have regard to how the resources already allocated to special schools might be used to optimum effect for pupils with special educational needs
- provide an assessment of the implications of any recommendations for the resources available to the State for the provision of education and
- have regard to the practical implementation of the recommendations.

The scope of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) did not include any examination of alternative models of provision or a comparison with pupils being educated in fully mainstream classes.

In the course of the research project, it was decided that the last three terms concerning resources and the implications for the State would be more appropriately addressed by the NCSE when formulating policy advice rather than through research.

The above terms of reference provided the template on which the Council has developed its advice to the Minister. While the Review made an important contribution to informing this advice, a range of other sources were also utilised, as outlined in section 1.1 above.

1.4 Structure of the Policy Advice Paper

The policy advice paper addresses the questions set out in the terms of reference for the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009). In addition, the paper identifies a range of questions which arise in relation to the future development of Special Schools and Classes within the context of the Irish education system and particularly in the context of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

This policy advice paper addresses certain of the questions identified through this process. It also identifies outstanding issues which need to be more fully investigated to provide a better understanding and a more substantial evidence base from which to develop future policy positions.

The policy advice paper is structured as follows;

- Section 1: Introduction.
- Section 2: Current policy and provision for the education of children with special educational needs in Ireland. The background to the development of this current policy and provision is provided in Appendix 1.
- Section 3: Main findings of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) and other relevant studies.
- Section 4: Policy advice from the National Council for Special Education.
- Section 5: Implications of this policy advice for the resources available to the State for the provision of education and a consideration of the practical implementation of the recommendations.

2 Current Policy and Provision for the Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Ireland

The Department of Education and Skills has responsibility for the development and determination of policy in relation to the education of children with special educational needs (SEN) within the Irish educational system. The policy of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in relation to Special Education is articulated in and disseminated to schools through a series of circular letters.

The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (Gov. of Ireland, 2004) was enacted in 2004 to 'make further provision for the education of people with special educational needs and to provide that the education of people with such needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs and to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs.' (Gov. of Ireland, 2004)

In 2006 the NCSE published an Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) which set out its views and recommendations on a plan for the implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004, in accordance with the obligations placed on the Council under Section 23 of that Act. This report highlighted that the term 'special educational needs' covered a very broad spectrum of conditions including those ranging from mild general learning disability to the most severe disabilities (p. 46).

The current system of provision is designed to serve the needs of children within this broad and diverse range of special educational needs. DES policy development in this area is based largely on the findings of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report (1993), on national and international developments and on research findings. Since 1998 legislation with a direct bearing on education provision for children with special educational needs has been passed including the Education Act 1998, the EPSEN Act 2004 and other related equality legislation. This legislation has had a significant influence on Department policy in relation to special education provision. Policy development has also been influenced by Court findings, which seek to interpret the Constitution and legislation in relation to the rights of children with special educational needs.

2.1 Current Policy

2.1.1 Inclusive Education

As outlined in section 1.2 above the EPSEN Act, 2004 explicitly states (Section 2) that *‘children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs unless to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated’.*

2.1.2 Continuum of Provision

In Ireland, pupils with special educational needs are served by a continuum of provision, the span of which stretches from full-time enrolment in mainstream classes to full-time enrolment in special schools with a range of options in between. A range of placement options is currently available to these children who may be educated in a:

- mainstream class with additional support from:
 - the class teacher through differentiation of the curriculum, co-teaching with other teaching staff, as required and
 - a resource/learning support teacher and/or
- special class in a mainstream school
- special school which has been designated by the DES for a particular category or categories of disability³
- special class in a special school.

Pupils are enrolled in special schools, in special classes or in mainstream classes in accordance with the terms of DES circulars, the recommendations contained in professional reports and in accordance with parental wishes. Following the enactment of legislation such as the Education Act 1998 and the EPSEN Act 2004 and other developments such as the establishment of the NCSE, further refinement of policy in regard to the placement of children with special needs is now necessary. The issues involved are considered later in this paper.

³ It is noted that in a small number of cases, parents of children with special educational needs may exercise their right to home-school their child. Some of the children who are placed in detention centres following Court Orders may also have special educational needs. Schools attached to detention centres, special care units and high support units are resourced directly by the Department rather than through the NCSE, as are hospital schools.

2.1.3 Continuum of Support for pupils in mainstream primary and post-primary schools

In accordance with current DES policy on assessment and identification of need, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) recommends a continuum of support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. This approach involves the use of a problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools which is implemented at three different levels. It starts with extra support being provided by the class teacher in the regular classroom, followed by learning support and/or resource teaching interventions if necessary, and finally, the involvement of external services such as psychologists. This continuum approach is based on the recognition that special educational needs occur along a continuum from mild to severe, and from transient to long term (DES, 2007).

Pupils are offered support along this continuum depending on the nature and extent of their learning needs. Fourteen categories of disability are currently recognised by the DES and NCSE for the purposes of allocating additional resources, see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Categories of Disability

<i>DES Disability Categories</i>
Physical Disability
Hearing impairment
Visual Impairment
Emotional Disturbance
Severe Emotional Disturbance
Mild General Learning Disability
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability
Moderate General Learning Disability
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders
Specific Learning Disability
Assessed Syndrome
Specific Speech and Language Disorder
Multiple Disabilities

Allocations of additional teaching hours and SNA support are determined by the special educational needs organiser (SENO) within the DES policy parameters that relate to the child's category of disability and the nature and extent of special education and care needs.

2.2 Current Provision in Ireland

2.2.1 Education Supports for Children with Special Educational Needs

In the school year 2009-2010 there were approximately 856,685 pupils enrolled in schools aided by the DES (DES, 2010). Of this number, 505,998 pupils were enrolled in primary schools and 350,687 pupils were enrolled in post-primary (DES, 2010). According to NCSE figures (December 2010), approximately 6,340 children attended special schools for children with disabilities. Approximately 3,000 pupils were enrolled in special classes for children with special educational needs arising from a disability, of which approximately 2,630 children were at primary level and 369 pupils were at post-primary level (Source: NCSE, December 2010).

Council notes that the EPSEN Act, 2004 does not distinguish between or define special educational needs in terms of high or low incidence. These terms are used in the main to distinguish the manner in which allocations of resources are made to schools to support children with special educational needs. The term 'high incidence disabilities' refers to disabilities which occur with a greater frequency in the general population and includes borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability. The term 'low incidence disabilities' refers to disabilities which occur with less frequency in the general population and includes physical disability, sensory impairment, emotional disturbance, moderate and severe/profound general learning disability, autistic spectrum disorders and specific speech and language disorder.

In the school year 2009-2010 there were approximately 16,600 (3.3% of total primary school population) children with low incidence disabilities in primary schools whose schools were sanctioned resources by the NCSE (Source: NCSE Special Education Administrative System (SEAS)⁴). There were approximately 17,500 (5% of total post-primary school population) pupils with both low and high incidence special educational needs in post-primary whose schools were sanctioned resources by the NCSE (Source: NCSE SEAS).

⁴ The NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS) is a computerised administrative system to support the efficient review, management and implementation of local NCSE services including the provision of data for management, policy and research purposes.

It is currently not possible to state the numbers of children with high incidence special educational needs being supported under the General Allocation Model (GAM) in primary schools, as the model supports both children with high incidence special educational needs and children with low achievement in literacy and numeracy who are eligible for learning support. A full explanation of the General Allocation Model is provided in Section 2.3.1 of this paper.

Current policy in Ireland is based on providing a continuum of support within the school system to meet the diversity of needs of children with special educational needs. Different models of support exist across the education system and resources (teaching hours, teaching posts, SNAs, transport, assistive technology, reasonable accommodation in examinations, etc.) are made available to schools to support these models. There are over 9,000 whole time equivalent (WTE) special needs teacher posts in mainstream primary and post-primary schools for teachers working directly with children with special educational needs and over 1,100 teachers employed in special schools. There are 10,575 WTE special needs assistant posts in schools to assist in the support of children with care needs (Source: DES, 2010).

2.2.2 Visiting Teacher Service

The Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Hearing and Visually Impairment provides a service to children and young people who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired from the time of referral through to third level education. Currently 43 teachers are employed within the Visiting Teacher Service (Source: DES, 2010). These teachers provide advice and support to parents and school. The service provided by the visiting teachers includes:

- guidance, support and specialist teaching to pre-school children and their parents in the home
- specialist teaching, support and monitoring in schools
- advice to parents and teachers on curricular and environmental implications, including the use of assistive technology
- liaising with parents, teachers and other professionals
- advising the State Examination Commission (SEC) in relation to applications for Reasonable Accommodations in state examinations
- the provision of a Transition Report for students in final year post-primary education, to advise disability and access officers in relation to appropriate accommodations and supports to be provided at third level.

2.2.3 National Educational Psychological Service

"NEPS mission is to support the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard for children with special educational needs."

NEPS psychologists work with primary, post-primary and special schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour and social and emotional development. They work with parents, teachers and children in identifying educational needs and offer a range of services aimed at meeting those needs. They have a particular concern for children with special educational needs.

NEPS currently employs 171 psychologists (Source: NEPS, Jan 2011) with an additional 6 posts in the process of being filled by the Public Appointments Service. Schools which do not currently have a service from NEPS may avail of the DES Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

To achieve its mission NEPS has adopted a model of service which embodies consultation both as an overarching framework and process for the delivery of services to schools. In addressing the developmental needs of all children in education NEPS psychologists aim to offer schools a balance between individual casework and support and development initiatives designed to promote inclusion and teacher/school effectiveness.

2.2.4 Early Education Supports

The Department of Health and Children has responsibility for the:

- Pre-school inspection service and
- Assessment of Need for health and education services for the 0-5 years age group (under the Disability Act, 2005).

An Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme was introduced from January 2010 as a free scheme to benefit children in the key developmental period prior to commencing school. This scheme allows eligible children to avail of a free pre-school place in the year before they commence school. The age range in which children qualify for the scheme is, generally, between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months

on 1st September each year. The scheme is a general one and services participating are required to make reasonable accommodation for children with special educational needs in accordance with the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2004).

As previously indicated the Visiting Teacher Service of the DES provides a service to pre-school children with visual and/or hearing impairment. Teachers with specialist qualifications visit the young children in their homes when they are at a pre-school age and/or at school when they are enrolled there. They model appropriate teaching approaches for parents and teachers and advise them on the management of their child's special educational needs. They also advise in relation to the provision of assistive technology. When the child is enrolled, the school can apply for additional resource teaching hours to cater for the needs of the pupil if the sensory impairment is significant.

Early intervention special classes for young children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) have also been established in mainstream and special schools. The Health Service Executive (HSE) and/or voluntary bodies provide services for many young children who have been assessed as having severe or profound general learning disabilities, multiple disabilities or autistic spectrum disorders through a range of early intervention services which continue to develop throughout the country.

2.3 Educational Support provided to Children in Mainstream Primary and Post-primary schools

Pupils with special educational needs are currently educated in mainstream primary and post-primary classes, in special classes attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools, in special schools or in special classes in special schools.

2.3.1 General Allocation Model (GAM)

All mainstream **primary** schools are provided with a general allocation of teaching hours to support inclusive education. This general allocation provides additional permanent teaching posts to assist schools to make appropriate provision for the needs of pupils with special educational needs arising from high-incidence disabilities and for children who are eligible for learning support teaching (DES Circular 02/05). High incidence disabilities include borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability. Pupils whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics are

given priority when schools are determining eligibility for learning support teaching (DES Circular 02/05).

Under the GAM the amount of additional teaching resources provided to schools is related to the overall school enrolment numbers, gender breakdown of pupils (as generally there is a higher incidence of special educational needs associated with boys) and status under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. This ensures that schools have a means of providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils. The model is therefore not reliant on an individual diagnosis of a special educational need.

DES Circular 02/05 sets out the details of the general allocation scheme, makes suggestions concerning the flexible deployment of the teaching resources available under the scheme and offers guidance on the development of a staged approach to the assessment and identification of special educational needs. The GAM is intended to facilitate the development of more inclusive schools and the flexible deployment of resources. The DES has undertaken a recent review of the GAM.

The GAM does not apply to post-primary schools. Learning support is available in post-primary schools for those pupils who have low achievement in reading or mathematics but who have not been diagnosed as eligible for support under any of the disability categories. To support these pupils, 0.7 of a teacher post for learning support is allocated to schools with less than 600 pupils and 1.2 posts are allocated to schools with more than 600 pupils (Source: DES).

2.3.2 Individual Allocation of Additional Support

Additional teaching resources are also allocated to primary and post-primary schools for the support of individual pupils who have complex and enduring special educational needs and have been assessed as having a low incidence disability. The number of hours allocated varies by category of low incidence disability. The categories used and the hours of additional teaching support available to schools per week are specified by the DES in Circulars 08/02 and 02/05, as below in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories of Low Incidence Disability

<i>Low Incidence Disability</i>	<i>Hrs of Resource Teaching per week</i>
Physical Disability	3
Hearing Impairment	4
Visual Impairment	3.5
Emotional Disturbance	3.5
Severe Emotional Disturbance	5
Moderate General Learning Disability	3.5
Severe/Profound Learning Disability	5
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	5
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	4
Assessed syndrome in conjunction with one of the above low incidence disabilities	3-5 taking into account the pupil's special educational needs including level of general learning disability
Multiple Disabilities	5

Post-primary schools are also given a specific individual allocation of resource teaching hours for children with high incidence disabilities as the GAM does not apply to post-primary schools. Specifically post-primary schools are provided with an additional 1.5 teaching hours per week for each pupil diagnosed with mild general learning disability, borderline mild general learning disability and specific learning disability in accordance with DES specified criteria.

Pupils who are deaf/hard of hearing and pupils who are blind/visually impaired are provided with additional support by the Visiting Teacher Service.

2.3.3 Number of Pupils with Additional Teaching Supports sanctioned by the NCSE 2009-2010

In the 2009-2010 school year there were approximately 34,140 pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools (including pupils in special classes) for whom the school was sanctioned additional teaching support by the National Council for Special Education (Source: NCSE SEAS, August 2010). It should be noted that these figures do not represent the total numbers of pupils with special educational needs allocated additional resources in primary schools as at primary level, pupils with high incidence special educational needs (i.e. specific learning disability, borderline mild general learning disability and mild general learning disability) are not resourced by the NCSE, but are resourced by schools under the

GAM. For a full breakdown of these figures across sector and category of special educational needs, please see Table 3 below.

Table 3: Number of Pupils with Additional Teaching Supports sanctioned by the NCSE 2009/2010

Academic Year: 09/10	Post-primary	Primary	Total
	No. of Pupils		
Assessed Syndrome	88	253	341
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	1090	2953	4043
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	3689		3689
Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	2054	3730	5784
Hearing Impairment	325	649	974
Mild General Learning Disability	3611		3611
Moderate General Learning Disability	244	511	755
Multiple Disabilities	510	1429	1939
Physical Disability	1394	2757	4151
Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	390	726	1116
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	31	24	55
Specific Learning Disability	3417		3417
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	493	3314	3807
Visual Impairment	176	283	459
Total Pupils :	17512	16629	34141

Source: NCSE SEAS, August 2010

In mainstream primary and post-primary schools these additional teaching hours are used to provide additional teaching support to pupils in the mainstream classroom or in small withdrawal groups or to teach pupils on a one to one basis.

2.4 Educational Supports Provided to Pupils in Special Schools

To date special schools have had a most significant role in providing education to children with special educational needs. There are 105 special schools in Ireland for children with special educational needs arising from a disability (Source: DES 2010). In addition to these 105 schools, the DES has recently granted recognition to 13 centres which were part of the ABA pilot scheme funded by the Department of Education and Skills to become special schools for children with autism, under the patronage of Saplings School Ltd., Autism Ireland and the COPE Foundation.

Voluntary bodies play an important role in the patronage of special schools. In its 2006 report to an Oireachtas Committee, the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

reported that member organisations are either patrons of, or have under their aegis, 48 special schools and the majority of these are under the patronage of the organisation (NFVB, 2006).

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the 105 special schools in terms of designated category of disability, as provided by the Department of Education and Skills in November 2010. The numbers of pupils enrolled in each type of school is based on figures provided by NCSE SENOs in December 2010.

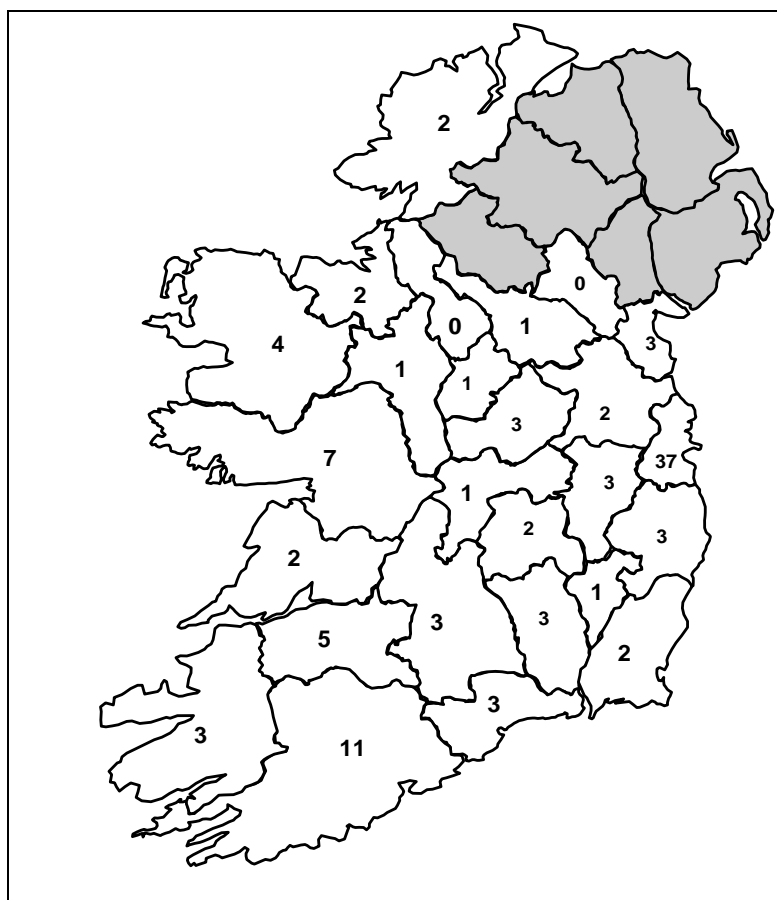
Table 4: Designation of Special Schools

Official DES Designation	No of schools	No of Pupils
Physical Disability	7	343
Hearing Impairment	3	153
Visual Impairment	1	44
Emotional/disturbance and/or behavioural problems	12	366
Mild GLD	30	2657
Moderate GLD	33	2140
Severe/profound GLD	9	249
Autism/autistic spectrum disorders	5	141
Specific learning disability	4	173
Multiple disabilities	1	72
Total	105	6,338

Source: Designation of special schools provided by the DES, November 2010. Figures for the numbers of pupils enrolled are provided by NCSE, Dec 2010⁵.

It is noted that out of a total of 105 special schools, 72 of these are for children with intellectual disabilities (mild, moderate, severe/profound learning disabilities). Twelve of the schools are for children with emotional and behavioural disorders. The special schools are distributed geographically across the country as follows:

⁵ This list does not include schools for children from the Travelling Community, Hospital Schools, schools attached to child detention centres, special care units and high support units and the 13 new special schools for children with Autism, formerly known as ABA centres.



A table showing the breakdown of special schools across each county is included in Appendix 2 of this paper. It can be seen that the majority of special schools are clustered around the urban centres of Cork and Dublin to cater for larger density populations resident in each of these areas.

Class teachers are allocated to special schools, on a pupil-teacher ratio basis, according to the profile of children with special educational needs enrolled in the school/class (See NCSE Circular 03/2010 and DES Circular 38/2010). There is a standard staffing schedule for special classes and special schools with ratios based on the SERC report recommendations for these schools. In applying these staffing ratios in special schools a degree of flexibility is available in order to meet the needs of children with complex special educational needs. Appendix 4 of this paper sets out the pupil-teacher ratio for special schools and classes.

2.5 Educational Supports Provided to Pupils in Special Classes in Mainstream Schools

In this paper, a special class is defined as a class which has been officially sanctioned by the DES or NCSE, which has a defined pupil teacher ratio and is designated for a particular category of disability. A special class may include children within a wide age range.

From the 1990s onwards, the number of special classes attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools increased as parents sought to have their children educated in the local school. As of December 2010, there were approximately 503 special classes attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools with a total of 3,000 pupils enrolled. This figure comprised 430 special classes attached to primary schools with 2,631 pupils enrolled and 73 special classes attached to post-primary schools with 369 pupils enrolled (Source: NCSE, December 2010). A breakdown of special classes according to disability category is given in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Designation of Special Classes

Official DES Designation	Primary	Post-primary
Mild GLD	75	6
Moderate GLD	15	10
Severe/Profound GLD	9	-
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	60	-
Specific Learning Disability	16	-
ASD (Early intervention)	20	-
ASD	210	51
Aspergers Syndrome	3	3
Emotional and Behavioural Disorders	9	-
Hearing Impairment	10	-
Visual Impairment	-	-
Physical Disability	-	-
Multiple/Complex Disabilities	3	-
Mixed	-	3
Total	430	73

Source: NCSE, December, 2010

As with special schools, class teachers are allocated to special classes according to the profile of children with special educational needs enrolled in the class (NCSE Circular 03/2010 and DES Circular 38/2010). There is a standard staffing schedule for special classes with ratios based on the SERC report recommendations for these classes (Appendix 4).

2.5.1 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs):

In order to facilitate the inclusion of children with special educational needs, SNAs are allocated to primary, post-primary and special schools to address care needs. These allocations are based on individualised applications and subject to eligibility criteria laid down by the DES. In order to qualify for SNA support a pupil must have a disability and must have care needs as outlined in DES circulars 07/02 and 02/05. The care needs of the child must be assessed and described by a professional who is also required to state reasons why the support of an SNA is necessary and the benefits which would accrue to the child from receiving such care in the school setting. The SNA support is intended to meet a range of significant care needs arising from a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where children's behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils (DES Circular 07/02). The duties of SNAs are solely related to care needs and are strictly of a non teaching nature.

Applications for SNA supports for particular pupils are made by schools to special educational needs organisers (SENOs) who examine the request in the context of DES policy and the SNA resources already available in the school. The SENO decides if the pupil is eligible to receive support and, if so, whether the school has sufficient SNA resources to meet the care needs of the child. It is important to maintain a balance between allocating necessary care support and the right of the child to acquire personal independence skills. Where the child is eligible for SNA support and the school has an insufficient number of SNAs to provide the required support additional SNA staffing may be sanctioned by the SENO. Schools are advised to regularly review the care needs and the level and type of support being given to the child.

Some pupils have major care needs requiring the assistance of an SNA on a full-time basis while others receive assistance from an SNA intermittently to meet their particular care needs as they arise. In the 2009-2010 academic year, SNA support was allocated to 13,016 pupils (including pupils enrolled in special classes) in primary and post-primary schools (Source: NCSE SEAS). This figure does not correspond to the

numbers of SNAs deployed in mainstream primary and post-primary schools as individual SNAs may be providing support to more than one pupil. For a full breakdown of these figures across sector and categories of disability, see Table 6 below:

Table 6: Number of Pupils with Special Needs Assistant Support 2009/2010

Academic Year 09/10	Post-primary	Primary	Total
	No. of Pupils		
Assessed Syndrome	67	351	418
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	567	2369	2936
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	86	138	224
Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	769	2352	3121
Hearing Impairment	54	232	286
Mild General Learning Disability	267	386	653
Moderate General Learning Disability	149	434	583
Multiple Disabilities	288	1038	1326
Physical Disability	523	1519	2042
Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	211	533	744
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	2	25	27
Specific Learning Disability	30	22	52
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	13	310	323
Visual Impairment	109	172	281
Total Pupils:	3135	9881	13016

Source: NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS), August 2010.

There were approximately 1,750 WTE SNA posts in special schools in Ireland in the 2009-2010 academic year (Source: DES, 2010).

The SNA scheme was the subject of two reviews during 2009-2010. In March 2009, the DES asked the NCSE to review all SNA posts in schools to ensure that the criteria for allocation were being consistently applied. The report from this review has been published and is available on the NCSE website (www.ncse.ie) The second review took the form of a DES Value for Money and Policy Analysis review of the scheme which is now complete and due to be published shortly.

The National Recovery Plan 2011-14 (Gov. of Ireland, 2010) states that there has been a significant increase in the number of SNAs in recent years and that it is intended to cap the number at 2011 levels and introduce a new system to facilitate the management of these finite SNA resources in a proactive manner. In December 2010, the Council was formally advised by letter from the Department of Education and Skills

that a decision had been taken to cap the number of SNAs at 10,575 WTE posts. The Council was requested to advance the development of proposals to manage the SNA numbers within that ceiling with a view to issuing the details of a new allocation process in the New Year. Since then the DES has issued a circular to schools signalling that revised arrangements will be put in place for the allocation of special needs assistant posts to schools (DES Circular 6/2011).

2.5.2 Home Tuition:

A Home Tuition Scheme is in place which is intended to provide an educational service to:

- Children with a significant medical condition which is likely to cause major disruption to their attendance at school on a continuing basis
- Children with special educational needs who are awaiting an appropriate educational placement, as an interim measure (DES Circular 75/2008). The maximum allocation of home tuition hours for children awaiting an appropriate placement is 20 hours per week subject to the appropriate school calendar.
- Children aged 2 ½ - 5 years who have been assessed under the Disability Act as having Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and requiring early educational intervention. In this case, allocation is limited to children who do not have a school based early intervention class placement available. The allocation for children with ASD up to 3 years of age is ten hours tuition per week and is intended to provide an individualised early educational intervention programme. This increases to 20 hours per week once the child is 3 years of age provided that he/she is not enrolled in an early intervention class. Where a child is attending a HSE early intervention service/pre-school, attendance will be taken into consideration in determining allocation. Home tuition ceases in the summer following a child's 5th birthday, or earlier where a place in an ASD class is available.

Home tuition is for educational intervention only and may not be used for therapeutic supports. The provision of therapeutic services such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychological services etc. are a matter for the HSE.

2.5.3 Other Support Services

In addition to the teaching and other staffing supports for pupils with disabilities within primary and post-primary schools, there is also special additional funding made available to support the pupils' participation in the education system. Provision is made

for adapted school buildings and specialist furniture and funding is also provided for the following:

- **Assistive Technology.**

The scheme for the provision of grants to schools towards the purchase of assistive technology for pupils with special educational needs is set out in DES Circular M14/05. The term 'assistive technology' refers to any item of equipment that can be used to improve the functional capability of a pupil with special educational needs that is of direct educational benefit to them. The scheme applies to pupils who have been diagnosed as having serious physical and/or communication disabilities of a degree which make ordinary communication through speech and/or writing impossible for them. In relation to pupils with Visual Impairment and Hearing impairment, the Visiting Teacher Service assesses and gives advice in relation to equipment commonly used, e.g. technology, large print, tapes, Braille machines, audiology equipment etc.

- **Special equipment**

Funding is provided to schools for the purchase of special equipment for pupils with special educational needs. €1.47 million was spent in 2010 on this equipment. (Source: DES, 2010)

- **Enhanced Capitation Grants**

These are payments made to schools in respect of all pupils attending special schools and special classes. These special rates vary, depending on the particular level of need involved. The current rates range from €512 to €986 per pupil. Capitation rates payable are outlined in Appendix 5.

- **Special Transport Provision**

The purpose of this scheme is to provide a reasonable level of transport service for children with a diagnosed disability and/or special educational need, who, because of the nature of their disability, may not be in a position to avail of a school bus service which would be time-tabled to pick up other children along the route of service. A child is eligible for School Transport if s/he is attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/ special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet the child's special educational needs under DES criteria. Where the provision of a reasonable level of transport service is not possible or

where the costs of providing such a service is prohibitive, grant-aid towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be provided by the Department.

In general, children are expected to avail of standard school transport arrangements or where possible to share special transport services. In exceptional cases, the DES will consider, based on information provided by the SENO, the provision of specific travel arrangements in circumstances where travel in the company of other children is not feasible.

Individual services are subject to periodic review and may be withdrawn and/or replaced with an alternative service/grant where local circumstances change e.g. other children apply for transport to the same class/school/unit, the child's independence increases to the extent that an individual service is no longer necessary or the cost of providing an individual service becomes prohibitive.

The Special Transport Scheme was the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2010 which is as yet unpublished.

2.5.4 Extended School Year

An extended school year is available for pupils with a severe/profound general learning disability or ASD. The programme provides four extra weeks tuition which can be either school or home based. Schools agree to take part in this scheme on a voluntary basis and where possible, the provision takes place in the school in which the child is enrolled. A home tuition grant is provided for eligible pupils who attend schools where the extended school year is not available.

2.5.5 Supports for Teachers of Pupils with Special Educational Needs: A Continuing Professional Development Framework

The Strategy Statement of the Department of Education and Science (DES) 2008-2010 includes a commitment to providing a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs and acknowledges the important role of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) (DES, 2008, pp.19-23). In this context the DES provides for a range of CPD opportunities for teachers of pupils with special educational needs that include distance learning models, face-to-face programmes, online learning, telephone and e-mail support, short seminars, in-school models of

support and post-graduate programmes. CPD opportunities are available for teachers of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream and special education settings.

The Teacher Education Section (TES) of the DES established the Special Education Support Service (SESS) in September 2003 as a CPD support service, which functions under the aegis of a DES Steering Committee. The remit of the SESS is to provide a quality service that is inclusive, promotes collaboration and co-operation and provides for equality of access to educational opportunities for all students with special educational needs. The service consolidates, co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in a variety of educational settings.

The SESS support scheme allows schools to identify their particular professional development needs and apply for advisory or financial support to the SESS. The key emphasis of the SESS is on encouraging school-led CPD, which has been identified as an important component in developing a CPD model for schools and is linked to school improvement priorities and individual teacher growth. The SESS provides CPD for teachers in all areas of special education. Currently the DES has commissioned an external evaluation of the work of the SESS, which will be completed in late 2011.

2.5.6 Postgraduate Programmes

As part of the CPD framework developed by the DES, teachers can access programmes of CPD relating to special educational needs. These programmes are as follows:

- **Combined Postgraduate Diploma Programme of Continuing Professional Development for Teachers involved in Learning Support & Special Education.**

The aim of this programme is to provide substantial theoretical and practical CPD for teachers working with pupils with special educational needs and for teachers working in recognised mainstream and other educational settings with those pupils requiring learning support teaching. Qualifications are awarded, by the Colleges/Universities involved, to participants who successfully complete the programme. This programme is currently being provided at seven colleges/universities (DES Circular 31/2010). There are 300 places available annually on this combined programme.

- **Graduate Certificate in the Education of Pupils with ASD for Teachers working with Pupils with ASD in Special Schools, Special Classes or as Resource Teachers in Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools.** The aim of this programme is to provide substantial theoretical and practical training for teachers working with pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders. The course is provided by St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and 18 places are available annually.
- **Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma Programme of CPD in Special Educational Needs (ASD) for Teachers.** The aim of this programme is to develop teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in working with pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. There are up to 25 places available on this programme annually. The programme is offered by St. Angela's College, Sligo in collaboration with the Special Education Support Service.

The provision of CPD by the DES is underpinned by the principles of flexibility and access in order to ensure that teachers are facilitated in accessing CPD opportunities that enable them to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to optimise the learning and teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

2.6 Health Supports for Children with Special Educational Needs

The provision of educational services and health related supports for children with disabilities is closely interconnected as many children with disabilities are reliant on the delivery of health services in order to participate in and derive benefit from the educational system. The Disability Act, 2005 complements the objectives of the EPSEN Act 2004 and supports its implementation. When the EPSEN Act 2004 is fully implemented, a high level of co-operation between the Education and Health sectors is envisaged so as to ensure the delivery of an effective and co-ordinated service to children with special educational needs, in both mainstream and special school settings.

Health, Primary Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) Services and personal social services are provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for people with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities or autism. Some of these services are provided directly by the HSE while many others are provided by voluntary organisations funded by the HSE. Each of the four HSE areas is responsible for providing services to the people in its area. The level of service varies considerably

throughout the country. Local service delivery is overseen by disability services managers.

2.6.1 Children aged 0-6 years:

As previously stated in section 2.2.4, the Department of Health and Children has responsibility for the:

1. Pre-school inspection service
2. Assessment of Need for health and education services for the 0-5 years age group (under the Disability Act, 2005).

Part 2 of the Disability Act, 2005 commenced in June 2007 for children under the age of five years. Under this Act, children under the age of five years have a right to apply through their parents or guardians for an assessment of their health and educational needs arising from a disability. The Act requires that the HSE authorises Assessment Officers (AOs) to arrange, oversee and coordinate an assessment of need and to produce a report based on the outcome of the assessment. The assessment must be carried out without regard to resource constraints or the capacity to provide the service in question. Assessment Officers are independent in their statutory function. Where an assessment report determines the need for health or education services, a Liaison Officer, formerly called case managers, must arrange for the preparation of a service statement, which specifies the health services to be provided and the period of time within which they are to be provided. Service statements are resource dependant and can only contain recommendations for services that the HSE has resources to provide. Education services are not specified in the service statement as these are the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills.

If a need for educational provision is identified during an assessment, the matter must be referred to the NCSE, to a school principal, or for assessment under the EPSSEN Act, 2004. As the relevant sections of the EPSSEN Act, 2004 relating to the assessment process (sections 3 and 4 of the Act) have not as yet been commenced, the inputs from the education sector are provided by the NCSE in co-operation with the NEPS under Section 8(3) of the Disability Act, 2005. The non-implementation of these sections of the EPSSEN Act, 2004 means that the point of contact for school-going children remains with the health sector rather than the education sector.

There are many health supports generally available to children in this age group; including early intervention teams (see below), the public health structure which

includes the public health nurse service, dental services and therapies including speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.

2.6.2 HSE Teams:

The HSE has established a number of locally based multi-disciplinary teams to act as a support service to children with disabilities. The service is either provided directly by the HSE or through voluntary bodies. These teams include:

- Early Intervention teams for children from 0-6 years with childhood developmental delay or disabilities. The child's needs are assessed and a service plan is drawn up.
- Children's Disability Teams, which provide a comprehensive service to children aged 6-18 with a physical, sensory or intellectual disability may also be available.
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Teams which provide multi-disciplinary assessment and intervention to children and adolescents with serious emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The above teams may include a doctor or community paediatrician, clinical psychologist, nurse, occupational therapist, early intervention specialists, physiotherapist, social worker, speech and language therapist, psychologist, psychiatrists as appropriate and available.

A key HSE objective is to develop **Primary Care Teams** which provide services in the local community. This will give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams, including general practitioners, nurses, occupational therapists etc. The HSE has indicated that there will be 530 Primary Care Teams developed by 2011.

2.6.3 Primary Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) Services

People with disabilities can avail of a range of Primary Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) Services. In relation to this paper, the relevant services for school aged children include psychological services, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services. These services are made available through the local structures of the HSE or through voluntary organisations on contract to the HSE. There can often be long waiting lists for these services. The services are delivered in the local health centres or in schools. However it is noted that the entitlement to access a service is determined by where the child lives rather than where they attend school.

3 Examination of Research Studies and Other Documentation: Role of Special Schools and Classes

3.1 Introduction

This section of the paper examines recent research evidence relating to the role of special schools and classes in the education of children with special educational needs. In particular it draws on the findings of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) undertaken by St. Patrick's College of Education on behalf of the National Council of Special Education. The final report was submitted to the NCSE in October 2009 and subsequently published on the NCSE website.

This section also draws on the findings of four international reviews of the literature commissioned by the NCSE:

1. International Review of the Literature of Evidence of Best Practice Provision in the Education of Persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. (Parsons, S. et al, 2009).
2. Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children: An International Review. (Marschark, M., Spencer E., 2009).
3. International Review of the Literature of Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Children. (Douglas, G. et al, 2009).
4. International Review of the Literature of Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Children with Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Difficulties (Cooper P. and Jacobs, B., 2010).

3.2 Future Role of Special Schools

3.2.1 Continuum of Provision

The EPSEN Act, 2004 explicitly states (Section 2) that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs unless to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for the other children with whom the child is

to be educated. This commitment to an inclusive education, as stated in the Act, is consistent with international agreements such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990) and the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (2006). These international conventions are outlined in Appendix 1 of this paper.

In line with the EPSEN Act, 2004 it is current Government policy that children with special educational needs should be included in mainstream schools to the greatest extent practicable. In order to achieve this, a continuum of educational provision is in place for children with special educational needs ranging from full-time enrolment in mainstream classes to full-time enrolment in special schools with other options available, as necessary, on the continuum. This policy position is in accordance with international practice in the education of children with special education needs which calls for inclusion in the mainstream to be regarded as the norm, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise. (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994, p.11).

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993) outlined a range of twelve options which might be included as part of a continuum of provision and which are still worthy of consideration. These include:

1. Full-time placement in an ordinary class, without additional support.
2. Full-time placement in an ordinary class, with additional support in the class.
3. Full-time placement in an ordinary class with withdrawal for short regular tutorial sessions.
4. Part-time placement in a special class, spending more time in the ordinary class.
5. Part-time placement in a special class, spending less time in the ordinary class.
6. Full-time placement in a special class.
7. Part-time placement in a special school, spending more time in the ordinary school.
8. Part-time placement in a special school, spending less time in the ordinary school
9. Full-time placement in a day special school.
10. Full-time placement in a 5 day residential special school.
11. Full-time placement in a 7-day residential special school.

It is interesting that the SERC report envisaged that pupils would be able to receive part of their education in special schools and part in ordinary schools, heralding a flexibility that was later reflected in the EPSEN Act, 2004.

The SERC report also predicted that many special schools would enrol pupils from different categories of disability and that these schools would become more like 'regional multi-category special schools, serving pupils with several types of significant special educational needs'. The Review Committee welcomed this predicted development provided that such schools were properly planned, monitored and funded. The Committee also suggested that in the future special schools could develop to provide out-reach services for pupils in the ordinary school system.

The core commitment in the EPSEN Act, 2004 is the right of children to be educated in an inclusive environment. The Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) recognises that the challenge for the future is to reconceptualise special education provision having regard to the concept of inclusive education in the EPSEN Act, 2004.

The question then arises as to whether or not the placement of children with special educational needs in special schools and classes is consistent with the vision of an inclusive education system as envisaged under the EPSEN Act, 2004. While the EPSEN Act, 2004 clearly envisages that the vast majority of children with special educational needs will be educated in mainstream settings alongside their peers who do not have such needs, it does identify two specific exceptions to this rule. The first exception is where this is not in the best interests of the child as determined by an assessment carried out under the EPSEN Act; and the second, where it is inconsistent with the effective provision of education to the other children with whom the child is to be educated.

The exceptions cited provide a pragmatic acknowledgement that the education of a child with special educational needs may not always take place in mainstream classes in mainstream schools, and therefore a variety of provision types will be required to meet pupil needs. Specifically the EPSEN Act, 2004 (section 20 (1) (g)) requires the NCSE to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available as required in relation to each type of disability.

Some forms of special provision should form part of this continuum. The notion of a continuum, rather than clearly segregated types of provision, is in line with the spirit of the Act's commitment to inclusion, and seems to imply a more fluid approach to pupil

placement, more contact between provision types and the potential of progression along a continuum based on the needs of the child. Norwich (2008) proposes the concept of 'flexible interacting continua of provision' in which the different options offered within the continuum are interconnected. This differs from the traditional one-dimensional approach in setting limits to the options that are included. In the Norwich model only schools that are linked to ordinary schools are included in the continuum of provision in order to preserve a balance between common and separate provision. In addition curriculum aims should be connected to the general common curriculum in order to balance common and differentiated curriculum content (Norwich, 2008).

In 2003, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE, 2003) examined trends in provision in eighteen European countries. The resulting report concluded that countries could be grouped into three categories according to their policy on including pupils with special educational needs:

- The first category included countries where policy and practices were focussed on the inclusion of almost all pupils within mainstream education. This category included Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway.
- The second category included countries that operated a multi-track approach to inclusion and offered a variety of services between the mainstream and special needs education systems. This category included Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland and the United Kingdom.
- The third category included countries that had two distinct education systems in which pupils with special educational needs were placed in special schools or special classes and did not generally follow the mainstream curriculum. This category included Switzerland and Belgium.

At that time it was difficult to classify countries such as Germany and the Netherlands as they had been positioned in the third category were but were in the process of moving towards the multi-track system.

3.2.2 Future Role of Special Schools within the Continuum of Provision

In Ireland, the movement toward the greater inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools has had consequences for both the role of special schools and the make up of their pupil populations. The main implications identified to date in the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) have been:

- a growing mismatch between special school designations and their pupil cohorts. In relation to this finding, Council notes that any perceived 'mismatch' was brought about by an expansion in the enrolment of many special schools which sought to respond to and cater for a wider range of special educational needs in addition to the categories specified in their original designation. This expansion in enrolment was supported by the Inspectorate and additional staffing in accordance with the prevailing Parent Teacher Ratios (PTR) for special classes and schools was allocated by the Special Education Section of the DES.
- an increase in the number of pupils enrolled in special schools with more complex needs
- an apparent growth in the numbers of pupils with mild general learning disabilities transferring to special schools after as they reached post-primary age
- a need for greater contact and co-operation between mainstream and special schools
- an expectation of a changed role for special schools in response to these issues.

When the evidence from policy and research literature is analysed two main reasons emerge for maintaining special schools into the future –

- provision for pupils with significant and complex needs who cannot be catered for in mainstream schools and
- collaboration with and/or provision of support and advice to mainstream schools (Ware et al, 2009).

In relation to the provision for pupils with complex needs, the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found evidence of significant levels of complexity of need currently present in special schools in Ireland.

In seeking to understand this finding and its implications for the future of special schools in Ireland, it is important to reach an agreed understanding of the term 'complex needs'. The authors of the report suggest that the term 'complex needs' can usefully be thought of as encompassing both breadth and depth of need (citing Rosengard, Laing, Ridley and Hunter, 2007). In practice, this means that pupils with complex needs are those who have several different needs, often requiring support from a number of different services to ensure that these needs are met (breadth of

need). For instance, this might include pupils assessed as having a moderate general learning disability and a sensory disability (breadth of need).

The term 'complex needs' also includes pupils assessed as having a severe or profound level of disability (depth of need). Examples include pupils with severe /profound intellectual disabilities or pupils with a moderate general learning disability with associated seriously challenging behaviour or children with severe visual impairment.

While some of these children may require special school or special class placement, it must be noted that they might also be included in mainstream educational settings depending on the level and extent of their needs and the views of their parents/guardians in relation to their choice of school.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) cites a number of examples to illustrate the increasing complexity of pupil profiles to be found currently in Irish special schools. For instance, the report states that in 2007 there were 2,336 pupils enrolled in twenty eight schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. Out of this total number, there were 193 pupils whose primary disability is moderate GLD, 63 pupils whose primary disability is autism/autistic spectrum disorders and 32 pupils with Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) /Severe EBD. These same schools include a number of pupils with two or more disabilities – in this case the report found 161 pupils with multiple disabilities enrolled across the twenty eight schools for pupils with mild GLD.

The report found that schools for moderate general learning disabilities also cater for pupils with complexity of need in terms of depth as many of these schools had enrolled children with severe and profound GLD. Across 29 schools for pupils with moderate GLD the report found 386 pupils enrolled with severe and profound GLD and 153 pupils enrolled with ASD. In effect this means that the report found that special schools are already catering for a wide range of special educational needs, both in terms of breadth (moderate GLD, severe and profound GLD, autism spectrum disorder) and depth of complexity (severe and profound GLD).

A recent review of SNA provision in special schools by SENOs supports these findings (Report on NCSE Review of SNA Allocation to Schools, April 2009 – March 2010). An analysis of SENO reports (June 2010) revealed that across 27 schools for children with

mild general learning disabilities (reviewed by that date) there were 2,341 pupils enrolled. Sixty percent of these pupils (1,407) had been assessed with mild general learning disabilities as their primary disability. The remaining 40% of pupils had been assessed in other categories which included ASD, mild/moderate GLD, moderate GLD, moderate GLD with ASD, severe/profound GLD, borderline GLD, low average IQ, EBD and physical disability. A very small number of children had been placed in special schools with no diagnosis of disability.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) concludes that special schools are catering for a group of pupils with complex needs and that they appear to have some success in doing so. The authors acknowledge that the evidence for this finding is limited in the study. However, they recommend that special schools should be enabled to continue to cater for this group of pupils in the absence of current evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these pupils.

A secondary role emerging from the research findings is that special schools might be developed as centres for the provision of support and advice to mainstream schools (Ware et al, 2009, p.38). In order to provide support to out-reach to the mainstream special school teachers must feel prepared for such a role and will require training to undertake such a role (McTague, 2005, cited in Ware et al, 2009). The issues of the provision of support and advice to mainstream schools, is addressed in Section 4 of this report.

3.2.3 Special Classes in Primary Schools

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found that in May 2006, there were 400 official special classes attached to 230 Primary schools (Ware et al, 2009). There were 2,499 pupils enrolled in 385 of these classes for which pupil numbers were given. Just over half the schools (55.2%) had only one class attached, while 15 (6.5%) had four or more special classes.

Current NCSE records (Source: NCSE December 2010) indicate that there is now a total of 503 special classes in place, of which 430 are attached to 264 primary schools (see table 4, section 2.5).

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) notes that the proportion of pupils with more complex needs in special

classes appears considerably lower than in special schools. However, in common with special schools, special classes originally designated for pupils with Mild GLD cater for a diverse range of needs. Classes designated for pupils with other disabilities cater almost exclusively for those pupils for whom they are designated.

The age trend in special classes for pupils with mild GLD appears to replicate that in special schools for this category of pupil. Like special schools, special classes for pupils with Mild GLD attached to primary schools have a number of older pupils including some of post-primary age. Some pupils in classes for pupils with Moderate GLD are also of post-primary age.

3.2.4 Special classes in post-primary schools

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) established that forty-one post-primary schools reported that they had one or more special classes officially designated as such by the DES. These forty-one schools had a total of fifty-five special classes between them. A majority of schools had only one officially designated special class.

Current NCSE records indicate that there are now 73 special classes attached to 61 post-primary schools in place (Source: NCSE, December 2010).

Post-primary schools also used resource hours allocated to the school to set up classes for pupils who in their view would benefit from placement in a smaller class group. The report referred to such classes as 'unofficial special classes' and did not include data from these classes in their figures as the researchers found it difficult to interpret data returned from schools in relation to these classes. While the report referred to these classes as 'unofficial', it must be noted that post-primary schools are entitled to deploy resource hours allocated to the school in this manner and that the establishment of such classes is in line with official DES policy.

The report found that the most common type of class recorded by post-primary schools was that described as 'other', a type of class which typically contained pupils with a variety of different categories of special educational needs. This is in contrast to the numbers reported for primary schools where all classes came under a particular designation and there was no category of 'other'.

The lack of continuity in provision of special classes between the primary and post-primary sector emerged as a major issue for participants (teachers, parents and principals) in the study. However, it was not clear from the study whether this finding implied that participants viewed placement in a special class as something fixed or whether they viewed the placement as an intervention or support to the child with the possibility of eventual inclusion in mainstream classes at some point in the future.

3.3 Role of Special Classes in Mainstream Schools as part of the Continuum of Provision

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found that special classes were perceived as an effective form of provision by parents, teachers, principals and those who made submissions. There was therefore a concomitant widespread level of support among the above mentioned participants for the future role of special classes as part of a continuum of provision. Participants in the study (Ware et al, 2009) perceived special classes to have the following advantages:

- Facilitation of inclusion within the mainstream class
- Provision of a 'safe haven' for some pupils
- A favourable pupil teacher ratio
- Enabling pupils to remain in their local area or not too far from it
- Enabling flexibility in the organisation of teaching and curriculum provision.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) suggests that there was little evidence in the national or international literature that supports one model of special educational provision as being more effective than another. A report of the UK Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2006) suggests that the most important contributory factor in the effectiveness of provision for pupils with special educational needs is not its type but the quality of the provision. This report found that the most effective provision was distributed equally between mainstream and special schools when certain factors were in place. The characteristics that made schools effective were ethos, provision of specialist staff and focussed professional development for all staff. However, better or outstanding provision was more often found in resourced mainstream schools and these schools were found to be proportionately more effective than others. In resourced mainstream provision pupils typically spend some of their time being taught by specialist teachers and some time in mainstream classes with their peers. The report points out that pupils with even the most severe and complex needs were able to make outstanding progress in all types of

settings. Pupils with EBD were least likely to receive effective support and Pupils Referral Units were the least successful settings.

A later Ofsted review, conducted between April 2009 and March 2010, found that no one model – such as special schools, full inclusion in mainstream settings, or specialist units co-located with mainstream settings – worked better than any other. Effective practices were seen across a wide range of models of provision (Ofsted, 2010).

Another study (Myklebust, 2006) comprised a longitudinal study of almost 500 young people with special educational needs in Norway over a period of six years. This analysis focused on the attainments of these students during their time in upper secondary education and compared attainment in ordinary classes to attainment in special classes. The majority of pupils were between the ages of 17 and 23 years. Pupils with special educational needs in Norway are allowed five years of upper secondary education, one or two years more than pupils on ordinary terms. The ordinary classes were said to have ‘special adapted teaching solely within the framework of ordinary classes’ and the special classes had a reduced class size. The study found that the attainment of pupils with special educational needs was higher in ordinary classes and this also led to better life outcomes (jobs, training, independence etc).

Students were divided into quartiles according to measured levels of functional ability. The study compared students with similar functional levels receiving their education in different types of classes. In each type of class, the level of competence attainment decreased with declining functional abilities among the students, as might be expected. However, among students in each of the three highest quartiles of functional ability, the educational outcome was better for those in ordinary rather than special classes and this relationship remained when the effects of other variables were controlled.

Myklebust (2006) concludes that the structural organisation of schools, such as placement in certain types of classes, appears to have a canalising effect that influences competence attainment of adolescents with special educational needs, whereas in ordinary classes they are met with expectations to achieve from teachers as well as from peers.

The International Review of the Literature of Evidence of Best Practice Provision in the Education of Persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Parsons et al, 2009) noted significant increases in autism provision in Ireland in recent years. This takes the form

of special classes set up within both mainstream and special schools. However this report also pointed out that there was little independent research in Ireland or elsewhere to assess the impact of autism specific settings on individual outcomes. The authors question whether this development has come about because these settings are perceived to offer a more “appropriate and inclusive” education and/or because staff in mainstream contexts are perceived to lack relevant and specific knowledge and skills in supporting pupils with ASD.

The report (Parsons et al, 2009) recommended that more research on the effectiveness of placement in autism-specific classes is required, together with data on how these operated in practice regarding inclusion. The authors emphasised, however, that the current lack of formal, published evaluation evidence about autism-specific provision does not mean that such provision should be regarded as inappropriate or unwelcome (by teachers, parents or pupils). Rather they view it as a good example of educational practice developing at the ‘coal face’ for good reasons, and in response to specific needs, and outpacing formal research and evaluation.

The authors concluded that more empirical research is needed on what constitutes an effective and appropriate education for individuals with ASD in terms of setting and intervention. These findings in relation to settings for Autism are of particular interest in light of the fact that currently 54% of special classes in mainstream primary schools and 74% of special classes in mainstream post-primary schools are designated for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Source: NCSE, December 2010).

The three international literature reviews commissioned by NCSE (Marschark and Spencer, 2009, Parsons et al 2009, Douglas et al 2009) provided evidence of ways in which support can be provided to pupils with special educational needs in mainstream school settings. This included special classes but also other models for such provision e.g. resource centres in mainstream schools or the provision of additional curriculum/resources to facilitate access to mainstream curriculum (e.g. mobility and independence education for visually impaired children, sign language interpreters for deaf children and technical materials such as low vision aids, large print books etc). The other issue identified across reviews was the imperative to have teachers who are adequately trained to teach children with special educational needs.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) recommended that special classes should continue to be part of placement

options, in the absence of evidence that the needs of all pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools can be met through the GAM and resource teacher service. In particular, the report recommends that the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of pupils with mild general learning disabilities should be evaluated before reducing the option of special class placement for these pupils in the system. The report suggested that an option worth assessing would be the expansion of alternatives under the GAM to include part time placement in an integrated special class/resource room for pupils whose needs are not being fully met in the mainstream class. This would have the advantage of preserving a continuum of provision, and is a form of provision found to be effective elsewhere (Ware et al, 2009, p. 194). An alternative option to part time placement in a special class (not considered in this report) is for schools to use teaching resources under the GAM to form small groups of pupils with similar special educational needs for a period of the day, as required. These pupils would then be included in their mainstream classes for the remainder of the day. The possibility of this option has always been available to schools under the operation of the General Allocation Model.

The report identified the continuity of special classes between primary and post-primary levels as an issue which should be immediately addressed. It recommended that all future special classes should be set up as part of a coherent area plan at primary and post-primary level, giving consideration to the type of special classes required, the age ranges of the pupils and their gender. Finally the report concludes that special classes should continue to be an alternative solution to special schools where the demographics would not support such a school.

As part of the terms of reference for the report (Ware et al, 2009), the authors were asked to review the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education as described in Section 2 of the EPSEN Act, 2004 (Gov. of Ireland, 2004). However, the authors did not provide any detailed consideration concerning how the recommendation in relation to the ongoing provision of special classes for children with special educational needs fits with the ambitions of the EPSEN Act, 2004 in relation to the provision of an inclusive education.

In considering the above recommendations of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009), it is important to bear in mind that there may be some emerging evidence indicating that resourced mainstream

provision offers certain advantages to pupils with special educational needs over and above full-time placement in special school or class provision. It must be noted that under the current DES staffing allocation for Irish mainstream schools children placed in special classes are counted twice – once for special class staffing and a second time for mainstream staffing (Circular 9/99). This means that every child in a special class has de facto a place in a mainstream class. Therefore full-time placement in a special class without inclusion opportunities should only happen when it is clearly in the interests of the child not to be included in a mainstream class for any portion of the day/week which might be expected to form the exception rather than the rule.

While research into the impact of special classes on pupil outcomes has not been a dominant theme in special education research, there is evidence internationally to show how important other specialist supports (assistive technology, Sign Language, Braille etc.) are for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream settings. There is also evidence supporting the need for teachers to be adequately trained to teach children with special educational needs.

3.4 Designation of Special Schools and Classes

3.4.1 Designation of Special Schools

Based on an international review of the literature, the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) clearly established that one future role for a special school is to cater for pupils with severe and complex needs. The report provided evidence that special schools in Ireland have already expanded their remit to cater for a wide range of special educational needs in addition to those categories specified according to their designation. As already stated, this finding is also supported by SENO experience in the gathering of data pertaining to their work with special schools.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) is equivocal about whether special schools should cater for a wide range of categories of need, rather than cater exclusively for pupils from a specific category. The authors found a trend both in Ireland and internationally towards the development of two distinct types of special school, covering both of these possibilities. They recommended that in the absence of evidence favouring one of these types of special school a range of special school provision should continue to be available catering both for specific categories of need and for a range of needs. The

authors acknowledged that it may be over-simplistic to think in terms of schools catering only for specific categories of need, given the findings of their study in relation to the population of pupils enrolled in Irish special schools, as referred to in section 3.2.1 above.

Finally, the authors noted that in rural areas, special schools currently cater for pupils with a wide range of needs, due to demographic considerations.

3.4.2 Designation of Special Classes

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) noted that the majority of special classes provided for pupils with somewhat less complex needs than special schools with the same designation. Generally, special classes in primary schools served the needs of pupils within the designated category for whom the class was established. The report did suggest that special classes in post-primary schools were not always operating on a category specific basis.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) recommended that the option of special class placement for children with mild general learning disabilities be retained until the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of these pupils is evaluated. In making this recommendation, it appears that the authors did not consider that special classes should cater only for pupils assessed as having complex or multiple needs, as defined in this paper. A question arises from the authors' recommendation which concerns how the placement of children with mild general learning disability in special schools and classes can be reconciled with the principle of inclusive education as envisioned under the EPSEN Act, 2004. In considering these matters, it should be recognised that some children with mild general learning disability may have complex educational and care needs arising from a combination of their low intellectual ability alongside associated language, social and behavioural needs and /or the presence of other conditions.

The report did not directly address the question as to whether special classes should cater for specified categories of special educational needs or for a broader/full range of special educational needs.

3.5 Placement of Children with Special Educational Needs

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) confirmed that it was generally the case that children with the most complex needs were placed in special schools, with special classes catering for pupils with less complex needs. There was correspondingly less diversity of needs in special classes than in special schools. However, in particular circumstances, there can be overlap between the levels of need of pupils who receive their education in special schools and those who are educated in special classes. This overlap might occur in a situation where the demographics do not support the establishment of a category specific special school. This may arise in rural areas of sparse population where the establishment in local schools of special classes for pupils with low incidence disabilities provides an alternative to pupils travelling long distances to special schools.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) also found an increasing number of admissions to schools for pupils with mild GLD at post-primary age. It noted that the majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with mild GLD are now of post-primary age. There was some evidence in the report that those who move from mainstream to special school at this juncture were more likely to have additional needs and behavioural issues as well as mild GLD.

The report specifically raised the issue of how best to retain post-primary aged pupils with mild GLD in school and how to provide access to appropriate certification and other courses for them. It was suggested that some evidence from their current study showed that special schools were successfully retaining post-primary aged pupils with MGLD and noted that in some special schools a range of appropriate post-primary programmes were available in a flexible manner. It should be noted that such programmes are also available to pupils with special educational needs in mainstream post-primary schools.

In its recent review of SNA posts in special schools on behalf of the DES (NCSE, 2010), the NCSE brought a number of issues regarding pupils' enrolment in these schools to the attention of the DES including the facts that:

- Some pupils were enrolled with special educational needs other than that expected by the category of special educational need sanctioned for that school

- A small number of pupils were enrolled in special schools without any professional reports to indicate that the pupils had a special educational need or without a professional recommendation for special school placement
- Some pupils were enrolled with a borderline mild general learning disability without any evidence of significant additional need (DES Circular 38/2010).

It is important however to note that many of the above situations evolved over a period of years as special schools extended their enrolment as part of their effort to respond to the needs of children and parents within their local communities. Over these years, special schools provided educational placements for many children whose needs at that time could not be met in mainstream schools. Additional staffing was provided by the Department to enable the schools to cater for the expanded enrolment.

The DES has recently engaged in a collaborative process through which transitional arrangements for special schools were set out to apply for the 2010/2011 school year and through which the issues outlined above will be further addressed for the school year 2011/2012.

3.6 Identification and Assessment

Assessment of children with special educational needs is undertaken by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or by HSE professionals or by professionals working in private practice. In order for a child to be placed in a special school or class, professional assessments must provide clear evidence to demonstrate that the child has a special educational need (DES Circular 38/2010). In the case of children with a borderline mild general learning difficulty, it must be demonstrated that the child has additional learning needs alongside the assessed category of disability. The professional report must also take into account the extent to which the child is making progress in his/her current learning environment and the other existing support available to the child in his/her school.

To date there are no formal, agreed criteria to assist schools, parents and professionals in discerning which children are best placed in mainstream schools and which are best placed in special classes or special schools. The EPSEN Act, 2004 suggests that such decisions should be based on the child's best interests and the effective provision of education to the other children with whom the child is to be educated. The Act also provides for a detailed system of individualised assessment and education planning and review which will provide a basis for decision making

regarding the placement of children with special educational needs. However the sections of the Act dealing with individualised assessment and education planning and review are not yet commenced.

The NEPS Continuum of Support (DES, 2007) recommends a graduated approach to the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs. This approach reflects the reality that special educational needs can occur on a continuum from mild to severe and from transitory to enduring. NEPS psychologists support schools in operating a continuum approach to assessment and intervention, developed from the NEPS Model of Service leaflet (NEPS, 2003) and the staged approach outlined in Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005). Guidelines have been produced for schools in applying this model in primary and post-primary schools and also with primary school pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The International Review of Diagnostic and Assessment Procedures (Desforges and Lindsay, 2009) makes important and far-reaching recommendations for the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs which are worthy of further detailed consideration and examination. It specifically recommends a framework for the assessment of special educational needs based on an interactionist / ecological model (also called a bio psychosocial model). This requires the use of a comprehensive range of assessment methods and tools to facilitate the development of a broad understanding of how the young person is interacting with different aspects of the educational environment. Of particular relevance to this paper is the recommendation that the assessment of severe and complex special educational needs should always require the provision of educational, psychological advice and medical advice where appropriate.

3.7 Role of parents in the choice of school

Article 42 of the Irish Constitution (Gov. Of Ireland, 1937) recognises the Family as the primary and natural educator of the child. The State cannot oblige parents to send their children to schools established by the state or to any particular type of school designated by the state, in violation of their conscience and lawful preference. The State does however have a responsibility to ensure that children receive a certain minimum education.

It is clear therefore that parental choice is an important factor in determining the placement of a child with special educational needs. Parents should be informed of all

options available to them when making this choice. SENOs and other professionals have an important role to play in supporting parents to make an informed choice regarding the enrolment of their child in a school.

While parents have the right to choose a school for their child, children with special educational needs are eligible to avail of the School Transport Scheme if they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/ special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet the child's special educational needs under DES criteria.

The right of parents as set out in the relevant sections of the EPSEN Act 2004, when commenced, to contribute to their child's assessment and to the formulation of the education plan as well as to receive information related to the assessment and educational planning processes will strengthen the opportunity for parental involvement in the education of children with special educational needs.

Section 10 of the EPSEN Act, 2004, when commenced, may further strengthen the rights of parents to choose a school for their child. This section of the Act authorises Council to designate a school which a child with special educational needs is to attend. In making this designation, Council must have regard to the needs of the child concerned, the wishes of the child's parents and the capacity of the school to accommodate the child.

3.8 Equitable access to curriculum and certification options

The White Paper on Education (1995) defines the term "curriculum" as "encompassing the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values" (Gov. of Ireland, 1995, p.19). This is a broad definition which includes those concepts, skills, areas of knowledge and attitudes which children learn at school as part of their personal and social development.

The Primary School Curriculum (revised in 1999) is designed to nurture and develop the child in all dimensions of his/her life – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. It comprises seven curriculum areas, Language, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Arts Education, Physical Education, and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The development of Religious and Ethical Curricula are the responsibility of the school Patrons.

The curriculum, as devised, recognises that all children, including children with special educational needs /disabilities have a right of access to the highest-quality education appropriate to their needs (Gov. of Ireland, 1999 p. 29). Primary schools are encouraged to develop a policy on assessment which provides for assessment *for* learning (information to guide a pupil's future learning) and assessment *of* learning (information on a pupil's achievements at that point in time) (NCCA, 2007).

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, the minimum school leaving age is 16 years, or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later. The vast majority of pupils make the transition from primary to post-primary education and complete at least three years of post-primary education. The aim of the junior cycle is to ensure that pupils continue to experience a broad, balanced and coherent programme of study across a wide range of curriculum areas in order to prepare them for transition to senior cycle education.

At Junior Cycle, pupils encounter an educational programme that covers eight Areas of Experience, including Language Literature and Communication, Mathematical Studies and Applications, Science and Technology, Social, Political and Environmental Education, Arts Education, Physical Education, Religious and Moral Education, and Guidance, Counselling and Pastoral Care. The areas of experience are intended to form a continuum and to provide a progression from the primary school curriculum.

Junior Cycle (lower secondary), is followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle depending on whether the optional Transition Year is taken. Transition Year immediately follows the Junior Cycle and can provide an opportunity for pupils to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations.

During the final two years of Senior Cycle pupils take one of three programmes, each leading to a State examination. The aims and objectives of the three programmes have a different focus and assessment procedures also vary across the programmes. It is important to note that approximately 9,000 pupils leave school each year before taking a Leaving certificate (Byrne and Smyth, 2010, ESRI).

The principles underlying education for pupils with special educational needs are the same as those relevant to all pupils. While the vast majority of pupils transfer from primary to post-primary education, this is not the case for post-primary aged pupils enrolled in special schools as they continue to attend special schools, which are

designated as national schools, throughout their education. It is important that these pupils have access to post-primary programmes equal to their peers in mainstream settings and as appropriate to their ability level. While Ireland has a centrally devised curriculum, there is still a strong emphasis on school and classroom planning. The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA, 2007) has produced curricular guidelines for teachers (www.ncca.ie) which are designed to assist teachers and others in meeting the needs of pupils with general learning disabilities.

In its Implementation Report (2006), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) recognises that one of the challenges raised by the concept of an appropriate education is how:

“to describe and develop an education for those with special educational needs that is strongly linked to the curriculum, which produces meaningful outcomes and which delivers benefits to those with special educational needs which are not separate from, nor devalued in any way relative to, those available to their peers” (NCSE, 2006).

This view of an appropriate education is in line with the current internationally held belief that pupils with special educational needs should have access to a curriculum that is broad, balanced, relevant, differentiated, progressive and continuous. However, is not so clear whether there is agreement regarding what these terms actually mean, in practice, for children with special educational needs or even whether the answer to this question is the same for children and young people across all categories of special educational needs. There is also a need to strike a balance between mainstream curricula, developmental curricula and additional curricular areas according to the strengths, needs and circumstances of the particular pupil (NCCA, 1999).

In the case of *O'Donoghue v Minister for Health* (1993), Judge O'Hanlon found that the State had a constitutional obligation under Article 42.4 to:

“.... Provide for free basic elementary education of all children and that this involves giving each child such advice, instruction and teaching as will enable him or her to make the best possible use of his or her inherent and potential capabilities, physical, mental and moral **however limited these capacities may be.**”

This case is of fundamental importance in establishing that the State has a duty to provide for free primary education to children with special educational needs and that

such education should be in accordance with their needs. In the case of *Sinnott v Minister for Education (2001)*, the High Court found that the State had failed to provide the applicant with free primary education in accordance with his needs and awarded him damages for past and future pain and suffering. Under appeal to the Supreme Court however, it was found that the State's Constitutional obligation to provide for free primary education applies to children only, not adults, and ceases at the age of 18.

The broad aims of education for pupils with special educational needs reflect those that are relevant to all pupils and include enabling a pupil to:

- live a full life and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual through access to an appropriate, broad and balanced curriculum
- function as independently as possible in society through the provision of such educational supports as are necessary to realise that potential
- continue learning in adult life. (NCCA, 2007)

In practice, the learning needs of children in special schools are widely diverse in nature, range and extent. For children with severe and profound general learning disabilities, learning in the first instance may involve becoming aware that a world outside themselves exists, learning to attend to that world and at a later time learning to respond to that world. Many of these pupils may need to learn how to communicate intentionality or to indicate a preference through pressing a switch which stands for 'yes' or 'no'. They need to be educated in a responsive classroom where their efforts to initiate and sustain communication is acknowledged and reinforced and where they are given plentiful opportunities to practice their communication skills. For these children, there are times when the lines are blurred between what might traditionally be regarded as 'education' and 'care', with every interaction posing an opportunity for learning and development to take place. The area of SPHE is of particular importance in this regard.

While not a homogenous group, pupils with moderate general learning disabilities need to learn how to attend and respond appropriately to people and activities in their environment and be encouraged to move from a passive to a responsive and interactive role (NCCA, 2007). There needs to be an emphasis on the teaching of life skills (including listening, speaking, basic reading and writing), personal and social skills (including basic hygiene, feeding, dressing, cooking), physical skills, basic numeracy and literacy. While the goal for all pupils is to achieve the maximum level of independence possible, a significant percentage of these pupils may always require

some level of support into their adult lives and may never achieve fully independent living.

Pupils with mild general learning disabilities need support to engage with the mainstream curriculum in a meaningful manner and to make progress over the period of primary and post-primary education (NCCA, 2007). Many of these pupils will be capable of achieving some level of success in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. The majority of these pupils should be able to lead independent lives when they leave school.

The Implementation Report identifies a number of issues which arise in relation to the experience of the curriculum, as currently delivered (NCSE, 2006, p. 94):

- a. Many children with special educational needs do not have access to an education based on the curriculum at first and second levels.
- b. Relatively few children with special educational needs sit the State examinations and achieve certificated outcomes from the education system
- c. Many children with special educational needs leave formal education without the skills to participate in economic, social and cultural activity or to live fulfilled lives independently in the community.
- d. Few children with special educational needs progress to meaningful further and continuing education beyond age 18.
- e. Outcomes for children with special educational needs are not systematically reported or tracked.

In relation to individualised planning, the Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) recognised that difficulties exist in relation to the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for children with special educational needs. It noted that:

1. not all children with special educational needs have IEPs
2. the linkages between IEPs and the curriculum are not sufficiently well understood
3. teachers are not sufficiently trained in the IEP process
4. parents are not sufficiently engaged in the IEP process

It must be acknowledged that substantial progress has been made since 2006 in many of these areas. Special classes have been established for children with severe and profound learning disabilities and for children with autistic spectrum disorders to facilitate their access to an education based on the curriculum at first and second

levels. The Vocational Educational and Training Sector has also had an impact on supporting pupils with special educational needs to progress to meaningful further and continuing education beyond age 18.

The TES (through the SESS and postgraduate programmes of study at Colleges of Education and /universities) has provided considerable training opportunities for teachers to assist their knowledge and understanding of individualised education planning and differentiation of the curriculum. The NCSE produced Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process in May 2006 (NCSE, 2006) which set out guidance on the preparation, implementation and review of the Education Plan as specified in the EPSEN Act, 2004. The NCCA produced Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Pupils with General Learning Disabilities (NCCA, 2007) while the Department of Education and Science published guidelines on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in post-primary schools (DES, 2007).

Further work remains to be done. At school level the processes of measuring, tracking and systematically recording outcomes for children with special educational requires much greater emphasis. The deferral of the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004 has delayed the statutory introduction of IEPs into schools, although it is recognised here that many schools are already doing excellent work in this regard. In addition, there is a need to examine whether the balance between mainstream curricula, developmental curricula and additional curricular areas is being maintained for pupils with special educational needs in our schools (NCCA, 1999).

The fundamental principle is that all children are enabled to access the curriculum in a manner that appropriately meets their individual needs. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to continue to employ innovative pedagogy and assessment methodologies to ensure that pupils access the curriculum in a manner that enables the holistic development of their potential abilities.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) recommended a review of the curriculum and certification offered to pupils of post-primary age in both special and mainstream schools to ensure a range of choices for pupils and their parents. This recommendation was based on the report's finding that there were an increasing number of admissions to special schools at post-primary level, with the majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities now being of post-primary age. The authors also noted that in some special

schools for pupils with mild GLD a range of appropriate post-primary programmes, provided in a flexible manner, was available to pupils.

The NCSE has commissioned two research studies relating to curriculum for pupils with special educational needs. The first study is to explore the implementation of the curriculum in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of special educational needs; and to explore the experiences of these particular pupils in gaining access to the curriculum. The second study is a review of the international research literature on curriculum and curriculum access issues for pupils with special educational needs in post-primary settings. While the focus of these studies is on mainstream settings, the results should inform our understanding in relation to general curricular issues for pupils with special educational needs. Research reports from these studies are due to be published in 2011.

The NCCA has commenced a major review of education at senior cycle and has very recently published a discussion paper on ideas for a framework for junior cycle 'Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a new Junior Cycle' (NCCA, 2009). A consultation process has been initiated in order to broaden and deepen the understanding of ideas contained in this paper. In addition, the NCCA is working on a Draft Curriculum Framework for pupils with General Learning Disabilities who find it impossible to attain the learning outcomes associated with junior certificate subjects and examinations as currently constituted. Finally, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) is developing certification options at levels one and two of the National Framework of Qualifications (www.nfq.ie).

It should be noted that a survey of curriculum offered to pupils of all ages in special schools would provide a valuable baseline regarding the availability of curriculum and certification options in special schools.

3.9 Range and nature of supports required for children within special schools and classes

Pupils in special schools and classes have complex needs which can require a wide range and variety of supports. Transport arrangements may also need to be considered in situations where children must leave home early to travel to school.

There are occasions when, given the nature of the child's needs, it can be difficult to ascertain whether these needs should be regarded primarily as educational or care

needs. It is often the case that in special schools and classes, significant portions of the school day are devoted to what might be regarded as care needs. Depending on the needs of the child, time may need to be set aside for feeding, toileting, nursing care, standing frames, administration of medication, etc. It is very important to emphasise that while pupils are attending school, they should be accessing the curriculum. This is made possible through the teaching of subjects such as SPHE or by reinforcing elements of the pupil's Individual Education Plan or by the incidental teaching of language and communication skills.

The educational and health supports available for children in special schools and classes are detailed in Section 2 of this paper.

The Department of Education and Skills has welcomed the efforts of many special schools to meet the needs of their communities by expanding their remit in order to enrol pupils with a wide range of special educational needs (Circular 38/10). The DES has signalled that certain issues in relation to the profile of pupil population and associated teaching allocations have been identified and need to be addressed in special schools (DES Circular 38/2010).

The DES has engaged in a process through which transition arrangements for special schools, to apply for the 2010/2011 school year, were set out and through which the above issues will be further addressed for the school year 2011/2012. This involved putting in place a collaborative process to clarify the position in relation to these issues and to identify appropriate staffing arrangements to apply with effect from the 2011/2012 school year. The Department has committed to addressing these matters and to liaise with relevant parties including NCSE, Patron Bodies, NABMSE, INTO, and the National Parents Council (Primary) (DES Circular 38/10).

3.10 Models for resourcing special schools and classes

Special schools and classes are resourced by the NCSE within the parameters of the resourcing policy of the Department of Education and Skills. It is the policy of the DES to resource schools on the basis of the designated category of the school or class. The DES has also authorised the NCSE to exercise flexibility in relation to pupils with complex needs enrolled in the school/class and to allocate resources above the standard where such needs arise (DES Circular 38/2010). The standard policy on the allocation of teaching posts and SNAs in special schools and classes is set out in Appendix 4.

Resourcing models for special schools and classes was not included in the terms of reference of the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) and hence the report does not make recommendations in this regard. The NCSE has commissioned two research studies whose findings have relevance to this topic.

The first of these studies is the International Review of Diagnostic and Assessment Procedures used to diagnose a Disability and to Identify Special Educational Needs (Desforges and Lindsay, 2009). This report puts forward the argument that it is the assessment of a child's need that should drive the resource allocation rather than the disability category. The report points out that while the disability category is a useful guide, it should not be the sole determinant of resources granted as the needs of children within any given category of disability can be very different. The report is supportive of the approach adopted in the GAM for children with high incidence disabilities in primary schools whereby the school is resourced to meet the needs of the child without the requirement of professional and external assessment. The report makes the recommendation that a diagnosis of disability should not be a pre-requisite or determinant for the allocation of additional resources for a child or young person with special educational needs.

The second research study is a review of the NCSE resource allocation process and an evaluation of the deployment of resources in schools to provide an appropriate, inclusive education for children with special educational needs. This study will review the way in which the NCSE operates the process of resource allocation, in particular to consider if the process is operated in an equitable, timely, efficient and effective manner. An exploration of how these resources are being deployed in schools as regards the provision of an appropriate inclusive education for children with special educational needs will also be undertaken. The focus of this study is on the provision of resources to children with low incidence disabilities as allocated by the NCSE.

3.11 Professional training requirements

Many pupils in special schools have extremely complex needs. Their teachers therefore require a wide range of strategies and methodologies to enable them to meet these needs. The need for further on-going professional training and development of staff has been extensively recommended across many of the research studies commissioned to date by the NCSE.

Ofsted (2006) in a wide ranging review of special educational provision in England found that the key factor contributing to pupils' progress, including those with complex needs, was access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers. The report (Ofsted, 2006) therefore recommended more access to appropriate training. The international literature is clear that teachers who are expected to fulfil these roles need continuous professional development to enable them to do so.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) , Phase 1, identified gaps in relation to specialist qualifications for teachers in special schools, a much smaller percentage of whom now have an accredited qualification in special educational needs than was the case in 1990. The current review found that merely between one-quarter and one-third of teachers in special schools had undertaken specialist training at diploma level or higher compared with the approximately 50% reported by McGee in 1990. However many of the current cohort of special school teachers had undertaken a wide variety of short courses and school based CPD under the auspices of the SESS. It appeared from the current review that a minority of teachers do not avail of training even when it is available and these teachers may need additional encouragement to do so.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) acknowledged that the Teacher Education Section of the DES has in recent years provided more opportunities for teachers in special education to enhance their knowledge and skills through an expansion of accredited training programmes in the colleges of education and universities, on-line CPD opportunities and through initiatives such as the SESS. The DES is currently providing for an independent evaluation of the impact of the SESS in terms of CPD provision.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) made the following recommendations in relation to continuous professional development:

- Continuous professional development should be structured in a way which enables teachers to build a coherent range of competencies
- Programmes of professional development for principals should have a substantial element on special education
- A review of the training needs of SNAs should be conducted.

In relation to this last recommendation, it should be noted that a Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme has been recently carried out by the Department of Education and Skills. The outcome of this review will shortly be published.

Finally, a number of the international reviews commissioned by the NCSE raised the issue of developing national standards and competencies for special needs education. The Teaching Council has responsibility for this matter, in relation to teachers.

3.12 Educational and social outcomes for children with special educational needs

The Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) notes that the main focus of assessment systems in Ireland and elsewhere is on identifying the needs of the child, with less attention being paid to assessing the outcomes either at individual child or school level. A focus on outcomes requires a more dynamic perspective which takes into account both the needs of the child and the capacity of the school environment to ensure that the child learns and develops to his/her potential.

Such an approach requires agreement on the following;

- What outcomes are to be measured, both at child and school level?
- Who is to be responsible for the collection of the data required to measure these outcomes?
- How are the outcomes to be measured?
- Who is responsible for the co-ordination and overall monitoring of this information?

The Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) asserts the need to build a system of special education that has a more appropriate balance between inputs, outputs and outcomes. This will result in a more appropriate balance being achieved between the needs and performance of the child on the one hand and the capability of the learning environment being provided by the school and teachers on the other hand.

In 2008, a three year longitudinal research project, **Project IRIS** (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools), was commissioned by NCSE to carry out an in-depth study of special and inclusive education. The study will consider, among a number of issues critical to the effective provision for pupils with special educational needs, the development of a framework for evaluating academic, social and administrative outcomes.

In 2010, NCSE commissioned research to review how progress and meaningful outcomes for children with special educational needs are identified and measured, drawing on international experience. In this context it will examine the potential of

available data in Ireland and the possible need for improved indicators and data collection on outcomes for children with SEN.

3.13 Cooperation between Health and Education

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found two routes through which multi-disciplinary support, funded by the HSE, is delivered to pupils in special schools. It is either provided directly from the HSE through community services or through an intermediate service provider which most often is the school's patron body.

Access to multi-disciplinary support emerged as a major issue in both phases of the review. Children in special schools often need a high level of support, requiring physiotherapy programmes, walking programmes, feeding and toileting programmes and speech and language programmes. Furthermore such programmes need to be integrated into their existing daily programmes.

Participants in the study mentioned that one perceived advantage of attending a special school was access to the services of a multi-disciplinary team and there were a few instances where this appeared to be working well. The study identified a number of difficulties with the services as currently constituted:

1. Many schools claimed that their pupils did not have access to the services of a multi-disciplinary team or that services were available only on a part-time or ad-hoc basis. Where service was available, it was often under the auspices of the school's patron body.
2. A large number of agencies were involved in the delivery of services but there was little evidence of co-ordination between the services. This resulted in individuals receiving support from a number of agencies with no team approach in place.
3. Where schools did receive services from a multi-disciplinary team, there were issues about the amount of support available and the length of waiting lists. In addition, many schools received no service from certain professionals within the multi-disciplinary team.
4. In cases where the services were being delivered under the auspices of the school's patron body, HSE funding was often supplemented by funding from other sources, such as fund-raising by parents.

A number of these findings were supported by an earlier DES evaluation of educational provision for pupils with ASD (DES, 2006) which also found that many schools did not have sufficient access to a full multi-disciplinary team. As a result of the factors outlined above, there was considerable variability between schools in the amount and type of support available to pupils.

It is also instructive to consider the experiences reported by SENOs as they attempt to coordinate health and education supports for children with special educational needs. SENOs report that there are occasions when:

- Health funded support services are available in special schools but not in special classes. As a consequence, parents seek to enrol children in special schools rather than special classes on the basis of health services provided
- Health funded support services are available in special classes but not in the mainstream setting. As a consequence, parents seek to keep their child in a special class, although a mainstream setting might otherwise be more appropriate to the child's needs
- Health funded support services are available for certain categories of disability but not others. An example of this is where out-reach autism services are provided to children with autism and mild general learning disabilities but not to children with autism and moderate general learning disabilities. As a consequence, parents seek a professional report which states that their child falls within a category of disability that will attract health supports
- Access to health supports is provided on the basis of postal address rather than the location of the school attended. As a consequence, some children in special schools have access to health supports while others may not. This can have an effect on a school's enrolment policy where the school approves the enrolment of children for whom they know that health supports are available in the school.

The need for collaboration across the health and education sectors arises in all four international literature reviews commissioned by NCSE (Marschark and Spencer, 2009, Parsons et al, 2009, Douglas et al, 2009, Desforges and Lindsay, 2010). The review of Deaf Education (Marschark and Spencer, 2009) concluded that the implementation of the recommendations of the report would require unprecedented co-operation between the Department of Health and Children and the DES.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) recommended a review of the manner in which multi-disciplinary support is

delivered to pupils with special educational needs in all types of schools. The authors concluded that more access to multi-disciplinary teams was required and that access needs to be available on the basis of need rather than educational setting.

To date, the research reports commissioned have not put forward a model for how collaboration between the health and education sectors might be developed and established in practice.

3.14 Linkages between Special and Mainstream Systems

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found that internationally there has been a trend towards special schools providing out-reach and in-reach support for mainstream schools. The report established that about half of the Irish special schools surveyed did have links with mainstream primary and post-primary schools but that the nature of these links varied significantly between schools. The majority of the links involved visits by adults or mainstream pupils *to* the special school. In the study, the most frequent link cited was where special schools provided work experience for post-primary pupils. Only a minority of the respondents reported that they visited special schools to participate in a collaborative educational or professional experience. Finally, the links that were established were of an informal and ad hoc nature and based on the goodwill of those involved (Ware et al, 2009).

Nonetheless, a view emerged in the study that special schools could be developed as centres for supporting mainstream schools, or as centres of excellence in terms of provision made for pupils with specific types of special educational needs or as a centre for training or research. The report (Ware et al, 2009) cited an example of an English school where links between special and mainstream schools were formalised and officially resourced. This school had developed models of providing in-reach and out-reach support to teachers in mainstream schools which enhanced their work with children with special educational needs in mainstream settings.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) concluded that one aspect of the future role of some Irish special schools could be to provide out-reach and in-reach support for mainstream schools to enhance the provision that these schools might make for pupils with special educational needs. The review found that not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role. Two areas in particular were mentioned in this regard, the

availability of a multi-disciplinary team and the training and expertise of the staff in at least some special schools.

It should also be noted that current international literature cautions against the transfer of expertise being seen as one-way (i.e. from special to mainstream school). Special school principals agreed with the idea that in the future special and mainstream schools would be involved in a two-way collaboration (Ware et al, 2009). The report suggests that policies need to be drawn up to enable more effective interaction between special and mainstream schools in the Irish context

The report (Ware et al, 2009) did not consider the current or future role of the SESS in supporting teachers in special and mainstream schools and how the services provided through this agency might dovetail with the proposition that special schools be developed as out-reach and in-reach centres in the future.

3.15 Linkages between special classes and mainstream classes in mainstream schools

The DES has issued clear directions to mainstream schools that children attending special classes must be integrated into mainstream classes to the extent that their levels of needs and attainments allow. The DES will require evidence from time to time that such is happening in respect of individual children (DES, Circular 09/99). In order to facilitate such integration, since 1994, mainstream schools have been permitted to count children in special classes twice for staffing purposes – on the special class and on the ordinary school roll.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) found that survey participants viewed the special class as an inclusive model of provision, from both an educational and social perspective. The special class model was seen to facilitate inclusion within the mainstream class and enabled pupils to remain in their local area to attend school.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) found that the majority of schools were making some provision for pupils with special educational needs within mainstream classes. Many schools had written policies which outlined how the special class interacted with the rest of the school. In these cases, pupils had specific times when they joined their mainstream class peers, in some cases for non-academic subjects only and in other

cases for academic subjects, depending on the needs and abilities of the pupils concerned.

The report (Ware et al, 2009) noted that in about half of the cases, pupils remained in the special class for the entire day, despite the policy of the DES and the inherent flexibility of the special class model. In these cases, the report recommended that schools should develop and implement policies and plans

- a. outlining how the special class relates to other classes and
- b. considering options such as part time and/or specific timetabled placement.

Finally, the report (Ware et al, 2009) further recommends that the inclusion of pupils from the special class in mainstream classes should not be used as a reason to withdraw health supports, where still required.

3.16 Dual Placement

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) explicitly addressed the issue of dual placement. The authors found a mixed response to dual placement with principals, parents and those making submissions being the most positive. The finding that pupils were the least positive was significant, although it should be noted that none of the pupils concerned had directly experienced dual placement.

Despite the mixed response, the authors go on to make the following recommendations in relation to dual placement:

- Dual placement arrangements should be facilitated where these are seen to be in the best interests of the pupils in order to facilitate either educational or social inclusion.
- Arrangements concerning insurance, transport and substitute cover for teachers or SNA should be clarified in relation to funding and management
- Dual placements arrangements should be facilitated in the future by co-locating mainstream and special schools.

There is a need to define what exactly is meant by dual enrolment and dual placement. Does it mean that the child is counted on the roll of both schools? Does it mean that a child spends a certain number of days in a special school and a certain number of days in a mainstream school? Should this arrangement take place for specific activities

only? Should it occur each day, or each week or each term? Should the arrangements be formal or informal? What might be the teaching arrangements? Does the exchange only happen in one direction, i.e. between special and mainstream?

4 Policy Advice: Special Schools and Classes

4.1 Vision Statement

The vision enshrined in the EPSEN Act, 2004 is one where children with special educational needs have the same right to avail of and benefit from an appropriate education as their peers who do not have such needs (Gov. of Ireland, 2004). Future policy formulation must therefore recognise and be influenced by the concept that children with special educational needs have a right to the same benefits from education as their peers (NCSE, 2006).

In its Implementation Report the Council views the inclusive school as the cornerstone of inclusive education service delivery. In its view the critical challenge is to ensure that children with special educational needs have access to an inclusive school (which must become the universal norm), are taught effectively while they are there and achieve successful outcomes (NCSE, 2006).

Following on from this position statement, Council is resolved that the intention of the EPSEN Act should be honoured where it states that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs while taking into consideration the two exceptions cited in the Act. Towards this end, Council recommends that further research be conducted on what needs to be in place to maximise the capacity of mainstream schools to include children with special educational needs in an effective and beneficial manner.

Council recognises however that there are children with complex special educational needs of such nature and degree that it would not be in their best interests to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream settings. Council also recognises that there are children whose inclusion in a mainstream class would, despite the provision of additional supports, be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated. Council recommends that special schools and classes have an ongoing part to play within the continuum of provision catering for the needs of these children.

Council is also of the opinion that, in the spirit of the EPSEN Act, 2004, future educational provision for children with complex special educational needs that cannot be met within mainstream classes, should be available locally in so far as is possible,

either as an integral part of a mainstream school (special classes) or situated on the same campus as mainstream schools (special schools or units) so that the opportunity for inclusion can be maximised.

Council is aware that it will take some time to realise this vision. In the intervening period, it recommends that special schools should be retained in order to continue to serve the needs of the children within the communities served by them. The role of special schools will change in accordance with the policy proposals set out below in this section of the paper.

The implementation of the policy of inclusive education will result in increasing numbers of children with special educational needs being enrolled in mainstream schools and a growing diversity of learning needs in the mainstream classroom (Ware et al, 2009). These changes bring their own challenges, for pupils, for school resources and for teacher skills and competences. Council is particularly cognisant of the challenge posed to mainstream schools to meet the diverse needs of increasing numbers of children with special educational needs. It is crucial therefore that the capacity of the mainstream system to include children with special educational needs is considered in tandem with the future role of special schools and classes.

Serious questions in relation to the policy of inclusive education arise for policy makers and practitioners such as:

- How ready are mainstream primary and post-primary schools to include children with special educational needs?
- Are the health and education supports necessary for the inclusion of children with special educational needs available in mainstream schools?
- Are children with special educational needs thriving and learning in mainstream schools and developing appropriate levels of independent living skills?
- Are children who do not have special educational needs thriving and learning in mainstream schools that include children with special educational needs?
- Are mainstream schools adequately responding to the growing diversity of learning needs in the classroom?

Currently we do not have adequate research evidence to answer these questions in the Irish situation. Practical strategies need to be developed at school and pupil level to ensure that more and better information about pupil, teacher and school experiences in

relation to these issues is available to assist the development of policy and practice in this area.

4.2 Principles

Proposals concerning the future role of special schools and classes must be developed in the first instance, within the context and spirit of the EPSEN Act, 2004 and must conform to its basic tenets and principles. In accordance with the EPSEN Act, 2004 and other relevant international agreements, Council now proposes the following principles to serve as underlying guidelines for the development of future policy in relation to special schools and classes in Ireland. In developing their principles Council reaffirms and elaborates the principles set out in the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (Gov. of Ireland, 1993).

- i) In accordance with the Education Act, 1998, the State must ensure that every person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or other special educational needs, has available to them the support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting their needs and abilities (Gov. of Ireland, 1998).
- ii) All children, including children with special educational needs, should be educated together in an inclusive environment in local schools to the greatest extent possible, in accordance with their best interests and in accordance with the effective provision of education for children with whom they are to be educated.
- iii) Special schools and classes should form one element of a planned response within an overall framework for the provision of special education to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.
- iv) The needs of a child with special educational needs should be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the provision of special education for that child. The views of the child should be taken into account when such decisions are being made, in accordance with the age and capacity of the child.
- v) The parents of a child with special educational needs should be fully informed, in an appropriate manner, of all placement options and enabled to play an active part in the decision-making process; the views of parents should be taken into account when recommendations on special educational provision are being made.

- vi) The Health and Education sectors should work together to ensure that necessary support services are delivered to children with special educational needs in a coherent and integrated manner.

4.3 Policy Advice: Recommendations

In the following section, Council sets out proposals relating to the future role for special schools and classes for consideration by the Minister for Education and Skills. Council has engaged in a staged process of external and internal consultation in the formulation of these proposals, which are based on evidence from international and Irish research, expert opinion, consultation with stakeholders and the experience of NCSE council members and staff.

4.3.1 Continuum of Provision:

The EPSEN Act sets out the statutory framework for the provision of education to children with special educational needs and states that children with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless that is inconsistent with the best interest of the individual child with special educational needs or the effective provision of education for other children with whom the child is to be educated (EPSEN Act, 2004). Council's position is that, in accordance with the EPSEN Act, 2004 and international agreements, the vast majority of pupils with special educational needs should be enrolled alongside their peers, in mainstream classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, with or without additional support services, as necessary.

The exceptions cited in the EPSEN Act, 2004 do, however, provide a pragmatic acknowledgement that the education of a child with special educational needs may not always take place in mainstream classes in mainstream schools. Therefore a range of provision is required to meet pupil needs. Specifically the EPSEN Act, 2004 (section 20 (1) (g)) requires the NCSE to ensure that a **continuum of special educational provision** is available as required in relation to each type of disability. Council is of the opinion that special schools and classes should remain part of this continuum but that their role should be developed in the future.

Council recognises that placement in special schools and classes can provide a high quality education to children with special educational needs. Such placements should follow a full evaluation of the reasons why it would not be to the benefit of the child to be placed in a mainstream school. When a child is placed in a special school or class

measures should be put in place to maximise opportunities for inclusion with peer groups and the child's placement should be reviewed periodically.

The notion of a continuum, rather than clearly segregated types of provision, is in line with the spirit of the Act's commitment to inclusion. Council recommends that the concept of a continuum of provision should be understood to imply a fluid approach to pupil placement, where pupils should be enabled to access the different types of provision and should be able to move along the continuum as their individual needs change over time and in accordance with their best interests.

Special schools and classes should continue to play a role in this continuum. The placement of children in special schools or classes should take place in a manner that is consistent with the provisions of the EPSEN Act 2004, as cited above.

4.3.2 Role of special schools in the Continuum of Provision

Pupils with special educational needs should be enrolled alongside their peers, in mainstream classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, to the greatest extent possible. Council recognises that in accordance with the EPSEN Act 2004, decisions on the placement of children in special schools and classes must always be made on an individual basis. Children placed in special schools should be those with complex needs, which should generally be understood to mean:

- pupils who have been assessed as having special educational needs arising from two or more low incidence disabilities, thereby requiring support from a number of different services;
or
- pupils with a severe or profound level of special educational needs arising from a single disability;
or
- Pupils with special educational needs who have been placed in a mainstream or special class and who following continuous evaluation as part of the NEPS Continuum of Support, are considered not to be benefiting from such a placement or who are impinging negatively on the education of other pupils in the class.

4.3.3 The role of special classes in mainstream schools

Council believes that children with special educational needs should have every possible opportunity to access their education in a setting where they can belong to a peer group and interact with children of different abilities in a variety of situations, to the greatest extent possible. However, Council recognises that there are some children with special educational needs for whom full-time placement in a mainstream class can be very difficult and may not be consistent with their own best interest and/or the effective provision of education to children with whom they are to be educated (see EPSEN Act, 2004, Section 2). In situations where full-time placement in a mainstream class is not possible, placement in a special class should be considered.

Council recommends that:

- Research be immediately undertaken to explore the efficacy of special classes as a model of provision in the Irish context. Council notes the need to monitor the development of international evidence on the impact of special classes as a model of special educational provision and to take account of evidence available to date.

While awaiting the findings of such research and in the absence of current evidence regarding their impact, Council recommends that special classes should continue to exist as part of the continuum of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

- Access to special classes throughout the country should be provided on a planned, equitable and transparent basis. The NCSE should continue to advise on the establishment or discontinuation of special classes.
- Special classes should be organised on a flexible basis to provide for specialist interventions and supports specific to children's needs and to facilitate an inclusive approach which allows each child to join mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible.
- Council recommends that all schools are required to develop a formal policy regarding how children, placed in special classes, will also be included in mainstream classes for set periods of time as appropriate. In addition, it should be explicitly stated, within the child's individual education plan, how each child,

in accordance with their learning needs and abilities, will access learning opportunities in the special class and in mainstream classes in the school.

- Council reminds schools that they may use the resources allocated for individual children with special educational needs in mainstream classes in a flexible way (Circular 02/05). For example additional teaching resources can be deployed to set up flexible groupings for teaching and learning purposes and/or to provide in-class support of pupils with special educational needs.

Schools are encouraged to have a mixture of options available for supporting pupils with special educational needs. In line with such flexibility, schools might deploy teaching resources available under the GAM to form small groups of pupils with similar special educational needs for a period of the day. The pupils would then be included in their mainstream classes for the remainder of the day. Decisions regarding the deployment of resources should be based on the particular needs of each pupil. School management should decide on the best use of these resources, based on the local context and the needs of the pupils. DES Circular 02/05 provides guidance to schools on the deployment of resources for the General Allocation Model.

- Council recommends that the quality of provision and outcomes for children with special educational needs in both special class and mainstream settings should continue to be regularly monitored and reviewed by the schools themselves and through external inspection and review processes.

4.3.4 Designation of Special Schools:

Special schools in Ireland are designated as primary schools catering for a particular category of disability and operate under the Rules for National Schools (Dept. of Education, 1965), including those rules which specify length of school day, length of school year and appointment of teachers. The designation of all special schools as primary schools needs to be examined particularly in light of evidence which suggests that an increasing number of pupils are transferring to special schools at or before post-primary age (See section 4.3.5).

Recent Irish research clearly demonstrates that special schools currently enrol children with a wider range of special educational needs than those categories specified according to their official designations. Many of these children have complex needs.

Special classes, which cater for children with special educational needs other than those covered by the schools original designation, have been established by many special schools. Council recognises that this trend developed over the years as special schools sought to act in a responsive way to meet the needs of children within their particular communities.

Council recommends that the expansion in the remit of special schools, to meet the needs of their communities by enrolling children with a wide range of special educational needs, should be formalised and should continue. In the future, special schools should be designated and resourced to serve those pupils within the community who require special school placement rather than be limited to any specific category of disability.

Special schools should continue to have the autonomy to organise their pupils in class groupings and in doing so take appropriate account of factors such as age, category of special educational need and levels of ability, both socially and academically.

Council is finally of the view that consideration must be given to children of average or above average ability, with special educational needs, who may require educational interventions to be provided, on a temporary basis, in separate specialist settings. This might include children with visual impairment who require to learn Braille, children who are deaf and require to learn sign language or children with emotional and behavioural disorders who require therapeutic interventions.

4.3.5 Transfer of post-primary aged pupils to special schools

Evidence to date suggests that an increasing number of pupils are transferring to special schools at post-primary age and that the majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with Mild GLD are now of post-primary age (Ware et al, 2009). The research to date does not establish the reasons why post-primary aged pupils are transferring to special schools following primary education. This trend could be linked to particular features of educational provision in special schools or alternatively it could be related to the perceived capacity of post-primary schools to meet the needs of this cohort of pupils in relation to curriculum, certification etc. It may also be linked to the experience of the child and his/her parents of the primary schools system or their experiences in seeking post-primary placements.

Potential challenges for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in post-primary schools include the following:

- Complex nature and structure of syllabus taught in post-primary schools
- Focus on State examinations and the pressures experienced by post-primary schools in preparing pupils for these examinations
- Organisational structures of post-primary schools, including the organisation of classes and timetabling. This requires pupils to be able to read and follow timetables, locate different classrooms, identify different teachers for different subjects etc. Pupils with special educational needs may find it more difficult to adapt to these changes after primary education
- Preponderance of pupils with special educational needs enrolled in certain post-primary schools with correspondingly fewer enrolled in others. This results in an inequitable distribution of pupils with special educational needs over different schools.

Special schools have provided solutions for some of these problems. However, the perceived difficulties must be addressed in order that all post-primary schools comply with the EPSEN Act, 2004 in relation to the provision of education in inclusive settings. Central to this is the principle that all post-primary schools must operate fair and transparent admissions and participation policies. Further questions arise concerning the:

- accommodations that post-primary schools must make and the support services that are required to facilitate the transition of pupils with mild general learning disabilities from primary to post-primary schools and to improve their retention rates in post-primary
- range of provision required in post-primary schools to cater for the full participation and engagement of pupils with special educational needs
- supports required by mainstream post-primary schools to meet the needs of a pupil population with a diverse range of special educational needs.

While these questions are beyond the remit of this policy advice paper, they are undoubtedly linked to it. Further work is required if the post-primary sector is to meet the provisions of the EPSEN Act, 2004, that where possible children with special educational needs should be educated alongside their peers in inclusive settings.

Council recommends that:

- the pattern of transfer of pupils of post-primary age to special schools warrants further investigation as it appears that many of these pupils could be educated in mainstream post-primary schools
- appropriate programmes and certification options must be available in all schools that enrol post-primary aged pupils with special educational needs
- post-primary aged pupils in special schools who are following programmes of work leading to State examinations should be taught by teachers registered with the Teaching Council.

4.3.6 Implications of changes for the patronage of special schools

The Council wishes to acknowledge the significant contribution made by voluntary bodies to the development of special schools both historically and at the present time. A significant number of existing special schools were established under the patronage of voluntary organisations which had a focus on particular disabilities. Hence, the schools were set up to serve children with a particular disability and support services were provided by the voluntary organisation's 'health' staff. The proposed revision of the enrolment policy of special schools and their re-designation as schools for pupils with complex special educational needs may have implications for the patronage of schools, as currently constituted.

Council considers that it is a fundamental principle that any child who attends a special school should have access to the services provided in that school, irrespective of where the child lives or their category of disability. Council believes that the enrolment policy of a special school should not be determined or influenced by the provision of health services. A school should not refuse enrolment on the basis that a child isn't attached to a particular service. Neither should a special school accept a child for enrolment but then not allow the child to access services provided to the school. Furthermore, health and education supports should be available to children with special educational needs regardless of the setting in which they are being educated.

In order to achieve this, Council recommends that the funding structures for service provision to children attending special schools should be examined by the relevant departments. Any such examination will require a consultation process involving the DES, HSE, NCSE and patrons of special schools.

Council recommends that any review of the patronage of special schools should address all of the above matters in consultation with the voluntary bodies and other patrons of special schools.

4.3.7 Designation of Special Classes

Special classes in primary and post-primary schools appear to enrol mainly those children within the designated category of disability for which they were established. There is some evidence that post-primary schools are using resources to create 'mixed' base classes for children assessed across a range of disability categories.

As special schools move towards meeting the identified needs of all pupils with complex special educational needs within local communities (rather than being category specific) it seems logical to expect that special classes may also develop along similar lines in the future and thus form part of the continuum of provision in dealing with more complex special educational needs. As there are fewer classes currently established at post-primary level, it should be possible to move more immediately to establishing special classes in post-primary schools which cater for children with complex needs within local communities. At post-primary level, there are already a number of mixed base classes established which appear to work well for the pupils concerned. These pupils can join their peers in mainstream subject classes at certain points on the timetable and withdraw to the base class for those subjects in which they require greater levels of support. This type of model appears to be more in line with the notion of inclusive education as enshrined in the EPSEN Act, 2004, offering, as it does, more possibility for inclusion with peers in the mainstream class.

There are significant differences between the concept of the special class as originally established in primary schools and the mixed base special class that is now emerging in mainstream post-primary schools. Originally special classes developed within primary schools. They had one teacher and a fixed ceiling on the number of pupils, all of whom had to have the same diagnosis. The mixed base special class that is now developing in mainstream post-primary schools normally has some or all of the following features:

- a number of teachers timetabled for this class, with one teacher nominated to act as the co-ordinator
- classes may operate in more than one classroom

- homogeneous groups of pupils may be formed for specific activities during the course of the school day or school week
- pupils who are attached to the mixed base special class are likely to be included in mainstream classes for a considerable part of the week, in accordance with their needs.

The flexibility inherent in this model is possibly suited to post-primary schools given their structure and the size of the pupil population. However it is possible that special classes in primary schools could practice similar flexibility, tailored to the particular circumstances of the primary school and taking into account the size and structure of the school. This 'mixed' base class model may also be suited to rural settings where there can be smaller numbers of primary aged pupils who require special class settings, across different disability categories. This would allow these pupils to avail of a placement within a 'mixed' base class situated within their own local area.

Council recognises that there are advantages to both of these options, i.e. specific designation and 'mixed' base classes. A designated special class has the advantage of allowing children with similar needs to interact and to receive their education together, for example deaf children who use Irish Sign Language (ISL) as their first language and preferred method of communication. It allows teachers to develop specialised expertise in a specific area of special education which can be of considerable benefit to the children and which can be shared with other professionals. It also has a logistical advantage in that it brings children with similar categories of special educational needs together for the provision of health related supports.

On the other hand 'mixed disability' base classes also have distinct positive features and can be regarded conceptually as a more inclusive option on the continuum of provision. They allow for different groups of children to be educated together thereby avoiding the possibility of children with similar disabilities being segregated together in one classroom. They facilitate the more expeditious establishment of a special class when there are a sufficient number of children with special educational needs to warrant such provision. They also ensure a more appropriate age distribution in the special class.

Council recognises that there is likely to be an ongoing requirement for both of these options in the system. Council recommends that:

1. the composition of the special class should be determined in response to the needs of children with special educational needs within particular local communities, taking into account local demographics and the ongoing feasibility of maintaining the special class
2. responsibility for the sanctioning of additional resources for a special class should continue to rest with the NCSE
3. further research on the extent to which special classes impact differentially on specified categories of special educational needs should also be investigated as part of the further research study recommended in section 5.3.4.

4.3.8 Identification and Assessment of pupils for placement in special schools and classes

As already stated in this paper and in accordance with national legislation and other international agreements, children with special educational needs should generally be educated alongside their peers in inclusive settings.

Only children whose needs are of such complexity (as defined earlier in this paper) that education in a mainstream setting is not consistent with their own best interests or the effective provision of education for children with whom they are to be educated should be placed in a special school.

Likewise children assessed as having special educational needs and for whom full-time placement in a mainstream class in a mainstream school is not possible should be educated in a special class.

The NEPS Continuum of Support (DES, 2007) recommends a graduated approach to the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs. Guidelines have been produced for schools applying this model in primary and post-primary schools and also with primary school pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A similar approach to assessment, identification and programme planning, which underpins the GAM in primary schools, is also outlined in DES circular 02/05 (DES, 2005).

The Council is of the opinion that this graduated approach should also be adopted when considering the placement of a child in a special school or special class. The process of assessment should include a rigorous examination of the interventions that

were or could be put in place to support the inclusion of the child in mainstream education before a decision regarding alternative placement in a special class or special school setting is taken. In the case of post-primary schools, the experience of the child in primary school should be taken into account.

Decisions on the placement of pupils should be based on:

- the assessed needs of the pupils,
- professional advice and
- informed parental choice and the views of the child, to the extent appropriate according to age and intellectual capacity.

Placement decisions should be based on a multi-faceted assessment which in addition to cognitive ability takes into account the child's interest in the widest sense. This includes factors such as the school's ability to adapt to the child's needs, the child's potential to benefit from mainstream education, the child's communication, social and emotional developmental levels, personal development, development of life skills, self esteem, ability to form friendships, and the likelihood of isolation in the particular setting chosen. Other factors to be considered include the school environment, resources and supports available, home factors etc. The Council is concerned that while the child's emotional and social needs should be taken into account when considering placement, behaviour issues should not be the sole or paramount determinant.

Council recommends that the Department of Education and Skills should initiate the development of a Code of Practice, with NCSE as the leading Agency, to guide parents and professionals in making decisions regarding the placement of individual children with special educational needs. The Code of Practice should set out:

- clear criteria for decision making in regard to the placement of children with special educational needs in mainstream settings
- clear criteria for decision making in regard to the placement of children with special educational needs in special schools and classes
- criteria which set out guidance and indicative thresholds for decision making on the placement of children in the different settings
- who is to be consulted about the placement of a child in a mainstream or special setting
- the process by which decisions regarding placement will be made, the persons and agencies who should be involved in the decision making process and the person/s with the authority to make final decisions regarding placement

- the agreed outcomes to be measured and evaluated to establish progress
- agreed criteria for measuring these outcomes for children with special educational needs
- a mechanism and criteria for reviewing the continuing suitability of the placement for the child with special educational needs
- the roles of different agencies in the placement of children with special educational needs, in monitoring of their progress and evaluation of outcomes achieved
- the role of parents in decision making on placement and access to information on their child's education
- the appeals processes which will be available to parents under the terms of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

Placement decisions should:

- Be consistent with the principles of the EPSEN Act, 2004
- Be in the best interest of the child
- Be clearly stated in accordance with the criteria specified in the Code of Practice, as indicated above
- Take into account the needs of the child as formally assessed
- Consider the child's progress in relation to goals and outcomes specified in the IEP.
- Take into account the support and interventions already put in place in the mainstream school
- Take into account the views of parents and pupils
- Take into account the cost of placement both to the individual family and to the State.

In relation to children placed in special classes, their individual education plans should set out their specific educational objectives and indicate clearly those times which the pupils will spend in the special class and those points at which the pupils will be included in the mainstream class. Parents should be involved in the decision to place children in a special class and be informed regarding the educational rationale, benefits and consequences of such a placement.

The placement of a child in a specialised setting is of critical educational significance and should be continuously monitored and formally reviewed on an annual basis. A child should stay in a special school/class for as long as that is consistent with their

best interest from an educational perspective, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the proposed Code of Practice. The system should be sufficiently flexible to allow a child to move between settings in response to changed needs and to meet the resourcing consequences of such flexibility.

To date, there is limited data available in Ireland on outcomes for pupils with special educational needs. Council believes that there needs to be a sustained emphasis on measuring the outcomes for children with special educational needs. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to reach agreement concerning how such outcomes should be measured. The NCSE has recently commissioned research to review how progress and meaningful outcomes for children with special educational needs can be identified and measured, drawing on international experience. In this context the research will examine the potential of available data in Ireland and the possible need for improved indicators and data collection on outcomes for children with special educational needs. The specific roles of the school, parents, children, the Inspectorate, the NEPS and other agencies, as appropriate, will need to be clarified as part of this process.

4.3.9 Range and nature of supports required by children within special schools and classes

Council recommends that schools should continue to be provided with the following additional supports to assist them in making appropriate provision for pupils with special educational needs:

Education Funded Supports

- Assessment of special educational needs and impact on learning
- Additional teaching support to access the curriculum in a way that enables holistic development of inherent potential
- Support with special care needs arising from a disability
- Adapted school buildings and /or specialist furniture
- Assistive technology
- Enhanced capitation grants to schools
- Special transport provision.

Council recommends that the payment of grants to special schools should continue to reflect the special circumstances of the school.

Health Funded Supports

- Assessment Services
- Therapeutic supports including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

4.3.10 Staffing arrangements for special schools and classes

The report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC, 1993) recommended pupil-teacher and SNA appointment ratios for special schools and classes which the Department of Education and Skills has since implemented. In recognition of the complex needs of some pupils enrolled in special schools, the DES has always authorised such needs to be taken into account when resources are allocated. The Special Needs Assistant Scheme is also in place to assist schools in the care of pupils with disabilities in a care context.

The DES acknowledges the contribution made by special schools to the continuum of provision for children with special educational needs and has welcomed the willingness of many special schools to meet the needs of their communities by expanding their remits and enrolling pupils with a wide range of special educational needs (DES Circular 38/2010). The DES has also indicated that issues relating to the profile of pupil population and associated teaching allocations in special schools require closer consideration of enrolment practices and resource allocations.

The DES has engaged in a process through which transition arrangements for special schools, to apply for the 2010/2011 school year, were set out and through which the above issues will be further addressed for the school year 2011/2012. This involved putting in place a collaborative process to clarify the position in relation to these issues and to identify appropriate staffing arrangements to apply with effect from the 2011/2012 school year. The Department has committed to addressing these matters and to liaise with relevant parties including NCSE, patron bodies, NABMSE, INTO, and the National Parents Council (Primary) (DES Circular 38/10).

Following the conclusion of the above process and pending the acceptance of the policy advice offered in this paper, Council will be in a position to consider appropriate staffing arrangements for special schools for children with complex needs, if requested to do so by the Minister. Council advises that staffing levels and pupil/teacher ratios should reflect the complexity of need that exists within individual schools and should

not be solely determined by a special school's designation. In addition, Council recommends that the flexibility allowed by the DES in the appointment of SNAs to special schools should continue. This ensures that SNA appointments are based on the level of individual care need that exists within a special school rather than being solely based on the school's designation.

Children with complex special educational needs such as those warranting placement in special schools can have very high levels of learning and care needs and can thus require a substantial level of teaching and care provision. Council recognises that the learning capacity and attainment objectives for these children are likely to be very different than for their mainstream peers. Learning opportunities must be individually focused to ensure that children in special schools can access the curriculum at a level appropriate to their needs. The Council acknowledges that special schools catering for children with complex special educational needs are likely to continue to require a substantial level of teaching and care resources.

4.3.11 Model for Resourcing Special Schools and Classes

Pupils with special educational needs are taught in mainstream schools by class teachers (Primary), subject teachers (Post-primary) and the network of learning support and resource teachers available throughout the school system. A diagnosis of disability is required to trigger the allocation of additional special education resources, with the exception of the provision of additional teaching support for children with high incidence disabilities in primary schools resourced under the General Allocation Model. This is because a certain rigour is required in determining which children are entitled to the allocation of additional educational resources in order to ensure that this is done in an equitable and transparent manner and that resources are directed towards those children with the greatest levels of need.

In contrast, the health system focuses on the person's right to an Assessment of Need (under the Disability Act 2005), without this necessarily leading to a diagnosis of disability or the allocation of any additional health resources or services.

The difference between the health and education sectors poses problems for the system. Parents and schools require professional reports to establish a definitive diagnosis of disability in order to trigger additional educational resources. Health professionals focus their concern on the assessment of the child's needs without this

necessarily leading to a diagnosis of disability, allocation of additional health resources or provision of service.

This difference in terms of policy and practice creates understandable tensions within the entire system and should be resolved. Otherwise it will continue to place undue demands on health and education professionals to undertake assessments on many children in order to provide a diagnosis. In contrast the General Allocation Model for mainstream primary schools provides an 'up-front' level of resources for schools. This enables each school to provide a differential level of additional teaching support for pupils with high incidence special educational needs and for children requiring learning support, without the child having to undergo formal assessment by a professional external to the school.

NCSE proposes to prepare a further policy advice paper which will examine the links between diagnosis of disability, the assessment of the special educational needs of children and models for resourcing children once these needs have been identified. The need to avoid the duplication of assessments for access to health and education supports will be taken into account. In preparing this paper, the NCSE will consider relevant papers and research including the following:

- Continuum of Support Guidelines already implemented in primary schools by the NEPS which outline a continuum of assessment and intervention processes and a graduated approach to the provision of additional support (DES, 2007).
- Review of the GAM in primary schools, undertaken by the DES, when available.
- Findings as outlined in the International Review of Diagnostic and Assessment Procedures commissioned by the NCSE (Desforges and Lindsay, 2009).

4.3.12 Curriculum and Certification

Council recognises and reiterates the basic principle that all children, including children with special educational needs have a right of access to an education appropriate to their needs, regardless of the setting in which that education is taking place. The aims of education for pupils with special educational needs are the same as those applicable to all children and are centred on enabling children to live full and independent lives so that they can contribute to their communities and continue to learn throughout their lives.

The Council recognises that under Section 41(2) (f) of the Education Act 1998, the NCCA has the statutory responsibility to provide advice to the Minister for Education

and Skills in relation to the curriculum for early childhood, primary and post-primary education and the assessment procedures to be employed in schools (Gov. of Ireland, 1998). The NCCA is further obliged, under Section 27 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, to consult with the NCSE prior to advising the Minister regarding the requirements, with reference to curriculum and syllabuses, of pupils with a disability or other special educational needs (Gov. of Ireland, 2004).

Council undertakes to work with the NCCA, to the greatest extent possible, in its current reviews of education at both junior and senior cycle education. The focus of this cooperation is to ensure that pupils with special educational needs have equitable access to a broad and balanced curriculum which is relevant to their needs whether they are being educated in special schools, special classes or mainstream settings. As previously mentioned it is also necessary to strike a balance between mainstream curricula, developmental curricula and additional curricular areas according to the particular learning needs of individual pupils. (NCCA, 1999). Finally, as a guiding principle, Council considers that it would be beneficial for pupils with special educational needs to achieve certificated outcomes from the education system and that such certification should be available regardless of educational setting.

Council recommends that a review of the programmes and certification offered to pupils with special educational needs, of post-primary age, in both special and mainstream schools should be undertaken by the NCCA to ensure a range of choices for pupils and their parents.

4.3.13 Professional Development of Staff in special schools and classes

In the future, the pupils enrolled in special schools will be those for whom it has been decided that it is in their best interests to receive their education in a setting separate from children who do not have special educational needs (in accordance with Section 2 of the EPSEN Act, 2004). It is to be expected that pupils in special schools will therefore have complex special educational needs and that their schools will require teachers with specialist knowledge and skills in order to provide appropriate education for their pupils. Children in special classes will also have needs to the extent that they cannot be educated in mainstream settings for some or all of the day. Enrolments in special schools and special classes are already progressing in this direction. This trend will be consolidated in the future if the proposals in this paper are accepted and developed and as the EPSEN Act 2004 is fully implemented. Council notes the Ofsted

(2006) finding that the key factor contributing to pupils' progress, including those with complex needs, was access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers. There was consistent and significant evidence provided to support this finding in the research reports commissioned by NCSE as outlined earlier in this paper.

Council believes that training for teachers of children with special educational needs should be provided within an overall framework for initial and continuing professional development and should be both generalist and specialist in nature. Specialist training should follow on from a general teaching qualification and ideally at a later date when the teacher has gained experience in teaching children both with and without special educational needs. Teachers are then more sensitive to and aware of the additional specialist training which they require to more competently undertake the education of children with special educational needs.

Council supports the recommendation contained in the Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) that staff in special schools should have access to continuous professional development. This includes opportunities to develop skills appropriate to teaching particular groups of pupils and collaborative working skills for appropriate interaction with colleagues, parents and professionals.

Council recognises the significant contribution made by the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills over the last number of years in providing professional development opportunities for teachers through:

- Expansion of accredited programmes delivered through the Colleges of Education and Universities
- Establishment of the SESS which seeks to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools for children with special educational needs.

Council recommends that:

- The Teaching Council establishes standards of teaching in relation to knowledge, skills and competence necessary for teaching pupils with special educational needs
- A strategic programme of professional development should be designed and offered to teachers in special schools with particular emphasis on the profile of children enrolled in the school

- All teachers of children with special educational needs in both mainstream and special schools should continue to have access to continuous professional development on an ongoing basis in order to develop specialist skills appropriate to particular groups of pupils and collaborative working skills.
- Council requests that the TES ensures that current programmes of initial teacher education and continuous professional development incorporate modules which are focussed on the particular needs of children with special educational needs, including those with multiple and complex needs. In particular the specific requirements of post-primary teachers should be considered in the development and provision of programmes for initial teacher education and continuous professional development.

4.3.14 Location of Special Schools

If special schools in the future are to serve mainly those children with the most complex and enduring needs, it may not be necessary to increase significantly the number of special schools in existence. It may be possible to amalgamate special schools in areas where two or more small special schools are catering for different categories of special educational needs within the same local area. As it is now proposed that special schools will continue to have a significant place in the future continuum of provision, it will be necessary to review the suitability of the accommodation that is currently available in certain special schools.

Given the small population size and demographic patterns, it may be expedient in the future to plan for the establishment of special schools and classes/units on the campus of mainstream schools to serve the needs of local communities, as an alternative to building new special schools in a separate location. These specialist units will need to be resourced and supported with the health and education supports necessary to meet the needs of pupils with complex and severe needs.

Policy on the establishment of special schools and special classes will need to continue to take into account the uneven population distribution across the country. In some areas there will be an insufficient number of children with complex and severe needs to warrant the provision of a separate special school.

Council proposes that suitable and equitable provision can be made for children with special educational needs in these areas within the context of a mainstream school or within a special class/unit attached to a mainstream school which takes into account

the distance that children will have to travel to school. For this reason, the Council does not propose a distribution of special schools on a similar geographic basis to mainstream schools.

The proposal to locate educational provision for children with complex special educational needs on the campus of mainstream schools means that children with and without special educational needs will be educated together on the same campus and this could provide increased opportunities for children with special educational needs to be included in activities with their peers. It also affords an opportunity for mainstream children to learn about and understand children with special educational needs. Such planning would also address the concerns of parents who, throughout the consultation process conducted in preparation of this paper, expressed serious reservations about the distances that some children with complex needs had to travel to schools. It gives due consideration to the conclusions reached by Norwich and Gray (2006) that in the future all specialist provision should be linked to ordinary provision in terms of organisation and governance.

Council recommends that:

1. Planning for the location of special schools and classes should ensure appropriate access to education for children with special educational needs on a geographic and demographic basis. Factors that should be taken into account include the population of school-going children within the local or county area, the numbers of children resourced by NCSE in each county and the distances travelled by children to schools.
2. In the future, educational provision for children with special educational needs should generally be provided on the same site as mainstream schools, where this is seen to be consistent with their best interests and the effective provision of education to the children with whom they are to be educated. This facilitates flexibility and interaction in terms of the continuum of provision, opportunities for inclusion and enables pupils' movement and progression between the different types of provision.
3. Planning of new mainstream schools should take into account the needs of pupils with special educational needs in the community, including demographics and distances from other services. This could possibly mean planning for a special unit/school on site but could also mean well planned,

time-bound special classes/transition arrangements or resourced mainstream classes to provide for optimal inclusion of pupils.

4. Major building programmes for new schools should consider the location of special schools on-site.
5. Special schools should be a central element in the planning of the DES building programme in order to ensure that the existing stock of schools is replenished and that future special schools are located in buildings which are fit for purpose.
6. Special classes should continue to provide support to children in areas where the demographics would not sustain the establishment of a special school.
7. School building programmes in areas where special schools are located should consider the desirability and feasibility of including the special schools requirements in any new school being built.
8. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of special schools in a single management structure for new schools.

4.3.15 Collaborative Linkages between the Special and Mainstream System

Support for Mainstream Schools:

Council notes the international trend towards special schools providing out-reach and in-reach support for mainstream schools. However the evidence to date suggests that in Ireland, the links between special and mainstream schools are tenuous for the most part. Links that exist are based mainly on informal visits by teachers and pupils from mainstream to special schools and on informal dual placement arrangements whereby individual pupils who are enrolled in special schools access education for part of the school week in a mainstream primary or post-primary school. (Ware et al, 2009).

The role of Irish special schools is already changing and will continue to do so over the next few years, particularly if the proposals contained in this policy advice paper are implemented. In the future, special schools will have a clear mandate to provide education to that cohort of pupils with the most significant and complex needs.

The Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009) expressed concerns regarding the current capacity of special schools to provide support to mainstream schools, given the levels of training and expertise of the staff in at least some schools. Council is of the view that special schools must be

afforded the resources, time and opportunity to develop into their new modified role before they will be in a position to offer support to other schools.

Council also recognises that teachers across all schools, mainstream and special, have developed their professional knowledge and expertise regarding the education of children with special educational needs over the last number of years. Council believes that opportunities should be provided for a two way exchange of this expertise to serve the interests of children with special educational needs enrolled across the spectrum of schools.

Council recommends that:

- Opportunities are provided for a two-way exchange of expertise between teachers in mainstream and special schools concerning good practice in the education of children with special educational needs.
- Special schools are supported to cater for those pupils with the most complex needs and that their progress in doing so is monitored and evaluated.
- Special schools are afforded the resources, time and opportunity to develop into their new modified role so that in the future they will be in a position to offer support to other mainstream schools.
- Providers of CPD (including third-level institutions and the SESS) are informed of the importance of continuing to develop expertise in supporting special schools in the education of children with the most complex needs.

4.3.16 Linkages between Special Classes and Mainstream Classes

Council believes that children with special educational needs need to belong to a peer group and to have opportunities for interaction with children of different abilities in a variety of situations, to the greatest extent possible. Special classes can be organised on a flexible basis to facilitate this inclusive approach. Accordingly, Council recommends that all schools are required to develop a formal policy regarding the inclusion, in mainstream classes and activities, of children with special educational needs who are enrolled in special classes. In addition, IEPs should specify how this will be achieved for individual children with special educational needs who are placed in special classes.

4.3.17 Dual Placement

Dual placement is defined as an arrangement by which a pupil is listed simultaneously on the rolls of two schools, usually one special and one mainstream, to facilitate his/her attendance part-time at each school. At present in Ireland, such arrangements have no official sanction; consequently, one capitation grant is paid to the school in which the child is officially enrolled.

Dual enrolment and shared placements were advocated in the SERC Report (Gov. of Ireland, 1993) and have been developing between schools on an informal basis since that time. As reported in the recent Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland (Ware et al, 2009), approximately one in three special schools currently operates some form of unofficial dual placement. In these cases mainstream and special schools operate informal arrangements whereby a child who is enrolled in a special school is placed for some or part of a week in a mainstream school. The pupils may also be listed on the roll of that school for the purpose of part-time attendance. These informal arrangements are put in place for a number of reasons including providing opportunities for children with special educational needs to meet peers who do not have such needs; social development; as transitional arrangements in preparation for a move to mainstream education; at the request of parents who wish to respond to the changing needs of their children. Links between post-primary schools and special schools can enable pupils to take specific subject/s for state examinations.

The international literature (Ware et al, 2009) indicates that there are certain factors which, if in place, will increase the possibility that dual arrangements work for the individual child. These include preparation and planning at all levels, effective coordination, good communication between those involved and the pupils' ability to adapt to the two learning environments. For any system of dual placement to operate successfully formal arrangements concerning insurance, funding, capitation, transport, substitute cover and roles of teachers and SNAs must be clarified.

School attendance plays an important role in developing a child's sense of identity and connectedness. In a situation where a child is 'dual enrolled' there are questions which need to be considered in relation to this.

- Where does the child feel that he/she belongs?
- Which school is taking care of the child?
- What needs are being met?

There is also a need to define what exactly is meant by the terms dual enrolment and dual placement and to clarify the circumstances and purposes for which dual enrolment or dual placement may be arranged. The following questions arise in relation to these matters:

- Does it mean that a child spends a certain number of days in a special school and a certain number of days in a mainstream school?
- Could it mean that the child spends a part of a day in a mainstream school?
- At a minimum does dual placement infer that the child is engaged in a separate programme by a different teacher in the other school?
- What is the purpose of the dual arrangement – is it academic, social or both?
- Is it for access to academic programmes not available in special schools?
- Should the arrangement be in place for specific activities only?
- Should it occur each day, or each week or each term?
- Should the arrangements be formal or informal?
- What might be the teaching arrangements?
- Does the exchange only happen in one direction, i.e. between special and mainstream? Could the child be placed in a mainstream school and go to the special school to learn certain skills such as Braille, ISL, etc?
- What distinction should be made between arrangements for 'dual placement' and a child 'visiting' a special school?
- How will outcomes for the child be clearly identified, recorded and monitored?

Council considers that to date there is insufficient evidence in the international literature (Ware et al, 2009) to support the benefits of establishing a formal system of dual enrolment for the individual child with special educational needs. It is therefore not possible at this point in time to make definitive recommendations in relation to dual enrolment in the Irish context. Council proposes that a further examination of the possible impact of dual enrolment for the individual child (including educational and social outcomes) be undertaken before a formal policy is adopted in this regard. This study should:

- Include an examination of the supports needed by each school to operate such an arrangement.
- Examine how protocols might be developed between schools to govern the dual enrolment of children.
- Address any anomalies that might arise from the current capitation system (see Appendix 5).

- Examine those factors which studies have shown are critical in the successful implementation of dual placement. These include planning and co-ordination, communication, time for collaboration, access to therapies and other administrative issues.
- Take into account the experiences and views of the pupils and parents concerned and place particular importance on the outcomes for pupils in the dual setting.

Schools should be allowed to continue to operate informal dual placement arrangements as currently these do not have resource implications for the State. These informal arrangements should be subject to the agreement of parents and pupils and the appropriate planning and monitoring of arrangements until such time as more evidence becomes available concerning the outcomes of dual enrolment for children with special educational needs. Finally, Council is of the opinion that if in the future special schools were located on the campus of mainstream schools, arrangements for dual enrolment or dual placements would be greatly simplified.

4.3.18 Co-operation between Health and Education

The provision of health supports emerges as a critical issue across literature findings (Ware et al, 2009). Council asserts the entitlement of children with special educational needs to access health-funded support services regardless of the setting in which they are being educated. Currently, Council is aware of situations where critical educational decisions are being made on the basis of the availability (or otherwise) of health supports. The following examples have been brought to the attention of Council where:

- parents seek to send their child to a special school rather than a special class or mainstream class because of the availability of health funded support services in the special school, even though their child is making good progress in mainstream education
- parents refuse to allow their child to leave a special class setting because health-funded support services will not be provided in the mainstream school setting, despite the child's readiness and suitability for mainstream placement
- the enrolment policy of certain special schools is determined by the health-funded support services that will be available to children in those schools
- parents seek professional reports which assess their child as being within a certain category of disability because their child can then gain access to a special school which will have health-funded support services attached

There are a number of further issues which arise in relation to the delivery of health supports:

1. Therapy services are available only in some special schools/classes and are not generally available to children with a disability and similar special educational needs who are enrolled in mainstream schools. This mitigates against parents being able to choose mainstream school settings for their children, even when this proves to be a suitable setting for their child.
2. Health-funded support services are delivered to children based on their place of residence rather than the location of the school they are attending. This can result in the anomaly of health-funded support services being delivered to certain children in a special school setting but not to others, depending on the postal address of the child.
3. It is often the case that health-funded support services are delivered in clinical settings. Pupils with special educational needs and their parents can find it extremely difficult to attend at clinics and would be much more likely to avail of services which are school based.
4. The assessment process under the Disability Act, 2005, is still for children aged under five years.
5. Certain special schools under the patronage of voluntary bodies refuse to enrol children if they do not live in the HSE area for which the voluntary body is contracted to provide services. This is because within certain current service agreements, the voluntary body claims that it only has the capacity to provide health-funded support services to children who are attached to their service.

Council believes that the provision of sufficient and consistent access to good quality health-funded and education-funded support services is essential for children with special educational needs whether they are enrolled in special schools, special classes or in mainstream classes. In particular, children should have access to an appropriate level of speech and language therapy. This requires the health and education sectors to work closely together to achieve the best provision and outcomes for children with special educational needs.

The Council therefore recommends that:

1. A unified system for the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs should be agreed and implemented. This may require a review of certain provisions of the EPSEN Act (2004) and the

Disability Act (2005) relating to assessment and identification of need in order to facilitate seamless provision and a greater cohesion between the education and health sectors. The Review of the Operation of the Disability Act 2005 (Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, July 2010) suggests that there is some incompatibility between the two assessment processes.

2. Protocols between the health and education sectors be developed and approved, at the highest levels, to establish the most efficient and effective way to provide multi-disciplinary support to pupils with special educational needs who attend special schools, special classes and in mainstream classes.
3. Such protocols should establish the nature and extent of the cooperation required between the health and education sectors for the delivery of an efficient and coordinated multi-disciplinary service to children with special educational needs in special schools and classes.
4. Formal institutional mechanisms for collaboration at local service planning/provision level be agreed and established.

5 Implications of Policy Advice.

5.1 Council's Obligations under the EPSEN Act, 2004

When giving advice to the Minister the Council is required under Section 20 (3) (b) of the EPSEN Act, 2004 to:

- (i) provide an assessment of the implications of that advice for the resources, including financial resources, available to the State in respect of the provision of education, and
- (ii) have regard to the practical implementation of that advice.

Council's vision for the future role of special schools and classes, as set out in this paper, was developed within the context of the commitment to inclusive and appropriate education for children with special educational needs as set out in the EPSEN Act, 2004, and on the basis of what Council believes to be in the best interests of children and young people with special educational needs. It is important to point out that in formulating this vision Council was not constrained by the exigencies of the current Irish economic situation.

If adopted, Council believes that this set of proposals will:

- be in line with the EPSEN Act 2004
- have their greatest impact when the EPSEN Act is fully implemented, particularly those sections that relate to the assessment and education planning for children with special educational needs
- bring about further improvements in the quality of education being provided for children and young people with special educational needs in Ireland
- result in a streamlining of the provision of special education and
- offer parents a range of appropriately resourced and supported options for educational placement, centred on the needs of children.

However, in this section of the paper which examines the implication of its advice for the resources available to the State, Council feels obliged to recognise the particular fiscal constraints under which the State will operate over the course of the next four years and in the context of the National Recovery Plan 2011 – 2014 (Gov. of Ireland, 2010) as currently agreed. Council recognises that the current economic circumstances dictate that new policies will have to be implemented within the level of

existing resources or within a re-prioritisation of existing expenditure. Council believes that a key issue for policy advice in relation to the future role of special schools and classes is the structure and nature of the provision to be put in place rather than solely the level of resources available.

Considerable investment has already been made in special education in recent years, with over €1 billion spent on supporting special educational provision in 2010 (DES, 2010). This figure includes the provision of resource teachers, SNAs, special equipment, enhanced capitation grants etc. There is an equal challenge involved in ensuring effective deployment and utilisation of existing resources as there is in providing additional resources.

Council also believes that if these proposals are accepted, it should be possible to adopt a phased approach to their implementation thereby allowing the State to manage the timeframe in which change is brought about and spreading the full cost over a number of years. Finally Council is of the opinion that in a number of instances, the cost of the proposals can be managed within the parameters of existing budgets and financial planning.

5.2 Implications of Policy Advice for the Resources of the State

The practical implications of NCSE policy advice and an assessment of the implications of that advice for the resources, including financial resources, available to the State are examined under two headings in this section:

1. The Terms of Reference for the policy advice as specified by the Department of Education and Skills, see section 1.3.
2. Cross-cutting issues for the future development of special schools and classes which arise from the policy advice.

5.2.1 Terms of Reference for Policy Advice: To review the role of special schools in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs

Council recognises the legislative intent in the EPSEN Act, 2004 that pupils with special educational needs should be educated alongside their peers, in inclusive settings to the greatest extent possible. Council believes that special schools have a role to play in the education of children with special educational needs as part of a continuum of special educational provision but that in the future the role of the special

school will develop in line with the provisions of the EPSEN Act, 2004. The implications of Council's policy advice in relation to the future role of special schools are as follows:

1. The majority of pupils with special educational needs will be educated in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.
2. A minority of pupils with special educational needs, namely those with the most complex needs, may require placement in a special school or special class setting, where this is seen to be consistent with their best interests and the effective provision of education to the children with whom they are to be educated.
3. Special schools will therefore serve those pupils with the greatest level and complexity of special educational needs rather than be designated by any particular category of disability. Over time Council believes that this will ensure that most children with complex special educational needs, who require a special school setting, will be able to attend the special school that is closest to where he/she lives, regardless of the diagnosed category of disability. This will reduce the need for children with complex needs to travel long distances to school.
4. Council recognises that it may not be possible to provide special schools for children with complex special educational needs in all parts of the country especially in areas of light population density. In such circumstances suitably resourced educational placements, including special class arrangements should be provided.
5. Since only those children with the most complex needs will be enrolled in special schools the numbers of children with special educational needs enrolling in mainstream settings will increase, both at primary and post-primary level. This will require health and education funded support services being made available in a consistent manner to these children in the mainstream settings.

5.2.2 Future Role of Special Schools: Implications of policy advice for the resources of the State

- **Provision of Educational Services**

In considering the implications of their recommendations for the resources of the State, Council notes that current evidence suggests that certain of these changes are already taking place within the special education system. The children enrolled in special schools are, by and large, already those with the most complex needs. Council does

not envisage that its policy advice will result in a major variation in the numbers of children attending special schools. Council has previously stated the principles which should govern the staffing arrangements pertaining to special schools (c.f. section 4.3.10 above).

If only those children with the most complex needs are attending special schools in the future, there may be a corresponding slight increase in the numbers of children with special educational needs enrolling in mainstream schools and special classes within mainstream schools, as has already been the pattern for the past number of years. The range and nature of special educational needs represented in mainstream schools may also increase in diversity. This will have implications for staffing levels required in mainstream schools. The average cost to the State for each additional teacher employed in a school, mainstream or special, is €55,000 while the average cost of employing an SNA is €31,000 per annum. (DES Statistics, 2010)

- **Provision of Health Services**

As part of its policy advice, Council states that health and education support services should be available to children with special educational needs regardless of the setting in which they are being educated. This will require consistency across all schools in the manner in which health support services are delivered. However Council notes the recommendation of the HSE “Report of the Reference Group on Multi-disciplinary Disability Services for Children 5-18 Years” that health service interventions should be based in the school whenever appropriate to meet the child’s needs (Section 3.6.2, Unpublished). This will require a re-configuration of existing structures and priorities within the HSE in order to allow this change to come about. Council welcomes the direction of the policy recommendations contained in the above report.

As previously stated Council asserts as a fundamental principle that any child who attends a special school should have access to the support services provided in that school, irrespective of where the child lives or their category of disability. Issues that arise in relation to the provision of health services to children with special educational needs are outlined in Section 4.3.18 of this paper.

Council considers that it may be necessary to examine the funding structures for support service provision to children attending special schools. Any such examination will require a consultation process involving the DES, HSE, NCSE, and patrons of special schools.

- **Location of Special Schools**

Council recommends that in the future, special school provision for children with special educational needs should be provided on the sites of mainstream schools. This could take the form of a special school, special class/unit or support within mainstream provision. This recommendation has significant implications for the planning of major building programmes for new schools which Council believes in the future should be directed at achieving the objective of locating special school provision for children with special educational needs on the same site as mainstream provision.

Council considers that in planning new school provision the policy position that children with special educational needs should, to the greatest extent possible, be educated alongside their peers should be taken into account in determining the nature and extent of the facilities to be provided. Planning should have regard to the needs of pupils with special educational needs in the community, including demographics and distances from other services so as to ensure equitable access on a geographic and demographic basis.

Council recognises that it will take time to arrive at a situation where all children attend school on the same campus, with the necessary supports in place. In moving towards this goal, Council is concerned that special schools should form a central element in the planning of the DES building programme in order to ensure that the existing stock of schools is replenished and that future special schools are located in buildings which are fit for purpose. Consideration should be given to the desirability and feasibility of relocating any existing adjacent special schools on the site of a new school. This would increase the opportunities for the development of inclusive practices and could facilitate the streamlining of school transport services.

Council is of the view that the adoption of a policy position by the Department of Education and Skills on the future location of special schools on the same sites as mainstream schools will open the need for discussion with the patrons of existing special schools in relation to the future management and patronage of these schools. The possibility of linking or integrating the management of special schools as part of a single school management structure can then be considered. Council is of the opinion that from now on, the management arrangements for any new special schools or special units built on the campus of a mainstream school should be closely linked or integrated into the management structure of that mainstream school.

Council recognises that there may be additional costs to the State necessitated by the location of provision for children with the most complex special educational needs on the site of mainstream schools and/or by the refurbishment of existing special schools so that they are fit for purpose. In the case where the extensive refurbishment of an existing special school is necessary, the DES might consider diverting the cost of the planned refurbishment towards the cost of a locating a purpose built special school on a mainstream campus, as indicated above.

In relation to the building costs of a special school, it should be noted that the building cost of an 8 classroom primary school is approximately €1.6m. There is also a start-up grant available to schools to set up a special class amounting to €6,500 per class established (Source: DES, 2010). There is a standard plan for the provision of a special educational needs unit in primary and post-primary schools consisting of two classrooms, two withdrawal rooms, multi sensory room, office space, central activities space and toilets.

Council notes that in 2009, a total of €66m was spent on the Special Transport Scheme which comprised grants to parents, cost of taxis, provision of escorts, transport by bus/adapted vehicle (Source: DES, 2010). As part of the NCSE consultative process underpinning this policy advice, parents expressed concern that certain children with complex needs had to travel relatively long distances to attend special schools and that they experienced significant levels of fatigue as a consequence of the increase in the length of their school day.

Council is of the opinion that the provision of the full range of services for children with the most complex needs on-site with mainstream schools could result in a more efficient transport service and a consequent reduction in costs as transport for all children is provided to a single location within the local community.

Finally, Council observes that the location of provision for children with the most complex needs on-site with mainstream provision would greatly simplify and facilitate arrangements for the dual enrolment or dual placement of children with special educational needs.

5.2.3 Term of Reference for Policy Advice: In particular to examine ways in which special schools can act in a co-operative way with mainstream primary and post-primary schools to provide enhanced service to pupils with special educational needs and their parents

Council is of the view that there is significant potential for special schools to assist mainstream schools in providing enhanced services to children with special educational needs and their parents. Some positive examples of cooperation and collaboration between special schools and mainstream schools are mentioned in other parts of this report and Council would support the continuing exploration of models of out-reach provision in the Irish context. Council is also of the view that special schools must be afforded the resources, time and opportunity to develop into this new role before they are in a position to offer support to other schools. Council also recognises that the greater availability in recent years of professional development opportunities for teachers across all schools has resulted in a development of teachers' professional knowledge and expertise regarding the education of children with special educational needs. Council believes that a two way exchange of this expertise between teachers in special and mainstream schools will serve the interests of children with special educational needs enrolled across the spectrum of schools.

This two way exchange of expertise could be facilitated through existing educational structures such as Education Centres, teacher organisations and subject associations. It could also be facilitated through study visits, short-term teacher exchanges and support provided to teachers through the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

The Council considers that such developments could be implemented without any significant additional cost to the exchequer other than that which is currently committed to the above structures.

5.2.4 Terms of Reference for policy advice: to review the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education as described in Section 2 of the EPSEN Act, 2004

Council recommends that special classes should continue to exist as part of the continuum of provision for pupils with special educational needs for whom full-time placement in an inclusive environment may be inconsistent with the child's best interest

or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated. Special classes should be organised on a flexible basis to provide for specialist interventions and supports specific to children's needs and to facilitate an inclusive approach which allows children to join mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible. As this is currently the position in relation to the establishment of special classes, there is no change in policy being recommended, in an overall sense, in relation to the future role of special classes.

Council is recommending that there should be some flexibility in relation to the arrangements for the placement of pupils in special classes. Options might include the placement of pupils within similar categories of special educational needs together in the same special class **or** the placement of children with a range of needs together in the same class. In the first case, the special class is designated for a specific category of special educational need, while in the second case the class caters for children across different categories. The option chosen should be determined in response to the needs of children with special educational needs within particular local communities, taking into account local demographics and the ongoing feasibility of maintaining the special class.

Council believes that this flexibility will result in special class placement being available, where required, for all children with special educational needs within the local community that require such placement. The NCSE has responsibility for the establishment and discontinuation of special classes which should be planned in a coherent and transparent manner.

Council recommends that schools should exercise flexibility in relation to the operation of special classes to provide for specialist interventions and supports specific to children's needs and to facilitate an inclusive approach. It should be explicitly stated, within the child's individual education plan how each child will access education within the special class and be included for educational activities in mainstream classes, in accordance with their learning needs and abilities.

In order to provide the best possible education for each individual child with special educational needs, schools should exercise greater flexibility in the use of resources allocated for children with special educational needs in mainstream classes, for example by deploying these resources to set up flexible groupings for teaching and learning purposes. The Council notes that such flexibility is already available to schools, under the terms of DES Circular 02/05. Council recognises that schools may

require further guidance in the exercise of this flexibility and in the development of individual education plans for children with special educational needs.

Finally, Council recommends that the quality of provision and outcomes for children with special educational needs in both special class and mainstream settings should continue to be regularly monitored and reviewed by the schools themselves and through external inspection and review processes.

Council believes that special classes should continue to have a role as part of the continuum of provision and as previously stated should be planned in a coherent and transparent manner to meet the special educational needs of children within the local area. Council is of the view that these changes can be accommodated without incurring additional expenditure from the exchequer.

Council is aware that there will be a cost in relation to the provision of guidance and training for teachers which will need to be carefully managed within existing budgetary priorities. Matters in relation to the professional development of teachers are dealt with in more detail in Section 5.3.3 of this paper.

5.2.5 Term of Reference for Policy Advice: the issues related to dual enrolment:

Council notes that the recent review of special schools and classes (Ware et al, 2009) found that approximately one in three special schools currently operates some form of unofficial dual placement with mainstream schools. At the same time, Council believes that there is insufficient evidence to date internationally that dual enrolment results in improved outcomes for children with special educational needs. Council considers therefore that it is not possible to make definitive recommendations in relation to dual enrolment in the Irish context. Council recommends that a comprehensive study be undertaken to examine what benefits, if any, children with special educational needs derive from dual enrolment or dual placement arrangements and to explore which factors are critical to the successful implementation of dual placement. The study should also examine whether or to what extent it might be worthwhile to establish a model of dual enrolment in the Irish context. Finally the study should include an examination of the supports needed by each school to operate a dual enrolment arrangement and address any anomalies that might arise from the current capitation system (see Appendix 5).

This study should be undertaken as part of the NCSE Research Programme.

5.3 Cross-cutting issues for the future development of special schools and classes arising from the policy advice

5.3.1 Identification and Assessment of pupils for placement in special schools and classes

Council recommends that the Department of Education and Skills should initiate the development of a **Code of Practice**, (with NCSE as the leading Agency), to guide parents and professionals in making decisions regarding the placement of individual children with special educational needs. Council acknowledges that the implementation of this code of practice may have implications for the work of professionals involved in the assessment of children, which include psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists etc. Council notes in particular that parents report that there can be delays in getting such professional assessments carried out at present.

NEPS currently employs 171 psychologists (Source: NEPS, Jan 2011) with an additional 7 posts in the process of being filled by the Public Appointments Service. Schools which do not currently have a service from NEPS may avail of the DES Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

The Renewed Programme for Government (Gov. of Ireland, 2009) provides for 210 posts, as necessary, to ensure full coverage by NEPS. The average annual cost to the State associated with a psychologist post in NEPS is approximately €105,000 to include pay and all non-pay costs excluding office rental, for example, Administrative Support, T&S, computers, CPD, tests and materials. (Source: NEPS, 2011). Council notes that under the terms of the National Recovery Plan 2011 - 2014 (Gov. of Ireland, 2010), the Government proposes to cap the number of NEPS psychologists at 178.

5.3.2 Model for Resourcing Special Schools and Classes

This policy advice paper highlights an anomaly between the health and education systems in terms of the assessment and identification of needs and the allocation of resources to children with special educational needs. The health system focuses on the person's right to an Assessment of Need (under the Disability Act 2005), without this necessarily leading to a diagnosis of disability or the allocation of any additional health resources or services. The education system, on the other hand, requires a diagnosis of the disability and assessment of special educational needs in order to trigger the

allocation of additional educational resources (although this is not the case for provision of additional teaching hours for children with high incidence disabilities in primary schools resourced under the General Allocation Model). Any change in the current system for allocating educational resources to schools on behalf of children with special educational needs would require an equal degree of rigour attached in order to ensure that the resources available are deployed in an equitable and transparent manner.

The Council recommends the establishment of a unitary system for the assessment and identification of children with special educational needs which ensures a clear identification of needs and eliminates the need for dual assessment. Council believes that on the basis of efficiency and clarity a single system of assessment is required. In order to inform the development of a unitary system, NCSE proposes to prepare further policy advice which will examine in detail the possibility of establishing a unitary system of assessment in the Irish context. The development of such a policy advice paper should be prioritised and prepared by the Council within its Framework for Policy Development, 2010-2012 and should examine the practical implications for the State in developing such a unitary system and assess the implications for the State's resources, including financial resources.

5.3.3 Professional Development of Teaching Staff

There is consistent and significant evidence in the research literature (Ware et al, 2009, Ofsted, 2006) to support the finding that the key factor contributing to pupils' progress, including those pupils with complex needs, is access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers. In recognition of the importance of this finding, Council has made a number of recommendations in relation to the ongoing need for initial teacher education and continuous professional development for all teachers of children with special educational needs in both mainstream and special schools as part of the overall framework for teacher education. Such programmes should incorporate modules which are focussed on the particular needs of children with multiple and complex needs. In particular the requirements of post-primary teachers should be considered in the development and provision of programmes for initial teacher education and continuous professional development. Council is of the view that the TES should continue to prioritise such ongoing professional development and training in line with the Strategy Statement of the Department of Education and Science (DES) 2008-2010 (DES, 2008) and the work of the Teaching Council.

Council would like to recognise the important work of the SESS in providing professional development opportunities in special education for teachers in primary, post-primary and special schools. Council is of the view that the range of specialist training that is required also requires the ongoing involvement of Colleges of Education and Universities to provide appropriate specialism and certification from diploma to doctoral levels.

In addition Council recommends that a strategic programme of professional development should be specifically designed and offered to teachers in special schools which would address, in an in-depth manner, the complex and diverse needs of pupils attending special schools.

It is difficult to estimate the amount of funding currently devoted directly towards the continuous professional development of teachers in special schools and classes as distinct from that allocated to teachers of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. The budget allocated to programmes delivered by the Special Education Support Service (SESS) covers all schools including special schools, both regionally and nationally, so it is not possible to isolate specific costs. In addition, it is difficult for the Council to estimate the actual costs of providing training directly to teachers in a special school or cluster of schools as the average costs can vary considerably, with tutor fees as the greatest cost varying according to specialism required.

The Council recognises that this recommendation, if implemented, would be additional to the professional development opportunities that are currently provided. Council attaches considerable importance to this recommendation and requests the TES to consider the prioritisation of such training within existing funding mechanisms.

5.3.4 Research

There are a number of areas where Council recommends that further research be undertaken as follows:

- The efficacy of special classes as a model of provision in the Irish context.
Council notes the need to monitor the development of international evidence on the impact of special classes as a model of special educational provision and to take account of evidence available to date (the commissioning of this research is already in progress as part of the NCSE 2010-2011 research programme).

- The extent to which special classes impact differentially on specified categories and levels of special educational needs.
- The pattern of transfer of pupils of post-primary age to special schools.
- Review how progress and meaningful outcomes for children with special educational needs can be identified and measured; drawing on international experience (the commissioning of this research is already in progress as part of the NCSE 2010-2011 research programme).
- Study relating to dual enrolment / placement.

Council will consider the prioritization to be given to the above recommendations for research within its current remit and budgetary provision over the coming years. It should be noted that Council has already prioritised certain of these areas and will continue to do so over the period of office of the current Council.

5.3.5 Co-operation between Health and Education

The delivery of sufficient and consistent access to health and education support services requires the health and education sectors to work closely together to achieve the best outcomes for children with special educational needs. The need for greater collaboration and coherent working relationships emerges as a common theme across the research literature (Ware et al, 2009) and through the experiences of SENOS and other front-line professionals.

Council recognises that a Cross-Sectoral Group representing health and education, has already been established to oversee the implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004. Council views this group as the appropriate formal mechanism through which closer and collaborative working relationships can be facilitated between the two Departments and their agencies. Council proposes that appropriate structures and protocols are put in place, as a matter of priority, to expedite this process so as to ensure the delivery of an efficient and coordinated multidisciplinary service to children with special educational needs in mainstream and special settings. As Council believes that these developments can be managed through existing structures there should be no immediate significant additional costs to the State.

6 Appendices

Appendix 1: Development of Special Schools and Classes - History and Context

The evolution of current policy and practice in relation to the education of children with special educational needs in Ireland can be traced back over many decades to the middle of the 19th century and this history has been documented in many other publications. This paper adopts the publication of the report of the Special Education Review Committee (Gov. of Ireland, 1993) as a significant milestone in the development of today's system and tracks developments from this point onwards.

Prior to the publication of the SERC Report (Gov. of Ireland, 1993), there was a general acceptance that the education of children with special educational needs could best be provided through placement in special schools and special classes (Gov. of Ireland, 1965). As a result of this policy, a network of special schools was established by the Department of Education and Skills over many decades to provide education for children with special educational needs. This network of schools developed separately and in parallel with the mainstream system with very little contact or overlap between the two systems. Special schools were set up as part of the National School system and, in accordance with the regulations of the Department of Education, pupils could be enrolled from the age of four years and remain on the roll to the end of the school year following their eighteenth birthday. This was in contrast to the mainstream system where generally pupils transfer to a post-primary school around the age of twelve years.

While originally established for the education of children with sensory impairments, the network of special National Schools was expanded in the late 1960s and early 1970s to cater for the special educational needs of pupils with general learning disability as recommended by the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Gov. of Ireland, 1965). Special classes were attached to mainstream primary schools in areas where it did not prove possible to set up a special school. During the 1980s, there began a move to provide special education in mainstream schools at both primary and post-primary levels in response to international trends and parental choice. A number of special classes for pupils with a moderate general learning disability were

subsequently established, largely in mainstream national schools, as were special classes for pupils with other disabilities including specific learning disability.

The Special Education Review Committee, 1991:

The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established by the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, T.D. in 1991 to review existing educational provision for children with special educational needs and to make recommendations for its future development. It should be noted that the Committee considered the description 'pupils with special educational needs' to include *all those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging* (Gov. of Ireland, 1993, P. 18). This is a broader definition of special educational needs than was subsequently adopted in the EPSEN Act, 2004 (Gov. of Ireland, 2004). As a consequence there are categories of pupils considered in the SERC report who would not be included under the EPSEN Act, 2004, namely pupils regarded as educationally and socially disadvantaged, children of the Travelling Community and pupils who are exceptionally able or talented.

The Review Committee proposed seven principles which should serve as basic guidelines for the future development of the system and recommended that due account should be taken of these principles in the framing of an Education Act. The principles outlined were:

Principle 1: All children, including those with special educational needs, have a right to an appropriate education.

Principle 2: The needs of the individual child should be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the provision of special education for that child.

Principle 3: The parents of a child with special educational needs are entitled and should be enabled to play an active part in the decision-making process; their wishes should be taken into consideration when recommendations on special educational provision are being made.

Principle 4: A continuum of services should be provided for children with special educational needs ranging from full-time education in ordinary classes, with additional support as may be necessary, to full-time education in special schools.

Principle 5: Except where individual circumstances make this impracticable, appropriate education for all children with special educational needs should be provided in ordinary schools.

Principle 6: Only in the most exceptional of circumstances should it be necessary for a child to live away from home in order to avail of an appropriate education.

Principle 7: The State should provide adequate resources to ensure that pupils with special educational needs can have an education appropriate to those needs.

(Gov. of Ireland, 1993, pp. 19-20)

In addition to setting down the above principles, the Report reviewed and made proposals for the development of services for particular categories of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although the categorisation of pupils underpinned these proposals, the Committee emphasised that the nature of the additional educational services that a pupil may require is often not adequately established by identifying that pupil's primary disability or special circumstances (Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993, P. 20).

While published in 1993, the report of the SERC committee has had a central importance in the development of policy and provision for children with special educational needs in the Irish context. Its importance is historical in terms of its influence on the White Paper on Education (1995) and the subsequent Education Act, 1998, which supported the provision of a system that would be sufficiently flexible to cater for the diversity of needs that children bring to the education system. The principles enshrined in the report and its recommendations continue to exert a significant influence over current policy and practice. It remains current policy that a continuum of provision should be available for children with special educational needs ranging from full-time provision in regular, mainstream classes, with additional support as may be necessary, to full-time education in special schools. In addition the fifth principle that appropriate education for all pupils with special educational needs should be provided in ordinary schools has resulted in a growth in the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

Movement towards Inclusion: The Irish Context

The recommendations contained in the SERC report did not stand in isolation from other movements, both national and international, towards the greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. While, in Ireland,

special schools were often still viewed in the early 1990s as providing the only appropriate placement for pupils with special educational needs, there was a heightened awareness of the necessity to create greater access to diverse settings. This, in turn resulted in a shift away from the view of special schools as the only or most appropriate model of provision for pupils with special educational needs, to a belief that they should also be provided with the choice, where appropriate, of access to and inclusion in mainstream schools.

A number of legal cases taken by parents against the State resulted in significant changes for the education of children with special educational needs.

In the case *O'Donoghue v Minister for Health (1996)* the High Court found that there was a constitutional obligation on the State to provide for the free primary education of all children. This involves giving each child, including children with severe/profound general learning disabilities '*such advice, instruction and teaching as will enable him or her to make the best possible use of his or her inherent and potential capabilities, physical, mental and moral, however limited these capacities may be*' (*O'Donoghue v Minister for Health, 1996*).

In the case of *Sinnott v Minister for Education (2001)*, the High Court found that the State had failed to provide the applicant with free primary education in accordance with his needs and awarded him damages for past and future pain and suffering. Under appeal to the Supreme Court however, it was found that the State's Constitutional obligation to provide for free primary education applies to children only, not adults, and ceases at the age of 18. These cases were significant in establishing the rights of children with special educational needs to an education in accordance with their needs which would be based primarily on educational needs rather than medical/care needs as traditionally delivered.

In 1996, the report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Gov. of Ireland, 1996) highlighted the lack of cooperation between the special school and mainstream sectors and the lack of support for children with special educational needs.

Throughout the 1990s and the decade following, the State played a proactive role in making funding and resources available to develop provision for pupils with special educational needs, in accordance with national and international developments and research findings. In November 1998, the announcement by the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin, T.D. that children with special educational

needs would now have an automatic entitlement to additional supports in mainstream primary schools provided further impetus for the inclusion of such children in mainstream education.

A substantial body of legislation enacted over the years 1998-2005 supported the rights of children with special educational needs to an education appropriate to their needs: the Education Act (1998), the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2004), the Education Welfare Act (2004), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005). This legislation provided a statutory basis for the development of education policy and provision and established a statutory framework for the development of effective national and local structures to ensure equity in the provision of services.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004

The EPSEN Act, 2004 provides the legislative basis for the future development of special education in Ireland. The vision enshrined in the EPSEN Act, 2004 is that of an inclusive education system in which all persons, including those with special educational needs, have equal rights to participate in, benefit from and achieve outcomes from education so that they can lead independent and fulfilled lives.

The Act provides for the rights of children to an assessment, to an individual education plan and to an independent appeals process. In December 2003, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), was set up under the Education Act, 1998, and was subsequently established under the EPSEN Act, 2004 on 1st October 2005. A Special Education Appeals Board, with responsibility for appeals in relation to a number of the provisions in the EPSEN Act, 2004 was established in 2006. This Board was set up to start the preparation of the policies and procedures which would be required when the various sections of the EPSEN Act, 2004 were commenced.

The Disability Act, 2005 complements the objectives of the EPSEN Act, 2004 and supports its implementation. When read together, the Acts appear to envisage a high level of co-operation between the education and health sectors so as to ensure the delivery of an effective and co-ordinated service to children with special educational needs, in inclusive settings.

International Movement towards Inclusion

While the above developments were taking place within the Irish context, a similar movement towards the greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream education was taking place across Europe. This is evidenced by a number of international declarations which placed a strong obligation on governments to provide education in inclusive settings for all learners.

These include:

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990): Ireland ratified this convention in 1992. As a state party to the Convention Ireland is obliged to provide periodic reports to a UN committee on the convention.
2. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994): Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994.
3. United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006): Adopted on 13 December 2006 to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Ireland became a signatory state to the Convention on 30th March 2007 but has not ratified the Convention. The Optional Protocol has not been signed.

On 5th January 2011, the European Union ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is the first time in history that the EU has become a party to an international human rights treaty.

Article 24 (Education) requires State Parties to ensure that

- a) persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability.*
- b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;*
- c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;*

- d) *Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;*
- e) *Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.*

Appendix 2:

Table 7: Geographic Distribution of Special Schools

County	No	By Designation
Carlow	1	Mild 1
Cavan	1	Moderate 1
Clare	2	Mild 1 Moderate 1
Cork	11	Mild 3 Moderate 3 Severe/Profound 1 Physical Disability 1 Multiple Disability 1 Specific LD 1 ASD 1
Donegal	2	Mild 1 Moderate 1
Dublin	37	Mild 5 Moderate 7 Severe/Profound 2 EBD 10 Physical Disability 4 Hearing Impairment 2 Visual Impairment 1 Specific LD 3 ASD 3
Galway	7	Mild 1 Moderate 1 Severe/Profound 4 EBD 1
Kerry	3	Mild 1 Moderate 2
Kildare	3	Mild 1 Moderate 2
Kilkenny	3	Mild 1 Moderate 1 EBD 1
Laois	2	Mild 1 Severe / Profound 1
Limerick	5	Mild 1 Moderate 1 Physical Disability 1 Hearing Impairment 1 ASD 1

Longford	1	Moderate 1
Louth	3	Mild 2 Moderate 1
Mayo	4	Mild 2 Moderate 2
Meath	2	Mild 1 Moderate 1
Offaly	1	Severe/Profound 1
Roscommon	1	Moderate 1
Sligo	2	Mild 1 Moderate 1
Tipperary	3	Mild 1 Moderate 2
Waterford	3	Mild 2 Moderate 1
Westmeath	3	Mild 2 Moderate 1
Wexford	2	Mild 1 Moderate 1
Wicklow	3	Mild 1 Moderate 1 Physical Disability 1

Appendix 3:

Table 8: Special Schools in Ireland, December 2010

SRN	School Name	Address	County
19355S	Ballyowen Meadows	Loughlinstown Drive, Loughlinstown	Dublin
18863J	Benincasa Special School	Sion Hill, Blackrock	Dublin
20121A	Carmona Special School	Dunmore House, 111 Upper Glenageary Rd, Dun Laoghaire	Dublin
19409P	Casa Caterina	Dominican Convent Campus, Cabra, Dublin 7	Dublin
19705T	Catherine Mc Auley NS	59 Lower Baggot Street	Dublin
18692I	Catherine McAuley Special School	Ashbourne Av., St Circular Rd	Limerick
18317F	Central Remedial Clinic	Vernon Avenue, Clontarf	Dublin
20053J	Cheeverstown Special School	Rowan House, Cheeverstown, Templeogue	Dublin
18370J	Enable Ireland Sandymount School	Sandymount Avenue, Sandymount	Dublin
19201O	Holy Family School	Renmore, Galway	Galway
19439B	Holy Family Special School	Old Bridge Road, Cootehill	Cavan
19433M	Holy Family Special School	Charleville	Cork
19523N	Holy Spirit Special School	Callan Road, Kilkenny	Kilkenny
19724A	Little Angels Special School	Knocknamona, Letterkenny	Donegal
18281K	Marino School N.S.	Church Road, Bray	Wicklow
19281P	Mater Special School	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service, James Joyce St.	Dublin
19719H	Mid West School for Hearing Impaired	Rosbrien, Limerick	Limerick
19210P	Mother Of Fair Love Special School	James Street, Kilkenny	Kilkenny
19548G	Nano Nagle Special NS	Listowel	Kerry
18408I	Newcourt School	Newcourt Road, Bray	Wicklow
20099K	Offaly School of Special Education	Kilcruttin Business Park, Tullamore	Offaly
19266T	Our Lady of Fatima	Carrigeen Street, Wexford	Wexford
18208A	Our Lady Of Good Counsel NS	Ballincollig	Cork
19500B	Phoenix Park Special School	Phoenix Park	Dublin
20311F	Redhills Special ASD School	Red Hill, Patrickswell	Limerick
20070J	Rosedale School	Woodlands Centre, Renmore	Galway
18483W	School of Divine Child	Ballintemple	Cork
19206B	School Of Immaculate Conception	Cregg House, Sligo	Sligo
19615S	Scoil Aonghusa Special School	Cahir Road, Cashel	Tipperary
18458A	Scoil Bernadette	Bonnington, Montenotte	Cork
19230V	Scoil Chormaic Special School	Golden Road, Cashel	Tipperary
18586J	Scoil Éanna	Montenotte, Cork	Cork

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19382V	Scoil Eoin	Armagh Rd, Crumlin, Dublin 12	Dublin
19789F	Scoil Micheal Naofa	Castlereagh	Roscommon
19590F	Scoil Mochua	Deansrath, Old Nangor Road, Clondalkin	Dublin
19760E	Scoil Triest	Lota, Cork	Cork
20028K	Setanta Special School	Beechpark, Stillorgan	Dublin
20162O	Sonass Special Primary Junior School	Carrigaline	Cork
19277B	St Anne's School	Ballymany Cross, The Curragh	Kildare
19567K	St Anne's Special School	Taylor's Hill, Galway	Galway
19414I	St Anne's Special School	Corrovarrin, Ennis	Clare
19370O	St Anne's Special School	Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea	Tipperary
19248R	St Anthony's Special School	Humbert Way, Castlebar	Mayo
18499O	St Augustine's School	Obelisk Park, Blackrock	Dublin
19592J	St Bernadette's Special School	Letterkenny	Donegal
19375B	St Brid's Special School	Pavilion Road, Castlebar	Mayo
19792R	St Brigid's Special School	Harbour Street, Mullingar	Westmeath
18772G	St Brigid's Special School	Ard Easmuinn, Dundalk	Louth
19522L	St Catherine's Special School	Newcastle, Greystones	Wicklow
19429V	St Christopher's Special School	Battery Road, Longford	Longford
19325J	St Ciaran's Special School	St Canices Rd, Glasnevin, Dublin 11	Dublin
19233E	St Clare's Special School	Ennis	Clare
18569J	St Declan's Special School	35 Northumberland Road, Ballsbridge	Dublin
19387I	St Dymphna's Special School	Ballina	Mayo
19217G	St Frances' Clinic Special School	Temple Street Hospital, Dublin 1	Dublin
19337Q	St Francis' Special School	Portlaoise	Laois
19547E	St Francis' Special School	Beaufort	Kerry
20074R	St Gabriel's Special School	Murphys Farm, Curraheen Road	Cork
19603L	St Gabriel's School	Springfield Drive, Dooradoyle	Limerick
19261J	St Hilda's Special School	Grace Park Road, Athlone	Westmeath
19376D	St Ita's & St Joseph's NS	St Ita's/St Joseph's N S, Balloonagh, Tralee	Kerry
18936K	St Ita's Special School	Crushrod Avenue, Drogheda	Louth
19151C	St John Of God Special School	Islandbridge, Dublin 8	Dublin
19282R	St John's Special School	Dungarvan	Waterford
18417J	St Joseph's For Blind NS	Drumcondra, Dublin 9	Dublin
19520H	St Joseph's Special School	Greenhills Road, Tallaght	Dublin
19340F	St Joseph's Special School	Ballytivan, Sligo	Sligo
19244J	St Joseph's Special School	Parnell Street, Waterford	Waterford
19047H	St Joseph's Special School	Thomas Hynes Road, Newcastle	Galway
20153N	St Joseph's Adolescent & Family Services	St Vincent's Hospital, Farview	Dublin
16864B	St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys	Navan Road, Cabra	Dublin
19410A	St Killian's Special School	West Gate Road, Bishopstown, Cork	Cork
19315G	St Laserian's School	Dublin Road, Carlow	Carlow

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19455W	St Mark's Special School	Piercetown, Newbridge	Kildare
19108B	St Martin's Special School	Ballytruckle, Waterford	Waterford
19214A	St Mary's Special School	Drumcar	Louth
19560T	St Mary's Special School	Athlumney, Navan	Meath
17944E	St Mary's N S For Deaf Girls	Cabra,	Dublin
19759T	St Mary's Special School	Rochestown, Cork	Cork
18534N	St Mary's Special School	South Hill, Delvin	Westmeath
18210K	St Michael's House	Baldoyle	Dublin
18671A	St Michael's House Special School	17 Grosvenor Road, Rathgar	Dublin
18763F	St Michael's House Special School	Ballymun Rd, Dublin 9	Dublin
19373U	St Michael's House Special School	Raheny Road, Raheny, Dublin 5	Dublin
19757P	St Michael's Special School	Hacketstown, Skerries	Dublin
20279M	St Michael's House Special School, Foxfield	Briarfield Villas, Greendale Rd., Kilbarrack, Dublin 5	Dublin
17971H	St Michael's Special School	Holy Angels, Glenmaroon, Chapelizod	Dublin
19773N	St Nicholas Special School	Ballina	Mayo
19499T	St Oliver Plunkett Special School	Alma Place, Carrigbrennan, Blackrock	Dublin
20330J	St Oliver's Special School	The Glebe, Tuam	Galway
19383A	St Patrick's Special School	Sisters Of Charity, Kells Road, Kilkenny	Kilkenny
19240B	St Patrick's Special School	Enniscorthy	Wexford
19316I	St Paul's Hospital Special School	Beaumont, Dublin 9	Dublin
19203S	St Paul's Special School	Montenotte, Cork	Cork
18904U	St Peter's Special School	Lucena Clinic, 59 Orwell Road	Dublin
18988G	St Raphael's Special School	Celbridge	Kildare
20010O	St Rose's Special School	Castlepark, Balrothery, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Dublin
20328W	St Theresa's Special School	25 Moher, Ballinasloe	Galway
19216E	St Ultan's Special School	Navan	Meath
19200M	St Vincent's Special School	Lisnagry	Limerick
19039I	St Vincent's Special School	Navan Rd, Dublin 7	Dublin
19032R	Stewarts Hospital Special School	Palmerstown, Dublin 20	Dublin
20100P	The Kolbe Special School	Block Rd., Portlaoise	Laois
20329B	Tigh Nan Dooley Special School	An Cheathrú Rua	Galway
19630O	Warrenstown House Special School	Corduff Road, Blanchardstown	Dublin

Appendix 4:

Table 9: Pupil-teacher ratio for special schools and classes

Category	Ratio of SNA to class group	Pupil-teacher-ratio
Physical Disability	1:1	10:1
Hearing impairment	1:4	7:1
Visual Impairment	1:4	8:1
Emotional Disturbance	1:4	8:1
Severe Emotional Disturbance	1:1	6:1
Mild General Learning Disability	1:4	11:1
Moderate General Learning Disability	1:2	8:1
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	2:1	6:1
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	2:1	6:1
Specific Learning Disability	-----	9:1
Specific Speech and Language Disorder.	1:3	7:1
Multiple Disabilities	1:1	6:1

Source: DES Circular38/10, DES

Appendix 5:

Table 10: Capitation Rates for pupils in Special Classes and Special schools

Category	Rates* for Special School Pupils and Pupils in Special Classes in ordinary National Schools		Rates for Model Schools Management Type 3 (rate less std - €200)	
	Under 12 years	12 years & over	Under 12 years	12 years & over
Mainstream Rate	€200	€200	€0	€0
Visual Impairment	€60	€60	€60	€60
Hearing Impairment	€60	€60	€60	€60
Profoundly Deaf	€86	€86	€86	€86
Mild General Learning Disability (Mainstream School)	€12	€61	€12	€61
Mild General Learning Disability (Special school)	€37	€60	€37	€60
Moderate General Learning Disability	€60	€60	€60	€60
Severe/ Profound General Learning Disability	€86	€86	€86	€86
Specific Learning Disability (Mainstream School)	€12	€61	€12	€61
Specific Learning Disability (Special school)	€37	€60	€37	€60
Emotional Disturbance	€60	€60	€60	€60
Severe Emotional Disturbance	€86	€86	€86	€86
Physical Disability	€60	€60	€60	€60
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)	€86	€86	€86	€86
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	€60	€60	€60	€60
Multiple Disabilities	€86	€86	€86	€86
Traveller Children	€82	€82	€2	€2
Out of Control	€86	€86	€86	€86
*RATES from 01/09/2008				

Source: DES, 2008

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