

*A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people*



Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

# Rebuilding Special Education

Proceedings of the Consultative  
Conference on Special Education 2015

7 March 2015

# Rebuilding Special Education

## Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Special Education 2015

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# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

The Irish education system has pursued a policy of inclusion since the early 1990s. Primary teachers have worked hard to ensure that primary schools are inclusive schools and welcoming of all pupils regardless of educational need. Nevertheless, there are challenges. The number of pupils identified as having special educational learning needs or disabilities continues to increase, creating additional pressures on schools in relation to resources and expertise. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils who have been diagnosed with Autism, in particular, and most teachers will teach children with Autism at some stage during their careers.

Developments in initial teacher education mean that all newly qualified teachers will have studied special education and inclusion, however, teachers will always need to build on their professional knowledge throughout their careers. The INTO's biennial consultative conference on special education is an opportunity for teachers to share their experiences and to add to their professional knowledge of special education policy and practice.

The INTO is delighted that the research carried out by Dr Patricia Daly and Dr Emer Ring, presented at the conference, shows the good work that teachers are doing to enhance the educational experience of pupils with special educational needs. Teaching in inclusive environments is not without challenges. It is reassuring to hear that pupils with special educational needs have a positive experience in primary schools today. The voice of some young people who have experienced the education system also added a richness to our conference. Siobhan Mungovan, Adam Harris and Fionn Crombie Angus spoke of their positive experiences and the challenges they faced during their time in school. Professor Michael Hayes, President of Mary Immaculate College, who opened the conference, is, sadly, no longer with us, having passed away recently after a short illness. Ar dheis Dé go raibh sé.

I would like to thank the working group who planned the conference and the education team in INTO Head Office for organising another successful conference.



Sheila Nunan  
General Secretary  
July 2017





# **Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Special Education**

7 March 2015

Limerick



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## Opening Addresses

### ***Seán Mac Mahon, President, INTO.***

Welcome Delegates,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all. It's a great pleasure, particularly as a former student, to be here in Mary Immaculate College for the INTO Consultative Conference on Special Education. Tá fáilte mór romhaibh go léir.

I also welcome our guest speakers and workshop presenters who will be introduced to you later.

This year we have almost 400 delegates present here today including members from INTO branches all over the country, invited guests and national committee members. The fact that so many teachers have travelled here to attend Conference on Special Education on Saturday speaks volumes about the professionalism and commitment of Irish primary school teachers.

The theme of today's conference is 'Rebuilding Special Education'. As you are all aware, the inclusion of children with special educational needs has been the norm in primary schools since the 1990s. While teachers have worked hard to rise to the challenge of inclusion, they do so often in overcrowded classrooms with few resources and limited access to support from other qualified professionals. Special schools and special classes also face particular challenges, as the number of children presenting with acute SEN needs keeps increasing together with the complexity and diversity of pupil profiles. We know that a new model for the allocation of resources to schools with pupils with Special Educational Needs is currently under consideration by the Department of Education and Skills.

Today we have workshops, which will look at topics such as ASD; Resilience and Self-Control; Early Intervention; Using ICT to support children with SEN; Teaching Literacy to children with SEN; and Assessment for children with difficulties with Literacy.

In addition to the workshops, there will also be discussion groups, which will give delegates an opportunity to debate some of the topical issues that arise.

Thank you all for attending, and I hope you derive much personal and professional satisfaction from your participation at this conference.

## ***Prof. Michael Hayes, Mary Immaculate College***

Good morning and you are very welcome to Mary Immaculate College for this INTO conference on special education. We at Mary Immaculate College are very honoured that the INTO has selected the Lime Tree theatre as the venue for this important conference. This morning we have some 400 delegates from all over Ireland gathered here for this special conference and I welcome each of you here today.

I would also like to welcome the people on stage here with me this morning, President of the INTO, Sean McMahon, who has already declared himself an illustrious alumnus, but he is also on our governing body keeping check on us.

Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Director of Education and Research and Sheila Nunan, General Secretary of the INTO, you are very welcome. My colleagues Dr Patricia Daly, head of the Department of Special Education and Dr Emer Ring, head of the Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies here in Mary Immaculate College you are very welcome and we look forward to listening to you.

Welcome too to the guests and presenters who will be involved in today's proceedings, thank you for your contribution to this event.

This college was founded in 1898 by a local bishop, Bishop Thomas Edward Dwyer and the Sisters of Mercy. From small beginnings, the college has grown exponentially. We will have over 3,500 students next year and the influence of our graduates in Irish society must not go unrecognised. Our graduates account for nearly 40% of all teachers in Irish primary schools - this is an enormous influence, privilege and responsibility for this institution. Mary Immaculate College articulates its mission as a third-level Catholic college of education and liberal arts. As a community, it promotes excellence in teaching and learning and research at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. It seeks to foster the intellectual, spiritual and personal and professional development of students within a supportive and challenging environment that guarantees the intellectual freedom of staff and students. For many years, a remedial course was offered in the college and in 1994, with funding from the In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) of the DES, this course was revised and extended to graduate diploma status and offered to primary and post-primary learning support teachers. A one-time offering of a two year part-time diploma in special educational needs was offered to teachers involved in special education which drew from the local region. A tradition of week-long introductory courses for teachers new to special education was offered during the school year and has existed for many years. In 2003, the first set of special needs assistant certificates were offered through the college which was involved in setting up the curriculum for these nationwide. That same year, the graduate diploma in SEN was offered to learning support teachers, of a different more intense version for resource teachers here in the college. In 2006 the first combined version of the graduate diploma in SEN for both learning support and resource teachers was offered and remains the current programme here in the college. We admit 50 teachers to this course annually from primary, post-primary and special schools. We are committed in MIC to engaging in research in special education, believing that research has the potential to contribute and enhance education provision for all children with special educational needs.

Dr Daly and Dr Ring will be reporting in their keynote address on the recent research conducted by a team of researchers here in the college for the National Council for Special Education.

One of the key tenets of our college's mission statement is the promotion of equity in society and the promotion of an environment where all have the freedom and the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The work of our department of Special Education is a concrete embodiment of that vision. Our department of Special Education was involved in developing two modules exclusive to initial teacher education segments for students in the new four year B.Ed. programme and the first of these was taught in Autumn 2013. A specialism in special education

has been developed for students including three additional modules in the final year project. Currently a double cohort of B.Ed students is enrolled in special education specialism with 66 students engaged in that course.

Professor Desmond Swan, professor of education UCD remarks that in relation to special education in Ireland ‘a lot has been learned from our years of trial and error in breaching the long impassable frontier of educating the “ineducable” and including the excluded, in order to realise that every child can learn if they are appropriately helped to do so’ and this is, I suggest, what we are all committed to by our presence here this morning.

Thank you very much and beir bua agus beannacht.



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## Presentations

### *Deirbhile Nic Craith, Director of Education and Research*

Good morning delegates.

My purpose here this morning is to provide a brief overview of developments in special education to inform our discussions throughout today. I'll make a brief reference to the following topics:

- Autism - Policy Advice on education provision for students with ASD – Spring 2015
- Special Class Provision
- A new model for allocating teachers to schools to support pupils with SEN
- Inclusion support Service
- Special Schools' Survey
- Curriculum Developments

### **Policy advice on Education Provision for Pupils with Autism**

The Minister requested the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to prepare policy advice on education provision for children with autism. The terms of reference for the policy review include the following:

- A literature review
- An overview of current provision
- Review the effectiveness of practices and interventions
- To identify the nature and extent of interventions which should be available for children with Autism, and
- To make recommendations
- To review current national and international research literature on evidence-based practices and interventions for the education of children with autism/ASD, with a particular focus on other EU countries.
- To review, and provide an overview of, current state-funded educational provision for children with autism/ASD, to include early intervention and the extended school year scheme, identifying the roles of the various agencies and State as well as the strengths and gaps in the educational and wider framework of supports that significantly impact on the education of children with autism/ASD.
- To review, with particular reference to educational and social outcomes, the effectiveness of the range of evidence-based practices and interventions for the education of children with autism/ASD.



- To identify the nature and extent of educational intervention/s, teaching practices and other supports which should be provided to enable children with autism/ASD achieve educational outcomes appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- To make recommendations on future arrangements that should be in place, where necessary, to improve the nature, extent, planning and delivery of education to children with autism/ASD, with specific reference to the roles of agencies and the nature and extent of supports that should be in place, taking into account the need for flexibility given constrained resources.

We are delighted that Patsy Daly and Emer Ring of Mary Immaculate College will be addressing us this morning in relation to the findings from their research on current provision for pupils with ASD. This research was commissioned by the NCSE as part of preparing their policy advice.

## **Special Classes**

The NCSE also worked with the ESRI in a joint piece of research regarding special classes in Ireland. The overall aim of this research is to look at the operation of special classes in mainstream schools and to assess to what extent the needs of students in special classes are met particularly in relation to inclusion. The first phase of the research, published last May, was basically an audit of special class provision in Ireland – where they are and for whom. Phase 2 is a more focussed longitudinal study which tracks the experiences, progress and outcomes for students who attend special classes. We know from the report of Phase 1 that over half the special classes are in primary schools, the majority sanctioned by SENOs or the Department, 7% of primary schools have at least one special class, and about 5% of pupils with special educational needs are in special classes. DEIS Band One schools are more likely to have special classes.

What is interesting is that 60% of special classes at primary level have been established for pupils with Autism. We know that there are more children diagnosed with Autism in our schools today. The establishment of special classes, including early intervention classes, has been the response at system level. In this context it will be interesting to see what policy advice the NCSE will provide to the Department in relation to the education of children with Autism, later this year.

From an inclusion perspective, it is noteworthy that one in five pupils in special classes spend all of their week in the special class. Allocations to special classes also tend to be permanent with little mobility for the pupils. One of the issues to consider in the discussion groups later is what inclusion means in practice for children in special classes, and how is inclusion for children in special classes supported?

## **New Model**

Policy advice of the NCSE in 2013 regarding the education of children with special educational needs, recommended that a new model for allocating additional teaching resources to schools to support children with special educational needs be put in place. The Minister set up a working group under the chairmanship of Eamon Stack, former Chief Inspector, to devise a new model. The INTO participated in the consultation process and made a submission. The Working group reported in June 2014 outlining its proposals for a new model. A further consultation process followed. The INTO, in its submission, acknowledged the merits of the proposals but also highlighted a number of concerns.

The principles of the new model are that there should be core additional teaching support for all schools, with additional teaching support based on schools' needs. Allocations should be for fixed periods but with a mechanism to respond to schools whose profiles change significantly. These are principles which the INTO supported. But there is always a challenge in making principles a reality.

The educational profile of a school includes the number of children with complex special educational needs, the results of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy, and the social context of the school. I don't have time here this morning to go in to the details of the proposals.

The INTO's initial response to the proposals expressed strong reservations about the use of standardised test results to allocate teachers to schools. The INTO demanded a broader definition of special educational needs, an increased baseline and the inclusion of STen 4 if the results of standardised were to be used. The INTO also demanded the restoration of the 15% cut in resource hours, the appointment of additional teachers to meet the needs of a growing population and additional administrative support to schools. We also recommended that any new model should be tested or piloted before implementation.

Since last October the Department, with the Educational Research Centre have worked on constructing the new model, allocating weightings to the various aspects of a school's educational profile in order to determine each school's allocation of additional teachers to support children with special educational needs. We still do not know how the new model will impact on individual schools as we do not have information regarding the weightings as they continue to be worked on. We know that the new model will have six components.

1. Baseline Allocation
2. Allocation for Pupils with Complex SEN
3. Allocation for Pupils with low attainment levels in English Literacy (Gaeilge)
4. Allocation for pupils with low attainment in Maths / Numeracy
5. Allocation for social disadvantage
6. Allocation for gender

There have been some modifications to the original working group proposals. 15% of all special education posts in mainstream schools will be allocated proportionately to schools as a baseline. This is different to the original proposal where there was a cap.

46% of all special education posts will be allocated to support children with special educational needs. There is more work to be done on developing the complex needs component. In the interim, the guide will be the current allocation of resource hours.

29% of all posts will be allocated to schools on the basis of low achievement in literacy and numeracy – achievement at STen 4 is to be included.

10% of all posts will be allocated for the social context of the school.

There are currently over 8000 special education posts in mainstream schools at primary level – almost one in four teachers is a special education teacher. Of these posts, about 56% are allocated through GAM and 44% for low incidence resource hours. The allocation under the new model at system level is not significantly different – 46% of all posts to support complex special educational needs and 54% to support low achievers, disadvantage, gender, EAL. But there is no doubt we need more posts in the system.

## **Inclusion Support Service**

The working group recommended that existing support services for students with special educational needs should be combined into one unified support service for schools. The Minister for Education announced on 10 February that an Inclusion Support Service would be established, bringing together under the NCSE the Special Education Support Service, the Visiting Teacher Support Service and the National Behaviour support Service. It is envisaged that the Inclusion Support Service will be up and running for the next school year but there are a lot of issues to be sorted first.

The INTO has also been invited to submit views on the potential coordination between the NCSE (National Council for Special Education) and NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service). You will have an opportunity to discuss what teachers need from an inclusion support service during your discussion groups.

## **Special Schools**

The INTO issued a survey to special schools early last year. The main issues for our special schools is the growing complexity of children's special educational needs and the lack of recognition for the additional leadership and management responsibility associated with being a principal with a staff almost three times as large as the number of teachers. The INTO is keenly aware of the need to address this issue in future negotiations. The inadequacy of capitation grants and challenges around the July programme were also issues for special schools.

On a positive note, the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs at junior cycle has been further developed. Short courses at level 2 are now available in Caring for animals and Exploring forensic science aimed at pupils with special educational needs. A toolkit has been developed by the NCCA to support the planning of curriculum and assessment for pupils with special educational needs at junior cycle. A background paper on the development of learning programmes at level 1 is also available for consultation on the NCCA's website. The revised integrated language curriculum for junior infants to second class is designed as an inclusive language curriculum and should be available in the Autumn.

Finally, I would like to refer to another research study on the experience of children with special educational needs. This research is drawing on the Growing Up in Ireland study – a longitudinal study of the experiences of nine year old children. The study looked at prevalence of special educational needs, and to what extent children with special educational needs engaged with school, their attainments and achievements, their wellbeing and whether they were happy in school. According to this study, children with special educational needs liked school less, had lower attendance levels, lower self-concept, reported having fewer friends and were more likely to be victims of bullying. These findings make us think about how we are meeting the needs of our most vulnerable pupils. But, a different approach to research can illicit different findings. The IRIS study – a three year project on inclusive research in Irish schools is due to publish its report next month, and I gather children with special needs are quite happy in school!

You will have an opportunity in your discussion groups to discuss a number of issues of relevance to special education, including transitions, learning support, special classes, professional development and the Inclusion Support service. We look forward to hearing your views.

Bainigí taitneamh agus tairbhe as an bplé agus an díosóirpeacht inniu.

# Keynote Presentation

## **Special Education from the Inside Out: Lessons Learnt from Interim Findings of an Evaluation of Education Provision in the Republic of Ireland**

***Dr Patricia Daly and Dr Emer Ring, Mary Immaculate College***

Dr. Patricia Daly, Dr. Emer Ring, Principal Investigators,  
Dr. Margaret Egan, Johanna Fitzgerald, Claire Griffin, Stella Long, Eucharía McCarthy, Dr. Mary Moloney, Trevor O'Brien, Anne O'Byrne, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Marie Ryan and Professor Eugene Wall with Ruth Madden, Research Associate.



Good morning and indeed it is a pleasure for both Patsy and I to present the keynote address to your conference this morning. The focus of our keynote is the evaluation of provision for children with Autism that we have just completed here in the college with a team of 12 researchers including Dr Margaret Egan, Joanna Fitzgerald, Claire Griffin, Stella Long, Eucharía McCarthy, Dr Mary Moloney, Trevor O'Brien, Anne O'Byrne, Siobhán O' Sullivan, Marie Ryan and Professor Eugene Wall with Ruth Madden, Research Associate. The report is currently in draft version. We hope that we will be able to draw on the interim findings for you this morning and that it will help you in your conference today. You can see also some children's drawings as we invited them to participate in ways appropriate to their strengths and abilities.

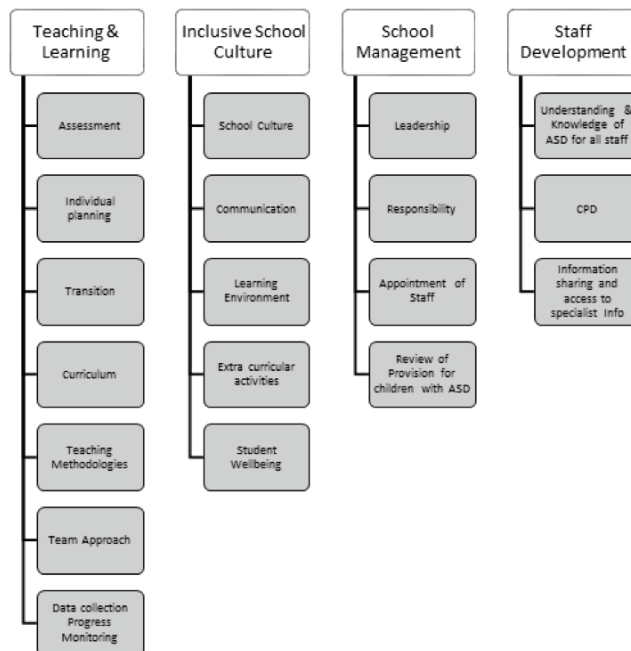
To incorporate the theme of the conference: Rebuilding Special Education, we have gone back to a different era and to a song from Pink Floyd called 'Another Brick in the Wall'. We invite you, as we are speaking, to identify what you think might be the bricks in the wall in accordance with the 'rebuilding' theme of your conference. We start with a picture drawn by a child in the Gaeltacht which shows himself and his friend looking out the school window into the yard – a viewpoint both instructive and not expected of children with autism.



### **Methodology of the Research on Educational Provision for Children with Autism in the Republic of Ireland.**

In order to ensure that the evaluation of education provision was conducted in a coherent and consistent manner, a broad evaluative framework was developed with reference to MCA and NCSE Evaluation Framework (MCA and NCSE, 2013). The Framework was used to inform the development of the data-collection NCSE for the specific purpose of this evaluation research and to develop a shared understanding of best practice in education provision for students with and in developing the criteria for weighting the evidence and evaluating provision.

This Evaluation Framework was developed by MCA in collaboration with the ASD. The Evaluation Framework sets out criteria and indicators against which provision can be systematically measured. The key statements and criteria of this framework are presented below.



Within the realist evaluation approach, a multiple case study research strategy comprising an empirical investigation using multiple sources of evidence was employed (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Yin, 2003; Cohen et al., 2011). Twenty four sites were selected including those with Early Intervention, Primary, Post-Primary, Special School, July and Home provision. The sites were

then stratified according to geographical location (urban/rural); composition (boys/girls/mixed gender); socio-economic grouping (mainstream primary and post-primary schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools initiative (DEIS) (DES, 2005)/mainstream primary and post-primary schools not participating in DEIS); language (Irish/English medium schools) and needs based (special schools). This stratification ensured that the sample of schools was representative of the schools in Ireland in which there was educational provision for students with ASD. In each site, the researchers interviewed key informants, analysed relevant documents and observed teaching. In addition, child conversations were conducted and opportunities were provided for children to make drawings of their school.

Interview data were uploaded to Nvivo software for analysis. Data analysis was conducted electronically with reference to MCA/NCSE Evaluation Framework (MCA and NCSE, 2013). Data-analysis was therefore aligned with the Evaluation Framework and codes were inductively developed from the data with reference to the Framework (Priest, 2006).

The preliminary findings for each of the four Key Statements of the Framework are presented below.

### **Statement 1: Teaching and Learning**

There were very positive findings in relation to assessment and everyone was very aware of the importance of assessment of and for learning. The curriculum was really at the heart of everything that schools were doing and there was very positive approach to the management of behaviours in all schools and again there are many challenges with regards to children with special educational needs we know this the increasing complexity in our schools but functional behaviour analysis was a part of people's practice.

Issues for reflection in assessment included

- Indicating in assessment policies what assessments are appropriate for children with ASD, when they are used and why.
- Acknowledging the impact of children's co-occurring special educational needs such as general learning disability and the associated implications for assessment in Assessment Policies.
- Extending children's involvement in their own learning through implementing explicit pupil self-assessment strategies and practice related to best practice for children with ASDs.
- The integral role of assessment in children's learning and teaching should be explained to parents.

Individualised planning was at a well-developed stage and often in evidence in early intervention classes, primary and special schools and at an initial stage of development, and sometimes in evidence in post-primary schools. Where the JEP was delivered in a school site, it was linked to the existing individualised planning in place for the student. There was no link with the student's individualised planning where the JEP was delivered in the home. In all the sites where individualised planning was a feature of practice, parents were almost always involved in the process. In home tuition sites, parents' targets were incorporated by the tutors.

There was scope for development in relation to the individualised planning process to ensure realistic targets were identified that the student has the potential of attaining; extending students' formal involvement in the individualised planning process and ensuring there is adequate access to external professionals in supporting the process. Attention should be given to incorporating specific planning for the JEP within the individualised planning process and systematic structures established to provide for detailed feedback from the JEP to the class teacher. Home tutors would benefit from formal structures and support for individualised planning. Parents also require information in a readily accessible format that clearly explains the individualised planning process in all sites.

Very good transition protocols were in place for children transitioning to and from the early intervention classes. An understanding of the importance of supporting students' transition from primary to post-primary school was evident in all relevant sites. Post-primary sites and special school sites often had very good protocols in place to support the transition of students to adult services. Almost all sites demonstrated an excellent awareness of the importance of clearly signalling transitions within the school day for students and internal transitions were managed sensitively and in an age-appropriate manner.

A child-centred approach to the curriculum, which addressed students' holistic development, was evidenced in the home tuition sites, early intervention, primary and special schools. An individualised and differentiated approach, which focused on the holistic development of the child was observed in these sites. The focus on developing and extending students' social and life skills was a particularly positive feature of the JEP. However consideration of the implications for a student's social skills when the JEP is being delivered in the home and in home tuition sites is required.

The absence of specific curriculum guidelines for early intervention classes is creating uncertainty with regard to providing for children's curriculum experiences in the early years. The potential of Aistear to contribute to students' experiences also requires further development. Guidance in relation to students' access to Irish in the curriculum is required to alleviate the dilemma articulated in relation to access to Irish in the Gaeltacht areas.

### **Statement 2: Inclusive School Culture**

A culture of high ambitions and aspirations for students with ASD was a feature of provision and a positive school culture in relation to providing for students with ASD was evident in almost all sites. Across all sites, there was evidence that teachers and SNAs understood, valued and had clear expectations for the growing independence of students as they progressed through the schools.

All sites displayed an understanding of the importance of communicating with parents in relation to students with ASD and formal and informal effective communication was evidenced in all sites. The value of advice and support from external professionals and services, where available, in supporting children with ASD was affirmed by all sites. You can see now what some of the bricks in the wall will be.

Commendable attention was directed towards creating well-structured, bright and spacious learning environments in almost all sites. Excellent practice was often evident in relation to supporting children in self-regulating and taking movement breaks as required.

Children's wellbeing was fostered in an affirmative and proactive manner in almost all sites. A safe, secure and positive environment was almost always evident and interactions were respectful and affirming. Almost all sites consistently promoted positive relationships and positive mental health was promoted informally and indirectly.

### **Statement 3: Management**

There were clear management structures in place at all sites with a commitment to educational provision for students with ASD articulated by all principals. Principals in special schools tended to have advanced qualifications in special education and ASD whereas principals at other sites considered provision for children with ASD part of their commitment to overall quality education for all students in the schools. All principals expressed their support for upskilling teachers who take on responsibility for educating students with ASD in the school. Principals were aware of the potential isolation of teachers in special classes and the presence of more than one special class at a site seemed to help reduce that isolation and increase the salience of the specialised provision among the general staff. All school sites commented on the dearth of availability of external services to advise and support them working with children with very complex needs.

Principals and overseers made consistent efforts to recruit and hire personnel with an understanding of ASD and who would constitute a good match with the students and their needs. Special school principals in particular were aware of the need for hiring teachers and SNAs who would fit well with the students and who were willing to complete CPD to expand and develop their skill sets.

### **Statement 4: Staff Development**

Across all sites there was evidence of excellent knowledge of ASD among most staff. In particular, direct care and teaching staff in special classes understood and demonstrated the changing needs of students with ASD as they progressed through the schools. The staff emphasised the need for growing independence of students and structured their teaching and support to enable this development. Principals were also very aware of the need for graduated levels of support for students to promote independent behaviour and responsibility commensurate with age and ability. Most of this knowledge and awareness was developed through consistent attendance at relevant CPD offered through the SESS and to a lesser extent the Middletown Centre for Autism, school patron bodies and other external agencies.

Schools provided admirable support structures for teachers to pursue CPD which included considerable administrative involvement. Principals hired substitute teachers for those taking CPD courses and colleagues covered for them frequently. Principals and teachers valued the range and depth of CPD available in particular through the SESS.

It was a source of universal and continued frustration to principals, teachers, parents and the SNAs themselves that no formal structured CPD exists for SNAs in schools either at the level of hiring or as pathways to professional identity. All schools and all stakeholders including the children identified the key roles SNAs play in educational provision and care for children with ASD in schools. Many SNAs attended CPD in their own time and at their own expense because they wanted to learn more about ASD to better support the students and the school teams. Principals found it difficult to provide in-house CPD for SNAs sometimes as several served concurrently as bus escorts and were not available at the end of the school day.



This concludes the presentation of some of the preliminary findings from the study. Now we go back to the conference theme of rebuilding. Here is our version of the ‘Wall’ and the bricks that could comprise it to rebuild special education.



Why a wall? Walls are both dividers and supports, they keep us in and keep us out. They tell us what is ours and what is not. You know the phrase ‘good fences make good neighbours’. The bricks in our wall here are a depiction of the many and varied structures in Irish schools that promote and enable us to consider all children to be inside. Some are surely close to the wall. Most of us who became teachers are academically and socially able and easily inside the wall. It is important to learn from the perspectives of those closer to the wall than we ever were. Their view is different and informative. As one of our principals, very experienced but new to his school, said, ‘I see things here with outside eyes for a while, this had advantages’.

Bricks are used for building things like walls but we don’t want to build the same old walls and have children fit by being just another brick in the wall. This is like the transmissive versus transformative view of education. We need to use our bricks to build structures that are new, unique and beautiful. We use the term beautiful here because special education must be more than meeting the needs of children with difficulties as written in targets in individualised plans. We must appreciate and grow their unique contributions to our schools. The schools that we visited have developed bricks have changed what they can do with the bricks, they have built new capacity. It is like modern Lego with its electronic pieces, faces, hinges, axles and pieces that did not exist in the original sets of thirty or forty years ago. Our bricks in this wall need to build new and beautiful structures. We cannot be satisfied by struggling to fit children who don’t fit easily into existing structures. Inclusion means fundamentally changing the structures and we believe we have many of the bricks to do this. It is not a case of shoving over and making room. It is making the room better for all of us.

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# Guest Presentations

## *Siobhán Mungovan*

### **Author**

Hello everyone. It is an absolute honour to be here today to speak to you all in this beautiful venue that is the Lime Tree theatre. My name is Siobhan Mungovan. I come from a small village outside Ennis in Co Clare. I guess the reason why I am here today is that I have co-written a book within the last year called *Me and My Backbone*. It takes you through my journey with Spina Bifida and for those of you may not know what Spina Bifida is, it is Latin and it means split spine.

With Spina Bifida comes other problems and I guess with me I have a severe form of Spina Bifida that comes with hydrocephalus which means a built of fluid in the brain, and scoliosis which I will explain later. When I was born, my parents did not get the best outlook for me. They were told that I would not be able to walk, I would have brain damage (because of the hydrocephalus) and I would need round the clock care. I guess with me the miracle is that I can walk, and even though I didn't walk until late and it's maybe not the best walk, but I can walk. I can only imagine how my parents felt the first moment that they saw their daughter walk, a whole heap of doors opened and they saw a light at the end of the tunnel. That light may have been dim, but it was still a light, it gave them hope and gave them a new-found strength, a strength that I firmly believe that they have passed on to me.

I went to a country school. At the time it was under-resourced like most schools are to this day. Today I would like to focus my talk on my experience in National School and even though it was a pretty good experience, it was definitely a time in my life where I did feel different. Today I would like to take you through some of the times that I did feel different and maybe how it could have been dealt with a small bit better.

### **The need to be discreet**

In school I was different. I did suffer from incontinence, and as you all can imagine, incontinence is not the most pleasant thing for a child to experience but I was very lucky with the teacher I had especially in junior and senior infants where the element of discretion was just amazing. Her understanding of my problem, if I did have an accident, meant that I wasn't treated any differently from any other child in the group.

I think that the most important thing for me to teach people is that if a child does have an accident, don't make them feel like they have done something wrong, treat them with the same respect as you would do with any child.

Another time where I felt different was in fourth class. We all know kids can be cruel and I'm sure you are all familiar with name-calling whether it is within the classroom or in the yard. But on this occasion, I got into a huge row with a classmate and believe you me I was giving as good as I got because I was feisty back then and I'm still feisty to this day, but out of the blue he came out with a word. To be honest, this word hit me like a tonne of bricks, it was the worst name that anybody could be called – that name being hunchback. In that moment, my heart sank and I didn't know what to do. I had never heard of the word before and my first reaction was to tell the teacher and even though the teacher did get him to apologise, I believe it was passed off very

quickly and quietly. I guess all I wanted was the teacher to give out to the student at the time, but looking back now, I believe that more education is needed within the classroom on how we treat people - especially people with disabilities and who maybe have a disfigurement - how to treat them like they are like everybody else and tell them what language is and isn't appropriate. I go into more detail about this in my book.

As you all can see, I do have a physical disability and even though I can walk and sit there can be times when sitting is uncomfortable because I have scoliosis which means curved spine, and for me, it means that all my weight goes to one side of the body. This led to the big problem in national school of getting pressure sores. For most of you in the audience, getting a pressure sore would be no big deal because all it starts off with is a little blister, but for me, I don't have any feeling in certain parts of my body and my healing powers would not be the best. So it was decided by my school and parents to get a special chair that would prevent me from getting pressure sores. I guess this was for my good, and it was something that needed to be done to prevent pressure sores, but this chair was a huge sponge chair, it was massive compared to the other chairs in the classroom. What it meant was that I had to sit at a table by myself - normally a table would sit two people - because of this contraption and it led to me being very lonely and feeling isolated because my interaction with my classmates was limited. I firmly believe that it should have been there from day one because it would have been normal then. So I think it's very important for the school to communicate with the family before the child starts school so they know what services and supports the child needs. I totally understand that each child's needs are different so that is why I think communication is the key point here.

As you all know I'm from Co Clare where it is notorious for its hurling, and even back then I couldn't swing a hurley to save my life and still can't to this day. It was decided that I would be pulled from PE class, and even though I know it was probably to save my feelings, I believe that I should have been involved in the sport - probably not the physical side of the sport - but I could have learnt the rules or been a lines person so I would have gained an appreciation for the sport later on in life. It has come to my attention in recent months that wheelchair hurling is on the up which I think is great, but I feel more work should be put into it because people of all abilities should enjoy our national sports and all sports.

I'd like to thank everybody in the INTO for having me here today and I go into a lot more detail in my book, so if anyone has any questions or wants to meet me afterwards, come up and say hello - I'd love it.

## **Adam Harris**

**([www.asiam.ie](http://www.asiam.ie))**

Thank you very much. I suppose I just want to begin by thanking everyone for inviting me here today, but also to thank you for coming. I think as a person with Asperger's who went through the special education system and who works a lot with parents around the country, it is really refreshing to see so many teachers being willing to give up their free time to learn more about educating people with Autism and supporting them in that regard. I think that is very good news indeed.

I want to speak a little bit from two perspectives. First of all, as a young person who went through the education system with a disability and I suppose not only that, but from a number of different fronts, spending the first three years of my education in a special school, the next five years in a mainstream school with the support of an SNA and then finally moving to secondary school independently. So I want to share those experiences and the challenges that went with that. But I also to speak from the point of view of somebody who is working a lot with young people today and some of the challenges that they are facing as they go through school.

To begin with my own story, from a very young age my parents could see that I was very different. I was the third child in the family and from the word go I had a huge attachment to my mother. I constantly needed to be held by her or I would get very frustrated. I had no ability or did not know how to interact with other children, and while I was talking before my first birthday in full sentences, much to my mother's disappointment in the long run I wasn't even able to crawl when I should have been walking. Over time, more and more questions and issues began to emerge. That began a two year process which ultimately led to my diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome before we were abolished a couple of years ago.

When I was diagnosed and it was time for me to go to national school, mainstreaming wasn't something that was even an option. In fact, when my mum was considering the possibility of mainstream, she would have been told in no uncertain terms by the principal of the local national school, 'maybe he shouldn't come here'. I think that it is interesting that mainstreaming really wasn't an option for me, and that is why I spent three years in special education. While that was very important, not alone at that time was the system a barrier to me going to education, but another issue was that I have an invisible disability. I would have been very quickly branded the bold boy and there would have been no support available to me. While I think we have made a lot of progress, there is still a huge amount of work to be done both in terms of students and the school system in general, in getting to understand invisible conditions more.

What special school did for me was to bring me to a point where I was able to sit in a mainstream classroom and have some prospect of learning. It was hugely significant, in that, by the time I would have entered second class you would have picked me out as the child with Autism, but by the time I left sixth class, you would have to sit in the class for longer and observe to realise I was different.

When my parents made the decision when I was seven that they were going to try and integrate me in the local school, people in the Autism school that I went to thought they were absolutely mad. At the time it wasn't particularly done, and people said that if this doesn't work out you are

giving up a really good school place. That is why I am really supportive of the idea of making schools work for people with disability as well as providing resources and research. I think, first and foremost, a really important thing is the culture and the openness and the attitude of the schools and the individual involved, because that is what definitely had a positive impact for me. I was integrated into mainstream school using the buddy system, which is probably something that people are familiar with. We have a lot of information about this on [www.asiam.ie](http://www.asiam.ie) and I think it is something that we totally underutilise. Not only did the buddy system (whereby people visited me when I was still in special school and I visited them and they were there as a safety net for me) benefit me, it was also a great leadership training for them and something that had very positive results.

Another thing that I would be a very big supporter of, was the support of an SNA. As you know today many people with Asperger's Syndrome find it difficult to access an SNA, and indeed I often wonder if I was at that point in school now would I have been able to get one. To be honest, without that support of an SNA in the first three to four years in national school, I would not have been able to last in national school. Because, first and foremost, what that person did for me was be the safety net when the anxiety overwhelmed me, when the classroom came too much, that person who knew me better than anyone else and was able to provide the correct support. Not only, I suppose, the fact of having an SNA, but for me - and perhaps this is a divisive subject - having an SNA that stays with you and that you can develop that relationship with. Indeed only three months ago I was at her wedding so we are still in contact and I think that is testament to the bond that can be created.

The very last thing that I want to say in terms of what I think helped me be able to make that move, was that my parents decided at the outset that Autism wasn't something that we were going to hide from, and that Autism was something that we should talk about. That the same way the dental nurse comes to your school to teach children to brush their teeth, we should talk about Autism because otherwise students wouldn't have known know why I behaved differently or why I wanted to talk about Tutankhamun at break and not the local football results or why I wasn't able to play sports without being so clumsy or running around erratically. Maybe the best thing to do was to explain that a little bit differently, and I suppose that is really what we try and do on a national scale in [www.asiam.ie](http://www.asiam.ie). I think those three things not only helped me to be integrated, but also to have the very positive experience of never actually facing bullying while I was in school, which isn't something that a lot of people with Autism can say, because at least 50% according to the National Autistic Society (NAS) research face bullying while in school (<http://www.autism.org.uk/research>)

There were many challenges while I was in school, one of those being the sensory environment. I remember my early days in mainstream and having to sit at those group tables that are used a lot in primary school, and trying to take down information from the board but being entirely distracted with what was going on outside the window, or the light that was flickering or the person who was at the rag at the top of the room. I also had severe difficulties with socialising and I didn't begin to socialise until I was 16, but the approach to socialising was always to expose me to everything, but still to have the opportunity for me to make the decision because I don't believe that forced socialising helps either.

The curriculum was something that was very difficult for me. My parents decided when I was in special school, that the priority would be the life skills, because the curriculum could always come

later, and I think it was an approach that worked. It meant when I made that move, I wasn't able to read and write and I had to do the first class curriculum and second class curriculum in one go and that was difficult, but it was how the school always addressed it. Another organisation set up in Australia by someone with very similar experiences to myself - and I am a big advocate of the idea of an "I can" network and that is how we address problems and things I wasn't able to do in school was by addressing them through things I was good at and things I was able to do and that is how we handle that I couldn't read and write properly. I loved history, and had adult history books read to me by the time I was eight, so the school got me doing history projects to work on my handwriting. I found socialising difficult so they found clubs that I was interested in, and got me to socialise with other kids through them and I believe that is something that really works. Why I was lucky was that, at the school they were so open to this, but for many others that wasn't the case. One of the things that makes me frustrated when I speak to parents and people with Autism around the country, is that, sadly, inclusion is still an option, a luxury and I passionately believe that we need to get to a point where inclusion is something that we can take for granted and it should be expected and demanded.

One thing that I want to say as well is that sometimes I think when we use the term 'Autism awareness' to teachers it can be quite frightening, especially when thankfully we now have so many people with different disabilities in our schools. Teachers can't be an expert in every disability, but one of the things that I think is important is that it is often about having that basic knowledge and those common steps to be able to understand how you can support a person, it is not about having a PhD in Autism. To that end, and I'm doing a bit of shameless self-promotion here, but [www.asiam.ie](http://www.asiam.ie) has a series of back-to-school handbooks and had over 2,000 downloads this year and these are 30 page guidebooks for teachers all done in bullet points that are really easy to dip in and out of with practical down-to-earth advice for when you are teaching children. Something I also think is relevant - there is an irony when we try and support people with Autism in school, because people with Autism find it difficult to communicate and sometimes the reason that supports for people don't work is because there isn't good communication between home and school something that was very important for me. Or something else that happens is that we look at it in a very black and white way, you are listening to me today describing my experiences of Autism, but it can be tempting to presume that that is everyone's experience. One of the guidebooks we developed is a book called *My Child* where you can get your parent to put in information specifically how the condition affects their child and I think that is a valuable resource and again, they are available to download for free.

Just to conclude there are two points I would like to make before closing, and that is that I think I have benefitted massively from the policy of integration, my parents would never have imagined that I would be at the point where I am today, very independent and "normal" whatever that is. But I think one of the problems is that we have encouraged integration on one hand from a policy point of view but one of the things we have missed is that we have decided we are going to have integration but under no circumstances are we going to talk about it. I think that is one of the biggest problems that we face. We think that it is going to work putting a load of people like me who are very different and have unusual behaviours at time into a mainstream school. We don't look different to anyone else but we won't educate the kids to understand Autism and that I think is the root of a lot of problems that we face today - that we have had the positive thing of encouraging people with Autism to go to schools - but nothing being done to teach people about Autism. I think one of the realities is that it is not just about students having an awareness of Autism in school from a very young age before they become prejudiced, but it is also about the



reality that this is a condition that affects one in 100 in the population. Everybody is going to come into contact with someone with Autism at some stage in their life and it is through education that we'll defeat bullying, make it easier for people with Autism to go to school and we will have a much more successful educational system for all.

To conclude, my story is a testament to the power of integration and committed teachers in the education system in supporting people with Autism and it is really great that you are all here today. But there is a degree of preaching to the converted here - the next step has to be to bring this to every teacher, every school and every student in the country.

Thank you very much.

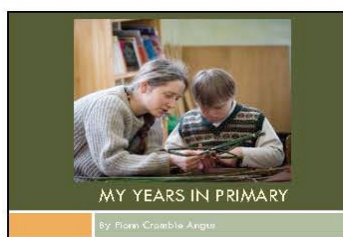
# ***Fionn Crombie Angus***

## ***Entrepreneur***

### How My School Supported Me

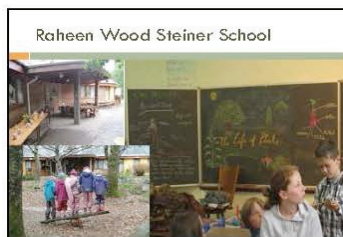
The following presentation tells the story of the primary school experience of Fionn, an 18 year-old Irish entrepreneur with Down Syndrome.

Slide 1



1. My name is Fionn Crombie Angus. I am 18 years old, and I live in Mounshannon, County Clare. I am going to talk to you about my primary years.

Slide 2



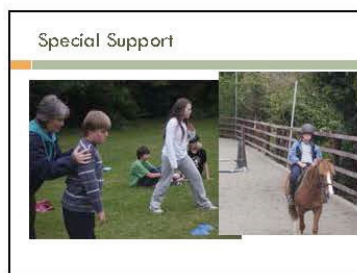
2. I attended Raheen Wood Steiner School, which is now a National School. At the time I went there, it was an independent school.

Slide 3



3. Here is a picture of my class. As you can see, there were a lot of girls. At the beginning of our primary years, there were only 3 boys; by the middle, there were 2; and at the end, I was the last man standing. We had the same main teacher for 6 years, as well as a number of subject lesson teachers. I had strong relationships with everyone at my school, and that meant I always felt completely included.

Slide 4



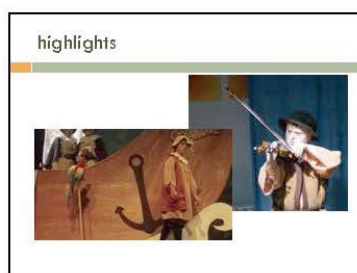
4. The curriculum was modified and personalised. My SNAs & teachers worked closely together to find what and how to teach me. Because it was an independent school, my SNAs were like Resource Teachers, but they experienced the whole day with me. One SNA took me horse riding as a regular part of my school week.

Slide 5



5. There were many highlights of my primary school years. We studied shelter building, working in the woods building numerous shelters, using materials we found there. For my model home project, I built this castle.

Slide 6



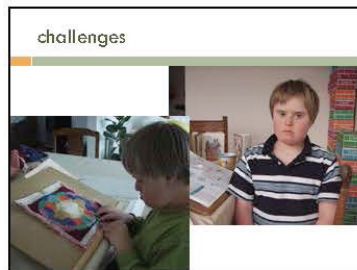
6. We did plays every year. I love drama, and I might grow up to be an actor. I love music, too, and I started fiddle lessons and daily practice during primary school, and had many opportunities to perform.

Slide 7



7. We went on a number of overnight camping trips. Sometimes my parents volunteered, to make sure things went smoothly. My mom was Daniel O'Donnell's Maths teacher, and he did a benefit concert for my school. My class got to sing the first songs on stage that night.

Slide 8



8. It wasn't all easy. Homework was sometimes hard, and I had to really work at it. My mom helped. Some teachers thought I wouldn't be able to join in the class work. I had a hard time making tiny cross stitches in Handwork. But my parents helped find solutions, so that I could participate in everything. Here is my finished pillow.

Slide 9



9. My favourite memory is the All Ireland Ancient Olympic Games. We had been studying the History and Mythology of Greece, learning about where many English words come from, and about the birth of democracy.

Slide 10



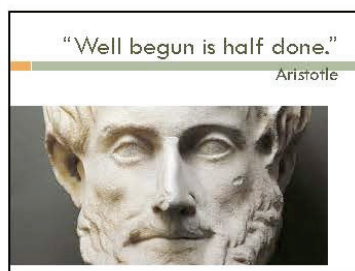
10. The events were the same as the original Olympics: the Pentathlon of Running, Javelin & Discus throwing, Wrestling and Jumping. Rather than competing only in what we were best at, all the students competed in every event. Now THAT's real inclusion.

Slide 11



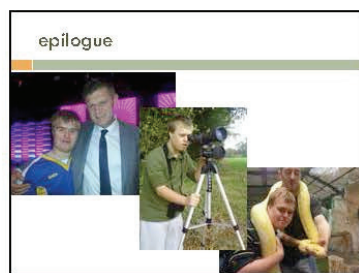
11. At the awards ceremony, each competitor in turn was celebrated for noble effort. Some were the fastest or strongest; some threw, not the farthest, but most graceful; some were recognised for doing honourable deeds during the Games. I earned my award for showing courage and steadfastness.

Slide 12



12. The words of Aristotle sum up how I feel about my primary school experience. 'Well begun is half done.'

Slide 13



13. Since I left primary I have accomplished a number of things. I was interviewed on the Saturday Night Show about my music and film making, and I have made studying nature a big part of my life.

Slide 14



14. Last year, along with my dad, Jonathan, we set up Fionnathan Productions. After a few visits guest teaching in primary schools, we applied to the Heritage Council. I became Ireland's youngest ever Heritage Expert. And if your school would like to hire me, I'll come.

Slide 15



15. Here is my email address to get in contact. We also use social media to promote inclusion and positive life outlook. You can find us on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, or go to our website. I wanted to end by thanking the INTO for the opportunity to address this conference.



# 3

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## Report from Discussion Groups

### Introduction

Each one of the six discussion groups was given a list of questions to focus on. Members of the Special Education Working Group along with representatives from the EDC, EQC and PDC acted as facilitators and rapporteurs. The collated responses of the participants are outlined below.

### Summary of Discussion Group Content:

#### Transitions

Teachers were in agreement that transitions between schools (mainstream to mainstream, special school setting to mainstream, children with SEN to secondary setting, preschool to primary) are often haphazard and lack consistency from school to school. There is no standardised procedure for the transfer of information and teachers in the new school are often 'left wondering' due to the inconclusive or incomplete nature of information transferred. Everyone concurred that time needs to be allocated for collaboration and consultation with other teachers from the schools involved with the greatest benefit to be found by including external professionals also.. It was felt that NEPS do not have the resources to deal with this properly and teachers present were not happy with the current service being provided by NEPS and their local SENOs.

When children move from one school to another, it was deemed highly ineffective that resources do not automatically follow the child. Schools are allowed a certain number of assessments depending on size but the one thing that was found to be in common was the fact that there are never enough assessments.

When discussing transfer from a special school setting to mainstream, it was noted that some mainstream schools are not always accepting of children with special needs and for those of whom a return to mainstream is recommended, a percentage of children do not 'make it'. Some present maintained that this can be attributed to parents who may not be in favour of the move (despite the recommendation), and it was suggested that this may be because of convenience issues for the parents involved.

Delegates who work in the pre-school sector complained of the lack of support from the DES. Pre-schools have no access to resource hours and children transferring into primary school are not assessed until it is too late which in turn can compromise the school's ability to cope. There was consensus that the NCCA, DES and the Early Years



policy unit should all have increased inputs into transition from preschool to Junior Infants.

With regard to the positives aspects of transitioning pupils, one group noted that the transition from language classes to mainstream normally worked very smoothly and successfully and that the transition of children with SEN from primary to secondary has improved over the last number of years with the advent of better communication and the new Passport scheme. DEIS schools are advantaged by virtue of their access to HSCL teachers who can dedicate a block of time to facilitate successful transitions. It was also noted that dual enrolment was a very successful pilot scheme which appears to have been scrapped.

Overall, teachers agreed that a more formalised approach to the transitioning of pupils between schools would be of benefit for both the children, teachers and parents involved but currently this 'yardstick' has not been established.

### **Learning Support and Resource Teaching**

Delegates in attendance were drawn from a number of backgrounds. Many models of intervention were identified by those present at the discussion groups that addressed this area and include: First Steps, Power Hour, Team Teaching, Literacy Lift-Off, in-class support/station teaching and withdrawal of pupils from their classes.

It was generally felt that children with Speech and Language difficulties were best catered for in small groups, outside of the classroom. Those present who had been involved in team teaching found it very effective as it entailed the sharing of good practice. The principal of a small school in a multi class setting said that her school used withdrawal of single class groups which was found to be effective.

Some challenges that were noted during the discussion included staffing in relation to the GAM model, planning time for in class/team teaching initiatives and the lack of materials and resources to effectively address difficulties children were experiencing and/or lack of access to resources which were recommended in professional reports. In relation to Speech and Language and OT reports, some teachers felt that they were not adequately qualified to carry out some of the recommendations. These recommendations also proved difficult to fulfil due to time constraints.

### **Special Class Model**

Teachers present who had been part of a school who has set up a Special Class acknowledged that the setting up of such a class is the hardest part due to the lack of support and the lack of a 'template' for their set up. Training for new teachers in Special Classes is often not provided and while knowledge gained through experience is valuable, it is not enough and there was consensus that prior training would aid teachers who are embarking on teaching a special class. The lack of training can also be a barrier in attracting other teachers to undertake the role in an already established class. It was noted that some teacher do not want 'in' to the special class and some do not want 'out'. It was generally felt that rotation of teachers in this setting is helpful and healthy.

It was noted in all the groups that discussed this topic that children with SEN sometimes have long distances to avail of a place in a special class. This can have a negative impact on their quality of life and also on their socialisation in their local area if they are being educated elsewhere. It was acknowledged that there is more decentralisation of special classes, especially autistic units.

Integration of children from special classes into mainstream has been done in varying form and on the whole, it was felt that this integrations is to the benefit of the children. However, two points of note were the fact that children who have received the majority of their education in the mainstream setting can lack independence. There is so much for them to learn and understand and adapt to when they reach the mainstream class. Another issue of concern is the feeling that if there is too much integration, the child may lose their access to SNA support. A CPSMA representative that was present in one groups acknowledged that the provision for special classes in primary schools is good as opposed to the same provision in secondary schools which begs the question, where can the students with these needs go once they complete their primary education? There is no continuation.

It was noted that in some European countries there is a preferential weighting system in terms of class size if there are children enrolled in that class with a special need i.e. the pupil teacher ratio is reduced in line with the number of children with SEN in that class.

### **Therapeutic Services**

There was consensus that the DES should provide a consolidated service for the provision of therapeutic services so that schools do not have to 'harass' the HSE and other bodies for services such as Speech and Language, psychological intervention and occupational therapy. One teacher present contributed her experience of a Speech and Language therapist who visits her school for three days a week, which addresses the needs of 70 children in 15 hours. It is a more time efficient and collaborative approach to meet the needs of children with specific requirements. There are significant challenges regarding parents not bring their children to appointments. The view was expressed that services such as Speech and Language should be provided by the DES and the HSE is not accountable to schools.

Earlier intervention is key to addressing issues and it had been found by many teachers present that diagnosis is often too late for the children in question. There are also issues surrounding the allocation of resources to children who are only 2 standard deviations or more below the mean. It was felt that a lot more could be done for the children who are borderline if time and resources were allocated.

### **Inclusion Support Service**

As part of the proposed new model for allocating additional teaching resources to schools to support children with special educational needs, the concept of an Inclusion Support Service has been proposed. The following contributions were noted from the discussion groups that discussed this topic.

There is a necessity for the smooth linking of therapeutic services and to streamline the current system with the possibility of having one contact number that would link directly with all the applicable services.

Data collection and access is something which teachers present found to be haphazard. When implementing a service like the ISS, it could prove an ideal opportunity to provide for a central point for data collection. At present it is often required of teachers to repeat the same information to every professional involved and it has been found that repeat assessments have been carried out because of lack of collaboration and the non-existence of shared data. Loss of information when students transition between schools has been a problem experienced by schools to date and leads back to the call for a centralised bank of data. However, this does raise data protection queries. Who would be responsible for it?

In relation to the services that will be integrated into the ISS, teacher questioned whether the SENO's role disappear with the allocation of teachers rather than hours. It was noted that training for teachers in line with best practice need to be provided and the role of the parent should be highlighted when providing services for children with SEN. There were concerns expressed regarding the possible dilution of services once they are amalgamated under the ISS. It was noted that the DES should trust teachers' own experiences and interactions with the children involved which putting a plan of support in place.

### **Training and Professional Development for Teachers both in Mainstream and Special Schools**

The general consensus from those who discussed this topic was that the training that is available for teachers is rather haphazard at best. It depends on local provision and, in many cases, on the due diligence of those organising courses in local education centres.

In many cases, teachers who have upskilled in their own time and at their own expense are forced out of Learning Support or Resource positions. In other cases teachers are forced into this area of special education who would prefer to remain in mainstream. Teachers present expressed concern about the loneliness of the shared Learning Support or Resource teaching post and the lack of a network of support system for those in this position.

A number of teachers spoke very positively about the experience of using the SESS service. This is a very worthwhile experience which can include all the partners involved in the education of the pupil with SEN: the parent, the class teacher, the LS/Resource teacher and the SNA. The advice and help they provide is very practical and down to earth. Some schools have used their Croke Park hours to facilitate this experience.

There is also valuable training available from Middle Town which is a joint cross border initiative though not all were familiar with this facility.

Geographical location of schools can also have a negative effect on accessing training.

A number of teachers spoke of the unfairness of not being able to access training for programmes such as Maths Recovery, Reading Recovery and First Steps for which

priority is given to DEIS schools but these programmes could have a major impact in all schools.

Reference was also made to the work prescribed for SEN children by Physiotherapists, Speech Therapists and Occupational Therapists which Learning Support/Resource teachers are expected to implement. Where does our job start and end? The view was expressed strongly that we are professionals but teachers are not experts nor are teachers trained in these areas.

### **Communication with Parents**

Challenges for Teachers: Lack of acceptance by parents of the need for learning support is a big challenge. Teachers need training to help them inform parents about their child's special needs. Some delegates felt that whole school staffs should be trained for, and rotated into, the SEN area. It was felt that this training should be included in CPD for all teachers. A number of delegates felt that the DES should provide examples of best practice for teachers especially for dealing with parents who themselves have special needs. There was general agreement that the lack of time to meet with parents, fellow teachers and other professionals was a major challenge for teachers. It was noted in one discussion group that in special classes/special schools a communication diary frequently used, which passes daily from home to school and has been found to be an excellent aid to the communication process.

Challenges for parents: The need for coordinated services to help parents deal with children with SEN was highlighted by many delegates. The use of complicated terminology in reports from NEPS and other services was seen as a major challenge for many parents. Many teachers felt that it fell to them to decode and simplify reports for these parents. HSCLE teachers can greatly aid the communication process with parents by explaining the terminology of assessment in the less threatening environment of the pupil's home. One delegate was critical of the lack of inclusion of EAL children in the discussion document as many newcomer families had cultural differences which led to the rejection by them of the idea that their children had ASD. Teachers need support to help overcome this barrier and ensure those children get the help they need.



# Appendix I

## Workshops

### 1. **Teaching Literacy to Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

*Carol-Ann Ó Sioráin*

This workshop will explore our concept of literacy and the stated definitions from national and international policy. Teachers will gain a deeper knowledge of special educational needs as the group identify common areas of difficulties and pedagogical approaches to support literacy development. Participants will be engaged in focused discussion and hands-on activities.

### 2. **Exploring Key Components of Effective Early Intervention for Children with SEN**

*Dr Emer Ring and Dr Patricia Daly*

Key components of recognised best practice in early intervention for children with special educational needs will be identified and discussed. The workshop will focus in particular on liaising with parents; child observations; the role of the environment in children's learning and teaching; curriculum access; managing behaviours that challenge, special needs assistant support and individualised planning.

The workshop will be interactive and comprise group-discussion and related participant tasks in addition to direct input from the presenters.

### 3. **Resilience & Self-control: Good for learners, Good for teachers**

*Máirín Barry*

In this presentation, we look briefly at current research in the area of student behaviour problems and effective behaviour management. In children, the emotional response is much quicker than the rational one and this has important implications for our practice as teachers. The question posed is "Can children learn to modify their impulses to ensure acceptable behaviour in the classroom, in the school yard, in everyday life?" The role of the teacher is pivotal in dealing with these issues and so we look at approaches and techniques for modifying behaviour with particular emphasis on Cognitive and Cognitive-Behavioural interventions, such as Stop, Think, Do (Petersen) and Friends for Life (Barret). Within these programmes, the development of self-control is critical. Some practical, useful ideas that can be tried out in any classroom will be explored. Current research into the effectiveness of such programmes and which strategies have proven to be most effective are considered.

#### **4. Evidence-based Instruction informed by Assessment of Need for Pupils Experiencing Difficulties in Literacy**

*Dr Margaret Egan*

It is vital that reading instruction be informed by systematic assessment of the needs of pupils who experience difficulty in reading. Much research has demonstrated that intensive, systematic, evidence-based instruction is essential for pupils with such difficulties. This presentation addresses the role of formal and informal assessment in Literacy and outlines informed intervention and instruction for students with SEN in the five key component areas of Literacy. By adopting such a systematic approach to teaching and learning teachers of pupils with SEN know what to teach, how to teach, and why they are teaching a particular skill, or set of skills, to make hard things easier for pupils and their families.

#### **5. ASD Specific Assessment and Planning for Access to the Curriculum**

*Dr Michele Lavin*

This workshop will give a brief overview of ASD and how it might affect a pupil in the learning environment. This will be followed by an examination of ASD specific assessments suitable for primary and post primary students and how these can help to gain a baseline for programme planning. This in turn will lead to a discussion on how ASD specific tasks correspond to strands and strand units within the primary curriculum and subject areas in the post primary. The workshop will discuss how the development of skills to assist in the inclusion of pupils with ASD within the mainstream class.

#### **6. Using ICT to support children with SEN**

*Trevor O'Brien*

In this session, the various aspects and benefits of ICT in special education will be considered, with a particular focus on content-free software such as PowerPoint and Clicker. It is contended that when the child's individual needs have been identified, the teacher may match particular software to support the student to access and benefit from the curriculum. Appropriately chosen and relevant software provides the child with a strong visual and kinaesthetic component, therefore appealing to a diversity of learning styles. Working at an individual pace, along with promoting autonomy and independence, are also clear advantages of integrating ICT into pedagogical framing. Some ways to do this will be discussed and there will be an emphasis on the imperative of effective teacher collaboration in order to foster successful learning and teaching.





