

Review of NCSE Resource Allocation Process and Evaluation of Deployment of Resources in Schools

William Kinsella, Lelia Murtagh, Joyce Senior, School of Education, University College Dublin,
in association with Michael Coleman, Mazars Consulting

NCSE RESEARCH REPORTS NO: 18



A report commissioned by the NCSE

2014

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The National Council for Special Education was established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act 2004) with effect from October 1st, 2005.

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Foreword

The NCSE commissioned this piece of research because we wanted to establish if the system governing the allocation of additional resources to schools for students with special educational needs was viewed as working effectively and efficiently. We also wanted to know how schools used these additional resources.

During 2010 and 2011, twelve in-depth case studies were conducted in mainstream and special schools and engaged with principals, class and special educational needs teachers, SNAs, students receiving the additional support and their parents. The schools' educational psychologists and special educational needs organisers (SENOs) were also interviewed.

The NCSE is pleased that schools considered the resource application system to be efficient in terms of the timely decisions made on applications. Schools also noted that the process had improved since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). However, difficulties in getting access to assessments in order to receive support were identified by both parents and schools. Access often depended on the parent's or school's ability to pay for private assessments.

There was considerable variation in how schools used the resources they received. However, there was little evidence of any systematic recording of the progress of students with special educational needs to establish if the additional support was effective. Some principals strongly advocated the need for more formal monitoring of the deployment of additional resources to ensure interventions are achieving the desired outcomes.

The findings from this report and other international research, formed part of the evidence used to inform the development of recent policy advice from the NCSE on supporting students with special educational needs in schools, which included recommendations for policy change on how resources are allocated and the need to document the impact of such resources on student outcomes.

Teresa Griffin
Chief Executive Officer

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for funding this research. The Department of Education and Skills and the NCSE provided access to national databases which was essential for the analysis of national statistics. We are indebted to the Irish Primary Principals' Network and its president, Mr Pat Goff, for distributing the primary school survey. We are also grateful to National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education and the general secretary, Ms Breda Cotter, for distribution of the special school survey. A special word of thanks is due to all primary, post-primary and special school principals, teachers and special needs assistants who participated in the surveys and case studies as well as the psychologists and special educational needs organisers. We would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by parents and pupils to this study. We would like to thank prominent academics in Finland, as well the head teachers and SENCOs in two primary schools in England, who facilitated site visits and gave so freely of their time and expertise. We would like to thank the members of the research advisory committee who gave so generously of their time by attending meetings in UCD and who gave such valuable inputs into its design and development. A particular word of thanks is due to Ms Jennifer Doran, head of research and development, NCSE, who provided invaluable guidance and support throughout the study.

Acronyms

ABA	Applied behaviour analysis
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
BSC	Behaviour support classroom
CPD	Continuing professional development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CVA	Contextual value added
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills [Department of Education and Science]
EAL	English as an additional language
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
FETAC	Further Education and Training Award Council
GAM	General allocation model
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLD	General learning disability
HLTA	High level teaching assistant
HRB	Health Research Board
HSE	Health Services Executive
ICT	Information and communications technology
IEP	Individual educational plan
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools' Programme
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LEA	Local Education Authority
MGLD	Mild general learning disability
NABMSE	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Services
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PGCE	Postgraduate certificate in education
PECS	Picture exchange communication system
PLP	Personal learning plan
RAD	Resource allocation and deployment
RTI	Response to Intervention
RTT	Resource teacher for Traveller children
SEAS	Special Educational Administrative System

ScotXED	Scottish Exchange of Educational Data
SEBD	Social emotional and behavioural difficulties
SEN	Special educational needs
SENO	Special educational needs organiser
SENCO	Special educational needs co-ordinator
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (England)
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (Northern Ireland)
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SLD	Specific learning difficulty
SNA	Special needs assistant
SPES	Special Education Strategy (Finland)
SPLD	Severe and profound learning disabilities
SWG	Student Welfare Group
TA	Teaching assistant
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WTE	Whole-time equivalent (teaching post)

Executive Summary

Introduction

This study aimed to review the system of resource allocation and deployment for pupils with special educational needs that operates within the Irish education system, with particular emphasis on provision for pupils with low incidence disabilities. It asked if the system of provision for these pupils was operating in an equitable, timely, efficient and effective manner and how additional resources are deployed in schools in the context of an inclusive education system for pupils with special educational needs. It also investigated stakeholder perspectives on its perceived effectiveness, with a focus on three key aspects of the system, namely; the application process, the allocation procedures and how resources are deployed in schools. Finally the study sought to identify issues and challenges in allocation and deployment and to identify models of best practice in additional resource provision.

The specific research questions were:

- How effective and efficient is the NCSE's process of allocating resources?
- How are schools deploying NCSE allocated resources?
- What other resources are available in the provision of special education, and how are these being deployed?
- How do schools and parents perceive the effectiveness of resource allocation and deployment in general?
- What major issues arise around resource allocation and deployment?
- What best practices / strategies exist for resource allocation and deployment?

Methodology

The study's starting point was a review of relevant literature on the research themes. In addition, a legislative and policy overview was conducted for Ireland, England and Finland. For the last two countries, information gleaned from informative site visits to both complemented the legislative and policy review. England was selected because of its geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and obvious historical and cultural links with Ireland. Finland was selected due to a similar population scale and urban-rural demographics. In addition, the Finnish education is frequently regarded as a model of good practice and consistently performs well in international comparisons of pupil attainment, such as those conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to the OECD (2010), Finland's performance levels have led educationalists to try to learn the secrets of its success.

Three stages were involved in the empirical data gathering and analysis. The first involved analysis of data from national databases and statistics to do with allocation of additional resources to schools for pupils with special educational needs. The second involved case studies of 12 randomly selected schools: five primary, five post-primary and two special schools, across various school characteristics such as size, pupil gender, geographical location and equality status (DEIS / Non-DEIS). This qualitative aspect of the study involved interviews with principals, with teachers responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision in the schools, and with class teachers, special educational needs teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs). Interviews were also conducted with pupils in each of the schools receiving additional support and their parents. The schools' psychologists and special educational needs organisers (SENOs) were also interviewed. The third empirical aspect of the study

involved a questionnaire survey distributed electronically to all schools in the country, primary, post-primary and special. This aimed to obtain a stratified representative sample of 300 primary (including special) and 100 post-primary schools. The target respondent in each school was the person responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision. Field work (interviews, analysis of national databases, site visits and national surveys) was conducted during October 2009-April 2011.

Findings

Study participants, especially the principals and those organising SEN provision in the case study schools rated the resource application system as efficient in speed of response and decision-making. It was felt this process had improved since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of SENOs. These personnel, however, found completing documentation in the application process was time-consuming. The SENOs, who are obviously central to this process, also referred to an ever-increasing volume of administration, lack of administrative support and excessive workloads which limit their capacity to engage with schools in an advisory, consultative role.

Participants in case study schools reported a perceived sense of exclusion from the decision-making processes for resource allocation. They articulated a strong sense of reduced professional and managerial autonomy and a lack of consultation for allocation and deployment of resources for pupils with special educational needs. Participants also criticised the inflexibility of the resource allocation policy, especially the insistence on, and narrow interpretation of, psychometric scores and the fact that a score just above or just below an eligibility cut-off point can render a pupil ineligible. This use of psychometric scores was also criticised by Desforges and Lindsay (2010), who perceive it as a manifestation of the medical model of disability, while they advocate an interactionist model. They recommend breaking the link between diagnosis of disabilities and access to services. Participants in case study schools and in the national surveys expressed concern that pupils presenting with severe manifestations of mild general learning disabilities (MGLD) or specific learning disabilities (SLD) often had considerably greater needs than pupils who had received higher levels of support on the basis of disabilities, such as ADHD or ASD, for which such pupils had been allocated more intensive resource teaching support. They reported considerable difficulties in meeting the needs of some pupils with MGLD or SLD under the general allocation model (GAM).

Ireland's resource allocation process depends on a diagnosis of a disability or special educational needs by a professional for pupils with low incidence disabilities. Parents in this study recounted difficulties in getting access to professionals, securing assessments and accessing therapies where required. Respondents to the primary and post-primary surveys highlighted waiting lists for professional assessments. In most primary and post-primary schools surveyed, it was reported that substantial numbers of pupils in need of professional assessments were not being prioritised because there were insufficient numbers of assessments available to the schools to cater for all those who needed it. Parents from the case study schools also reported instances of pupils thought to require assessments, but who could not because others were considered a higher priority and insufficient assessments were available. Access depended therefore on parents' or the school's ability to fund private assessments. This challenges the equity of the resource provision system.

Challenges were reported on deployment of resources especially in post-primary schools. Some pupils were reportedly allocated resource hours but were unable to avail of them, due to timetabling issues or class organisational structures. There was also a reported lack of review procedures to establish if the additional support was effective and if it needed to continue. Considerable variability was reported both from surveys and schools in deployment of resources in schools, especially at post-primary. A high prevalence of 'unofficial

special classes'¹ was reported from the post-primary schools. Some deployed additional teaching hours to reduce class size in particular subjects, while others deployed additional hours in the form of special classes. Some respondents identified placement in a Junior Certificate Schools Project (JCSP) class or a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) class as a means of deployment of additional hours, even though these are not designated as classes for pupils with special educational needs, but for those at risk of school disaffection and early school drop-out.

During interviews in case study schools, more comment was generated on the role of SNAs and their centrality in the inclusion of the most challenged and most challenging pupils in mainstream education than about any other professional in the education system. The SNAs were seen as fulfilling a variety of caring and support duties and these duties were fulfilled in various modes of deployment, some at individual and others at classroom level. Many participants regarded such personnel as an under-utilised resource in Irish schools, a sentiment echoed by the SNAs themselves. Survey respondents corroborated these views.

The effectiveness of any resource allocation and deployment system is likely to be determined by the nature of the quality assurance procedures that ensure interventions are achieving the desired outcomes. There was little evidence from this study of systematic recording of the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Some principals strongly advocated the need for more formal monitoring of those with additional resource support.

All education systems are most challenged by challenging behaviour. Respondents from about two-thirds of mainstream schools surveyed, primary and post-primary, rated support levels available for this difficulty as either 'inadequate', or 'very inadequate'. Almost three-quarters of the special school respondents rated it as either 'inadequate' or 'very inadequate'.

Core Recommendations

A substantial number of recommendations were made based on the study's findings. Only some are listed below. The complete list may be found in Chapter 8 and the equivalent recommendation number to that in the final chapter is included in brackets after each entry here.

1. The system of application for additional resources needs to be less time-consuming for all concerned, school personnel and SENOs. This could be best achieved by use of an electronic application and recording system, so that school personnel can submit applications and provide documentation in electronic format. (3)
2. Due to the large caseload carried by SENOs and the volume of paperwork involved in the role, there is need for the appointment of more SENOs along with adequate levels of administrative support for the role. Such developments are essential to ensure effective communication with parents and with other professionals. Such developments would also facilitate enhanced involvement of SENOs in schools enabling them to work more collaboratively with school personnel in the resource application and allocation processes. (4)
3. There is need for enhanced communication between SENOs and parents, so that parents are informed in writing of decisions made on resource applications and the rationale for those decisions. (5)

¹ Some schools use resource hours to set up what may be termed unofficial special classes to cater for students who would benefit from placement in a smaller class. These are also usually called base classes. The NCSE (2011, p57) points out that 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.

4. The DES could revise the policy on resource entitlement and devise more creative approaches to the process of resource allocation, with a view to breaking the link between the two. This revision should incorporate procedures for acknowledging the views of school personnel and use of school-based assessment data in decision-making on resource allocation. (6)
5. For as long as access to resources for low incidence disabilities is mediated by access to professionals and a formal diagnosis, then access to such professionals must be equitable and should be determined by the level of a child's need, not by school setting, geographical location or socio-economic factors. (7)
6. At the point of allocation, arrangements for deployment of proposed additional teaching resources should be discussed by school personnel and the SENO to pre-empt difficulties that may arise in the school's capacity to deliver the allocated resources. (9)
7. The role of special needs assistants should be reviewed in consultation with school personnel, with a view to granting more autonomy to schools in SNA deployment. Consideration should be given to creating teaching assistant posts within schools. (12 and 13)
8. More consistent and systematic approaches are needed to record the progress of pupils with special educational needs who have additional support to ensure they are making adequate progress. (14)
9. Schools need more specialist support from behaviour support specialists (for example by the National Behaviour Support Service [NBSS]) to deal with challenging behaviour. These services should particularly target DEIS schools and emphasise preventative initiatives in primary schools. (18)

1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Changes in the education of children with special education needs in Ireland, emanating from reports such as the Special Education Review Committee report (Government of Ireland, 1993) and legislation such as the Education (1998) and EPSEN (2004) Acts, prompted significant additional resources for the sector. In 2005, two models of resourcing special education were introduced. The general allocation model (GAM), first introduced in SP ED Circular 02 / 05 (DES, 2005) allocated additional teaching resources for primary school pupils with high incidence disabilities on the basis of specific school characteristics, such as number and gender of pupils and disadvantaged status. High incidence disabilities include borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability. Since 2012, a GAM has also been applied at post-primary level with a general allocation of 'high incidence resource teaching' for relevant pupils in second-level schools. (DES Circular No 0010 / 2012).

The second model arose with the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in 2005, where responsibility for the allocation of additional teaching resources for those with low incidence disabilities was transferred from the DES to the NCSE². In addition to this, the NCSE also allocates SNAs to pupils with care needs and / or behavioural difficulties. Resources from this model are allocated on the basis of individual diagnosis and assessment of special educational needs and an assessment of resources already in the school. This system is operated locally through SENOs. The NCSE's Implementation Report (2006) highlighted resource utilisation as an important area for monitoring:

A key issue as regards resources necessary for the implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004 will, therefore be the extent to which existing special educational needs resources are being effectively utilised and / or have the potential to be better used in future to meet the new requirements of the Act. (NCSE, 2006a: p9)

In February 2009, the NCSE, then in its fourth year of allocating resources, invited tenders for a research service to conduct a review of their resource allocation process and an evaluation of how resources were being deployed in schools to provide an appropriate inclusive education for children with special educational needs. This report is the product of that research study.

1.2 Key Aims of the Study

This study aimed to review how the NCSE operates resource allocation, in particular whether the process is operated in an equitable, timely, efficient and effective manner. An exploration of how these resources are deployed in schools in the provision of an appropriate inclusive education for children with special educational needs was undertaken to identify how well schools and different stakeholders understand the system of resource allocation and policy and actual deployment of such resources. A further aim was to identify deployment issues and models of best practice. This study's principal focus was on resource provision to children with low incidence disabilities as allocated by the NCSE. This could not be fully gauged, however, without considering other resources within the school and children with other needs, such as those with high incidence disabilities. Key research questions included:

² Pupils with high incidence disabilities (both general and specific learning disabilities) at post-primary were originally allocated individual resource teaching hours under this model, but as indicated above, these pupils are now provided for under a general allocation model.

1. How effective and efficient is the NCSE's process of allocating resources?
2. How are schools deploying NCSE allocated resources?
3. What other resources are available in special education provision and how are these being deployed?
4. How do schools and parents perceive the effectiveness of resource allocation and deployment in general?
5. What major issues arise around resource allocation and deployment?
6. What best practices / strategies for resource allocation and deployment exist?

1.3 Key Tasks

1. Locate the study in an appropriate empirical and policy context.
2. Develop a comprehensive methodological framework encompassing study sample and selection, management of ethical issues, methods of data collection, and management and phasing of the distinct components of the research, noting key milestones and reporting schedules.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the NCSE's process of allocating resources in a representative sample of schools.
4. Explore the deployment of NCSE allocated resources and other resources within a representative sample of schools.
5. Conduct the appropriate documentary analysis of information available to support the empirical research, e.g. school policies, timetabling, resource deployment details and discuss same with school staff.
6. Document the experiences and views of those involved in allocating, deploying and receiving such resources in a representative sample of schools, incorporating a variety of school types, pupils / students with a variety of SEN and in different cycles of education.
7. Provide a report of the findings and document how they answer the key research questions for this sample.
8. Identify the key issues arising and possible implications for NCSE, DES and school practice and policy around allocation and deployment of SEN resources.

1.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study's main strength resides in its comprehensiveness and its review of the additional resource allocation system for pupils with special educational needs operating in Irish schools. It used extensive qualitative and quantitative research methods involving qualitative interview schedules and quantitative surveys to review this system across primary, post-primary and special schools. It accessed the views of a wide variety of stakeholders, representing both service providers and users and their parents or carers. It analysed national statistics to provide a national statistical context for the system of resource allocation. In addition, it involved site visits to two other jurisdictions to provide illustrative data on practices elsewhere. It thus achieved a comprehensive triangulation of methods, school type and respondent, yielding a wealth of data not previously matched in relation to additional resource provision in this country. It is the first such comprehensive analysis undertaken of that system.

The study's limitations relate to the data being gathered mainly during the calendar year 2011. It is thus a snapshot in time taken during a period of considerable change in the Irish education system, especially for provision of additional resources for pupils with special educational needs. The Irish economy was experiencing a significant recession, resulting in reviews of, and significant changes to, allocation. The value of any study is determined largely by the representativeness of its sample of respondents and that sample's response rate. Every school in the State was invited to participate in the electronic survey. While the final sample broadly represented key socio-economic variables in the population, the response rate was disappointingly low, in particular for mainstream primary schools. Nonetheless, the data analysed for the total valid sample of 330 schools nationwide (8.2 per cent of total population) give valuable insights into resource allocation and deployment.

The study's qualitative component involved case studies of 12 schools; five primary, five post-primary and two special. While these yielded a wealth of qualitative data, from a total of 138 interviews conducted with a wide variety of respondents and the schools were randomly selected, case studies are by definition limited in the extent to which they may represent their respective types. Likewise, while the site visits proved informative, the contrasting data-gathering methods employed, the small convenience sample of respondents and the different type of respondents interviewed, limit the extent to which any general conclusions can be drawn.

2: Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the legislative and policy contexts for the system of additional provision for pupils with special educational needs operating within the Irish education system. This outline is approached by examining, in some detail, legislation, policy and practices in two other countries, England and Finland. While these are good comparators for the Irish education system, it is acknowledged that no resource provision model can be transplanted from one jurisdiction to another. England was selected because of its geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and obvious historical and cultural links with Ireland. Finland was selected because of similarities in scale of population and urban-rural demographics. In addition, the Finnish education system is frequently regarded as a model of good practice and consistently performs well in international comparisons of pupil attainment (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]). According to OECD (2010), Finland's performance has led to educationalists studying it to learn the secrets of its success. This chapter thus provides an overview of historical and current trends in England and Finland on the nature of provision for pupils with special educational needs. Information gleaned from the literature review for England and Finland was complemented by site visits to the two countries, findings from which are reported in Chapter 5. The study's focus is on the systems of allocation and deployment of additional resources which operate in Irish schools, with an obvious focus on how such additional resources are allocated in mainstream schools. However, some specialist settings such as special schools / classes also receive due consideration as particular specialist forms of resource deployment, the existence and the effectiveness of which affect those systems required in mainstream schools / classes.

2.2 Special Educational Needs Provision: Finland

The Finnish education system was examined in some detail and entailed a review of relevant literature, consisting of journal articles on current and historical developments within the Finnish education system, as well as current legislation and education policy documents.

2.2.1 Comprehensive Education in Finland

The Finnish education system's relevance here derives, first, from the consistently high performance of Finnish students in international comparison studies, albeit on relatively narrow metrics of performance in English maths and science. Possibly more relevant to this study, this superior performance is driven significantly by the lowest performing Finnish students outperforming the lowest achieving students of any other country³ in these tests. 'The countries with the very highest overall reading performance in PISA 2009, Finland and Korea, also have among the lowest variation in student scores' (OECD, 2010: p14). This suggests that students at the lower end of the ability spectrum and those presenting with special educational needs achieved better educational outcomes than their counterparts in other jurisdictions. Authors such as Sabel, Saxenian, Miettinen, Kristensen and Hautamaki (2010) attribute this to the effectiveness of what is referred to as the 'part-time special education services'. This is the system of support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. 'Part-time' refers to the system of accessing additional support in mainstream schools, as opposed to placement full-time in special schools.

³ Intellectually disabled students, those with physical functional disabilities and / or with limited proficiency in the language of the PISA assessment constitute permitted exclusions from the assessment process. However, 'exclusions of students remained below 2 per cent in most, and below 5 per cent, in all countries' (OECD, 2010, p25).

The single most compelling piece of evidence that the success of the Finnish school system in international comparison is due to the role of individualised pedagogy and especially (part-time) special education in the comprehensive schools is the striking performance of the bottom quintile (0-20 per cent) of the school population in the PISA exams. This group does so much better against its peer quintile in other countries than the higher scoring Finnish quintiles do against theirs that its achievement accounts for much of Finland's overall high standing, and it is of course the lowest quintile that benefits most from part-time special education services. (Sabel *et al*, 2010, p36)

Authors such as Sabel *et al*, (2010) identify the development of comprehensive education since the 1970s as the catalyst for the emergent superiority of the Finnish education system. Originally a two-track system of grammar schools existed for the 'theoretically gifted' pupils, destined for universities and the professions, and civic schools for the 'practically gifted' pupils destined for vocational institutes and manual or 'blue collar' occupations. Students were placed on differing academic and occupational trajectories at around age 11, similar to England's former 'Eleven-plus' system. The introduction of the Finnish comprehensive school system in 1972-77 meant a break with this way of thinking. In 1968, Finnish parliament passed the School System Act to replace the existing two-track system, with a guarantee of free public and, eventually, compulsory education in comprehensive schools for nine years, including six years of primary school (age seven to 12) and three years of lower secondary school (age 13 to 15). This entire period of schooling, referred to as the basic education period, involved educating the whole age group together for nine years (age seven to 15), instead of the former four years (age seven to 11). It also included free hot meals, health care, transportation, learning materials and psychological support, thus indicating that comprehensive education was embedded within an extensive welfare state system.

Moberg and Savolainen (2006, cited in Sabel *et al*, 2010) carefully designed an historical comparison of educational attainments pre- and post-comprehensive education. They used a random sample of ninth grade pupils from four schools in the city of Jyväskylä in 2005, a sample used by one of these researchers in a previous study in 1966. They assembled a random sample of ninth graders from the same schools and same catchment areas in 2005. While 2 per cent of the 1966 sample received part-time special education, 29 per cent of the pupils in the 2005 group received it. They administered the same tests (comprehension and information retrieval) that had been administered in 1966, and performance improved significantly even though the test used was obviously more suited to the original 1966 sample. The average or mean score of the 2005 group was higher, by 30 per cent in one test and 50 per cent in the other, and statistically highly significant ($p < .001$). The variance in the 2005 group was smaller than in the 1966 group, thus performance had become more homogenous. The crucial finding, as far as the researchers were concerned, and which is of relevance to the current study, was the distribution of the overall improvements in reading. It was the poorer performing students, the lower deciles, in the 2005 sample who improved most, relative to the 1966 group. Sabel *et al*, (2010) conclude that:

These results, outperformance by the low decile groups, reduction in variance and underpopulation of the low performance categories, reproduce the defining features of Finland's showing on the PISA tests. Moberg and Savolainen (2006) demonstrate that Finland's relation to its own past is like its current relation to lower-performing school systems in other countries. What has changed in Finland, the treatment that explains the improvement in performance, is the introduction of comprehensive schools that mitigate learning disorders through part-time special needs education. (Sabel *et al*, 2010, p36)

2.2.2 Special Education in Finland

With the development of comprehensive education, most pupils were thus educated together until age 15 and many who would previously have been educated in special schools were subsequently educated in mainstream schools, either in special classes or as part of a 'part-time' special education system in which they were withdrawn from classes on a 'pull-out' basis. The principle is that additional support is to be commenced as soon as learning difficulties are observed so that the pupil does not lag behind in his or her studies and is to be provided as often and as broadly as is appropriate from the standpoint of the pupil's academic success (Sabel *et al*, 2010).

Finnish comprehensive school reform did not occur in isolation, but was accompanied by a major transformation of teacher education. By 1971, the latter was provided by universities and all teachers had to receive a minimum of three years' training and a bachelor's degree. By 1972, all teachers had to spend five days annually in in-service teacher training. In the late 1970s, the Master of Science, requiring four or five years of university education, became the prerequisite for teaching. As part of their training, teachers are trained to conduct research on effective pedagogical methods, as there is a strong emphasis on research methods training as part of teacher education, with a significant focus on evidence-based interventions being implemented in the classroom. Special education teachers teach in special classes and in special schools, but also teach in mainstream schools offering 'part-time special education' to pupils who predominantly attend, but may be withdrawn from, mainstream classes. The training of special education teachers requires an additional year following the master's degree, during which they engage in a rigorous further course on responding to a wide range of learning disorders.

The contribution of teaching assistants is becoming increasingly important both in inclusive and specialist classrooms in Finland. Teaching assistants are 'educated professionals', and their education consists of 40 study weeks, with one week being equivalent to 40 hours of work (Takala, 2007). In a study of the role of these assistants, Takala (2007) observed 60 lessons and identified a total of 11 different tasks which could be condensed into three main tasks:

- Assisting a pupil.
- Guiding or teaching independently.
- Indirect tasks, such as assisting a teacher and discussions with other professionals and with parents.

It is common practice for a teaching assistant to be asked to take a small group of pupils to a different room to do tasks similar to those being done in the classroom with the teacher. Sometimes if the teacher has to attend a meeting, the teaching assistant conducts a lesson according to the teacher's instructions and if the teacher is ill, the assistant can work as a substitute teacher and receive a teacher's salary.

The percentage of Finnish comprehensive school students who receive special education is a much higher fraction of the school population than in other OECD countries (Sabel *et al*, 2010). In 1968, less than 1 per cent received part-time special education for reading and writing difficulties. By 1979, this had increased tenfold and by 2010 about 30 per cent of all Finnish comprehensive school students were receiving at least some special education. A majority (22 of the 30 per cent) receive short-term special needs instruction in standard classroom settings to address particular learning problems. They access short-term special instruction to address specific topics, for example, in literacy and numeracy and might each typically receive several courses of such educational therapy in proceeding through comprehensive school. The remaining 8 per cent present with more pervasive cognitive or behavioural problems (Sabel *et al*, 2010) and are diagnosed by school psychologists as requiring more intensive and continuous attention and are often grouped for instruction in specialised classrooms (Sabel *et al*, 2010).

A core principle of the Finnish special education system is early identification of learning difficulties and immediate provision of sufficient support to meet the school's learning objectives, while allowing the student to remain in class with his / her peers. The focus on early identification begins during the pre-school years. A network of child health clinics located across the country provide regular, free assessments of the physical, mental and social development of new-born and pre-school children. It involves at least nine visits during the child's first year and one visit per year in the following five years. It includes an extensive health examination (including an assessment of family well-being at four months of age) and equally extensive assessments at 18 months and at four years. Finnish children are aged seven when they start school in first grade, but some with special educational needs start school at six. The rationale is that early anticipation and intervention into common learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, help ensure that children start school with comparable mathematics and reading skills.

The provision of special education services of all kinds is carefully and regularly monitored in each school by a Student Welfare Group (SWG). This has become a crucial and distinguishing feature and a core aspect of the Finnish comprehensive schools and is a multi-professional, school-based group responsible for ensuring the physical and psychological well-being of students, for overseeing their progress and for the school's overall learning environment. The SWG would include a principal, psychologist (sometimes working for several schools and with several SWGs), the school nurse, special education teacher(s) and sometimes, as requested, a representative of the municipal social welfare administration. The SWG reviews the performance of each class and sometimes each student in the school at least once a year. This allows identification and tracking of students in need of remedial, part-time and special education. Much of the SWG's attention focuses on students who receive part-time education. When a student is identified as requiring full-time special education, the SWG checks that the individualised study plans guiding the development of each pupil's needs are being followed to good effect and, if not, what corrections are necessary.

When a student has difficulties in the classroom, the teacher initiates supportive measures, such as informal tutoring, either individually or in a group, and notifies the parents. Each teacher has a reserve of at least one lesson hour per week for these activities. If this is insufficient, the teacher consults a special education teacher with relevant expertise, who may conduct assessments, observations or short interventions. If this is insufficient and the student is at risk of falling behind, teachers and parents meet to discuss the option of formally pursuing special education. If the parents approve, the case is referred to the SWG, which can decide to make a formal diagnosis of the learning problems and on that basis provide a customised programme of intervention, in the form of an individual education plan (HOJK in Finnish), in the regular classroom or in a specialised setting. Any decision to transfer a student to full-time special needs education must contemplate their return to the mainstream classroom. The SWG is therefore a significant decision-making body for resource allocation and student placement. It has responsibility for managing SEN resources allocated to the school. Resources are allocated in terms of hours of tuition in terms of teaching lessons according to pupil need, rather than monetary funding. However, there is no specified list of hours allocated to different disabilities; for example, there is no stipulation that if a pupil has been diagnosed with ASD then that pupil is entitled to a specific number of additional tuition hours per week. This decision is made at school level. The SWG performs a core function in allocating support, placing students and monitoring progress (Sabel *et al*, 2010). Peer review of, and by, teachers is an inherent aspect of the monitoring process.

2.2.3 Special Education in Finland: Further Development

The Finnish special education system is considered to function well and to make a significant contribution to the system overall. However, according to Sabel *et al* (2010), it is under strain and one sign of this is the growth in special education. The numbers enrolled or transferred to full-time special education increased more than 60 per cent, from under 5 per cent to about 8.5 per cent of the school population during 2000-09. The numbers in part-time special education increased by about 15 per cent (up from 20 per cent to 23 per cent of the school population) (Sabel *et al*, 2010). While the rise is regarded as a likely outcome of the system's success, there is also concern about significant variation in the administration of the special education programme across municipalities. The percentage of pupils transferred into full-time special education can range between 5.5 per cent and 12 per cent between areas (Sabel *et al*, 2010). There is similar municipal variation in the rates of participation in part-time special education. It suggests that different criteria and different diagnostic and decision-making processes are being used to make judgements on provision of special education services in different regions.

Kivirauma (2004), writing on the evolution of conceptual thought within special education in Finland, concludes that at the time there was an ongoing battle between the medical and the social paradigms for the right to diagnose deviance or difference. He views it as a dichotomy between the individualistic or categorical perspective, with its emphasis on diagnostic labelling, and the alternative relational perspective, which emphasises the interaction between the person and his or her environment, as a locus of causality of disability and special educational needs. Kivirauma, Klemela and Rinne (2006) warn that the apparent dominance of an inclusion discourse does not necessarily mean that inclusion functions in practice. They cite the examples of Sweden, where the number of pupils in special units increased by as much as 62 per cent during 1993-99 as well as Finland, where there has been a huge growth in the number of special education pupils. They also emphasise the impact of gender, family structure and social / cultural background on the likelihood of placement in special education, and the over-representation in part-time special education of pupils from minority cultures, possibly due to diminished Finnish language proficiency. This reinforces the relational nature of special educational needs, advocated by proponents of the social model of disability. Kivirauma *et al*, (2006) conclude:

Thus, in Finland, one of the Nordic countries which has adopted an egalitarian compulsory school system and which is one of the top countries in PISA comparisons, the school seems to be most suitable for Finnish and Swedish speaking middle and upper-class children, especially girls. (Kivirauma *et al*, 2006: p130)

The Ministry of Education established a steering group of special education to examine these issues. It concluded that some municipalities took insufficient or no supportive or corrective action to help pupils with part-time special needs before deciding to refer them to full-time special education. The ministry therefore launched a Special Education Strategy (SPES) in November 2007. The approach to identifying and intervening in response to special educational needs contained within this strategy is strongly influenced by the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, developed in the US and which is being introduced into Finland (Sabel *et al*, 2010). The novel aspect of the SPES relates to the emergence of the new support phase, Intensified Support, a period of systematic intervention between mainstream and special education that corresponds to the second tier of RTI. It demands careful assessment of student needs, emphasises a pedagogical approach over a psycho-medical approach prioritising the role of teachers over psychologists in identifying SEN, and requires systematic intervention planning in a collaborative manner.

The SPES requires multi-professional collaboration, sharing of knowledge and responsibilities and the decisions and practices are expected to be more evidence-informed and systematic than before (Vanhanen, Vainikainen, Hiltavuori, Hautamaki and Thuneberg, 2009). According to these authors, the strategy stresses flexibility,

collaboration and more systematic planning. It advocates co-teaching, multi-professionalism, flexible groupings, and individual learning plans (ILPs). The SPES aims to influence the ways professionals talk about student needs and difficulties. It advocates against the categorisation of students or groups by diagnostic labelling and emphasises identification of pedagogical needs and appropriate interventions. There was concern that important decisions are often made on the basis of a once-given label, and that it is not always clear whose interests are best served by the diagnosis and the related label (Osgood, 2006, cited in Vanhanen, *et al*, 2009). This would concur with Skrtic's (1991) assertion that the organisation of SEN provision can serve the needs of professionals within the field more so than the individuals accessing their services.

The Finnish education system does not employ high-stakes testing in the same manner as the US and the UK in that it does not engage in national periodic testing of pupils as they progress through the education system with possible consequences for schools and their personnel. There is no publication of statistics that would allow ranking of either individual schools or students. The only significant assessment with implications for the future direction of a pupil's academic trajectory now occurs at the transition from secondary to tertiary schooling. However, Sabel *et al*, (2010) reject the apparently common misconception that teachers in the Finnish system rely almost exclusively on their own evaluations of student performance to the near exclusion of standardised instruments for assessment. Finnish education relies on the information from diagnostic testing from the start, well before the beginning of formal instruction (Sabel *et al*, 2010). At age two-and-a-half, Finnish children are tested for emergent cognitive problems, and by the time they reach pre-school, at age six, their teachers can anticipate learning difficulties on the basis of a rich battery of further tests. When formal schooling begins, students are frequently tested and the recent legislation makes this continuous monitoring mandatory. Assessments in schools are frequent and are aimed at identifying and addressing problems quickly. Thus Finnish teachers play a crucial role in student assessment, but they do so with the help of tests, and in collaboration with test makers. This has gone largely unremarked in discussion of the Finnish school system (Sabel *et al*, 2010).

Another characteristic feature of the Finnish education system is the level of decentralised autonomy devolved to municipalities and to schools, as the Finnish system is regarded as being based on a culture of trust rather than on control, and teacher autonomy is seen to facilitate a 'freedom to teach' rather than a risk of 'curricular anarchy' (Vanhanen, *et al*, 2009). The national core curriculum issued in 1994 further expanded the authority of teachers and schools in curriculum development and eliminated most of the remaining mechanisms of centralised control over the operation of schools. This coincided with the dismantling of the inspection system and the elimination of all forms of central control of teachers' work, a shift from centralised inspection to school self-evaluation. It is worth noting that, according to OECD (2010: p10), 'many of the world's best-performing education systems have moved from bureaucratic "command and control" environments towards school systems in which people at the frontline have much more control of the way resources are used, people are deployed, the work is organised and the way in which work gets done.' However, the National Board of Education (NBE) fulfils a monitoring role for the system as a whole. It conducts an annual evaluation of the performance of a sample of 5 to 10 per cent of the student population to monitor the extent of regional or social disparities and, if needs be, prompt improvement in individual schools included in the sample, though schools are never ranked and results are never published, but are fed back confidentially to the schools. On the basis of these continuing interactions with all parts of the school system, the NBE identifies shortcomings in the organisation of the school system and suggests ways of addressing them.

Finnish educators are examining a further potential strategy in the form of school enquiry teams, borrowed from the US. These teams help a group of weak students address a particular learning problem, while at the same time helping teachers acquire the skills to define and treat such problems collaboratively and to drive system change (Sabel *et al*, 2010). The aim is to effect change by means of a team focusing on a particular problem affecting 15 to 30 pupils. The team would be headed by a school principal, recruiting at least two

additional staff members with particular areas of expertise suited to the identified problem. For example, a team might focus on the bottom third of the students in performances on maths or reading tests, and select 15-30 students, with whom it will develop specific improvement initiatives. More than one such team can function in a school. Teams establish short- and long-term goals, design and implement a pedagogic strategy, pursue it with the target population, assess the results and revise the strategy as necessary. It is an ongoing process of refinement and improvement. The last step is to make the improvements achieved as widely available as possible within the school, through an analysis of the factors that may be contributing to the difficulties, such as inappropriate curriculum, lesson design or teaching methods. The teams embody a culture of collaboration, joint evaluation and peer review. Without using the specific terminology, this is very similar to the concept of schools as learning organisations, engaging in collaborative problem-solving to effect systemic change in a continual process of school improvement, as advocated by Senge (2006) in the US. Sabel *et al*, (2010) conclude that the success of the Finnish school system depends significantly on classroom practices that systemically tailor pedagogy to the needs of individual students, on efficient school and school-system practices, on collaboration between regular and special teachers, the review of service provision by the SWGs in schools and some monitoring of systemwide performance by the NBE.

2.3 Special Educational Needs Provision: England

Examination of the English education system entailed scrutiny of education policy and legislation as well as a review of relevant literature.

2.3.1 Legislation

In England, the government does not impose funding arrangements that are applicable across the jurisdiction. Authority and decision-making are devolved to the various regions, which are administered by local authorities which in turn further devolve substantial decision-making powers to schools. The assumption is that school management personnel are best placed to decide how to spend funds for pupils with disabilities / special educational needs. Such resource allocation in many parts of England consists mostly of allocated funding, depending on school factors, rather than additional hours of extra tuition or care support per pupil. If a pupil is allocated specific tuition hours, management will usually have to fund those hours from its overall SEN budget.

The Education Act 1996 (DfES, 1996) and the Code of Practice (DfES 2001) provide the legislative and policy framework for SEN provision in England. A statutory assessment of special needs must be conducted in accordance with the Education Act (DfEE, 1996). Under this Act, a child has 'special educational needs' if they have a learning difficulty requiring special educational provision. As in other jurisdictions, legislation for this cohort is supplemented by anti-discrimination legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act (DfE, 1995) was enacted in England to make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons regarding employment, provision of goods, facilities and services, including educational services. This Act was subsequently subsumed into the Equality Act (DfE, 2010), the focus of which was again predominantly on prohibiting discrimination around employment and provision of, and access to, services. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (DfES, 2001) targeted discrimination on grounds of disability in schools and other educational establishments. It placed a duty on local education authorities (LEAs) and schools to ensure that pupils with special educational needs were educated in a mainstream setting, unless this was incompatible with parent wishes or mainstream provision could not be adapted to meet the pupils' needs without prejudicing the efficient education of their peers or incurring unreasonable public expense. SENDA (DfES, 2001) also stipulated that a school must take reasonable steps to ensure students are not discriminated against or substantially disadvantaged in admission to a school or the services it provides.

A Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Pupils with Special Educational Needs was first introduced in England in 1994 (DfEE, 1994) and revised in 2001 (DfES 2001b). Based on the premise that all students have a right to a broad and balanced education, it specified fundamental principles to guarantee the statutory rights of children with special educational needs were met. This could involve a statutory assessment and a statement of needs. Local authorities have a duty to ensure provision is made in line with the requirements of a child's statement. The code stipulated that a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) be appointed in each school to take responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision. However, it also emphasised that all teachers are teachers of children with special educational needs and that SEN provision is a whole-school issue.

Stipulations such as the formulation of individualised education plans, as statutorily required, for example in the US since 1975 and statements of special educational needs used in England, can be seen in several ways: one, as an effective means of guaranteeing the rights of pupils with special educational needs to individualised tailored instruction to meet those needs; or two, as reinforcing an individualised deficit model of disability and as being contrary to inclusive practice. A single focus on direct allocation of additional resources to an individual pupil may not always be beneficial and can sometimes serve to separate them from their peers and from access to the mainstream curriculum (Beek, 2002). As in Finland, UK commentators question the link between individual diagnosis and identification of needs as a criterion of entitlement to resources and the medico-deficit model of disability, as administrations struggle to resolve the tension between a desire to meet individual needs, while de-emphasising categorical diagnostic labels.

The government in England published a Green Paper entitled *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability* in March 2011. This consultation document sought opinion on plans to change the delivery of educational services to children with disabilities and special educational needs. It proposed earlier intervention and a simplified assessment and intervention plan, with greater parental involvement. It advocated greater collaboration between services, enhanced mediation services and performance measurement. The impetus for the proposed changes was prompted by existing poor life-chances for this cohort, delayed identification of needs and ineffective interventions while at school, a perceived overly bureaucratic system and limited parental choice. The Green Paper proposed a co-ordinated education health and care plan and advocated enhanced training for teachers and psychologists, the employment of more healthcare professionals and a greater involvement of voluntary and community organisations. It aimed to support the best schools in disseminating best practice guidelines. It contended that the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs could be reduced by more effective teaching since the more effective the mainstream class teaching, the less need to refer pupils for additional support or assessment. It recommends greater performance measurement of the lowest achieving pupils. In response, the Children and Families Bill was introduced 'to make provision about children, families and people with special educational needs' (House of Commons, 2013; www.parliament.ac.uk, accessed March 16th, 2013). It emphasises early identification of SEN and the integration of special educational provision with that of health and social care, through the formulation of educational, health and care (EHC) plans and the constant review of educational, health and care provision on an annual basis. It emphasises inclusion in mainstream education, but does not preclude special education. The Bill obliges school authorities to designate a staff member as special educational needs co-ordinator with responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision. It also proposes a code of practice to outline the duties and responsibilities on all schools, local authorities and other relevant bodies arising from the proposed Bill.

2.3.2 Resource Allocation Models

The stated core principles of the resource allocation system in England include equity between schools, maximum mainstreaming of pupils with special needs, early intervention, preferably without the need for a statement, and accountability for pupil progress, attainment and well-being (DfES, 2002). It must also contribute to the drive for improved standards across the school system. It aims for identification and assessment to be related to individualised planning to meet individual needs, but not necessarily to resource entitlement (DfES, 2002). It is perceived as inefficient and overly bureaucratic to distribute resources on the basis of assessment alone because such a system requires use of clear criteria and often a period of relative failure precedes allocation of resources by this method. The assumption is that additional help should be provided as soon as it is required rather than after a period of failure. Whole-school funding, as opposed to individual pupil allocation, offers schools greater flexibility to determine priorities for support and intervention and enables them to meet the particular learning needs of individual pupils at an early stage. In most local authority regions, centrally provided advisory teaching services support children in mainstream settings with a range of severe and complex needs where it is essential that specialist advice and teaching skills are available (DfES, 2002). This would apply, for example, to children with profound sensory impairments, significant and complex emotional and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, significant specific learning difficulties and complex language and communication disorders.

A review of documentation from five local authorities in England conducted as part of this study indicates that a central tension emerging is the need to devise an open, transparent, bureaucratically efficient resource allocation system based on a recurrent allocation model. This reduces the need for assessment to establish entitlement which allows sufficient flexibility for schools to respond quickly to unexpected demands that may not fit easily into a formulaic system of resource allocation. The associated issue of possible 'perverse incentives' is receiving equal critical attention (DfES, 2002). It is emphasised that resources should support inclusion and attainment, and schools should not be penalised for success by the early withdrawal of the resources that have supported achievement.

In England there are three broad approaches to the distribution of resources for pupils with additional educational needs; they are not regarded as either necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive in terms of possible options. These are:

- Whole-school allocation
- Direct pupil audit or assessment
- Allocation through groups of schools

2.3.2.1 Whole-School Allocation

In considering any level of overall school allocation of resources, the first issue is indicators of need. The important issue in determining these is to ensure that they can be derived from available data in order to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. Indicators in common use in England include:

- Free school meals
- Reading test scores
- Key stage attainment data
- Number of children on roll
- Mobility and turbulence factors
- Baseline assessments
- Cognitive ability test scores

According to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2002), one advantage of a whole-school based allocation model is that indicators can largely eliminate perverse incentives. Schools are not in a position to individually influence budget allocations through over identification of needs, and schools will not be disadvantaged by a budget reduction if they can improve attainment. It is a system that is easy to administer, provides genuine whole-school funding and individual children are not usually identified. Additional arrangements may be required for pupils who have severe or complex needs and this can leave an element of perverse incentive in the system. Pupils deemed to require specialist provision may attend specially resourced mainstream schools. This concept refers to mainstream schools that receive additional funding from local authorities to support provision for children with complex and low incidence needs.

2.3.2.2 Direct Pupil Audit or Assessment

This approach distributes resources to schools on the basis of the relative assessed needs of individual children. Typically, criteria are agreed and used to determine a resource band for each eligible pupil. Each band generates a cash sum that is delegated to schools. The cash value of each band is commonly determined through a combination of the total budget available and the number of children to be supported. Resources may be delegated on a whole-school basis with the sum of individual band values determining the budget share. The concept of auditing implies periodic assessments which can also fulfil a monitoring role. There are several variants of the audit approach in current use in England. Some authorities audit the whole population with special educational needs, while others use a combination of arrangements involving the distribution of a proportion of available resources through indicators, reserving entry into the audit for those with more complex needs and disabilities. Some local authorities audit all cohorts of pupils with special needs annually, while others identify those in particular year groups and maintain bands of individual children until the next audit point is reached. This latter arrangement has the advantage of being more stable and does not penalise successful schools in the short term. The whole-school allocation model, using indicators, and the individual pupil audit approach are not necessarily mutually exclusive and a combination of both operates in some regions.

2.3.2.3 Allocation Through Groups of Schools

This approach allocates resources for pupils with complex needs to a partnership body that represents the key stakeholders within a group of schools. A number of local authorities are developing this approach to distribution of at least some of their resources. There is evidence (Meijer, 1999) that delegating resources to clusters or groups of schools can be particularly helpful in supporting inclusive practice. Such a group usually consists of a secondary school and some primary schools. This is likely to greatly facilitate ease of transition and transfer of resources between primary and second-level schools. Typically, a local partnership arrangement brings together specialist support staff and officers from the local authority, head teachers and SENCOs. This body is responsible for the distribution of additional resources to schools within a given area and has direct control and oversight of the budget for this process. Allocations are made on the basis of needs as assessed by SENCOs, supported by professional advice where appropriate. Moderation is well developed to ensure that resources are distributed fairly between schools.

2.4 Special Educational Needs Provision: Ireland

This section outlines the Irish legislation most relevant to provision for pupils with special educational needs and a review of policy directives that govern it.

2.4.1 Irish Legislative Context for Additional Resource Provision

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Government of Ireland, 1993) stated that Ireland had a conspicuous lack of legislation governing much of educational provision but particularly covering educational provision for students with special needs. The Education Act of 1998 was the first attempt to address this lack. It accorded the same rights to pupils with disabilities and other special educational needs as are accorded to those without. It also provided formal legislative guarantees of participation within the education system for children with such disabilities. The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) formally acknowledged the rights of parents of children with disabilities or special educational needs in their choice of school, though with the proviso that 'the rights of patrons' and the 'effective and efficient use of resources' would not be adversely affected. Griffin and Shevlin (2007) contend that such provisos weakened the Act's legislative guarantee. Lodge and Lynch (2004) also highlight the frequent reference to such caveats as a determining factor in providing adequate services and facilities for disabled learners. Carey (2005) contends that while the Education Act 1998 was a major step forward in Irish educational policy and provision and was well intentioned, it contains many 'vague and ambiguous phrases', (Carey, 2005: p140). In common with Griffin and Shevlin (2007) and Lodge and Lynch (2004), he contends that including the critical proviso that 'in carrying out his or her functions, the Minister shall have regard to the resources available' weakens the legislation. Carey concludes: 'It (Education Act) may well be destined to be ineffective legislation from the perspective of the child with special education needs' (Carey, 2005: p141).

Key to educational provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is the concept of equality which must address equality of access, of participation and outcomes. Irish equality legislation is enshrined in the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2000, 2004). These aim to promote equality, prohibit discrimination, prohibit harassment, guarantee reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities, and allow for a broad range of positive action measures. They allow preferential treatment to cater for the special needs of those who need additional facilities, arrangements, services or assistance. Thus, an educational institution must do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by offering special treatment or facilities in circumstances where, without these, it would be impossible or difficult to access educational services. In its document, *Schools and the Equal Status Act*, which summarises the main implications for schools arising from the Equal Status Acts, the Equality Authority (2005) emphasises that schools must mainstream and reasonably accommodate people with disabilities. Furthermore, a school may not discriminate in relation to a student's admission, participation or expulsion, or access to any course, subject, facility or benefit that it provides, on the basis of one or more of the nine specified grounds, including disability.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) is the most pertinent piece of Irish legislation on SEN provision, though it is yet to be fully implemented. Its stated purpose is to make further provision for the education of people with special educational needs; to ensure that the education of this cohort, wherever possible, takes place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs; and to ensure that they have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education, as do their peers who have no such needs. It aims to assist children with special needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate fully and in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives. It also provides for the greater involvement of

parents in the education of these children. Implementation of the EPSEN Act began in October 2005 with a view to full implementation over a five-year timeframe from that date. However, due to deteriorating economic conditions, this has been postponed indefinitely, though the Government for National Recovery 2011-2016 document commits to publishing a plan for implementation to prioritise access for children with special needs to an individual education plan (Government of Ireland, 2011).

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) specifies the procedures and timelines to be followed if school personnel become concerned that a student may be presenting with special educational needs and he or she has not responded appropriately to 'such measures as are practicable' to meet these needs. Such procedures may entail an assessment, the formulation of a statement of findings and, if deemed necessary, the formulation of an education plan in consultation with parents. The plan must be reviewed regularly and at least within 12 months of its formulation. However, due to the postponement of the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, these elements have not been implemented. A statutory duty rests with the Minister for Health and Children and the Minister for Education and Science [now the Minister for Education and Skills] to provide the requisite resources, but within the constraints set out by the Minister for Finance. Carey (2005) contends that while the Act has its limitations, 'it is a major piece of legislation that will serve as the guiding template for all special education services' (Carey, 2005: p163).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established in 2003, pursuant to the Education Act 1998. Its functions were specified in the EPSEN Act, 2004 and it was formally established in 2005. The allocation of resources for pupils with low incidence disabilities at primary and post-primary school is the NCSE's remit. The allocation of additional teaching resources to pupils with high incidence disabilities at post-primary level is also the responsibility of the NCSE but, in primary schools, it is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The DES sets resource provision policy. The NCSE is also responsible for the allocation of special needs assistant (SNA) support to pupils with significant care needs. The NCSE (2006a) issued a report on the implementation of the EPSEN Act in 2006, in which it identified the following issues as significant for future resource provision:

- Assessment of need will focus on needs identification rather than on resource implications.
- The concept of an individual education plan which will have an outcome-focused orientation.
- A concept of equity requiring that a child with special educational needs is not disadvantaged by the State in terms of educational provision (and / or resources and supports for it) being skewed in favour of a particular form of disability, i.e. to the detriment of the support of other co-morbid disabilities.
- A greater focus will rest on outcomes of student learning and teaching, as recommended by the EPSEN Act 2004, rather than on resource inputs. This suggests greater accountability will be incorporated into any new resource allocation models.
- All children will have appropriate individual education plans. Current NCSE research indicates that school staff, NEPS, HSE and the Council itself feel under-resourced to deal with implementing this support provision. Therefore, future resource allocation will also incorporate indirect support of the target group by funding training for parties who contribute to the formulation of IEPs.
- A greater emphasis will be brought to bear on a school's systemic capacity to use its total resources to support students with special educational needs. This will lead to a move away from support of the cohort in terms of an individually-based disability deficit paradigm to one in which the school exercises a systemic capacity building for inclusive education for all its students. (NCSE, 2006a)

While the EPSEN Act is mainly concerned with educational provision for children of schoolgoing age with disabilities or special educational needs, the Disability Act 2005 is concerned with persons of all ages with disabilities and with enabling them to access and participate in society and its institutions. The Act's stated purpose is to enable provision for assessment of the health and education needs of these people. Application for an assessment can be made to the Health Services Executive (HSE) by a person who believes they may have a disability, or by an advocate. Independent assessment officers carry out assessments without regard to the cost of any service to meet applicant needs. They must provide written reports stating whether or not the applicant is presenting with a disability. If the applicant has a disability, the report must contain a statement of needs and a service statement. This must include a statement of the nature and extent of the disability; a statement of health needs and educational needs (if any) required by the disability; and a statement of the services considered appropriate to meet applicant needs. Crucially, however, provision cannot result in net expenditure exceeding the sum determined by the Minister for Health and Children. This means that budgetary constraints govern the right to, and availability of, services. The Disability Act 2005 therefore provides for a statutory right to an assessment but not necessarily to the services deemed necessary to meet the needs identified.

To date, entitlements under the Act have been confined to children with disabilities aged up to five. Since June 2007, parents can apply for an assessment of need under the Act if they think the child may have a disability. The assessment that follows focuses on the child's needs and does not necessarily result in a diagnosis which exactly meets the DES criteria for low incidence special educational needs to access resources (DES 2011). It has, however, established a comprehensive assessment of needs system for the identification and possible diagnosis of disabilities among pre-school children. Such a system is to be welcomed, as early identification is essential to efficient and timely allocation of additional educational provision for pupils entering the school system with significant disabilities.

While Ireland has therefore enacted comprehensive and progressive disability, equality and rights legislation, the pervasive use of provisos and get-out clauses, renders the legislation resource-driven rather than needs- or rights-driven. It means it falls short of the rights-based legislation vehemently demanded by representative groups within the Irish disability sector. Similar criticism is voiced by UK commentators of UK legislation (e.g. Allan, 2008). It does not resolve the issue of possible conflicts of rights between pupils with, and those without, disabilities and special educational needs, thus potentially subjugating the rights of the former to those of the latter within the system. The legislation is inevitably further weakened by delays with implementing the EPSEN Act and restriction of the Disability Act to the pre-school age group.

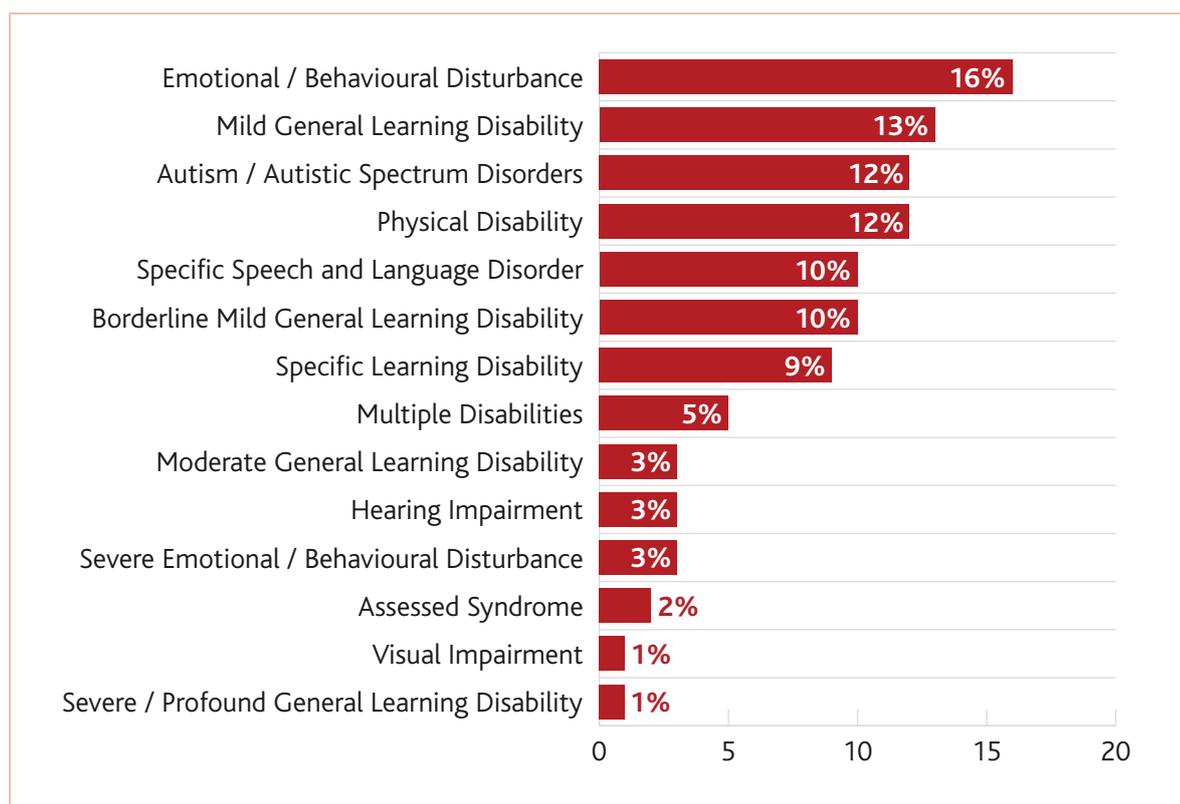
2.5 Number of Pupils with Special Educational Needs Allocated Resources by NCSE

A valuable source of information on the number of children with special educational needs receiving resources is the NCSE database: Special Educational Administrative System (SEAS). This contains information on the level of additional support allocated by the NCSE to primary, post-primary and special schools via SNAs and additional resource teaching hours. It does not provide a full national profile of all pupils with special needs, as those with high incidence disabilities and other learning needs at primary level are not included as resources for them are directly provided by the DES under the general allocation model (GAM)⁴.

2.5.1 Types of Special Educational Needs in Schools Nationally (SEAS Database)

The SEAS database categorises each child as having one of 14 different types of SEN, in accordance with the DES categories for resource allocation. Figure 2.1 below shows more than half of all pupils identified have an emotional / behavioural disturbance, a mild general learning disability, autism / autistic spectrum disorder or a physical disability.

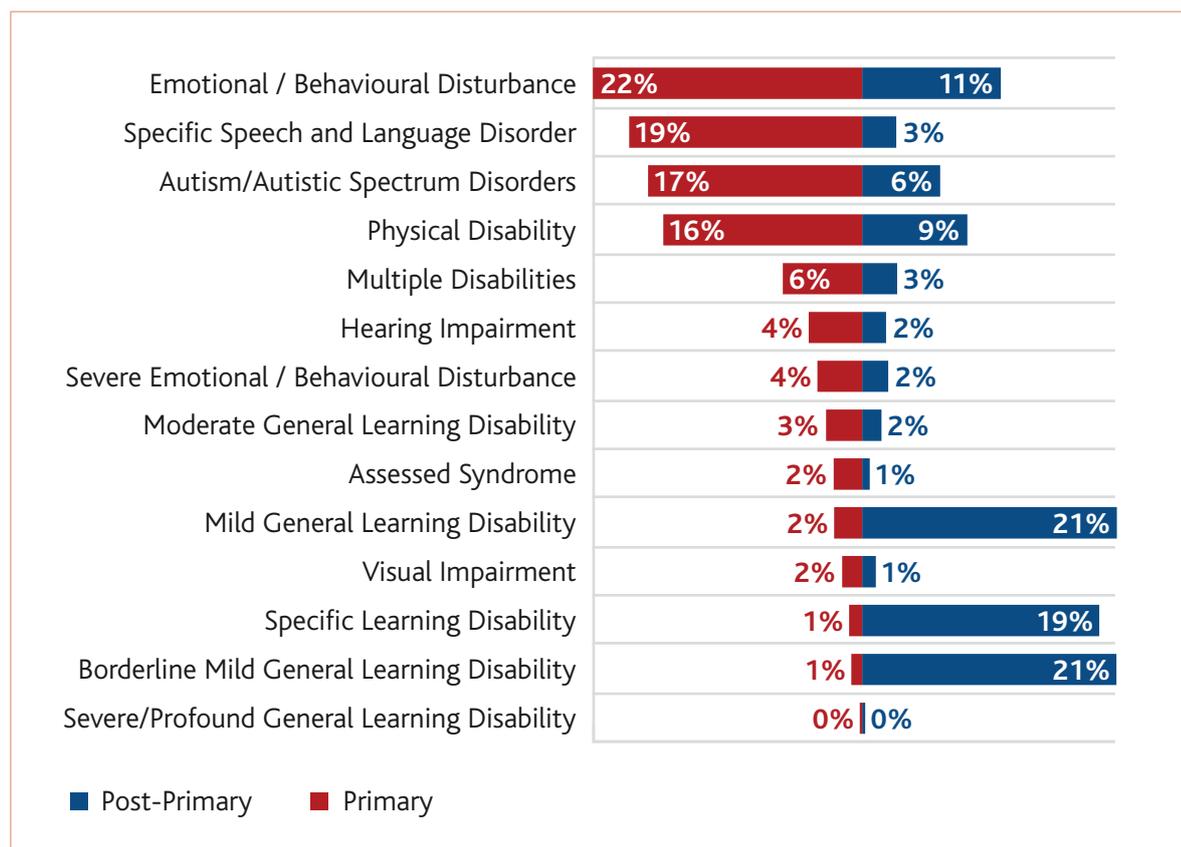
Figure 2.1: Percentage of children with special educational needs receiving additional resource teacher supports from NCSE (SEAS database September, 2009)



⁴ The SEAS database records all applications for additional supports received from schools and the decisions to grant such supports. Each pupil can appear more than once, depending on the number of different types of support allocated. Where a pupil is allocated two types of support (e.g. SNA support and resource teaching hours) two records are listed. The SEAS database records date from 2005 and the data used in this research are based upon an extract provided by the NCSE in September 23rd, 2009. All data used in this exercise were anonymised: pupil name, PPSN and gender details (other than where schools' data specifically pertained to boys or girls exclusively) were not provided as part of the dataset.

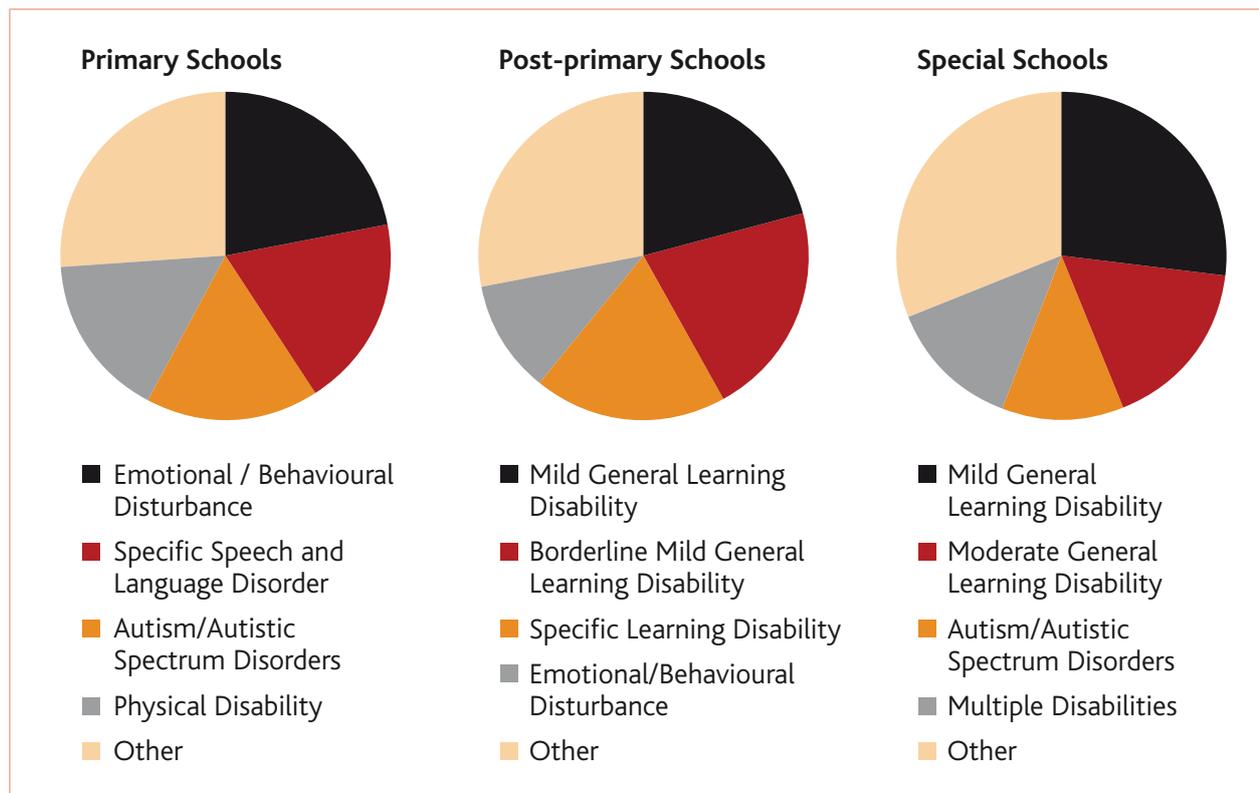
In comparing the prominence of SEN categories between primary and post-primary schools, the differing proportions of assessed SEN between school groups become evident. Children with high incidence disabilities are covered under the GAM in primary schools, so their numbers do not feature within SEAS. At post-primary, such pupils, once assessed, are subsequently resourced – hence their number appears for the first time in post-primary figures.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of children with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools receiving additional resource teacher supports from NCSE (SEAS database, September, 2009)



It is worth noting that the numbers receiving resources with a physical disability, hearing and visual impairment appear to decrease significantly between primary and post-primary pupils. Primary pupils in these categories number 3,827, falling to 1,980 at post-primary. It is surprising that, given the likely permanent nature of these disabilities, the figures should be so different. It is not clear if transience explains the discrepancy (e.g. corrections to vision issues later in school life) or if it is simply higher numbers of pupils being reported, assessed and resourced over time. In primary schools, the most common form of assessed SEN is emotional / behavioural disturbance: 22 per cent of pupils with assessed special educational needs are categorised as such (see Figure 2.3). In post-primary, 61 per cent are categorised as having a mild general, borderline mild general or specific learning disability. This compares to only 4 per cent of the pupil population at primary. (GAM can explain this gap). The highest number of pupils resourced in special schools were those with general learning disabilities. Data on special schools is based purely on individual pupils assessed and placed on SEAS; it may not include every pupil's designation.

Figure 2.3: Children with special educational needs receiving additional resource teacher supports from NCSE by school sector (September, 2009)



2.5.2 SEN Provision Nationally Based on SEAS Database

The data compiled for analysis are based on the number of pupils with an assessed special educational needs receiving resources from the NCSE rather than subjective measures – e.g. in the 2006 Census, each household was requested to state whether their children had a special education need. This data (see appendix 1) excludes children provided for under the GAM at primary. Based on the SEAS data:

- 4.4 per cent of pupils in schools have assessed special educational needs and get resources from the NCSE.
- While the data were anonymised, it is still possible to infer, with reference to single gender schools, that 4.6 per cent of boys in boys-only schools had an assessed special educational needs, compared with 3.1 per cent of girls in girls-only schools.
- Roughly equal numbers of pupils with assessed special educational needs were in primary and post-primary.
- There was no difference in the ratios of this cohort when comparing urban and rural school settings.
- The largest numbers of these pupils are in post-primary years three to five inclusive (note that pupil placement in a school year is based on date of birth: this approach may not always reflect reality – where pupils start school a year later than that expected on the basis of their birth year).
- Much lower ratios of pupils with assessed special educational needs are noted in fee-paying, Gaelscoileanna and boarding schools, with the highest ratios evidenced in disadvantaged (DEIS) schools.
- The ratio of pupils with assessed special educational needs appears to be inversely related to the size of the school (pupil roll) – evidenced in both primary and post primary schools (more pronounced in the latter).

2.6 Irish Policy Context for Additional Resource Provision

2.6.1 Teacher Allocation

The legislation enacted at macro national level is implemented in schools in accordance with guideline circulars from the Department of Education and Science, now the Department of Education and Skills (DES). SEN resources – in terms of personnel, materials and IT equipment – improved considerably from 1998 onwards, when the DES committed to 'an automatic response to support pupils with special educational needs [which] was implemented by a system of resource allocation introduced in 1999 and revised in 2002 [and] very significant levels of resources have been allocated to schools since 1998' (DES, 2003, SP ED 24 / 03: p1). Varying resource teaching hours were made available for individual pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes. A report of a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Education and Science in January 2003 also emphasised the significant rise in employment of additional support personnel during 1998-2003, during which resource teachers went from 100 to 2,300 and SNAs from 300 to 3,800, with a further 1,000 part-time SNAs.

The DES Circular SP ED 24 / 03 to primary schools in 2003, which outlined guidelines for allocation of resources for primary school pupils with special educational needs, constituted a change of direction in entitlement and allocation. It noted some 'misapplication' of the terms of previous circulars and aimed to 'provide clarification in relation to the deployment of resources in schools'. All applications for resource teachers and SNAs for 2003-04 would be based on supporting professional report(s) outlining individual pupil difficulties, but also in the context of the school's already available resources. This denoted the start of a shift towards a whole-school, rather than an individual pupil, approach in determining additional resource allocation.

The circular stated that the practice of using resource hours for individual tuition only was contrary to the principle of integration in teaching and learning. Wherever possible, it stated, schools should provide additional help for children in the mainstream classroom or, if necessary, in small groups to minimise disruption to the normal class programme. It thus recommended that, although resource teaching allocations may have been sanctioned on the basis of individual applications, these resources should be deployed to best meet the needs of pupils who required additional support. The DES advocated development of coherent special education support teams consisting of learning support / resource / visiting teachers 'without making artificial distinctions between them' (DES, 2003).

This circular also emphasised the need for a staged approach to assessment, intervention and review, requiring schools to show evidence of documented intervention before referring pupils for assessment. According to Circular SP ED 24 / 03 (DES, 2003), learning support should be provided in English and mathematics from first class upwards for those performing below the 12th percentile, with pupils performing at or below the 2nd percentile being accorded a high priority for learning support and review. It provides a useful template for recording learning support inputs for each school pupil, including reporting initial and current literacy and numeracy scores.

National administrative structures for resource allocation were changed significantly from January 2005, following the formal establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). An important aspect of the NCSE structure was the appointment of 70 regional SENOs. At the time of the conducting of this study, this figure had increased to over 80. The SENOs are 'responsible for co-ordinating and facilitating delivery of educational services to children with disabilities at local level ... [and] will be a focal point of contact for parents / guardians and schools and will process applications for resources for children with disabilities who have special educational needs' (DES, 2005: p2).

The Special Education Circular 02 / 05 (DES, 2005) outlined the key principles of a general allocation model (GAM) for the allocation of resources for pupils in primary schools who present with high incidence special educational needs and those requiring learning support. The GAM provides additional teaching resources to assist schools in making appropriate provision for:

- Pupils eligible for learning-support teaching. In determining eligibility for learning-support teaching, priority should be given to pupils whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics.
- Pupils with learning difficulties, including pupils with mild speech and language difficulties; with mild social or emotional difficulties; or with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD. Pupils with dyspraxia, ADD and ADHD who have been assessed as being in the low incidence category, will continue to receive an individual allocation of support through the relevant SENO.
- Pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities (borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability). (SP ED 02 / 05, DES, 2005: p3)

'It reflects the fact that most schools would have children with these needs' (DES, 2005: p1). This Circular was a move away from individual-based to school-based resource allocations with the result that annual allocations would be made to schools based on predicted incidence of these needs in accordance with the demographics. These demographics include: school size, gender make-up and perceived socio-economic status of the catchment area, that is, whether or not it qualifies as a DEIS school under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. This was intended to give schools more autonomy in resource deployment for those who needed it. The allocation of additional teaching resources under GAM aimed to facilitate development of 'truly inclusive schools' and to ensure they 'have a means of providing additional teaching support to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils' (DES, 2005: p3).

It was generally assumed additional support would be in small-group settings though, where necessary, pupils could receive individualised teaching within the GAM. The circular stated: 'School management should note that the additional teaching resources that are allocated to schools under the terms of the general allocation model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching or to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream classes' (DES, 2005: p3). The concept of an annualised general allocation has the benefit of avoiding so-called 'perverse incentives' where the prospect of additional resources incentivises schools to refer pupils for assessment. It also removes the perceived risk of schools being disadvantaged by a loss of resources due to improved performances of pupils who no longer meet eligibility criteria based on individual assessment.

Additional teacher posts to meet the needs of pupils qualifying under the GAM were allocated to primary schools as summarised in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Allocation of Additional Teacher Posts in Primary Schools⁵

School Type	First Post: No of pupils required	Second Post: No of pupils required	Third Post: No of pupils required
Boys' school	135	295	475
Mixed school	145	315	495
Girls' school	195	395	595
Designated disadvantaged	80	160	240

(DES, 2005: p20)

As pupils with low incidence disabilities would not be found in every school, individual resource allocations would continue for these pupils. For low-incidence needs (less frequently-occurring such as those arising from individually-assessed syndromes and disabilities), the DES devised the following criteria for eligibility.

Table 2.2: Criteria for Eligibility of Resource Teaching Support⁶

Low Incidence Disability (LID)	Hours Of Resource Teaching Per Week
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 and profound general learning disability	5
Autism / ASD	5
Specific speech and language disability	4
Assessed syndrome with one of the above low incidence disabilities	3 to 5, taking into account the child's special educational needs including level of general learning disability
Multiple disabilities	5

(DES 2005: p16)

⁵ These criteria were changed from the beginning of the academic year 2012-13 and the allocation is now based on the number of mainstream class teachers in a school (DES Circular 007 / 2012).

⁶ These allocations were reduced by 10 per cent in 2011 and a further 5 per cent in 2012 (DES Circular 7 / 2012; appendix C).

Post-primary students with assessed low incidence disabilities receive the same resource teaching support. Furthermore, post-primary schools were originally provided with an additional 1.5 teaching hours per week for each student diagnosed with mild general learning disability, or a borderline mild general learning disability and also for those with a specific learning disability, if levels of attainment in literacy or numeracy are at, or below, the 2nd percentile. However, from the academic year 2012-13 onwards, a GAM support at post-primary also applies. The core aspects of the revised arrangements are:

- The overall allocation of resource teacher support for 2012-13 is maintained, the same as for 2011-12.
- Post-primary schools will get an allocation for high incidence resource teaching equating to 95 per cent of the allocation as at December 31st, 2011.
- There will be no requirement, therefore, for schools to have assessments for entrants with high incidence needs.
- High incidence allocations to these schools will be maintained at this level throughout the 2012-13 school year.
- The remaining 5 per cent of resource teaching hours for post-primary high incidence needs will be retained by the NCSE so it may allocate them to schools, including new schools, which currently have no such allocation (SP ED 0010 / 12; DES 2012: p2-3).

In addition to the resource teaching allocation for post-primary pupils with these difficulties, there is also a general allocation of learning support teachers for post-primary students who have not been diagnosed with such disabilities but who have low levels of achievement in maths or reading. In this context, 0.7 of a teaching post is allocated where enrolment is fewer than 600 pupils, with 1.2 posts allocated where enrolment is higher than 600 pupils (NCSE, 2011).

2.6.2 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) Allocation

Special need assistants (SNAs) assist in making suitable provision for pupils with significant care or behavioural needs arising from a disability. They are allocated based on individualised student applications and subject to eligibility criteria set out in the DES in Circular SP ED 07 / 02. It is stated in Circular SP ED 24 / 03:

SNAs are allocated to pupils 'with significant medical need, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is a danger to themselves or to other pupils... Schools are reminded that SNAs should only be allocated duties of a non-teaching nature' (DES, 2003: p2).

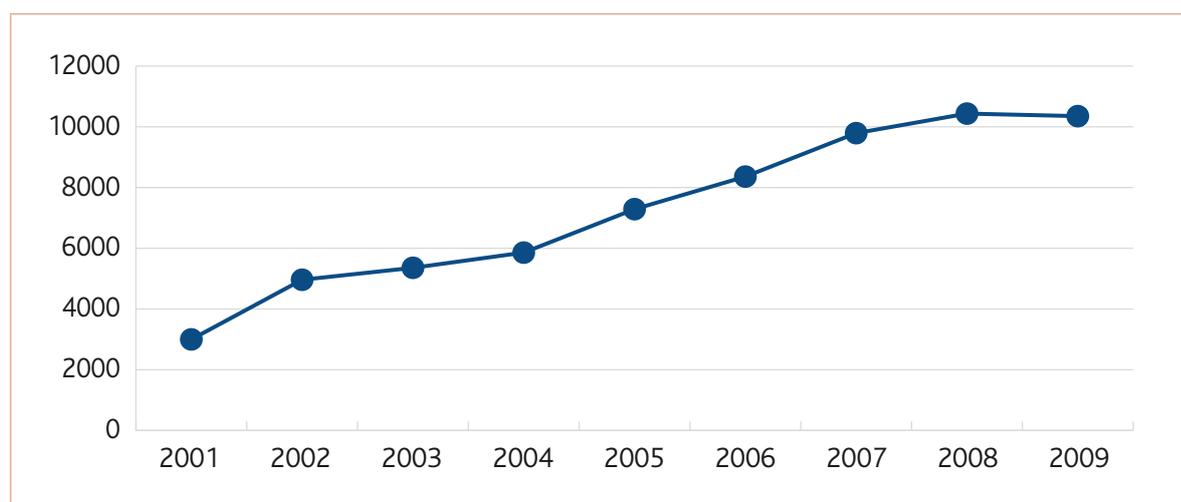
Just as it advocated more flexible arrangements for the deployment of resource teachers, Circular SP ED 2003 also advocated a flexible approach to SNA deployment to support several pupils where possible and by possibly deploying an individual SNA in more than one classroom. In 2009, the Department of Education and Science (DES) requested the NCSE to review all SNA allocations. According to Circular SP ED 0009 / 2009 (DES, 2009), the rationale behind this was the instances where some SNA duties did not reflect the basis for the allocation and where SNA resource levels in some cases were greater than proper application of the criteria allowed for. In other cases, posts were retained when the relevant pupils had left the school.

Table 2.3: Growth in Numbers of SNAs Deployed in Schools 2001-09⁷

Year	Mainstream Primary and Special Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Total	Annual % Increase
2001	2695	293	2988	99.8%
2002	4594	385	4979	66.63%
2003	4901	468	5367	7.79%
2004	5250	619	5869	9.35%
2005	6273	1021	7294	24.28%
2006	6974	1416	8390	15.03%
2007	8038	1786	9824	17.09%
2008	8440	2002	10442	6.30%
2009	8392	1950	10342	-0.95%

(Source: DES, 2011b)

Figure 2.4: Cumulative growth in the number of SNAs 2001-09



(Source: DES, 2011b)

In 2011, DES Circular No 006 / 2011 addressed SNA allocation. It informed schools of the necessity to cap the number of whole-time equivalent SNA posts at the 2010 level of 10,575. Expenditure on the SNA scheme had increased by 922 per cent during 2001-09 (DES, 2011b) (See Table 2.3 and Figure 2.4). Future allocations of SNAs, it stated, would have to be within this overall limit of 10,575 which would be managed within an annualised allocation to eligible schools.

⁷ In 2012, it was announced there were 10,400 SNA posts in mainstream and special schools meeting the significant care needs of over 22,000 children. (NCSE Press Release, November 2012).

2.6.3 Specialist Support: National Educational Psychological Service

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), established in 1999, services primary, post-primary and also special schools. NEPS psychologists 'are concerned with learning, behaviour [and] social and emotional development [and] work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs' (www.education.ie). Its range of services includes support of individual students through consultation and assessment by engaging in special projects and conducting research. According to the NEPS (2012):

The NEPS model of service embodies consultation both as an overarching framework and as a 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 (NEPS, 2012: p105).

This is emphasised in a statement from NEPS: 'Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention' (NEPS, 2012: p105).

In accordance with DES Circular Sp Ed 24 / 03, which emphasised the need for schools to adopt a staged approach to assessment, intervention and review, and to show evidence of documented intervention by school personnel, before referring pupils for assessment, NEPS operates a staged model of service (NEPS, 2007). However, it is acknowledged that, for some pupils with more complex needs, there would be an obvious immediate need for assessment and allocation of resources.

This approach consists of a three-staged model. Stage 1, Classroom Support, is where if there is concern about a pupil's academic progress or social / behavioural functioning, the teacher would administer tests and, if necessary, the teacher designs a short, simple plan for extra help within the classroom. If concern persists after two further school terms, the school's special education support team is consulted and a decision might be made to progress to Stage 2 of intervention. The School Support stage is where the child is referred to the learning support teacher, with parental permission, for further testing. If diagnostic assessment indicates supplementary teaching is beneficial, then this is arranged.

At Stage 3, School Support Plus, the school formally requests a consultation and possibly an assessment from an outside professional for pupils who have not responded to learning support or behavioural interventions. Such professionals include psychologists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, audiologists etc. The recognition that SEN occurs along a continuum from mild to severe and from transient to long-term (NEPS, 2007) underpins the model. This staged approach to intervention and provision of a graduated continuum of support is similar to the systems operating in Finland and England.

Just as learning difficulties occur in a continuum, as outlined by NEPS (2007), so too do behavioural difficulties in schools. While the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) supports a small minority of second-level schools at the severe end of this continuum, NEPS does so for most schools in the country. Similar to its mode of intervention for learning difficulties, the NEPS model of support for pupils presenting with behavioural difficulties is also structured according to the three-tier model as set out above and outlined in Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties – A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers (NEPS, 2010). It ranges from in-class support for behavioural issues co-ordinated by the class teacher, to assessment and intervention co-ordinated by the learning support or resource teacher, to the involvement of external services in more detailed assessment and development of intervention programmes. This continuum of support is intended to match the continuum of occurrence and severity of behavioural difficulties:

Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties may be usefully thought of as behaviour occurring along a continuum from developmentally appropriate (e.g. normal testing of boundaries) and milder more transient difficulties to difficulties which are significant and / or persistent, and which may warrant clinical referral and intervention. (NEPS, 2010: p4)

The theoretical perspectives for explaining behavioural difficulties explored by NEPS can also be placed on a continuum from biological / individual to the eco-systemic and ecological approaches. These perspectives are integrated into a bio-psycho-social approach and the NEPS (2010) model offers a whole-school framework for promoting positive behaviour and for preventing difficulties. It describes classroom structures and supports which help to create a positive environment, maximise learning / socialisation and minimise difficult behaviour.

2.6.4 Specialist Support: National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS)

The resource allocation and support system in any jurisdiction is not concerned exclusively with the learning needs of pupils, but also addresses the behavioural needs of some pupils. In this regard, the Department of Education and Science set up a task force on student behaviour in second level schools in 2006. It was required to examine the impact of disruptive behaviour on teaching and learning in second-level schools. One of its recommendations (Martin, 2006) was the establishment of a behaviour support team that would be easily accessible to schools experiencing difficulty in coping with persistent and serious student disruption. The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) was thus established in June 2006 and caters to a small number of second-level schools that seek its support and expertise in managing and responding to challenging behaviour. The body issued a document outlining its model of support which states that it is 'actively piloting the feasibility and efficacy of a whole-school approach [to behaviour management] in an Irish context' (NBSS, 2009, p5). It operates on the assumption that positive teaching and learning behaviours depend on the nature of the organisation as a whole. The NBSS mission statement is Promoting and Supporting Behaviour for Learning. It is guided by these key principles:

- A whole-school approach, founded on respectful relationships, is essential in promoting and supporting positive behaviours throughout the school community.
- Behaviour is intrinsically linked to teaching and learning.
- Inclusion is a core educational value.
- Good practice in schools is acknowledged and disseminated. (NBSS, 2009: p6)

The NBSS offers three levels of support for behaviour which are similar to the staged intervention approach and continuum of support available for pupils with academic difficulties:

Level 1: Whole School Positive Behaviour Support

This involves whole-school support for all students in all settings. It is preventive and proactive in reducing disruptive behaviour. It is about whole-school policies and practices that should meet the needs of 80-90 per cent of pupils. At this level, the NBSS supports its partner schools in developing a whole-school approach to positive behaviour, including provision of continuing professional development (CPD) or in-service provision. A positive behaviour strategy team is established and its work is informed by regular data collection and analysis conducted by the NBSS as part of its service.

Level 2: Targeted Intervention Behaviour Support

This involves targeted group interventions, applicable to some at-risk students (1-10 per cent of pupil population). Due to the complex nature of the behaviour, some students may require additional behaviour support to that provided at Level 1. It involves implementation of targeted behaviour interventions in small / class groups whose progress is impeded by their social, emotional or behavioural skills. Part of the intervention involves establishing the purpose or function of the behaviour as well as identifying pupils' strengths and identifying what is working well for them. The NBSS collaborates with teachers to develop behavioural interventions. Its work consists in supporting teachers as they conduct the intervention or possibly actively partnering teachers in the classroom.

Level 3: Intensive, Individualised Behaviour Support

This involves intensive, individual interventions that may be required by 1-5 per cent of the pupil population and may involve short-term intervention in a behaviour support classroom. These students are likely to manifest a variety of challenging behaviours that impede their own learning and that of others. They are likely to be persistently at risk of suspension. A behaviour support classroom is one element of NBSS Level 3 support, and should be an integral part of a whole-school approach to promoting positive behaviour. It is an intensive, short-term, individualised intervention, providing an academic and a behavioural curriculum. Students attend the support classroom part-time, maintaining contact with peers and other school staff. This classroom's key aim is reintegration. The NBSS provides basic support classroom staff with in-service training and ongoing in-school support as well as a range of resources to facilitate the intensive individualised interventions with pupils. Partner schools without such a classroom, as part of NBSS support, are provided with Level 3 support for their pupils directly from NBSS personnel. Support for all students at Level 3 involves the formulation of an individual student behaviour plan.

Henefer (2010) conducted a study, on behalf of the NBSS, to evaluate the establishment, evolution and ongoing work undertaken during 2007-09 in 36 post-primary schools participating in behaviour support classroom interventions. During the academic year, 2008-09, 648 students had attended these classrooms in the 36 schools, with an average of 18 per classroom. Two-thirds of these were male and most were in the Junior Certificate cycle, with second year being the year group most highly represented. Most attending students were reported as having literacy and numeracy difficulties, special educational needs, school attendance issues and difficult home circumstances. Data submitted to the NBSS revealed that only 5.2 per cent were reading at or above their chronological age, with 75 per cent showing a delay of three years or more in reading proficiency.

The study's conclusion was that schools had in general been successful in creating environments within the basic support classrooms in which many students felt cared about and supported (Henefer, 2010). Positive outcomes included increased motivation and improved attitudes to school. 'Work being done in the BSCs has helped many students to better meet the challenges of school that had, prior to the intervention, proved impossible for these young people to address' (Henefer, 2010: p1X). Part-time attendance, with a gradual reintegration appeared to work most effectively, with only two of the 36 schools employing full-time attendance. The staff in the behaviour support classrooms expressed reasonable satisfaction with available resources.

Issues that emerged as possibly needing review and further clarification included the selection and referral procedures; data collection and student profiling by mainstream teachers; appropriate documentation; and formulation of student behaviour plans. The study also emphasised the need for an achievement of a balance between academic and behavioural supports for students while in the classrooms and effective communication between BSC teachers and subject teachers in relation to curriculum content. While

procedures for reintegration were becoming more defined, some 'problematic issues' remained in evidence. However, in 2008-09, most students had reintegrated successfully after basic support classroom interventions, though the author does cite Sproson (2004), who stated: 'There is no clear evidence that this type of short-term, intensive intervention manages to "cure" students and move them back away from the need for support' (Sproson, 2004, cited in Henefer, 2010: pXII). There is a danger of recidivism or repeated referrals to the classroom for some and there may be unrealistic expectations of mainstream teachers of change in students on reintegration, as there may be difficulty generalising the skills learned in the support classroom to the mainstream one. Henefer (2010) concludes that it is essential that this intervention is not regarded as a 'quick-fix solution or 'add-on' for a complex and recurring issue that exists in many schools in Ireland.

2.6.5 Specialist Settings: Special Schools and Special Classes

According to the NCSE, about 6,340 children attended 105 special schools for children with disabilities in 2010 with over 1,100 teachers employed in them (NCSE, 2011). In addition to these 105 schools, the DES has granted recognition to 13 centres which were originally part of the applied behaviour analysis (ABA) pilot scheme to become special schools for children with autism (NCSE, 2011). Most special schools cater for students from a particular disability category but may also often make special provision for other disability groups. Out of the total of 105 special schools, 72 catered for children with intellectual disabilities, while 12 were designated for children with emotional and behavioural disorders. Special schools operate pupil-teacher and class-SNA ratios, as outlined in Table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4: Teachers and SNAs Ratios in Special Schools

Type of Special Class / School	Pupil-Teacher Ratio	Class-SNA Ratio
Visual impairment	8:1	4:1
Hearing impairment	7:1	4:1
Mild general learning disability	11:1	4:1
Moderate general learning disability	8:1	2:1
Severe and profound general learning disability	6:1	1:2
Emotional disturbance	8:1	4:1
Severe emotional disturbance	6:1	1:1
Physical disability	10:1	1:1
Speech and language disorders	7:1	3:1
Specific learning disability	9:1	No automatic allocation
Autism / autistic spectrum disorder	6:1	1:2
Multiple disability	6:1	1:1

(DES 2010: p5)

Circular No 0038 / 2010 specifically addresses enrolment of pupils in special schools and acknowledges the valuable contribution of these schools to the continuum of provision available for children with special educational needs. In the course of the review of SNA allocations by the NCSE, however, concerns had emerged 'relating to the profile of pupil population and associated teaching allocations' in special schools. (DES, 2010: p1). These included:

- Some pupils enrolled with special educational needs other than that expected by the category of special need sanctioned for that school.
- A small number of pupils enrolled in special schools without any professional reports to indicate that they had a special educational need or without a professional recommendation for special school placement.
- Some pupils enrolled with a borderline mild general disability without any evidence of significant additional needs.
- Teacher posts in schools over and above the level currently appropriate under the prevailing pupil teacher ratios for categories of pupils actually enrolled.

The circular also stated that the NCSE was assuming responsibility for sanctioning the allocation and / or retention of class teachers and SNA posts in special schools. Previously, the Council had been involved in allocating resource teachers in mainstream schools and SNAs in all schools, including special schools.

Ware *et al.*, (2009) conducted a comprehensive study on the role of special schools / classes in Ireland, with international comparison. It concluded that these schools are important in the continuum of educational provision for pupils with special educational needs, that their pupils had severe and complex needs that were generally catered for in these schools with access to appropriate curricula and an emphasis on developing life-skills. It was found that most pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD were of post-primary age, suggesting they had difficulty coping in second-level schools. The authors found that, contrary to best practice in other jurisdictions, links between special and mainstream schools in Ireland were informal and ad hoc and depended on the goodwill of individuals involved. Opportunities for dual enrolment / registration seemed hampered by administrative procedures.

Another development elsewhere is the development of special schools as centres of excellence. However, concerns were expressed as to whether Irish special schools could fulfil this role regarding resources and expertise, especially around staff qualifications. Although teachers availed of the continuing professional development (CPD) initiative, the issue of teacher qualifications in special schools and classes emerged as a significant concern. Inconsistency of support from multi-disciplinary teams was also an issue. In addition, SNA training was highlighted. Participants expressed high satisfaction with special classes, regarding them as important in the continuum of provision for pupils with special educational needs, though opportunities for inclusion into mainstream classes were seen as not being availed of fully, along with an apparent lack of continuity between special classes at primary and second level.

The study recommended that special schools should be enabled to continue 'in the absence of evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these students' (Ware *et al.*, 2009: p11). It concluded that special schools were meeting the needs of pupils who were presenting with complex needs 'though the evidence for this is limited' (p11). The authors recommended a review of the curriculum and certification available to post-primary pupils in special schools, which are categorised as primary schools despite catering for pupils up to age 18. They also recommended development of the outreach services of special schools through which they could support mainstream school staff and pupils though it was found that 'not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role' (p12). They urged an audit of special class provision as it appears it was difficult to establish the exact number of special classes in mainstream schools. After the research for this study was conducted, the DES announced the closure of 108 special classes for pupils with MGLD in primary schools that had fewer than nine pupils. Their needs would subsequently be met under the GAM and concerns were expressed about whether the model could adequately do this (Ware *et al.*, 2009). Continuation of special classes as a placement option was recommended, again in the context of a lack of evidence on the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet their needs.

The special class is another type of specialist setting and hence a form of resource deployment for pupils with disabilities / special educational needs. According to NCSE (2011: p40): 'A special class is defined as a class which has been officially sanctioned by the DES or the NCSE, which has a defined pupil teacher ratio and is designated for a particular category of disability. This would distinguish them from unofficial small classes organised in some schools to provide intensive support to pupils with particular needs, especially in subjects such as English and maths. The pupil-teacher ratio, as in special schools, is determined by the nature of the disability or special educational needs. In December 2010, about 503 special classes were attached to mainstream schools, primary and post-primary, 3,000 pupils were enrolled in these classes (NCSE, 2011). The designation of the special classes, according to disability category, is outlined in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Designation of Special Classes by Disability Category

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
Asperger's 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 (2011) based on DES data (2010)

2.7 Financial Resources Allocated to Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Ireland

An assessment of the quantum of financial resources allocated to the education system for children with special educational needs was performed. The resultant number is arrived at through the consolidation of data from several sources and its subsequent translation into financial resources. The calculation of financial resources allocated should not be viewed as an absolute figure but an approximate estimate for the following reasons:

- The researchers did not audit pupil numbers shown for each individual school in the State but accepted them as stated by the Department of Education and Skills on its website.
- The NCSE SEAS database captures details about children assessed for the purposes of allocating resources. By definition, it is possible for the count of these children within the educational system to be higher due to children not being formally assessed, their need may not have been recognised for resource purposes or they may have special needs but do not require resources.

- Identification of the quantum of financial resources theoretically allocated to children with special educational needs does not automatically mean such resources are deployed for the purpose intended. Situations where this occurs may include vacant positions, parallel deployment of teaching time, where the resource allocation was for individual attention but the in-school deployment was shared among groups of students.
- Not all special education resources are included in these figures, e.g. the cost of NEPS or capitation grants etc.

To arrive at an estimate of total resources allocated, and their financial equivalent, conversion factors were used. For Ireland, these were:

- Teacher time – teaching hours were converted to whole-time equivalents (WTE), on the basis of a 25-hour week.
- Teacher pay was based on the existing payscale (2010) (salary scale €30,904 to €59,359: median €48,200) plus €4,918 degree allowance plus 20 per cent on-costs = €63,750 rounded off.
- Special needs assistants' pay was based on existing payscale (2010) (salary scale €23,188 to €37,339: median €30,738) plus 20 per cent on-costs = €36,900 rounded off.
- NCSE organisational costs – based on the 2010 budget, being €9.25 million (Government Estimates).
- The expenditure on special needs cost figures are fully inclusive of direct, indirect and apportioned (i.e. GAM) costs.
- The Irish school populations was taken as 841,000 pupils

Based on available school and pupil data from the DES, and SEN pupil data from SEAS, as well as the assumptions / conversions made above, Irish expenditure on SEN resource allocation including teacher salary, SNA salary and NCSE organisational costs is estimated at over €1 billion (see Table 2.6 below). Special needs outlay per pupil (all pupils) is €1,275 per head. When compared to the Department of Education and Science (DES) budget in 2010 of €8,380 million, it represents about twelve per cent of the total allocation. It should be noted that other SEN costs are not included and the total spend on SEN in 2011 was €1.3 billion, about 15 per cent of the entire DES budget (DES, 2012c).

For comparison purposes, financial figures on outlay for SEN provision in England were also examined. On a total pupil population in England of 7,190,000 (DCSF: National Pupil Projections: Future Trends in Pupil Numbers 2009 figures), the reported spend figure on special needs was £5,135.65 million (2008-09 expenditure: Hansard 26 / 01 / 2009) which represents about 8 per cent of the £62,400 million spend within the Department for Education in England. However, in making such comparisons, it is difficult to ensure that a like-with-like outcome is achieved due to omissions and differences in treatment of input factors between jurisdictions. For example, within the figures for England, the extent to which the salaries of all SEN teachers and teaching assistants involved in SEN provision are included within the overall SEN expenditure figure is unclear. Also, costs within the Irish system, such as the cost of the NCSE, may not be comparable with the English figures. The financial reports of the Department for Education (England) do not provide a breakdown of the spend on SEN provision and the most detailed information is found in responses to parliamentary questions.

Table 2.6: Financial Expenditure on SEN Provision in Ireland (DES, 2009/2010; NCSE, 2009/2010)

	Schools	Pupils	SEN Pupils	GAM / LRST Teachers	SEAS Teachers	SNAs	Resources Total
	#	#	#	wte	wte	wte	€'000
Primary							
Disadvantaged	676	102,680	4,404	1,284	567	–	117,955
Mixed	2,269	327,396	10,857	2,363	1,491	–	245,706
Boys	147	35,506	1,560	245	232	–	30,427
Girls	88	26,932	482	139	63	–	12,914
SNAs	–	–	–	–	–	8,141	300,403
Subtotal	3,180	492,514	17,303	4,031	2,353	8,141	707,405
Secondary							
Disadvantaged	200	72,497	6,237	110	554	–	42,313
Mixed	305	152,466	6,731	202	659	–	54,842
Boys	100	49,431	1,958	67	203	–	17,212
Girls	127	67,930	2,137	89	191	–	17,796
SNAs	–	–	–	–	–	2,065	76,199
Subtotal	732	342,324	17,063	467	1,607	2,065	208,361
Special schools	127	6,603	2,729*	–	–	–	77,836
Subtotal	4,039	841,441	37,095	4,498	3,960	10,206**	993,603
Transportation	–	–	–	–	–	–	68,276
Assistive Technology	–	–	–	–	–	–	1,474
NCSE	–	–	–	–	–	–	9,250
Total	4,039	841,441	37,095	4,498	3,960	10,206	1,072,603

* This was the number of pupils attending special schools who were registered on the SEAS database

** This total number of SNAs includes those deployed in special schools

Notes

- Primary school teacher numbers based on the DES formulaic allocation of teachers to school size and type.
- Secondary school teacher numbers based on conversion of SEN assessed teaching time to whole-time equivalent posts (25 hours / week)
- Special school teacher numbers (1,219) taken from DES database – posts assumed to be WTE.
- SNA WTEs taken directly from DES.
- Special needs valuation is the sum of average teacher and SNA costs.
- Average teacher costs based upon 2010 payscales (mid-point) + degree allowance +20 per cent on-costs.
- SNA costs based upon 2010 payscales (mid-point).
- Assistive technology costs taken as allocated to an individual child on the SEAS database.
- Disadvantaged schools shown separately as a differential calculation of teacher allocation is used by DES.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has compared the legislative and policy contexts in Finland, England and Ireland for provision for pupils with special educational needs. The Finnish education system is widely regarded as a model of good practice and, according to the OECD (2010), its performance levels have led educationalists to study it to learn the secrets of its success. Furthermore, Finnish commentators, such as Sabel *et al*, (2010) consistently claim that the high rankings of Finnish students in international comparisons are largely explained by the lowest performing pupils outperforming their counterparts in any other jurisdiction. They attribute this success to the effectiveness of its special education system, which operates on a continuum from part-time special education to full-time special education. (Finland's part-time special education equates to the Irish learning support and resource teacher system and, more recently, may include co-teaching in mainstream classroom.) This amounts to full-time placement in a special class or a special school. The Finnish system was therefore seen as an appropriate international comparator of the system of additional resource provision in Irish schools. Likewise England was considered appropriate because of geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and the historical and cultural links with Ireland.

The Finnish, English and Irish systems of provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are each underpinned by substantial equality and disability legislation. The impact of Irish legislation is diminished, however, by the delay in implementing fully two core elements, the EPSEN Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005. The Finnish education system, particularly its special education system, has been detailed in this chapter. It is characterised by an emphasis on teacher excellence, devolution of administrative decision-making to schools and of pedagogical decision-making to teachers, including a dismantling of its inspectorate. It emphasises early identification of and interventions for pupils with special educational needs. It does not engage in national standardised testing of its pupils as they progress through the education system, opting instead for an evaluation of a random sample of the student population.

Notable differences exist between the Irish and English education systems, especially regarding roles of some personnel within the SEN system. The SENCO's role is well formalised within English schools and teaching assistants appear to play an important role for pupils with special educational needs. The role of teaching assistant differs from that of special needs assistant (SNA) in Ireland. As in Finland, considerable emphasis is put on early identification and intervention, preferably without recourse to securing diagnostic labels along with a desire to separate assessment and resource allocation procedures. There is also devolution of budgetary decision-making to schools.

The implementation of legislation is translated into Irish education policy by means of circular guidelines from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and its agencies. The most pertinent of these for SEN provision have been reviewed here. Irish schools are also supported by a range of agencies, which fulfil advisory, supporting and resource-allocating roles in schools and the roles and functions of some have been described. An analysis of national databases and expenditure figures elicited data on the cost of SEN provision in Ireland, per pupil and as a percentage of overall spend on education.

3: Core Issues in Allocation and Deployment of Resources

3.1 Introduction

This study examines the system of additional resource provision for pupils with special educational needs in the Irish education system. The key aspects of any such system relate to the processes of application for, and allocation of, additional resources and the means of deployment of such resources in schools. From the literature reviewed on Finland and England in chapter 2, it is clear that another essential focus is the need for evaluation of the effectiveness of deployed resources. During this review of the literature, core issues emerged which warrant further exploration in consideration of application, allocation, deployment and evaluation. The criteria for application and allocation reflect the model of disability which underpins a resource provision system, especially regarding the role of assessment and diagnosis of disabilities. Education planning, whether at individual or group level, is central to resource deployment and, through its review mechanisms, is equally central to the evaluation of their effectiveness. The core issues of models of disability; identification and diagnosis of disabilities and SEN; education planning, and progress monitoring and evaluation; are therefore explored within this chapter.

3.2 Models of Disability

The apparently pervasive influence of the medico-deficit paradigm in resource allocation systems has been referred to in the context of the Finnish and English systems. Kivirauma (2004) states that the field of special education in Finland was dominated for a considerable time by the traditional positivist, psycho-medical paradigm. A new post-positivist paradigm then emphasised that special education was a social product by nature, meaning that environmental change (in the curriculum; in the school's social organisation) might lead to changes in the need for special education as well. This reflects a paradigmatic shift from an individual, medical concept of disability and SEN to a social model of disability, also referred to by Desforges and Lindsay (2010) as the interactionist / ecological or biopsychosocial model. This is more than an academic debate between competing discourses because the prevailing model or concept of disability will influence how it is likely to be diagnosed, how support is organised, how resources are deployed and the interventions likely to be recommended for pupils with special educational needs.

The influence of the medical model is most evident where there is a requirement to diagnose, categorise and specify in order to establish eligibility for resources and support, sometimes referred to as a 'refer, test and place' approach to disabilities and SEN (Dessent, 1987). On this basis, the influence of the medical model has been evident within Irish legislation and related policy stipulations. However, with the general allocation model (GAM) now operating at primary and post-primary for high incidence disabilities, the need for diagnostic assessment, to establish resource entitlement is now confined to pupils with low incidence disabilities. Desforges and Lindsay (2010) conducted an international review of procedures used to diagnose a disability and to assess SEN in eight different countries. They reported that half of these, including Ireland, require diagnosis of a disability before going on to assess SEN. In contrast, the other four countries have no requirements for diagnosis of disability, nor do they use a label to categorise SEN. These authors advocate the latter approach: 'We recommend that SEN policy should be explicitly informed by an interactionist / ecological model (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010: p4). They further state: 'We recommend that diagnosis of disability should not be a prerequisite to an assessment of SEN' (p5). Their rationale for this recommendation is because 'most systems of classifications of disability are underpinned by the medical model of SEN, a model which we have already rejected in favour of the interactionist / ecological model' (p5).

Winter *et al.*, (cited in NCSE, 2006a), when reviewing models of resource allocation in operation in Ireland and internationally, also identified three significant issues which call into question the appropriateness of a resource allocation model so closely tied to assessment.

- The use of a categorisation system may mislead people into believing that all children within an assessed disability category may have common rather than unique needs. This may lead to the misdirected or inappropriate allocation of particular resources for individual children in addition to the more obviously damaging potential of a label on a student's self-concept and level of attainment.
- Given the relative scarcity of resources vis a vis need experienced by students with special educational needs, the allocation and delivery of individualised resources solely through assessment may lead to a perverse incentive to over-identify with special educational needs, as schools may be tempted to use assessment primarily as a means of accessing resources, financial and otherwise, to meet their own interests rather than those of its students with special educational needs.
- Resource allocation based on individualised assessment contradicts the ethics and principles of inclusive education, since students with special educational needs must be explicitly identified (labelled) in order to access the very supports which will allow them participate within the school system on a par with their non-disabled peers.

Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008) conducted a study of SEN provision in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland based on the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of 16 parental advocacy and support groups and of two management associations, 32 principals, ten teachers, six SNAs and three other key informants. A core conclusion also was that the conceptual understanding of SEN was 'seriously deficient', that resource allocation models were based on categorisation of ability and were informed by an inadequate conceptualisation of disability (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008; p141).

While models or conceptions of disability are usually considered individually, one example of an attempt to implement the social or biopsychosocial model within a national education system was the impetus in Norway to replace SEN provision for a minority of students with a system of adapted education for all. The aim was to replace the right to extra SEN resources for individual students by an improved legal right to adapted education for all. This aims to meet the demands of diversity in the integrated school by adapting the curriculum, methods, organisation etc to all student needs (Nes & Stromstad, 2006). Norway's schools and teachers were encouraged to reduce use of statements and teach students with special educational needs in the mainstream classroom. State special schools were closed in 1991 and local experts as well as regional and national competency centres in special education were meant to support schools in their efforts to adapt their education for all (Nes & Stromstad, 2006).

In 2001, government appointed an official committee to review the content, quality and organisation of basic education, that is compulsory and upper secondary education in Norway. The committee made 117 proposals which were then circulated to various stakeholders for consultation; 155 bodies responded. Most suggestions were approved with the important exception of the proposal recommending the removal of the paragraph on special education (Section 5.1) from the Norwegian Education Act. Under this Act, students who cannot profit from ordinary education have a right to special education. The percentage of such students had remained relatively stable at 5-6 per cent (NOU, 2003, cited in Nes & Stromstad, 2006). The main proposal was to strengthen the overarching demand of the Act to adapt education to each student's abilities and qualifications. The committee proposed that paragraph 5.1, which grants an individual right to a statement and earmarked resources, should be replaced by a strengthened legal right to adapted education for all. The resources hitherto directed to special education would still be allocated to schools.

Norway has a strong diagnostic culture in which the 'fault lies with the student and there is less focus on what schools can do to adapt to diversity' (Nes & Stromstad, 2006; p363). The committee advocated a

change of focus from 'What is wrong with the student?' to 'What is wrong with the school?' Students were segregated due to part-time, pull-out programmes and much of what was called special education was delivered by assistants with no formal qualifications. According to Nes and Stromstad (2006), research shows that students who are assigned to pull-out classes do not learn more than students who participate in their classes. The committee expressed the opinion that the right to extra resources targeted at individual students as a result of statements was a barrier to real inclusion. This was because it was less urgent for schools to adapt their education as long as they could solve their educational problems by assigning students to special education. There was also concern about minority students' overrepresentation in special education and it was recommended that they be given special attention in initial literacy training.

Norwegian politicians generally approved of the removal of SEN provision in favour of adapted education for all. However, the proposal was rejected as most educators did not, while academics were divided evenly on the issue. There were concerns that adapted education would not be sufficient for pupils with special educational needs, because special education was seen to have qualities different from ordinary education: different content, extra resources and enhanced expertise. It was perceived as a step backwards for the students and for parents who had fought for special education. While the latter might vary in quality, the perceived solution was not to remove it, but to improve it. According to Nes and Stromstad (2006), proponents of retaining Section 5.1 largely overlooked the research-based criticism of staff competence, adapted content and outcomes in special education and were ignoring the effects of categorisation and diagnosis. These are similar to issues raised by Ware *et al.*, (2009) in the study of special schools in Ireland.

Nes and Stromstad (2006) contend that a strengthened legal right to adapted education would benefit more students than a right to special education for a minority, because the competence must be available for all, not just those with a statement. Nes and Stromstad (2006) argue that if there was nowhere to export school problems, then the school itself would be responsible for solving them and the need for adapted education would be more urgent. In their view, one way of obtaining more inclusive approaches for all might be to replace the individual rights of a few with strengthened rights for all.

3.3 Identification and Diagnosis

A crucial factor in any system of allocation of additional resources or support to a particular cohort of a pupil population, such as those with disabilities and special educational needs, is the establishment of eligibility criteria for access. In the traditional system, this usually involves a diagnosis of disability / condition, usually involving an assessment of intellectual functioning and further assessment of an area of functioning related to the presenting difficulty. For example, reading will be assessed if there is a suspected difficulty and adaptive functioning is likely to be assessed in the case of a suspected intellectual disability. This practice of categorisation for diagnosis is being called into question in favour of a focus on a pupil's needs and his or her response to the interventions to meet those needs. This Response to Intervention (RTI) approach is regarded as a shift from a medical to a social model paradigm. It provides a possible alternative to the traditional diagnostic labelling approach and, potentially, is an effective means of evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and resources. It therefore warrants consideration in a review of any system of additional resource provision, being relevant to application and deployment. To date, RTI has been discussed predominantly in relation to specific learning difficulty or disability (SLD), as it is known in Ireland and the UK, or learning disability (LD), in the US, but may well have relevance in the context of other disabilities and SEN. This section outlines the reasoning behind the proposed benefits of RTI as an alternative in the diagnosis of a SLD, due to reservations about the traditional approach to diagnosing it on the basis of a so-called discrepancy model.

The most commonly known SLD is dyslexia, a specific difficulty in reading, while others include dyscalculia, a specific difficulty in mathematics or a specific language impairment (SLI). Use of the term 'specific' denotes

that the difficulty is likely to be confined to one or more specific areas of literacy, language or numeracy and that the difficulties experienced by such pupils are not due to a global developmental delay, or general learning disability (GLD) or intellectual disability (ID). The concept of specificity or relative confinement of difficulties to particular areas implies that general level of functioning is likely to be intact and at or above average levels, while functioning in the affected area is likely to be significantly below average. Hence, the concept of a discrepancy between overall level of ability and performance in a particular area was born and this discrepancy model has been the dominant means for diagnosing a specific learning disability (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010). Statistical tables have been produced which predict levels one should achieve in literacy, language and numeracy, based on an overall intelligence quotient (IQ) score. If a pupil's achievement in a particular area is significantly below one's predicted scores and if the discrepancy between ability and achievement is 'abnormal' or 'uncommon', that is occurring in less than 10 per cent of the population, then the pupil is likely to be diagnosed with a specific learning disability. Depending on level of difficulty in the affected area, such as reading, the pupil may be entitled to additional interventions, exemptions from studying second languages and accommodations in State examinations.

The discrepancy model has attracted increasing criticism. It is labelled as a 'wait to fail' model and thus possibly militates against early intensive intervention. The wait to fail concept arises from a child's likely experience of a prolonged period of failure at reading before the discrepancy between ability and achievement is sufficiently large to warrant a diagnosis and hence possibly establish entitlement to additional intervention. This is not to suggest, of course, that some interventions may not have been initiated during this period. A diagnosis of SLD is likely to be made at an age when academic problems are becoming more difficult to remediate, even with the most intensive efforts. Thus a diagnosis of SLD and the resulting intervention do not result in a closing of the ability-achievement gap (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). Desforges and Lindsay (2010: p11) also express serious reservations in relation to the discrepancy model:

We have reservations about the use of discrepancy models of assessment for specific learning difficulties and speech and language difficulties (the gap between general cognitive ability and specific literacy and language skills). The review found that in the US, there are strong moves to reduce the use of this model, and in a number of other countries other sources of evidence have to accompany the use of discrepancy scores. We suggest the use of assessment frameworks that tap directly into the skill deficits and difficulties. (Desforges & Lindsay (2010: p11))

The RTI approach has been postulated as a welcome viable alternative to the discrepancy model. Reference has been made to this approach in the Finnish context, as it is being introduced from the US into Finland. It involves early identification of pupils who are not performing to expectations for their class level and who are presumably at risk for continuing to lag behind their peers. It provides instructional modifications (interventions) for these children that are instituted early in their educational careers (Scanlon & Sweeney, 2008). It is only after persistent underachievement, despite systematic graduated and well-documented interventions, with appropriate progress monitoring, that pupils will be considered for a diagnosis of SLD or LD. These guiding principles also underpin the School Support stage of the NEPS model of support (NEPS, 2012) in Irish schools and the School Action (DfES, 2001) stage in UK schools. Desforges and Lindsay (2010, citing Snow, 2009) also advocate an assessment process that actively incorporates examination of change over time as influenced by active intervention, which is the essence of the RTI approach:

In some countries, particularly the US, there is increased interest in research-based methods, most notably Response to Intervention (RTI). This approach is now becoming established in the US following its inclusion in the reauthorisation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (Berkeley *et al*, 2009). It is particularly relevant to the current system in Ireland for high incidence disabilities as its main development has been for children with reading and mild and specific learning difficulties. (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010: p11)

According to Scanlon and Sweeney (2008), the rationale for a systematic Response to Intervention approach derives from two factors. First, many children who demonstrate early reading difficulties can overcome them if they get intensified assistance in developing literacy skills and strategies. This thinking can be traced back to 1987, when Marie Clay published an article titled Learning to be Learning Disabled in which she asserted that many children identified as learning disabled (at least in reading) qualify for that classification not because there is something inherently wrong with the child, but because the child's early instruction was not sufficiently responsive to their instructional needs. Clay (1988, cited in Scanlon & Sweeney, 2008) argued that consideration for LD classification should be delayed until substantial efforts had been made to help the child to overcome his or her early difficulties. Clay's Reading Recovery programme, an intensive intervention for struggling early readers was, in fact, developed to accelerate the progress of children with difficulties at the early stages of learning to read. Second, and conversely, Juel (1988, cited in Scanlon & Sweeney, 2008), on the basis of a longitudinal study, concluded that many children who struggle to read at the early stages of learning (at the end of first grade) continue to struggle throughout their academic careers and many are ultimately identified as reading disabled. Scanlon and Sweeney (2008) cite numerous studies which indicate that, for many children, classroom and small group interventions can serve to accelerate the development of early reading skills, thereby reducing the numbers who need more intensive one-to-one interventions (e.g. O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty and Bell, 2005; Scanlon *et al*, 2005).

In view of these findings, the discrepancy model approach to formal identification of reading difficulties and establishing entitlement to interventions was perceived as contrary to best practice. According to Scanlon and Sweeney (2008):

Rather than give pupils the 'gift of time' which was once thought to be the appropriate response to pupils who lagged behind their peers at the early stages of learning to read, an RTI approach involves attending to the instructional needs of young children as soon as those needs can be identified in the hopes of closing achievement gaps before they have the opportunity to grow and become debilitating. The wait to fail model in which struggling learners languished in schools while waiting for the discrepancy between their intellectual and academic abilities to grow large enough to qualify them for 'services' is not acceptable. (Scanlon & Sweeney, 2008: p26).

These sentiments were reflected in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (US Congress, 2004). This Act allows local education authorities to use a student's Response to Intervention (RTI) as part of the evaluation procedure for identifying specific learning disabilities and, when determining whether a child has a such a disability, a local authority will not be required to consider whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability (Jimerson, Burns and VanDerHeyden, 2007). These authors describe RTI as the systematic use of assessment data to allocate resources most efficiently to enhance learning for all students and to effectively identify those eligible for special services.

Scanlon and Sweeney (2008) describe RTI as a tiered approach to instructional modifications. Instruction is gradually intensified for low-performing students who do not show accelerated growth with less intensive intervention. They propose a three-tiered approach:

- Tier 1: what is normally delivered in the classroom, differentiated as appropriate.
- Tier 2: instruction is generally provided in addition to classroom instruction and is provided by a specialist teacher in a small group context. Failure to progress adequately at Tier 2 warrants an additional Tier 3 before consideration for LD classification.
- Tier 3: intensive intervention provided in addition to Tier 1 support, that is, the student would receive literacy instruction from both the classroom teacher (Tier 1) and the specialist teacher (Tier 2) to allow accelerated progress. It is the documentation of limited progress over a protracted period of time, in spite of multiple attempts to adjust the amount or type of instruction the child receives, that serves as a major criterion in deliberations on classification.

It is Tier 3 stage that distinguishes RTI from the model of a continuum of support operating in the Irish and UK systems. Furthermore, the systematic data gathered during this stage, on the basis of teacher-administered tests, can be used as a basis of diagnosis of specific learning disability if the pupil has not appropriately responded, without needing a psychological assessment and IQ measurement.

According to Scanlon and Sweeney (2008), considerable diversity of opinion exists on how the RTI approach can be used and there is only limited scientific evidence to guide schools in its implementation. Some studies have offered relatively short periods of intervention at each tier, while others offer longer term interventions. They differ in types of intervention as well as duration. Therefore it is not possible to offer a precise timeline for interventions and decision-making. Scanlon and Sweeney (2008) recommend:

- Tier 1: first two or three months of kindergarten
- Tier 2: where required, throughout remainder of kindergarten.
- At the beginning of first grade, all children would be assessed. Those with most limited progress would begin Tier 3 at the start of the school year. Children with reasonable progress at Tier 2 might continue at Tier 2. They suggest a minimum of 15-20 weeks of daily Tier 3 intervention before a referral is made for special education or consideration of a learning disabled classification.

According to Gresham (2007), RTI is based on the notion of determining whether an adequate or inadequate change in academic or behavioural performance has been achieved because of an intervention. Decisions on changing or intensifying an intervention are based on how well or how poorly a student responds to an evidence-based intervention that is implemented with integrity. It thus allows one to rule out inadequate instruction or poor classroom management practices as an explanation for insufficient academic achievement or behavioural difficulties. RTI avoids assessment tools that do not inform instruction. He claims that RTI will move the field of special education from an exclusive reliance on eligibility determination into intervention-based practices in the schools for struggling learners.

Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) distinguish between level data derived from the normal standardised tests which reflect how a student is performing relative to peers at a specific point in time, and slope data, which reflects how a student is learning across time in comparison to his or her previous learning. These data capture rate of learning and can also be called growth rates, frequently represented on line graphs, where the steeper the slope the more accelerated the learning. Slope data are obtained by repeatedly measuring student performance in a particular area. Student progress is monitored by means of teacher-administered quick assessment (one to five minutes) frequently (weekly) to gauge improvement. The assessments thus provide information about the student's rate of learning and the effectiveness of a particular intervention. Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) outline the RTI process as follows:

1. Universal literacy screening: all students are screened on basic literacy skills about three times a year and student performance is compared with minimal benchmark scores and students not meeting benchmarks receive help. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Test (DIBELS) (Good & Kaminski, 2003) is a commonly used instrument for this. Teachers thus identify where help is needed for students who are falling behind without great discussion of whether the problem is perceptual, low IQ, motivational or environmental.
2. Scientifically valid interventions are implemented. Within most RTI models, interventions are first delivered to a small group and are intended to assist students in developing skills that will allow them to improve their reading. It may involve 20 minutes or so of small-group work daily to catch up with their peers.

3. Progress of students receiving intervention is monitored. Progress-monitoring data are continuously collected as students receive interventions, which should indicate if the intervention is changing the student's reading. The assessments are administered repeatedly, either weekly or bi-weekly. They should be sufficiently sensitive to small changes in reading performance. The screening and progress-monitoring measures include various oral reading fluency measures, word-identification measures, nonsense-word fluency and measures of phoneme segmentation, which can provide practical information for teachers in guiding instruction. These are relatively easy-to-administer measures of reading and related skills. By providing additional help to the students in the classroom and monitoring progress on a measure such as word identification or oral reading fluency, the teacher can identify those who continue to fall behind the expected rate of progress.
4. Individualised interventions for students who continue to struggle despite receiving initial intervention as they will require more intense targeted interventions. This may mean additional assessments to clarify the nature of the difficulty. Progress continues to be monitored.
5. A decision-making process to determine eligibility for special education services occurs when necessary. Special services may be indicated when the student has not responded to interventions that have been well implemented over a sufficient period.

Like any emerging strategy within special needs education, the RTI approach is not without shortcomings. Despite positive findings from initial research into its effectiveness, it is not clear how it will generalise into schools and there is lack of consistent clear guidelines on how it should be implemented in schools especially in relation to issues such as length, duration and frequency of interventions. Implementation integrity may be the most significant obstacle to overcome when implementing RTI on a national level. It requires development of valid and reliable assessments for all age levels and reasonable teacher training in its use. It depends on teacher proficiency and expertise available in the school (Gersten & Dimino, 2006).

According to Scanlon and Sweeny (2008), existing research that supports the use of an RTI approach to learning disability classification focuses primarily on literacy learning in the early grades. There is little or no research on the applicability of an RTI model in the upper grades and in other academic areas. Numerous authors have identified the need for ongoing research into the effectiveness of the RTI approach, preferably using random control design trials. However, Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) conclude:

Despite the challenges with RTI, we have seen this approach increase the quantity and quality of instruction for struggling readers. RTI is an initial attempt to provide an alternative to the dominant and damaging discrepancy model in which so much time is spent admiring the student's reading problem. By this, we mean people discuss the problem, collect data on it, and write about it months before they do [authors' emphasis] anything about it. IDEIA 2004 provides school districts with a choice to opt out of the discrepancy model. (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008: p289)

3.4 Education Planning

As indicated above, education planning for pupils with special educational needs, at individual or group level, is central to deployment of additional resources allocated to meet those needs and to evaluation and review of those resources.

3.4.1 Individualised Education Planning (IEP)

The concept of statutory individualised planning for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs was first enshrined in US legislation in 1975 as part of the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (Congress of United States, 1975). This Act has undergone revisions, most recently as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (2004). Its three main concepts are the guarantee of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment (LRE), supported, where necessary, by an individualised education programme (IEP). These combine to set appropriate targets, guarantee requisite resources and support and monitor pupil progress. The legislation is rights-based and disputes concerning FAPE, LRE and IEPs are frequently adjudicated in the US courts (Roberts, 2007). As indicated above, individualised education planning has also been mandated within UK legislation, though there are concerns that it may reinforce the individual, deficit model of disability and be contra-inclusive (Allan, 2008).

The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1996) stated that a principle that should be central to Irish legislation was that the 'unique needs of the individual person must be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the appropriate provision of education for that person' (Recommendation 165). In addition, individual education plans should be developed for persons with disabilities (Recommendation 168). Furthermore, the concept of appropriate education should follow the example of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (United States Congress, 2012) in the US. This states that for a programme to be appropriate, it must be based on, and responsive to, the child's individualised educational needs. According to Winter and O'Raw (2010), an effective IEP requires collaboration between teachers, parents and pupil, an outline of the learner's unique needs, setting appropriate goals and monitoring / evaluating progress regularly, with a view to enabling the pupil to achieve to the best of his or her ability and to function as independently as possible.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) report on IEPs provision for children with disabilities (McCausland, 2005) involved a review of international policy on the plans in five countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US and the UK. Each places IEP and SEN provision in the context of mainstreaming, inclusion and a focus on individualisation through changes to the standard curriculum, as opposed to ignoring the curriculum and starting from scratch for each child with special educational needs (McCausland, 2005).

The main issues with IEPs for the NDA report include:

- Lack of teacher expertise in formulation and implementation of IEPs.
- Failure to involve parents and students meaningfully in IEP production and review.
- Time constraints on the involvement of teachers and professionals in IEP meetings.
- The need for training of parents and pupils around IEP contributions.
- The tendency towards greater emphasis on IEP production than on review.
- Time requirements and level of paperwork involved.
- Lack of implementation of IEPs in classroom practice.

These comments must be viewed in the context that IEPs are not mandatory in Irish schools. Even where IEPs are formulated for pupils with special educational needs, there is a risk they might not be practised as written so that they become a cumbersome paperwork exercise yielding little educational benefit for the pupil (McCausland, 2005). Nugent (2002) cites inadequate review and monitoring procedures as a likely cause of ineffective IEPs, particularly where schools feel under pressure to produce plans to meet administrative obligations. According to Riddell *et al*, (2001, cited in McCausland, 2005), training and development for teachers in all elements of the IEP process is critical for successful implementation. Additional guidance and training are particularly important in mainstream schools. In a small scale study in a special school, Nugent

(2002) demonstrated the positive impact of appropriate training for teachers on their attitudes towards IEPs and their willingness to implement them. According to Riddell *et al.* (2001, cited in McCausland, 2005), all schools require ongoing support in the preparation of IEPs and this may be essential to the effective bedding down of the programme in mainstream education.

While IEPs, in various formats and guises, have been used in many schools in Ireland, and especially in special schools, the concept of statutory individualised education planning was only introduced in legislation in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. If a pupil is referred for assessment, it is the school principal's responsibility to ensure that, where deemed necessary, an education plan is formulated within one month of assessment. It must be detailed, goal-driven and outline the child's strengths and needs. It must also detail the child's current level of attainment and specify the support services required. The plan must be reviewed regularly and at least within 12 months of formulation. If parents are concerned that the child is not making satisfactory progress, they can request a review after six months.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2006b) advocates use of IEPs in future resource provision arrangements and has published guidelines on the formulation of IEPs in a document, *Guidelines on Individual Education Plan Process* (NCSE, 2006b). However, it stated that school staff, NEPS, HSE and the Council itself, feel under-resourced to deal with implementing this support provision. Future resource allocation would also need to incorporate indirect support of students with special educational needs by funding training for parties who help to draft IEPs. The statutory requirement for IEPs has been deferred due to delays in implementing the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004).

It is generally accepted that it is more difficult to incorporate the IEP process into mainstream schools than into special schools or units with which IEPs have traditionally been associated. According to participants in a study on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in Irish second-level schools (Kinsella, 2009), implementing IEPs at second-level is likely to prove challenging due to time constraints, a perceived lack of expertise in formulating, implementing and reviewing IEPs and the logistical difficulties in facilitating the necessary meetings within the constraints of second-level school timetables. McCausland (2005) also states that consideration needs to be given to the cultural and organisational features of second-level schools which pose particular problems for smooth implementation of IEPs.

The proposed introduction of IEPs in mainstream schools has met resistance, especially at second level, and if they become a statutory requirement the matter is likely to become an industrial relations issue. For example, the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) has issued guidelines to members not to engage with the IEP process until appropriate training has been provided. Some criticism of the IEP approach is evident from SENCOs in England who describe it as a 'bureaucratic encumbrance'. However, according to Frederickson and Cline (2009), the formulation of an IEP is not a statutory requirement in itself, even under the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), and is only one way of recording provision that is additional or different. An alternative and more-grouped based approach to education planning, called provision mapping is a recent strategy. Unlike IEPs, a provision map is not written for each child, but can be written for a year group or a subject group. Provision for an individual child can be highlighted within it (Frederickson and Cline, 2009).

3.4.2 Provision Mapping

Provision mapping is, therefore, a possible alternative to IEPs as part of the deployment and evaluation of additional resources for pupils with special educational needs. It is defined as a way of showing the range of provision a school makes for this cohort. Typically, grids are constructed by first showing the additional and different provision made. Then information may be added which outlines the academic targets of particular pupils, the additional support being provided and the nature and frequency of such support (Frederickson &

Cline, 2009). The Department for Children and Education (DCE) of Wiltshire Council (2011) in England has published a provision mapping tool, Wiltshire Indicators and Provision Document (WIPD) and describes the approach as succinct and inclusive in showing provision available to pupils throughout a school. It is a means of tracking provision and a tool to describe inclusive practice. An effective provision map clearly links provision and pupil progress (Wiltshire Council, 2011). The council contends that it is an efficient management tool which should fit very well into any process or cycle of school development and improvement. It shows at a glance all school provision that is different from, and additional to, the normal differentiated curriculum. A provision map can be reasonably general, outlining the provision for each class or year group, indicating the number getting additional assistance, the staff-pupil ratio of that assistance, such as small group or one-to-one tuition and frequency of occurrence of the input. Because English schools are reasonably autonomous and manage their own budgets, a monetary cost per week column is also usually included. It thus provides an excellent means of auditing SEN provision from a human and financial resources perspective, it facilitates mandatory reporting to inspectorates or central authorities and it can greatly inform decision-making by management (Wiltshire Council, 2011).

Provision maps can be as detailed as required and include pupil names or initials, their needs and targets, the interventions in place and staff involved (e.g. teacher, teaching assistant, care assistant). It is assumed they would be linked in with a pupil-tracking and progress-monitoring system for the entire target group that should, and is presumed to be, operating in every school (Wiltshire Council, 2011). This involves an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of all provision recorded on the map for pupil progress and cost effectiveness and it should include views of pupils on their own progress and those of parents / carers. In this context, SEN provision is seen as part of a cycle of self-evaluation, school development planning and target setting (Wiltshire Council, 2011).

In Wiltshire, the guidance is that schools continue to write IEPs for pupils at the school action plus stage and for pupils with a statement of need. At school action stage, schools can choose to continue to write IEPs or can rely on the evaluated provision map and pupil tracking system for evidence of intervention and progress. According to documentation from Kent County Council (KCC, 2006), provision maps will support schools in reducing bureaucracy and can be used as an alternative to writing many IEPs for students with low level needs. Reference is made to guidance from the DfES in this regard:

It is now government policy that IEPs are only one method by which schools can plan for pupils with SEN. They are not statutory and are merely one way of planning and recording the additional or different provision for a child with SEN and recording outcomes for individual pupils. When schools have arrangements to plan individually for all pupils and record their progress, then IEPs may be unnecessary. The DfES will be promoting this view in order to cut down on unnecessary paperwork and duplication. (DfES, 2005, cited in KCC, 2006: p19)

The Wiltshire Learning Support Service (Wiltshire Council, 2011) outlines the benefits of provision maps, stating that they help to:

- Audit how well provision matches need and identify gaps.
- Give a clear outline of the graduated provision available.
- Ensure progression and age-appropriate interventions.
- Identify strengths in provision and areas for development.
- Cost provision in terms of resources, including human resources.
- Highlight repetitive or ineffective use of resources.
- Demonstrate accountability.

- Inform parents, external agencies and the inspectorate on how resources are being used to meet needs.
- Assess school effectiveness when linked with outcomes for pupils through review of the provision.
- Support schools in setting annual objectives and success criteria for SEN policy.
- Focus attention on whole-school issues of teaching and learning including individual child issues.
- Plan development to meet pupils' identified needs.
- Record changes in provision.
- Enable a seamless transition between classes, between key stages, or even between schools.

The Institute of Education, London has produced a programme or toolkit, SENJIT: Provision Mapping / Management for Inclusion Guidance Materials (www.ioe.ac.uk) for devising provision maps.

3.5 Progress Monitoring and Evaluation

The effective deployment of additional resources for pupils with special educational needs must address the issue of monitoring progress in response to those resources. This monitoring can be approached at several levels beginning at the micro level of individual pupils getting some additional interventions and for whom strategies such as IEPs, provision maps and the Response to Intervention approach discussed previously may be effective. Pupil performance may also be monitored at the macro levels of the school or even the national system to facilitate inter-school (school 'league tables') and inter-country comparisons (PISA). Standardised testing at the macro level of the school is often referred to as 'high-stakes testing' and is particularly associated with the US and the UK.

In the US, under IDEA (1997), the concept of effective education was introduced for pupils with special educational needs. This shifted the focus somewhat from placement of such pupils to their educational outcomes. Also, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) 2001 focuses on student performance and achievement. NCLB requires schools to show progress toward meeting state standards, measured in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP) for each of its subgroups, including students with disabilities. Unsatisfactory academic performance can result in corrective sanctions, which exist on a continuum from the school being deemed to need special additional support to the removal of the principal or even school closure, hence the concept of high-stakes testing. Roberts (2007) states that while the NCLB does not dramatically alter the landscape of special education, it does increase the pressure on schools to ensure that each target student is receiving whatever he or she needs to succeed and to perform on standards-based, standardised tests alongside his or her peers.

As a consequence of concerns about educational standards in England in the 1980s, the curriculum was reformed and the Education Reform Act 1988 decreed that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, share the right to a broad and balanced curriculum. Furthermore, children's learning was to be assessed at the end of each key stage of progression through the education system and the results were to be published. The aim was to make schools more accountable for delivery of the curriculum, to increase competition between them and to provide parents with a greater element of choice in their children's education. This coincided with devolution of decision-making, including budgetary decisions, to schools. Some commentators, such as Tomlinson (2000), saw this market forces approach as militating against inclusion of pupils with special needs because provision for them was likely to be demanding in terms of resource provision while they would contribute little to, or possibly negatively impact on, overall school performance. The National Curriculum Council (1989) insisted that the anticipated consequential improvement in standards would be beneficial for all students, including those with special needs. The use of high-stakes testing does not appear to be a prerequisite for high national academic standards. The OECD (2010) noted that the UK was one of the highest users of achievement data in tracking performance, but

lower usage of such data does not preclude high student achievement, as was evident from the performance of students in Finland. Similarly, Ireland does not engage in periodic standardised assessments of pupils and the publication of school results data.

Regardless of whether there is a requirement to engage in national and whole-school assessments of pupil attainments, there is a need to monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs who require additional support. According to DfES (2002) in the England:

It is essential that there are 'robust procedures' put in place to ensure that resources are used to raise standards amongst the pupils for whom such resources are intended; that where identified (e.g. in a Statement of an IEP) the individual needs of pupils are met; that pupils make good progress and achieve well; that support services are effective; and that inclusive learning is supported. (DfES, 2002: p28)

OFSTED (2004) reported that few schools in England evaluate provision for SEN systematically to establish how effective it is and whether it represents value for money. It recommends that improvement be measured in three areas; educational attainment, self-esteem and peer relations.

Attention is also beginning to focus in Ireland on levels of achievement and the effectiveness of the educational provision available to students with special educational needs. According to the Equality Authority (2005), inclusion in mainstream education involves not only issues of access and participation, but also of achieving outcomes in terms of education credentials and personal development. The Report on the Implementation of the EPSEN (2004) Act, by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2006a: p21) states: 'There is a significant requirement to obtain value for money and ensure effective utilisation of the considerable additional SEN resources already allocated in recent years.' In Ireland's current economic climate this is more important than ever. There is no structured emphasis on outcomes of SEN provision despite an 'almost endemic fascination with inputs' (NCSE, 2006a).

The quality of the education of pupils with special educational needs who avail of additional support is likely to be affected by the efficacy of the resource allocation and deployment system. It is essential therefore to ensure that those who are the targets of additional resources, in whatever guise, are benefiting from these resources, are achieving their academic potential, and are participating in all aspects of the education system to the best of their capacity and that they enjoy a sense of belonging and well-being. Like many other jurisdictions, the preoccupation to date has been with identification, allocation and organisation of delivery of additional support, with little attention given to monitoring the outcomes and effectiveness of such provision.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed issues central to the systems of allocation and deployment of resources for pupils with special educational needs. The model of disability that underpins such a system will influence the application and allocation processes. Central to these processes is the role of diagnosis and assessment. Literature has been reviewed in this chapter which questions the practice of diagnostic labelling to establish entitlement to resources, being perceived as a reflection of a medical model of disability. An alternative interactionist / ecological model has been proposed. The distinction between a medical and a social or ecological model of disability is usually debated at the level of the individual. However, an attempt was made in Norway, though without success, to incorporate the social model into legislation at the national systemic level. The aim was to replace individual rights to specified resources by a legal right to adapted education for all for the perceived benefit of every pupil in the education system.

One manifestation of the social model is a proposed Response to Intervention (RTI) approach which to date has been postulated as an alternative approach for identification of a specific learning disability (SLD), such as dyslexia, but which may have relevance for SEN arising from various conditions and disabilities. Detailed in this chapter, the arguments favouring RTI – which emphasises pedagogical rather than psychological assessment – arose largely out of criticisms of, and reservations about, the discrepancy model, the traditional approach to diagnosing SLD. While RTI may therefore offer a viable alternative in the application for, and allocation of, resources, it also provides a potentially effective means of monitoring pupil progress and of evaluating the effectiveness of resources deployed, which is also crucial to any system.

Education planning is also central to resource deployment and to effectiveness evaluation. The traditional approach to education planning for pupils with special educational needs has been the formulation, implementation and review of individualised education plans (IEPs). Literature relating to IEPs has been reviewed in this chapter. They are not mandatory in Irish schools because the EPSEN Act has yet to be fully implemented and their proposed introduction is being resisted in some second-level schools. Provision maps, which can be formulated at group rather than individual level, have also been reviewed here and they may be an alternative or a complement to individualised planning for this cohort.

4: Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the study's aims and objectives and describes its various stages: participants, instruments and procedures. The final section describes the steps taken to ensure that the research adhered to the highest ethical standards. Relevant instruments and documentation can be found in the relevant appendices (numbered in the order in which they were used in the study).

4.2 Aims and Objectives

This study had several aims. First, it aimed to review Ireland's system of resource allocation and provision for pupils with special educational needs, emphasising provision for those with low incidence disabilities. It also aimed to explore if this system operates in an equitable, timely, efficient and effective manner. It also focused on how these resources were deployed in the context of an inclusive education system for this cohort. Another aim was to explore stakeholders' perspectives on the system's perceived effectiveness, focusing on three key aspects: the application process, allocation procedures and deployment practices. Finally, it aimed to highlight issues and challenges in allocation and deployment and to identify models of best practice in the area.

Specific research objectives were:

- How effective and efficient is the NCSE's process of allocating resources?
- How are schools deploying NCSE allocated resources?
- What other resources are available for special education and how are they deployed?
- How do schools and parents perceive the effectiveness of resource allocation and deployment in general?
- What major issues arise with regards to resource allocation and deployment?
- What best practices / strategies in relation to resource allocation and deployment exist?

4.3 Research Design

The study comprises three main stages. The starting point was a review of the national and international context within which the empirical research stages of the project would be conducted. Key statistics for provision of SEN resources in schools nationally were obtained by analysing existing school and pupil databases which yielded useful demographic data on schools nationally. Another important aspect of this first stage was a review of relevant literature on legislation, policy and resource allocation in Ireland and in other countries considered good comparators for the Irish education system. These were England and Finland and the legislative and policy review was complemented by information gleaned from informative site visits to both.

The second stage involved questionnaire surveys on resource allocation and deployment distributed electronically to all primary, post-primary and special schools in the country. The target respondent in each school was the person with responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision.

The third stage involved case studies of 12 randomly selected schools; five primary, five post-primary and two special, across various school characteristics such as size, pupil gender, geographical location and disadvantage status (DEIS / Non-DEIS). This aspect was qualitative, involving interviews with principals, with teachers responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision, with class teachers, and SNAs. Relevant pupils and their parents were also interviewed in each school. Likewise, educational psychologists and SENOs were interviewed.

4.4 Stage One: The National Context, National Statistics and Site Visits

4.4.1 National Context

The literature review for this study began by accessing two main databases, ERIC and PsycINFO, and accessing combinations of key words such as 'resource allocation and SEN', 'resource allocation and disabilities', and 'resource allocation and inclusion'. More focused searches were conducted within these databases on specific topics such as individualised education plans (IEPs) and Response to Intervention (RTI). Information on legislation and education policies within particular countries was obtained by directly accessing relevant websites within each country. The range of research reports available on websites such as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) were particularly useful in providing up-to-date information on the national context.

4.4.2 National Statistics for Ireland

Children with special educational needs are educated in mainstream and special schools in Ireland. The NCSE and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) allocate additional resources to schools to meet their needs. Resources include additional resource teachers, learning support teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs), transport and assistive technology / specialist equipment. A school requests, and receives, these for a pupil. To get an overview of the system of additional resource provision for pupils with special educational needs in Ireland, the first stage of the study involved producing a descriptive report of resources allocated to schools nationally, how they are allocated and trends associated with the allocations.

Three datasets⁸ provided the national statistics for analysis. From these, a schools and pupil database was developed by merger analysis. The data sources used were:

- DES database of schools: Data from this comprises a listing of all primary, post-primary and special schools. Information associated with these schools includes location, number and gender of pupils. The data was not cross-referenced to any further sources.
- NCSE database: Data contain information on the level of additional support allocated by the NCSE to primary, post-primary and special schools in the form of SNAs and additional resource teaching hours. The NCSE database, Special Educational Administrative System (SEAS), does not provide a full national profile of all pupils with special needs. This is because it does not include those with high incidence disabilities and other learning needs at primary level as resources for these pupils are directly provided by the DES under the general allocation model (GAM). The SEAS database records all applications for additional supports received from schools and the decisions to grant such supports. Each pupil can appear more than once, depending on the number of different types of support allocated. Where a pupil is allocated two types of support (e.g. SNA support and resource teaching hours) two records are listed. The SEAS database records date from 2005 and the data used in this research are based on an extract provided by the NCSE on September 23rd, 2009. All data used in this exercise were anonymised: pupil name, PPSN and gender details (other than where schools' data specifically pertained to boys or girls exclusively) were not provided as part of the dataset.

⁸ Additional sources of data were reviewed but did not yield sufficient information for this exercise and are therefore not included in the analysis. This was because they included different and specific disability and special needs populations and were used for different purposes. Therefore, there was a risk of double-counting. Such databases included: HRB (physical and sensory and intellectual disability) databases, HSE Assessment of Need information, Census of Population / CSO 2006, National Disability Survey (CSO, 2008)

- DES Learning Support / Resource Teaching Database: This database is a listing of allocated resources based on pupil enrolment and sharing / cluster arrangements under the GAM. Through the GAM, a primary school is allocated additional teaching posts based on the number of pupils enrolled and the type of school (girls, boys, mixed or disadvantaged). The list comprises all school allocations and clustering arrangements. A clustering arrangement is applied for by the school and agreed with a school inspector.

The databases yielded key information for school selection for our case studies and surveys along with a useful national context for the study generally. However, it comes with caveats. These include:

- The differing time stamps on the data sources, e.g. the basis for the general allocation formula in the LSRT database was the 2003-04 school enrolment figures – although this was updated to the 2008-09 school year, while the school listing from the DES is for year 2009.
- The SEAS database records the number of (assessed) pupils with special educational needs arising from a low incidence disability at primary level and a low and high incidence disability at post-primary level allocated additional resources. This is not a full listing of all such pupils in Irish schools as it excludes those supported through the GAM. The data reported is September 2009. The implied year of schooling used in categorising pupils in this database is based on the pupil's date of birth. In some cases, the date was either above or below the threshold used for classification in the 2009-10 school year. Such a categorisation ignores the possibility that a child may be educated in a different school year group.

4.4.3 Site Visits to Finland and England

To complement the information gleaned from the literature review and subsequent data from the surveys and case studies, site visits were conducted in Finland and in England. Their purpose was to provide illustrative international information as a context for a review of the Irish system of additional resource provision for pupils with special educational needs. England was selected because of its geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and obvious historical and cultural links with Ireland. Finland was selected because of similarities in scale of population and urban-rural demographics. In addition, the Finnish education is frequently regarded as a model of good practice and consistently performs well in international comparisons of pupil attainment such as those conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to the OECD (2010), Finland's performance levels have led to educationalists studying it to learn the secrets of its success.

The visit to Finland consisted of a visit to a school of education within a leading university and interviews were conducted with academics who have written on the Finnish education system and who are involved in policy development in Finland. The visit was arranged as a consequence of attending a conference at which one academic presented a paper on the Finnish system. The visit to England involved visits to two urban primary schools, sourced through an acquaintance, where interviews were conducted with two head teachers and two SENCOs and an observation visit to a school classroom in one was also facilitated. Both site visits involved small convenience samples of respondents that could not in any way be considered representative of the relevant jurisdictions. Furthermore, the methods of data gathering on the two visits differed in that in England there were visits to two primary schools, while in Finland interviews were conducted with teacher educators from a university. The small samples and the contrasting data-gathering methods would constitute a limitation of this study. Nevertheless, the visits were informative and useful in yielding some international context.

4.5 Stage Two: National Surveys

The national surveys aimed to collect information from a representative sample of schools in relation to the allocation and deployment of additional resources with a specific focus on the study's research objectives:

- Their experiences and views regarding the application and allocation process.
- How resources allocated are deployed in schools.
- The perceived effectiveness of the process of allocation of additional resources.

The person considered best placed to provide this data was deemed to be the teacher with responsibility for SEN co-ordination.

The original intention of the project team and advisory group was to target sufficient sample sizes which would yield 300 primary (including special schools) and 100 post-primary schools representative of the key strata of school size, pupil gender, DEIS status and geographical region. However, given the plethora of surveys in recent times and to maximise the likelihood of achieving these targets, it was eventually decided to invite all schools to participate via an electronic survey.

The total populations of primary, post-primary and special schools according to DES (2009) statistics are set out in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Total Population of Irish Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools and Pupils by Gender Composition of School

Gender composition		Primary	Post-primary	Special	Total
Boys school	%	7.29%	15.57%	6.3%	8.77%
	<i>N</i>	232	114	8	354
Girls school	%	4.21%	19.81%	0%	6.91%
	<i>N</i>	134	145	0	279
Mixed school	%	88.49%	64.61%	93.7%	84.32%
	<i>N</i>	2,814	473	119	3406
Total		3180	732	127*	4039

Source: (DES, 2009)

* Note: Information subsequently provided by NCSE indicates that some of these schools are hospital schools

As there was no readily available up-to-date list of electronic email addresses for all schools listed in Table 4.1, a number of strategies were used to identify email contact details for principals and schools in each of the three school types – primary, post-primary and special schools (see below).

Participants were assured that once data were submitted, they would be collated and consolidated to produce a fully anonymised database to be used for quantitative analysis and analysis of qualitative comments in response to open-ended questions. Furthermore, they were assured that the school roll number (SRN) at the start of each questionnaire would be used only to enable Mazars to populate returns with standing data associated with individual schools (e.g. type, status, pupil numbers) to limit the number of questions for the respondent. It was emphasised that the SRN would not be incorporated into the research database used by the UCD research team or in any documentation forwarded to the NCSE.

4.5.1 Primary School Sample – Distribution and Response Rate

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) distributed the relevant electronic survey to their members on behalf of the NCSE and the research project team. About a week before this, the project team sent an email attachment to principals via the IPPN containing a survey information sheet for participants (see appendix 2). Principals were asked to forward this information sheet in its entirety to the individual responsible for co-ordinating SEN. The email containing the hyperlink to the actual survey was sent to IPPN members on October 12th, 2010. The closing date was November 1st, 2010. Despite reminders, it was clear as the deadline approached that the overall response rate was low. To maximise the response rate and to facilitate respondents who asked via email / telephone call for additional time, the deadline was extended to December 8th, 2010 for all three surveys.

Although 288 individual responses were logged by the electronic survey application, only 178 of these could be counted as valid returns for analysis purposes. There were three main reasons for elimination:

- A respondent started filling in the questionnaire on one computer, stopped and resumed the process on another. This meant the respondent could not access their initial submission and would have to start again. In such cases the electronic survey application (Survey Monkey) registers two separate responses.
- A respondent answered some, or all, of the introductory demographic items but only a few of the others.
- Our data cleaning exercise revealed that nine respondents worked in special schools. These anomalies were detected through the high numbers of children with special educational needs reported in these schools or through qualitative comments on the survey which indicated they were special schools. As members of IPPN it seemed a few special school principals may have received and responded to the primary school survey. Given the anonymous nature of the dataset available for analysis it is not possible to say if they also completed the special school survey.

While 5.6 per cent (n=178) is a low response rate for the primary school survey, it does represent almost two-thirds of the original target number aimed for (excluding special schools) and, as will be shown later, is broadly representative of the population of primary schools in terms of some key demographic characteristics.

4.5.2 Post-Primary School Sample – Distribution and Response Rate

No official list of email contacts for post-primary schools exists so the project team compiled its own using the DES list of schools and addresses along with available internet listings of school contact details. Electronic information letters were sent to 690 email addresses on October 12th, 2010 (see appendix 2). A significant number of undelivered emails (n=80) indicated that some email addresses were no longer in use. Two days of Google searches and telephone calls to schools helped update the database. The final email containing the post-primary survey hyperlink was sent to all schools on October 15th, 2010. As with the primary survey, reminders were sent and the closing date extended until December 8th, 2010. The number of responses recorded by the electronic survey application was 199. As in the case of the primary school sample, elimination of duplicate and incomplete responses yielded a much smaller sample for analysis. The final sample of 107 respondents represents a response rate of 14.6 per cent of the total population of post-primary schools nationally. While this is also a low response rate it did achieve the target number of 100 schools and again is broadly representative of the population of schools in terms of key socio-demographic characteristics as will be discussed in section 4.5.5 below.

4.5.3 Special School Sample – Distribution and Response Rate

The National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) facilitated distribution of the special school survey by forwarding emails including the survey communiqué (appendix 3) to its listed members (n=127) on behalf of the research team on November 1st, 2010. (It must be noted that the NCSE later informed the research team that there are only 105 officially defined special schools and the remainder may be made up of other types of primary schools such as hospital schools or the 13 pilot applied behaviour analysis (ABA) schools as they were at the time of the study. Reminders aimed to stimulate response and the November 17th deadline was extended to December 8th, 2010 as for the other surveys. Sixty-three responses were recorded by the electronic survey application. However, only 45 questionnaires were valid for analysis following the elimination of incomplete and duplicate surveys. This represents a response rate for special schools of 35.43 per cent (see Table 4.2) which, while still relatively low, is high in comparison to that for the other two surveys and as will be seen later is broadly representative of the population of special schools.

4.5.4 Three Samples – Response Rates and Final Numbers

A summary table showing target populations, final sample numbers and response rates is provided below.

Table 4.2: Population and Sample – Responses

Schools		School Type			Total
		Primary	Post-primary	Special	
Population	N	3180	732	127	4039
Survey: Logged Responses	N	288	199	66	553
	%	9.06%	27.18%	51.97%	13.7%
Survey: Valid Responses	N	178	107	45	330
	%	5.6%	14.62%	35.43%	8.17%

4.5.5 Representativeness of Three Samples

Notwithstanding the low response rates, the 330 respondents across the three school types (primary, post-primary and special) should yield valuable information on the resource allocation and deployment in schools nationally. Furthermore, a breakdown of respondents according to key demographic variables indicates that the final samples, even if small, are broadly representative of the population in terms of gender composition of school, school type, size, location and region. In the following sections the sample data are compared with population breakdowns for each key variable.

4.5.5.1 Gender composition of school

As Table 4.1 shows, 84.3 per cent of all schools in the national population are mixed. The remainder is made up of 8.8 per cent boys-only schools and 6.9 per cent girls only schools. Table 4.3 indicates that the proportions are broadly similar in our sample of schools with the proportions of boys schools almost identical at 8.5 per cent and the percentage of girls slightly higher at 9.7 per cent. The gender breakdown of schools within the primary sample (7.3 per cent boys; 6.1 per cent girls) is also comparable to that of the national population (7.3 per cent boys, 4.2 per cent girls). And similarly within post-primary schools the gender breakdown (13.1 per cent boys; 19.6 per cent girls) is similar to that of the national population (15.6 per cent boys; 19.8 per cent girls).

Table 4.3: Final Samples: Gender by School Type

Gender		School			Total
		Primary	Post-primary	Special	
Boys	N	13	14	1	28
	%	7.3%	13.1%	2.2%	8.5%
Girls	N	11	21	0	32
	%	6.1%	19.6%	0%	9.7%
Mixed	N	154	72	44	270
	%	86.5%	67.3%	97.8%	81.8%
Total	N	178	107	45	330

There are only eight single sex (boys) special schools nationally. Just one of these was represented in our sample.

4.5.5.2 School location

The data in Table 4.4 show the breakdown of survey schools by location and region (i.e. province). It will be noted that school census data for this year (DES, 2010a) show about a third of schools in urban⁹ areas with two thirds in rural areas: 28.7 per cent urban, 71.3 per cent rural. The corresponding figures for schools in our survey are 32.4 per cent and 67.6 per cent respectively. This one third: two-third ratio is also found in the primary and post-primary populations and samples. Special schools nationally are almost evenly split between urban (51.5 per cent) and rural locations (48.5 per cent) (DES, 2010a). However, the special school sample has a slightly higher proportion of rural schools (55.6 per cent) compared to urban ones (44.4 per cent).

4.5.5.3 Region

Nationally, 41.6 per cent of mainstream primary and post-primary schools are found in Leinster counties, 30.8 per cent in Munster, 18.2 per cent in Connacht and 9.4 per cent in Ulster (DES, 2010a). The data in Table 4.4 show that 52.8 per cent of schools in the primary sample and 48.6 per cent of schools in the post-primary sample are in Leinster: percentages which are higher than the corresponding national statistics (39.8 per cent; 49.3 per cent). Connacht and Ulster schools are slightly underrepresented in the total sample – 13 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively. The proportion of Munster primary and post-primary sample schools (29 per cent in both cases) are just 1 per cent short of corresponding national population percentages.

⁹ Urban schools are those schools located in the following regions: Cork City, Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown, Dublin Fingal, South Dublin, Waterford City, Galway City, Limerick City. All other schools are described as Rural.

Table 4.4: Final Samples: Respondents by Location and Region

Schools			School Type			Total
			Primary	Post-primary	Special	
Location	Rural	n	124	74	25	223
		%	69.7%	69.2%	55.6%	67.6%
	Urban	n	54	33	20	107
		%	30.3%	30.8%	44.4%	32.4%
Province	Connacht	n	20	18	5	43
		%	11.2%	16.8%	11.1%	13.0%
	Population		–	–	–	18.2%
	Leinster	n	94	52	26	172
		%	52.8%	48.6%	57.8%	52.1%
	Population		–	–	–	41.6%
	Munster	n	52	31	12	95
		%	29.2%	29.0%	26.7%	28.8%
	Population		–	–	–	30.8%
	Ulster	n	12	6	2	20
		%	6.7%	5.6%	4.4%	6.1%
	Population		–	–	–	9.4%

4.5.5.4 School size

The data in Table 4.5 show the distribution of schools of different sizes in the sample as well as in the national population.

Table 4.5: Percentages of Schools in National Surveys by School Size

Number of pupils		School			Total
		Primary	Post-primary	Special	
75 and under	n	37	2	31	70
	%	20.8%	1.9%	68.9%	21.2%
	<i>Population</i>	9.7%	1.9%	54.4%	–
76-200	n	74	11	14	99
	%	41.6%	10.3%	31.1%	30.0%
	<i>Population</i>	30.3%	3.1%	45.6%	–
201-500	n	61	48	0	109
	%	34.3%	44.9%	0%	33.0%
	<i>Population</i>	48.0%	34.6%	–	–
Over 500	n	6	46	0	52
	%	3.4%	48%	0%	15.8%
	<i>Population</i>	11.9%	62.2%	–	–
Total	N	178	107	45	330

Most primary school respondents are either in schools with 76 to 200 pupils (41.6 per cent) or schools with 201 to 500 students (34.3 per cent). A fifth (20.8 per cent) are in small schools (<75 pupils) while only 3.4 per cent are in large schools with more than 500 pupils. In the post-primary survey, 44.9 per cent of respondents work in schools with 201 to 500 pupils with a similar proportion (48 per cent) in larger schools (>500 pupils). A tenth (10.3 per cent) work in schools with 76 to 200 students with only 1.9 per cent working in schools with 75 or fewer pupils. A comparison with population statistics for large primary schools of more than 500 pupils (11.9 per cent) and large second level schools (62.2 per cent) indicate that these schools are somewhat underrepresented in the respective surveys.

By their nature, special schools are small and so most of these respondents (68.9 per cent) work in schools with 75 pupils or fewer with the remainder (31.1 per cent) of the sample in schools of 76 to 200 pupils. The special school sample is slightly over representative of the smallest school size category (<75 pupils) when compared to national population statistics.

4.5.5.5 School type

Between a fifth and a quarter of schools (23.4 per cent) in the primary sample have DEIS status (roughly half DEIS band 1 and half DEIS band 2), a figure which matches closely that of the whole population (21.2 per cent; n = 673) (DES, 2011). The same pattern is found at post-primary level with 26.2 per cent of DEIS schools responding, the corresponding population percentage is 26.8 per cent (n=168) (DES, 2011).

Standing school level data provided by the DES show 6.1 per cent of the primary and 9.3 per cent of the post-primary sample are Gaelscoileanna. Overall these figures represent a somewhat higher percentage of Gaelscoileanna than that in the general school population (4.4 per cent primary; 5 per cent post-primary) (DES, Statistical Report 2010-11, Gaelscoileanna, 2012). Five (2.8 per cent) primary school respondents work in Educate Together schools. There are no fee paying or boarding schools represented in the primary sample but 10 per cent of post-primary respondents (n=12) work in fee-paying schools.

4.5.6 Survey Instruments: Design and Piloting

The survey instrumentation (information letters and questionnaires) were designed with the research advisory committee. They were then piloted with representatives (two principals and three teachers involved in SEN provision) of the three sectors: primary, post-primary and special school. NCSE staff responsible for allocation also reviewed all questionnaires. Participants were asked to log on to the live websites for the relevant survey, complete it and send their feedback via email on the following aspects:

- Clarity of information / instructions
- Clarity and appropriateness of questionnaire items and electronic format
- Length of time it took to complete the questionnaire.

Copies of the three questionnaires can be found in appendices 4, 5, 6. Each was divided into four sections covering questions relating to:

- The school
- Resource application and allocation
- Resource deployment
- Impact of resource deployment.

Most items were closed in nature, requiring the respondent to select from a range of specific options. However, a substantial number were open ended where they were invited to type in their responses. Where possible, question content and formats were kept consistent across all three surveys.

4.5.7 Analysis of Survey Data

Basic descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and cross tabulations are reported for most survey responses. Mean scores, correlations and associated statistical tests are used in the case of some interval data. Standard content analysis is conducted on open-ended responses.

4.6 Stage Three: Case Studies

This stage involved in-depth case studies of 12 schools, five primary, five post-primary and two special. Personnel interviewed included principals, class teachers, SNAs and those with responsibility for co-ordinating SEN, as well as pupils receiving additional support and their parents.

Interviews were also conducted with external support personnel (SENOs and psychologists). The interviews aimed to explore participant perceptions of how the resource application and allocation system was operating and how resources were deployed in the schools.

4.6.1 Case Studies: Sample

The sample of 12 schools was constructed first by combining information from several databases described in stage 1 above. All schools in the State were identified using the primary and post-primary databases on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) website. Gaelscoileanna were identified through details supplied by Gaelscoileanna Teo. The numbers of pupils with special educational needs in each school were established by using an extract of data from the NCSE SEAS database.

The resultant combined database provided sufficient data for each school as follows:

- School name
- Roll number
- Address
- SENO area
- County
- Province
- Primary or post-primary
- Number of female pupils
- Number of male pupils
- Fee paying status or not
- Boarding status or not
- Gaelscoil indicator
- Special school or not
- Numbers of pupils with special educational needs with allocated resources
- Number of pupils with special educational needs as percentage of total pupil population.

Schools in this database were divided into 12 categories according to the desired sample and one school from each category below participated in the study:

- Post-primary – single sex – girls provincial
- Post-primary – single sex boys provincial
- Post-primary – co-ed provincial – voluntary
- Post-primary – co-ed fee paying – urban
- Post-primary – DEIS / VEC urban
- Primary – DEIS urban mixed
- Primary – Gaelscoil
- Primary – girls national – large 300+
- Primary – boys national large 300+
- Primary – rural mixed – small
- Special school for pupils with mild general learning difficulties
- Special school for pupils with moderate general learning difficulties.

The final selection of mainstream schools within each category was completed on the basis of the percentage of the pupil population identified with SEN. Within each of the above categories, the school falling midway within the range of the percentage of the pupil population identified with special educational needs was selected as the target school. A second and third school were also selected by the same procedure within each category and these were approached in instances where it was not possible to conduct the research in the target school.

The final sample of 138 participants who participated in the case study interviews is outlined in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Case Study Interview Participants

Interview Participant	Number (Type of School)
School principals	12 (5 primary, 5 post-primary, 2 special)
Support co-ordinators	9 (4 primary, 5 post-primary)
Class teachers	12 (5 primary, 5 post-primary, 2 special)
SNAs	12 (5 primary, 5 post-primary, 2 special)
Special class teachers	2 (1 primary, 1 post-primary)
Clinical programme manager	1 (special)
Deputy principal	1 (special)
Psychologist	5
SENO	9
Parents	39 (14 primary, 16 post-primary, 9 special)
Keyworker	1 (post-primary)
Pupils	35 (13 primary, 15 post-primary, 7 special)
Total number of participants	138

4.6.2 Case Studies: Procedure and Instruments

The principals of the selected schools were contacted by telephone. The nature of the study was outlined and they were asked if they would be prepared to allow their schools participate. On expressing an interest in participating, a letter was forwarded to the school outlining the study and inviting school personnel to participate (See appendix 7). The target personnel in each school were the principal, the teacher with responsibility for co-ordinating SEN who will be referred to as a support co-ordinator for ease of reference, one class teacher and one SNA. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these personnel on site in their schools (See appendices 8-16 for copies of interview schedules).

To maximise triangulation of perspectives within the case study schools, pupils getting additional support (learning support and resource teaching) and their parents were invited to participate in interviews. Letters were forwarded to the mainstream schools and distributed by school personnel to the parents. If interested, they returned parental consent and pupil assent letters. They were then contacted through school personnel and arrangements were made to conduct the interviews in the schools. In the two special schools, principals randomly selected pupils and sought their parents' consent for participation. All pupils were interviewed in the presence of their parents (See appendices 17 and 18 for copies of interview schedules). The target number was four pupils from each of the 12 schools. Consent for participation was received for 35 pupils across ten schools. In two schools, school personnel decided not to participate in this aspect due to time

and organisational pressures. The pupils involved therefore were from four primary, four post-primary and two special schools. While the target number from each school was four, not all ten schools could recruit four pupils and their parents for interview. The total sample consisted of 13 primary school, 15 post-primary and seven special school pupils. In the case of four, both parents participated in joint interviews. One keyworker, with responsibility for a pupil who was in care, also participated. The parents were predominantly mothers, 33 in all, with six fathers. In total, therefore, interviews were conducted with 35 pupils, 39 parents and one keyworker, yielding a total sample of 75 participants in this aspect of the study. The age, gender and class details, as well as the diagnosed condition and nature of support allocated, are outlined in Table 4.7 for primary school participants and in Table 4.8 for post-primary.

Table 4.7: Parent and Pupil Participants from Four Mainstream Primary Schools

School No	Pupil No	Gender	Parent Interviewed	Class	Age	Diagnosis	Support
Primary 1 (P1)	9	Female	Mother	Fifth class	12	Physical Disabilities	SNA (physical support)
	10	Male	Mother	Fifth class	11	Very rare medical condition; Dyspraxia	3.5 hours RT; SNA full-time
	12	Female	Mother	Fourth class	10	Moderate learning difficulty	3.5 hours RT
	1	Female	Mother and father	Third class	10	Speech and language impairment	4 hours RT
Primary 2 (P2)	2	Female	Mother	Sixth class	12	Speech and language impairment	1.5 hours RT
	4	Female	Father	Senior infants (repeat)	6	Cerebral palsy	3.5 hours RT; SNA support
	3	Female	Mother	Third class	10	Speech and language impairment and dyslexia	4 hours RT
Primary 3 (P3)	5	Male	Mother	First class	7	Autistic spectrum disorder	5 hours RT; SNA support, half-post, (originally full-time SNA).
	8	Female	Mother	Fifth class	11	Down syndrome	5 hours RT
	13	Female	Mother	Sixth class	13	Autistic spectrum disorder; Eating disorder	5 hours RT; SNA in class, not officially allocated
	6	Male	Mother	Fourth class	10	Autistic spectrum disorder	5 hours RT; SNA support
Primary 5 (P5)	7	Male	Mother	Sixth class	12	ADHD And dyspraxia, with speech and language difficulties	5 hours RT; SNA support; Medication.
	11	Male	Mother	Sixth class	12	Emotional behavioural difficulties	3.5 hours RT; SNA support (shared)
	13 pupils		14 parents				

Table 4.8: Parent / Keyworker and Pupil Participants from Four Mainstream Post-Primary Schools

School No	Pupil No	Gender	Parent / Keyworker Interviewed	Class	Age	Diagnosis	Support
Post-primary – level 1 (S1)	14	Male	Mother	First year	14	Pervasive developmental disorder, with aspects of Asperger's syndrome Possible dyslexia	5 hours RT
	15	Male	Mother	Second year	13	Specific learning difficulties: dyslexia and dyscalculia	1.5 hours RT; Small class for maths
	16	Female	Mother	Third year	15	Dyslexia	1.5 hours RT
	17	Male	Mother	Sixth year	18	Dyslexia	1.5 hours RT
Post-primary – level 2 (S2)	18	Male	Keyworker	Third year	14	EBD	SNA in class
	19	Male	Mother	Sixth year (LCA)	18	Mild general learning difficulty Mild cerebral palsy	1.5 hours RT; SNA support
	20	Male	Mother and father	First year	12	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (on medication)	1.5 hours RT; SNA support
Post-primary 4 (S4)	21	Male	Mother	Second year		SLD: dyslexia ('severe')	1.5 hours RT
	22	Male	Mother and father	Fifth year	17	Asperger's syndrome	SNA support (shared) 3 hours RT
	23	Female	Mother	First year	14	Rare genetic physical condition	SNA (physical support only)
	24	Male	Mother	First Year	13	Dyspraxia	1.5 hours RT
Post-primary 5 (S5)	25	Male	Father	First Year	13	SLD	1.5 hours RT
	26	Male	Mother	Third Year	15	ADHD	3.5 hours RT
	27	Male	Mother	Third Year	15	ASD	5 hours RT
	28	Male	Mother	Second Year	15	Down syndrome	3 hours RT
	15 pupils		16 parents 1 keyworker				

Total Mainstream Sample Interviewed = 59 (28 pupils, 30 parents, 1 keyworker)

The pupils in the mainstream schools were aged six to 18 and from senior infants in primary school to sixth year in post-primary school. Of the 28 pupils, 18 were male and 10 were female, and they had a range of complex needs, physical, medical, educational and emotional. Some arose from rare and complex medical and physical conditions and these are not specified in the tables to avoid any risk of pupil or school identification. Those who participated were supported by comprehensive additional resource provision, as outlined in Tables 4.7 and 4.8, including up to five hours extra teaching support per week, care support from SNAs, sometimes on a full-time basis, and SNA support to address needs arising from attentional and behavioural difficulties, again sometimes on a full-time basis.

Table 4.9: Diagnosed Primary Conditions of Pupil Participants in Mainstream Schools

Condition	Number of Pupils
Autistic spectrum disorder / Asperger's syndrome	6
Emotional behavioural difficulties / attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	5
Specific learning difficulty	5
Speech and language disorder	3
Physical disabilities / cerebral palsy	3
Down syndrome	2
Moderate learning difficulty	1
Mild general learning difficulty	1
Dyspraxia	1
Rare medical condition	1
Total	28

The diagnosed primary conditions, with which the pupils attending the mainstream schools presented, are outlined in Table 4.9 above. Autistic spectrum disorder and emotional and behavioural difficulties are the two conditions most prevalent within the sample across the two settings, with an incidence rate of six and five respectively. Amongst the post-primary sample, five pupils had specific learning disabilities and one a mild general learning disability. Pupils presenting with these difficulties at primary level are not allocated additional resource support by the NCSE as they are supported instead under a General allocation model (GAM). It was intended that one pupil receiving support under GAM would be included from each school. However, no such pupils were in the final sample recruited by the primary schools.

The age, gender and class details, and the diagnosed conditions are outlined in Table 4.10 for special school participants. One of these schools was designated for pupils with a mild learning disability, while the other was for those with a moderate learning disability (Mod LD). Pupils were aged 10 to 17. In addition to the intellectual disability on the basis of which they were placed in their respective schools, they also presented with co-morbid conditions such as ADHD, epilepsy, ASD and Down syndrome.

Table 4.10: Parent and Pupil Participants from Two Special Schools

School No	Pupil No	Gender	Parent Interviewed	Class	Age	Diagnosis	SNA Support
Special school 1 (Sp1)	29	Female	Mother	Second year Post-primary (PP 2) (11;1)	14	MLD, ADHD, Epilepsy	Classroom SNA
	30	Female	Mother and father	PP 2) (11:1)	14	ASD	Individual SNA
	31	Male	Father	PP 2) (11:1)	14	MLD, Asperger's syndrome	Classroom SNA
	32	Male	Mother and father	Primary 4 (P 4)	10	MLD, ASD	Individual SNA
Special school 2 (Sp2)	33	Male	Mother	PP3 (7:1)	17	Mod. LD, ADHD	Individual SNA
	34	Male	Mother	PP 2 (8:1)	14	Down syndrome	2 classroom SNAs
	35	Male	Mother	P 3 (8:1)	10	Mod LD, Rare syndrome	2 classroom SNAs
	7 pupils		9 parents				

Likewise, permission was sought from management personnel within the NCSE to contact the SENOs attached to the case study schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine SENOs (See appendix 20 for copy of interview schedule). One worked with two of the case study schools and the two others were unavailable for interview.

All the interview schedules were piloted, following which suggested amendments were incorporated into the schedules. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcribed data were entered into MaxQDA computer software for analysing qualitative data and emergent themes were identified from this analysis.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Approval to conduct the surveys was sought from and granted by the UCD Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee. As all surveys did not involve vulnerable groups or sensitive topics it qualified for an exemption from full ethical review. The signed copy of the ethical approval form can be found in appendix 21. The interviews conducted as part of the case studies included interviews with pupils with special educational needs who, for ethical considerations, would be regarded as members of a vulnerable group. Hence application was made to the UCD Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee to conduct that aspect of the study. This involved a comprehensive application form and provision of all supporting documentation, including the information letters sent to parents and pupils and the parental consent and pupil assent forms. Full ethical approval was granted to conduct the interviews. A copy of the confirmation letter is provided in appendix 21. It was also necessary to submit an application for ethical approval to a research ethics committee associated with one of the special schools, and this was granted. No copies of correspondence are provided to avoid identification of the school.

5: Findings: Report of Site Visits to England and Finland

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents information from site visits to England and Finland that complements the review of literature on these countries. England was selected because of its geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and obvious historical and cultural links with Ireland. Finland was selected because of similarities in scale of population and urban-rural demographics. It was also selected because the Finnish education is frequently regarded as a model of good practice and consistently performs well in international comparisons of pupil attainment, such as those conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Interviews were conducted with two head teachers and two special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in two primary schools in England. These schools constituted a convenience sample and contact was made through a mutual acquaintance. There is thus no claim that these schools are representative of English primary schools. It was considered potentially informative to explore practices in two schools in England, first, to contextualise the information from the literature review and, second, to provide illustrative examples of practice for the Irish context. To further contextualise the operation of the system of provision for pupils with special educational needs in Finland, interviews were conducted with two prominent teacher educators from one university in Finland.

Table 5.1: Site Visits: Interview Participants

England	No of Pupils / Teachers	Participants
School 1	211 pupils	
	7 class teachers (including SENCO)	Head teacher 1
	Non-teaching head teacher	SENCO 1
School 2	198 pupils	
	7 class teachers (SENCO role shared between 2 teachers)	Head teacher 2
	Non-teaching head teacher	SENCO 2
Finland		Professor 1
		Professor 2

5.2 Organisation

5.2.1 Structure of Education System

Children begin primary school in England at age four, at the start of the academic year during which their fifth birthday occurs. They enter reception class and then proceed to key stage 1, consisting of year 1 and year 2, with key stage 2 consisting of years 3 to 6, at which stage they leave primary aged 11. The key stages are significant because pupils are assessed on national standardised tests at the end of each. For example, at end of key stage 1, a pupil is expected to gain a grade 2, indicating a readiness to work at key stage 2 curriculum. A pupil may obtain a grade 1 and proceed to key stage 2, but will be working a grade level below their age.

Outlining the basic structure of the Finnish system, the professors reported that children generally do not begin school until age seven. However, children identified during pre-school years as presenting with disabilities may begin formal primary schooling one year earlier. All are also entitled to one year of pre-school, which is publicly funded. There is also a kindergarten system for which, it appears, parents pay a nominal charge. Finland has few private schools: 'We have very, very, very few private schools – we have almost none,' according to Professor 1.

Lower basic education in Finland consists of six first grades, grade 1 to grade 6, (age seven to 12), while upper basic education consists of grade 7 to grade 9 (age 13-15). Lower basic education is predominantly class-based, while the upper version is subject-based. Maximum pupils in a mainstream class in primary is 30, but generally the number is 20, possibly up to 24 in urban areas. This refers to pupil numbers in each class, not the pupil teacher ratio, which would be based on number of pupils in a school per teacher.

The mainstream school day starts at 8.18am and ends at 2pm. Teachers have meetings after 3pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, in which they engage in collaborative planning for individuals, groups and classes and, where applicable, prepare for co-teaching with their partners. A one-hour planning session each week is in their timetable. As for parent teacher meetings, 'normal common meetings' for the parents take place in the evenings after school. The school year is 190 days.

When pupils transfer from lower to upper basic education, there is an element of school selection by parents, especially in urban areas, according to Professor 1. While there is no practice of schools publishing results or operating 'league tables', selection can be made on rumours and reputations. He said:

Of course there are rumours, you cannot prevent them and they may be true or may not be true – believing that this one is a better one than that one. (Professor 1)

Class placement in the upper schools is organised around subject choices, such as music, science or languages and there can be some manipulation of the class placement system through opting for particular subjects, with the result that 'in-school class placement is correlated with the background variables', according to Professor 1.

This professor stated that pupils entering secondary education (age 16-18) attend a gymnasium or a vocational school: 'It's about 55 per cent gymnasium and 45 per cent vocational schools.' He said the former is more academic: 'It's a German type of upper secondary school leading to university.' Gymnasium is the high school and the only national high stakes testing in Finland takes place at the end of this period of schooling, as this is the pathway and transition point to university. Those who attend vocational schools are likely to proceed on to polytechnics to train in the trades. The professor estimated that the drop-out rate between upper (primary) school (age 13-15) and gymnasium / vocational is as low as 1 per cent. He reported that SEN provision obviously persists into these levels and the gymnasia are struggling with this because, historically, they had no pupils with special educational needs. Reading difficulties and dyslexia would be difficulties most prevalent here. SEN provision is also becoming more of an issue in vocational schools, as the curriculum becomes more theoretical and no longer exclusively practical. He reports that no teachers are specifically trained as special educators for these sectors.

5.2.2 Organisation of SEN Provision

One school visited in England has an enrolment of 211 pupils, with seven teachers and a non-teaching head teacher. There is a SEN co-ordinator (SENCO) who is also a full-time class teacher. She co-ordinates and supervises SEN provision, but only works directly with the pupils in her own class. She is given some non contact time when required, but receives no regular timetabled administration time to fulfil the SENCO role. In larger schools or those with a greater incidence of SEN, the SENCO may get a half-day each week for administration and, in exceptional circumstances, the post may be a non-teaching role. In the second school of 198 pupils, in which there were also seven teachers and a non-teaching head teacher, the SENCO role was divided between two full-time class teachers.

In one school (1), 28 pupils were on the SEN register out of 211 (13 per cent): most were boys; three had statements. Two of the latter were diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders; the other presented with severe dyslexia, according to the SENCO (at age 11 his reading age was six). In the other school (2), 22 per cent of the pupil population of 198 were on the SEN register and only one had a statement. Previously the average would have been four or five pupils with statements. The head teacher explained the apparent decrease in this number as follows:

I think it is two things, one money for schools used to come, used to follow a child with a statement, so the school would push really hard to get a child statemented in order to get funding and then the system changed about four years ago – the funding came straight into schools. There was no centrally held pot of money, so it's up to schools where they put that money for the children. (Head Teacher 2)

The budget allocated to schools is determined by factors such as incidence of SEN and social indicators, such as the numbers availing of free school meals. This school (2) is in a socially disadvantaged area, though the pupils' social background was described as mixed by the head teacher because pupils attended from outside the catchment area. She also stated that 50 per cent of pupils were from ethnic minorities, with 40 per cent having English as an additional language. The school had no preferential pupil-teacher ratio based on socio-economic indicators. There was no specialist teacher for teaching pupils who did not have English as a first language, but there were two 'specialist teaching assistants who can speak other languages', according to the head teacher.

Teaching assistants fulfil a significant role within the resource deployment system in England. While some may be qualified teachers who have opted for this role rather than assume the responsibility of a class teacher, they normally have a basic generic qualification over one year which would include working in a school, but would not have received any specific SEN training. It appears that they receive a lot of 'in-house' training 'on the job'. One head teacher (1) emphasised the use of a cascade model of training: if one teaching assistant received specific training, the information would be disseminated to others. All six teaching assistants in one school were on permanent contracts, but that may not be the case in all schools. The other school had nine teaching assistants, one full-time and eight part-time. Commenting on the role of teaching assistants, one SENCO stated:

Our teaching assistants do a lot of teaching – they teach the children towards their IEP targets, they also lead intervention groups with groups of pupils maybe not children on our special needs record but there are children who are just slightly below age-related expectations to almost stop them from becoming part of our special needs cohort, they do booster groups – yeah they do have a big teaching load and that is a huge change in the last five or six years I would say. (SENCO 1)

The role of SENCO was central to organising provision for pupils with special educational needs in both English schools, while Finnish participants emphasised the role of the Student Welfare Group (SWG) as central to that process. The SENCO role in English schools involves a lot of administration, recording and documentation most of which is done 'after school, before school, lunchtime, afternoon play, that kind of thing'. The school day begins at 8.50am and finishes at 2.30, but one SENCO said she was normally in school from 7.30am until 5.15pm. Class teachers are expected to attend meetings and engage in collaborative planning outside of school contact hours and the SENCO thought it would not be possible to fulfil her role if this was not the case. A head teacher outlined procedures in her school as follows:

They [teachers] are directed to start at 8.30 in the morning, have to be on the premises by 8.30, the day starts at 8.50, they'll have their lunch break and the day finishes at 3.15. They have to be on the premises at 3.30 and then, on one evening a week, they have a staff meeting, that is 1.5 hours to 5 that evening. Then I have still hours over so I direct for parent evenings once a term and then any other events that happen, like performances in the school – it might be drama performance or something like that where I direct staff to stay. (Head Teacher 1)

She also outlined that each teacher has one afternoon each week planning time and, during this time, a high level teaching assistant (HLTA) takes charge of the class. All parent teaching meetings take place outside of school hours. In one school (2), particular pupils are asked to come in for ten minutes extra tuition from teaching assistants each morning over a six-week period before school officially starts.

The four English participants interviewed saw the SENCO role as crucial to effective provision for the target pupils and indicated that it had changed over recent years from provider to co-ordinator.

I think it is crucial because we are monitoring the provision and progress of a hugely vulnerable group in cases so I think it is vital, I mean I liaise with class teachers, I liaise with parents or outside agencies – the SENCO might be the hub at the centre of all of that, ensuring that everything is working and that everything is going smoothly, but as I said it has moved away from the person who provides all of that because of course the code of practice doesn't say that we should be doing that anyway, the code of practice says it is the class teachers' responsibility to provide for all of the children in their class. (SENCO 2)

Both Finnish participants emphasised the importance of the Student Welfare Group (SWG) in organising SEN provision.

Within the system of special education¹⁰, the major element is the Student Welfare Group, most of our schools have Student Welfare Groups. It's a committee chaired by the principal or vice principal of the school, with the participating members being special teachers, co-teachers and at least one class teacher, also the school nurse and school psychologist. (Professor 1)

He reported that there is a school nurse in every school, 'being paid by the social authorities' and that psychologists were usually allocated to two or three schools, hence the availability of these professionals to be involved in structures such as the Student Welfare Group. According to the professor, the Student Welfare Group is a means of facilitating professional learning, where professionals learn from each other. It is a place where 'different kind of teachers', that is mainstream / SEN teachers and educational psychologists have to learn to communicate with each other, to be more specific about learning problems – not simply saying, 'I do not want this child in my class', but in expressing the problems or the observations so that professional communication can start. He said: 'It's dealing with assessment and review which can be modelled by Response to Intervention thinking' (Professor 1).

¹⁰ When Finnish participants refer to 'special education', it refers to the full spectrum of support offered in addition to regular teaching, including in-class support and withdrawal, it does not necessarily imply full-time placement in special classes or schools though these are options for some.

5.3 Teacher Education and SEN Qualifications

Primary teacher training in England consists of a four-year Bachelor of Education degree or, alternatively, with any undergraduate degree, qualification comes via an intensive one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). English school participants reported that teachers are given good opportunities to avail of continuing professional development initiatives. This is delivered during school term and in School 1 teachers are usually replaced by supply teachers while absent for CPD purposes, but the school budget must fund this and it is thus at the head teacher's discretion. In School 2, the head teacher utilised her most highly qualified teaching assistants as substitutes for teachers attending CPD initiatives.

I've got what we call HLTAs – high level teaching assistants – the highest grade teaching assistant, she has done all the training, she can cover a whole class. She doesn't plan for it, but she can deliver and my cover supervisors can cover as well, so if it's a day's training, I wouldn't employ a substitute teacher. (Head Teacher 2)

The SENCOs reported receiving no specialist qualifications in SEN, though the SENCO in School 2 had received some training from the local education authority (LEA) when assuming the role seven years previously. SENCOs assuming the role for the first time must now obtain a certificate qualification. She had also received training as part of an initiative known as the Inclusion Development Programme, which informed teachers about responding to various types of disabilities and SEN. This was a national programme rather than locally funded by the LEA.

The previous government did the Inclusion Development Programme, which is where we had different focuses like dyslexia, speech, language and communication, autism and behaviour management and they were all targeted at supporting class teachers and making sure that every child in their class was included at, you know, at their level. So that was a really useful tool, I felt, because that was aimed at class teachers, helping class teachers to make sure that provision was effective for the special needs children in their class, whatever they need. (SENCO 2)

No special needs teacher was employed in either English school:

We don't have anybody with a special needs qualification, we don't have a teacher of special needs – all of our class teachers are responsible for teaching the children in their classes. (SENCO 2)

The head teacher of School 1 also commented on the system of SEN provision and the absence of a specialist teacher in the school:

I'm very happy with it because it has developed over the years – we used to have – I used to pay the salaries of specialist teachers coming in [from LEA specialist teaching service] to support those pupils, those most needy SEN pupils. Two years ago, we couldn't afford it anymore, so we had to upskill one of my SENCOs and two teaching assistants in those support strategies and now we're in our third year of doing that – it's working extremely well – it's better that the knowledge that used to be just with those specialist teachers is now within the school. (Head Teacher 1)

In Finland, however, teacher qualifications are at Master's level and there is a great emphasis on further qualifications for teachers who specialise in special education.

In teacher education, a Master's degree takes five years. Subject teachers major in their subjects in the university and then they get from us a further one-year university course for pedagogical thinking. So it should be four years but nobody graduates in that so far, it may take six years. Our university is not organised like in the British system where you have to do that in prescribed time. (Professor 1)

The teachers embarking on further training in special education are already qualified teachers and will have at least two years professional experience. It was described as a '... semi-full-time course' – it's one full year of studies in special education'. This means special teachers in Finland need to be qualified teachers who have completed one extra year of training.

On training SEN teachers, one professor emphasised the changing nature of the system of provision in Finnish schools:

The second group of teachers [other than mainstream class teachers] we train, they are so called 'part-time special educators', remedial or pastoral – it's very, the names are very difficult to translate but they might be called part-time special teachers from the point of view of the children: the children stay in their normal classes and then are pulled out for special education either in small groups where several other children with special needs are being called or individually. And nowadays there is of course a third type of activity which is co-teaching where the part-time special educator visits this class and collaborates with the teacher. (Professor 1)

The part-time special educators work in both lower (age seven to 12) and upper schools (age 13-15). One professor has been involved in a study going into schools to examine the extent to which co-teaching / shared teaching was utilised to provide additional support to pupils with special educational needs. It involved examining school policies on co- or shared teaching and observing practices to establish the extent to which such policies are implemented. The conclusion was that co-teaching was reasonably widely practised, but there were numerous variations of the approach. He said co-teaching was more common and easier to facilitate in lower schools. The third group of teachers are special class teachers, who work in special schools and increasingly in special classes.

We do still have special schools of course, one would expect 2-3 per cent of the population to be educated in special schools, based on the distribution of abilities, simply due to the fact that the brain is not properly working or there is some kind of dysfunction that cannot be prevented. In any country, one would expect 3 per cent, we have 8 per cent. (Professor 1)

To become a special class teacher, an extra module must be completed in addition to special education training, 'where the subjects which are being taught in special schools are being dealt with' (Professor 1).

5.4 Interventions for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

5.4.1 Referral Procedures and Classroom Practices

Within the two English schools, there was a staged approach to intervention in the schools. The first stage of this is class action during which the teacher recognises a pupil is experiencing difficulties and not keeping pace with peers. The pupil is seen to need some extra support, such as in-class group support, but does not require withdrawal or one-to-one tuition. Class teachers or teaching assistants supply the extra support. If this is deemed insufficient, the next stage is school action.

That's really when I become involved as a SENCO, because at that stage the children get placed on a special needs record and we talk to the parents of the children as well. So at that stage the children get what we call an individual education plan, an IEP, which specifies the additional and extra input they are going to get alongside the normal curriculum but again that might take the form of some in-class work. We do try and encourage inclusion wherever we can – we don't want children always having to go out to do extra classes with people because if they do that, they are missing the normal curriculum in the class. (SENCO 1)

If the pupil is still not making adequate progress, it goes to school action plus which involves outside agencies, such as an educational psychologist or outreach team. Should the child still not make progress, he or she may be put forward for a statement. A pupil given a statement in this local authority area will usually be allocated hours of support: it is not usually specified as teaching hours so will be provided by a teaching assistant.

We had a child who came into our reception class who we were concerned with, we knew that he was autistic, it took us a year to get a diagnosis for him and with his statement came 15 hours of support plus 2 hours of teaching. It doesn't come with any extra funding, doesn't come with any extra staff, we have to meet that 15 hours plus the 2 hours of teaching from our current school entitlement budget, it's not that some autistic specialist person comes in and does that. So our teaching assistants provide that 15 hours, possibly being advised by outside agencies. The allocation of teaching hours sort of went out and now it seems to be coming back in again. We are in a fortunate position that we have a teaching assistant who is also a qualified teacher and so we tend to use her for that. We also have a retired teacher who taught here who comes in and does some one-to-one tuition for us and he will do some of that as well, depending on the child and their needs and their skills. (SENCO 1)

While pupils are withdrawn from class sometimes to work with teaching assistants, in both schools every effort is made to minimise out of class time and to provide as much in-class support as possible. There is no team or co-teaching between teachers in the schools, only between teachers and teaching assistants. Participants in English schools stressed the importance of differentiation in the classroom as the starting point of provision for pupils experiencing difficulties. When asked if teachers were skilled in differentiating the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs, one SENCO replied:

We are – I'm 100 per cent confident, I say that with absolute confidence because over the last 6 years that I have been here, we have done such a huge amount of training, moderation, checking that it's actually happening, work groups, looking at books and seeing that all of that is in place, looking at outcomes, planning etc. We work on three levels of differentiation – BA, A and AA and – below average, average, above average. Then below the BA pupils, we have our SEN pupils and above our AAs we've got our gifted and talented pupils, so now we've got 5 levels. (SENCO 1)

The SENCO's comments were borne out in a conversation between the researcher and a class teacher, who emphasised the need for differentiation strategies in her class of quite diverse pupils in relation to culture, language and ability, including gifted and talented pupils. She demonstrated impressive examples of her differentiation strategies within her class plans. In School 1, the effectiveness of differentiation practices is monitored through a comprehensive peer review system, conducted by the senior leadership team led by the head teacher. Other team members consist of a literacy and a numeracy co-ordinator who are also assistant head teachers who monitor provision throughout the school in literacy and numeracy.

Participants from Finland reported that in their system the normal referral procedure also originates in the classroom. Concerns arise in the classroom and the teacher or subject teacher contacts either the principal or special teacher and they start discussions. They can decide that the SEN teacher should visit the classroom and this requires no formal decision. That teacher may screen or observe, may use diagnostic instruments or small tests and examine the child's schoolwork. The professor emphasised there was no need for a label at this point:

This creates now an interesting problem – how to describe students; there is no reason to draw the conclusion that this is attention deficit disorder or self-regulation. It is so that they can produce a document to the Student Welfare Group. (Professor 1)

Finland has no equivalent role of SENO similar to that operating in Ireland. If school personnel need more resources, they can apply to the Student Welfare Group or the director of education and then start negotiation. For allocation, hours of tuition for teaching lessons are allocated rather than funding as under the UK system. There is no specified list of hours allocated to different disabilities.

There is no recommendations that if you have this mild reading problems, you should be given 10 lessons, if more is needed, then more is given, if less is needed, less is given. We don't have that kind of referral decision, where if a child has been diagnosed with ASD, he or she would receive a certain number of hours. (Professor 2)

The two Finnish participants discussed the changes taking place in SEN provision as a consequence of the new law on special education passed in 2010:

This summer [2010] the parliament has passed a new law or has changed the law of basic education in relation to those parts that deal with special education. We might call that a change from two-tier model to a three-tier model, from a two-level model to a three-level model. We can describe that using the Response to Intervention approach, which comes from the US. The three levels are 'general support', 'intensified support' and 'special support'. (Professor 1)

According to the professor, if an 'intensify' decision is made by the Student Welfare Group, that is not a referral to special education. It is simply using all the resources available to the school. Then the response to that intervention must be monitored and if the agreed actions lack the desired effect, then other options must be tried. If there is a good response, then the intervention may continue or cease after a time. If response is inadequate, then the intervention is revised and this is then monitored for effect.

If these acts with their follow ups are not enough, then there comes a time where there needs to be a decision to introduce 'special support'. That is now an official decision, that is not even made in the Student Welfare Group because unless the principal has been given that right by the rules of the municipalities, most often it goes upwards to the chief of education or the minister. This is now a legal decision, it can be complained in the court if parents want and then you have a pedagogical review, you have to prepare a pedagogical review. This pedagogical review must contain the proof that intensified support has been tried and has not worked. (Professor 1)

If a pupil has been diagnosed with Down syndrome or autistic spectrum disorder, he or she may go directly into intensified or special support. They may have come through special groups in kindergarten. According to one participant, only two pupils with Down syndrome were integrated in mainstream education in the 1990s whereas 'it is probably about 50 per cent [of all such pupils] currently'.

5.4.2 Monitoring Procedures

Each pupil on the SEN register in the English schools has an individualised education or behaviour plan and these are all written by class teachers. The SENCO monitors the targets set and ensures they are appropriate. Parents are invited into the schools every term for an IEP review. Members of the senior leadership team conduct classroom observations to examine class plans, methods of delivery and pupil performance. Apart from the head teacher, team members are also full-time class teachers. This is part of the school's 'performance management' system. When they are observing in other classrooms, their classes are taught either by one, possibly two teaching assistants, by the head teacher or a supply teacher, 'depending on the budget and the need'.

I think it is what needs to be done, because long gone are the days where you shut your classroom door and you just got on with what you thought was right for those pupils. Within our system, there is individuality, there is autonomy, we've taken our own curriculum, we've adapted it to our children and

the needs of them so we have the independence and we have the autonomy, but we also do have the monitoring because at the end of the day if it's not working for the pupils, why are we doing it in the first place? (SENCO 1)

In School 2, the SENCO also had a monitoring and peer review role, including observing teaching assistants teaching groups of pupils. School performance is also externally monitored by Ofsted. Inspections now make much more use of school self-evaluation procedures, so that when inspection occurs it is about the senior leadership team defending the ratings they have given to their school, though this also involves some observations of class teaching.

In contrast, the Finnish education board has dispensed with its inspectorate, prioritising instead school autonomy and the professional autonomy of teachers. Within the Finnish system, the Student Welfare Group thus fulfils an important monitoring role. In the newly-introduced three-step support system, when there is a need to start intensified support, it is necessary to conduct a pedagogical evaluation. The teachers do this and it must be in written form and must include an IEP which should be written together with the child's teachers. Parents are involved, as well as members of the Student Welfare Group and the child is asked to contribute.

The question is because this is a new system, there is quite a lot of resistance already from the general teachers' part; they don't know when they have time to make all those IEPs. There is a problem in getting time for meetings and all that. It's a new system, they haven't started it yet. (Professor 2)

In Finland, IEPs must be implemented after a decision has been made to introduce special support, and when asked if mainstream / subject teachers would contribute to IEPs, the answer was 'partially yes'.

My suspicion is that special teachers will do them but, in principle, it's not so that they should do it, it could be done also with subject teachers. I doubt the universal willingness of them or the capability. (Professor 2)

5.4.3 Future Directions

In England, SENCOs advocated early intensive small-group intervention for all children struggling with reading, regardless of labels or causes.

I think it is about spotting early on in key stage 1 the children who aren't making progress and putting in in-class support to help them, small group interventions to help them, I think the earlier you get in, the better your result. We do some in reception, we do it mainly in year 1 – our area is with the writing, it's not reading, it's writing, so we have an early literacy support group in year 1 to really focus those children; lots and lots of work now on phonics in key stage 1, throughout key stage 1, which is having a huge impact on reading, writing and spelling, so I do believe it is crucial. (SENCO 1)

She was familiar with initiatives such as Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery and had received LEA training in them. These were not in use in the school as they had devised their own programmes, but she supported the underlying principle of early, systematic, intensive small-group interventions. The SENCO was confident that the system of SEN provision in the school was working well and that all pupils were making progress. She expressed concern about the pupil in her school aged 11 with severe dyslexia who had achieved a reading age of only six. She reported that, in 14 years of teaching, she had not seen another child leave primary school with that level of reading deficit.

One of the professors advocated an interactionist model of disability similar to the ecological model proposed by Lindsay and Desforges (2010), taking account of the individual child, educational factors, such as the difficulty of material to be learned, and the social and economic context in which the child operates:

Then we need another model as well, you can look to the problems of a child from a teachability perspective. This means learning math, learning history, learning science so you have the subjects here; it is the teachability of a subject, how difficult it is to learn to use geometry, how difficult it is to understand second degree equations. We call it in Finnish education, it's didactics. We train subject teachers to teach maths – they see the child from that perspective. You may have to change something, it's educability. There are objective constraints; we have socio-historical constraints – gender is one of these, class, social background and race of course or place of living – socio historical things which place you somewhere in time and place. Also the neuro system. (Professor 1)

According to this professor, the special education system has been effective, but too many pupils were referred to special education and change was thus prompted by the need to make such decisions more 'official'. It was proving costly and he felt that general classroom teachers might not be doing as much as might be expected of them to meet the needs of all their pupils. It was thus deemed necessary to put more responsibility on these teachers. He referred to the 'huge increase' in the number of pupils accessing special education: up to 30 per cent between integrated and segregated special education. However, he emphasised that the 'treatment times' may be short. He said: 'We have estimated during the nine first years or grades (age seven to 15) at least 35 per cent of children receive some kind of support, be it called special education or part-time or whatever'. He also said:

I have calculated that the treatment times that many of them are in remedial or part-time education for is at least two years – that's my guess, so they are not only there at grade 1, they are there for at least two grades. However, there is about 20 per cent or something who receive less than 10 lessons, that is concluded from these statistics. Nowadays they are now included but there used to be a period when the official statistics cut off those who were receiving less than 10 hours during the previous year. Therefore based in these figures I think there is a distribution, the treatment times is the distribution where some 20 per cent receive less than 10 hours and some, I don't know this is my guess, 5 per cent are there in every year during the basic education – I think that is the case and then maybe 5 per cent, that's my guess – most of them receive more than 10 hours for less than 2 years. A few could be struggling with a particular topic in maths, get some help, say in trigonometry, that problem gets sorted and that's it. (Professor 1)

A professor reported that segregated special education classes were not as common as they had been. However, she felt that the new system would reduce the number of special schools, but possibly increase the number of special education classes although pupils would not be confined to these classes full-time.

I think they are more and more, the number is going up. If special schools close, you will have more special classes so some students who were in special schools, will be in special classes in mainstream schools and spend some of their time in mainstream classes They are using those systems very effectively so that students from the junior classes can go to special education classrooms during the day. (Professor 2)

She reported there were special classes in mainstream schools attended only by children with autistic spectrum disorders. Special units existed for reading and special language classes, as well as special classes for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. She did not regard the behaviour support units as effective:

I think they are going there for years! And I think that's our main problem, actually I don't think it is a good system, now that I know that the whole system. I think one of our problems is even if they have social and emotional behavioural needs, they are just put there with all the children having the same kind of problems. They need to learn about how to socialise with other students ... I think the municipalities and we also are trying to find new methods to handle that. (Professor 2)

5.5 External Support

The educational psychologist visits the English schools only three or four times each year, because they are regarded as schools with low level need, whereas other large schools might receive 25 or 30 visits annually. The psychologist works with pupils, class teacher and parents and provides suggestions for school staff regarding particular pupils. Assessments consist mostly of observations and examination of pupils' work, but not a lot of cognitive assessment. There is a less emphasis on assessment and diagnosis than heretofore:

Regardless of labels, you don't need a label – the child is not learning to read, you put in whatever is needed to get that child reading. That has been a huge shift, not necessarily for us as teachers but for parents because a lot of parents think well are they dyslexic, that's the difficulty. If they get this label, it is going to change them and it has been a very long process to convince them that, actually no, what we're doing in class is the most important thing, how they support them at home is the most important thing, the label isn't the most important thing. (SENCO 2)

The SENCO reported that the educational psychologist from the local authority will usually only become involved in cases of suspected autistic spectrum disorder or severe behavioural difficulties. Due to their workload, psychologists do not usually get involved in referrals such as specific learning disabilities or mild general learning disabilities. If psychological intervention is required in these cases, the pupil will be referred to an agency for an assessment, but the school must pay for this out of the school budget though this is not a private agency but is part of the local authority.

One Finnish participant thought the developments in special education there, with a shift in emphasis from psychological to pedagogical assessment and review, would change the role of education psychologists. It would become more preventative and also focus more on group work, the classroom atmosphere and the relationships between teacher and students, with less emphasis on testing. 'But again the psychologists are afraid to lose some of the power and teachers might not want it if we start giving it to them' (Professor 2). However, she said the role of the educational psychologist, at least in the biggest cities, has previously been somewhat consultative in that they are available to answer questions from teachers and the Student Welfare Group has been in place where teachers can ask questions of the psychologist and discuss problems in that context.

Behavioural difficulties were more of a challenge in one English school than in the other and occasionally led to pupil exclusions. The head teacher reported that early intervention at age six or seven prevents problems from becoming more serious when the pupils get older. It may require inputs from behaviour specialists or from the autism outreach team, depending on the underlying condition. A system is in place in which a head teacher can bring a case of a challenging pupil to an external pupil referral meeting. The local authority behaviour management team and other head teachers would attend as well as a representative from an excluded pupil unit. The team suggest strategies which the school implements and the case is discussed at a meeting six weeks later. If the strategies fail, a teacher from the behaviour support team visits the school, conducts observations and works with the class teacher and teaching assistant in designing a six-week intervention. A teaching assistant from the behaviour support team visits the school weekly to monitor progress. Again, if the intervention fails, the pupil is at risk of exclusion. The behaviour team do not liaise with the family. This is the head teacher's task. If exclusion results, it could be a managed move to another school or to a referral unit for a limited period before placement in another school.

Head Teacher 1 felt the school teachers did feel competent to meet pupil demands though she would have liked more support from external agencies to ensure they were meeting the needs of pupils with the most complex needs. Advisory services and outreach teams operate especially for emotional behavioural difficulties, but apparently these are being reduced due to financial cutbacks. There is an autism outreach team which is 'very active with our autistic children and they give us a great amount of support and I think they are a really good service'. There is a special school adjacent to one primary school (2), though it is under completely separate management. However there are links between the two with pupils from the special school included in PE classes and some mainstream pupils visiting the special school. Staff in the latter also provide consultative outreach services to the mainstream school, especially for behaviour management and ASD. This is a relatively recent development. The SENCO (2) believes there is still a need for special schools 'as there are still some needs which are too great to be met in a mainstream school', but with the proviso that inclusion should be the aim where at all possible. She stated that no pupil can be refused admission to the primary school on the grounds of disability or complexity of need, because it would be in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Within the Finnish system, while special schools may act as resource centres for mainstream schools, there is no dual enrolment of pupils or dual deployment of staff between the two school types.

5.6 Summary

Interviews conducted with educators in England and Finland revealed interesting differences between the two education systems, most notably in relation to the roles of personnel within the SEN system. The role of SENCO is well formalised in English schools with a literacy and a numeracy co-ordinator in each school. Neither of the two English schools visited had a specialist SEN teacher despite having significant numbers of children with special educational needs and even a small number with statements. In contrast, specialist qualifications would be highly prioritised for teachers of pupils with special needs within the Finnish system. As in Finland, there is considerable emphasis on early identification and intervention in the English schools, preferably without having to resort to securing diagnostic labels, and there is a common desire to separate assessment and resource allocation procedures. The devolution of budgetary decision-making to schools was evident in both English schools.

Differentiation of the school curriculum is the starting point of SEN provision in English schools. Management personnel from both expressed full confidence in their teachers' ability to differentiate the curriculum, which is delivered at three, sometimes five, different levels within the classroom. This confidence comes from the significant amount of peer review and observation of classroom teaching by SENCOs and by senior management that is common practice in English schools. Likewise, in Finland, the need for the mainstream classroom teacher to differentiate the curriculum is prioritised in meeting the needs of pupils who experience difficulties and there is, at once, considerable autonomy and responsibility accorded to the class teacher. The system is also characterised by a culture of significant peer review. Early, systemic preventative intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy are favoured, with a view to pre-empting difficulties at a later stage, in both jurisdictions.

6: Findings: National Surveys

This chapter presents findings from the three surveys – primary, post-primary and special schools – which were conducted from mid-October to early December 2011. A few caveats must be noted, however. The first relates to the sample. The methodology chapter (4) states that final samples for analysis represent 8.2 per cent of all schools nationally: 5.6 per cent (n=179) of primary schools, 15 per cent (n=107) of post-primary schools and 35 per cent (n=45) of special schools. Despite the low primary response rate in particular, that sample still represents almost two-thirds of the original target number of such schools. As with the other samples, it is broadly representative of the population of schools in terms of key characteristics of gender composition, school type, size, location and region (see Chapter 4). A second caveat is the variation in numbers responding to individual questionnaire items within each survey. Responses are calculated on the basis of the valid numbers responding to each item.

Our description of the findings starts with key school information from respondents in section one of the questionnaires in each sample followed by data from the other three sections: resource application / allocation, resource deployment and impact of deployment. Where possible, relevant comparisons are drawn across the three school types. Finally, readers should note that all questionnaire items with number and frequency of responses for each sample can be viewed in appendices 22, 23 and 25.

6.1 Schools

6.1.1 Mainstream School Characteristics and SEN Provision

Table 6.1 shows, not unexpectedly given the difference in school sizes, that the average numbers of pupils with low and high incidence disability are much higher in post-primary than primary schools. The percentage ratio of pupils with a high as opposed to low incidence disability is 11.3: 7.1 in primary and 28.2:12.7 in post-primary. Thus, the latter have a much higher ratio of high to low incidence pupils than do primary schools, reflecting the influence of the general allocation model (GAM) at primary (pupils do not need to be formally diagnosed under the GAM).

Table 6.1: Mainstream Primary and Post-primary Schools: Pupils, Teachers and SNAs

Variables	Primary N=178		Post-primary N=107	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
N teachers in school (FTEs)	11.56	9.01	36.31	19.42
N pupils with a high incidence disability	11.31	14.94	28.15	24.87
N pupils with a low incidence disability	7.1	6.8	12.73	12.76
N additional resource teaching hours allocated to school for this academic year	19.01	20.49	60.97	46.94
N SNAs deployed in school during this academic year (FTEs)	2.73	2.93	3.61	3.64
N teachers predominantly involved in teaching pupils with SEN (i.e. >=70 per cent of their time)	3.01 (30.6%)	2.15 (21.2%)	3.29 (11.2%)	3.07 (16.4%)
N teachers (FTEs) with qualifications in SEN*	0.99 (9.2%)	1.40 (13.8%)	2.44 (7.5%)	2.09 (8.2%)

FTE = Full-time equivalent: * completed a full-time postgraduate course in SEN

The number of additional resource teaching hours deployed reflects the school size difference in the two mainstream surveys; in primary schools the mean number of additional resource hours is 19.01 per school while the equivalent at post-primary is 60.97. A breakdown of these data by school size showed the difference was most significant for schools with 200 to 500 pupils where the average number of resources hours is 63.12 in post-primary and 26.05 in primary schools. However, no firm conclusions can be drawn from this comparison given the wide range of the 201 to 500 category and the likelihood that many more primary than post-primary schools fall in the lower end of this category. It is also important to note here that GAM hours are not quantified whereas resource teacher hours are. Because of the lack of a GAM at post-primary (until 2012), those with high incidence at this level receive a quantum of hours based on a diagnosis. Therefore it is easy to quantify whereas this is not possible for the GAM. This could also contribute to the difference.

The fifth row of data in Table 6.1, shows that the mean number of SNAs deployed in schools was 2.73 in primary (SD=2.93) and 3.61 in post-primary (SD=3.64). This may be considered surprising given the larger numbers of pupils in post-primary. But it may be that the care needs of some children diminish as they advance through the school system. Pearson correlations between selected school level variables confirm a strong relationship between the number of SNAs in a school (primary and post-primary) and the number of low incidence disabilities in that school ($r=.79$).

Data presented in Table 6.1 for the average percentage of teachers predominantly involved in teaching pupils with special educational needs (≥ 70 per cent of their time) show that at primary the percentage is 30.6 per cent while at post-primary it is only 11.2 per cent. A t-test shows this difference to be statistically significant ($t(226.6)=8.21$, $p<.001$). Given that there is only one class teacher in primary school but several different subject teachers at post-primary, this is probably not surprising. However, looking at this finding in combination with the differences in SNA support, it is clear there are more SNAs and more specialist teachers per capita in primary than in post-primary schools.

Respondents were asked how many teachers in their schools had specialist qualifications in SEN. This was calculated as a percentage of the total number of teachers. Results show that the mean percentages of teachers with specialist qualifications are 9.2 per cent for primary and 7.49 per cent for post-primary; the difference was not statistically significant.

6.1.2 Special Classes in Mainstream Schools

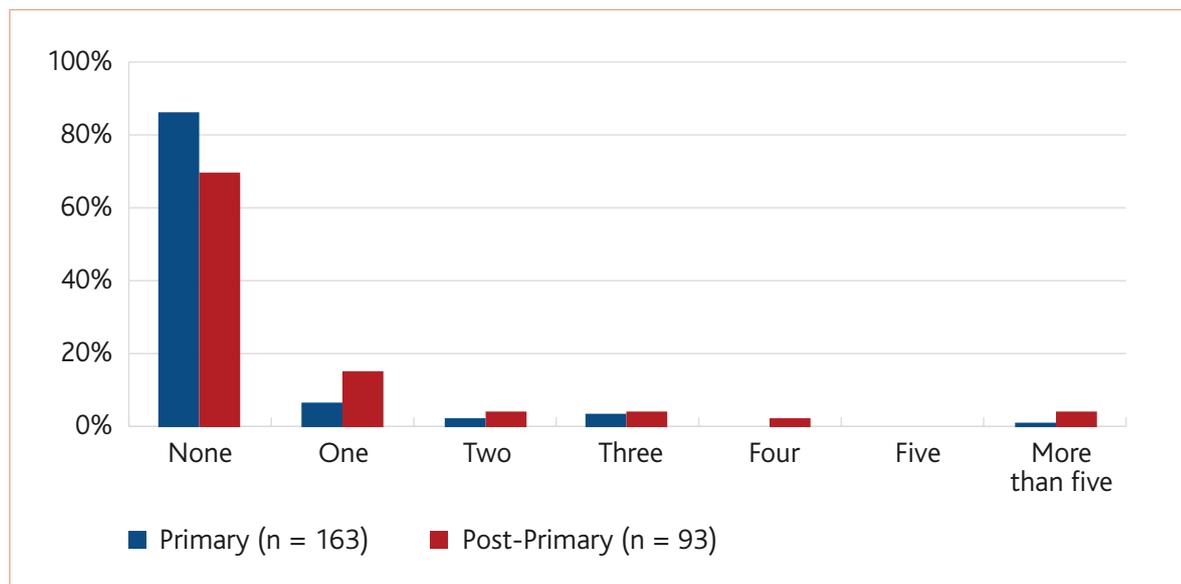
A special class is defined as one officially sanctioned by the DES or NCSE, with a specific pupil teacher ratio and designated for a category of disability. A special class can include children within a wide age range (NCSE, 2011; Ware *et al*, 2009). The NCSE policy advice on special schools and classes (NCSE, 2011: p40) indicate that nationally a total of 503 special classes are in place. At primary 430 are attached to 264 schools (8 per cent of all such schools) and these have a pupil enrolment of about 2,631 pupils. At post-primary 73 are attached to 61 schools (about 10 per cent of such schools nationally) and these special classes cater for 369 students.

Schools may use resource hours to set up what may be termed unofficial special classes for students who would benefit from placement in a smaller class. These are also usually called base classes. The NCSE (2011: p57) points out that schools are entitled to deploy resource hours allocated in this manner and that establishing them is in line with official DES policy. Ware *et al's* (2009: p161) study of special schools and classes reported that there were 'schools, other than those which have officially been allocated special classes, attempting to cater for the needs of children with SEN at post-primary level through the organisation of special classes'. These unofficial special classes catered for a wide range of ages, and most covered only the junior cycle at post-primary. Pupils were in them as a consequence of assessments, exam scores (often from internal exams), parental wishes, specific literacy or numeracy difficulties, as well as behavioural difficulties (Ware *et al*, 2009: p159-160). The most common special need catered for in these special classes was MGLD.

6.1.2.1 Official special classes in mainstream sample

Figure 6.1 below shows that 14.1 per cent (n=23) of the primary sample had at least one official special class in their schools compared to 20.2 per cent (n=28) of the post-primary sample. In addition, post-primary schools were more likely to have more than one official special class: 10.8 per cent of the post-primary sample had three or more compared to 4.9 per cent of the primary sample. Comparing these data to the national NCSE (2011) figures above it would appear that post-primary schools with special classes were more likely to respond to our survey than those without, i.e. the post-primary sample is over-representative in terms of schools with official special classes.

Figure 6.1: Mainstream schools: how many official designated special classes or units are in your school?



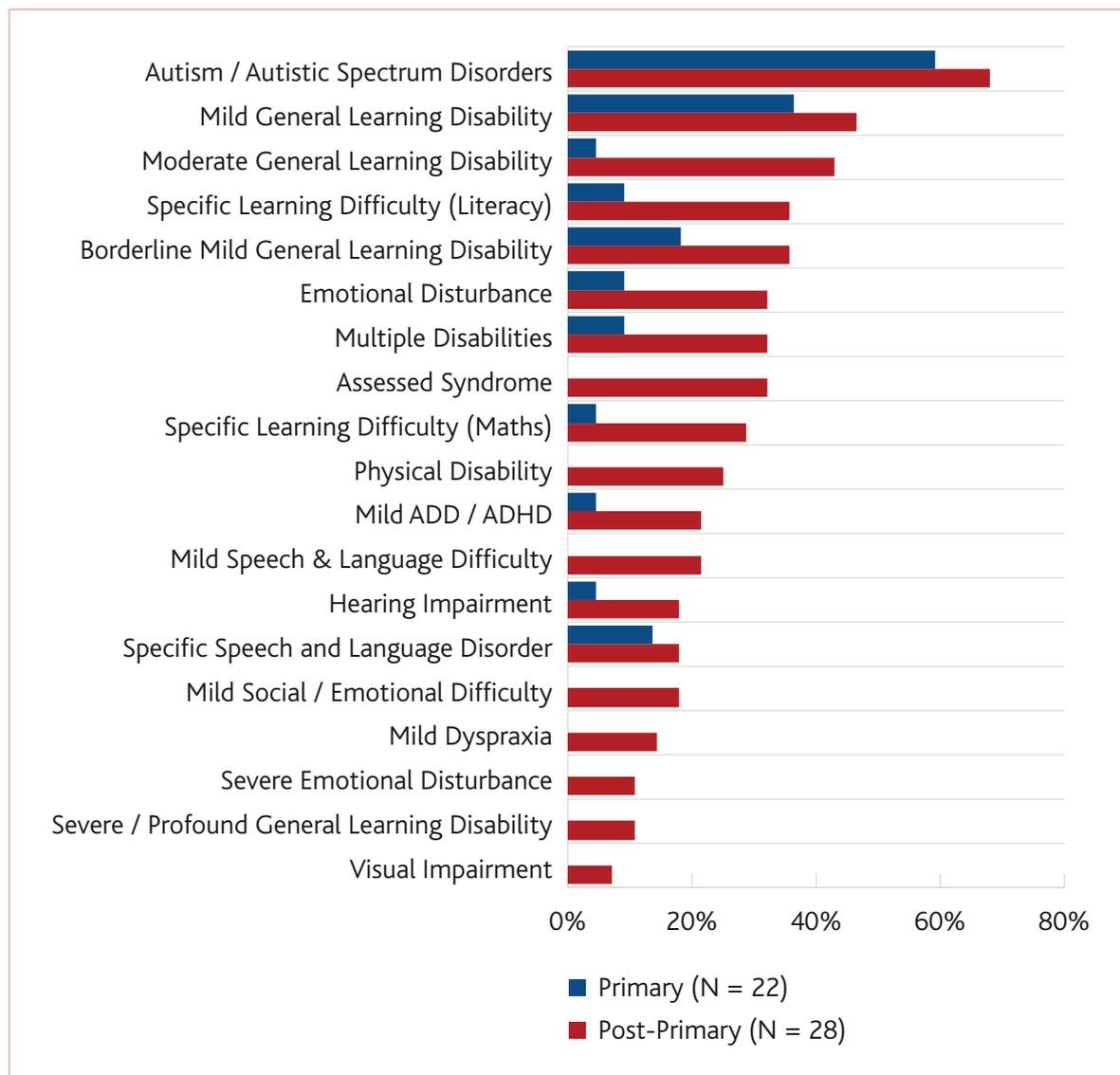
Using pre-defined school size categories, the findings show that most primary (76.2 per cent; n=12) and post-primary (71 per cent; n=22) official special classes have fewer than nine pupils. Unusually, one primary and one post-primary respondent reported having an official special class with more than 15 pupils – the highest pupil teacher ratio for a special class should be 11: 1.

In a subsequent item respondents were asked to select from a list the different types of disabilities represented in their official special classes. Figure 6.2 gives a breakdown of these disabilities by school type. ASD was the most commonly reported SEN (59.1 per cent respondents; n=13) in the 22 primary schools with official special classes who responded to this item. ASD was also the most frequently reported category of SEN in special classes in the post-primary survey. Nineteen of 28 (67.9 per cent) official special classes in the post-primary sample included students with ASD. The predominance of ASD in special classes reflects the national situation where 49 per cent of special classes at primary and 70 per cent at post-primary are designated for students with ASD (NCSE, 2011: p40).

Pupils with MGLD were in 36.4 per cent of primary school special classes and pupils with borderline MGLD in 18.2 per cent of these classes (n=4). The proportions of classes having these same SENs at post-primary are higher: MGLD (46.4 per cent classes), moderate GLD (42.9 per cent), borderline MGLD (35.7 per cent) and SLD (literacy) (35.7 per cent).

Primary school pupils with other types of special educational needs are not commonly found in official special classes. However, as Figure 6.2 shows substantial numbers of other disabilities are represented in official post-primary special classes. Students with emotional disturbance are represented in 42.8 per cent (n=12) of post-primary classes, three of these having students with severe emotional disturbance.

Figure 6.2: Mainstream schools: types of special educational needs catered for in official designated special classes or units



Between 22 and 30 per cent of post-primary special classes (Figure 6.2) also had children with the following: an assessed syndrome, multiple disabilities, specific learning difficulties in maths. Others recorded in fewer than 22 per cent of post-primary special classes were in order of frequency: mild speech and language difficulties, mild ADD / ADHD, specific speech and language disorder, hearing impairment, mild SEBD, mild dyspraxia, severe / profound GLD and visual impairment.

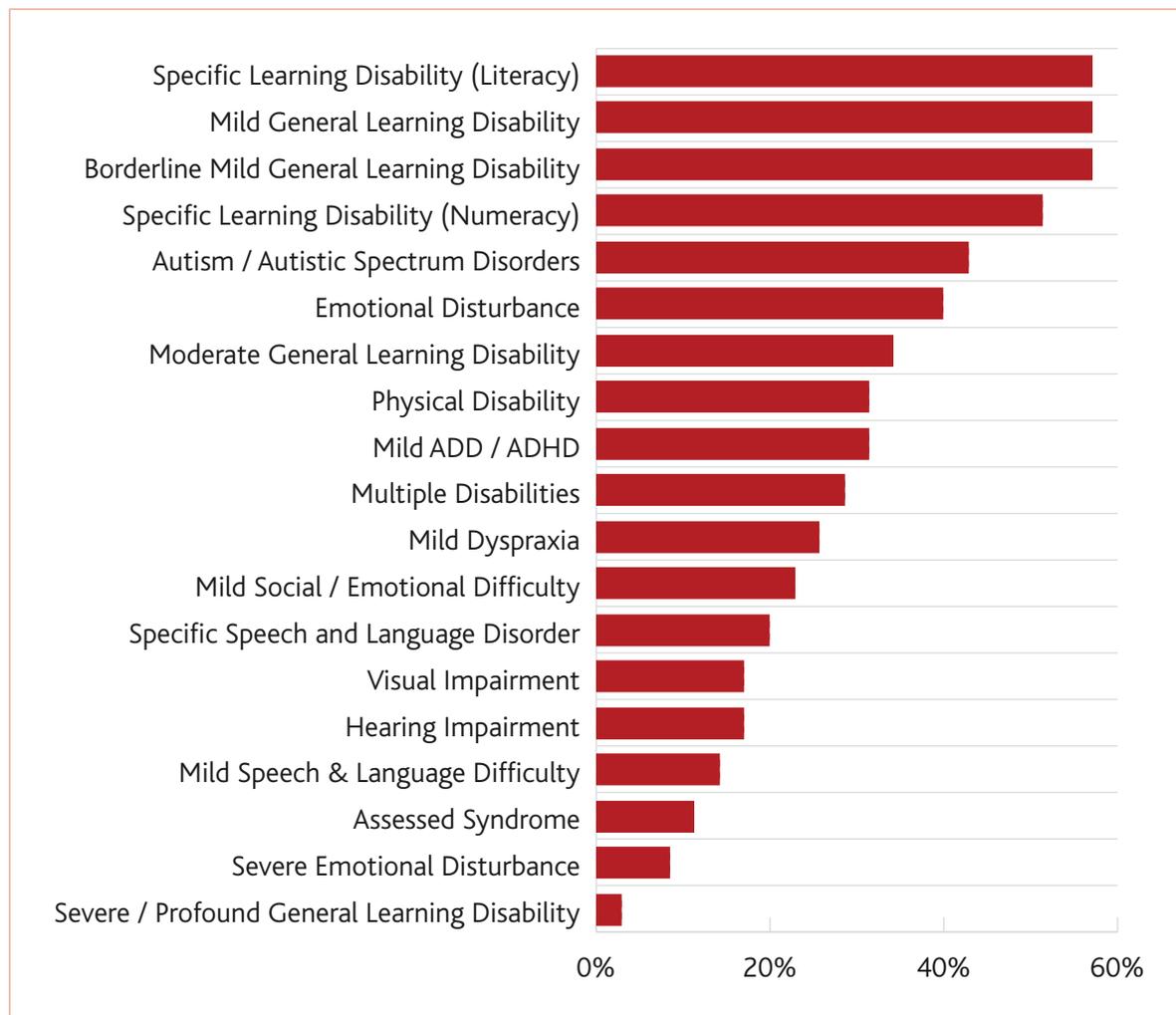
6.1.2.2 Unofficial special classes in mainstream sample

Post-primary respondents reported much higher proportions of unofficial special classes in their schools than primary school respondents. Only 3.3 per cent (n=5) of the primary sample had unofficial special classes: three schools had one and two schools each had two. Equivalent data for the post-primary sample provided in Figure 6.3 show 41 per cent (n=34) of those responding have one or more such classes. Notably, 13.3 per cent (n=11) had more than five. Most (n=25) of these unofficial special classes have fewer than nine pupils (44.4 per cent with < 6; 25 per cent with 6-9).

Comments elicited from respondents on this item yielded additional information on the nature of unofficial / base special classes but also for timetabling arrangements that are regularly put in place in post-primary for delivery of learning support hours for small groups on a withdrawal basis:

- Literacy classes.
- Numeracy and maths classes.
- English classes.
- A mix of special educational needs students.
- Formed for students with unassessed disabilities such as EBD.
- Individual / small group (four) classes.
- Nurture group.
- Junior Certificate Schools' Programme (JCSP) classes.
- Learning support classes.
- More groups than classes.
- Classes take place when Irish is being taught.
- Tutorial class set up opposite French / Spanish class.
- Used for students who lost resource hours

Figure 6.3: Mainstream – Post-primary schools: types of special educational needs catered for in unofficial special classes (n=35)



Respondents were asked to provide data on the types of SEN found in these classes. Due to the small numbers of unofficial classes in primary, Figure 6.3 shows the results for the relevant post-primary sub-sample only (n=35). The most common SENs reported were borderline MGLD, MGLD, specific learning disability (literacy) (57.1 per cent) followed by specific learning disability (numeracy) (51.4 per cent), autism / ASD, emotional disturbance, moderate GLD, mild ADD / ADHD, physical disabilities (30-43 per cent of schools). The following categories of SEN were noted by fewer than 30 per cent (n=10) of respondents: multiple disabilities, mild social emotional difficulty, specific speech and language disorder, mild dyspraxia, visual / hearing impairment, mild speech and language disorders, assessed syndrome and severe / profound learning disability.

6.1.2.3 Students with SEN in JCSP, LCA and FETAC classes in post-primary

Pringle (2008, cited in Ware *et al*, 2009: p53), who conducted a study focusing on school completion for pupils who had attended a special class at primary level, found availability of programmes such as the JCSP¹¹ was an important factor in ensuring that they went on to achieve in post-primary. The three main curricular options available for students with MGLD at post-primary have been described by the SESS as JCSP, LCA¹² and FETAC foundation level courses¹³ (see SESS, 2012).

In the post-primary survey, information was collected on the distribution of students with special educational needs in each of the above three programmes (see appendix 23). Just over a quarter of respondents (n=24) reported having a JCSP in their schools. By far the most predominant SEN associated with these classes is general learning disabilities: an average of 12 students with GLDs per JCSP class. An average five students per class have specific learning disabilities, an average four have behavioural difficulties and an average two students in each class have specific language difficulties / autistic spectrum disorders.

Over a third (36 of 95) of the post-primary sample reported having a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in their schools. This provision matches closely DES 2009 / 10 data which show that 39.7 per cent of post-primary schools offer the LCA course (DES, Statistical Report 2009 / 2010). In all but one of the schools in our survey which offer the course, the programme is organised as a separate class. The most commonly reported SEN in LCA classes is GLD with an average of seven students with GLD in each class. This was followed by specific learning disabilities with an average four students per class and behavioural difficulties with an average three students per class. On average only one student with ASD is recorded for these LCA classes. Only one LCA class has more than 20 students. Of the remainder, 44.7 per cent have 16-20 pupils, 36.8 per cent have 10-15 and 15 per cent have fewer than ten.

Eighteen (of 95) post-primary respondents (19.1 per cent) reported that courses accredited by FETAC were available in their schools and that students in these programmes were organised in separate classes. Like LCA classes, most FETAC classes have more than ten students and GLD is the most common SEN with an average of four students with GLD per class. On average two students with behavioural difficulties are in FETAC classes. An average of one student per class is recorded in the case of the remaining disabilities: specific learning disabilities, specific language difficulty and ASD.

¹¹ The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is an intervention within the junior cycle aimed at students at risk of leaving school early, perhaps without completing the Junior Certificate. On completion of the junior cycle, JCSP students, like most other junior cycle students, receive a Junior Certificate that includes a list of the subjects taken and the grades achieved. In addition JCSP students also receive an individualised student profile. This is a profile of the skills, knowledge and achievements of each student. (DES, 2005, p13)

¹² The Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year programme for students who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes. Participants in the Leaving Certificate Applied are mainly engaged in work and study of an active, practical and learner-centred nature. (NCCA, 2012), http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Leaving_Certificate_Applied/

¹³ The FETAC courses are suitable for many students over 15 who may not be in a position to follow either the Junior Cert or LCA course. Foundation level courses may be suitable for students with MGLD. (SESS, 2012, Special Education Support Service: Information on Mild General Learning Disability. http://www.sess.ie/sites/all/modules/wysiwyg/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/Categories/ASD/8MGLD.pdf)

6.1.3 Special Schools: Characteristics and SEN Provision

Table 6.2 shows that the 45 respondents to the special school survey came from schools ranging in size from 6 to 142 pupils, with an average of 64 pupils (SD = 33.82). Data not shown in table form reveal that 13 per cent (n=6) of these special schools had over 100 pupils while 8.8 per cent (n=4) had fewer than 20. Teachers in these schools varied from one to 21 with a mean of 9.57 teachers per school. About four out of ten (43.48) special school teachers had a specialist qualification in SEN, a percentage substantially higher than that in mainstream schools.

Table 6.2: Special Schools: Pupils, Teachers and SNAs

Special School Survey	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
N class teachers in school	45	1	21	9.57	4.37
N pupils enrolled in school	45	6	142	64.29	33.82
SNAs allocated on class numbers	44	0	44	9.8	9.14
SNAs allocated to individuals	41	0	32	8.60	7.4
% teachers (FTEs) with qualifications in SEN*	42	–	–	43.48	25.61

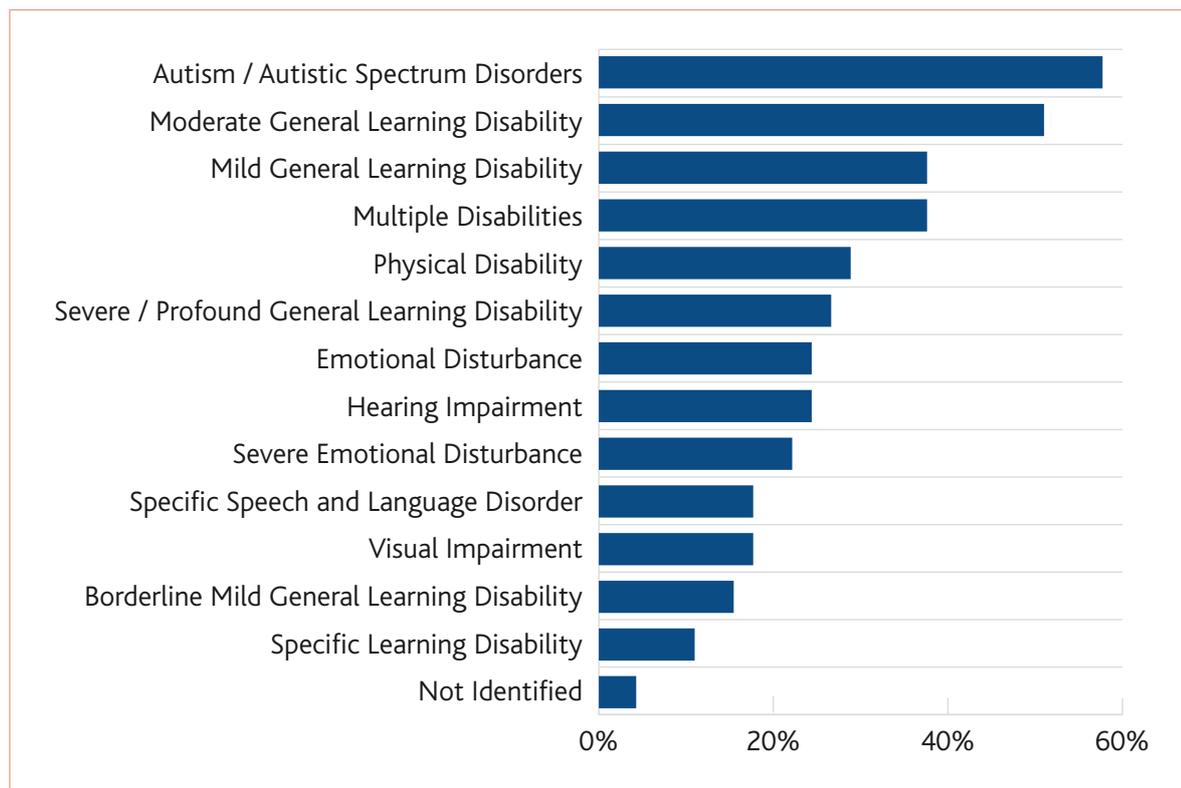
FTE = Full time equivalent: * completed a full-time postgraduate course in SEN.

The age ranges of pupils in special schools are set out in Table 6.3 below. All ages, up to age 19, are well represented in the sample schools. Only two schools have students over 19. An average of 9.8 SNAs (SD=9.14) are allocated on the basis of class numbers while an additional 8.6 SNAs (SD=8.6), on average, are allocated to individual pupils.

Table 6.3: Special Schools: Pupils' Age Range

Age Range	N=45	per cent
< 8 years	39	86.7%
9-12	41	91.1%
13-16	38	84.4%
16-19	33	73.3%
> 19 years	2	4.4%

Figure 6.4: Special schools: primary category of SEN of pupils attending



Special school respondents were asked to indicate the primary categories of SEN in their schools and the results are set out in Figure 6.4 above. The four most common (30-58 per cent of schools) were autism / ASD, moderate GLD, MGLD and multiple disabilities. Other categories listed were recorded for < 30 per cent of schools.

Special schools are designated primary but many provide post-primary programmes for older students (Ware *et al*, 2009: p121). Table 6.4 below shows the range of programmes available in the present survey and respondents’ perceptions of their suitability for students.

Table 6.4: Post-primary Programmes / Certifications Available to Students in Special Schools and their Perceived Suitability

Post-Primary Programmes	N	Very Suitable	Suitable	Unsuitable	Very Unsuitable
FETAC	32	78.1%	12.5%	9.4%	–
Junior Cert Foundation	19	36.8%	42.1%	10.5%	10.5%
Junior Cert Ordinary	14	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%
JCSP	13	53.8%	15.4%	15.4%	15.4%
Leaving Cert Foundation	7	–	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%
Leaving Cert Ordinary	6	–	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%
LCA	5	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	–
LCVP	4	–	–	50.0%	50.0%
Other	7	42.9%	42.9%	14.3%	–

The most widely used post-primary programme is FETAC, reported as available by 80 per cent (n=32) of respondents and considered suitable by 90.6 per cent of these. The Junior Certificate Foundation and the Junior Certificate Ordinary are reported available in 19 and 14 respectively of special schools and considered suitable by about seven out of ten respondents (78.9 per cent; 71.5 per cent). The JCSP, available in 13 schools, was also rated suitable by seven out of ten respondents. However, the various Leaving Certificate programmes (foundation, ordinary, applied, vocational programme) are used only in a minority (< 7) of the special schools and are generally considered unsuitable for students.

Separation of primary and post-primary education in special schools

Separate primary and post-primary programmes are provided in 34.9 per cent (n=15) of the special schools. Those with this provision were asked for their views on how the post-primary section is organised. Of the 13 who responded, all report the length of the school day is the same as at primary while 91.7 per cent (n=11) report that the length of the school year is the same. Only in the case of three schools are the subject options and subject teacher choices reported as organised in the same way as in mainstream post-primary (appendix 25, Q10).

Table 6.5: Special Schools: Should the School be Separated into Primary and Second-level?

Response	N	per cent
Yes	25	58.1%
No	13	30.2%
No opinion	5	11.6%
Total	43	100%

Respondents were also asked if the school should be separated into primary and post-primary. Table 6.5 shows that while most (58.1 per cent) agreed they should be separate, 30.2 per cent believed the reverse while 11.6 per cent had no opinion. Table 6.6 indicates that respondents were divided in their views on whether the second-level section should be organised on the same basis as other such schools. In general, however, only

slightly more respondents (> 57 per cent) believed they should be different in terms of length of school day, school year, subject options, than those who suggested they should be the same. Note, however, the small numbers responding to these items (n=21-22).

Table 6.6: Special Schools: Should Second-Level Section be Organised on the Same Basis as Other Second-Level Schools?

Should be...	...same	...different	N
Length of school day	36.4%	63.6%	22
Length of school year	42.9%	57.1%	21
Subject options	42.9%	57.1%	21
Subject teachers	50.0%	50.0%	22

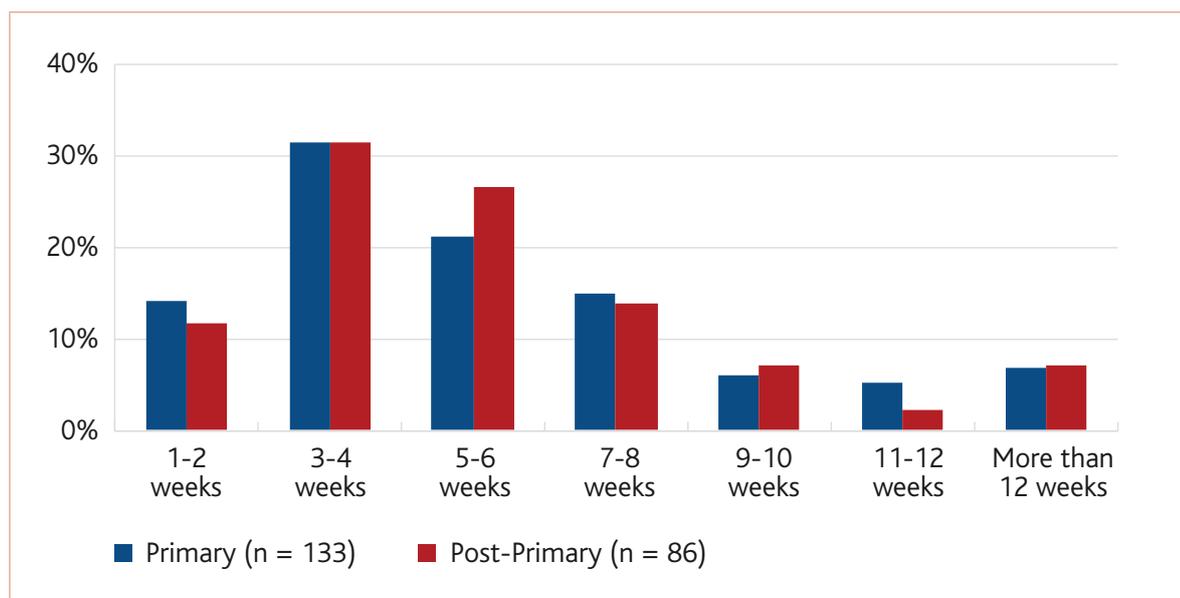
6.2 Resource Application and Allocation

In this section, the various aspects of the resource application and allocation process are examined. As the number responding to each questionnaire item in this section varies, the reader should refer to the total n noted in each chart or refer to relevant appendices (22, 23, 25).

6.2.1 Wait Time from Application to Allocation

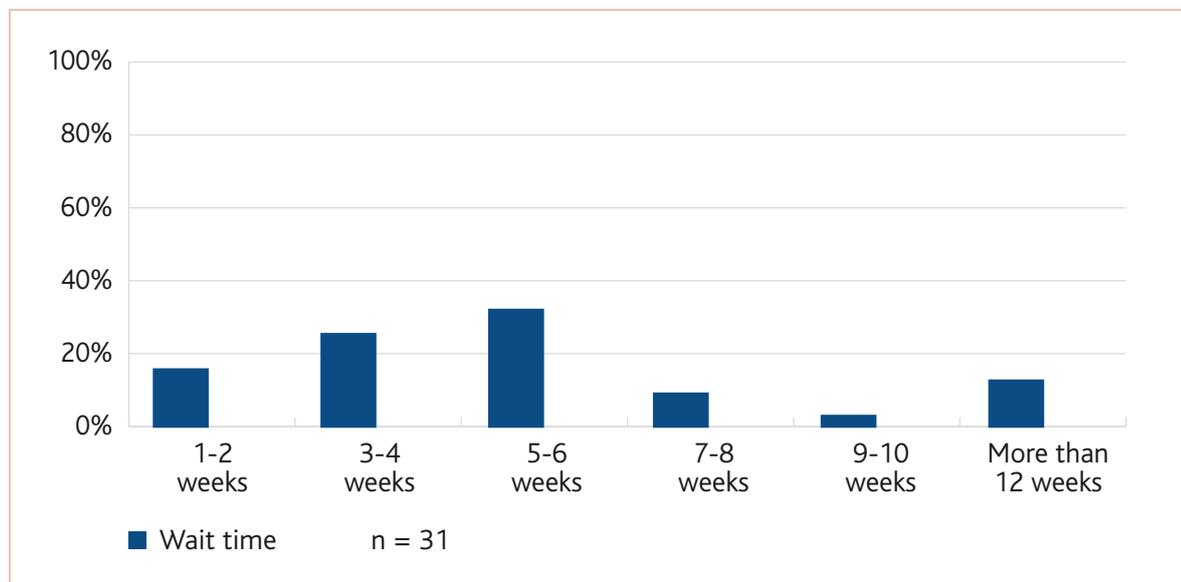
Figure 6.5 below shows the average waiting times between application to the SENO for additional resources and sanctioning of same in mainstream schools.

Figure 6.5: Mainstream schools: average waiting time between application to the SENO / NCSE for additional resources, such as additional resource teaching hours and the sanctioning of such support



The typical waiting time for primary and post-primary combined is three to four weeks (31.4 per cent of schools) or five to six weeks (26.7 per cent). Long wait times of > 12 weeks are reported by only 7 per cent of schools while short wait times were reported by 11.6 per cent of schools. As Figure 6.5 illustrates, these proportions are relatively similar across the two types of schools.

Figure 6.6: Special schools: average waiting time between application to the SENO / NCSE for class teachers and SNA support and the sanctioning of that support

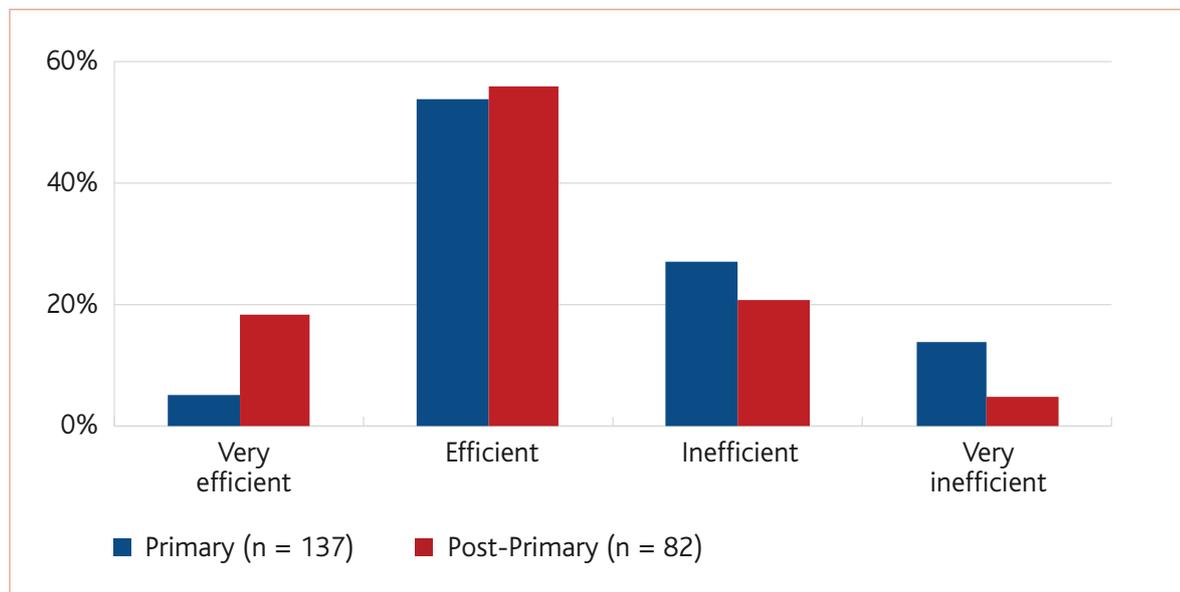


Just 31 special school respondents provided information on the average waiting time between application to the SENO / NCSE for additional resource, such as class teachers and SNA support, and the sanctioning of that support. Figure 6.6 shows that for 41.9 per cent, the waiting time is four weeks or shorter. About a third (32.3 per cent) wait five to six weeks, 12.9 per cent wait seven to ten weeks while 12.9 per cent (n=4) report waiting more than 12 weeks. Thus for up to three-quarters of the special schools responding the waiting time is under six weeks. Taken together, these findings confirm that the NCSE is largely succeeding in its aim to process applications within six to eight weeks across all three school types.

6.2.2 Efficiency of Application System

Efficiency ratings for the application system shown in Figure 6.7 indicate that 74.4 per cent of post-primary respondents consider the system efficient (56.1 per cent 'efficient'; 18.3 per cent 'very efficient').

Figure 6.7: Mainstream schools: how efficient do you find the current system of application for additional resources?



The corresponding percentage at primary is lower at 59.1 per cent (5.1 per cent 'very efficient'; 54 per cent 'efficient'); 40.9 per cent of primary school respondents rate the system as inefficient (13.9 per cent 'very inefficient'). Participants were asked to elaborate on their responses to this item and about a quarter did so. A content analysis shows the most common themes relate to the bureaucratic nature of the application process and the role of SENOs.

- Paperwork and time consuming nature of process (n=9).
- Long wait time from application to approval (n=4).
- Praise for efficiency and support of SENOs (n=7).
- SENOs differ – some efficient / supportive, others not (n=2).
- Heavy workload of SENOs (n=3).
- Absence of SENOs (sickness, etc) (n=3).
- Views and opinions of professionals and parents often ignored in process (n=3).

Despite criticism of the paperwork involved, responses to another item (Appendices 22 and 23: Q2.03) show a high percentages of respondents believe the documentation required to support applications is 'appropriate' (79.4 per cent primary; 91.6 per cent post-primary). About 14 per cent wrote comments on this item. Many issues raised mirrored those noted above on the system's efficiency: too much paperwork, time consuming process, delays in accessing necessary reports etc. Among the suggestions to improve the process was better communication between professionals.

There should be more interaction between the school / medical professionals in the compiling of reports. Medical reports need to make clear diagnosis and recommendations – I was refused resource hours for emotional disturbance because X clinic didn't specify...

The impact of not getting appropriate documentation together in a timely fashion is illustrated in the following comment:

Just now I'm dealing with a situation where a child is proving to be a serious danger to other children in the school and also staff, but because it is not on paper that he has a behavioural problem we are left to cope on our own...

Further insights into the time-consuming aspect of the process are gained from responses to other related items. In the first of these, respondents were asked to indicate how time-consuming the application process was in terms of completing documentation (Appendices 22 and 23). Once again the responses are remarkably consistent across school types with 58.4 per cent of 137 primary school respondents and 54.7 per cent of 86 post-primary respondents reporting it was 'time consuming' while an additional 35 per cent and 39.5 per cent respectively consider the process 'very time consuming'. About 10 per cent of primary school respondents and 18 per cent of post-primary elaborated on their responses. The following comments illustrate the extent of the work involved in the application process and the impact it has on the person with responsibility for SEN co-ordination.

About 60 per cent at least of my time goes on Special Ed. (435 pupils in school) (Post-primary respondent)

Very time-consuming when coupled with requests from HSE to fill out forms. Meeting with parents / obtaining consent each step of the process – all very time-consuming. (Primary respondent)

SEN applications consume the majority of my spare time especially in the first and last two months of the school year (Primary)

It is the most frustrating element of my job (Post primary)

Figure 6.8: Special schools: how efficient do you find the current system of application for resources?

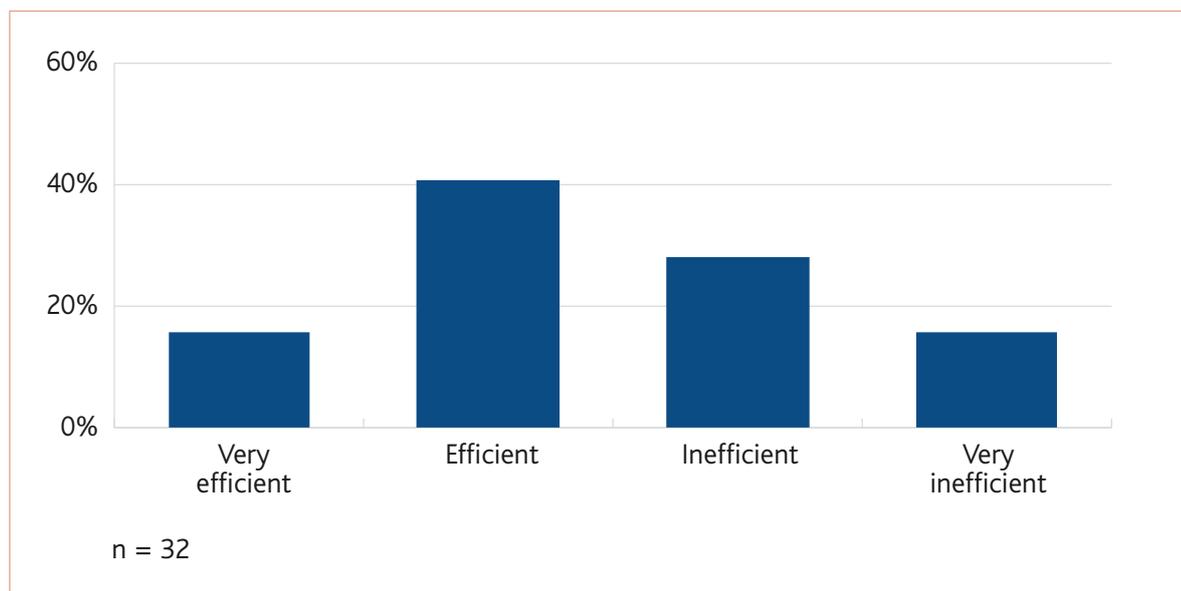


Figure 6.8 shows that just over half (56.2 per cent) of 32 special school respondents rate as efficient the current system of application for resources; however, this also means that a substantial minority (43.7 per cent) consider it to be inefficient. This disparity is also reflected in responses to the item on how appropriate documentation required to support applications for resources is. While 52.9 per cent (of the 34 responding to this item) rated it appropriate, 47.1 per cent believe it is inappropriate. Like their mainstream counterparts a large majority (88.6 per cent) of the total of 35 special school respondents agree that the documentation aspect of the process is time consuming, with 28.6 per cent of these rating it as 'very time-consuming'.

6.2.3 The Role of the NCSE and the SENO

Notwithstanding these criticisms of the current system, 80.5 per cent (n=66) of post-primary respondents agreed the system had improved (19.5 per cent reported 'very improved') since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of SENOs. While most (62.5 per cent; n=81) primary school respondents reported an improvement, the percentage is lower than for post-primary; 17.8 per cent (n=23) believe it has disimproved since the establishment of the NCSE. It must be noted here that about a quarter of respondents did not answer this question at all (27.9 per cent at primary and 23.4 per cent at post-primary). An open ended item attached to this question yielded interesting elaborations, many of which echoed the comments expressed earlier. At primary level, 17 per cent of respondents commented in some way while at post-primary 13 per cent responded. A number of the respondents indicated they had no experience of the old system and hence could not make a valid judgement in relation to the item.

A main advantage of the new system was seen as its transparency and fairness in the application process etc.

Criteria are quite clear.

Criteria tightened up, process longer.

However, complaints about the paperwork, bureaucracy and its time-consuming nature re-emerged.

Another layer has been introduced, slowing down the process ... We need to be listened to more as class teachers at the coal face with the child's difficulties...

It requires more paper work now.

It is still very time-consuming and frustrating.

A common theme in comments on the current system relate to the role of the SENO, with positive and negative views expressed. Some views expressed identify positive as well as negative aspects in this regard.

In our experience, the system is clear and fair but it is dependent on a clear and fair SENO. Our SENO is good so that could be why our experience is good.

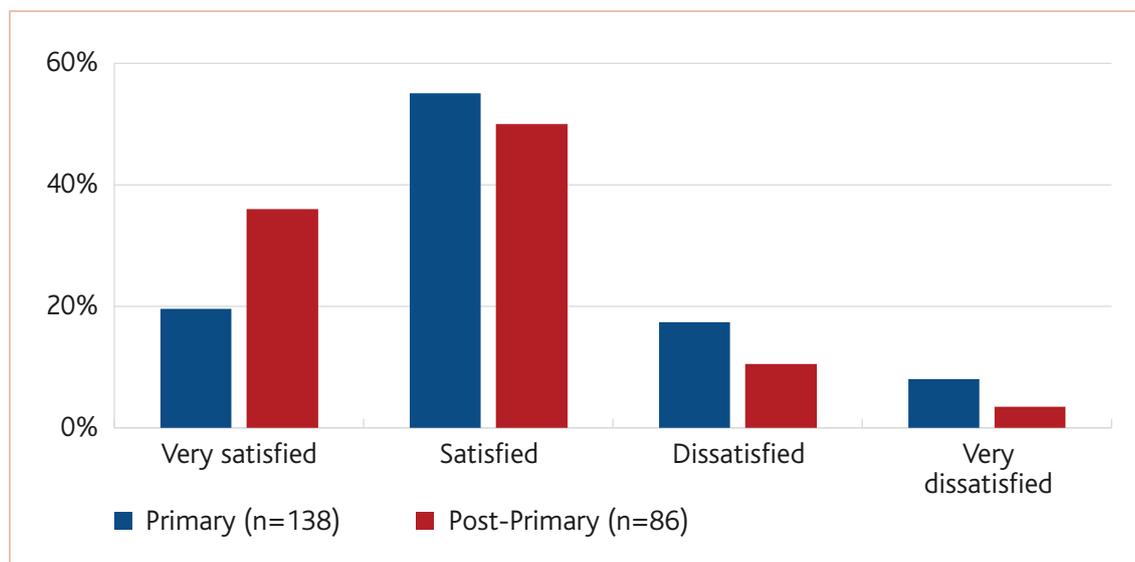
On some levels it has improved but the decision-making has now been removed to SENOs who have little or no experience of the reality in schools and are used by DES to make cuts even when they know themselves that there is a need for resources.

Other comments came down more strongly on one or other side of the argument:

There was a time when a professional report recommending resources was acted upon. There may have been a time delay but now we have unqualified people reassessing the child's needs in an ad hoc manner and generally watering down or dismissing the recommendations.

There's someone to talk to and less chance of paperwork going astray or just sitting on Department desks.

Figure 6.9: Mainstream schools: how satisfied are you with the role of the SENO in relation to your school?



Overall, however, satisfaction levels are high with the role of SENOs in mainstream primary schools. Figure 6.9 indicates that 74.7 per cent (n=103) of primary respondents are satisfied (19.6 per cent are 'very satisfied') while 86 per cent (n=74) of post-primary respondents were satisfied, 36 per cent 'very satisfied'. Seventeen per cent of teachers elaborated on their choices. In the main, comments described positive experiences of working with a SENO though some were negative on absent SENOs or workload issues. Below are a few examples of the views expressed:

We have developed a good relationship with our SENO.

The SENO was very helpful when we had to apply for resource hours for a child with autism who has since left the school. She was also very helpful when we had to deal with a troublesome SNA situation.

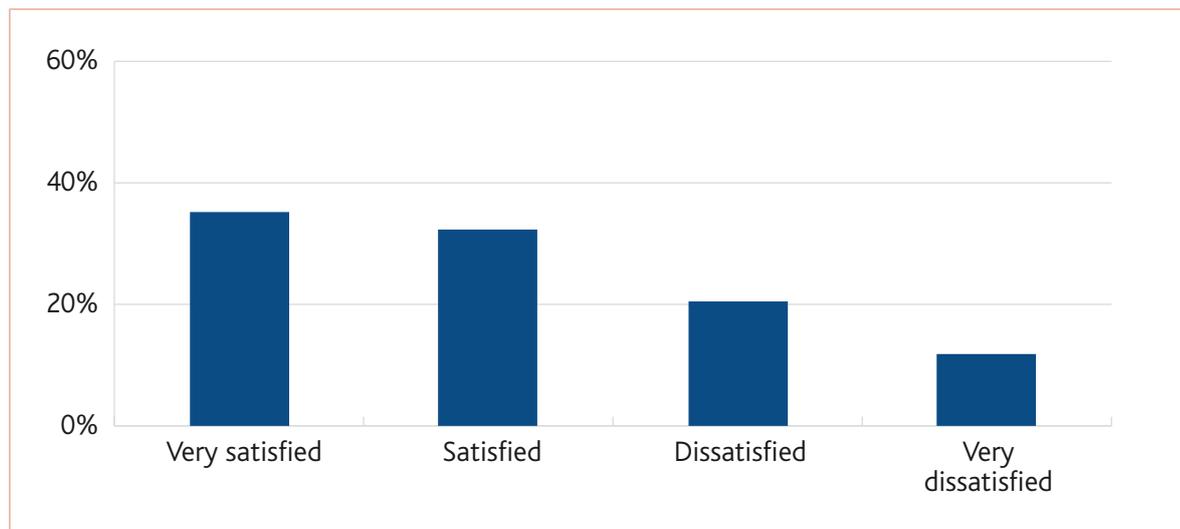
We are satisfied with the role of the SENO in relation to our school as far as the allocation of resources is concerned. However the time taken to put these resources in place is not satisfactory as the SENO has got such a large caseload.

She is most obliging but her workload is huge.

The individual SENO is helpful and efficient in the role but that role seems to have become reduced to sanction or otherwise of hours / SNA... Wasn't it intended that there would be an advisory and advocacy element as well.

There is no SENO in this region at the moment.

Figure 6.10: Special schools: how satisfied are you with the role of the SENO in relation to your school? (N=34)



Special school respondents were less likely than their mainstream counterparts to agree that the system of resource application has improved since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of SENOs. Slightly more of those answering this item believe it has 'disimproved' (56.7 per cent; n=17) than 'improved' (40 per cent; n=12). Despite this, as Figure 6.10 shows, 67.7 per cent of the special school respondents (n=23) overall are satisfied with the SENO role (35.3 per cent 'very satisfied'). About a third (32.4 per cent), however, are dissatisfied.

6.2.4 Allocation of Resource Hours in Mainstream Schools

Earlier we presented summary data (see Table 6.1) on the average number of additional resource hours allocated to primary and post-primary schools: an average of 18.98 at primary and 60.97 at post-primary. As indicated earlier, the number of additional resources is closely related to both school size and the presence of a GAM at primary (i.e. it is not possible to quantify hours for high incidence under the GAM at primary but it is at post-primary).

Figure 6.11: Mainstream schools: what is the total number of additional resource teaching hours allocated to your school for this academic year?

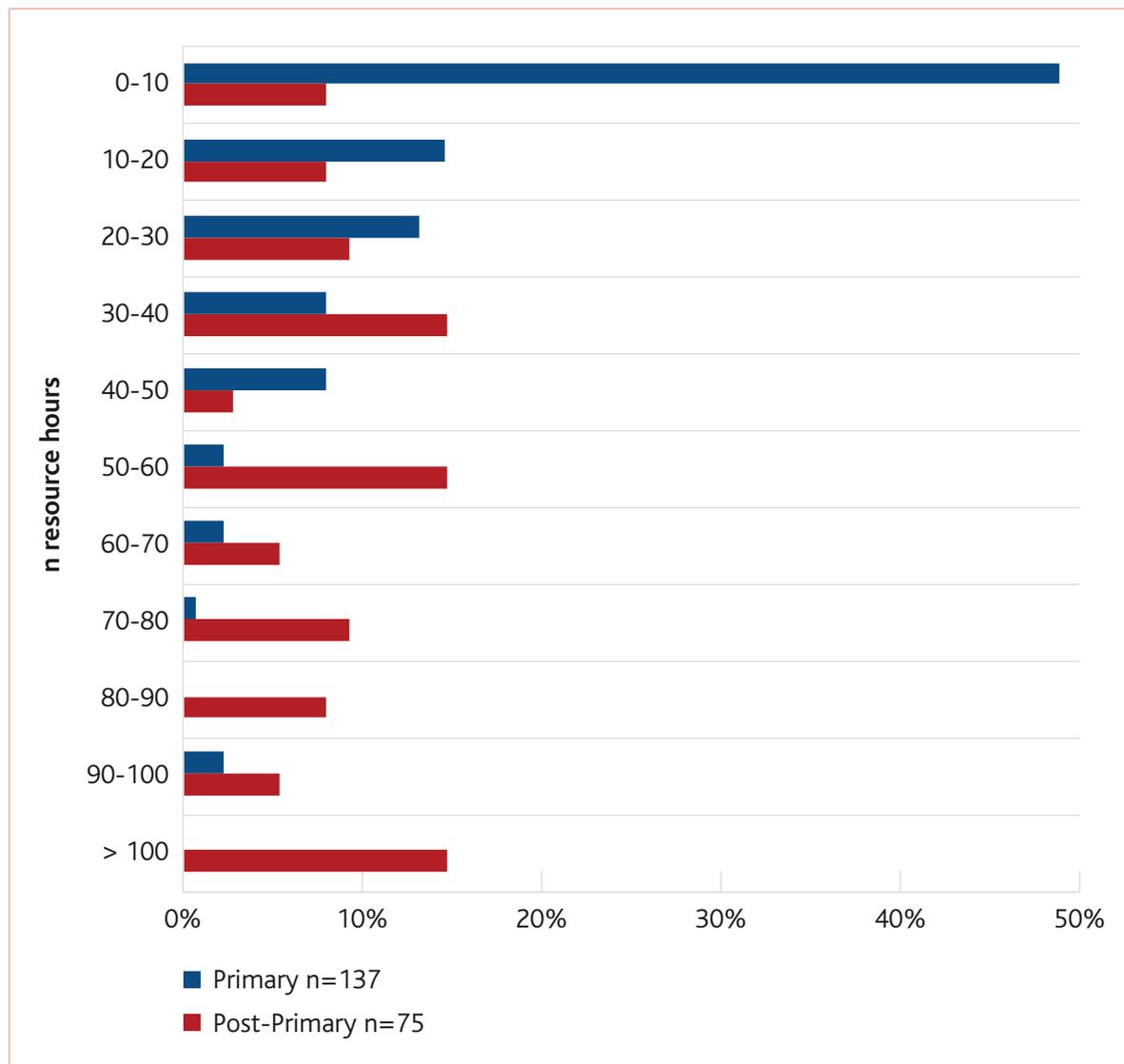
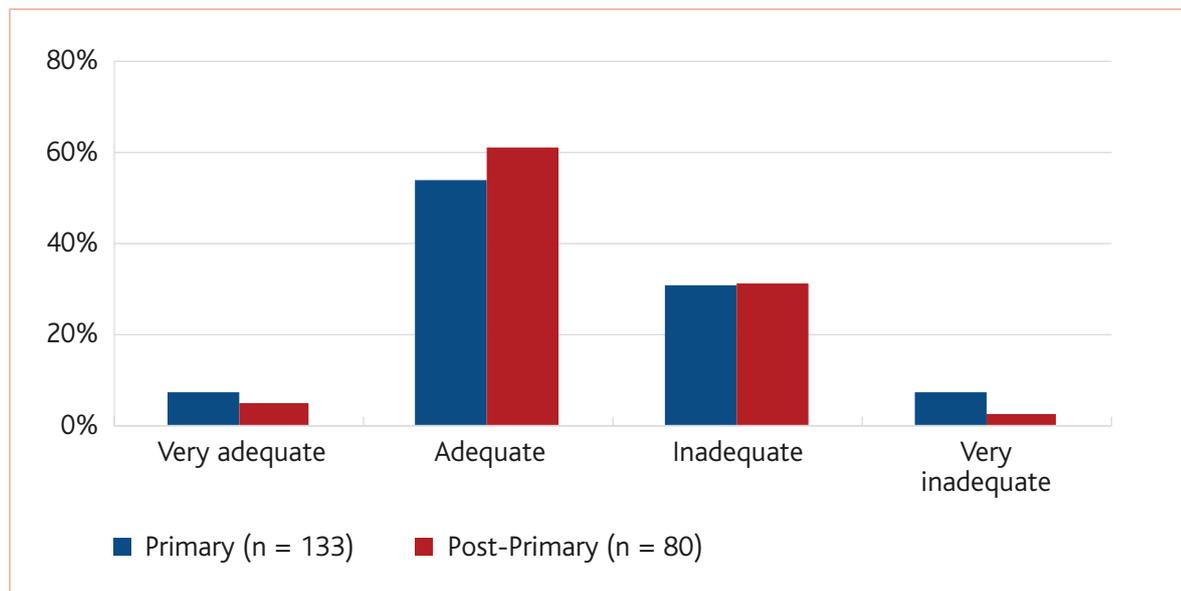


Figure 6.11 displays the allocation of resource teaching hours in the form of frequencies for primary and post-primary sample schools. It can be seen that while 63.5 per cent of primary schools have under 20 hours, the remainder have varying amounts with up to 50 hours in the case of ten schools. In the post-primary survey, the allocations are much higher, again due to larger school sizes and the absence of GAM at post-primary as explained above: 57.3 per cent of post-primary schools have less than 60 resource teaching hours with 11 having more than 100.

6.2.5 Perceived Adequacy of Allocation of Resource Hours in Mainstream Schools

The data in Figure 6.12 below indicate that, in general, both primary and post-primary respondents rate the allocation of additional resource hours to be adequate. The percentage is higher here (61.6 per cent primary, 66.3 per cent post-primary) than for those who believe it is inadequate (28.5 per cent, 24.8 per cent). Just over a quarter of respondents in both school types failed to respond to the item.

Figure 6.12 Mainstream schools: how adequate is the allocation of additional resource teaching hours granted to your school for this academic year?



The perceived adequacy of resource hours was compared for DEIS and Non-DEIS schools. Table 6.7 shows the distribution of responses and indicates that more respondents in DEIS schools perceive the hours allocated to be inadequate than those in Non-DEIS schools ($\chi^2 (3) = 12.48, p < .01$).

Table 6.7: Mainstream Schools: Adequacy of Allocation of Additional Resource Hours for DEIS and Non-DEIS Schools

Response Type	DEIS Yes	DEIS No	Yes %	No %
Very adequate	1	11	2.0%	7.1%
Adequate	22	96	43.1%	62.3%
Inadequate	22	42	43.1%	27.3%
Very inadequate	6	5	11.8%	3.2%
Total	51	154	100%	100%

Written comments on adequacy of allocation generally refer to perceived limitations to the system:

Children with mild general learning disabilities and language disorder are in great need of resource hours.

The school’s allocation has been cut by two hours this year so the shortfall has had to be absorbed by the general allocation model, to the detriment of pupils in this category (primary school).

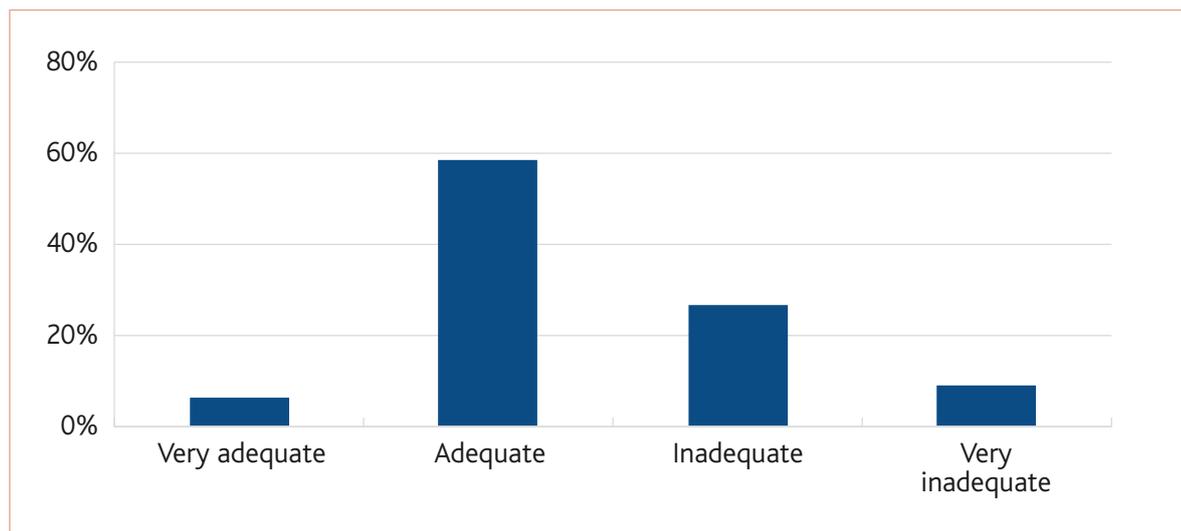
I do feel that we have children who would benefit hugely from extra resource time but unfortunately they don’t qualify.

It appears to me that schools where parents can afford private assessments have more resource hours than DEIS schools THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE [sic].

6.2.6 Perceived Adequacy of Allocation of Teaching Resources in Special Schools

Data presented in Figure 6.13 show that while almost two-thirds (65 per cent; n=22) of special school respondents believed the allocation of teaching resources granted for the current academic year to be adequate (see Figure 6.13), the remainder (35.3 per cent) rate them as inadequate.

Figure 6.13: Special schools: how adequate is the allocation of teaching resources granted to your school for this academic year? (N = 34)

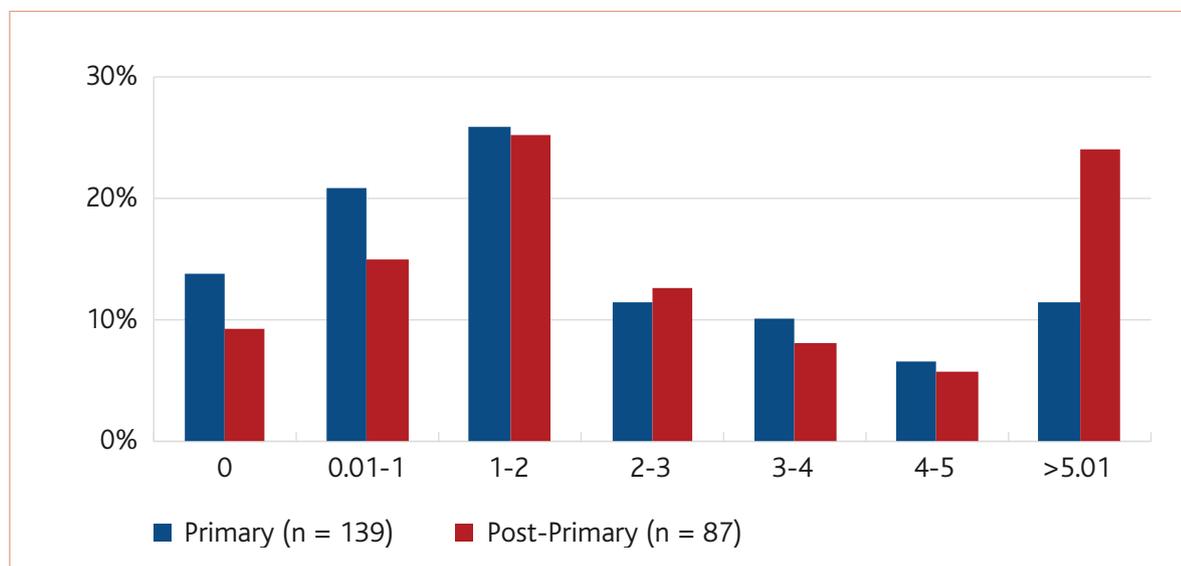


6.2.7 SNA Support

Number of SNAs allocated

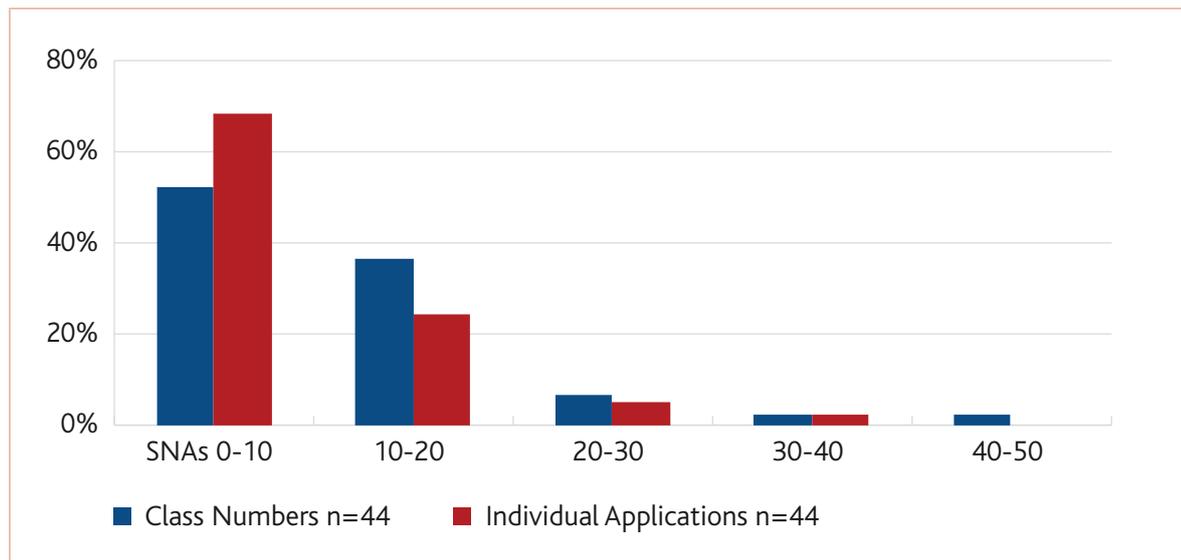
It will be recalled from section 6.1.1 (see Table 6.1) that the average number of SNAs per school was only slightly higher in the post-primary sample (M=3.61) than in the primary (M=3.06) sample, despite the significantly larger school sizes at post-primary. A visual illustration of the distribution of SNAs at primary and post-primary shown in the clustered bar chart in Figure 6.14 confirms this trend.

Figure 6.14: Mainstream schools: number of SNAs deployed in the school during current academic year? (FTEs)



The mean number of SNAs allocated in special schools according to class numbers was 9.8 with an additional 8.6 SNAs, on average, allocated in accordance with individual applications. Figure 6.15 below illustrates the distribution of SNAs across special schools.

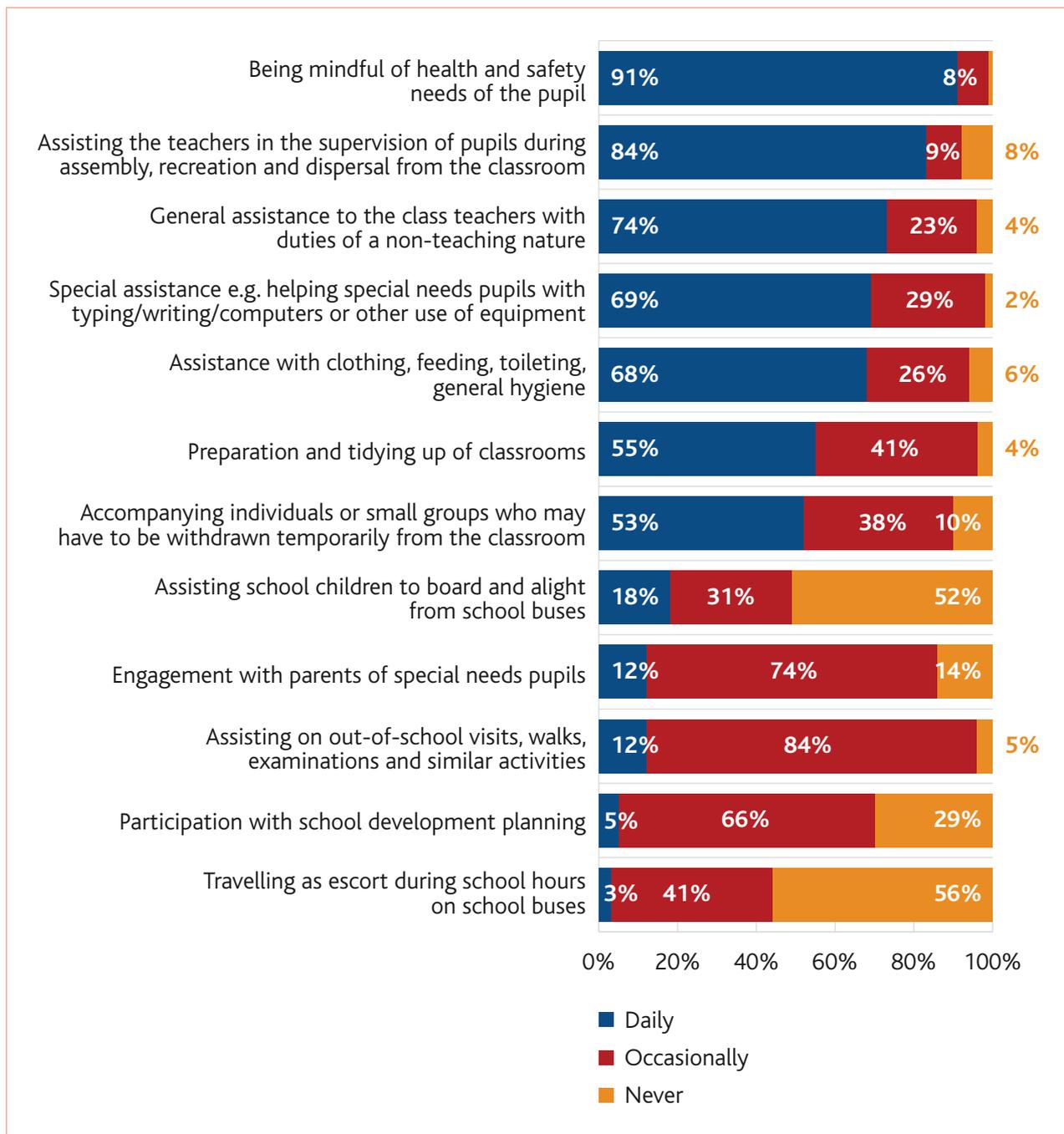
Figure 6.15: Special schools: number of SNAs (FTEs) (within specified range) allocated during this academic year in accordance with (a) class numbers (b) individual applications



Support provided by SNAs

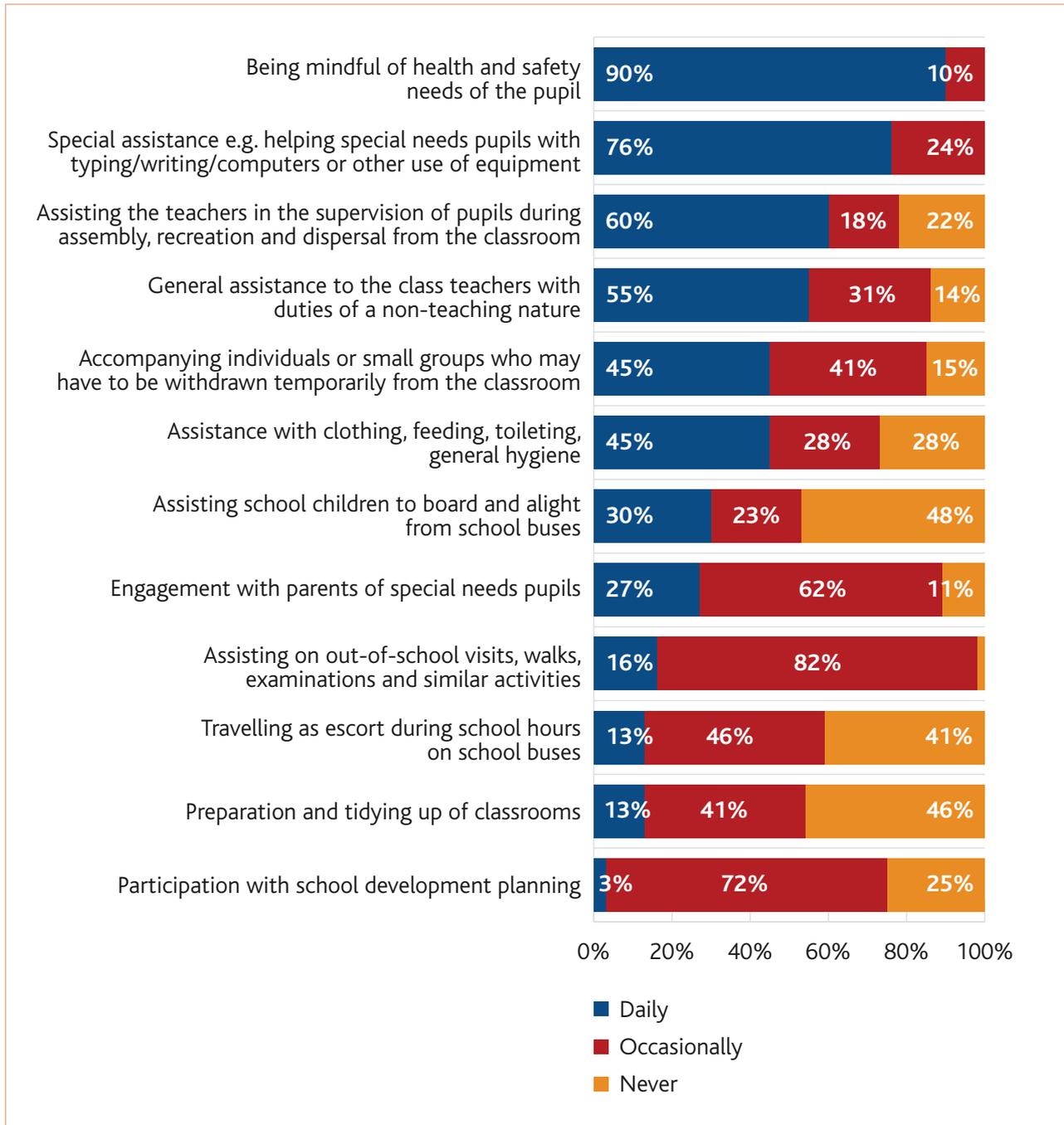
Details on the nature and frequency of the work done by SNAs in primary, post-primary and special schools are shown in Figures 6.16, 6.17 and 6.18 respectively.

Figure 6.16: Primary schools: general nature and frequency of support provided by SNAs*



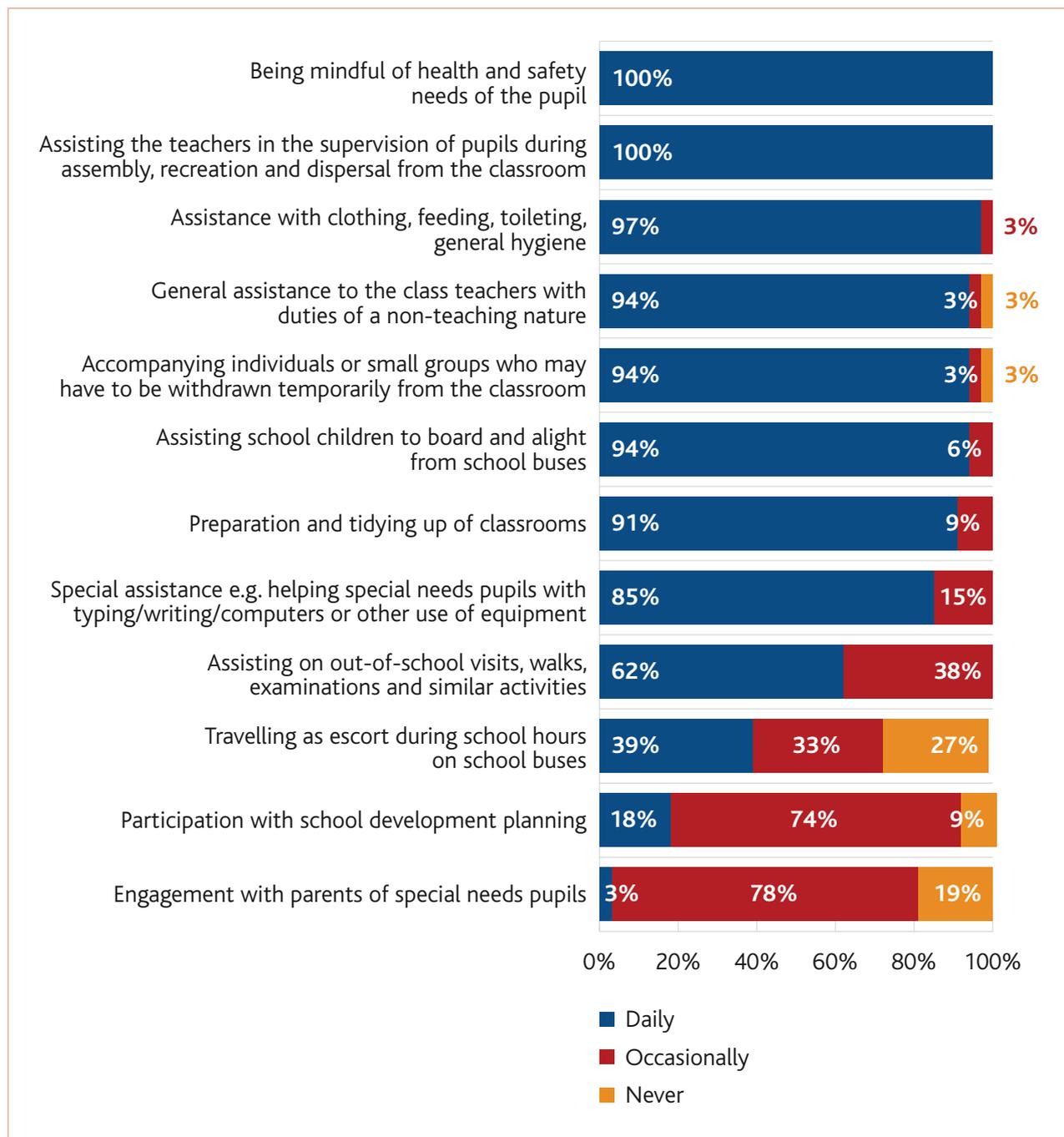
* As defined in the various DES circulars (DES, 2002: Circular 02 / 07; DES, 2011: Annex 6-8)

Figure 6.17: Post-Primary schools: general nature and frequency of support provided by SNAs*



* As defined in the various DES circulars (DES, 2002: Circular 02 / 07; DES, 2011: Annex 6-8)

Figure 6.18: Special schools: general nature and frequency of support provided by SNAs*

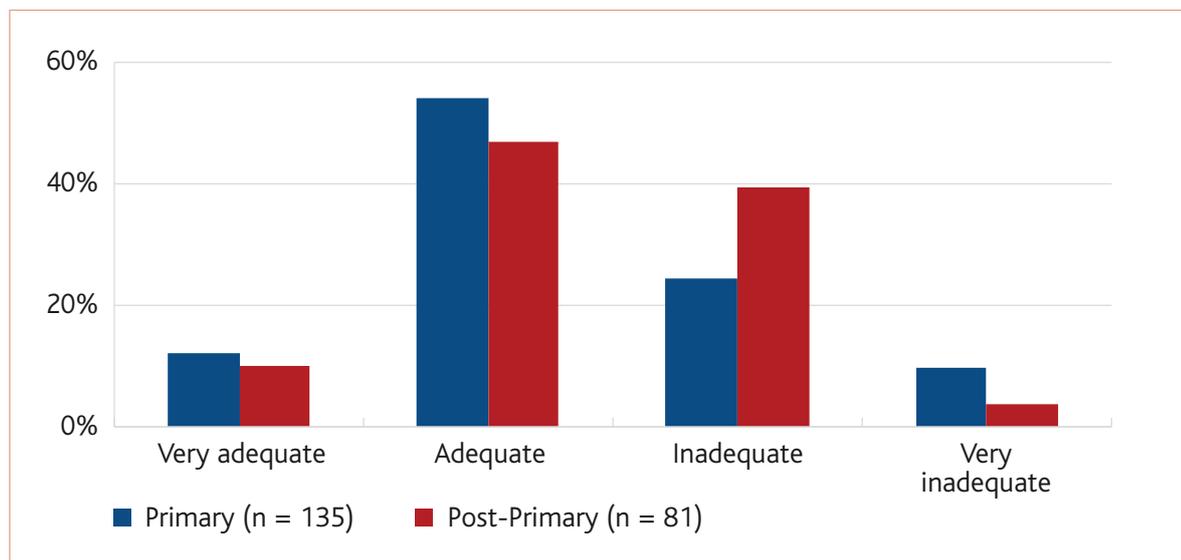


* As defined in the various DES circulars (DES, 2002: Circular 02 / 07; DES, 2011: Annex 6-8)

The three figures above indicate that most SNA duties as defined in the various circulars from the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2002: Circular 02 / 07; DES, 2011: Annex 6-8) are carried out daily while others are occasionally. The two activities they are least likely to engage in mainstream schools are 'assisting students boarding or alighting from school buses' (48 per cent primary and 52 per cent post-primary selecting 'never') or 'travelling as escort during school hours on school buses' (56 per cent primary and 42 per cent post-primary selecting 'never'). Preparation and tidying of classroom is a less frequent occurrence in post-primary (46 per cent select 'never') than in primary (4 per cent 'never'). Figure 6.18 illustrates the SNAs' central role in special schools in all activities listed and indicates more intensive involvement here in all activities daily than their mainstream counterparts, a finding which is not unexpected as students with greatest need are generally in special schools.

6.2.7.1 Satisfaction with allocation of SNAs

Figure 6.19: Mainstream schools: how adequate is the allocation of SNAs granted to your school for this academic year?



Levels of satisfaction with allocation of SNAs in mainstream schools are shown in Figure 6.19 above. While 66 per cent (n= 89) of primary and 56.8 per cent (n=46) of post-primary teachers found it adequate, notably, a substantial minority at post-primary in particular do not agree. In total, 34 per cent of primary and 43.2 per cent of post-primary respondents believe it inadequate. However, it should be noted that a quarter of participants did not respond to this item. Some who did elaborated in a follow-up comment box and pointed to the valuable role that SNAs play in supporting students with special educational needs.

Children in need of help are well supported.

Our SNAs are constantly engaged with the students.

Other comments emphasise the shared nature of many SNA positions and the challenges of and inadequate SNA support generally.

We have 1.5 SNAs shared between 5 students.

Two pupils have been granted a quarter of an SNA each!!!!

Shared access more difficult to allocate.

We only have two SNAs in our mainstream school (junior school with 12 mainstream classes and two autism classes). We have at least three more children who should be supported. I find shared provision is totally inadequate. If a child has a problem or is a danger...

I have been told that children with ADHD will only receive SNA support in the most extreme circumstances. Meanwhile a teacher with 33 pupils in a split class continues to battle alone with constant interruption of her class.

Child with mild form of cerebral palsy turned down, child with serious, possibly life-threatening epilepsy granted eight hours, increased to ten after appeal, huge cause of concern to staff and class teacher in particular.

There were also comments on the restricted role definition of the SNA and the need for it to be expanded.

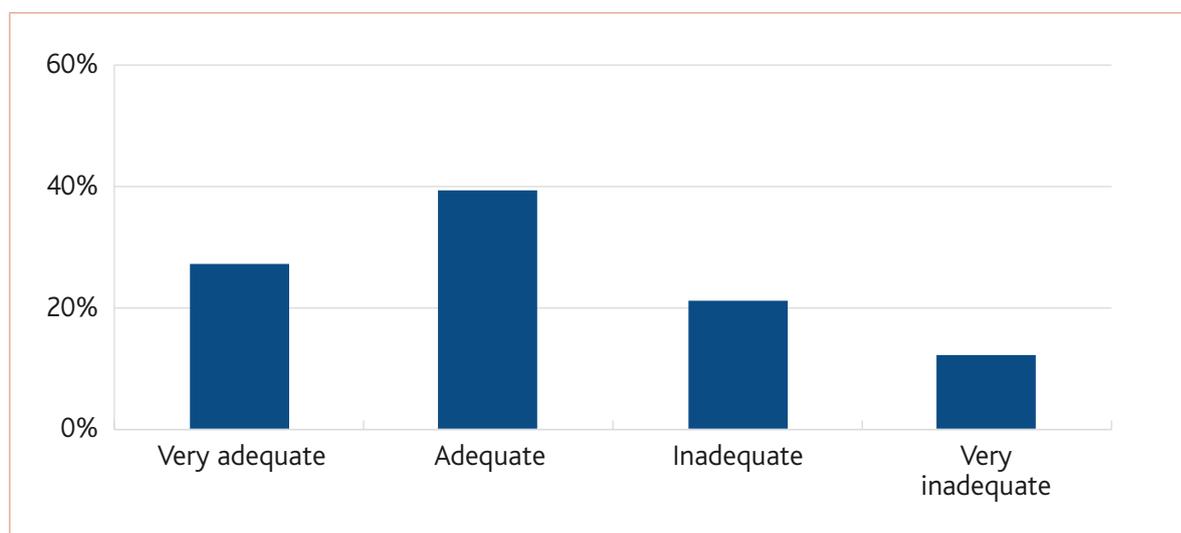
Should not be restricted to care needs only – in a large group setting which includes a child with SEN it is difficult for the class teacher to meet the needs of all children in the class without support.

Schools are about education and while the emphasis of help from SNAs now seems to be about physical needs we are allowing a massive chasm develop by pretending that we are serving the needs of our most vulnerable in ever increasing class sizes.

A comparison of perceived adequacy of SNA allocation in DEIS and Non-DEIS schools indicated no significant difference between the ratings of the two groups.

Satisfaction with the allocation of SNAs in special schools shown in Figure 6.20 match closely those reported in the mainstream survey (see Figure 6.19 above): two-thirds (n=22) rate SNA allocation as adequate while a third rate it inadequate.

Figure 6.20: Special schools: how adequate is the allocation of SNAs granted to your school for this academic year? (N=33)



6.2.8 The General Allocation Model (GAM) in Primary Schools

Primary school respondents (only) were asked to rate the GAM as a system of provision for pupils with special educational needs that are not categorised as low incidence disabilities. The results show that of the 136 responding, 56.6 per cent (n=77) consider the system at least good (good: 40.4 per cent; very good: 10.3 per cent; excellent: 5.9 per cent), while the remaining 43.4 per cent rate it 'not good'. Respondents were asked to comment if desired on this item and 37.5 per cent (n=51) did so. A variety of responses were given but three main themes dominated:

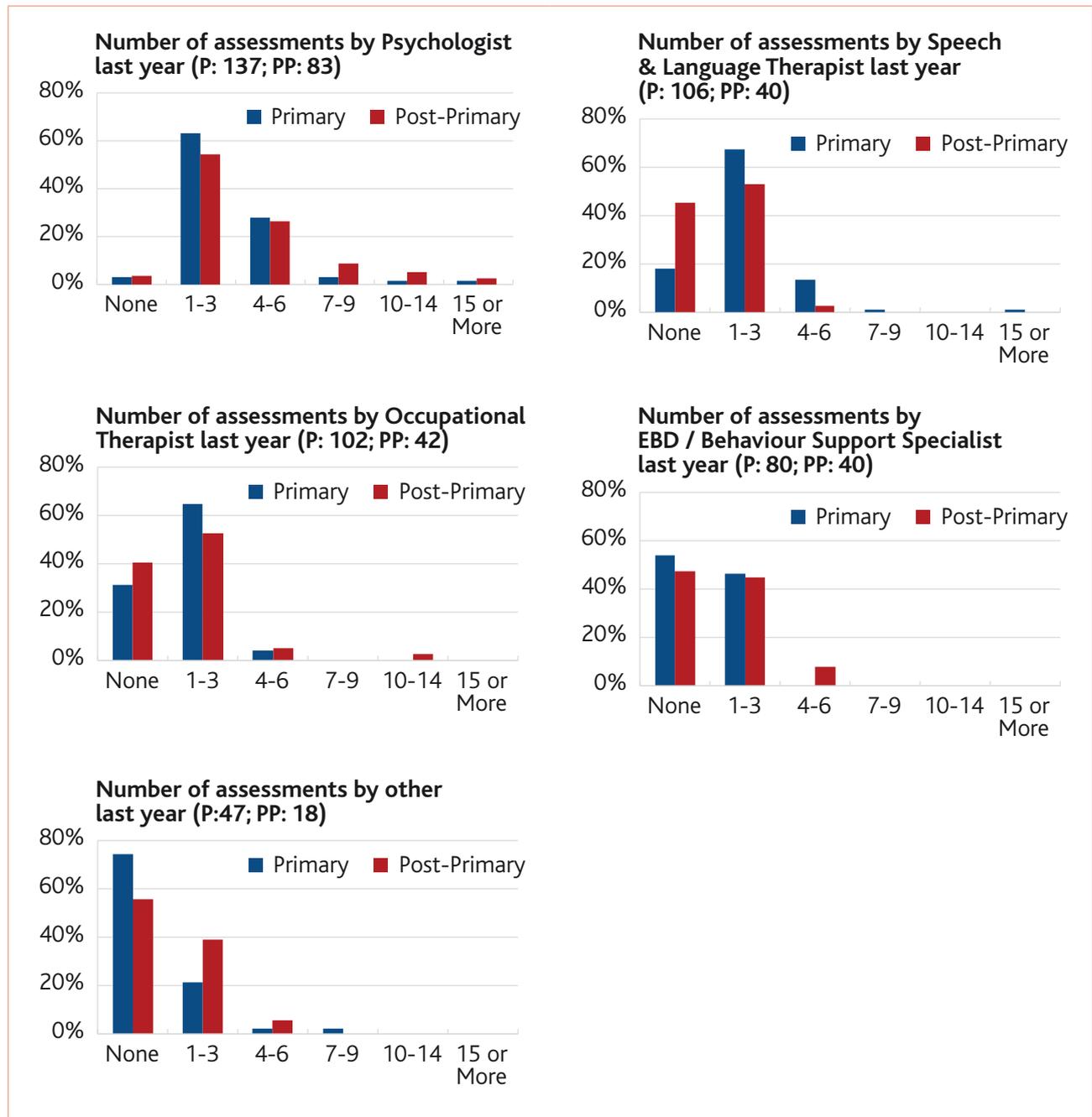
1. GAM based on outdated enrolment figures, need to be reviewed on a regular basis (n= 15).
 - It's totally inadequate. Our numbers have doubled in the past 5 years and we still have 7.5 hours. Hardly makes sense.
 - Our GA is currently based on the enrolment figures of 2003 when we had 63 children. We now have 121 on roll and this has never been revised.
2. Children with MGLD or specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia need one-to-one attention which cannot be provided by GAM (n=12)
 - There is huge discrimination against children who are MLD – previously they were allocated resource hours, and now they have to fit into the same category as children who are below the 10th percentile.
 - Children with specific learning disabilities should have an individual allocation of hours.
3. It discriminates against girls in girls' schools SEN (n=5).
 - As a girls' school we are only allocated one teacher for 400 children. We need more.

Asked to compare the GAM with the previous system of allocating resource hours (for most diagnosed disabilities including MGLD and SLD), just over half (54.4 per cent) of the 127 responding believed it compared favourably while the remainder reported that it compared either 'unfavourably' (33.1 per cent) or 'very unfavourably' (12.6 per cent).

6.2.9 Professional Assessments in Mainstream Schools

Data in Figures 6.21 to 6.25 below show psychologists are the most likely of all professionals to conduct assessments in participating primary and post-primary schools, followed by speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and EBD / behaviour support specialists. It must be noted that only 136 primary and 87 post-primary teachers responded to this item and percentages are calculated on these numbers. About 97 per cent of these primary and 96 per cent of post-primary respondents reported at least some psychological assessments conducted in their schools in the previous year (2009) with most (63.5 per cent P and 54 per cent PP) having one to three, over a quarter (26 per cent P; 27 per cent PP) having four to seven and the remainder more than seven. Assessments by speech and language therapists (SLTs) were reported as being conducted in 64 per cent of primary schools with most (67 per cent) reporting that SLTs conducted one to three assessments in the previous year (2009). Assessments by occupational therapists were reported as occurring in about half of primary schools (51 per cent) while the figure was 27 per cent for behaviour support assessments. At post-primary about half of those responding to this item reported schools having had assessments by occupational therapists (n=25), speech and language therapists (n=22) or behaviour support specialists (n=21). In almost all cases one to three assessments per school were conducted.

Figures 6.21 to 6.25: Mainstream schools: number of professional assessments conducted in the previous year (2009)

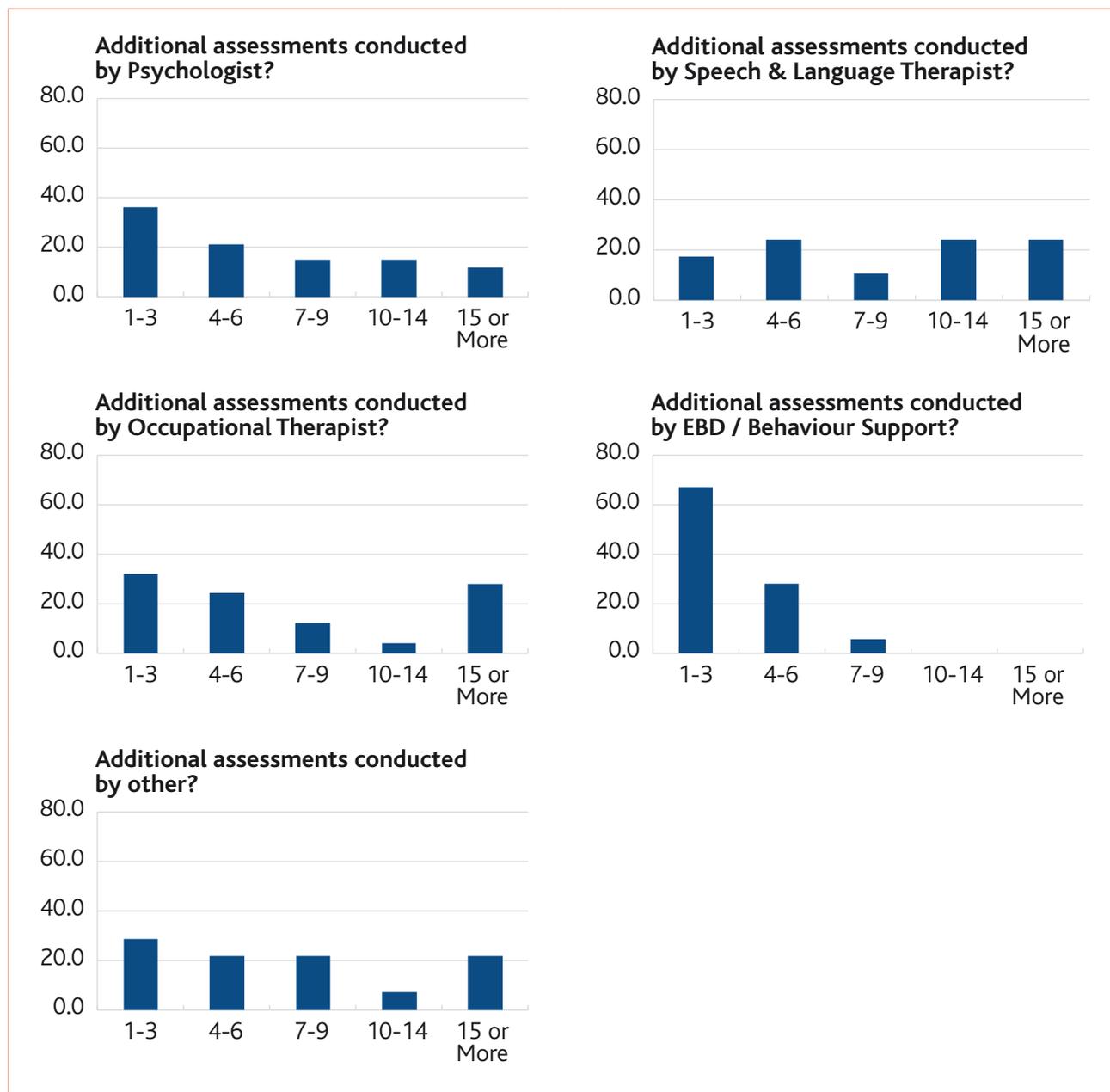


6.2.10 Additional Professional Assessments in Special Schools

Pupils enrolled in special schools would have been assessed as part of the requirements for attending those schools.

Information on the number of additional assessments by professionals conducted during the last year is provided in Figures 6.26 to 6.30 below.

Figures 6.26 to 6.30: Special schools: number of additional assessments by professionals conducted in the previous year (2009)



All special schools responding to this item (n=33) report having had additional psychological assessments conducted: 36.4 per cent had one to three, 36.4 per cent had four to nine while 27.3 per cent had ten or more. Speech and language assessments were conducted in 29 schools, with 43 per cent having more than ten. Assessments by occupational therapists were conducted in 25 schools with eight having more than ten. Assessments by EBD / behaviour support specialists were conducted in n=18 schools with 12 of these having one to three assessments and six having four to nine. Assessments by other professionals were recorded for 15 special schools and included, in order of frequency, assessments by:

- Physiotherapists
- Psychiatrists
- Social care workers
- Counsellors
- Paediatrician, geneticist, audiologist
- Play psychotherapist
- Nurse

6.2.11 Waiting Time from Application of Professional Assessments to Conducting of Same

Table 6.8 shows average waits from application to time of conducting various professional assessments.

Psychological assessments: At primary, almost three quarters (74 per cent) of respondents (n=131) report the average waiting time for assessment to be under three months including 22.1 per cent who report it to be less than one month. In the case of 3.8 per cent of primary schools, it took more than ten months for the psychological assessment to be conducted. The results are broadly similar at post-primary with 77.2 per cent of assessments occurring within three months and again 3.8 per cent taking longer than ten months. Similarly most (64.5 per cent) additional psychological assessments in special schools were also conducted within three months though three (9.7 per cent) waited ten months or longer.

Table 6.8: Average Waiting Time for Assessments from Time of Application to Time of Conducting Assessment: Per Cent Schools

	Psychologist	Speech & Language Therapist	Occupational Therapist	EBD / Behaviour Support	Other, as above
Primary					
<i>n</i>	131	88	80	52	23
1 month	22.1%	12.5%	13.8%	7.7%	8.7%
2-3	51.9%	26.1%	20.0%	15.4%	4.3%
4-6	17.6%	22.7%	23.8%	13.5%	13.0%
7-9	3.1%	15.9%	8.8%	9.6%	4.3%
10-12	2.3%	6.8%	5.0%	7.7%	0%
> 12	1.5%	9.1%	15.0%	17.3%	8.7%
N / A	1.5%	6.8%	13.8%	28.8%	60.9%
Post-primary					
<i>n</i>	79	24	25	23	10
1 month	30.4%	20.8%	24.0%	17.4%	20.0%
2-3	46.8%	29.2%	32.0%	26.1%	10.0%
4-6	12.7%	4.2%	8.0%	8.7%	0%
7-9	5.1%	4.2%	0%	0%	0%
10-12	1.3%	8.3%	8.0%	4.3%	0%
> 12	2.5%	16.7%	20.0%	21.7%	30.0%
N / A	1.3%	16.7%	8.0%	21.7%	40.0%
Special Schools					
<i>n</i>	31	28	23	14	11
1 month	22.6%	46.4%	39.1%	21.4%	27.3%
2-3	41.9%	25.0%	34.8%	71.4%	27.3%
4-6	16.1%	14.3%	17.4%	7.1%	27.3%
7-9	9.7%	3.6%	0%	0%	9.1%
10-12	6.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
> 12	3.2%	10.7%	8.7%	0%	9.1%

Speech and language assessments: Of the primary schools where speech and language assessments were conducted (n=88), only 38.6 per cent occurred within three months from application. An additional 38.6 per cent took four to nine months while 15.9 per cent took over ten months. Of the 24 post-primary schools speech and language assessments, a half (50 per cent) were conducted within three months while a quarter took more than ten months. Special schools reported the shortest wait time for these assessments: 71.4 per cent got them within three months of application. Three schools (10.7 per cent), however, had to wait over a year.

Occupational therapy assessments: Just over a third (33.8 per cent) of all occupational therapists' assessments in primary schools took place within three months from time of application while an additional third (32.6 per cent) took four to nine months; 20 per cent took longer than nine months (10 per cent not applicable). It must be noted here that fewer OT assessments were reported at post-primary (n=25) than at primary (n=80). Of the 25 post-primary schools reporting OT assessments, 56 per cent were conducted within three months of application while 20 per cent took over 12 months (8 per cent not applicable). In 39.1 per cent of special schools, OT assessments were conducted within three months with most (73.9 per cent) done within six months. However, in the case of two schools (8.7 per cent) they took more than one year.

EBD / behaviour support assessments: Only 52 primary school teachers responded to this questionnaire item on EBD assessment wait time. Of these 28.8 per cent ticked the 'not applicable' box; the remainder were well distributed across the various time intervals listed: 23.1 per cent reported EBD assessments conducted within one to three months from application, with the same percentage taking four to six months, while 25 per cent (n=13) of primary schools had to wait more than ten months. Of the 18 post-primary schools reporting EBD assessments, ten occurred within three months, while in the case of six schools it took more than 12 months. Twelve special schools responded to this item: all but one reported that EBD assessments occurred within three months from application.

Other professional assessments: In six special schools where assessments were conducted by other professionals such as those listed in section 6.2.9 above, they took place within three months though one took over a year.

6.2.12 Waiting Time from Completion of Assessment to Receipt of Related Report

Information on waiting time from assessment to receipt of related reports in the case of each professional assessment for all three school types is set out in Table 6.9 below.

Table 6.9: Average Waiting Time from Completion of Assessment to Receipt of Related Report: % Schools

	1 Mth	2-3 Mths	4-6 Mths	7-9 Mths	10-12 Mths	More Than 12 Mths	N / A	N
Primary								
Psychologist	22.1%	51.9%	17.6%	3.1%	2.3%	1.5%	1.5%	131
Speech & language therapist	12.5%	26.1%	22.7%	15.9%	6.8%	9.1%	6.8%	88
Occupational therapist	13.8%	20.0%	23.8%	8.8%	5.0%	15.0%	13.8%	80
EBD / behaviour support specialist	7.7%	15.4%	13.5%	9.6%	7.7%	17.3%	28.8%	52
Other, as above	8.7%	4.3%	13.0%	4.3%	0%	8.7%	60.9%	23
Post-primary								
Psychologist	30.4%	46.8%	12.7%	5.1%	1.3%	2.5%	1.3%	10
Speech & language therapist	20.8%	29.2%	4.2%	4.2%	8.3%	16.7%	16.7%	79
Occupational therapist	24.0%	32.0%	8.0%	0%	8.0%	20.0%	8.0%	25
EBD / behaviour support specialist	17.4%	26.1%	8.7%	0%	4.3%	21.7%	21.7%	23
Other, as above	20.0%	10.0%	0%	0%	0%	30.0%	40.0%	24
Special								
Psychologist	44.8%	31.0%	24.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29
Speech & language therapist	68.0%	20.0%	4.0%	8.0%	0%	0%	0%	25
Occupational therapist	63.6%	27.3%	9.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	22
EBD / behaviour support specialist	75.0%	8.3%	16.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12
Other, as above	85.7%	14.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7

Psychologists' reports: Over two-thirds (67.7 per cent) of primary schools reported that psychologists' reports were received within a month of assessment while in 27.8 per cent of schools they were returned within two to three months. One school reported a nine-month wait. Similar turnarounds were recorded at post-primary where 67.5 per cent reported psychological reports returning within one month, 27.5 per cent within two to three months and the remaining 5 per cent within four to six months. In the case of 13 special schools, psychologists' reports were returned within a month, in nine it took two to three months, while in the remaining seven it took four to six months.

Speech and language reports: Half of all primary schools whose students (n=45) had speech and language assessments received reports within one month, 35.6 per cent in two to three months and the remainder (6.6 per cent) in under nine months. Out of 23 post-primary schools responding to this item, most (78. per cent) received speech and language reports within three months; four schools did not receive them for over 12 months. In the special school survey, speech and language assessment reports were also typically

received within three months (88.8 per cent; n=22) with most of these schools (n=17) receiving them within a month from time of assessment.

Occupational therapy assessments: Almost all primary schools which had OT assessments (83.2 per cent) reported receiving the report within three months; 43.9 per cent got it within a month. Likewise, at post-primary, 84 per cent had the report returned within three months including 64 per cent within one month. Most special schools also received OT assessment reports within one month (63.6 per cent), with an additional 27.3 per cent within two to three months

EBD / behaviour support assessments: While 49 primary schools answered this item, 28.6 per cent ticked the 'non-applicable' box and 53.1 per cent reported EBD reports returning within three months from assessment. Five of the schools did not receive the relevant report for over one year. At post-primary, 21 teachers responded to this item with 23.8 per cent ticking 'not applicable' and 71.5 per cent reporting that EBD reports were returned within three months. Nine of the 12 special schools which reported students having EBD assessments received the relevant reports within one month with the remaining three schools reporting that it took up to six months.

6.2.13 Number of Pupils on Waiting Lists for Professional Assessments

In a series of items, survey respondents were asked to indicate the numbers of pupils on waiting lists for various professional assessments. It should be noted that the number of respondents to each item varies considerably (see appendices 22, 23, 25).

Psychologists' assessment waiting list: About half (51.5 per cent) of primary schools responding to this item (n=129) had one to three pupils on a waiting list, 22.3 per cent had four to six, 7.7 per cent had seven to 14 while 3.1 per cent (n=4) had 15 or more. The percentages were broadly similar at post-primary with 37.7 per cent having one to three students, 27.3 per cent having four to six, 14.3 per cent having seven to 14 and 6.5 per cent (n=5) having 15 or more. In special schools, the longest waiting list is for psychologists' assessments. Sixty per cent of special schools (n=27) were waiting for psychologists' assessments. About 40 per cent of these schools had one to three students, with another 40 per cent (n=12) having more than ten.

Speech and language assessment waiting list: Just over half (54.5 per cent) of the 99 primary schools who responded to this item have one to three pupils awaiting speech and language assessments, 17.2 per cent have four to six students, 3 per cent have seven to nine while 4 per cent (n=4) have 15 or more. The corresponding percentages of students at post-primary were somewhat lower with only 6.9 per cent of schools reporting more than three on this list. Forty per cent (n=18) of special schools had waiting lists for speech and language assessments: eight had one to six students while another eight had ten or more on their lists.

Occupational therapy assessment waiting list: Seventy per cent of primary school respondents had a waiting list for OT assessments. Most (58.9 per cent) had one to three while 7.7 per cent had four or more (one > 15). At post-primary 43 per cent of schools had waiting lists for OT assessment: 28.6 per cent had one to three students while 10.7 per cent (n=3) had four or more. Twenty special schools (44 per cent) were waiting for OT assessments: seven schools had one to three students, seven had four to nine while six had ten or more.

EBD / behaviour support assessment waiting list: Of the 73 primary school respondents to this item a third had no waiting list for EBD assessment; 38.4 per cent had one to three pupils while 15 per cent had four to nine. At post-primary level almost half (n=16) of those responding had no waiting list while 39.4 per cent (n=13) had one to three on such a list. Of the four remaining schools, two had four to six on their list, one had ten to 14 while another had 15 or more students. There were waiting lists for EBD / behaviour support assessments reported in 14 special schools: most of these (n=11) had under six students for assessment.

6.2.14 Number of Mainstream Students Considered in Need of Assessment but not Prioritised under Current System

Psychological assessment: Over three-quarters of primary school respondents (78.6 per cent; n=92) believed varying numbers of their pupils needed psychological assessment but were not prioritised under the present system: 47 per cent reported one to three pupils, 7.1 per cent reported four to six, 10.2 per cent reported seven to 14 pupils while 4.3 per cent reported more than 15 in this category. The perceived need was even greater at post-primary (n=71): 19.7 per cent of respondents had one to three students, 31 per cent reported four to six, 18.4 per cent had seven to 14 and 15.5 per cent reported more 15 students needed these assessments but were not prioritised in the current system.

Speech and language therapist assessment: The proportions of primary pupils perceived as needing speech and language assessments but who are not prioritised are broadly similar to those perceived as needing psychological assessments: 43 per cent (n=40) reporting one to three pupils, 15.1 per cent (n=14) with four to six, 9.7 per cent (n=9) reporting seven to 14 and 5.4 per cent (n=5) more than 15. Far fewer post-primary schools report this: eight schools had one to three pupils, four schools had four to six and three had seven to 14 students needing S&L assessment but who are not prioritised under the current system.

Occupational therapist's assessment: At primary, 48.2 per cent (n=41) of respondents report one to three students needing OT assessment but not prioritised, 10.6 per cent (n=9) have four to six while 7.1 per cent (n=6) have more than six. The corresponding numbers at post-primary again are much lower: only five schools report one to three students, four have four to six while two have more than six students in this category.

EBD / behaviour support specialist's assessment: The percentages of primary schools with children in need of, but not prioritised for, EBD / behaviour specialist were as follows: 43.6 per cent with one to three pupils (n= 34), 14.1 per cent (n=11) with four to six pupils and 9 per cent (n=7) with more than seven. About a fifth (n=22) of post-primary schools had pupils needing EBD assessments but who could not be prioritised under the current system: 16 of these schools had under six such students while the remainder had ten or more.

Respondents were asked to indicate what was preventing assessment. Among a variety of reasons (see Table 6.10) across the different types of professional assessments, three predominated. 'Waiting lists' was the most common reason at primary and post-primary. In the primary survey, 40-47 per cent of those responding select this option in the case of EBD, OT and psychological service while 53.6 per cent select this option for SLT assessments. At post-primary, waiting lists were also the greatest barriers for SLT assessments (47.8 per cent), psychological (43.1 per cent), EBD (35.7 per cent) and OT assessments (30.4 per cent). 'Lack of service' is perceived as the next major barrier, selected by 20-30 per cent of primary and post-primary teachers who responded to this item. 'Does not meet the criteria' is reported as preventing assessment by 18.3 per cent of primary school respondents (n=21) for psychological reports and by 11.1 per cent (n=8) for EBD reports. Corresponding percentages at post-primary are lower: 12.3 per cent (of 65) and 17.9 per cent (of 28) respectively.

Table 6.10: Mainstream Schools: What is Preventing Access to Assessment?

	Does Not Meet Criteria	Lack Of Service	Waiting List	N / A	Other	n
Primary						
Psychologist	18.3%	20.0%	44.3%	12.2%	5.2%	115
Speech and language therapist	5.2%	24.7%	53.6%	14.4%	2.1%	97
Occupational therapist	7.1%	27.1%	47.1%	15.3%	3.5%	85
EBD / behaviour support specialist	11.1%	30.6%	40.3%	13.9%	4.2%	72
Other, as above	0.0%	4.2%	12.5%	79.2%	4.2%	24
Post-primary						
Psychologist	12.3%	27.7%	43.1%	4.6%	12.3%	65
Speech and language therapist	0.0%	26.1%	47.8%	21.7%	4.3%	23
Occupational therapist	0.0%	21.7%	30.4%	30.4%	17.4%	23
EBD / behaviour support specialist	17.9%	25.0%	35.7%	21.4%	0.0%	28
Other, as above	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	9

6.2.15 Number of Special School Pupils Who Need Additional Assessments but Cannot Access Them

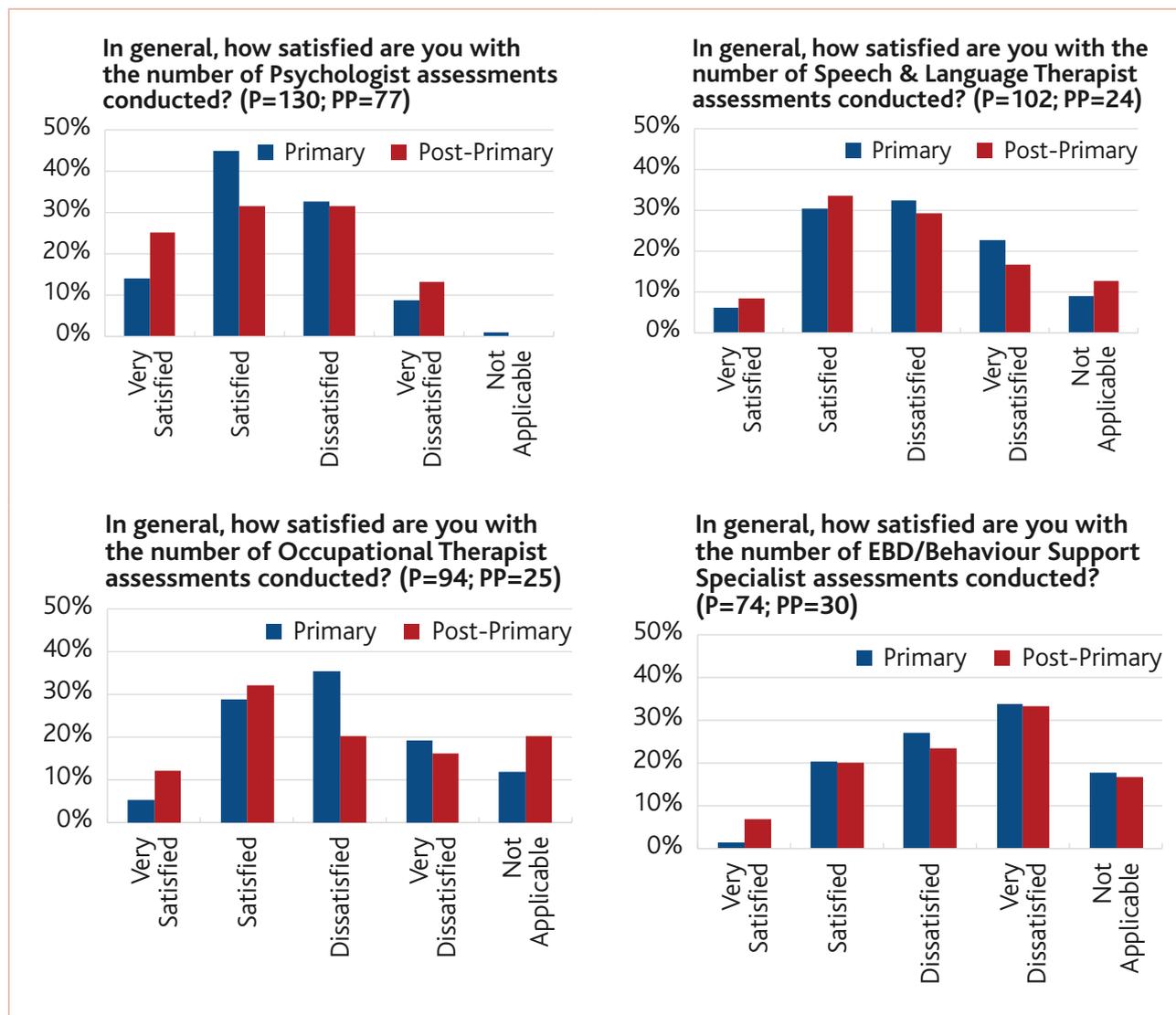
Special school respondents were asked if any students needed the five categories of assessments above but could not access them. A sizeable minority agreed there were such students: 42 per cent (n=19) in the case of psychological assessment, 35.5 per cent (n=16) for EBD, 31 per cent (n=14) for OT, 28.8 per cent (n=13) for SLT and 8.9 per cent (n=4) for other types of assessment. In general, the range is one to nine per school with the highest numbers for psychological and OT assessments. However, five to nine special schools reported having 15 or more students needing at least one of the four major types of additional assessments but who cannot access them. Possible barriers were identified in response to another questionnaire item. For psychological assessments these are waiting lists (43.5 per cent; n=10) and 'lack of service' (34.8 per cent; n=8). These are also seen to prevent children from accessing assessment by occupational therapists. For schools unable to access speech and language assessments, waiting lists are considered the main barrier (n=7) while for EBD assessments, 'lack of service' is the biggest obstacle in ten special schools.

6.2.16 Satisfaction with Number of Assessments Conducted

Given the waiting lists and the students with perceived difficulties who cannot access assessments, it is unsurprising to find high levels of dissatisfaction among respondents about the numbers of assessments conducted in schools generally. Figures 6.31-6.34 indicate that in the primary school survey, it is only psychological assessments (n=130) that satisfy more respondents (58.4 per cent) than not (40.8 per cent). Dissatisfaction with the numbers of SLT assessments at primary is 54.9 per cent and 54.2 per cent with OT assessments. Dissatisfaction is highest for EBD assessments with 60.8 per cent of responding primary teachers

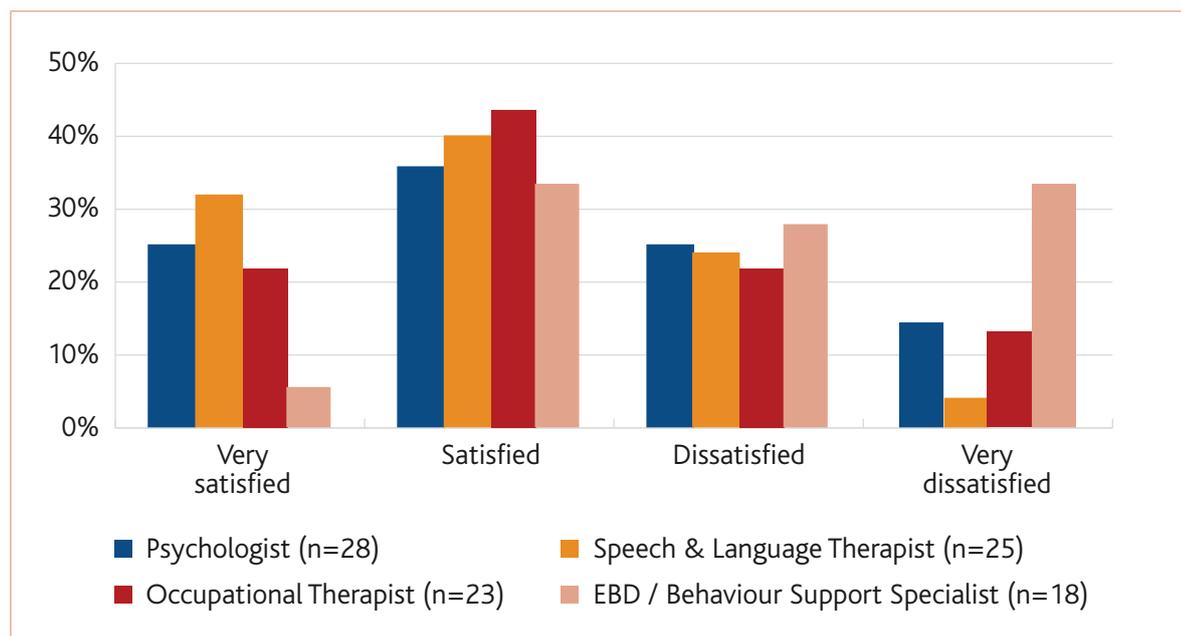
(n=45) either 'dissatisfied' (27 per cent) or 'very dissatisfied' (33.8 per cent) with the number of assessments. In the post-primary survey 35-45 per cent of those responding to each item (see Figures 6.31-6.34) are dissatisfied with the number of SLT, OT and psychological assessments. As in the primary survey, the highest percentage of dissatisfaction (56.6 per cent) is associated with EBD / behaviour assessments.

Figures 6.31 to 6.34: Satisfaction with numbers of assessments conducted in mainstream schools



Similarly, special school survey data presented in Figure 6.35 below also show that highest levels of dissatisfaction are associated with the number of additional assessments conducted by EBD / behaviour specialists (22.7 per cent schools 'dissatisfied; 27.3 per cent 'very dissatisfied'). And while most respondents (60-72 per cent) are satisfied with the number of psychological, OT and SLT assessments, 28-35 per cent of those responding to each item are not satisfied. Again a word of caution must be noted in making these comparisons: the number responding to the EBD item is much lower than for the other three items.

Figure 6.35: Satisfaction with the number of additional assessments conducted in Special Schools

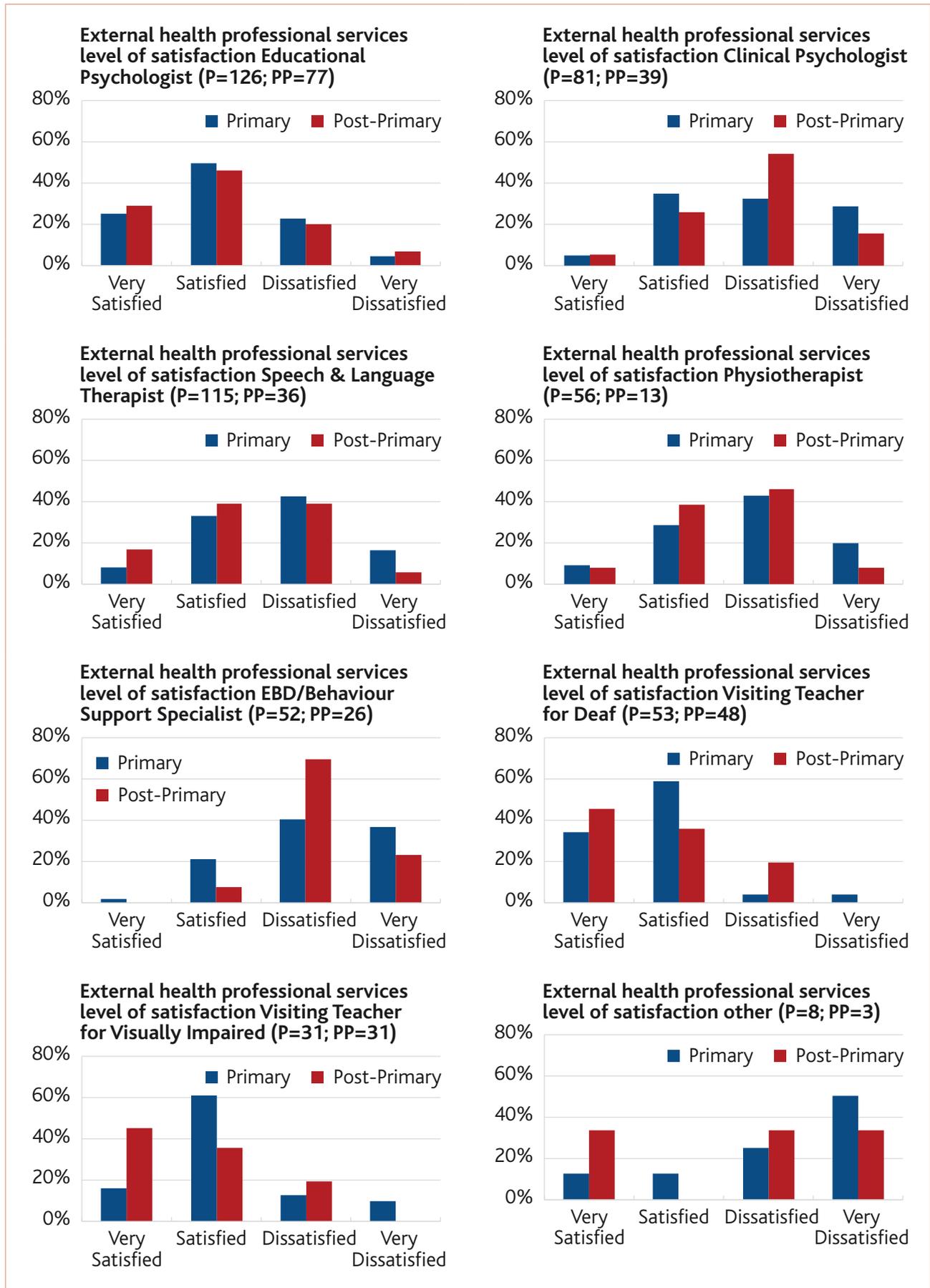


6.2.17 External Professional Services Available to Students with SEN in Mainstream Schools

The survey sought information on the range of external professional services available to children with special educational needs in schools and their satisfaction with each. It is important to note that depending on a child's requirements, certain services will not be needed, e.g. visiting teachers. Of the primary school teachers responding to various items (see appendix 22, Q2.20) 92 per cent (n=126) reported having access to these services from educational psychologists while 88.5 per cent (n=115) have access to SLT therapists. Services from clinical psychologists and visiting teachers for the deaf were also available in most primary schools responding (71 per cent (n=81) and 63 per cent (n=53) respectively) while just over half of those responding also reported access to services of EBD / behaviour support specialists (56 per cent; n=41) and physiotherapists (54 per cent; n=56). Finally, 43 per cent (n=31) reported being able to avail of services of visiting teachers for the visually impaired in their primary schools. In the post-primary survey the services of the educational psychologist were availed of by 94 per cent (n=82) of schools responding to this item. About half this number had access to services from visiting teachers of the deaf (n=48) while schools accessing other services were as follows: 39 for clinical psychologists, 36 for SLTs, 26 for EBD specialists. Fewer than 20 post-primary schools reported accessing the services of physiotherapists and the visiting teacher for the visually impaired.

Levels of primary and post-primary respondents' satisfaction with each of these professional services are summarised in Figures 6.36-6.43 below. Primary respondents' levels of satisfaction are highest (67.9 per cent) for educational psychologists (22.6 per cent 'very satisfied'; 45.3 per cent 'satisfied') followed by teachers for the deaf (58.3 per cent 'satisfied'). Greatest dissatisfaction is recorded for SLTs with 52.3 per cent 'dissatisfied' (including 14.6 per cent 'very dissatisfied') while 43 per cent are dissatisfied with the services of EBD / behaviour support specialists and clinical psychologists. Post-primary respondents' satisfaction is also very high for the services of the visiting teachers for the deaf (74.2 per cent) and of educational psychologists (69.5 per cent 'satisfied'). As in the primary survey, greatest dissatisfaction is also associated with the services of clinical psychologists and EBD / behaviour support specialists with about 45 per cent of teachers dissatisfied in each case.

Figures 6.36 to 6.43: Mainstream schools' satisfaction with professional services available



6.2.18 Professional Services Available to Pupils in Special Schools

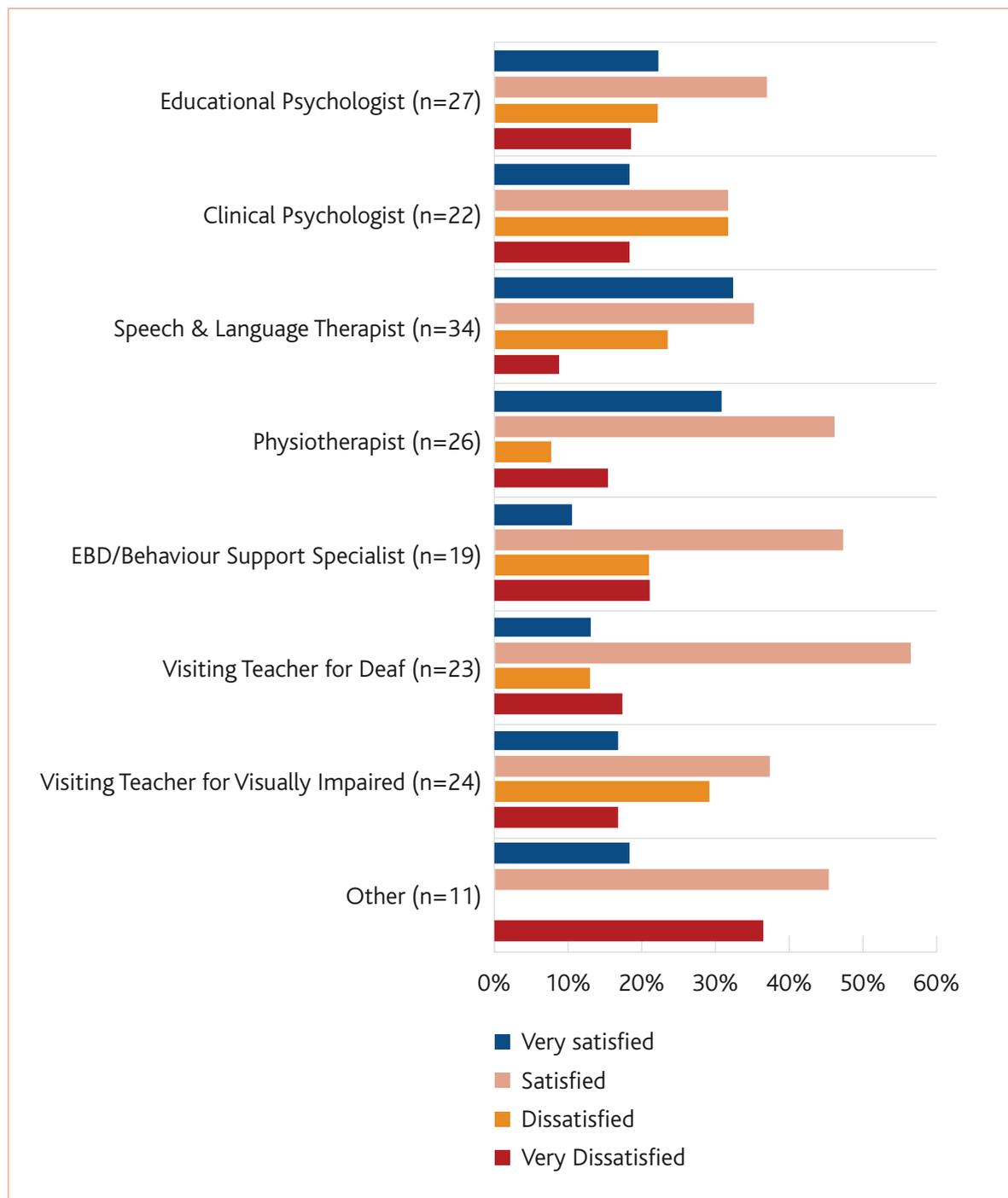
Special school respondents were asked to provide information in relation to the sourcing of professional services for children in their schools. The data in Table 6.11 indicate that the services most likely to be sourced externally are in order: those of visiting teachers for the deaf and visually impaired (73.9 per cent), clinical psychologists (68 per cent), EBD / Behaviour support specialist (65 per cent) and educational psychologists (64.5 per cent). Physiotherapy services are provided internally and sourced externally in equal measure while speech and language therapy is most likely to be provided internally (62.2 per cent).

Table 6.11: Professional Services Available for Children in Special Schools: Those Provided Internally and / or Sourced Externally

Response Type	N=31		% Responses	
	External	Internal	External	Internal
Educational psychologist	20	11	64.5%	35.5%
Clinical psychologist	17	8	68.0%	32.0%
Speech and language therapist	14	23	37.8%	62.2%
Physiotherapist	16	14	53.3%	46.7%
EBD / behaviour support specialist	13	7	65.0%	35.0%
Visiting teacher for deaf	17	6	73.9%	26.1%
Visiting teacher for visually impaired	17	6	73.9%	26.1%
Other	7	9	43.8%	56.3%

Figure 6.44 below indicates that special school respondents are more satisfied than dissatisfied with professional services. Nonetheless, significant dissatisfaction is associated with the services of clinical psychologists (50 per cent), visiting teacher for visually impaired (45.9 per cent), educational psychologists (40.7 per cent) and EBD / support specialists (42.2 per cent). Caution is advised for these findings due to the small number of respondents to these items.

Figure 6.44: Satisfaction with professional services for children in special schools



6.2.19 Assistive Technology

Figures 6.45 to 6.47 show the types of assistive technology available and their levels of use in primary, post-primary and special schools respectively.

Figure 6.45: Number of primary schools reporting pupils with SEN using assistive technology

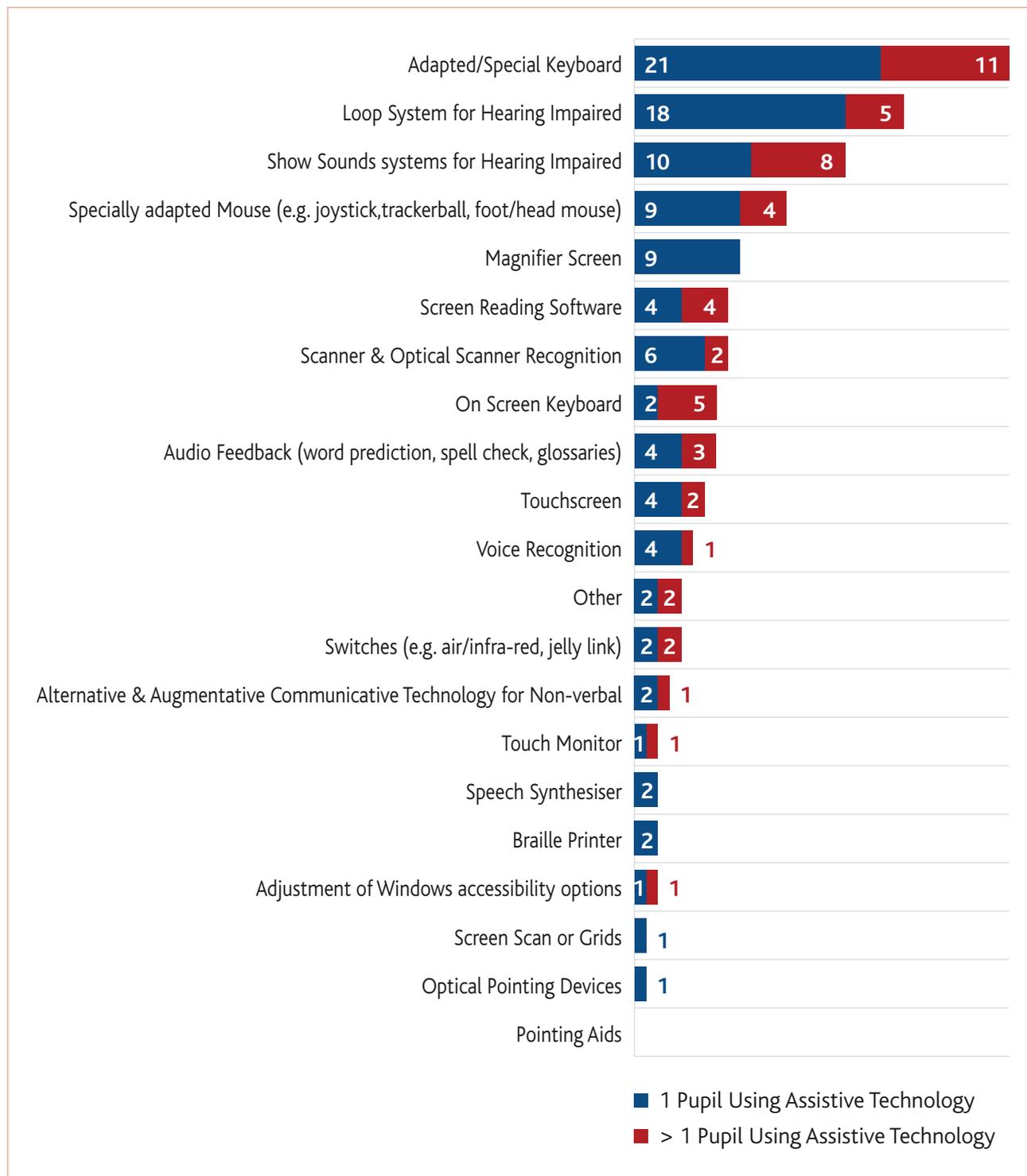


Figure 6.46: Number of post-primary schools reporting pupils with SEN using assistive technology

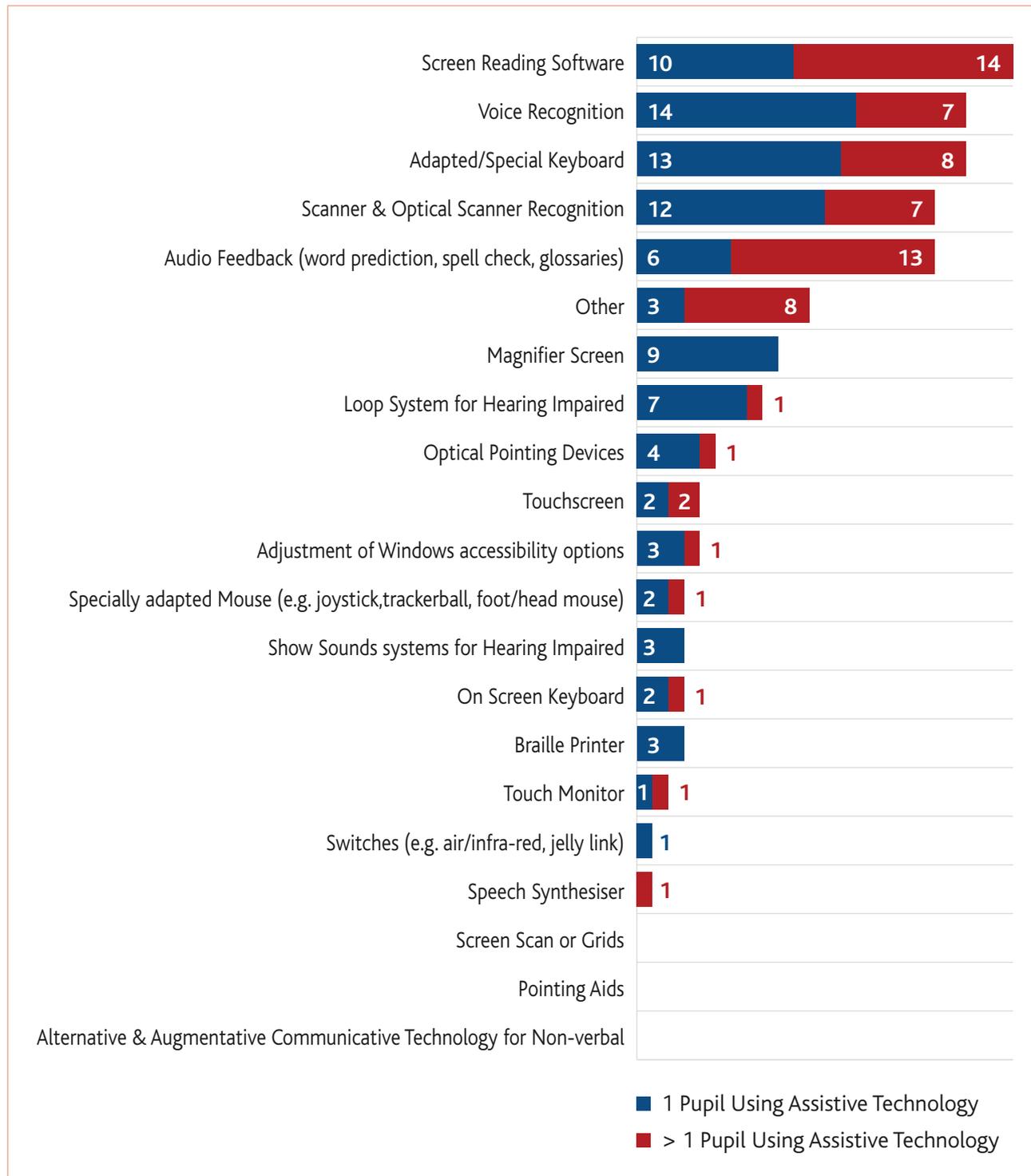
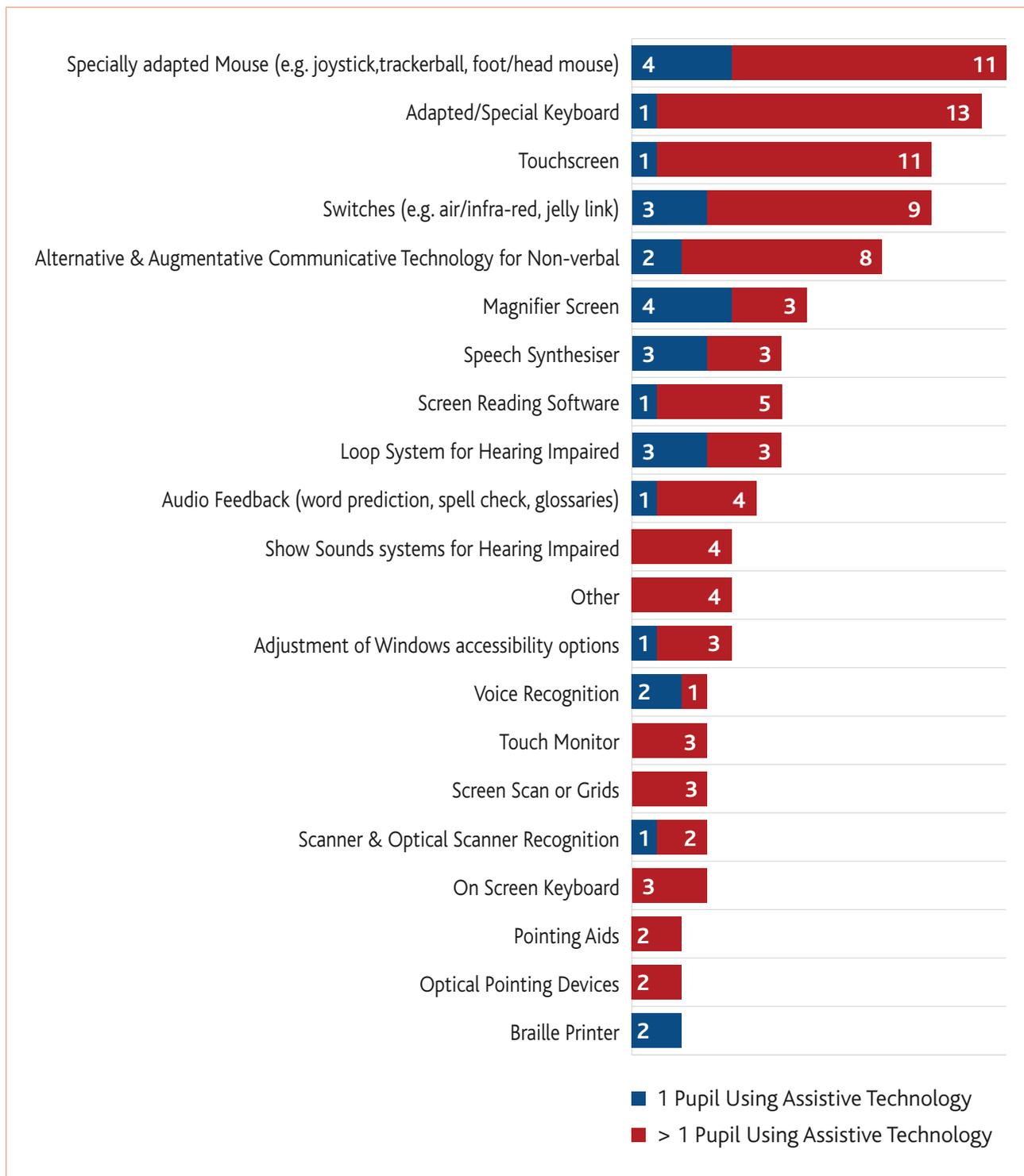


Figure 6.47: Number of special schools reporting pupils with SEN using assistive technology



While low use of assistive technology is indicated overall in mainstream primary schools, the most common are the adapted / special keyboard, the loop system for the hearing impaired, the show sounds systems for hearing impaired, specially adapted mouse (e.g. joystick, trackerball, foot / head mouse) and magnifier screen. In almost all cases (see appendix 22, Q2.22) all primary schools whose pupils use these systems consider them to be helpful. A majority also (60.9 per cent; n=67) rate the level of AT available to children with special educational needs to be adequate; however, there are still almost 40 per cent who think otherwise.

Adapted / special keyboards are also among the most frequently reported forms of AT (n=32) in post-primary schools along with screen reading software and voice recognition. Other additional types of AT reported include language and literacy aids such as audio feedback (word prediction, spell check, glossaries), scanner and optical scanner recognition. Again, all but one of the post-primary respondents who report using any form of AT rate it as helpful. However, over a third (n=29) considered the AT available to students with special educational needs in their schools as inadequate.

In special schools, the most frequently used (in five or more schools) AT forms are the specially adapted mouse, adapted keyboards, touchscreen, switches, alternative and augmentative communicative technology for non-verbal pupils, magnifier screens, speech synthesiser, speech reading software, loop system for hearing impaired and audio feedback. In almost all cases respondents in schools where pupils use the specific AT listed in Figure 6.47 rate them as either 'helpful' or 'very helpful'. Most (61.6 per cent; n= 20) also rate AT available to their pupils with special educational needs as adequate. However, as in the mainstream surveys just over a third (37.5 per cent; n=12) of special school respondents consider it inadequate (9.4 per cent rate it as 'very inadequate').

6.3 Resource Deployment

6.3.1 Additional Resource Hours and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools

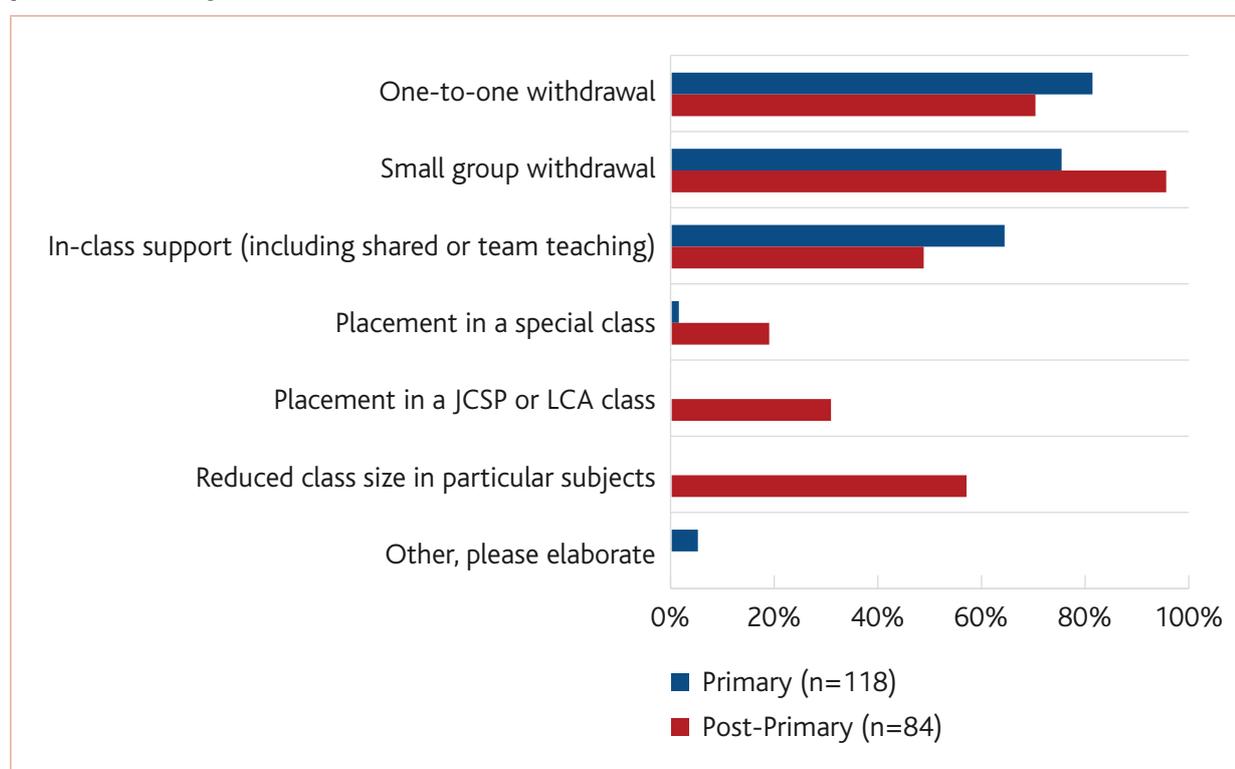
In most primary (61 per cent) and post-primary schools (72 per cent) surveyed, no distinction is made between the role of the learning support and the resource teachers (meaning that both are engaged in similar forms of SEN provision). Where such a distinction is made in 46 primary schools, the mean number of resource teachers is 1.4 (SD=.87) and that of learning support teachers is also 1.4 (SD=.92). Of the 23 post-primary schools which draw this distinction, the mean number of resource teachers is 2.4 (SD=2) while that of learning support teachers is 2.3 (SD=2.8). Most primary respondents (72 per cent) and post-primary respondents (65 per cent) report that pupils with additional resource teaching support receive it predominantly from resource teachers.

Table 6.12: Post-primary Teachers Providing Additional Specialist Tuition to Students Allocated Additional Resource Teaching Support

Post-primary N Pupils in School	N Respondents	Number of Subject Teachers (FTES) Providing Additional Tuition	
		Mean	SD
75 and under	2	5.00	1.414
76 to 200	10	2.22	1.298
201 to 500	37	7.41	5.776
Over 500	34	9.19	9.299
Total	83	7.45	7.375

At the beginning of section 6.1, we noted that 30.6 per cent of teachers in the primary school sample were predominantly involved (70 per cent or more of their time) in teaching pupils with special educational needs while the equivalent percentage at post-primary was only 11.3 per cent. Post-primary respondents were also asked how many class teachers (FTEs) were involved in additional specialist tuition (separate from their mainstream class teaching) for students with additional resource teaching support. An analysis of responses, (see Table 6.12) yielded a mean of 7.45 mainstream teachers involved (SD=7.38). However, the mean varies considerably according to the size of the post-primary school, those with over 500 pupils having, on average, nine teachers involved in additional specialist tuition. Subject areas for this tuition are, in order of the percentages of schools providing it: maths (18.5 per cent), English (17.8 per cent), geography (12.3 per cent), history (10.5 per cent), science (10.5 per cent) and other (5-7 per cent). Over half the teachers (52 per cent) give this tuition in their own special subject only.

Figure 6.48: In what form do pupils with additional resource teaching hours predominantly receive additional tuition?



Information on how additional tuition is provided for pupils with resource hours is shown in Figure 6.48. One of the most frequent forms is small group withdrawal used in 75.4 per cent of primary and 95.2 per cent of post-primary schools. One-to-one withdrawal is almost equally popular and is provided in 81.4 per cent of primary and 70.2 per cent of post-primary schools. In-class support (including shared or team teaching) is also commonly used but more often in primary (64.4 per cent) than in post-primary schools (48.8 per cent). Two other forms of provision used in post-primary schools are: reduced class size in particular subjects (57.1 per cent of schools) and placement in a JCSP or LCA class (31 per cent of schools). It will be recalled from section 6.1.2 that over a quarter of post-primary schools reported having a JCSP and one third an LCA programme. The least used format reported for additional tuition was placement in a special class: only reported in the case of 1.7 per cent (n=2) primary schools and 19 per cent of post-primary schools (n=16). For primary this is somewhat lower than what would be expected given the number of special classes reported in Figure 6.1; however, the number of primary respondents is lower in the case of the present item and the term special classes may be interpreted differently in both cases.

6.3.2 Learning Support in Mainstream Schools

In section 6.1.1 teachers reported an average of 11.31 per cent of pupils with high incidence disabilities in primary schools and 28.15 per cent in post-primary schools. (As noted earlier it is unclear if all children under the GAM are included in this figure at primary level as those with high incidence SEN require no assessment under this scheme; at post-primary level, they do so they are more identifiable). Not unexpectedly, the data in Figure 6.49 show numbers of pupils receiving learning support are higher in post-primary than in primary: 21.8 per cent (n=26) of primary schools reported having >40 pupils receiving learning support while 48.8 per cent (n=35) of post-primary schools had this many pupils getting learning support, including 12.5 per cent with >100 pupils getting learning support.

Figure 6.49: Number of pupils receive learning support

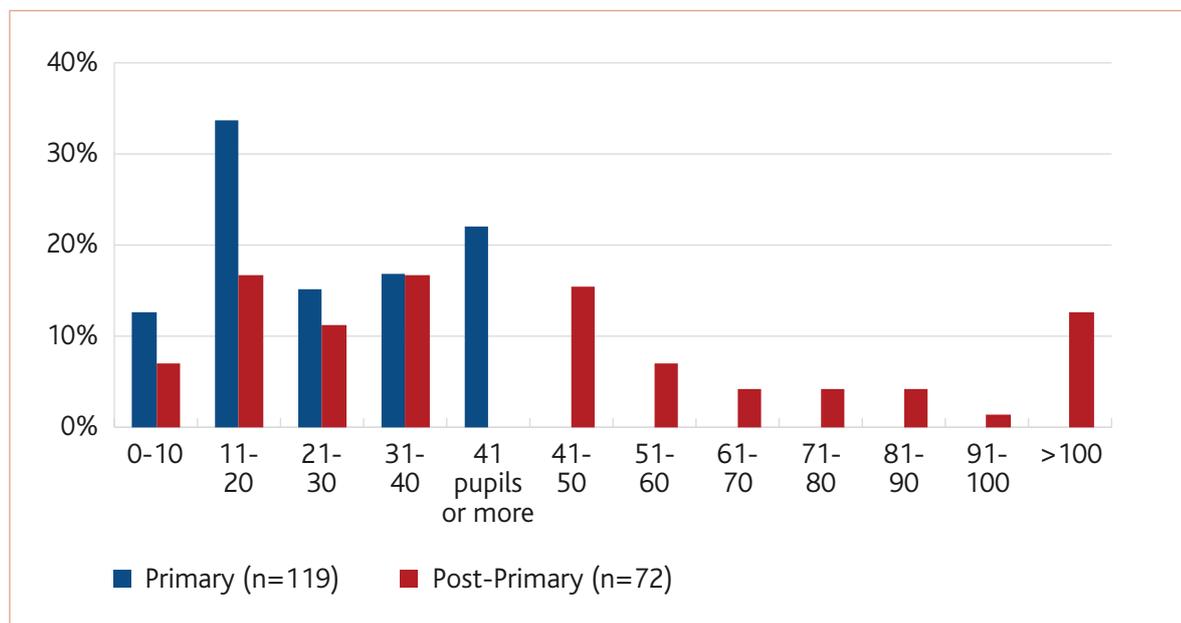
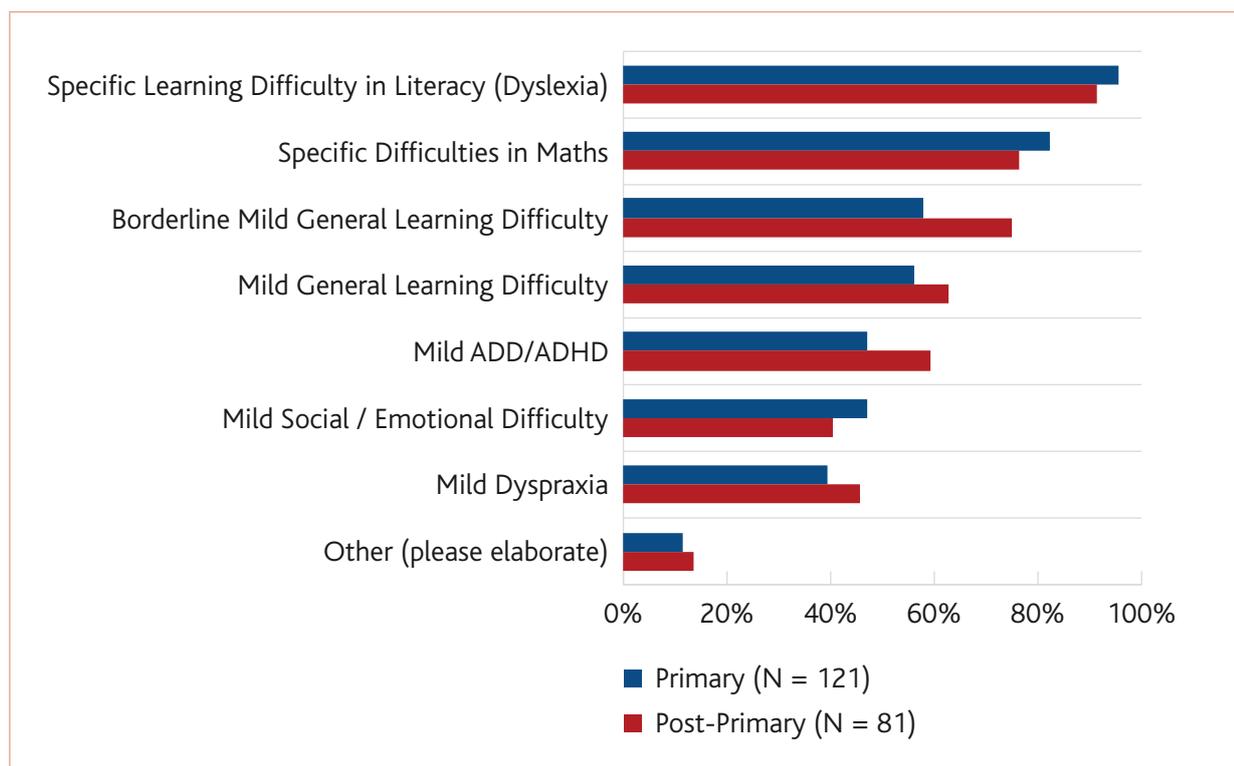
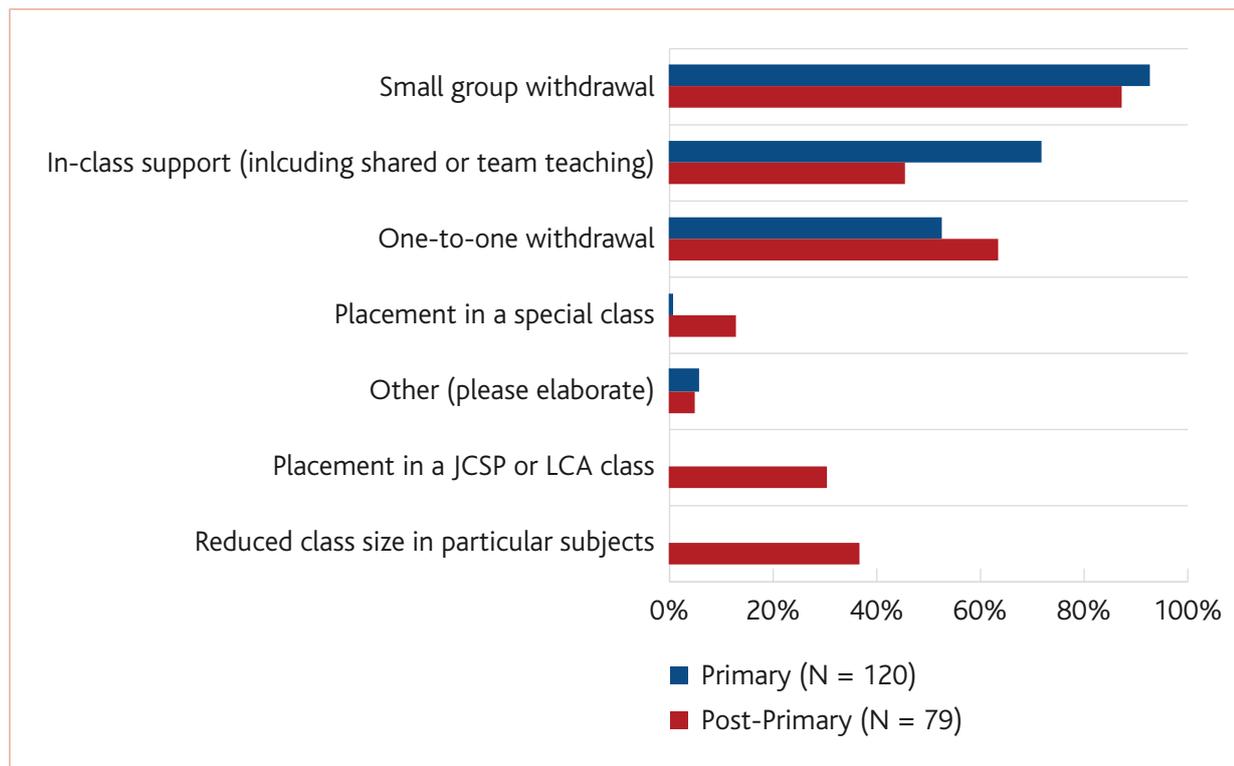


Figure 6.50: Main areas of difficulties of pupils receiving learning support



The data in Figure 6.50 show the main areas of difficulty for pupils with learning support are broadly similar across primary and post-primary: the two most common being dyslexia (95.9 per cent primary; 91.4 per cent post-primary) and specific difficulties in maths (82.6 per cent primary; 76.5 per cent post-primary). Borderline MGLD is an area of difficulty reported by 75.3 per cent of post primary and 57.9 per cent of primary respondents. Mild GLD comes next, reported by 56.2% at primary and 63% at post primary while Mild ADD / ADHD are reported by 47 per cent at primary and 59.3 at post primary. Less frequent but, nonetheless reported by 40-50 per cent of respondents at both levels are mild social / emotional difficulty (n=33) and mild dyspraxia (n=37).

Figure 6.51: In what form do pupils with high incidence SEN with learning support predominantly receive additional tuition?



The form in which pupils with high incidence disabilities with learning support predominantly receive additional tuition is set out in Figure 6.51 above. Small group withdrawal is most common (91.7 per cent at primary and 87.3 per cent in post-primary). One-to-one withdrawal is used in 52.1 per cent and 63.3 per cent of primary and post-primary schools respectively. In-class support is used in 71.1 per cent of primary but in only 45.6 per cent of post-primary schools. However, placement in a JCSP or LCA class is an additional form of learning support used in 30.4 per cent of post-primary schools. Placement in a special class of students with high incidence disabilities is recorded only for one primary school but by 12.7 per cent (n=10) of post-primary schools.

Respondents were asked which of the above forms of additional tuition they considered most effective and why. Answers mirrored those given for effectiveness of methods used in tuition of pupils with additional resource teaching hours. A mix of approaches was advocated by 28 primary and 21 post-primary respondents and the merits outlined. A further 14 primary and six post-primary respondents considered the method used should match pupil needs and this should vary according to subject area, age etc. Seven primary and six post-primary schools believed that in-class support removes the potential stigma that can result from withdrawal. On the other hand, one-to-one or small group withdrawal is seen to benefit pupils as specific needs can be targeted more directly. Six primary and nine post-primary respondents mentioned 1:1 withdrawal while 12 primary and 19 post-primary respondents alluded to the advantages of small group withdrawal for students needing additional teaching support. Finally five primary teachers and six post-primary mentioned the benefits of team teaching.

Below are some sample comments:

Primary

Completely depends on the individual case. In-class support works well for maths and literacy with junior classes, if well planned and monitored. It can be difficult, for example in senior classes, where the English curriculum which is 'whole language' based does NOT meet the skills needs of lower achieving pupils. ...

Each method has something going for it... depends on the situation...

In class. As less stigma than being withdrawn.

One to one is ideal as child is afforded more time and is optimally supported. Group withdrawal more effective for older groups as they are becoming more independent learners.

Team teaching seems to be reaching out to a wider range of children; is raising self esteem amongst the children and therefore no one is viewed as different. Creates a happier and more productive learning environment for both pupils and teachers alike.

Post-Primary

Small group withdrawal works well in our school as strong links established between mainstream and Learning Support teachers.

Small classes and in-class support work well in maths. For help with literacy, small group withdrawal or 1:1 is effective – if possible during Irish free classes (when exempt).

One to one withdrawal is effective so that specific areas can be addressed and the student can work at her own pace.

Once again it depends on the student and their specific needs.

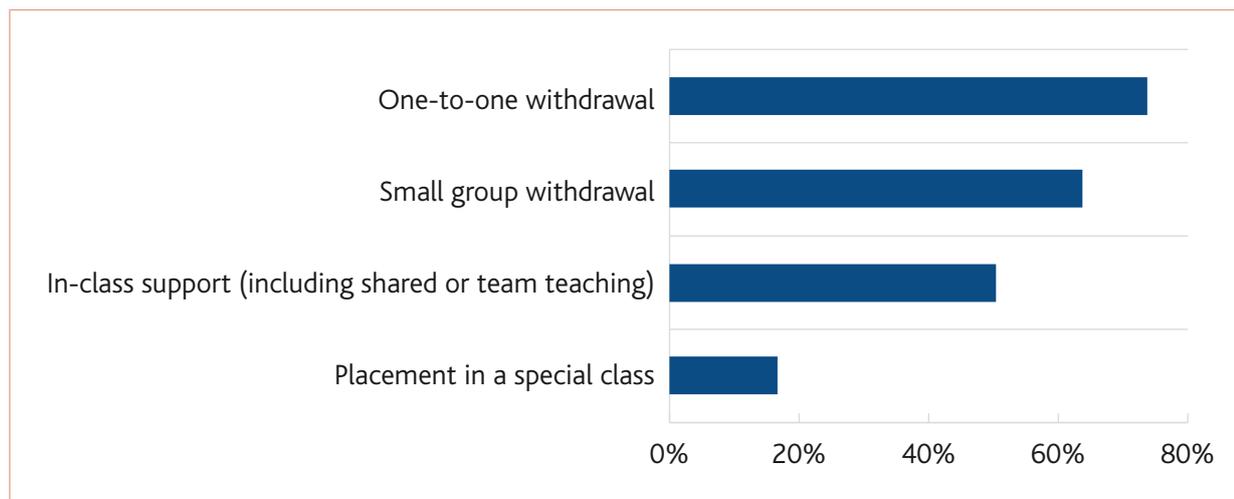
In Class support because you can reach a larger number of students & it avoids stigma of going out of class for extra help.

Team teaching reaches more students without stigmatising.

6.3.3 Deployment of Teaching Resources in Special Schools

Special school respondents were asked to select all the practices in place for the deployment of teaching resources. Figure 6.52 shows that the most common practices are one-to-one withdrawal, used in 73.3 per cent (n=22) of schools, small group withdrawal, in place in 63.3 per cent (n=19) of schools, and in-class support, in place in 50 per cent (n=15) of schools. Placement in a special class only was reported for five schools (16.7 per cent). Three respondents commented that all teaching was done by class teachers.

Figure 6.52: Form of tuition in place for students in special schools



Other arrangements included dedicated teachers for some subject areas, teachers swapping classes for certain subjects, working with other professionals, moving students between special classes (see comments below).

One dedicated ICT resource teacher to support essential AT needs.

Some teachers swap classes where one teacher takes another's for music while the other does ART or RSE with all the girls or boys at once.

[X] takes Home Economics for the senior school as the DES provided no hours following the retirement of the Home Economics teacher ... She also draws up and co-ordinates FETAC Level 1, 2, 3.

We operate three classes, for the afternoon sessions, i.e. PE, music, art, drama and cineclub – we have a whole school approach, involving all teachers and all SNA staff.

Principal tries to take class groups to relieve pressure on class teacher – where possible.

Teachers working with HSE professionals. For example the resource teacher working with the OT ...

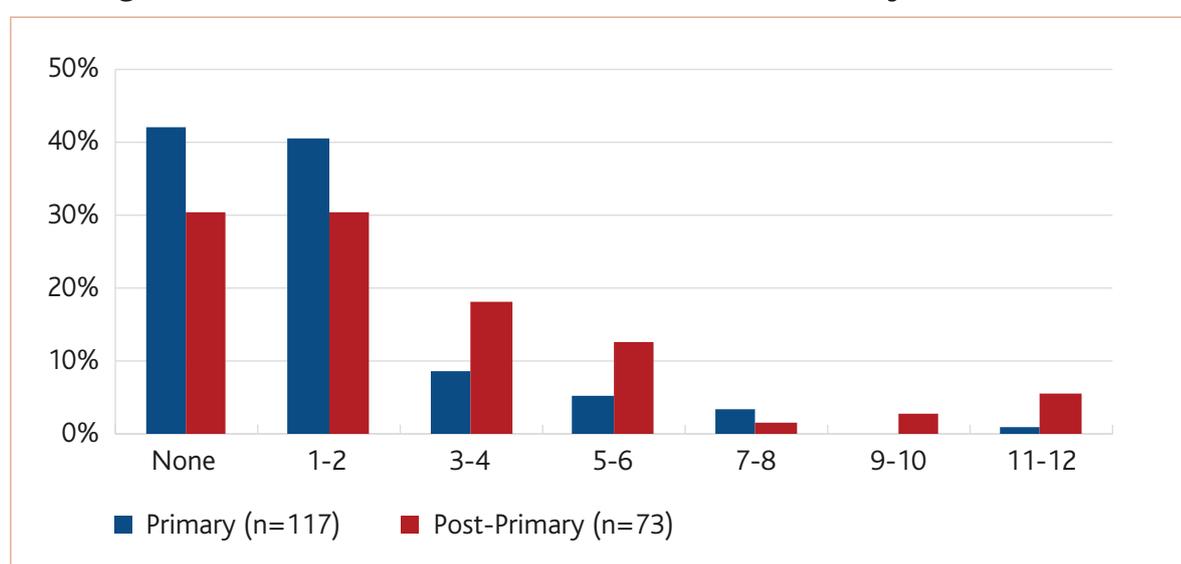
This helps the children practice / develop the skills and supports and enhances the work of the OT, freeing the OT to work with other children.

Streaming in the secondary section of the school, mobility of children between ASD and MGLD classes depending on individualised needs.

6.3.4 Support for Students with Emotional Behaviour Difficulty and Challenging Behaviour

Figure 6.53 below shows information from mainstream respondents on numbers of students allocated additional support on the basis of a diagnosis of emotional behaviour disturbance / difficulty. It should be noted that only 117 primary and 73 post-primary teachers responded. Of these, a higher percentage in the primary survey reported having no pupils with a diagnosis of EBD (41.9 per cent) than in the post-primary survey (30.1 per cent). Just over 40 per cent of primary schools reported having one to two students, 13.6 per cent had three to six while 4.3 per cent had more than six pupils with EBD. As expected, given the larger school sizes, the numbers are highest in post-primary schools with 30 per cent having one to two students with EBD, 30.1 per cent having three to six and 9.6 per cent having more than six.

Figure 6.53: Mainstream schools: pupils allocated additional support on the basis of a diagnosis of emotional behaviour disturbance / difficulty



Further details on the deployment of resources for students diagnosed with EBD (see appendices 22-23) show the predominant support in primary and post-primary is resource teaching hours (89 per cent primary; 91 per cent post-primary) followed by SNA support (69 per cent primary; 76 per cent post primary) and learning support (24 per cent primary; 41 per cent post primary). Counsellor support featured most strongly in post-primary schools (52 per cent) as did placement in a special class or unit (9.7 per cent). Other forms of support reported at primary are play therapy, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the Incredible Years Programme, a school-based behaviour management programme, a HSE early intervention team and, at post-primary, NEPS and HSE support services.

Figure 6.54: Nature of additional support for students with EBD in mainstream schools

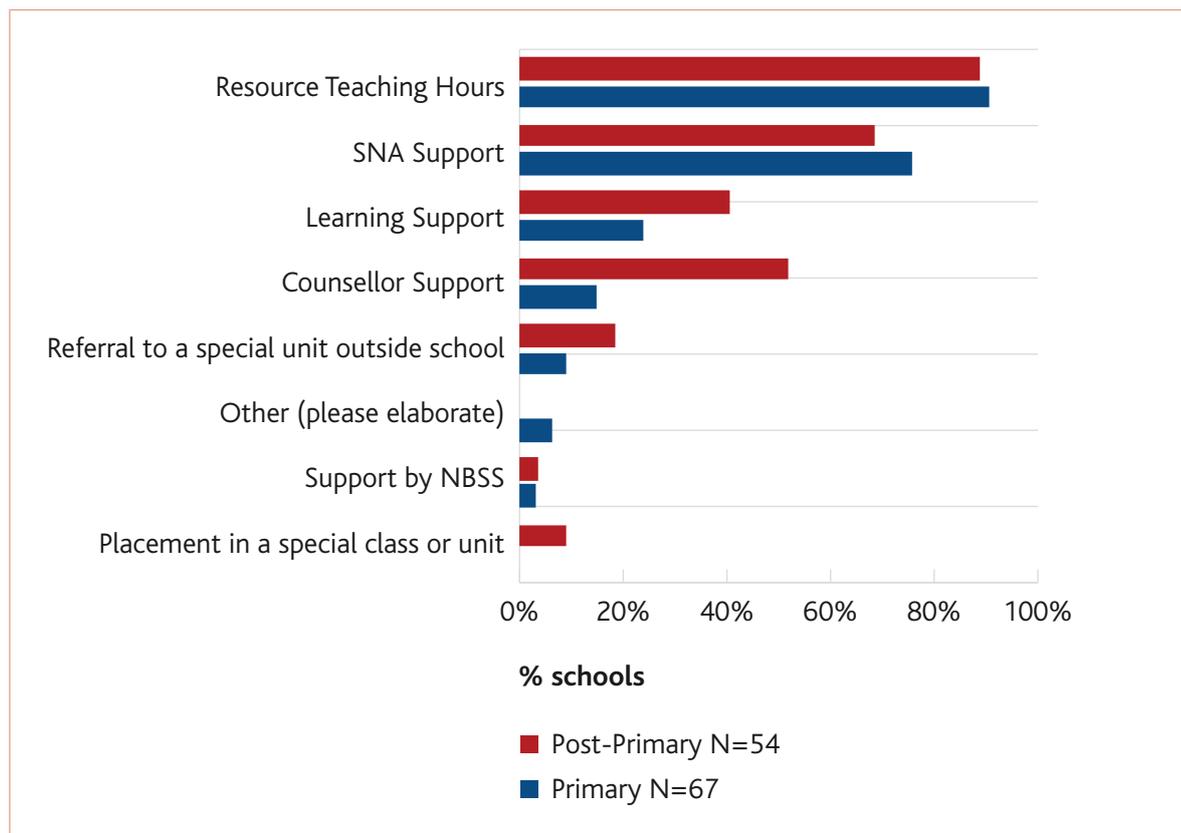


Figure 6.55: Mainstream schools: rating of support available to pupils with EBD

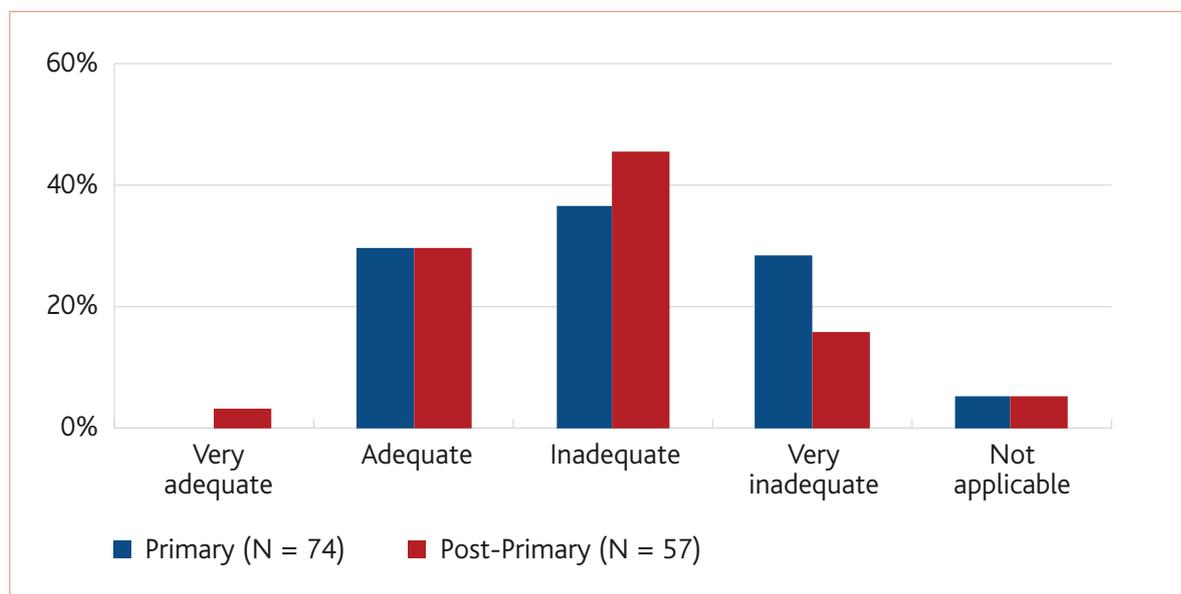


Figure 6.55 shows that most mainstream schools (64.9 per cent primary; 61.4 per cent post-primary) rate the support available to pupils with EBD as inadequate. More primary respondents (28.4 per cent) consider it 'very inadequate' than post-primary (15.8 per cent). However, 30-33 per cent of respondents in both surveys consider such support adequate. Of those mainstream schools allocated additional support for these pupils (primary=62; post-primary=54), most (primary=40; post primary =33) believe that pupils with challenging behaviour also benefit from this support (see appendices 22-23)

Table 6.13: Special Schools: Rating of Support Available for Children with Extremely Challenging Behaviour in Respondents' Schools

Support for Extremely Challenging Behaviour	N=34	%
Very adequate	1	2.9%
Adequate	6	17.6%
Inadequate	16	47.1%
Very inadequate	9	26.5%
Not applicable	2	5.9%

Data in Table 6.13 above show that almost three-quarters of special school respondents (73.6 per cent) rate the support available for children with extremely challenging behaviour in special schools as inadequate, including 26.5 per cent who consider it 'very inadequate'. Only 20.5 per cent (n=7) rate it as adequate. A long list of comments (n=30) from respondents on this item (see appendix 26) give some insights into the reasons for this. A selection of comments is included below. A major theme was the need for specialist support staff for these children such as behaviour specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors and social workers. Additional SNAs were also seen as necessary as well as additional resources, space and staff training.

SNA, Behaviour Support Specialist, parents support, psychologist, social worker at times.

Children with severe EBD and MGLD will not be accepted into special schools for EBD because of their intellectual disability. However, we are expected to enrol these students with a much higher pupil teacher ratio and a lot less SNA support. This issue needs to be addressed urgently as special schools for MGLD are under extreme pressure to deal with behaviour issues with inadequate support. Students with extremely challenging behaviour need access to professionals who can help plan and implement effective behaviour programmes. This requires training, adequate staff, space away from the classroom (for therapy, time out, safety of others). A specialist curriculum and perhaps more flexible transport arrangements for these students could help.

These children need targeted interventions by experienced relevant professionals. All staff need training in appropriate responses to challenging behaviour and there has to be a consistency of approach. In certain instances these children need to be in a safe area where the opportunities for them to cause harm to themselves, other children and members of staff are severely limited.

We need a specialised support team on call, resident Psychologist, Psychiatrist and Counsellor.

More SNAs and specialised training and support for EBD class teacher and SNAs. More resources including special area for the EBD class with appropriate facilities, constant access to psychological and behavioural specialists and advisors.

Behaviour Therapist + Assessment by Psychiatrist if necessary or Clinical Psychologist. Support from C.A.M.H.S.

6.3.5 Use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

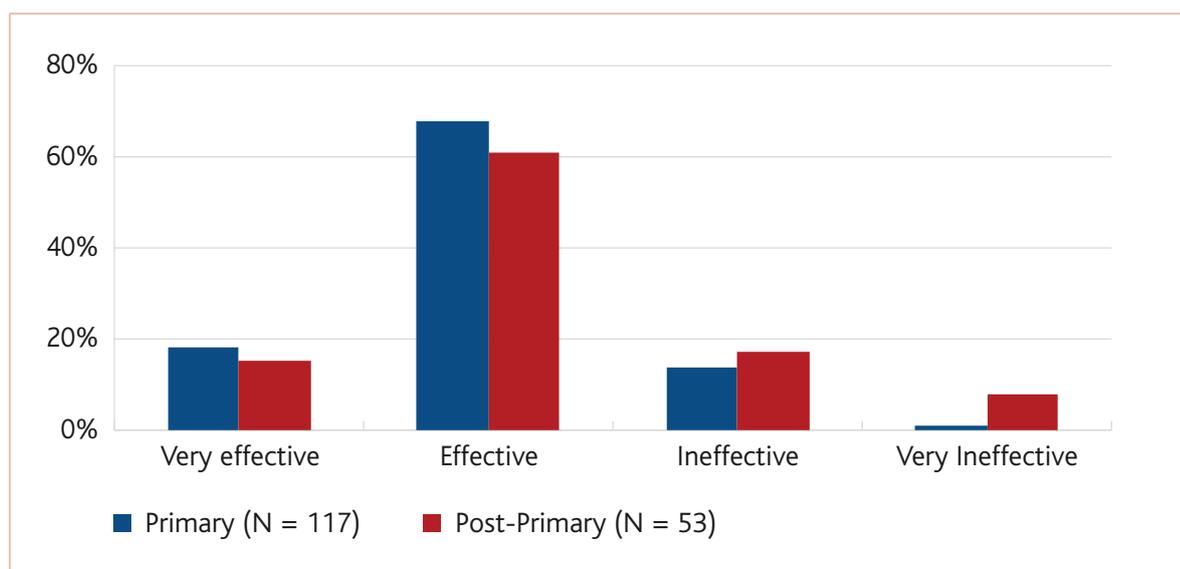
Table 6.14 shows IEPs are used more frequently for low and high incidence pupils in primary than in post-primary schools: 99.1 per cent of primary schools use IEPs for low incidence disabilities compared to 64.9 per cent of post-primary. The gap is somewhat smaller between primary and post-primary schools for IEPs for high incidence disabilities: 70.4 per cent in primary schools and 60.1 per cent in post-primary schools. Responses to another item indicate that 93.9 per cent of primary and 73.7 per cent of post-primary schools are using IEPs to record additional resources (teaching hours, IT etc) in the IEP.

Table 6.14: Mainstream Schools Having IEPs for High and Low Incidence Pupils with SEN

IEPS	(n=)	Yes	No
Primary			
High incidence	(108)	70.4%	29.6%
Low incidence	(115)	99.1%	0.9%
Post-primary			
High incidence	(66)	60.1%	39.9%
Low incidence	(74)	64.9%	35.1%

Figure 6.56 below indicates that most mainstream respondents endorse the effectiveness of IEPs to monitor the need for additional resources: 85.4 per cent of primary respondents and 75.5 per cent of post-primary rate IEPs as effective / very effective in this regard. However, 20-25 per cent from both school types believe them to be ineffective. These results must be interpreted with caution particularly in relation to post-primary schools as only 53 responded to this item.

Figure 6.56 Mainstream schools: how effective are IEPs as a way of monitoring the need for additional resources?



Comments about IEPs and their effectiveness (see appendix 24) give additional insights into their usage and the strengths and challenges associated with them. Notably, comments are more positive at primary than post-primary level; for the latter, lack of time and resources are presented as major obstacles to successful implementation.

Primary

Very important for reviews with the SENO.

Drawn up by class teacher and LS / RT teachers, reviewed 2-3 times in year, targets set.

They give clear guidelines to all as to targets for SEN children and help communicate to parents the support being offered to their children provided they are used as a working document rather than sitting in a file waiting to be checked!

Post-Primary

Until time is allocated to allowing teachers, students, parents and professionals compile IEPs, we continue to use Students Profiles as guides.

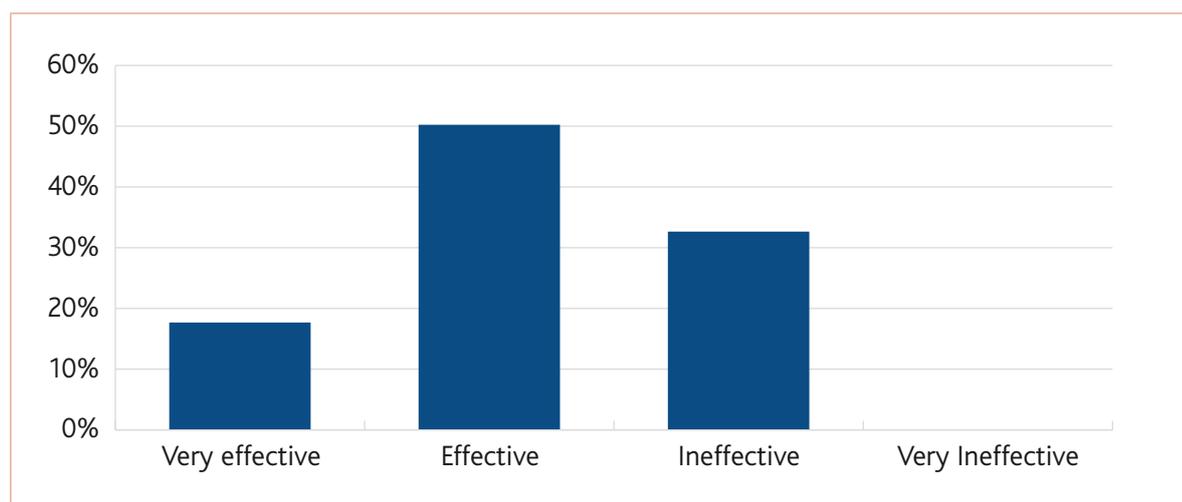
TUI does not allow IEPs. However teachers are encouraged to have their own plans for the students in their planning for the teaching and learning.

IEPs are difficult to put in place in a meaningful way without proper resourcing, they can be a paper exercise.

Have been introduced but time restraints makes it impossible to monitor & review

All but one of the 35 special school teachers (97.1 per cent) report IEPs use. Asked if allocated resources (e.g. IT) are recorded in IEPs, 77.4 per cent (n=31) of those responding confirmed they were. Data in Figure 6.55 indicate that about two-thirds of special school respondents (67.6 per cent) agree that IEPs are effective in monitoring the need for resources while about a third (n=11) disagree, rating them ineffective.

Figure 6.57: Special schools: effectiveness of IEPs in monitoring need for resources (n=34)



6.3.6 Impact of Resource Deployment

The impact of resource deployment is assessed here for respondents' views on how deployed resources assist pupils with special educational needs to access the school curriculum, participate in extra-curricular activities and improve self-esteem.

Figure 6.58: How effective are additional resources in assisting pupils with SEN to access the school curriculum?

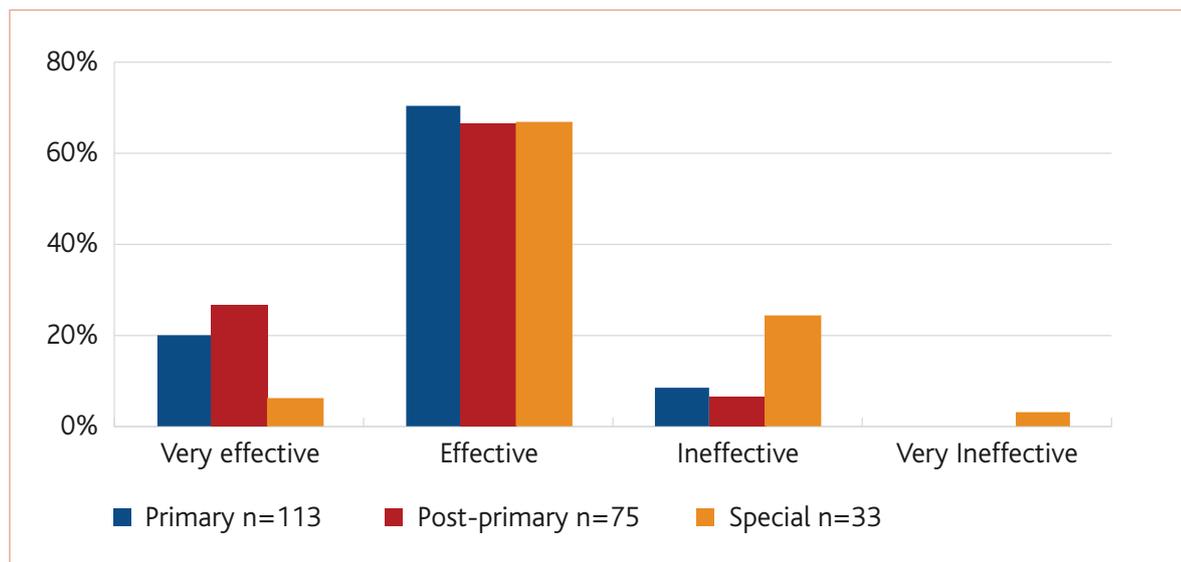


Figure 6.58 shows most teachers (primary 91.2 per cent; post-primary 93.4 per cent; special school 72.8 per cent) believe the deployed resources assist pupils with special educational needs to access the respective curricula. Respondents were asked to indicate resources which are particularly effective here and why. These include: SNAs, assistive technology, special programmes and resource teachers among others. In the special school survey, the importance of human as opposed to technological resources was emphasised. Of those providing additional information 14 teachers allude to SNA work in assisting pupils to access the curriculum. The importance of adequate teacher support including low teacher: pupil ratios is highlighted in about ten comments while five mention assistive technology.

Primary

Human resources: resource / learning support teachers, SNAs etc; ICT, assistive technology, sensory equipment, resource hours; special literacy / maths programmes (Toe by Toe, First Steps, Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery).

Post Primary

Additional / resource hours, SNAs, assistive technology, e.g. visual / hearing aids, ICT e.g. laptops, reasonable accommodations in State exams.

Special Schools

School transport and SNAs are very effective in this regard.

Teacher support is vital. SNA support is vital. Assistive technology very useful. Specialist furniture very necessary and useful.

Personnel ... children need human contact and no machine or other resource can compensate for the positive effect of one to one.

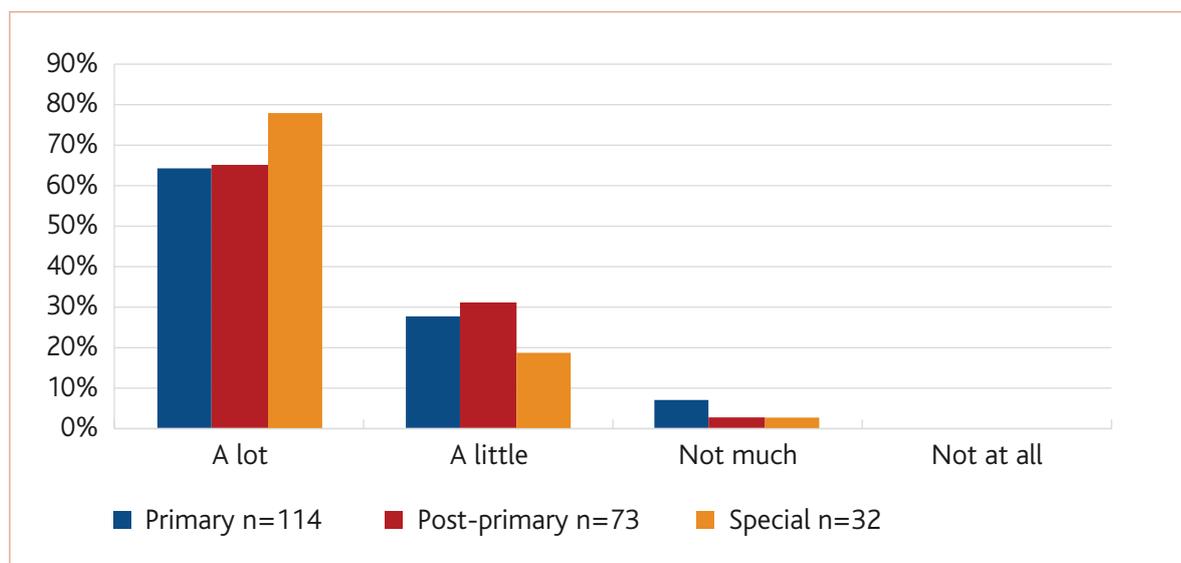
The resources themselves are effective but not adequately distributed.

According to SENOs, SNA resources are not allocated to assist pupils to access the school curriculum so this question is effectively null and void when it comes to SNAs. Other resources such as assistive technology and teacher allocations can only be considered here and they are effective when given to a school.

Respondents were asked how effective additional resources were in assisting pupils with special educational needs to participate in extra-curricular activities (sports, games, dance, drama). Of those who replied (n=108 P; n=74 PP), a majority in the primary (77.8 per cent) and post-primary surveys (55.4 per cent) rated them effective. A substantial minority (44.6 per cent), however, at post-primary in particular, believed them ineffective. Most (78.8 per cent) special school respondents also rated deployed resources as effective here with just over a fifth considering them ineffective.

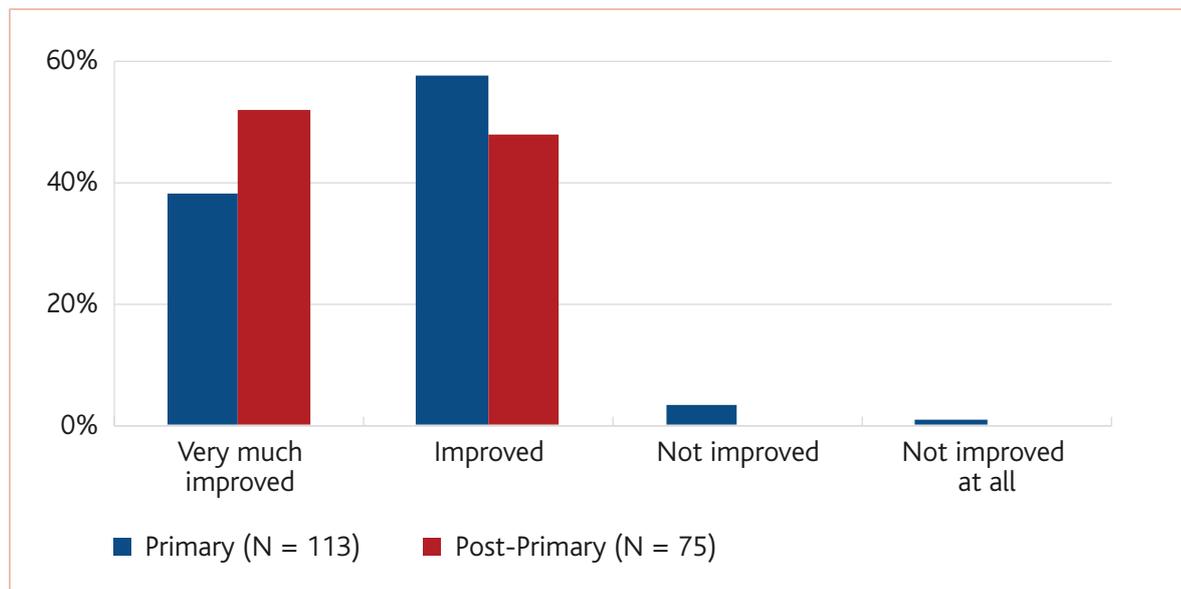
Figure 6.57 shows that 65-66 per cent of respondents in both the primary and post-primary surveys agree that the self-esteem of pupils with special educational needs improve 'a lot' as a result of the additional resources deployed. An additional 28-31 per cent believe it helps pupil self-esteem just 'a little'; few (7 per cent at primary, 2.7 per cent at post-primary) believe it is 'not much' help. In the special school survey, almost all respondents agree that the resources help improve self-esteem: 78.1 per cent believe they improve it 'a lot' while 18.8 per cent indicate they improve it 'a little'.

Figure 6.59: Extent to which the resources improve the self-esteem of pupils with SEN



The penultimate item in the mainstream surveys asked respondents the extent to which inclusion levels of pupils with special educational needs improved as a consequence of the additional resources they received. Figure 6.60 below indicates that all post-primary respondents agree it has improved (52 per cent very much improved), while 95 per cent of primary respondents also agree it has improved (38 per cent very much improved). Less than 5 per cent of primary school respondents (4.4 per cent) believe inclusion levels have not improved as a consequence of additional resources.

Figure 6.60: Extent to which the level of inclusion of pupils with SEN improved as a consequence of additional resources



6.4 Respondents’ Concluding Comments

The last item of each questionnaire invited concluding comments on the application for, allocation and deployment of resources in schools for pupils with special educational needs. Sixty-one primary schools and 35 post-primary responded. A content analysis was conducted on these and the major themes noted (see appendix 24 for full list of comments). The most dominant reflect the general findings already reported throughout this chapter while also expanding on some responses / views. While most are critical of aspects of the current system, a small number of comments were positive on the current system of allocation. At primary the main themes were:

- Needs of pupils with MGLD and SLD not being met by GAM.
- GAM needs review – outdated.
- GAM works well for school.
- The amount of documentation and time consuming nature of the application process.
- The need for more staff and resources.
- Long waiting lists for assessment / delay in accessing professionals.
- Delay in getting assessment reports.
- Need for more SNA support; role of SNA too narrow.
- Resource allocation and deployment (RAD) system too complex.
- Need for additional support for students with EBD.
- Recognise mainstream teachers’ role in supporting students with special educational needs.

Many of these same themes emerge in concluding comments in the post-primary survey but some are unique to this group of respondents:

Challenging role of co-ordinator of SEN / SEN team / Need dedicated SEN co-ordinator to manage resources efficiently.

Some students not getting enough or proper support: Allocation for MGLD and SLD not adequate.

More support for special educational needs students in transition from primary to post-primary.

Criteria for resource hours too restrictive.

Overloaded second level curriculum.

System of withdrawal for SEN support has negative social implications.

Need more support for students with SEBD.

Need multidisciplinary collaboration.

Need appeals mechanism in RAD system.

Happy with RAD system / system needs review.

Positive impact of inclusion and role of NCSE.

Importance of having positive relationship with SENO.

Twenty-five (56 per cent) of special school respondents wrote concluding comments, some lengthy. As in comments made throughout the survey the importance of the SNA role resurfaced here alongside criticism of recent cutbacks in SNA provision¹⁴. Current provision for MGLD in particular was also seen as inadequate, this cohort being seen as disadvantaged by SNA allocation compared to their mainstream peers. Recent restrictions on bus transport were also criticised. Positive comments from four respondents referred to the importance of having a good relationship with the SENO.

The following extracts illustrate the comments made.

It's hard to be thinking of people as resources in the same headspace as applying for materials or assistive technology. It seems a most unhelpful way to be looking at staffing – both teachers and SNAs in special schools...

...the SNA review process was negative and caused great distress to schools, staff, children and parents. To remove SNAs midyear was totally negative and showed a distinct lack of awareness of how special schools operate and what transition plans children with special educational needs need in order to cope.

The general allocation model is discriminatory towards special schools. A child with Down syndrome may be allocated a personal assistant within a mainstream setting and merely .5 of an assistant for 8 such students within a special school setting.

Just because a pupil has a mild GLD allocation of resources is based on P:T ratio of 11:1 and 0.25 SNA support to a class. There are very few pupils in special schools for mild GLD who simply have a mild GLD. Our school has pupils who are on the ASD spectrum, have ADD, ADHD, EBD, speech and language difficulties, physical disabilities, hearing impairment etc. In addition we have pupils from severe social and emotional disadvantage.

Unfortunately, Bus Éireann is now dictating who attends our schools and the NCSE is rigidly adhering to the nearest special school provision even though pupils from a certain geographical area were sanctioned to attend a school in the recent past...

¹⁴ It should be noted here that the NCSE SNA review was under way at the time this survey was being conducted.

In the area of transport great distress can be caused to parents who are refused transport on the basis of the school not being the nearest, most appropriate, and they may just be living less than 5 miles outside the catchment area and buses passing their door daily.

The present system has been effective in our school due largely to the excellent relations that have existed between the SENOs and the school in the past. I hope it continues.

6.5 Summary and Conclusion

6.5.1 Summary of Key Findings from the Three Surveys

Key findings from the preceding analysis are summarised below. These come with a caveat, however: specifically, the low response rate to the mainstream questionnaires and the fact that not all questionnaire items were completed.

6.5.1.1 Mainstream Provision

- Primary school respondents in this study reported 30.6 per cent of teachers as 'predominantly' involved (70 per cent or more of their time) in teaching pupils with special educational needs while the equivalent percentage at post-primary was only 11.3 per cent.
- At post-primary, teachers were reported as involved in providing some additional specialist tuition (separate from their mainstream class teaching) in the following subjects: maths (18.5 per cent), English (17.8 per cent), geography (12.3 per cent), history (10.5 per cent), science (10.5 per cent) and other (5-7 per cent). Over a half of teachers provided this tuition in their own subject specialism only.
- The two most common reported areas of difficulty for pupils with learning support were dyslexia (primary 95.9 per cent; post-primary 91.4 per cent) and specific difficulties in maths (primary 82.6 per cent; post-primary 76.5 per cent).
- Small group withdrawal was the most common practice (primary 91.7 per cent; post-primary 87.3 per cent) used for providing learning support in mainstream schools. In-class support came next in primary schools (71 per cent) but not in post-primary schools (46 per cent). One-to-one withdrawal was used in 52 and 63 per cent of primary and post-primary schools, respectively. Placement in a JCSP or LCA class was reported as an additional form of learning support used in 30 per cent of post-primary. Interestingly, a combination of all the above forms of support were also used in special schools but one-to-one withdrawal featured most predominantly (73 per cent).
- Primary and post-primary respondents reported that students with additional resource hours got additional tuition mainly from resource teachers. Small group and one-to-one withdrawal were the most common forms (70-95 per cent) in which these students receive additional tuition. In-class support (including shared and team teaching) is also used, more frequently in primary (64 per cent) than post primary (48 per cent). Two other forms of additional provision for students with low incidence special educational needs were uniquely associated with post-primary: reduced class sizes for subjects (57 per cent) and placement in JCSP / LCA classes (31 per cent).

6.5.1.2 SNAs and Special Classes

- Primary school pupils with special educational needs in this study got more additional support from class teachers and SNAs than their counterparts in post-primary. SNA allocation was relatively low (mean=3.61) in the post-primary schools surveyed compared to the primary schools (mean=2.73) despite the higher numbers of children at the former with low incidence disabilities. An average of 18 SNAs per school was reported in the special school survey.

- Most reported SNA duties were as defined in the relevant DES circular and were carried out daily. However, SNAs in special schools were more intensively involved in all activities than their mainstream colleagues.
- While most respondents considered SNA allocation adequate, about a third in all three surveys believed it inadequate. The main criticisms were the shared allocation of SNAs for some students with special educational needs, low levels of allocation and official restriction of the SNA role to care needs only.
- Proportionally more post-primary schools in our study (20 per cent) had official special classes than primary (14 per cent). While this is also the case in the population generally (NCSE, 2011: P – 8 per cent; PP – 10 per cent), the proportions are higher in our study, indicating that our sample may be over-representative of schools with special classes. Another noteworthy finding was the high proportion of post-primary survey schools with unofficial special classes (41 per cent) compared to only 3 per cent in the primary survey.
- The most common types of SEN found in special classes in mainstream schools were: ASD, general learning difficulties (mild, moderate, borderline), specific learning difficulties, emotional disturbance, physical disabilities. A similar pattern was found in special schools with ASD also the most common SEN recorded.
- LCA, JCSP and FETAC classes were on offer in a significant percentage of post-primary schools. The LCA was available in 38 per cent of these and organised as a separate class. FETAC was available in 19 per cent also organised separately. JCSP was available in 25 per cent but generally not as a separate class. FETAC was reported as used in 80 per cent of special schools surveyed and considered suitable for students. Leaving Certificate programmes, however, were not considered suitable for students in special schools.

6.5.1.3 System of Application and Allocation

- While most mainstream and special school teachers considered the application process efficient (primary 74 per cent; post primary 59 per cent; special 56 per cent), a substantial minority in primary and special schools in particular (40 per cent) did not. Criticism focused on the time consuming and bureaucratic nature of the application process. Among suggestions for improvement was better communication between professionals involved.
- In general, the RAD system was seen to have improved since the NCSE's arrival but a substantial minority still disagreed. Positive comments focused on the aspect of fairness and transparency. Most respondents registered high levels of satisfaction with SENOs: primary (74 per cent), post-primary (86 per cent) and special schools (68 per cent).
- A much higher percentage of respondents from all school types believe the allocation of special educational needs resources is adequate (primary 61.6 per cent; post-primary 66.3 per cent; special 65 per cent) than think otherwise. Personnel from DEIS schools were more likely to consider the hours allocated inadequate than respondents from Non-DEIS schools.

6.5.1.4 Professional Assessments

- Psychological assessments were conducted in almost all mainstream schools, speech and language (S&L) in 82 per cent, occupational therapy in 69 per cent and EBD in 46.3 per cent. On average one to three assessments of all types were conducted. S&L and EBD assessments on average took the longest from time of application – up to six months. All special schools had additional psychological assessments conducted while most also had S&L, OT and EBD assessments.

- Most professional reports were received within three months of assessment but four to five mainstream schools reported not receiving SLT / EBD report for over one year.
- The longest waiting lists for assessments in all school types were reported for assessments by psychologists and speech and language therapists.
- Substantial numbers of students in 70-80 per cent of primary and post-primary schools were seen to need professional assessment of all four kinds listed but were not prioritised under the present system. The greatest need was seen around psychological assessments at post-primary. Waiting lists were the most commonly reported reason preventing assessments followed by lack of service.
- High levels of dissatisfaction were reported with the numbers of assessments conducted at primary and post-primary. Only in the case of psychological assessments were respondents more satisfied than dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction was highest for EBD assessments in mainstream and special schools.
- For available support services, satisfaction was highest for educational psychologists, and visiting teachers for the deaf (58.3 per cent satisfied). Highest levels of dissatisfaction were recorded for services of SLTs, EBD / behaviour support specialists and clinical psychologists across all three school types.

6.5.1.5 Assistive Technology

- Low level use of assistive technology was indicated overall in mainstream schools. The most commonly used were adapted / special keyboard, loop system for hearing impaired, show sounds systems for hearing impaired, specially adapted mouse and magnifier screen. Most respondents (mainstream and special school) whose pupils use these systems considered them very helpful. About 40 per cent thought AT provided in schools was inadequate.

6.5.1.6 EBD and Challenging Behaviours

- Significant numbers of pupils with EBD were reported in primary and post-primary schools surveyed: about 60 per cent of primary and 70 per cent of post-primary schools had some students with EBD. Most mainstream respondents (primary 64.9 per cent; post-primary 61.4 per cent) rated EBD support as inadequate. Similarly, almost three quarters of special school respondents rated the support for children with challenging behaviour as inadequate.

6.5.1.7 Use of IEPs

- IEPs were used in more primary than post-primary schools: 99 per cent of primary schools use them for pupils with low incidence special educational needs compared to only 64.9 per cent at second level. For high incidence pupils IEPs were used in 70 per cent of primary and 60 per cent of post-primary schools. All but one of the special schools reported using IEPs. Most schools using IEPs consider them effective in monitoring the need for additional resources.

6.5.1.8 Perceived Impact of Resources on Students with SEN

- Over 90 per cent of all mainstream and 73 per cent of special school respondents believed the additional resources deployed were effective in assisting pupils with special educational needs to access the curriculum. While most also believed the resources helped students participate in extra-curricular activities, a substantial minority of post-primary respondents (45 per cent) disagreed.
- Sixty-five to 66 per cent of primary and post-primary and 97 per cent of special school respondents agreed that pupil self-esteem improved a lot as a result of additional resources.
- Finally, almost all (95 per cent) primary and post-primary respondents agreed that inclusion improved as a consequence of additional resources.

6.5.2 Conclusion

The three surveys conducted for this study were extensive in nature and yielded a rich corpus of data from 330 schools on the process of resource application, allocation and deployment in mainstream and special schools in Ireland. The broad range of topics they covered was important in giving respondents the opportunity to comment on all aspects of the RAD system. Both this and the triangulation of data helped highlight recurring themes within and across all three.

The most pertinent of these were summarised above. The low response rate will, however, compromise the extent to which major generalisations can be made from these three surveys. In addition, the proportionally higher number of special classes in responding mainstream schools compared to that found in the population generally may also bias the findings i.e. teachers with a greater vested interest in SEN provision may have been more likely to respond. Notwithstanding these limitations, the data presented in the methodology chapter show that the preponderance of mainstream responding schools were well distributed across key variables such as school size, location, gender composition and DEIS status. Furthermore, the sample of 330 teachers with responsibility for SEN provision is close to our original target (Chapter 4) and is large enough to give valuable information on resource allocation and deployment in schools nationally.

7: Findings: Case Studies of Mainstream and Special Schools

7.1 Introduction

A central aspect of this study was the conducting of in-depth interviews with personnel in 12 case-study schools; five primary, five second-level and two special schools. Among interviewees were principals, class teachers, SNAs and SEN co-ordinators in the schools. For ease of reference, the latter will be referred to as support co-ordinators, while acknowledging that no such official post exists in Irish schools, though some who perform this function may hold a special duties post or perform another management function. This section of the report outlines the main themes emerging from the interviews conducted with school personnel and some external professionals who support staff and pupils, namely psychologists and SENOs. This information is further complemented by information derived from interviews with pupils from these schools who were in receipt of additional support and their parents. The aim of the interviews was to explore participants' perceptions of how the resource application and allocation system operates, how resources are deployed and to elicit recommendations for change or possible improvement, where appropriate. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. This analysis involved repeated coding of data from a bottom-up perspective, yielding numerous codes. The aim was to structure these into three core themes on resource provision that were the study's focus: application, allocation and deployment. As the analysis progressed, the data yielded two further core themes, namely organisation and evaluation. The analysis yielded an intermediate set of sub-themes as outlined in Table 7.1. This chapter is thus structured around the five themes of organisation, application, allocation, deployment and evaluation.

Table 7.1: SEN Provision: Themes and Sub-themes

Core-theme	Sub-theme
Organisation	Co-ordination
	Collaboration
	External support personnel
Application	Role of assessment
	Access to professional services
Allocation	Eligibility criteria / categorisation
	General allocation model (GAM)
Deployment	Teacher deployment
	SNA deployment
	Special classes
	Special schools
Evaluation	Pupil progress
	IEPs

7.2 Organisation

The participants in this study acknowledged the increased resources and support personnel available to schools in the preceding decade. However, there was also a parallel emphasis on the increased complexity of the current school populations in Irish schools, such complexity being a factor of a wider spectrum of pupil ability, increased cultural and linguistic diversity and a greater complexity of needs, whether academic, social, behavioural or medical. This, in turn, has given rise to an increased level of complexity in the staffing structures of schools, with more support personnel involved, the management of which is putting increasing demands on management personnel. Examples of the additional personnel now evident in schools are increased numbers of SEN teachers and SNAs. A primary principal summed it up, stating that 'it is a school within a school'.

Between the low and the high incidence children catered for under the general allocation model, and children with English as a second language, we're talking about 120 children plus [out of 660]. We have four learning support teachers, five and a half special needs resource teachers and we have two language teachers. That's a team of 11 people, as well as 12 SNAs, which is a school within a school. (Principal Primary P4)

In parallel with increasing complexity, an increased range of external professionals is involved in supporting schools, most notably psychologists and SENOs. While this is very positive in terms of support, it is not without its challenges in terms of school personnel having to liaise with an increasing number of external agencies, which is accentuating the complexity of school organisations. Participant views on organisation of SEN provision clustered around the sub-themes outlined in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Organisation

Core-theme	Sub-theme
Organisation of SEN provision	Co-ordination of SEN provision
	Collaboration
	External support personnel

7.2.1 Co-ordination of SEN Provision

Within the ten mainstream case study schools, only one, a small primary, had no designated person for co-ordinating SEN provision. A full-time learning support teacher and two part-time resource teachers were shared with three other schools. The former took responsibility for providing learning support under the general allocation model (GAM), while the resource teachers worked with low incidence pupils. 'To be honest we work well as a team, without anyone being in charge' (LST P3). In two other primary schools, the principals, one a teaching principal, assumed responsibility for SEN provision. In the remaining seven mainstream schools, a designated person had a co-ordinating role considered essential for this task. The organisational structures pertaining to SEN provision in the case study schools are outlined in Table 7.3. Principals viewed the support co-ordinator as a type of liaison person, who maintained clear lines of communication between staff, parents, school management and outside support bodies and personnel.

The actual co-ordination of the allocation of the resources within the school, there's a huge need because of the number of teachers involved in learning support and resource, the SNAs, parents and the services, NEPS, there really does need to be somebody with a designated role to co-ordinate that. (Principal Second-level S4)

Table 7.3: Organisation of SEN Provision in Case Study Schools

School type	SEN structures / personnel
Second-level 1 (S1) (258 pupils)	Learning support co-ordinator
	5 part-time SEN teachers
	1 SNA (part-time)
Second-level 2 (S2) (426 pupils)	Head of SEN team (assistant principal)
	Assistant co-ordinator (of SEN provision)
	6.5 SEN teachers (co-ordinators for each year group)
	9 part-time SEN teachers
	15 SNAs
Second-level 3 (S3) (614 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator (special duties teacher).
	5.66 SEN teachers (126 hours)
	1 SNA
Second-level 4 (S4) (915 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator (also JCSP co-ordinator)
	1.2 learning support teachers
	2 full-time resource teachers
	6 part-time SEN teachers
	5 SNAs
Second-level 5 (S5) (450 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator
	1 full-time SEN teacher
	5 part-time SEN teachers
	3 SNAs
Primary 1 (P1) (120 pupils)	Learning support teacher (full-time)
	2 part-time resource teachers (shared with 3 other schools)
	2 SNAs
Primary 2 (P2) (280 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator
	1.8 learning support / 3 resource teachers
	4 SNAs
Primary 3 (P3) (660 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator (assisted by principal and deputy principal)
	9.5 learning support / resource teachers
	14 SNAs
Primary 4 (P4) (246 pupils)	SEN co-ordinator (principal)
	2 full-time learning support teachers
	2 full-time resource teachers / 1 part-time (3 hours)
	2 SNAs
Primary 5 (p5) (231 pupils)	1 learning support teacher
	2 resource teachers
	7 SNAs (2 in ASD unit)
	ASD unit (assisted learning class)
Special school 1 (Sp1) (150 pupils; 30 residential)	26 teachers
	24 SNAs
	Multidisciplinary team (2 social workers, 2 psychologists, 2 speech and language therapists)
	Vocational training
Special school 2 (Sp2) (69 pupils)	12 full-time teachers, 3 part-time (practical subjects)
	28 classroom assistants
	Speech and language therapist (0.5 post) / occupational therapist
	Special unit for pupils with severe / profound ID

On the administrative time required for this role, that principal, in a large secondary school of over 900 pupils, considered it needed two hours per day administration time. The principal emphasised the role was much more than paperwork; it was about the importance of relationships forged and maintained with all stakeholders. The principal of a large primary school said the administrative obligations were so great it was necessary, occasionally, to employ a substitute teacher to free the SEN co-ordinator's teaching commitments and focus exclusively, albeit for a short time, on the bureaucratic work.

The amount of work and time that goes into the whole area of special needs from the moment that a class teacher or a parent draws your attention to a possible need in a child to go through the process of evaluation and observation and eventually assessment, and then to deal with all of the agencies that you might be dealing with. You start with the NEPS psychologist, you may have to deal with speech and language therapists, behavioural people, all of that kind of stuff and to co-ordinate and collaborate with all of those people in the eventual final evaluation for the child is a massive amount of work. (Principal P3)

In interview, support co-ordinators also emphasised the role's multifaceted and complex nature emphasising time-management as critical in their operating effectively within the school setting. The considerable administrative and bureaucratic workload was also stressed, along with its demand for time. It must be noted all support co-ordinators carried out their duties in addition to teaching / principalship responsibilities. These included liaising with staff, supervising newly appointed staff members, co-ordinating SNA work, devising timetables, co-ordinating standardised testing, organising the purchase and allocation of resources, drafting policy with other staff, intervening / arbitration in difficulties with children displaying challenging behaviour, maintaining positive relations with parents and guardians, chairing meetings with a variety of interested and relevant parties, organising assessments and ensuring that pupils receive the appropriate support on the basis of these assessments, contacting the different government departments and ensuring the school is receiving the support to which it is entitled and maintaining accurate records.

A support co-ordinator at second-level said: 'The workload is immense, if you want to do it properly, the workload is immense.' (Support co-ordinator S3). A primary school colleague agreed, contending that the range of responsibilities can cause stress, particularly as one endeavours to teach and plan for one's classroom duties. She stated:

I've been run ragged; because not alone are you dealing with a caseload of children but ... you have to keep checking in with everyone all the time about what's happening. The whole thing is really huge. (Support Co-ordinator P3)

A support co-ordinator in a second-level school said the workload was so overwhelming it led her to question her future in that role and, indeed, as a teacher: 'I reckon if I don't give up what I'm doing, I'll be retiring, that's how big it is ... because it's too much work' (support co-ordinator S3). Time and timetabling were raised again and again in interviews, especially at second-level where the number of staff involved and the complexity of the timetables yielded few opportunities for them to meet, plan and co-ordinate their inputs.

A second-level principal, who had been head teacher of a school in England, stated:

Time is the biggest issue and you see I'm used to a system in the UK where there is 'directed time' – there is no directed time here. Directed time is where the school authorities have time after school, have five in-service days a year that are guaranteed for training and you have inter-department meetings for an hour after school – it's just not here in this system. So you are taking time out of staff meetings for this instead. (Principal S1)

However, the challenge of time management was not confined to large second-level schools. It was also significant for small primary schools, especially for teaching principals. One of these stated:

I see the challenges as trying to keep on top of your own class and their needs and keeping a full overview of the school and ensuring that every child gets what they need. (Primary P1)

7.2.2 Collaboration

A key element of the support co-ordinator's role is liaising with other staff, a time-consuming job and, as pointed out by one second level co-ordinator: 'It is impossible to timetable such meetings into a regular schedule such is the casual or ad hoc nature of many of them.' Meeting times were scheduled into SEN teacher timetables in one second-level school, while in the others they depended on teachers' willingness to meet during free time. Maintaining good communication systems was seen as central to the role. This involves liaising with principals, deputy principals, SNAs, mainstream teachers and resource teachers, pre-empting problems, dealing with them as they arise and ensuring that 'everyone is of one understanding as to what's required' (support co-ordinator P3).

Collaboration between mainstream and SEN teachers, a major challenge at second-level, aims to synchronise teaching inputs, to inform mainstream teachers about the nature of pupil difficulties and to distribute teaching resources to class teachers. ICT was used extensively here in two second-level schools. In one, a co-ordinator was appointed for each year-group to ensure collaboration between the teachers involved in providing support to pupils and mainstream teachers.

We have a resource co-ordinator for each year group, then we have the learning support teachers and that filters through to the class teacher and we have a system and the mainstream teachers so. We also have a school bulletin so anything that teachers need to know we keep a bulletin so we have a SEN section in that so any information that is important will be I suppose passed on through that. It is – it took us a long, long time to – we've come up – I mean it's not ideal but we're always sort of going back to the drawing board but it seems to work quite well – the information is getting through and the teachers are aware of what the needs of the students are – I mean we would – every student who has I suppose any kind of a learning difficulty, behavioural difficulty, we would have a list of recommendations for them and that is given – the learning support teacher would give that to the class teacher. (Support Co-ordinator S2)

Effective use of allocated resource support thus requires a lot of collaboration between school personnel, especially between SEN personnel and class teachers. By and large, support co-ordinators praised the co-operation and the collaborative ethos of mainstream teachers whom they saw as another critical element of the special needs team within their respective schools. Regular meetings and clear lines of communication between support co-ordinator and mainstream teachers were identified as key elements of their role. However, it was reasoned that time constraints endemic in school structures militate against facilitating such meetings. One principal emphasised that large schools need a non-teaching support co-ordinator post and also the length of the school day needs to be revisited in this regard.

In a school of this size I would have a non-teaching post for the special needs co-ordinator because it takes three of us to co-ordinate this school because it is a school within a school. If there was a non teaching special needs organiser in the school they could release class teachers [to attend meetings]. I would also change the school day to facilitate communication with the class teachers and for class teachers to liaise with resource teachers. Now you can do that through your hour a week that the government are looking for from teachers as an extra hour or you can build it in. I think time to liaise with people is critical and you cannot create that time in an overloaded curriculum in the school so if we're honest about it, if we are really honest about it everybody has to sit down and say we're either

talking about extra time and I'm either going to do it for nothing or you're going to pay me to do it. But it has to be negotiated. One hour a week even would be fantastic just even for the teachers to meet as groups, that their special needs resource teachers whatever. That would be fantastic to the school. (Principal P3)

Psychologists and particularly SENOs stressed the need for a designated person with a co-ordinating role for SEN provision.

Some schools don't have a post for resource co-ordination believe it or not ... you need a team, you need a care team that is working in there and if you have a proper care team, depending on the numbers it could be 2, it could be 4, it could be 3, depending on the number of kids coming in, if they sit down and work out exactly what those kids need and have it planned out by September, there shouldn't be any difficulties. (SENO 2)

The lack of role definition and communication between the SEN team and principal can reportedly be frustrating, particularly for SENOs as they may have to respond to similar queries from different personnel in the same school.

In some schools I work with you would have several people ringing me about the same issue and you wonder what communication is going on with the school. In one of the schools the SEN co-ordinator changed in the last few years and everything changed to fit into place; it is much easier now for me and I would have minimal contact with the principal and that is his choice – it is working well. In secondary schools, the schools which have a SEN team seem to be the ones that I would have the least problems with; to me they seem to be doing the best job possible, that's just from my perspective – schools who are not hammering on my door but not every school has an SEN team. (SENO 1)

I know SENOs who never see the principal in their schools; the principal has completely abdicated responsibility to the SEN co-ordinator and the SEN co-ordinator is running around and is really stressed out and especially at this time of the year [spring] in the bigger schools ... (SENO 3)

One of the most obvious changes in Irish schools in recent times has been the presence in classrooms of additional adults in addition to the class or subject teacher. This was heralded in particular by the appointment of SNAs. In interviews with school personnel more spontaneous comment was generated about SNAs than any other professional in the education system. These comments remarked, first, on the novel aspects of appointment of SNAs and how it marked such a change in Irish classrooms; second, on the crucial role of SNAs in meeting the needs of, and effectively including, pupils with special needs; third, the nature of the SNA role; and, finally, the deep concern expressed about a perceived risk of reduction in SNA numbers. An NCSE audit of SNA allocation and deployment was in progress during this research and prompted the concern. SNA numbers have since been capped at 2010-11 levels. A second-level principal remarked:

The biggest thing is the SNAs in the classroom – that's a huge change and there would have been some resistance to that amongst teachers, that you don't want a second adult – there's no resistance now – it is an accepted norm now so that's a huge change. Two adults in a room is now an accepted norm. (Principal S2)

Principals were consistently complimentary about the quality of support SNAs supply. Support co-ordinators were overwhelmingly positive about the role and its contribution to the running of every special needs programme. SNAs are seen as an 'indispensable resource' and individuals were praised for their professionalism and rapport with their pupils. The prevalence of SNA support throughout the system is reflected in every class teacher interviewed having had either current or previous experience of working with SNAs in their classrooms. They were unanimous in their positive comments on how much they valued this support. One second-level teacher in a school where challenging behaviour was the dominant theme for SEN summed up the comments of many:

I would say for me, we talk about the special education needs department, for me it's the SNAs that provide the support across the department and they're brilliant because the SNAs go from class to class with the class group, so an SNA will come into me and I'll be teaching a class group and they will be able to come up to me and say 'Look such and such is having a really bad day' or something has happened in the previous class and I think that's one of the brilliant things about the SNAs. They're almost part of the class and have a much clearer picture of what's going on in the classroom than we have as class teachers. It's brilliant, at times it seems that they are coming to us with gossip, but you need to know that gossip, you need to know what's going on in the class, the dynamics of different students. (Class Teacher S2)

7.2.3 External Support Personnel

7.2.3.1 Role of the NCSE and SENOs

An influential development for external professionals and agencies supporting schools has been the NCSE's establishment and the appointment of SENOs. Principals regard their assigned SENO as the human interface between themselves, as education providers, and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), seen as resource providers. In this context, the SENOs were positioned as gatekeepers to the resources of the Department.

I feel that they have a very hard job; I can imagine that they are under huge pressure and they can only give out a limited amount, they have to have very strong cases themselves to be able to support what they are giving. (Principal S5)

The priority areas for SENOs were seen to be administration, student observation for SNA applications, communication with parents and school personnel. As for communication with parents, all SENOs said they would like to see the relationship and communication with parents being more formal. In particular, they thought parents should receive a copy of the official letter with the outcome of the application decision. While acknowledging that it would be extra administrative work, they considered it essential for parents to be made explicitly aware of the outcome for the resource allocated or the reason for non-allocation.

I think the parents have a right to know, I know it is added work but it still should be done. I do think the parents should be involved and I feel that education for the parents about the [role of the] SNA should be enforced. Some parents say, 'don't take my child's teacher away from them' but I have to explain that the SNA is only a helper, your child's class teacher is in charge of the child, an SNA only looks after your child's care needs. (SENO 2)

In relation to unsuccessful applications, the SENOs find that the parents can be given misleading reasons by the schools. In one case, a school reportedly told a parent that the SNA support had been cut:

... outright lied to a mum and told her that the SENO had reduced her child's SNA ... so I sent her the individual decision form, she needed to know and she needed to be able to go to him [the principal] and say. (SENO 2)

In relation to resources, four SENOs reported that parents were often uninformed or misinformed about resources granted, particularly allocation of resource hours. In addition, they found many parents were unaware their child had been allocated resource hours, or, in cases where they were aware, they did not know the number of hours and the nature of support given during those hours. A recurrent theme raised by five SENOs was that parents were often unaware their child had been allocated resource hours, but was not actually in receipt of such hours.

What's happening now is that very sad and distressed parents are ringing me asking why their child is not getting any help. I can't tell the parents how many they (resource hours) are actually getting ... it's the school that would make the decision. (SENO 2)

Many SENOs appear to work in a consultative role with parents, advising and informing them of their entitlements:

I find myself giving a lot of advice to parents around what they are entitled to ... I'd say to them 'I've given the school x, y and z and you need to make sure they come back to you with blah or whatever', so I'm encouraging parents to be a bit more empowered. (SENO 6)

Communication with other professionals was considered a 'high' to 'medium' priority in their role as SENO, while consultation regarding IEPs was a 'low' priority. It must be noted that IEPs are not yet mandatory and the SENOs do not formally have a role here. When asked what they regarded as the most valuable aspect of their role to schools, they said it was face-to-face contact with school personnel as opposed to the previous system whereby the application went into a central system in the Department of Education and Science [Skills] and there was no designated liaison person with whom schools could consult. 'It is a constant person who is always there; when they ring, they will always get the same person ... so I just think the availability' (SENO 3).

While a small number of SENOs work informally with schools around best SEN practice, most said they wished they were in a position to use their expertise and work in a more formal consultative, partnership model rather than one of administrator. 'Let us talk to the schools about best practice and how to use those resources and get the best out of them.' Interestingly, one SENO felt this was not within the remit of NCSE, but rather of NEPS.

The better schools do use us around best practice in SEN and they will ring you up and say 'how do you feel I should approach this?' which makes it difficult for us because technically that's not our role. In relation to NEPS that is mentioned in the Guide to make sure of best practice but the NEPS person is that person for them so I'd say the biggest value is that they have one person to link with on all of those issues. (SENO 7)

In general, the psychologists attached to the case study schools said their relationship with the SENOs was positive and they acknowledged the role had lessened their administrative work, allowing them to concentrate on assessment and intervention.

For us it's very helpful because the SENO deals with that, we're dealing with the needs of the child rather than the provision. I suppose where my role kicks in is before that provision is in place by doing the assessments and then when the teacher is put in place by following up and by supporting the teacher or the SNA in putting appropriate interventions in place so that can work out very well. So the in-between stages doesn't cause me any headache because I don't get quite involved with that end of things. (Psychologist 2)

By and large, the principals spoke positively about their individual SENOs, only criticising a complicated resource application process which they claimed was less than transparent. The principal of a large primary school was very complimentary of the SENO assigned to his school and the professionalism and transparency of the processes employed. Similarly, the SENOs reported a positive relationship with school personnel and other professionals, particularly NEPS psychologists. Overall, support co-ordinators articulated their belief that the resource allocation system, though still somewhat flawed, had improved in terms of efficiency, timeliness and fairness. There was also praise for individual SENOs and their professionalism along with (almost) unanimity in their acknowledgement of the improvement in the system since SENOs were appointed.

However, SENOs criticised the training they had reportedly received and their perceived limited understanding of the whole-school context of applications for resources; such was their focus on the needs of individual pupils. Seven SENOs stated that the baseline training and overall induction process when joining the NCSE was minimal and that this has resulted in varying practice: 'Give us some baseline training so we're all singing off the same hymn sheet' (SENO 6). It appears the focus of their initial training was in relation to SNAs.

We were never given any baseline training, the biggest piece of training we got was on SNAs, how to do an SNA review and that was then and that was led by the Inspectorate and there were these kind of broader criteria that you could use, they were never official or written down so again you have some SENOs who took that completely on board and you had SENOs who go very strictly by the Circular so already we have got disparities. (SENO 4)

The training wasn't – it has improved since but the training – I came in after the main group of people who received quite a bit of training I understand but because I came in, maybe two years afterwards, I received it was training on-the-job really ... I think maybe surely have induction in Head Office for a start but not having a caseload for a few weeks and maybe working, shadowing a SENO would be the way to do it and maybe processing a few applications, overseen by the SENOs, do you know? I think that on-the-job learning to me would be the way to do it. (SENO 8)

In terms of lack of training, particular areas which a number of SENOs referred to was observation of students and IEPs:

... we never got training on how to write those up – I happen to know that you can't be, I can't put my opinion into it and I can only state facts but we need training in it. (SENO 7)

It's not within my remit – I would love to do it [be involved in IEP formulation] but I can't see how it can be a SENO thing unless they give us baseline training because it's not fair on people who don't come from a school background and also some of the people who do come from a school background are coming from that mind-set of schools need more resources. We need more so we are all saying the same thing and not just about IEPs. (SENO 3)

Furthermore, the SENOs expressed the need and their desire for ongoing continuing professional development, particularly those who had joined the NCSE in later years.

An important factor in the relationship between the school principal and the SENO was the principal's perception that a SENO had the potential power to revoke or retain resources. This was particularly related to the allocation and retention of SNA support. The relationship between school and SENO was apparently characterised by some suspicion and wariness. At a practical level, a primary principal said: 'In all fairness to the SENOs, their workload is too heavy; they have too many schools, too many children.' This principal said that when the school applies for an additional SNA, the whole school SNA allocation is audited. This results in extra administrative demands on the principal coupled with real fear that the existing allocation will be reassessed negatively and they will lose rather than gain support. The SENOs themselves spoke of the ever increasing volume of administration.

I would benefit from admin support absolutely. I absolutely hate the admin end of it ... I would definitely think SENOs would be more beneficial on the ground if they had admin support. My bone of contention is the caseload – there was an attempt in our area to change the caseloads and it was agreed and then it was disagreed so we ended up getting them back again so I mean there needs to be a look at caseloads definitely and I would preferably like to have primary schools and follow on secondary schools – a lot of your time now is spent trying to track down files and whatever so you are waiting on those files to come into you from your own schools. (SENO 2)

Another SENO (4) defined her role as 'effectively an administrator and a processor of applications'. SENO 6 said the 'job has broadened and our administration pressure has gotten much bigger because we have no admin support at all, I spend a lot of my time writing and sending stuff out'.

An area in which many SENOs proposed a change was in relation to the existing SEAS database into which applications must be centrally entered. In addition to the system being reportedly very slow, it is felt that there is too much duplication of form-filling. The SEAS database system is also reportedly very rigid in relation to categories of disability; for example, when inserting 'Down syndrome', it is not possible to also add the level of intellectual disability.

In general, as this comment illustrates, the SENOs felt their role had made little impact on SEN practice within the schools.

[SEN] policies would be the role of the Department of Education and Science, policy wouldn't really be our remit; you just simply give the resources and that's the end of your role. It's not actually doing them – it's not a comprehensive role – I would be happier with my role if I felt it was more comprehensive in terms of what I actually offer – I would like to see the staff involved, I'd like to see something of benefit as a result of it other than just the school saying to me I need four SNAs or five SNAs and you have actually no role in terms of SEN policy. (SENO 2)

If there wasn't as much paperwork, like when the application comes in, we have to fill out something like four or five different file papers and then do a computer system as well – there is a lot of work ... I feel we could make a bigger impact on policy. (SENO 3)

However, while the SENOs considered their impact on SEN practice was minimal, there was a sense among a number of them that schools have become more accountable in terms of resources:

Yes, they've all written policies; they have all written SNA policies; schools definitely feel more accountable when we go out because there is a person asking questions. It has made them more accountable in terms of their resources absolutely and their deployment of SNAs, their use of the resources, also. (SENO 3)

7.2.3.2 Role of NEPS

Another crucial aspect of the expanded support system for schools is the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS), which has been gradually expanding since its statutory establishment in 1999. Regardless of the service in which they worked (i.e. VEC, Disability Service or NEPS), the psychologists interviewed all defined their role as consultative, working in partnership with teachers and parents using a joint problem-solving framework. This contrasts somewhat with the principals' view of the role of psychologists, as their perceived level of satisfaction with the service received frequently relates to the number of assessments conducted in the school. While school personnel valued all inputs from NEPS, they wanted more psychological assessments when the need arose and objected to an apparent arbitrary quota of assessments determined by the psychologist's workload rather than school needs. This issue arose regularly during interviews on the limit to assessments which the NEPS psychologists could conduct in each school. The principals and support co-ordinators in the larger schools, especially at second-level, argued that this limit took no account of the

school's individual and ever-changing needs in any particular year. This inflexibility, it was argued, resulted in situations whereby schools, having identified the needs of individual pupils, were forced to bypass the official system and arrange to have them assessed privately. In these cases, the school often meets these costs through fundraising. This resulted in high levels of frustration which seemed directed towards the service itself, rather than towards individual psychologists. A second-level principal stated:

I suppose at the moment, there are probably ten [pupils] on my list [for assessment], four of those are going to be covered through NEPS and we're going to cover another four or five privately through the school but then I am still left with two, that I just can't fund this year. (Principal S5)

According to a primary school principal, private assessments were relatively easy to organise and timely in their execution, which sometimes contrasted with a delay between the application and their actual assessment within the NEPS system. He contrasted the quantity available to the school under an alternative scheme for commissioning private assessments, before the school was supported by NEPS and the current situation:

Now a school of this size is at a disadvantage at the moment being part of NEPS, because before NEPS came around we were entitled to two assessments per 100 from private psychologists – we're now only entitled to six which means that our psychologist from NEPS will do six, sometimes she will do seven, maybe she will squeeze in an eighth but, previously, we had the facility where we were able to get ten to 12 children a year assessed. (Principal P3)

The psychologists themselves referred to the challenges associated with moving from the expectation of the old paradigm of assessment-based practice to the notion of the psychologist as facilitator, consultant, mediator and advocate. One stressed that the concept of the psychologist as advocate is ... 'very important, we are not only here for the students, we're also here for the adults, for the teachers, for the SNAs, for the parents'. The principals also acknowledged the 'added value' of the NEPS model of support other than individual assessments. The principal who was critical of the reduced number of assessments available to the school did acknowledge the other benefits of the NEPS service:

I would feel certainly, as principal, that the package that we now get [from NEPS] is much better and that the feedback that we get from the psychologist is much better and that the psychologist is more in tune with the needs of the school as against maybe going to six or seven different psychologists and getting ten or 12 children assessed and just getting a written report back and 'you pay me for feedback' and all the rest of it. We now have structured feedback, structured intervention in the school for those who get it and structured advice for the teachers and the people creating the learning plans and you know dealing with the children first hand, so there's a big advantage there. I would feel that the problem is that the workload for the individual psychologist is too heavy. They have too many schools to manage and they're not allowed to do as much work. I would like to see them maybe spending more time in the school and probably not only just evaluating children, but advising teachers maybe on strategies particularly in relation to behavioural management issues and maybe also working with parents. (Principal P3)

The resource teacher in another school which had no designated NEPS psychologist lamented the lack of such a service:

We don't have a designated psychologist here in the school. We've never had one attached to the school. Some schools have. Some schools have a psychologist assigned to the school. We have been, this has been, we were told we were going to get a psychologist, that all schools would have access to a psychologist since seven years ago. This has not happened. We have certain psychologists we use; some of them are not very satisfactory. And I'm not saying that they don't come up with what we want, it's because they don't give good feedback. In [named school], the psychologist comes to the school, follows up, looks at the IEPs. That's what you need. (Resource Teacher [RT] P1)

Principals also commented on the quality of reports received from NEPS psychologists. They found 'the bullet-pointed recommendations and suggestions were particularly useful'. There was a suggestion that reports should be made as user-friendly as possible with more everyday language employed. This, it was argued, would make such reports easier for parents to understand. Assessment reports reportedly have little value for the SENO other than for diagnostic criteria. Due to their large caseload, they tend to scan reports for the disability categorisation. One SENO stated: 'When I started I used to read from the beginning, now I read a speech and language and a psychologist's report in about two minutes.' All SENOs said that, with the present system of resource allocation, there is a danger that reliance on the report leads to a focus on the category of disability, rather than the child's individual strengths and needs. The general consensus on uniformity of professional reports was that speech and language and occupational therapy reports were usually clear and required no follow-up clarification. There is a reported lack of consistency, however, around language, terminology, and recommendations in psychological reports. This was linked to factors such as disciplines (i.e. clinical, educational, counselling) and whether working in a private capacity or for an organisation such as NEPS or the VEC, as well as the assessment instruments used. Most SENOs believed professional reports had improved on awareness of resource allocation criteria as, heretofore, professionals would make blanket recommendations for resources without reference to the existing criteria and this raised school and parent hopes. The SENO was then regarded as the person who said 'No!'

Well it has changed ... people are more aware that that's the piece you have to have but some of the professionals are really frustrating us by writing things like 'Under Circular 2005 this child is entitled to four hours of learning support with their multiple disability'. That gets the parents' hopes up and the schools say, 'The psychologist said' and we are the ones then who have to go 'Actually the criteria are' ... we are very much seen as the people who say no. (SENO 6)

While the psychologists viewed assessment from a strengths-based paradigm facilitating a holistic understanding of the student, they believed their role was defined by a system driven by categorisation. In turn their assessment reports led to an emphasis on disability category, rather than need. One psychologist summed it up: 'The psychologist and an assessment and a report are the vehicles to get support for a student.' They referred to the difficulties it created for them in expectations of school personnel, parents and the NCSE. They spoke of the constraints imposed on them by the current resource allocation model and expressed a desire to obtain resources without needing formal cognitive assessments. One psychologist gave an example of a report which was not accepted as the student was not assessed using a standardised cognitive instrument (for a specific valid reason): 'The first thing I was told was there is no IQ assessment so therefore there can't be resources.'

Linked to assessment was the issue of reassessment, particularly on transfer to second level. In general, psychologists and SENOs see reassessment on transfer to second level as important, not for the purpose of applying for resources but for monitoring progress and reevaluating continuing need. They felt there were certain categories of disabilities for which a child can be allocated resource teaching hours in junior infants and these would not be reassessed until transfer to second level even though they may no longer be entitled to, or need, the resource. One SENO gave the example of speech and language difficulty whereby a child may be allocated resource teaching hours in junior infants and still be getting it in sixth class even though there can be notable improvement if the child is receiving speech and language therapy.

There are certain categories where the child gets resource hours in junior infants and specific speech and language as well but very few pupils meet that criterion within two to three years with intervention of a speech and language therapist. Lots of children have come to my caseload that has been diagnosed with mild, within the mild category, at five years of age. Now at the moment there is no time limit on assessments, that assessment will get resource hours without an assessment at post-primary. (SENO 6)

They felt that many children had out-dated assessments and reassessment was important as the recommendations pertaining to a child who was initially assessed at age four would not be relevant for a child who is now 12 years old. It was noteworthy that many SENOs held differing views on the criteria for reassessment before transfer to second level; for example, some appeared to apply the blanket rule that an assessment in the previous four years would not necessitate reassessment, whereas others specified that emotional behavioural difficulties would require an updated assessment report a year before transfer to second level.

7.3 Resource Application Process

The process of application for additional resources is obviously a core theme in this study. Issues arising for resource application are outlined in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Resource Application Process

Core-theme	Sub-theme
Resource application	Role of assessment
	Access to professional services

7.3.1 Role of Assessment

All mainstream school principals commented on the time personnel spent in applying for resources. One described this system as 'less than user-friendly'. A primary school support co-ordinator stated: 'It's not easy to get resources, really. It's a long haul.' Interviewees were anxious to stress that, within their respective schools, resources were applied for on the basis of real need and not in a casual or unco-ordinated manner. They said careful consideration was given to the pupil profile, how current resources were allocated and whether these could be better deployed to meet increasing need. Only when there was, in the opinion of the school management, a resources and needs deficit did they apply for further support. They were, it was argued, acting with the pupils' best interests in mind while, at the same time, ensuring that current resources were used effectively and efficiently. They contended that when pupils deemed to be in need of additional support were not granted it because they were deemed ineligible under DES policy parameters, they felt their professional integrity and judgement were being questioned and therefore undermined. Principals within all mainstream schools said they would prefer a broader model which afforded more professional autonomy and which would place responsibility and choice within the hands of individual schools on how best to meet pupils' needs.

All the mainstream school support co-ordinators complained about the inextricable and rigid relationship between psychological reports and resource allocation, particularly given the limit to the number of assessments a school could access in a given year. A primary school support co-ordinator did not think the application system was efficient at all because of the need for psychological assessments. She had 20 pupils on a waiting list for assessment and the NEPS psychologist could conduct only three. The support co-ordinators contended that inequality was being perpetuated when some parents could afford private assessments and access resources for their children on the basis of these while others with limited resources could not. Critically, two children with identical needs may not have access to identical support due to an inherent inequity within the application system. Psychologists and SENOs expressed a wish for a move away from a medical to a more needs-based model, examining requirements on an individual basis. One SENO stated:

Well I think there's long term changes and short term changes and the long term changes would be around the model and the fact that it is based on ... 'you have x, you get y' ... So the long term changes I would see would be that it would be more outcomes based, based on each individual child's needs, I regularly see children that have seriously complex needs that don't meet any criteria ... they can't be assessed by any of the people and they have very complex needs and get no hours of resource – that's ridiculous. (SENO 6)

Most psychologists and SENOs commented on the need for increased school autonomy in the application process. They felt school-based assessment, particularly curricular-based assessment, should be taken into consideration. One psychologist stated:

I think personally the whole criteria system is medically oriented, it's not educationally oriented. It doesn't involve the schools in their assessment of the child; it relies too heavily on outside professionals' opinions without engaging with the school. I think there are massive flaws there. I'd like to see schools more engaged and complete their own assessments ... maybe the NCSE should be asking for the school's assessment as well as a psychologist's assessment. (Psychologist 3)

This sentiment was echoed by a support co-ordinator:

Everything hinges on the assessment whereas in a lot of situations the school are more in the know – I think the educational psychological assessments while it does have a bearing on the hours allocated to an individual student, I think also the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator does need to be taken into account with regards hours allocation as well. There needs to be a balance between the two. (Support Co-ordinator S1)

This support co-ordinator also emphasised the need for better communication between SENO and psychologist. SENOs noted that the teacher's opinion and input are not sought during the application stage as they are not listed amongst the professionals who can diagnose a child for resource allocation purposes.

They [teachers] weren't even on the list for professional recommendations – I think if they had been valued as a professional from the beginning the process would be different now ... I think if you went to teachers in their own school to make recommendations people wouldn't be looking for them [resources] if they didn't need them ... (SENO 3)

We need to focus on needs and how best to meet same so that's going away from the idea of the medical model and I think that there's scope for more recognition of a report written by a teacher. They know the children, they are professionals – ok they can't give a diagnosis but I suppose if we are moving away from the medical model, that is what we would be looking for yeah. (SENO 5)

Because the resource allocation system is based on categorisation, access to it depends on access to various professionals who fulfil a resource-defining / entitlement role. Parent experiences in this study suggest that access to such professionals can be mediated by school type, socio-economic circumstances and geographical location. This would challenge the equity of the resource allocation system. Five parents of pupils attending voluntary secondary schools, fee-paying or otherwise, reported that, during their children's primary education, they had funded private assessments to a significant extent to secure diagnoses, access additional tuition and avail of exemptions and accommodations. A parent of a pupil diagnosed with a specific learning disability during primary education said:

He needed an assessment in primary school, but the school could not provide it. The school had ten children waiting to be assessed and had to prioritise those with greatest difficulty. There was a lot of frustration before the diagnosis, we were fortunate to be able to fund the assessment, get the diagnosis and get the support. Then he changed to a school with smaller classes. (Parent 1 S1)

The mother of a girl who had experienced emotional difficulties in early childhood and who was later diagnosed as presenting with a specific learning disability reported very difficult experiences during pre-school and primary school. She had been expelled from three pre-schools by age four due to her emotional behavioural difficulties and resulting challenging behaviour. She was later diagnosed as having a SLD, dyslexia and dyscalculia, but got little support, other than that funded privately. According to the mother:

She received very little help in primary school, [she was] sometimes taken out of class to work on counters with an SNA, when her class were doing fourth class maths. I got private tuition on a daily basis, four days per week Monday to Thursday. (Parent 3 S1)

At the time of interview, this pupil was coping well in second-level education, but the mother was convinced that had she not funded private tuition for her child during primary school, this would not be the case. Other parents said they were funding private assessments again towards the end of second-level education to establish possible entitlement to special consideration for entry to, and to access support within, third-level. There is therefore a considerable risk that the inequity arising from unequal access to professionals during primary and second-level education will carry forward into third-level. All participating schools reported that it was necessary to exploit additional funding of assessments either by encouraging parents to fund them privately, by seeking funding from local agencies or by financing them from school funds.

We have actively sought financial support from different organisations and we've got money in for assessments that we may not have been able to do otherwise so we've got quite a large number of assessments done say in the last 12 months. So at the moment now we're working through them. For a couple of years we were finding it very difficult – the tide seems to have turned now though we're managing to get a good number of assessments done and if there's somebody who urgently needs an assessment we find that we can get it done quite quickly. (Principal S2)

A parent dependent on public services said: 'We have to do a lot of running around, like we have to fight for everything really and go look and find this and find that.' A parent who had adopted two children at different periods, which resulted in accessing public services in different areas within the same city, commented on the difference between the two services, resulting in significant distress for the family in relation to the second child.

Now we have a nine-year-old we adopted and it took eight years to get her assessed because they didn't tell us what was wrong with her, all her history, nothing so that we had seven years of hell going through school and homework and screaming everything. She was diagnosed only last year and now she is in a special school. (Parent 1 S5)

Another parent of a pupil diagnosed with ADHD in fourth class and prescribed medication felt the assessment and diagnosis delay had prevented her son from accessing the education system effectively during the crucial years of early primary. At time of interview, this pupil was in first year and was still on medication. While his mother was initially concerned about the medication and would obviously still prefer if he did not require it, she felt it was necessary to enable him to learn:

There was no difference for first six weeks [on medication], after that you could see a difference straight away. I think everything improved; he even took books out at home and said I'm going to try and read this and he'd say will you write out maths questions and I'll do them, so he was more interested than ever before, it was completely different. (Parent 2, S2)

His mother reported that she had asked the 'education board' and the school to allow him to repeat sixth class because she 'felt it was very unfair on him going into secondary school unable to read and unable to cope with, I felt, basic needs that you need going into secondary'. However, her request was refused and she commented on his subsequent class placement in second-level as follows:

It's a special class; he's in one of the lowest classes. I'm upset for him, it doesn't really bother me. Obviously people want the best for their children I think it hurts me to think that the education system has let him down way back when, where I'm just hoping he will catch up. It was very upsetting for me to think that something could be wrong and that he's grown up all this time and not have received help for it. That was upsetting for me. (Parent 2 S2)

She also reported that, on receiving the diagnosis of ADHD, she was left to source information for herself from the internet in order to inform herself about the condition.

Principals in the two special schools in the study recognised significance of the NCSE's role though the perception varied of its exact nature for special schools. In Special School 1 (MGLD), the principal and programme manager summarised the role as the NCSE providing SNAs and transport for pupils.

... and we're not sure what their role is in teaching – recommending or suggesting teaching – there are varying views; sometimes in the past we have received one teacher to work in the area of autism but they seem to have stepped back from that now and seem to say that they can only recommend SNAs. (Principal Special School Sp1)

However, the NCSE's role in special schools has since expanded considerably in relation to allocation of resources. When asked to comment on the application process, the principal in the SP1 said that students most in need of SNA support were not always the ones who received it and that an arrangement whereby they could discuss student need with the SENO would be more productive:

... in our case we do most of it at the very end of the academic year – July is our usual and we will make application for a block grouping – all our new students, all in one. We are surprised at what we receive from time to time; we may request SNA support for 12 students and we have an enrolment of maybe 25. At the end the students who receive SNA supports are not the ones of greatest need but they may require some request on some document as to why it would be sanctioned by the school. It would work much better if the SENO came in, had a discussion with the school principal and programme manager and we advise them as to who needs SNA support, not what would appear to be the case if you read a report. We have received SNA support for children who do not need them and we have been turned down for students who badly need them. (Principal Sp1)

Greater school involvement in decision-making on resource allocation and more flexibility around deployment were also raised by the two special schools. While expressing concern at how the NCSE perceives individual pupil needs, the principal of Sp1 gave this insight:

... their criteria is based on, they have a coded system and that coded system seems to be regarded as secret; for example, when you get your report back, they will say that you will get report for code 7 student because they have additional needs in the area of 7 and 10. Now we have picked up that 7 means autism, but you're not sure what else they're saying so if they shared the codes with us and shared how they came to their decisions it would be helpful. (Principal Sp1)

The SENO is perceived as crucial in resource allocation to both special schools. The principal of Sp2 (moderate GLD) described the relationship very positively.

Very, very supportive I have to say; great for advice and when we're in enrolment looking at a child for transport, for assistive technology, for the acquisition of SNA support, but very willing and very supportive in carrying out their role from the Council with the – very professional manner. (Principal Sp2)

However, the principal in Sp1 was less positive:

The link between the SENO and school is falling down – the link between school and the Department of Education it has changed in the climate that we're in the past 12 months and both of these are not working well at the moment and I have concerns about the next six months ... they're questioning everything in respect of the SERC¹⁵. Report so they're asking for a lot of details on staff; we can see the writing on the wall. (Principal Sp1)

He also expressed dissatisfaction when asked about the efficiency of the resource application process.

Unfortunately with the transport for example you feel you're a little pawn; the application goes from here to the SENO, the SENO then takes it to the Department and the Department takes it to Bus Éireann; then it comes back and it's time – it could be more efficient and more direct. (Principal Sp1)

7.3.2 Access to Professional Services

Some parents said lack of professional and inter-agency collaboration could delay getting a diagnosis and led to duplication of assessments. A parent of a child subsequently diagnosed with dyspraxia documented the delay experienced by her child. The diagnosis was eventually secured at age 10 / 11 following private assessments by a psychologist and an occupational therapist. He had been assessed 'through the school' in senior infants with an 'inconclusive' outcome. Another parent had failed to secure explanations for her child's behavioural and attention difficulties through local services and 'eventually had to go to Dublin and secured a diagnosis of ADHD through private assessment'.

Accessibility to public services appears to vary considerably according to geographical location and this does not necessarily suggest that urban regions are better served than provincial as variability within urban areas was also reported. The parents of two children accessing services from long-established health service providers were complementary about the clinical support. Also another parent commented favourably on services provided by Early Intervention Teams, set up by the Health Services Executive (HSE). However, the parents of four other children reported less positive experiences. One parent of a boy who eventually received a diagnosis of ASD said the process was slow, that he was on a waiting list for public services, but the parents decided to access professionals privately, only to find that the clinical service in question would not accept private reports and they had to persist with the public waiting list to get the assessments done again. The mother felt this was a waste of what were obviously scarce resources.

It was hard because it seemed to come in bits and pieces and I felt we were waiting on a list to go public and then we went private and then our private reports wouldn't work they wouldn't accept them in [named service], so we still had to wait for the public ones to come up and lucky I hadn't said in the public system that we were going private because we would have been knocked off the list, so we waited and waited and we got the public reports and then eventually we had to go and look for help on a waiting list for speech and occupational therapy so it was a long haul now, it was very hard. (Parent 3 P1)

Again, after diagnosis the parents had to educate themselves on the condition: 'When we got the diagnosis, we went and read every book you could get and we said "right ok we know now and we can handle this now"'. This child was originally granted full-time SNA support, but it had been reduced twice to that of a half-time post. The parent felt that there should be more contact between the SENO and the parent around the issue of reducing support in this manner. A further complication of this case was the fact that having been

¹⁵ In the early 1990s, authorities in Ireland were beginning to rethink the nature and level of educational provision available to children with disabilities and established the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) which produced the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Government of Ireland, 1993).

diagnosed by the service, which involved assessments by a psychologist, a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist, the child was not entitled to services from these professionals because he was in mainstream education. 'Well that's all gone because he is in mainstream; I have to go private now for everything.'

Emphasising that schools and the education system must liaise with and depend on other systems, such as the healthcare system, especially for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, participants commented on HSE support. One principal referred to a model of good practice in this regard:

There is an Early Intervention Team and if they're working with children prior to coming to school, they continue to work with them while they are in school. That's a magnificent intervention, the excellent support that they give to the resource teachers here and the children they're dealing with is phenomenal and we would feel that should be widened to include all of the children including the low incidence children in the school, that they come under the care of a team like that who will visit the school regularly. (Principal P3)

However, this principal was critical of the supports generally available from health services, declaring they were disjointed and unco-ordinated. 'It's the disjointedness and disconnectedness of the system that is so difficult for principals and parents to lever and it makes the accessibility of services so difficult.' He said child services should be administered within the Department of Education, rather than Health. Reiterating the connectedness between the school and the social system, another principal emphasised the importance of involving parents in the school and providing classes for parents, including literacy classes. A wrap-around of services was recommended for the family and the school, with maximum co-ordination and minimum fragmentation. Another principal emphasised the need for more-co-ordination between various parts of the education system, especially between mainstream and special schools. He observed this in the context of three siblings presenting with significant needs, 'no language, no social skills, no ability to communicate', but whom parents wanted to enrol in a mainstream school. He contended that the school could only facilitate these children for the duration of their resource hours and advocated attendance in a nearby special school for the rest of the school day, through a system of dual enrolment, through which they could access all the necessary clinical services.

The parent of a child with a rare medical condition also reported duplication of assessments for no apparent reason other than administrative issues. Her son was attending a children's hospital as he had medical and care needs and had also been diagnosed by the hospital as presenting with dyspraxia. His mother said that when she approached a local early intervention service for occupational therapy support, the hospital diagnosis was not apparently accepted and a multidisciplinary assessment followed which took a long time to execute and left the child without the therapy. She criticised the service for not visiting her son's school to communicate with teachers, opting instead to forward handouts on dyspraxia. This parent spoke positively about the hospital care she received for her son and of the care and educational support he got in school, but was very critical of local health services. Two parents of a child with speech and language disorder also advocated better communication between therapists and teachers.

An issue that arose in a number of interviews was the need to take a holistic view of the family when allocating resource support, especially in relation to the issue of a number of children within the same family presenting with disabilities. One parent had three children with low incidence disabilities in one school and another parent had two children with such disabilities in one school and another child in a special school. One single parent had a daughter with ASD in a mainstream school and a son with Down syndrome and ASD in a special school. This parent was in a unique position to comment on the resource allocation system in Ireland, as she had moved to Ireland from England two years previously, having thus had significant experience of the

system of provision there for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. She commented on the emphasis on testing and assessment within the English system:

It was more, I think, exam orientated; they headed towards the exams and there was a lot of tests and that, which she wasn't able for. Here they've got back to basics as I call it, sums and spellings, that kind of thing which she was bypassing you know. (Parent 4 P5)

Her daughter had just completed the primary system in England and was due to begin second-level but her mother thought she was not ready for this.

But she just wasn't ready, if I had stayed, had I been there longer I just dread to think what secondary school would have been like, because it was just so fast-paced and exam orientated, it just would have been a disaster. (Parent 3 P5)

Her mother believed the curriculum she was following in the Irish school system was more suitable and was tailored to her individual needs more so than in England. Despite the diagnosis of ASD in England, she was not granted a statement of need: 'I did apply for it [a statement in England] but they wouldn't do one for me.' She was granted resource teaching support in the Irish school on the basis of the diagnosis received in England. She had very good access to external professionals in England, which was not her experience here. An anomaly was that her daughter was attending a mainstream primary school with a special unit for pupils with ASD attached. She was presenting with communication difficulties, but had no access to a speech and language therapist. If she were attending the special unit within the same school with the same diagnosis, she would have speech and language therapy.

7.4 Resource Allocation System

Table 7.5. outlines the major issues arising in the interviews for resource allocation.

Table 7.5: Resource Allocation

Core-theme	Sub-themes
Resource allocation	Eligibility criteria
	General allocation model (GAM)

7.4.1 Eligibility Criteria

Most support co-ordinators agreed that when reports are received and forwarded to relevant agencies, support is provided in a timely and effective manner. As for the efficiency of the resource allocation system, most SENOs said it was now more efficient. In the past a lot of delays were reported due to omissions on application forms (for example, PPS numbers, parents' signatures), but this has improved greatly. However, most SENOs felt the administrative aspect of the system was not efficient in the time it takes for the SENO and the principals from the point of view of form filling and duplication of required data. One SENO said: 'It's not efficient in terms of time, not just my time, but everybody else's time; the principal's time filling out application forms.'

There was a perceived rigidity in the categorisations used to determine allocation. In so doing, support co-ordinators maintained the 'human dimension' of resource allocation was disregarded and instead the focus was on the 'statistical scores of pupils'. The input of school staff in mediating such results was seen as an unexplored option which could potentially serve to bridge the apparent mismatch between quantitative

statistics and qualitative experiences. Two principals criticised the narrow and specific criteria used to assess the needs of the child for resources.

But if a child fits into a certain box then the resources come, that's very efficient. The problem is that not every child who has a serious need fits a box, so that's where I see it being inefficient.
(Principal P1)

One second-level principal commented very negatively on the timing of allocation:

The greatest problem I have is that the application for new students or for the continuation of hours happens so late on in the year that the quality of the personnel that I have to deliver those hours to these children with special needs falls short of what the children deserve, falls short of the quality of being able to deliver the quality of provision no matter how well intentioned the teachers might be. So you find yourself with maybe the equivalent of two whole time-teachers in terms of hours but you don't know until July or August if you are getting that. (Principal S4)

A second-level principal raised another complication on appointing teachers of pupils with special educational needs. If a school is over-quota and is allocated additional resource teaching hours, it must utilise existing staff regardless of their interest in, or aptitude for, teaching these pupils. That principal had reservations about pupils with the most severe needs being taught by teachers without SEN expertise.

Support co-ordinators called for a system where schools could argue for the inclusion of pupils within a scheme even if their test results made them ineligible. They criticised the SENO over-riding or discounting the advice of psychologists, principals and teachers on individual pupils. In general, the SENOs felt the present resource allocation model was out-dated and too rigid around current categories of disability.

We are dealing with a very outdated system – there is no broad definition of SEN, you either have a disability or you don't, if I get an application for a child with an IQ at 89 and a score below the 2nd percentile, I'll have to turn it down and I had a dad one time who said 'are you telling me my child isn't bright enough to get resources with an average IQ?' He had a very good point. (SENO 4)

Five SENOs gave examples of disabilities which do not fit the system and qualify for resources; for example a child with acquired brain injury may not qualify for resources, while a child with diagnosed Asperger's may be doing really well and not need their resource hours:

The main thing is the model itself, how we do things and how we – it's infuriating for a parent to say to me, 'My child has an acquired brain injury and they can't concentrate for more than two seconds at a time' and I say, 'Sorry we don't meet the criteria' – that's ridiculous and then that's not a help to the principal of the school, it's no help to the resource teacher, it's no help to anybody you know and everybody is saying I will write whatever you want because they don't meet the criteria and then the other thing is, as I said earlier, children who do meet the criteria, say for Asperger's, and they are doing really, really, really well and even socially they could be doing really well and they don't need the support. (SENO 5)

A learning support teacher echoed the sentiments of many support co-ordinators and principals, saying the system was too rigid and the criteria too strict:

In one specific case, it was like only one point or two points short of qualifying for resource teaching. In those situations like I think that's totally unfair. Like there should be a gap of you know at least five points for kind of an average acceptance because this is the child now that had to wait a whole year and she was getting learning support but she was definitely more needy of resource. But the Department are too put on if they're over 40, or they're 70 or they're 50 or they're 49. They're non-verbal learning disorder, if they're a verbal learning disorder, if there's a difference between this. It's all numbers now we're down to. [Named SENO] would be on to us and says what are the

numbers?. Not how's the child coping in school, or you know, is the child improving or you know ... no. What's the number? And we're pulling our hair out here. We're only teachers. We haven't the training. [Learning Support Teacher (LST) P1]

The support co-ordinators in each of the four mainstream primary schools emphasised the importance of intensive intervention during primary years, especially the early years. They criticised the delay that can arise from the staged approach to assessment and intervention:

So that has caused problems in the sense that we would love to have more hours with some of the children that are in need because it's quite a large number of children really in a small area, in a small school and the fact is that when children are needing that kind of help, if they get it at a primary school level, it's crucial. That's where they do most of their learning, intensive learning, especially in the junior classes. So if we could have more hours to spend with the children in the group situation or in the individual situation because time is crucial for those, you know, at that age. They need a lot of intensive work. So that if they miss out on like two years, senior infants, First class, second class, by the time they get to resource then there's a huge gap there where they should have been getting help. A younger age, it's crucial, absolutely, to get them at a younger age and to get you know, to cut down on the red tape that you need to qualify. (Primary RT 1)

The resource and learning support teachers in that school highlighted a perceived dissonance between the practices of HSE personnel and the demands of Department of Education and Skills' requirements for eligibility for resource allocation:

The Department then are so stuck, this is the biggest problem. They're stuck on labels. This is the problem. The Department are stuck on labels and scores. The HSE will say we don't want to label children. The HSE don't want to label. The Department ... the only way we'll get resources is labelling. Now you can imagine then the fight you have. I'd a child with Asperger's. He has been determined Asperger's. He was attending the HSE. I knew he had Asperger's. They refused to give the label, they would not give that title, so he'd get the resources. We knew that if we sent him to [named professional], so we told the mother, she took him to [named professional], she was in there one hour, she got her title, she had it when she came out, she came down to us. She said 'brilliant', we sent it to the SENO, got his hours. (Primary LST 1)

Two principals said access to resources depended somewhat on the relationship between the school and individual SENOs as well as the SENOs' expertise and knowledge of disabilities.

Principals called for increased dialogue between schools and SENOs at the application stage, whereby schools can explain their needs and the SENO could realistically assess them in the context of the 'knowledge from the ground' rather than solely from a paper application:

There seems to be a mismatch between hours allocated and diagnosed need. For example, a pupil diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome would be allocated up to five hours teaching support per week, whereas a student with a borderline MGLD will be allocated 1.5 hours and in my experience the student with borderline MGLD needs more hours' allocation, so the whole criteria with regard to resource allocation needs to be looked at. (Support Co-ordinator S1)

The support co-ordinators in four of the second-level schools were highly dissatisfied with resources available for pupils with behavioural difficulties and the difficulties this posed for class teachers and others responsible for meeting their needs. In their experience, having an SNA assigned to a child with behavioural difficulties effectively mitigated the behaviour and pre-empted confrontations and instances of challenging behaviour. They were unhappy with the current system arguing that behavioural difficulties by their nature were sometimes difficult to classify or characterise within a framework of recognised learning disabilities and that

therefore the pupils in question might be deemed ineligible for resources. There was a sense that support co-ordinators, at times, felt powerless when dealing with officialdom like the HSE, NEPS or the Department of Education and Skills. While no criticism was made of individual staff members within these organisations, support co-ordinators argued there was a lack of transparency in how resources were allocated and they felt removed from the process itself, often not understanding the categorisations or criteria employed.

Two primary school principals advocated a weighting system in favour of pupils with special educational needs when calculating pupil-teacher ratio, so that a pupil with a diagnosed disability, syndrome or condition would carry a weighting of 1.5 or 2 in comparison to pupils without any such needs.

I think that there should be a bigger allowance in terms of staff deployment for schools that have a positive policy of enrolment of children with special needs and we are one such school and I think that, and particularly in an all boys school we don't get the support in terms of class size. So I think that we need to have a lot more flexibility about the system and also that children with lower incidences special needs should count for higher numbers in terms of appointments schedules so that schools can reduce classes. I mean we had a general inspection 18 months ago and the inspection team asked me would I consider using some of the team to reduce class size and absolutely I would consider doing that but then how do you give the one-to-one, how do you fulfil your legal obligations to the child whose parents say: 'I have a report that says my child has to get one-to-one learning, so there needs to be a review of what is the understanding of one-to-one learning and small group learning and most effective intervention for that child. (Principal P3)

A teacher from the same school also pondered the merits of possibly incorporating SEN teachers into mainstream class teaching:

Again I suppose the smaller numbers in class, it goes back to basics, you know we are getting all this additional support which is wonderful but would we need all the support if we had classes of 20? You know if a child was never in a class of more than 20 would they need all the support long-term? You know are we pumping it in too late? If some or all this support went into extra class teachers, maybe we'd be better off. I think sometimes we have too much withdrawal and too much small group, just make the classes smaller but again it's the financial thing – extra classrooms, you know we have a lot of teachers but not necessarily being used to benefit all the children. (Class Teacher CTP3)

7.4.2 General Allocation Model (GAM)

Lack of autonomy for school-based professionals was a common theme in discussions on the resource allocation system. One approach which should enhance school autonomy is the general allocation model (GAM), an annualised general allocation of additional teacher support to primary schools, based on certain school variables, such as pupil gender and social demographics. This support aims to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs who have not been diagnosed with a low incidence disability. The support co-ordinators in each of the mainstream primary schools though it an anomaly that pupils with specific learning disabilities, borderline MGLD and MGLD were provided for under this system at primary, but were catered for under the individual resource system at second level¹⁶, if attending difficulties were of significant severity.

The four support co-ordinators were concerned that pupils with the more severe needs arising from SLD or MGLD were not provided for adequately under the GAM. They perceived an anomaly where a pupil with MGLD attending a special school would have the benefit of a pupil-teacher ratio of 11:1, which is not likely to

¹⁶ In the most recent changes to the system of provision for pupils with special educational needs in second-level schools, high incidence disabilities such as SLD and (B)MLD are now also provided for under a general allocation model.

encourage their enrolment in mainstream schools where their needs are expected to be met under the GAM and the Learning Support system. Psychologists also stressed this perceived anomaly with one highlighting how paradoxical and anti-inclusive the system is: 'I find it ironic that some children are not eligible for NCSE resources but they are eligible to go to a special school.' Principals and support co-ordinators complained that the GAM was 'too crowded' in terms of those it catered for and the inclusion of pupils with SLD / GLD under this system potentially left less than a desirable level of support for other pupils with significant needs, especially in literacy and numeracy. One psychologist referred to the 'bottleneck' effect which the GAM creates at post-primary.

The challenges then of the present system of resource allocation and deployment ... well, I suppose the general allocation model doesn't marry completely with the post-primary model so you end up then with that bottleneck effect. We have tried to address that by using the transition profiler and identify the students early on entry in the hope of addressing these issues as early as we can. (Psychologist 4)

However, the mainstream primary school support co-ordinators did identify some positive aspects of the GAM, acknowledging that it provided a certain level of guaranteed support to schools, which greatly assisted pupils and teachers. However, it was considered as being somewhat 'too crude' to meet the wide variety of needs of its target pupils and considerable differences were noted between schools within the same allocation band under the model. The principal of an all girls' DEIS primary school was particularly vocal on this. She strongly recommended that the GAM be reviewed for DEIS schools. Given that an individual resource allocation system was criticised for lack of school autonomy, it was surprising that the capacity of a general allocation system to enhance such autonomy was not identified as a positive aspect.

7.5 Resource Deployment

Issues arising for deployment of support personnel in the case study schools are outlined in Table 7.6

Table 7.6: Resource Deployment

Core-theme	Sub-themes
Deployment	Teacher deployment
	SNA deployment
	Special classes
	Special schools

7.5.1 Deployment of Teaching Support Personnel

A huge variety of arrangements was reported from schools on how additional resource support was deployed. The arrangements for the mainstream schools are summarised in Table 7.7. The predominant mode of deployment of additional teaching support was on a small-group withdrawal basis, with exemptions from Irish and, where applicable, exemptions from foreign languages used extensively in this regard. Pupils with 1.5 hours for a SLD were usually grouped together to receive additional tuition during Irish classes. At primary, this was likely to be delivered by a learning support teacher. At second-level, it was delivered by a full-time learning support teacher or a mainstream class teacher engaged in learning support for a few class periods each week, often one or two periods per week. At primary, such inputs focused on literacy and numeracy. At second-level, it might be on literacy and numeracy or in the teacher's subject specialist area. The focus of the support, therefore, could be determined by which teacher was available at a particular time as much as by pupil needs. It also meant pupils could receive additional support from different teachers during a week.

The mainstream teachers [referred to as 'satellite' teachers] may teach their own subjects, may do some literacy or numeracy, if they are comfortable, or may help with homework. So really what they are comfortable with and what the student needs. (Support Co-ordinator S4)

Table 7.7: Teacher Deployment

School Type	Deployment ¹⁷
Second-level 1 (S1) (258 pupils)	14 pupils with allocated resource support hours;
	7 low incidence disability (LID), 7 high incidence (HID)
	5 pupils individual withdrawal, also group withdrawal,
	Team teaching in one class
Second-level 2 (S2) (426 pupils)	Total of 160 resource support hours
	46 pupils with HID; 36 pupils with LID
	Individual and group withdrawal and individual support within classroom
	A lot of team-teaching, for both behavioural and academic reasons; 'A two-teacher model'.
Second-level 3 (S3) (614 pupils)	126 resource teaching; 20+ pupils with LID
	Resource hours for SLD grouped to facilitate the establishment of smaller classes in English, maths and Irish. Some one-to-one withdrawal
	Team teaching (e.g. to alleviate behavioural difficulties in practical subjects, such as science).
Second-level 4 (S4) (915 pupils)	Group withdrawal, especially for students exempt from Irish, 4 / 5 times per week.
	'Small' class during English and maths classes.
	One-to-one 'time-out' for some students with ASD
	Limited team-teaching (e.g. SEN teacher going into science class with JCSP students).
Second-level 5 (S5) (450 pupils)	5 pupils with LID; 6 pupils with HID
	Individual and group withdrawal; extra tuition for pupils with SLD during Irish class.
Primary 1 (P1) (120 pupils)	5 pupils with LID + GAM
	Individual and group withdrawal, in-class support and team teaching;
	Seriously at risk; individual tuition; 3 or 4 half-hour sessions per week; for dyslexia, GLD, MGLD.
Primary 2 (P2) (280 pupils)	15 pupils with LID + GAM
	Individual and group withdrawal.
	Team teaching (but not at whole-class level; splitting of classes into groups)
	Reading recovery and maths recovery
Primary 3 (P3) (660 pupils)	42 pupils with LID; about 60 pupils with HID
	Individual and group withdrawal and in-class support.
	Low incidence pupils all get some individual time.
Primary 4 (P4) (246 pupils)	17 pupils with LID; 7 pupils with HID
	In-class support in junior and senior infants
	Individual and group withdrawal in remaining classes.
Primary 5 (P5) (231 pupils)	50 resource hours;
	40 pupils with HID; 11 pupils with LID
	Individual and group withdrawal, in-class support and team-teaching. Social skills group work. ASD Unit

¹⁷ Detailed information on resource hours allocated and the numbers of pupils receiving such resources was not available from all the case study schools. All available information is provided.

This support co-ordinator emphasised that, as pupils progress through second-level school, the focus shifts from general literacy and numeracy skills to exam focused topics. In another second-level school, the hours allocated for SLD were grouped together to form a small-group English and a small-group maths class that were delivered by English and maths SEN teachers during the regular English and maths classes. In one second-level school, resource hours were grouped to facilitate setting up a small class in each year-group and the pupils remained here for most of the time. They were doing core subjects at Foundation Level. The school's support co-ordinator was concerned that some pupils with resource hours could not avail of additional support in this structure because they were 'too good' to be in these classes:

The dyslexics don't get the one-to-one, that's the problem, they don't get the support because they are not in the smaller classes, they could be in Honours English. (Support Co-ordinator S3).

While all personnel interviewed expressed reservations about individual withdrawal of pupils for additional support, there was some individual withdrawal in each of the participating schools. Where there was withdrawal of students at second-level, it tends to be subject-specific withdrawal. There might be four classes per week in a particular subject and for one of those classes, a student or a group of students might be withdrawn for help in that subject, preferably provided by a teacher of that subject.

Support co-ordinators in mainstream primary schools emphasised that some pupils needed intensive tuition either on an individual or small-group basis.

Most effective for children with the most need is a small group or individual work. They [pupils with dyslexia] fall through net if in a group. Seriously at risk children need individual tuition; three or four half-hour sessions per week in phonics, basic numeracy. These are pupils with dyslexia, GLD, MGLD. (LST P1)

Another support co-ordinator concurred:

Certain children need one to one, certain children if they have resource hours can work within a group and in certain cases they benefit from in-class (support). I don't think that team-teaching helps a resource child in a classroom with a percentile of 2 in maths; in that case you would have to do some withdrawal. Class team teaching does not always meet the needs of a resource child in maybe 4th, 5th or 6th class, where they have severe difficulties reading; they are going to get success for one-on-one out on their own and the teacher working in small steps. (Support Co-ordinator P2)

In one large primary school (P3), resource hours were combined with individual withdrawal, group withdrawal and individual in-class support, but the principal said 'children designated low incidence hours would all get some individual time'. A primary resource teacher highlighted the danger of class teachers abdicating responsibility to resource teachers:

I still think that the class teacher has the overall responsibility and they still need to be well in tune with where the child is at, that it's not a question of handing over the maths to a resource teacher – I think that is very dangerous even if there is a huge gap, because it's still part of the child's life and they are still going to have to interact with the other children and with the class. (Support Co-ordinator P1)

One class teacher referred to the amount of pupils withdrawn from classes as a 'revolving door' scenario:

The class teacher is trying to manage what I would call the 'revolving door' where there are children going in and out every day and you are trying to track what subjects they are missing and so forth. You're trying to constantly track what the absence is and take a record of that for when you are setting their homework. I think there is a case for each sort of support, I suppose it is up to each school to decide how best to use resources that are allocated to them, but as I say for some cases, yes, you do need to withdraw children and other cases perhaps the group intervention but also I think there is a case where in-class support is best. (Class Teacher P3)

There was limited reporting of individual in-class teaching support and some of the pupils who were interviewed as part of this study expressed a preference for going out of the classroom to receive additional tuition, rather than receive additional support in class, unless such support was being provided at whole-class or group level. One second-level pupil (S1) stated: 'I prefer to go out to be honest because you have a lot more privacy and you can sort of just think a lot more.' Another pupil (S5) withdrawn from class for support compared that approach favourably with primary support he had received when he was supported in class. He said: 'It [in-class support] was a little bit more difficult because you had a lot of things going on around you and you didn't have privacy or that.' No parent expressed concerns about pupils being withdrawn from class to receive additional tuition. One said:

He said to me the other night that whatever college he goes to, he said I don't want to have somebody sitting there beside me as if I am you know some 'handicapped' person. (Parent 1 P5)

A principal said pupils did not always object to being withdrawn from class as much as was sometimes assumed. Team-teaching was not a common mode of deployment in the participating schools, though most schools had limited variations of it. Reports from mainstream primary support co-ordinators indicated it was most easily achieved in primary, especially smaller schools, and it largely depended on the nature of the relationship between the prospective team-teaching partners. When some primary support co-ordinators referred to team-teaching, it was in the context of two or three teachers splitting a class, to work in separate rooms / workstations as part of Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery intervention initiatives.

In one second-level school, in which there were significant learning and behavioural difficulties, the team-teaching approach was used largely to reduce challenging behaviours in the classes. In two others this approach was also employed, but to a much lesser extent, to support pupils doing practical subjects;

To alleviate behavioural difficulties in practical subjects, such as science; it's the challenge of the 'moderate' kid in the science class of 30. (Support Co-ordinator S3)

In the other school, the support co-ordinator (S4) referred to team-teaching as the 'SEN teacher going into science class with JCSP students, then possibly withdrawing a group for revision of a topic'. While the Department of Education and Skills insists the JCSP should not be regarded as part of SEN provision or perceived as a type of special class, it frequently entered the discourse on SEN with the personnel in the three schools in which the programme is offered.

In relation to literacy and numeracy skills, performance at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests was the cut-off criterion for determining eligibility for learning support. One primary school used the 12th percentile as the cut-off point, while another provided additional support up to a STEN¹⁸ score of four. In the deployment of teaching resources, with the exception of one small primary school, the distinction between resource teaching and learning support was not maintained, with the result that pupils availing of both levels of support were frequently taught in the same groups. A primary principal explained the rationale for not distinguishing between supports for different pupils:

What we have done here is that we would look at each class and we look to see what the needs are, whether they come under general allocation or whether they have hours under special allocation hours or whether they are RTT (resource teacher for Travellers) or whether they are you know, whether they are resource children and we try to let them go together, but some children get more support than others. We might take them out in a group, we might also do in-class teaching. They get both because originally it was all withdrawal and then kids can have very low self esteem. So now we mix it. It works very well and there is no discrimination then either because once upon a time there were two teachers

¹⁸ STEN scores range from 1 to 10.

here who took the Traveller children separately, now nobody even knows who the Traveller children are. (Principal P3)

Study participants identified challenges in deployment of additional teaching resources, chief among them timetabling, especially at second-level for pupils not exempt from Irish or not on a reduced timetable. It was contended that resource hours have been allocated to some pupils who cannot avail of them, while other pupils, for example those with specific learning disabilities or MGLD, have not been allocated sufficient hours.

Timetabling is main challenge in providing additional support; how do you timetable five hours tuition for a student with ASD or AD(H)D. The focus for students with AD(H)D is on planning and organisation; there's the challenge of finding 3.5 hours in the timetable. There is a mismatch in allocation of hours; e.g. for pupils with ASD versus SLD and borderline MGLD. (Support Co-ordinator S1)

This support co-ordinator also highlighted the challenge of providing social skills training for pupils with ASD which one ideally needs to deliver in groups with typically developing peers – it is difficult to organise this in a second-level timetable.

Second-level principals and support co-ordinators emphasised the challenge of co-ordinating the inputs of various teachers in supporting pupils with special educational needs, and giving them sufficient teaching resources, especially where it involved a lot of teachers, each with a relatively small input and no particular SEN expertise. In one school, almost a third of staff was involved in providing such support. One qualified SEN teacher was appointed for each year group to co-ordinate inputs from various mainstream teachers in part-time learning support and to encourage collaboration with the subject teachers.

As the following comments illustrate, views varied among SENOs about how resource hours were deployed at individual school level. A general consensus was that resource hours were not used effectively, particularly in post-primary where they can be used to reduce class sizes.

There are schools that I see where I can't identify where the resource hours are being used for the children. Yes I think we need, I think possibly there needs to be more accountability for the resources that are being put in place. I'm not sure we all appreciate just how much resources are being given, how much costs are going out on them. (SENO 1)

I ask them what they do with the hours and if they said they were going to split the sixth or fifth year class, I'd say you can't do that ... I would ask them what they would do with the hours and who teaches what and who is what on their list and go through their general allocation list with them and make sure they are streaming them properly. You know all of my schools had a presentation done by me to their staff explaining how the general allocation model works and how the resource teaching model works. They have to know what they are supposed to be doing! (SENO 3)

I think a lot of resource hours going to post-primary will disappear and more hours given to maths classes, more niche subjects. Unfortunately a lot of children, say with Asperger's for example, don't get the resource teaching hours in post-primary because it's sure, he's very bright and doing 10 subjects and we don't want him to drop any of them, how would you fit in resource ... and then you mention social skills and it's double Dutch! (SENO 5)

7.5.2 Deployment of SNAs

Second-level SNAs were more likely to perform a more systemic role, operating at whole-class level rather than focusing exclusively on one or two pupils, though they would monitor target pupils. This was not always the case, however. For example, in one instance, the SNA was supporting a pupil with Down syndrome but not full time so the pupil was in school only when supported by the SNA or receiving resource teaching support. The allocation was 20 hours SNA support and the pupil was therefore not in a mainstream class at

any stage, unless supported by the SNA and this resulted in a reduced timetable. This was because the pupil was considered a 'flight risk' and likely to leave the school unsupervised. The SNA described the care and supervisory roles she fulfilled here:

She couldn't exist in the school without an SNA, she just couldn't. I mean she has to be taken to classes, like she's a flight risk, she'd just disappear you know, you have to keep your eye on her very carefully. I would be with her for her break because her motor skills are quite poor; she wouldn't be able to open her bottle of water. I sit with her in the classroom, I would take out her stuff, I've tried to get her to do it as much as possible but again she has problems opening the zip on her pencil case and lids of pens. She would have her own little workbook; she isn't on the same level as the rest of the class. I find it difficult to supervise that to make sure she's doing what she's supposed to be doing you know when the teachers allocate her work. We're doing domestic science since the start of this term so obviously you have to be very careful with cookers and heat and you know stuff like that. I can only speak from my own experience, but this child could not be in the school without me, she just couldn't you know? She just couldn't exist within this environment going from class to class, making sure she has the right books; she just couldn't cope. (SNA 1 S1)

This SNA emphasised the positive influence of mainstream education on this girl's behaviour because she tended to mimic the behaviour of her peers. She contended that if she was in a special school, she would be inclined to mimic less positive behavioural characteristics:

She has a friend who also has Down Syndrome and I know the weekends she has been with her friend because of her behaviour and this child is a lot worse so I'm thinking if she's in an environment where all children are like that, she would ape (i.e. imitate) their behaviour. She's a terrible mimic so it's something to think about you know. (SNA 1, S1)

In another second-level school, the SNAs, in addition to their classroom allocations, provided a 'drop-in' service to the pupils who had been allocated SNA support. This operated in the mornings before school, at breaks and occasionally when pupils had no timetabled class due to exemptions. At this time, an SNA might help with homework or revise classwork material. In this school, emphasis was less on individual support unless there were specific care needs. While each SNA was linked to a particular pupil, he or she would not necessarily spend all the time in that pupil's class, but would provide support in classes with other pupils with SNA support. The rationale for this approach was to reduce pupil dependence on an individual SNA. In this school also, the role changed as the academic year progressed, with more emphasis on individual support at the outset gradually changing to more general systemic support in classrooms as the year progressed.

A significant part of the SNA remit related to pupil safety, such as ensuring the pupils remained in the school grounds and accompanying their charges on all trips outside the school. In some cases the SNA would take charge of the pupil from the parents in the morning and supervise that child continuously, except when in the charge of a resource teacher, until the child was handed back to parents at time of going home. Care and toileting needs were an important aspect for those supporting young children or those with most significant disabilities. A few were fulfilling specific needs such as PEG-feeding for pupils with rare medical conditions and had specific training from nurses in this regard.

In one second-level school, the SNAs were very much involved in the overall management of classes, especially behaviour management, firstly of their target pupils and then of the class as a whole:

Here the classic difference is that the students are older. You have to treat them in a way that they are not insulted, you know you have to be very careful with peer pressure and that as well and it's not obvious, I could never go in and sit beside the one student all the time. Our boss [support co-ordinator], she would have told us who has an SNA assigned to them; usually the classes we're in there's two or three students or even more in the room so we're very conscious then of who we really

are watching and who we really are helping. But generally you help the teacher keep the class going because there are other people with behavioural issues as well that will stop the progress of the class and you have to help her to keep the class going. So we move around a bit, but obviously we'd be very clued in as to who needs help more so than the others. You'd help them generally more but you don't make it obvious, you don't go in every time and sit beside the one person all the time. (SNA 2, S2)

SNA work was well co-ordinated by the support co-ordinator in this school and she met them every morning to discuss issues arising. Each SNA fulfilled a mentoring role with three students and attended IEP meetings for them. They wrote a weekly report about each pupil's behaviour indicating which strategies were working and issues arising. In most schools, the SNAs met the support co-ordinator once each week. In another school, the SNAs met only once each term, with the principal, deputy principal and SEN teacher. In one school, the SNAs had a significant role in monitoring bullying, especially between classes. They remained with the classes at transition times.

A lot goes on between the two classes, like when one teacher leaves and before the next teacher arrives. That's where you can see a lot of bullying going on or if we're concerned about somebody, if somebody is maybe falling behind, suddenly there's a change in their personality or because you are with them so much, you see it, you see a lot, they talk to us a lot more as well because they know we're not teachers so they tell you if there's something going on or they're worried about something and sometimes things come up that you feel you have to highlight and bring it to our boss' [support co-ordinator] attention. (SNA 2 S2)

This SNA worked with a third year class in the mornings in which there were 18 or 19 students, four of whom had SNA access. Two SNAs supported that class. In the afternoon, she worked in a first year class of 17 pupils, three of whom had SNA access. As well as monitoring behaviour, they assisted pupils with copying material from the blackboard and with academic work. They engaged in paired reading and helped pupils with computer work. They reminded them to take their medication; they had been trained in the use of defibrillators and in the care of pupils with epilepsy and cystic fibrosis. They also supervised on yard duty. The SNAs documented all significant behavioural incidents in their classes, regardless of whether their target pupils were involved.

One second-level SNA, who was initially apprehensive about her ability to assist pupils with aspects of the curriculum, said she was 'shocked' at the level at which most target pupils were functioning, especially in literacy and numeracy.

I am shocked at the level when they come into us, like when they come in first year and how 'weak' they are. I know there are behavioural issues in the primary schools, I just can't believe that they can get through the net, not being able to get the basics like the reading and the writing and the maths. They are so far behind. They would be so far behind, so weak coming in that I just think that they need more resources in the primary schools first of all. (SNA 2, S2)

She said that these pupils really benefit from one-to-one assistance, whether in the context of paired reading, revising class work or assistance with projects and it enhances their confidence.

When we help them with some of their projects, it's the first thing they have ever completed. One of the pupils last year, she did one of the projects I helped her an awful lot, we printed down stuff and she coloured it in and she kept saying 'can I bring it home?' and I'd say 'if you bring it back, you can bring it home' and she did and she was so glad. I think it was the only piece of work she completed in her life; they get such a sense of achievement and you think if you had more time like to do things with them and all the way through, it would be great, but it's all time and there's so many students to help but if you had a smaller classroom you could do more with the individuals in that classroom but it's the same as teachers, I think they would be able to get around more and see and help them more with their weaknesses. (SNA 2, S2)

One SNA regretted the lack of support for pupils after school in relation to completing homework. Many had no support or got no encouragement at home to complete it and could not do it without assistance. In one area the local priest was providing tuition free of charge and in some instances teachers provided a voluntary after-school service and pupils did attend, especially in preparation for examinations.

Some of the classes finish at twenty past three and they don't open a book until they come in the next morning and they don't know how to study. I think they don't know what to do. They have no idea; like you are looking at them in third year and they are going home before the mocks with nothing and I'm saying 'you're not going to bring the book, you need the book to look over stuff?' They say: 'I don't want to be stressing, don't be stressing me out.' If you could give them something after school as well that could be funded, it would be of huge benefit. (SNA 2, S2)

Personnel in the two special schools in this study regard SNAs as pivotal to the success of educational provision. They are part of a multidisciplinary team approach in both settings. Although their roles are clearly defined within each school structure, they vary between the two settings. The specific care needs of the pupils in both schools largely dictate the nature of the role of SNAs. This role focuses mainly on supporting and caring, with more emphasis on caring and care needs in the moderate and severe and profound school setting (referred to as Special School 2) while in the school for MGLD (Special School 1), the main focus is on support. SNAs are well-trained in both schools, engaging in continuing professional development as soon as they are appointed to the position of SNA. In School 2, there is full involvement of SNAs in the IEP process, with regular meetings to allow for sharing of information between teachers and SNAs.

... then every month we have a meeting which the principal starts off if there is any issue that's concerning the whole group. I make time to meet the whole group and the two representatives [SNA reps] would come along and whether it's in-house training which they do, they go through the policies that there were, no matter where you are on the team that you have a valuable role to play; that you are aware of child protection, what our health and safety policy is, what's happening and what's going on so yes there is a lot of input ... (Principal Sp2)

Comments by special school SNAs demonstrated a consistent view of the role of the SNA within each school setting to that held by the management teams. The role is clearly defined and excludes direct teaching. The relationship between the SNA and the classroom teacher is seen as central to the success of the teamwork.

You're working directly with your classroom teacher and the principal would give general guidelines that if anyone had any queries. I suppose the principal would oversee supervision of the, like of SNAs, but it's mainly the SNA has a relationship with the teacher they are working with. (SNA Sp2)

From the teachers' perspective, it is apparent from interviews with teachers in the two special schools that the role of the SNA contributes significantly to the positive school environments and success in programme delivery.

... there is a greater chance of every child being able to access the type of programme I'm delivering and there's a huge amount of differentiation in what I'm delivering but at the same time some children just need somebody sitting beside them to keep them focused. (Class Teacher, Sp2)

Including SNAs in delivery of teacher-devised programmes is working well for one teacher interviewed. She outlined how the SNA enabled her to meet the individual needs of her pupils with multiple disabilities.

They do phenomenal work; I have to say for me personally care needs; but it's not only care needs, it's definitely supporting, supportive for me that I can conduct my job as a teacher satisfactorily as far as that is possible and taking a keen interest in the needs of all the children. I have programmes, you set your programmes in place; I could never humanly, it would never be possible for me with the needs of each child, be able every day to give them what they would need; so the programmes I have set my

SNAs are able to carry them out with me under my supervision and that to me is just phenomenal.
(Class Teacher, Sp2)

It was apparent that SNAs in both special school settings work with whole-class groups and support individual pupils where the need arises. However, the principal in Special School 1 explained that parents now have more awareness of their entitlements to SNA support for their children and sometimes expect an SNA presence for them throughout the day.

... if the SNA really worked with her – it would be great. There's an SNA in that classroom who's on maternity leave at the moment and I think the SNA who's allocated to Saoirse [pseudonym] probably has to spend a lot of time helping the teacher with some of the more difficult kids in class; so if the other SNA was there it would be better. (Parent Sp1)

Other parents in this study endorsed the SNA as pivotal in their child's progress. As one parent put it:

Oh, just someone who could actually just get to know him and understand him; and know that behind this little monster really was a child that was just looking for help and to see him build up a relationship with someone else other than us as well was amazing really and I could never thank enough the fact that she has done for [name of child]. (Parent Sp2)

Principals expressed some frustration in relation to the process of obtaining and retaining SNA support, stating that they, as school managers, should have some input into the allocation of SNAs to the school and flexibility in deciding what precise duties they should perform. A second-level principal (S1) said the SNAs in his school were underutilised in terms of their own professional abilities and strengths. It was argued by several principals that these 'human' resources could be utilised more creatively to best meet the needs of the pupils in their care. They contended that there should be flexibility in relation to how an SNA is deployed in classrooms. According to the majority of principals, the rigidity in the role of the SNA, which can be reinforced by Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports, means that some SNAs were not being used to their full potential. A second-level principal with experience of the teaching assistant (TA) role in the UK stated:

One of our children had been allocated a full time SNA because he had major attention deficit disorder; the child is actually very bright and didn't need ongoing support, so I interpreted the SNA role as a classroom support teacher, helping other kids with maths and the WSE said that's not what an SNA should be doing. Her role was, SNA support is really only helping a kid with bags and very, very low level support so we had to give that up. I don't necessarily agree that that is the best use of an SNA but that's the terminology they are working with. (Principal S1)

A primary school principal explained his approach to deploying SNAs, using the SNA to support the individual pupil, but also supporting other pupils in the class:

The policy in this school is you are allocated to that class because that Child A is there, now you will work with Child A, but you will work with Child A in the context of the class and in collaboration with the teacher. (Principal P3)

Lack of autonomy in deployment of resources was frequently raised by principals and support co-ordinators. The latter were highly critical of the review carried out by the NCSE on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills on the allocation of SNAs. Reflecting the recurring appeal for the increased autonomy of schools, they argued strongly that school personnel should have been more closely involved in the review process. Support co-ordinators argued that the review personnel did not necessarily understand the whole-school context of resource allocation. They concurred with the views of the principals that SNAs could provide more support to the class teacher were they allowed to do so and suggested that they should be encouraged to utilise fully their own skills and abilities. One second-level principal (S2), emphasising the crucial contribution of SNAs in supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties, crudely stated: 'A reduction in SNAs will mean more

suspensions and more exclusions.’ The lack of continuing professional development for SNAs was highlighted by several principals. It was also stated that teachers needed some training in managing and liaising with SNAs. One teacher made an interesting observation on further education for SNAs, reflecting the positive attitude towards them.

I know from talking to some of the SNAs that they themselves are interested in further study and learning. Some of the SNAs in this school I know haven’t done their Leaving Cert which means I don’t know if they are at a disadvantage then if they are supporting a student in a Leaving Cert class, but I would feel they probably are. So I think for some of the SNAs, I know from talking to a few of them that they’d be interested in doing further study or learning and I think we’ve a whole lot of teachers in this school who are qualified who could actually help the SNAs with further study and learning for some of them to go back and do their Leaving Cert. (CT S2)

All SENOs attached to the case study schools emphasised the urgent need for the existing role of the SNA to be reviewed and clarified. They believe schools and parents misunderstand the exact nature of their role and that in reality they have a teaching role. In many cases, SENOs reported that the SNAs were acting as a teaching assistant.

There is a need for a teaching assistant ... I mean SNAs are left in charge of classes and that is clearly outlined that that should never happen. Personally I would prefer SNAs to be specifically like teachers and to be specifically qualified in a certain area. (SENO 1)

Absolutely without a shadow of a doubt there needs to be a review of their role – if what everyone is doing is using them as a learning support assistant and we are still saying they are only there to go to the toilet and help you with your lunch then isn’t that telling us something about which is the greater need in our school system? There’s a massive need for training – I say to teachers, in a whole group of children, mix it up, you sit with him next time don’t be afraid to move them away from that Velcro feeling. (SENO 4)

They feel that teachers also need training in best practice on integrating SNAs in the classroom. Some SENOs referred to the relationship between teachers and SNAs and its lack of clear definition means it can be fraught with difficulties in terms of role definition and collaboration.

The relationship between the teacher and the SNA isn’t clearly defined ... in some cases, they are treated quite negatively in the classroom. Some teachers are treated badly by their SNAs if it is a newly qualified teacher and an older SNA. The principals are afraid to manage their staff, you know if I say to a school principal it should be coming from the class teacher to the SNA about that child, not the other way around – she says ‘I know, I know’ but she can’t handle it. (SENO 5)

A number of the SENOs referred to cases whereby SNAs allegedly refused to assist with care needs because they maintained it was not within their role. The nature of their contracts meant that some principals reportedly did not feel they were in a position to address this.

And they refuse to do the toileting or the wiping of the sick or the whatever it is they are needing to do for that particular child. They’ll say ‘that’s not my role’ but you could never introduce that model though until you address the whole issue of how the teachers approach SEN because otherwise, as it is, a lot of the SNAs are teaching the child. (SENO 4)

Other SENOs noted that although schools must complete and return a declaration form when a student leaves, some schools do not notify them of this and the SNAs are left in place. This is allegedly more prevalent among children with a diagnosis of EBD.

...such a high turnover of kids, reports come hard and fast from professionals in adverted commas for EBD and loads and loads of kids have EBD and they're constantly applying for SNA support for schools and every time I send people out, the kids who have them are gone, they have left ... and regularly when they go in (now, I prompt them to go in more often) the kids are missing like last week I sent somebody in there to have a look and she spent 4 days in there and there was 2 and a half SNAs doing nothing and she's been there since November – yeah 2 and a half people getting paid – taxpayers' money and nobody has told us the kids are left... (SENO 3)

While the psychologists did not generally comment on the role of the SNA, one advocated classroom SNAs, as is the case in special schools. It was also felt that a teaching assistant role would be more supportive and productive for the students.

I know a teaching assistant is a different kind of focus than SNA but I think if we are talking about team teaching and all those things and sharing of resources and teachers coming together to plan and whatever, not work in their own little classrooms – that to me is the ideal. The teaching assistants ... can be so much more productive and supportive for the students – rather than having I think that – teacher and SNA two totally different roles and different, on a different level, if I can put it that way and I think that at times that can be difficult – I think two people team teaching in a class can be more productive. (Psychologist 3)

Interviews were conducted with SNAs from the case study schools to get their perspectives and an insight into their experiences of providing SNA support to pupils. The roles and responsibilities assumed by and allocated to SNAs had some variety but they also had reasonable consistency. It varied between assuming individual responsibility for one or a small number of pupils to assuming a more systemic role, supporting teachers and pupils at classroom and at whole-school level. The allocations and duties, as reported by the SNAs, are outlined in Table 7.8. The descriptions of the duties and roles they provide would reinforce the views of teachers, support co-ordinators and principals that the inclusion of pupils with significant care and behavioural needs in mainstream schools depended on the support of an SNA.

All the SNAs interviewed had undergone some training, usually at FETAC Level 5 or Level 6 certification level. Second-level SNAs said the courses were really designed for preparing them for work in primary rather than second-level. Many had also attended additional two-hour modules on specific disabilities and conditions, such as autistic spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome, dyspraxia etc. One SNA had trained as a Montessori teacher, while another had comprehensive qualifications in and experience of SEN teaching. In general, their duties were, for the most part, in line with DES guidelines of performing a caring, supporting, but non-teaching. Reports also referred to SNAs engaging in some tuition. The main role was supporting individual pupils in mainstream classes, but also providing additional support to other pupils in the classrooms when their target pupils did not require individual attention. Some SNAs expressed concerns about their contracts, regarding them as too 'vague': They also expressed concerns about lack of job security, a concern accentuated by the audit of SNA support conducted in the schools. Some would like the role to be broadened to that of 'classroom assistant', providing more general assistance in a classroom, with less focus on individual pupils.

Table 7.8: Self-Reported Allocations and Duties of SNAs

SNA No	School Type (No of Pupils)	No of SNAs In School	No Of Pupil(S) Supported by SNA Respondent	Nature of Disabilities / SEN of These Pupils	Main Duties
1	Second-level (S1) (258 pupils)	1	1	Down Syndrome	Care and supervision
2	Second-level (S2) (426 pupils)	15	3 (Other pupils as required)	Challenging behaviour	Behaviour management
3	Second-level (S3) (614 pupils)	1	2	Asperger's Syndrome; Intellectual disability	Care, supervision and support
4	Second-level (S4) (915 pupils)	5	SNA team approach, linked with one pupil	ASD	In-class support to maintain attention
5	Second-level (S5) (450 pupils)	3	1	Physical disabilities	Care and support
6	Primary (P1) (120 pupils)	2	2	Medical conditions	Care and support
7	Primary (P2) (280 pupils)	4	2 (Other pupils as required)	ADHD / EBD One has language difficulties	Care and supervision
8	Primary (P3) (660 pupils)	14	2	EBD and ASD	Support and supervision
9	Primary (P4) (246 pupils)	1	2	Down Syndrome; ASD	Care and support
10	Primary (P5) (231 pupils)	7	1	Medical condition	Care, supervision and support
11	Special School 1 (Sp1) MGLD (150 pupils)	24	Total 150 pupils in school	Multiple disabilities (18 per cent ASD; high incidence EBD)	Care, supervision and support
12	Special School 2 (Sp2) Moderate, Severe and Profound (69 pupils)	28	Total 69 pupils in school	Multiple disabilities (55% non-verbal; 10% physical disabilities, high incidence ASD)	Care and support

7.5.3 Deployment in Specialist Settings

7.5.3.1 Specialist ASD Unit

At the extreme end of the continuum of support, a specific approach to resource deployment is placement in a special class or a special unit for pupils with most severe needs. There was a special unit for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) attached to one of the case study primary schools and an interview was conducted with the teacher of that unit. The unit had been established eight years previously and the teacher had taught in the unit for seven years. She had previously received qualifications in special needs education and had experience of teaching as an SEN teacher. She had undertaken training in a number of areas related to ASD and had received training in TEACCH, PECS, and the Hannen programme, as well as doing a part-time course in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). She also accessed training on Alex Kelly's 'Talkabout' programme and in the construction of Social Stories. The 'Stretch and Grow' programme, described by the teacher as a 'little PE programme', was delivered once each week in the unit by an external person. This was funded through fundraising by parents and by the teacher.

The unit had six pupils aged eight to 11 supported by one teacher and two SNAs. Five had a diagnosis of ASD, while the sixth had pervasive developmental disorder (PDD). Pupils were supported by a clinical HSE-funded service. While all six were verbal, the teacher reported considerable diversity in the group in intellectual functioning and severity of ASD. Three pupils attended mainstream classes and one was about to be 'completely mainstreamed'. This was the pupil with PDD. Another had likewise transferred to mainstream the previous year. The pupils were all integrated during playtime.

The teacher reported that the unit's pupils received good speech and language support from the HSE supported clinical service, with a therapist visiting the unit for half a day each week and working with individual pupils. The therapist also liaised with the class teacher. This had only been in place for six months and, before that, there had been no speech and language input for a time. Other therapeutic support was limited with a high turnover of clinical staff supporting the unit. The teacher said the school had other children with diagnoses of 'mild ASD, Asperger's or ASD tendencies'. Placement was influenced by parental choice and also the crucial issue of access to clinical services. Pupils in the mainstream school would not have access to the same services and would have to source these services in their community, which was likely to prove more difficult. When a pupil becomes included full-time in the mainstream school, he or she will no longer be supported by the original service. Also, the pupil who had transferred the previous year had also lost the right to school transport, though there was no such decision for the pupil in the process of transferring. This loss of transport might relate to the pupil not attending his or her nearest mainstream school. The teacher expressed concern about the pupil about to transfer who 'had a huge sleep issue' which was not being addressed; his attendance was affected by his sleep problems:

One boy has a huge sleep issue and his parents are crying out for support and it's impinging very much on his ability to work and his ability to manage his day. He is not in today again because he hasn't slept at all last night and I feel so sorry for that family and I wish they could get more support. (ASD unit teacher)

The teacher strongly recommended a continuum of clinical support between the unit and the mainstream school.

That is a big difficulty for the boy who transferred last year because he still needs speech and language therapy and the parents were asked then to go and find access in the community and you know how difficult that is and this wouldn't be a couple who would be, you know you are throwing it back on an individual family. Continuity of support is required; let's look at it as a resource for children rather than for that child A and that child B. (ASD unit teacher)

The teacher reported that, while there was good interaction with colleagues in the mainstream school and they were very supportive of the unit, the role of a special unit teacher can be professionally isolating. She would really like to see a forum being established for teachers who teach in ASD units, through which she could liaise with other such teachers. She spoke positively about the level of resources available to her and she felt that the level of SNA support was adequate. The main difficulties related to the physical constraints of the unit and indeed the physical constraints of the whole school. She questioned why a unit was ever sanctioned for a school that was operating within such physical constraints. She felt that there should be more strategic planning in relation to the establishment of such units.

This teacher had issues with turnover of clinical staff resulting in interrupted clinical support for children and their families and lack of a continuum of clinical support between the unit and mainstream education. She cited a need for more effective planning of services for pupils with ASD and criticised the apparent differential level of support available to pupils with an ASD diagnosis, resulting in parents seeking such a diagnosis as a means of apparently accessing more resources for their children.

7.5.3.2 Specialist Behaviour Support Classroom

The principal of a second-level DEIS school emphasised discipline and behaviour for learning: 'If you ask the staff what are the problems here? they'll always say "discipline", that is the first thing people will say.' He reported that the school population included a large number of 'challenging' disaffected students with no interest in remaining in education. He referred to a large number of students from a cultural minority whose needs were not met within the system. He encourages a positive attitude amongst staff in relation to pupils with challenging behaviour, stressing the difficult home circumstances from which these pupils come.

The problem is that these children have horrendous problems, the problem is with the homes that these children are coming from, they're 'soap opera' lives. We have to do our best for these children you know to mind them and protect them. (Principal S2)

There were numerous comments from school personnel to the effect that the education of many was, in certain circumstances, being compromised by the behaviour of a few.

The main challenge is behaviour problems in the class and I suppose lack of support for what we're doing in the class from maybe from family backgrounds and stuff like that. We have students who very often turn up without copies, pens, books, things like that and we'd also have in most classes, but not all, we'd have certain students that would have behavioural problems that would be very obvious in the class; students refusing to sit down, students moving around the classroom, students shouting out and things like that, that would literally stop you teaching the rest of the class. We'd also have some students with things like dyslexia and things like that, while that presents you with a problem teaching that student, it doesn't usually impinge on the rest of the class. (Class Teacher S2)

The principal reported a difficulty in getting pupils to engage in, and co-operate with, the assessment process. Parents could be resistant, especially around behavioural assessments, resulting in a failure to keep appointments and engage with relevant services. The school was responding to behavioural challenges by implementing a range of therapeutic interventions such as Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) for staff and inputs from an Adlerian therapist for pupils. The principal stated: 'Things like that have been useful to staff in that its encouraging them to look at their own behaviour and their own stress levels and how to manage themselves.' This school was also supported by Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) psychological service, from which a counselling psychologist visited the school weekly, a service staff found invaluable.

Challenging behaviour concerns were particularly applicable to DEIS schools but not confined to them. A principal of a large, Non-DEIS secondary school expressed extreme concerns about the lack of appropriate therapeutic interventions for pupils presenting with the most severe emotional, behavioural difficulties.

My wish list now is around emotional and behavioural difficulties. We currently have two students who are greatly disturbed and have been and we have used a lot of resources, as has the social work department, NEPS, the HSE, and child and adolescent psychiatric services. Both children are now, because they are older, are drinking and taking substances from head shops and other illegal substances. One is 15, one is 16, and they will really end up causing themselves or others harm or be in jail. The resources that are available are being wasted on them because they are entitled to resource hours, an SNA but they are like anorexics being fed a gourmet meal, they are not able to eat from the table and they actually need to be in a secure, safe, caring, therapeutic environment of which there does not exist such a facility in Ireland. The nearest is in England and there are Irish children currently in Abraska, in the States, and that is an awful indictment of our current situation in Ireland. (Principal S4)

That principal also stated:

There is too much expected of schools; our last case was a child with emotional behavioural difficulties who had been asked by the judge to go back to school, but the school cannot provide that service. (Principal S4)

A primary principal also emphasised the need for therapeutic interventions in schools.

I do think children with behavioural needs or with psychiatric problems need to be properly assessed by the HSE and then we need to be supported here in school with some sort of therapy and I really think a lot of children in this school need therapy and nobody is looking after that. Now we were paying for drama therapy from our school completion funds for a couple of years and then the school completion decided that the money was not to be spent in that way. Now I really regret that because I feel that there are children here who have nobody to talk to and they do need someone and they do need someone to straighten out how they think. (Principal P2)

The teachers interviewed were committed to inclusion, but also articulated concern in relation to pupils with significant behavioural difficulties:

I think in principle it [inclusion] is a very good idea but often by including students with special education needs, they play themselves out in terms of behavioural problems. Often by including those students in the class, you're actually excluding education from other students in the class. I wouldn't like to work in a school that rejected students, but because it has an open door policy it seems to let every possible student into the school and sometimes you have one or two students who can damage the education opportunities of a whole class and that does concern me and I would safely say it does every teacher. (CT S3)

In relation to social and emotional behavioural difficulties, the psychologists reported that there has been a significant increase in SEBD referrals. They stressed they are genuine and in no way linked to a desire to obtain more resources. This contrasted with SENOs who believed the phrase 'is a danger to self and others' is overused to obtain an SNA. Both acknowledge that the caveat in the current DES policy of having to have treatment (or a behaviour plan in place) can be a significant delay factor in allocating resources for students with SEBD. This is further compounded where a private psychologist completes an assessment which is not accepted. They believed the response to SEBD must be aimed at individual and group level, whereby agencies work in partnership and this may ease the need for full assessments. Psychologists acknowledged the work done by mental health promotion groups but perceive an urgent need for more liaison and partnership between agencies such as the HSE, NBSS and NEPS.

Of the pupils interviewed, those with emotional, behavioural and attentional issues recounted the least positive accounts of their school experiences. They articulated a sense of alienation from the system and a perceived sense of victimisation, in that they felt blamed for everything going on in their classes, that they were singled out for punishments (such as detentions and suspensions), and that their punishment was more severe than that of their peers for similar misdemeanours. The case of a second-level pupil in care demonstrates the sense of alienation. He presented with behavioural difficulties, an inability to sit down and focus on work and with anger management issues. According to his keyworker: 'It really bothers him that he is in care, that he has different circumstances.' She said he was academically able, generally happy in the school, wanted to complete his second-level education and was benefiting from the school, as it was a constant in his life. 'He does like school, gets up in the morning, no problem.' She said his attendance was good, though he got a lot of detentions and suspensions. He had been on a reduced timetable in the past and he was at risk of exclusion. The keyworker said he was angry with teachers, fighting with peers and felt a sense of 'victimhood' in that he felt that would get suspended more quickly than his peers. She said: 'I think he feels not listened to and I suppose all young people want to feel that they are being listened to, and I don't think he feels that at the moment.'

When the pupil was asked why he was getting into trouble, he replied: 'I just don't find it interesting, too much messing in class and then I just start messing. Then I get suspended over something stupid.' When asked if there was something he would like to change about the school, he replied: 'To be good' and when asked what would be required for him to be 'good', he replied: 'Everyone just to shut up, they give you a headache in that class.' He resented that he was not allowed to do art or PE, probably because of behavioural issues. He said an SNA in the class 'sits with the fellas who are bold' (apparently not including himself), but that she would help him if he asked. He summarised his perception of the situation as follows:

If anything happens in the school, they're at me straight away and everybody in my class is looking at me straight away and three other lads to see who did it. Just because I get a bit cheeky, then the teachers scream at me and I just go mad, I hate people screaming at me. Just them telling me to do something, I tell them I'll do it in a minute and then they start screaming at me. Then I just go mad. They'd send me to the principal and I get a suspension straight away. (Pupil 1 S2)

The keyworker felt that there was need for more communication between school and the care situation, that there was no contact with the home school liaison officer (HSLO), that all communication was with the year head, who had recently told her: 'He's on his last legs here!' The keyworker felt it would be detrimental to him if he did not stay in this school. His behaviour in the care setting was much better than that reported in school. She reported that he liked talking one-to-one with adults, that he was attending counselling and was attending all appointments. She said:

He's very caring, sensitive, and obviously gets led by others, but underneath it all, he's great, he's like exceeding expectations and I think he'll continue to do better and better with the right support. (Keyworker S2)

She said teachers were trying to build a relationship with him, but he was 'pushing them away'. Speaking in general terms, the keyworker recommended more involvement from education welfare officers with young people in care:

There's a lot of young people in care who don't attend school and maybe don't have enough options, you know we can try and sort so many things but there's lots of long waiting lists and whereas if an education welfare officer was involved and got them into education a lot quicker, that would help [prevent] a lot of the social problems. They end up like absconding and in criminal activity. I think education is the key for young people so I think definitely there should be more involvement in all residential units with an education welfare officer like knowing exactly what the young people in the unit are doing educationally and pushing to get them into some sort of education. (Keyworker S2)

The second-level school attended by this pupil was using a nurture group approach to manage the most challenging behaviours and, at the start of this research, an application had been made to the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) to set up a behaviour support classroom. This classroom was established while the research was ongoing and a further visit was made to the school to conduct an interview with the teacher in charge of that classroom.

The teacher said this classroom was Level 3 of a three-tier model of support offered by the NBSS. Level 1 is a whole-school initiative; it might assist the school in devising and implementing a school-wide policy to tackle a particular issue, such as using mobile phones in class. At Level 2, the intervention would be targeted at a particular group for example a group of 20 pupils persistently arriving late. Level 3, the BSC, is a system where pupils are referred to the support classroom and spend part of their school day there, supported by two teachers. No pupil spends all the time in such a classroom. The attendance varies from four to 12 periods a week. The aim is to remove them from classes and subjects where they are experiencing greatest difficulty, with the intention of reintegrating them back again into those classes. The school care team is the mechanism through which pupils are referred to the BSC. It is a formal documented procedure and no pupil

can be referred on the basis of a particular incident in class. 'It is not a sin bin, a dumping ground,' according to the teacher. In this first year of its operating, it was targeted at first and second year pupils only and had 14 pupils, all boys, using it. Most had diagnoses of EBD or ADHD. Three were on medication. While in the class, pupils were instructed in literacy, numeracy and social skills and possibly other subjects as well, depending on frequency of attendance. Only one of the 14 was reading at a level commensurate with his chronological age.

The maximum number of pupils in the class at any one time was five, the minimum two and two teachers supported them. Both had received training from NBSS. Communication was good between the BSC teacher and subject teachers. Referral for an individual pupil begins with each of his or her teachers completing a learning behaviour checklist on which they are rated on general, learning, classroom and social, emotional behaviour. If a pupil receives 75-80 per cent maximum negative ratings, they are withdrawn from that class and attend the BSC during those periods. A pupil profile is then completed by the year head or some teacher who knows them well. This profile details a pupil's strengths as well as the challenges and the academic and counselling interventions in place. Parental permission is sought for involvement of the pupil in the BSC and there is a strong emphasis on partnership with parents and communication with parents, including home visits if necessary.

The BSC teacher devises a behaviour plan with the parent and counsellor. The pupil also completes a 'my work at school' sheet to explore their self-esteem and understanding of school rules and the need for boundaries. The practice is to assist the pupil to address one goal at a time. This is outlined on a goal sheet and the teacher of each mainstream class attended by the pupil rates their level of achievement of that goal.

That falls down at times, the goal sheet, because if he is messing in class, teachers want to write down that he is messing in class and they don't distinguish that it's the individual goal I want recorded which is understandable as well because they kind of want to improve all behaviour, not just the particular goal. But if he is looking after his goal, it's showing ownership of it and I'm not a reactionary, I can't go into every class and sort out every discipline problem for individual teachers, you know there is still classroom management, there is still the pastoral care system in the school where there are class teachers and year heads to look after that. My job is where he is failing in school, if they are with me it means they are in serious bother, they are heading for their 20-day suspension. So I'm trying to pull them back from that and show them that they can actually succeed within the class. (BSC teacher)

The teacher provides a weekly report for the parent, usually by telephone. The BSC classroom also provides a 'Contact and Check' support, where pupils can 'check in' in the morning before going to their regular classes to ensure that they have the necessary materials for class, to pre-empt any difficulties in this regard. The teacher was timetabled for 18 hours' contact time with pupils in the BSC and four hours' administration time, while the second teacher had 22 hours contact time with pupils. There is a social element and pupils can have tea and toast, look at television or access a laptop.

The NBSS, which provided a grant of €10,000 for the room, was initiating a pilot programme of occupational therapists doing a programme called Alert with pupils in the behaviour support classroom. It also introduced an initiative called Families First Therapy in the school. Described as a 'wrap-around' approach, it focused on the family and integrated inputs from all professionals involved. Within the class, the teachers implement a social, personal and health education (SPHE) programme called Friends for Life:

It's basically for students dealing with anxiety and fear in their lives and it's the only one in the world that is recognised by the World Health Organisation. There is one for children and one for adolescents, I have to use the one for children because their reading age is so low and they enjoy it. It is writing and reading but it's based around building steps to cope with fear and anxiety and holding on to friends and things. It's an excellent programme. (BSC teacher)

The BSC teacher was positive about the support and guidance from NBSS personnel. He reported that they provided excellent resources and information and came to the school to provide support where necessary. There was constant telephone, email and text contact. In his opinion, the BSC had been a positive initiative. Two pupils had been fully reintegrated into classes from which they had been withdrawn. This reintegration is also documented to monitor performance. They maintain contact with the BSC every Friday afternoon to report on their performance for the week. According to the BSC teacher, the attitude among subject teachers was positive. They would like to have more pupils referred to the class, 'but for it to be successful, you can't overload it'.

7.5.3.3 Special Schools

All participants from the two special schools asserted the ideal as inclusive education in mainstream settings. Given current economic constraints, however, they think the future of the special school is assured due to the diversity of service it offers and the individualised support available within it. All respondents were positive about inclusion although they recognised the constraints applied by the economic situation. They universally wished for more collaboration between special and mainstream schools. The principal in Special School 1 said 'the DES sees the role of the special school as a last resort placement option'. He also asserted that 'the Department deals with numbers and not needs'. Commenting on transfer of pupils back to mainstream from the special school, the principal in Special School 1 remarked:

The ideal world would be that we would prepare them to return back to mainstream. Unfortunately that has not been our experience – we find that their needs are so great and they are so far behind by the time they reach here that they actually remain with us ... We do see our role as supporting mainstream schools and we have made every effort through organising school tours for mainstream staff and parents as well as to support them in surviving and managing in mainstream. (Principal Sp1)

The deputy principal in Special School 1 said that having special schools under the jurisdiction of the primary section of the DES is problematic. In-service for teachers is restricted to primary as a result while most pupils in special schools are at post-primary level, and teachers are not offered in-service appropriate to this level.

The outreach role of the special school was explored in the interviews. Both special schools in this study have attempted outreach initiatives with limited success.

We have a small history of dual enrolment but anything that happens we have to be prepared to receive no recognition whatsoever from funding or staffing and you couldn't sustain that long-term. If they're in another school, they are on their roll not on ours; so we have supported and successfully supported but we have never received any recognition whatsoever, so you couldn't say that we have goodwill towards it and we won't say that we won't do it again; if there is a child who needs it, we would be prepared ... (Principal Sp1)

Special School 1 devised a plan to support pupils with SEN in three local mainstream schools. However, funding, which would have assured the services of an outreach teacher, was denied. The principal in Special School 1 maintains open communication with all 'feeder' schools and invites parents and teachers to visit his school before enrolment decisions. Special School 2 operates a small-scale dual-enrolment scheme (one day a week) with a local secondary school, for a small number of pupils. The principal in Special School 2 commented that the special school will have an enduring role to play in Irish education while the pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream schools remains at current levels. He asserts that the teaching is at a slower pace and almost exclusively individualised. Commenting on possible future development of these schools' role, the principal of Special School 2 stated:

I would like to see an improvement or enhancing or nurturing or fostering a closer partnership with mainstream schools, the dual enrolment, the integration of the child from the parish interacting with pupils from the area; but that its primary placement would be in the special school where his needs are being addressed. (Principal Sp2)

When asked to comment on the effectiveness of the system of provision of additional resources for pupils with special educational needs within the Irish education system and the role of special schools as part of that system, the principal of the school for MGLD said:

I see it [the special school] as being separate because in the Department of Education, there isn't an understanding of special schools at present and the staff that we're dealing with in there do not understand or recognise how special schools work and there needs to be a designated unit ... if we go and talk about looking for additional resources we find ourselves speaking to somebody dealing with mainstream schools and they have no background or no understanding. (Principal Sp1)

From a parents' perspective, interviews revealed a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the special schools involved in this study. Parents spoke about the difficulty in making the initial decision to enrol their child in a special school. When asked was it difficult, one parent stated:

Not at all, not in the end. We had come to see the school two years prior to [child's name] coming in here and I suppose you always have that difficulty of where to actually give [child] the resources where she is going to get the best help for her needs and no situation is going to be perfect. (Parent Sp1)

A high incidence of ADHD was reported in both settings. Teachers believed mainstream schools could not respond to the differentiation techniques needed to accommodate such pupils. One teacher described a pupil who could not sustain more than half a day in a mainstream setting and was in danger of dropping out. He is now happily enrolled in the special school where the variety of activity and the suitability of the programme have accommodated his needs. The result is a general improvement in behaviour and performance, according to his parents. For this pupil, the placement has been successful and his parents believe he would not have survived in a mainstream setting.

... he would have totally disrupted that mainstream class and it wouldn't have been fair on those children and certainly I have other children and I would not like a child like (child) in a class with them and I don't mean that in a bad way; he just wasn't able for mainstream and would never be able for mainstream ... we did try various things and it just didn't work for him. (Parent Sp2)

In the interviews completed with parents in both special schools, there was universal satisfaction with the current placement for the children involved. Pupils interviewed also reported a high level of satisfaction with their educational placements. The following response is characteristic. When asked 'Is there anything you do not like about school?', the pupil replied: 'Oh no, I like it really much.'

The principals of both schools reported dramatic changes in the profile of needs among pupils. The increase in ASD was a feature of both and one which presents a significant challenge in terms of professional development of staff. In Special School 2, it was significant that 95 per cent of foreign-national pupils have ASD as well as moderate general learning disability. The principal said it was worthy of further investigation. There is also a high incidence of non-verbal communication in School 2 (55 per cent), while in Special School 1 the diversity within the mild range was the main cause for concern. The principal stated that at the upper end of the mild range, pupils were displaying more significant challenging behaviour and mental health issues. This often results in exclusion from local second-level schools. At the lower end of MGL (IQ below 60), the profile seems to be more like what would have been classified as 'moderate' in previous decades. According to the principal of Special School 2, the group most likely to succeed in mainstream education is the middle range of mild general learning disability who are presenting as less complex.

Commenting on the stage of enrolment, both principals assert that most pupils enrol in special schools at post-primary. This appears to reflect a difficulty in successfully accommodating many categories of pupils with special needs in post-primary schools.

... and almost all will have been in a primary school because the nature of mild intellectual disability is such that really it's generally speaking not that obvious until the child is failing in the mainstream school system so that's one of the key features of our children here is that they will have generally experienced failure in the mainstream system prior to coming here. (Principal Special School 1)

Parents were asked to summarise their priority goals for their children. All cited independent living skills and social adaptation as the most important. Achieving functional literacy and numeracy was expressed as a goal by some, but not as a priority. Commenting on a work experience programme for those aged 16 and upwards in Special School 1, a parent commented:

In some ways it doesn't matter what the training is in; what area it is in if they just learn so much about what it is to be you know working or to be productive and to know how to work in a group situation and to work together with each other. (Parent Sp1)

Parents also expressed satisfaction with the accessibility of the school when they have concerns about their children. Their satisfaction with their children's placement appears to be directly related to the support and resource allocation available in the particular special school. In the case of Special School 1, where a model of co-operation between health (HSE) and education is providing a holistic support system, due to the involvement of a religious patron body, their satisfaction was high. Parents referred particularly to the extra professional support of psychologists and speech and language therapists that instigate a wide range of programmes within the area of social skills and adaptive behaviour. In contrast, Special School 2 relies on clinical services from NEPS and the HSE. This service is prioritised and limited in delivery and waiting lists for assessment are lengthy.

Social skills, all of that is extremely important; they don't get that in mainstream; they often won't get it in other special schools because they are not well-resourced enough. (Parent Sp1)

The interviews with parents graphically record the difficult journey they undertake to access the most suitable services for their children. The obstacles and barriers within the system were described by many of them. One parent of a child with ASD and ADHD was asked to outline the process of initial assessment and described that initial encounter with a consultant paediatrician.

Very tough, extremely tough, the first consultant we met just I think the language was the thing that was the problem for me was – it wasn't that I didn't understand him, he was so blunt, the first thing he said to me was that [child] was backward when your child is two – somebody in that profession to turn around and tell you, a consultant really who is paid a large amount of money to go to get a diagnosis and I went in to him to tell you that your son is 'backward'. (Parent Sp2)

This particular parent was so traumatised by this encounter that she did not seek further consultation until the child was five years old.

The initial assessment and diagnosis, which results in parents being told their child has special needs, presents significant emotional challenges. The news is usually met with a mixture of emotional responses which include anger, bewilderment, denial and guilt. These emotional challenges are apparently not addressed empathetically, with psychologists often delivering written reports with no personal analysis or summary. Respondents have undertaken counselling, at their own expense, to deal with the trauma. Many parents interviewed saw counselling as essential to helping them through this difficult time and to give them the resilience to deal with the day-to-day trauma of having a child with special needs. One parent was asked if counselling would have helped her and her family. She replied:

... I think I needed counselling because the way you know – it still affects me – it's only recently I've actually stopped crying when I say to somebody this is what the consultant said to me. I mean I knew my child had special needs but for him to come out with it so bluntly ... there was no extra talk, no extra help, no extra follow-up. (Parent Sp2)

The resilience of parents who face this journey is notable.

It was very long and drawn out and you were constantly fighting to get to the next step, and you might at one stage you would be getting speech therapy and you wouldn't be given occupational therapy or the other way around, or nothing ever, it never flowed, you were getting a little bit of something all the time ... when you attend a special service up to six years of age, when you reach six you are dropped. Once his sixth birthday comes, that's it, you're gone. (Parent Sp2)

A parent of a child in Special School 1, with acquired brain injury, refers to her experience of psychological assessment for her daughter and communication with clinicians which follows:

... not a huge amount [referring to communication] – certainly not from [name of service] – it took me a long time to go to the services there because I had a problem with her behaviour as well and I was looking for help with that – it took a long time and it was only because when she was coming to school we got the assessment and I read it. I was really left deal with it myself and take out of it what I wanted to. (Parent Sp1)

This parent then described her positive relationship with the psychologist attached to the special school in which her child is now enrolled:

Now here, because she sees a psychologist, there is a psychologist ongoing who by now I have got to know – I can pick up the phone to her anytime or she picks it up to me. (Parent Sp1)

In all cases, parents said that they found the special school setting the most suitable placement for their children. All were adamant their children could not cope with mainstream educational placements due to class sizes and lack of resources and support services. No regrets were expressed in the interviews on the choice of special school.

He has learned at his pace and I would have found it very frustrating for [the child] had he gone to mainstream school because I don't think he would have gotten the proper resources and I don't think, even if he had an SNA attached to him in a mainstream school, the amount of work it took to get him to where he is now – it would never have been done at a mainstream school level – they wouldn't have the resources for him. (Parent Sp2)

Many of these parents had experienced mainstream primary for their children. While they acknowledged the efforts made in mainstream schools, they spoke of the difficulties their children had encountered given large class sizes, lack of expertise and resources. One parent of a boy aged 14 with Down Syndrome said:

I just feel that [child] has special needs and he needs extra help – you know he wouldn't fit into mainstream school – I just feel that you know there are people that want their kids to go to mainstream schools and some of them are well capable but others the parents can't accept that the child needs – sometimes the parent nearly has to wake up and say we need to put the child where the child is going to come along and actually have friends and not you know mainstream schools are hard on kids ... I just think a special school is for special kids because the people that are here are specially trained to work with my child and I know teachers in the mainstream schools do great work with the special needs kids but they have bigger classes, they don't have the help that they need sometimes. (Parent Sp2)

Parents spoke of the increasing isolation of their children as they had struggled through mainstream. The effect of failure on their self-esteem with resultant behavioural difficulties was a common theme. As a child's needs became more apparent with age, parents were faced with reviewing their educational placement. To enrol in a special school, the basic criterion is an assessment of learning ability, through psychological assessment, which places the child within the mild or moderate range of ability. The current position is that every child who enters a special school arrives with an up-to-date psychological assessment. Other conditions, such as ASD or EBD, are officially not part of the enrolment criteria and come as additional needs with new enrolments. Most pupils within the mild range of ability in special schools have multiple disabilities resulting in complex needs and increased demands on available resources.

Nearly every student in here has two or three additional needs and they need to be recognised and understood but they [DES] are not open to that at present. (Principal Sp2)

Children in the mild range with no other conditions are usually suitable for inclusion in mainstream schools. However, they appear to be in the minority in these schools, with the current trends showing multiple conditions as more typical.

A further dilemma for parents when their children reach 18 is that decisions have to be made regarding further training or transfer from post-primary education. Both special schools in this study have links with further training and adult education in special settings. Parents have expressed relief there is a continuum of support available at this age as the children become adults and graduate from the special school. Referring to a system of supervised residential placement for a number of older pupils in School 1, one parent described the merits of this programme which is supported by the Health Services Executive (HSE) through the patron.

Since she started that I would have said that [(child) is forming friendships ... they have been learning how to live with one another, how to cope with lots of situations, they do the shopping, they cater for each other and they have to share, cook, clean you know. Life-skills and also they are learning a huge amount about themselves and their fears ... it's wonderful for children like [child] who would find it difficult maybe to cope with siblings and with family life and not being the centre of attention all the time; she would have little understanding of the idea of sharing and being part of a group. (Parent Sp1)

Many parents interviewed outlined the impact which having a child with special needs can have on family life. Her next sister, who I suppose would be old enough to be able to absorb reasons why and to be able to make logic and reality out of the situation, she was given some sibling support by [hospital] but it was more support around the fact that [child with special educational needs] had epilepsy and how that would affect siblings; but it does of course impact on their behaviour and I think her younger sister found that to be useful in some ways, particularly as she felt somebody was listening to her point of view and she was in a situation where parents weren't listening so she didn't have to give answers that were required or expected. (Parent Sp2)

The absence of family counselling has been identified as a deficit in the current resource provision. Parents have expressed despair at not knowing where to source information and support. A number of parents emphasised the value of support from other parents of children with SEN as the only means of support in the early days. However, the special schools appear to be providing the necessary support, with better communication structures and collaborative practices facilitating greater involvement of parents as partners in the education process. Respondent parents have identified the schools as sources of information and support for social, emotional, educational, economic and medical issues.

7.6 Evaluation

The main issues arising in relation to evaluation are outlined in Table 7.9

Table 7.9 Evaluation Themes

Evaluation	Pupil progress
	IEPs

7.6.1 Pupil Progress

School personnel acknowledged the substantially increased resources available to schools for SEN provision. Some, however, advocated the need for monitoring and review to ensure they were being deployed effectively and had the desired effect:

I'm not sure that people know what to do with the hours when they get them; I think that's a big issue. The work that's actually done with the individual students when the teachers get them. I'm not sure about the quality of that work and it's not a blame thing here, it's just knowing exactly what the exact needs of the students are, targeting those needs and seeing if there has been progress. I'm not sure that we have cracked that one yet. (Principal S3)

Another principal concurred with these views, saying;

I do feel after a certain amount of time you should be able to see progress. I don't think that these students should be given resources ad infinitum; I do think you should be able to see a result of that extra help. (Principal S4)

There was no consistent system of evaluation of the progress of pupils who were in receipt of additional support other than regular assessment and tests conducted in the schools. Within the primary schools, performances on standardised tests of literacy and numeracy, such as the Drumcondra and the Mary Immaculate College tests, MICRA-T and SIGMA-T were the principal means of monitoring progress. This was complemented by teacher observations and performances on teacher-designed tests in both mainstream classrooms and withdrawal settings, administered by class and SEN teachers. In second-level schools, progress on end-of-term tests and, in some instances, monthly tests was the main approach to monitoring performance. There was little emphasis on periodically administering standardised tests of literacy and numeracy in second-level schools. Principals said they depended a lot on teacher observations / opinions on whether pupils benefited from support received.

One primary school principal regretted that 'a lot of the children who are in resource don't make huge achievements' but she said they had been told regularly by educational and clinical psychologists that those with additional support were functioning beyond their actual assessed level. She said: 'So I suppose that shows that they're getting a high level of support both in class and out of class.' As for evaluating whether the resource allocation system is working, a second-level principal said:

Well we know it is working in that we have content SEN students, and the behavioural problems are very much lessened by the presence of the SNAs. (Principal S4)

Another second-level principal used school completion rates as a barometer of the system's effectiveness, saying many pupils in the LCA classes would be the first from their families to complete second-level education.

I'm a firm believer that if you keep people in education, that it influences the next generation, and the next generation after that. If you take a long-term view, then it is very beneficial. (Principal S2)

A support co-ordinator believe SENOs should occasionally review allocated hours to monitor effectiveness and establish if the student still needed the support.

The allocation of the hours I think that whole area needs to be reviewed. More input from the SENO with regards to review. If the student has been granted 1.5 hours and if they were to progress and develop, that needs to be reviewed at a certain point that once they're allocated hours doesn't mean that the hours should stay with them forever. (Support Co-ordinator S1)

That support co-ordinator indicated that while SENOs did not tend to review resource teaching hours, they did review the care needs of pupils with SNA support. This frequently occurred when additional SNA support was sought for another pupil. Another support co-ordinator felt that if a pupil no longer needed allocated support, then school personnel should and would allocate those hours to another pupil or pupils:

Well it's really an SNA review so I don't know if the resource hours are actually going to be reviewed – I don't think they are – I think it is just the use of SNA, certainly in this school if a student has had their resource in first year they generally keep them unless they leave or whatever. I think in a school like this we'll always have students who will need, you know, they may not be needed for that particular student but they'd be needed for somebody else. (Support Co-ordinator S2)

In general, SENOs and psychologists said they did not get involved in monitoring deployment of resource hours and SNAs as they believed it was not in their remit. Most SENOS, however, thought resource hours in particular were not always utilised effectively.

There are schools that I see where I can't identify where the resource hours are being used for the children. Yes I think we need, I think possibly there needs to be more accountability for the resources that are being put in place. I'm not sure we all appreciate just how much resources are being given, how much costs are going out on them. (SENO 1)

On monitoring the effectiveness of assistive technology and IT resources, most SENOs referred to applications for laptops, in particular, often having to be queried due to cost and suitability.

Then if it's assistive technology, that's another one that can be a bit tricky because sometimes you get recommendations for children who are young to be using the technology or who don't fully meet with the criteria or there is an application for two children in the school in senior infants, one with dyspraxia and one with a slight disability and two laptops but they weren't just regular laptops, they were multimedia, home entertainment type €2,500 a year each! You get some mad ones, you get some that are very borderline and some meet the criteria but what can complicate it a little bit is the child might fulfil this criteria as per the Circular but that child mightn't necessarily need accommodation in exams – reasonable accommodation is not our area, it's NEPS but in conscience you have to look and say, if I give this child a laptop and then they don't meet the criteria for reasonable accommodation, you are doing them a disservice so if I am very concerned, then I ring the parents or the school and query it. (SENO 3)

As the following comment demonstrates, many schools do not appear to use the requested laptops to maximum benefit.

That [assistive technology] is out there as an extra thing that you can have – in general, I mean some of my schools are excellent, but in general I think the mentality around special needs is still, there is stuff to be got, there are four things you can have, and let's see how many you can get and I rarely see the technology being used well. Particularly if you get an application for a child in primary school where you think to yourself, how much written work are you actually doing and how about getting him up to speed with his typing now and getting him a small, the other small, word processors so it will be actually be of used to him when he gets it – you see them on shelves in some schools – that's a huge drain on the Department as well. (SENO 4)

A further important issue repeatedly raised by SENOs was laptops not often transferring between primary and post-primary or primary and special school.

... the amount of assistive technology not transferring over – I mean I always log into my SEAS and I log in to see if they have an application for assistive technology but then again that's another SENO and another school that you are not familiar with and don't know the principal at all so whose role is it to. (SENO 5)

Oh God yeah, they'd hold onto as much laptops as they can – they won't transfer them unless the schools actually say – unless they actually are pinned to it, there is no kind of fast rule about assistive technology. (SENO 2)

Parents and pupils were generally positive about the support provided in the schools and confident they were benefiting from it. A comment from a parent of a pupil with MGLD attending a second-level DEIS school, where there were significant challenges evident in meeting the needs of pupils, reflected the sentiments of many:

They have been fantastic in the school they really have, I couldn't fault them, could you [addressing her husband]? If there is any problem with the school from the Principal, Vice Principal they are always available to us and they are just fantastic so I couldn't have asked for a better school to put him in really. (Parent 3 S2)

A parent of a child in a primary school stated:

I think they are doing all they can do for her, they are all doing their best for her. I think it is great the help she is getting. They are very good to her in the school now I have to say (Parent 2 P4)

A pupil spoke positively about the support available in his class from an SNA:

When you're in a class, like when I was in sixth class, I didn't need that much help, you had to do it all yourself, but you see in these classes there is an SNA, so you get to do your work because the normal teacher and the SNA help me. Say we were stuck on something, she'd help and she'll talk with us and help us through it like but she won't tell us the answer or anything. (Pupil 2 S2)

One pupil interviewed with both parents had a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, had spent eight years in a special school, never attended a mainstream and then enrolled in a mainstream second-level school in first year. At time of interview he was beginning fifth year, having successfully completed the Junior Certificate, obtaining grade A in one subject, grade B in five and grade C in three others, mostly in higher level papers. His parents emphasised the importance of SNA support when he began secondary, especially during transition between classes, when he walked directly behind the SNA to cope with the crowds of pupils on the corridors. This was a school of over 900 pupils. On returning to school in fifth year, having opted not to do transition year, he found it extremely difficult to cope with the different class compositions, resulting in anxiety and possible depression. He and his parents stressed the importance of the SNA room as a drop-in centre before school in the morning, at lunchtime and as a place to do homework or work with an SNA during free classes.

Overall, parents were generally satisfied with both mainstream and special school support for pupils under the current resource allocation system; they felt sufficiently involved in the process, well informed on relevant issues, and that they had appropriate access to relevant school staff. Likewise, pupils were satisfied with support available and its mode of delivery, predominantly in small group withdrawal settings, with the exception of pupils disaffected as a consequence of emotional, attentional and behavioural difficulties. This satisfaction was consistent across school types, whether primary or second-level, and across disadvantaged status, whether DEIS or Non-DEIS.

The core issues of poor literacy skills and poor school attendance were identified as significantly affecting the potential effectiveness of the additional resources deployed in schools. These issues were of particular concern to personnel in the DEIS schools, both primary and second-level. The principal of the primary DEIS school raised the issue of 'readiness to learn' and linguistic ability in the early primary years as key factors in the acquisition of literacy skills:

We're a DEIS school and I think the children we have coming in now have huge needs, our school community has changed completely. This year we discovered that 27 of our 51 first class pupils couldn't read. Now they had huge intervention in junior infants and senior infants but they still couldn't read, because they weren't ready coming into school. A lot of our parents we've discovered, well quite a few of our parents, don't read themselves, they don't have a supply of books at home, their children are coming in, they haven't basic vocabulary coming in and so this has an ongoing effect. It takes three years after starting school for some children to be ready to learn and what we're finding now is a lot of our incoming children are at that stage. (Principal P2)

This principal emphasised the importance of systemic, preventative interventions in literacy, language and numeracy. Initiatives such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, First Steps Writing and Early Literacy Lift Off were all implemented, but this had to be resourced from existing learning support allocation. She felt that because it was an all-girls school, it was disadvantaged under the General Allocation Model for an all-girls' school of 1.8 learning support teachers. She was also concerned at the potential impact of support staff reductions. There had been four English as an additional language (EAL) teachers in the school, it had been reduced to three at the time of this interview and, at the time of a subsequent visit to the school, it had been reduced to two. There were two resource teachers for Traveller (RTT) children in the school, but those posts were being terminated and were being replaced by one learning support post. She felt that schools like hers which had embraced educational, social and cultural inclusion were now particularly disadvantaged by recent reductions in teaching posts for Traveller children and English as an additional language pupils.

The principal of the second-level DEIS school (S2) emphasised the two-way directional influences of educational attainment and social disadvantage, reporting that when one year group entered the school, of 100 students in first year 30 had a reading age of around seven and only one was reading above chronological age. 'If you have 30 per cent reading under seven, it's very difficult to meet their needs.' He reported that despite these literacy difficulties, a librarian post funded from the JCSP had recently been discontinued.

The principal of the DEIS primary school (P2) said underachieving children had poor attendance. Her big concern was that the greatest attendance problems were in junior and senior infants. She thought the Education Welfare Board did not have enough power to deal with this. School attendance was also raised by personnel in the second-level DEIS school as a factor impacting negatively on the potential effectiveness of the support system for pupils with special educational needs:

I have one class which was two classes, but they were amalgamated at the beginning of third year, as so many of them had dropped out. I have in that group a total of eight students, but at any given time I probably only have four in. Then the other class has about 13 students and at any given time, there's about eight or nine in attendance. It is difficult to judge how they are doing: part of that is because of bad attendance, part of that is because they very often won't do homework, they sometimes lose copies and things like that. (Class Teacher P2)

7.6.2 Individualised Education Plans (IEPs)

In both special schools, a consolidated system of individualised planning and review reportedly existed in the form of individualised educational planning. In Special School 1, IEPs are drawn up for all pupils with input from teachers, SNAs, clinicians and parents. Reviews are completed once a term, while parents are involved in initial formulation and bi-annual reviews. According to the principal in Special School 1: 'IEPs are essential because teaching is individualised ... they are central to what we do.'

Programmes are complex in the special school settings because of the age-range of pupils and the requirement to provide primary and post-primary education in the same setting. The primary curriculum has traditionally provided the basis for school in-service training. However, Irish is not included as a subject in most special schools in Ireland. There is increased emphasis on subjects within the SPHE range (including RSE) and many primary pupils in special schools do home economics (especially cooking). Respondents in both special schools stressed the individualised nature of teaching, with individualised planning and priority goals for each pupil. The programmes they administer are pupil-centred and appropriate to individual need. Social skills is listed as a subject area and permeates all activities and settings along with formal teaching of the skills associated with social adaptation and relationships.

Assessment is described as an area that is 'under development' in Special School 1. Use of standardised tests such as the Sigma T and Micra T tests is limited, but the IEP process and psychological and other clinical assessment is the underlying assessment structure. In Special School 2, the IEP process also forms the main structure of assessment along with a limited psychological assessment service with extended waiting lists.

At present in [Special School 2 area] the waiting lists for psychological assessments are sometimes almost ten years of age... (Principal Sp2)

Certification at post-primary in both special schools is through FETAC – Level 1 and 2 in the school for moderate GLD (Special School 2) and Level 3 in the school for MGLD (Special School 1). School 1 also offers JCSP for a small number of pupils. Interview responses indicate a high level of creativity and modification of programmes within both schools which are justified by the individualised nature of planning. Both principals acknowledged the usefulness of the NCCA Guidelines for differentiation; but there was no reference to adherence to any national curricula in stated programmes between the two school settings.

An obvious way to monitor effectiveness of interventions would be the formulation and review of IEPs.

Their use in participating schools to monitor pupil progress was inconsistent and views diverged on their feasibility in mainstream settings. They were predominantly regarded as the remit and responsibility of SEN personnel, as reflected in the comments of one teacher:

The children would have the IEPs devised really by the special educational team. I myself wouldn't have much of an input into them, I find, because of all the other pupils in the class as well, we just don't really have the time. It really is a time issue so we would leave it to the special education team to work with the psychological report. They would devise the IEPs and run it by the class teachers or if there is anything else they think we should add, but as I say it's more done on an informal basis rather than formalised. Again it is just getting the time to sit down and actually do all these reports and, in theory, it works well but in practice you have another 25 pupils waiting to be taught as well. (CT P3)

In contrast, in one primary school, bi-annual reviews of IEPs constituted the main approach to monitoring pupil progress. Some respondents distinguished between IEPs formulated for low incidence pupils and less detailed individual learning plans (ILPs) for those with high incidence disabilities, though the terminology seemed inconsistent across schools. Such plans, where in use, were deemed beneficial:

They're quite good – I mean they do specify what the children actually need or what the pupils need to aspire to, so it does set a framework in place for how to progress with the child in a setting. (CT P2)

The use of IEPs was much more prevalent in the primary and special schools than in the second-level schools, though the support co-ordinator in one of the latter (S1) was implementing IEPs for pupils with resource hours. These were based on the psychological reports, devised in consultation with students and parents with copies for class teachers, who could then discuss them with the support co-ordinator, if they wished.

A second-level principal expressed strong views, however.

I feel extremely, extremely angry about very few things but IEPs are one that I do. My own study for my masters involved an IEP and so I feel that I can speak with some confidence and expertise in saying that to be adequately developed, monitored, evaluated, reviewed with all the relevant stakeholders, and so that it would be other than a paper exercise which is giving the parents a false belief in what's being delivered, it is giving the Department of Education and Science and the general public a false belief in what is being done. If we continue to say that we are developing IEPs because, with the lack of training and without the rolling out of broad nationwide information on the proper development of IEPs, we are doing children a disservice and an injustice and I refuse point blank to even call them IEPs – 'learning plan' maybe, 'programme of work', maybe 'individual programme of work', but nobody in Ireland should be doing an IEP at present. (Principal S4)

Another second-level principal (S3) emphasised that the time required to complete IEPs for large numbers of pupils would render them impossible. The support co-ordinator from that school concurred:

We do unofficial IEPs but the aspect of doing a complete IEP I'd have to laugh – I mean when do you do that? How do you do that? How do you make the teachers do – I mean the practical application – how do you do that? (Support Co-ordinator S3)

In another second-level school, they were tentatively beginning the process of devising individualised plans, with a focus on behavioural plans.

Well we just started this year because we just felt it kind of helps us so we are just doing them with the neediest students – you know we have identified a number of students, about 20 students. Most of them would be behavioural – now we have a couple of students who have – we have that student who I said has dyspraxia – he has a lot of difficulties so we felt that he should have an individual education plan so we have done about 7 now at this stage. This year we took it on because it is you know it's a difficult issue and there's a problem with unions as well – it's – I suppose it's planning for the student – you have to plan – you know we just take the view that you have to plan and you have to plan as part of your normal work as a teacher anyway. (Support Co-ordinator S2)

It may be worthy of comment that in the two second-level schools in which the IEP process was being embraced, one of the support co-ordinators had taught in another jurisdiction and had some experience of individualised planning there, while the other did work with the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and had received some training in relation to IEPs. This suggests availability of training may be a factor in attitudes to IEPs, especially at second-level.

The IEP process forms the basis for most of the planning and review in both special schools with information on individual pupils collated from psychological reports, teacher-observation and testing and other clinical reports such as speech and language. Parents have significant input in the planning and review stages of IEPs through information on adaptive behaviour and social skills in the home and community setting. They help to identify priority goals (usually non-academic) and these are recorded and form the basis for review meetings. According to the parents, involvement in the IEP process has enabled them to become partners in assessing their children's potential abilities. Through this collaboration with parents, there is agreement and

understanding between home and school on the goals of education for each pupil involved. These goals, both academic and non-academic, are reviewed and modified regularly and communication between parents and teachers is apparently well established.

Psychologists and SENOs said that while primary schools generally devised and implemented IEPs, secondary schools are not engaging with them.

Primary schools most definitely have IEPs in place and have done for a long time and they're open to writing plans and can see the benefit of them and will share them. With the post-primary, no plans are in place; some schools are doing action plans but they are not writing it down as an IEP or plan so obviously there are issues there. (Psychologist 2)

Involvement in the IEP process was not rated as a priority by either the SENOs or the psychologists (except from the psychologist attached to Special School 1). While some schools have asked SENOs for their input in terms of resources, the SENOs said they had done it informally as it was not in their remit. On a practical basis, they said it would not be possible for them to attend many IEP meetings. They also contended they had received no baseline training in the area and those of them who had no teaching background would be at a disadvantage.

It's not within my remit – I would love to do it but I can't see how it can be a SENO thing unless they give us that baseline training because it's not fair on people who don't come from a school background and also some of the people who do come from a school background are coming from that mindset of schools need more resources. (SENO 4)

7.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined the main themes emerging from interviews conducted with school personnel in the case study schools, as well as external professionals who support these schools. These personnel included principals, support co-ordinators, class teachers, special needs assistants, psychologists and special educational needs organisers. It has also reported findings from interviews conducted with pupils in the schools who have been allocated additional resource support and their parents. An objective of the interviews was to explore participant perceptions on how the resource allocation system operated in the schools and to elicit recommendations for change or possible improvement, where deemed appropriate. The wider spectrum of ability of the pupils and the greater complexity of needs, whether academic, social, behavioural or medical, has led to increased complexity in staffing structures with more support personnel involved, both internal and external to the school. This in turn has led to a necessity to formalise a school position for SEN co-ordination and participants agreed unanimously that this must involve reduction in teaching duties for those assuming the role.

Of all the roles discussed in these interviews, more comment was generated about SNAs than any other professional in the education system. These may have been prompted by the perceived threat of a cut in SNA numbers as a result of a NCSE review being conducted at the time of the study. However, they also reflect the importance that school personnel attribute to the role of SNAs in supporting and including pupils with significant needs, whether physical, medical or behavioural, in mainstream education and in special schools. An issue that arose for SNA allocation, retention and deployment was the desire for greater autonomy at school level for resource allocation and deployment. Participants contended that this lack of autonomy and a perceived sense of rigidity in SNA deployment, apparently reinforced in school inspections, resulted in SNAs being an under-utilised resource. Interviews with SNAs revealed that they were deployed largely in accordance with DES guidelines; for the most part, they fulfilled caring and supporting roles and were not engaging in any teaching duties, though instances to the contrary were reported. Thus a variability existed in how they fulfilled their supporting roles, as in some schools they operated mostly at whole-class rather than individual level.

Participants welcomed and acknowledged unanimously the increased resources made available over the previous decade. In addition, it was agreed that application for and allocation of additional resources had improved considerably in timeliness and efficiency with the establishment of the NCSE and appointment of SENOs. The latter were regarded as a welcome human interface between the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and schools. Again, school personnel called for increased input in decision-making for resource allocation and greater school autonomy in its deployment. They welcomed the expansion of the NEPS, despite instances of an apparent mismatch between NEPS services sought and those delivered. This related in particular to conducting psychological assessment and there tended to be an association between perceived quality of service and the number of assessments conducted in a school in a particular year. However, school personnel also valued other aspects such as the NEPS consultation model and provision of support and development to staff and pupils.

Schools reported a huge variety of arrangements in deployment of allocated resource support and the distinction between resource hours and learning support at the point of allocation was not generally reflected at the point of deployment. The predominant mode of delivery was in the form of small-group withdrawal from mainstream classes. Reporting of team-teaching initiatives was limited and they frequently resulted in a 'splitting' of a class rather than co-teaching it. Pupils with the most severe needs were generally withdrawn individually. Second-level principals were concerned about the timing of allocation of resource teachers and about constraints on these allocations arising from general teacher allocation criteria, as a consequence of which pupils with the most severe needs received additional resource support from teachers with no qualifications in SEN. Some principals, while commenting that the system was working well, advocated greater focus on monitoring the effectiveness of the additional support provided. The general approach to this was in the context of routine tests and assessments, as well as teacher opinions and observations. Views conflicted on the desirability and feasibility of IEPs to monitor pupil progress, especially at second-level.

Parents were generally satisfied with support provided for pupils with low incidence disabilities under the current system, they felt sufficiently involved in and informed about the process, and believed access to relevant staff was appropriate. Likewise, pupils were satisfied with the support available and its mode of delivery, with the exception of disaffected pupils with emotional, attention and behavioural difficulties. Parents said they experienced a sense of acceptance and inclusion of their children in mainstream schools and emphasised the commitment of school personnel in meeting their children's needs.

Access to professionals, to assessments and diagnoses emerged as the most contentious issue and as the major defect of additional resource provision. The defining characteristic of any such system must be equity and this study indicates that allocation and deployment of additional resources is equitable from the point of establishment of entitlement. It is at the point of establishment of that entitlement that the equity of the system is challenged, through unequal access to professional assessments which are prerequisite to establishing such entitlement. There is a sense that access to the resource system is mediated by an array of professionals. The experiences of parents interviewed suggests access to these professionals can vary according to school type, e.g. mainstream or special, socio-economic circumstances and geographical location. In such circumstances, there is need to review the system of resource entitlement and devise more creative approaches to allocation. This may require a complete rethink of how the additional resource allocation system operates and of the model of disability that underpins it, with a greater focus on what is happening in the classrooms, rather than classifying some pupils as 'different' and then focusing on specialist provision for them, especially when that classification is a function of professionals, to whom there is unequal access.

While some study participants recommended further resources and services or, at least, advocated retaining existing levels, they recognised the economic realities within which the Irish education system had to function and had no unrealistic expectations of additional resources becoming available. Personnel in DEIS schools emphasised that it was essential that resource reductions did not further disadvantage schools at the frontline of educational disadvantage, at the interface of social disadvantage and educational, cultural and linguistic diversity. Participants emphasised the need to bias general allocations, including pupil-teacher ratio and SNA allocations, in favour of the young and educationally disadvantaged. Early, systemic, preventative initiatives were recommended to prevent subsequent failure in literacy and numeracy. Likewise, early therapeutic interventions may pre-empt school disaffection and early drop-out among pupils with emotional issues. Participants believed such preventative educational and therapeutic initiatives are the best means of breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The need for this was poignantly demonstrated in a comment from a ten-year-old girl with a diagnosis of language and reading difficulties as recounted by her mother: 'When I get older, I'll teach you to read Mammy.'

8: Discussion and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to review Ireland's system of resource allocation for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. It sought to explore if it operated in an equitable, timely, efficient and effective manner and if additional resources were being deployed in schools in the context of an inclusive education system for pupils with special educational needs. It aimed to investigate how well school personnel and other stakeholders, including parents, understood the system of resource allocation and policy and to identify issues and challenges in the processes of application for, and allocation and deployment of, additional resources. In addition, it aimed to explore stakeholders' perspectives on the system's perceived effectiveness. In essence it aimed to examine if the resource allocation system is bureaucratically efficient and transparently equitable and to explore how resources are deployed within schools.

A system of additional resource provision for pupils with special educational needs must obviously operate in the context of the wider education system in which it is embedded and also within the constraints of the economic system funding it. The starting point was, therefore, an examination of available national statistics on allocation of resources for pupils with special educational needs and the associated financial costs.

The study also examined relevant legislation and education policy in other jurisdictions to provide another perspective as a context for examining Irish legislation and policy on education of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. This was complemented by information gathered on site visits to England and Finland.

The study's core aspect was gathering empirical data at school level in the system. Two complementary perspectives comprised this approach. One was a national survey of all schools in the country – primary, post-primary and special schools. Comprehensive case studies of 12 schools (primary, second-level and special) complemented this. These schools differed in size, school type, pupil gender and geographical location. A range of school personnel was interviewed along with psychologists and SEN organisers as well as pupils who had been allocated resource teaching support and their parents.

Chapters 2 and 3 provided an outline of core issues arising from the literature review conducted as a background to the study. Chapter 4 detailed the methodology. Information gleaned from the site visits was presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 outlined the findings from the national survey of primary, post-primary and special schools, while the findings derived from the 12 case study schools were presented in Chapter 7.

This concluding chapter summarises and synthesises the main findings of the study and formulates appropriate recommendations for the system of application for, and allocation and deployment of, additional resources for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in Irish schools.

8.2 Finland, England and Ireland: A Comparison

The Finnish education system is widely regarded as a model of good practice and, according to OECD (2010), its performance levels have led educationalists to study it to learn the secrets of its success. Furthermore, Finnish academics and commentators consistently claim that the high rankings of their students in international comparisons are largely explained by the lowest performing pupils in Finland outperforming the lowest performing pupils in any other jurisdiction. They attribute this success to the effectiveness of its 'special education system'. This operates on a continuum from 'part-time special education', which equates to the Irish Learning Support and Resource Teaching system, and more recently may include 'co-teaching' in mainstream classrooms, to full-time special education, which amounts to full-time placement in a special class or school.

It was therefore considered appropriate to use the Finnish system as an international comparator in this study of additional resource provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in Irish schools. England was also considered an appropriate comparator due to geographical convenience, linguistic similarities and the historical and cultural links with Ireland.

Table 8.1 provides an outline of the main contrasts and similarities that emerged from these three jurisdictions.

Table 8.1: Finland, England and Ireland: A Comparison

Characteristic	Finland	England	Ireland
Legislation	Comprehensive equality and disability legislation	Comprehensive equality and disability legislation	Comprehensive equality and disability legislation; deferment of full implementation of core pieces of legislation
SEN structures in schools	Student Welfare Group (SWG), which co-ordinates provision, monitors effectiveness and makes decisions on resource allocation	Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) in all schools, literacy co-ordinator and numeracy co-ordinator in most schools	No formal support co-ordinator post but most schools in this study report a teacher fulfilling this role.
Resource allocation structures	Formal SWG structure in schools with power to make decisions re allocating resources, placing pupils with SEN.	Resources allocated at local authority level, funded out of school budgets	Resources allocated at regional level and funded from centralised budget.
Funding arrangements	Devolution of funding and resource deployment decisions to schools.	Devolution of funding and resource deployment decisions predominantly to schools	National centralised funding arrangements with strict guidelines for resource deployment.
Curriculum	Devolution of pedagogical decision-making to teachers	Emphasis on central curricular control	Emphasis on central curricular control
School inspection and evaluation	Inspectorate dismantled	Ofsted Inspectorate; some shift towards self-evaluation, but monitored by inspectorate visits	Centralised inspectorate: whole-school evaluation (WSE) and school-self evaluation being introduced
Teacher education	Teacher Education: Master's level; 5 years	Bachelor level or Degree plus postgraduate certificate: 4 years	Bachelor level or Degree plus postgraduate diploma: 4 years
Teacher competence and differentiation	Teachers regarded as being competent and confident in differentiating curriculum, according to reports from site visits	Teachers regarded as being very competent and confident in differentiating curriculum, according to head teachers in site-visit schools	Some teachers in this study reported a lack of confidence in adequately differentiating curriculum
In-service / continuing professional development	In-service training: 5 days per year compulsory	In-service-training widely available and 5 such days are compulsory, but may not be related to SEN	In-service training optional and significant investment has been made in this regard, particularly under the Special Education Support Services (SESS)

Characteristic	Finland	England	Ireland
SEN teacher education	SEN teacher education one-year full time	Training for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) at certificate level	One-year: part own school-based: part college-based (8 weeks)
SEN qualifications	Significant emphasis on highly qualified SEN teachers, according to site-visit respondents	Reduced emphasis on qualified SEN teachers in the two English site-visit primary schools; all primary teachers are regarded as competent SEN teachers	Emphasis on qualified SEN teachers, but indications from case-study schools are that distribution of qualified SEN teachers across schools can be inconsistent. SEN pupils frequently taught at second-level by teachers not qualified in SEN, but teaching their specialist subjects
Teaching assistants / SNAS	Teaching assistants play a significant role in SEN provision	Teaching assistants play a central role in SEN provision	Special needs assistants (SNA) perform a care role
Identification and assessment	Universal pre-school screening for disabilities / SEN	Assessment on referral or suspicion of difficulties	Assessment of need on referral or suspicion of difficulties
School starting age	Children begin school at seven years of age, SEN children may begin at six	Children begin school in year of 5th birthday	Children begin school aged 4-5
Standardised testing	No standardised testing: monitoring of random samples of pupils, results confidential	High-stakes testing, with results published	No national standardised testing as of yet but such tests will be introduced under the national literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011)
Assessment	Emphasis on continuous assessment of SEN pupils by teachers, reduced emphasis on referral to external professionals. Emphasises pedagogical rather than psychological assessment, as system embraces Response to Intervention (RTI) approach. (Hautamaki <i>et al</i> , 2010)	Consistent monitoring of SEN pupil progress by teachers through IEPs. Referral to external professionals for diagnosis, though the aim is to separate assessment and resource allocation procedures	Inconsistent procedures for monitoring of SEN pupil progress in case study schools. System heavily reliant on external professionals to establish entitlement to resources. Parents and principals in this study reported that access to professionals can be inconsistent
Progress monitoring	Accountability and progress monitoring of SEN pupils by frequent administration of teacher-administered tests. (Hautamaki <i>et al</i> , 2010)	SEN pupil progress in the site visit schools closely monitored by senior management team.	Pupil progress-monitoring based on general use of standardised or in-house tests. Can be variable according to school, according to some principals in case study schools

Characteristic	Finland	England	Ireland
Individualised planning	Strong emphasis on individualised planning (IEP)	Strong emphasis on individualised planning (IEP) and / or whole-school provision mapping	Implementation of IEPs reported in most survey respondent schools, though there can be resistance, especially in second-level schools (TUI website [www.tui.ie]), with such resistance evident in some of the case-study schools.
Teacher performance	Strong emphasis on teacher peer review and classroom monitoring by SWG	Strong emphasis on performance monitoring of teachers by SENCO and senior management team through classroom observations	No culture of peer review or classroom monitoring by senior management
Early intervention programmes	Early, systemic preventative intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy are favoured, with a view to pre-empting difficulties at a later stage	Early, systemic preventative intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy are favoured, with a view to pre-empting difficulties at a later stage	Early, systemic preventative intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy, such as Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery recommended by principals of DEIS primary schools in this study
Mainstream and special school links	Very little collaboration between special and mainstream schools, according to site-visit respondents	Significant links between special and mainstream schools in the site visit	Very little collaboration between special and mainstream schools reported by principals of case-study special schools in this study

8.3 Organisation of SEN provision

There is a contrast in school structures in the three jurisdictions for managing and co-ordinating SEN provision. England's Code of Practice stipulates the appointment of a SENCO in each school and school personnel regarded this post as a prerequisite for the effective management of SEN provision. There is no equivalent post within Irish schools, though there was a person in nine of the ten mainstream case-study schools who was performing the duties associated with it. Participants strongly recommended the formalisation of such a post. The participants in the larger schools expressed concerns about the difficulties of co-ordinating inputs of various personnel involved, especially in post-primary. In one primary school, the system of SEN support was described as 'a school within a school'. Psychologists and SENOs also emphasised the need for a designated person to assume responsibility for co-ordination of SEN provision, especially in post-primary. The SENOs stated that such a structure facilitated better communication between them and the school.

Recommendation 1

Organisational structures need to be standardised in Irish schools for the co-ordination and delivery of SEN provision, especially in larger schools. This could best be achieved by setting up a SEN department or team, especially in second-level and large primary schools.

Recommendation 2

Where established, a support co-ordinator with SEN qualifications and experience of teaching students with special needs should support a SEN department or team. Key functions of the support co-ordinator would include co-ordination of SEN provision and enhancement of communication between all involved in SEN provision. In large schools, with a high prevalence of SEN, the co-ordinator would require some reduction in teaching commitments. In small primary schools, such a post would not be so essential or could be shared between clusters of schools, similar to the arrangements for the sharing of resource teachers.

8.4 Resource Application System

Responses to the primary and post-primary surveys in this study indicate that the resource application system is efficient in terms of speed of response and decision-making in processing applications and that this process has improved since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of SENOs. However, completing documentation attaching to the application process was regarded as either 'time-consuming' or 'very time-consuming' by the vast majority of these respondents due to the excessive amount of documentation required. Some principals in the case study schools expressed similar reservations. The SENOs, obviously central to the application process, also referred to an ever-increasing volume of administration, lack of administrative support and excessive workloads. The SENOs were critical of the SEAS database to which applications are entered, describing it as slow. They were critical of the fact that in addition to inputting data into the database there is a requirement for a lot of form-filling. Support co-ordinators in the case study schools advocated greater communication between SENOs and other professionals, especially psychologists. Some SENOs also advocated enhanced communication with parents, so that parents are informed in writing of decisions made in response to resource applications for their children and the rationale for those decisions.

Recommendation 3

The system of application for additional resources needs to be less time-consuming for all concerned, both school personnel and SENOs. This could be best achieved by using an electronic application and recording system, so that school personnel can submit applications and provide documentation in electronic format.

Recommendation 4

Due to the large caseload of SENOs and the volume of paperwork involved in the role, more SENOs should be appointed along with adequate levels of administrative support. Such developments are essential to ensure effective communication with parents and with other professionals. Such developments would also facilitate enhanced involvement of SENOs in schools enabling them to work more collaboratively with school personnel in the resource application and allocation processes.

Recommendation 5

Enhanced communication is needed between SENOs and parents, so that parents are informed in writing of decisions made in response to resource applications and the rationale for those decisions.

8.5 Resource Allocation

A common theme for participants in the case study schools on resource allocation was a perceived sense of exclusion from the decision-making processes. They articulated a strong sense of reduced professional and managerial autonomy and a lack of consultation around allocation and deployment of resources. They perceived this exclusion as, at best, ignoring and, at worst, challenging and questioning their professional judgements. They advocated that the decision-making process should also be informed by greater use of data from school-administered tests and general school performance and greater consultation with school personnel in relation to a pupil's needs. This sentiment was also expressed by SENOs and endorsed by psychologists in this study.

Support co-ordinators were critical of the inflexibility of the allocation system, especially the insistence on, and narrow interpretation of, psychometric scores and the fact that a score just above or below an eligibility cut-off point can render a pupil ineligible for resources. This narrow interpretation was also criticised by Desforges and Lindsay (2010) who see it as a manifestation of the medical model of disability, while they advocate an interactionist model. This is in keeping with the recommendations of participants in this study, who advocated a contextual approach to resource allocation so that school factors and performance would also be taken into account in deciding eligibility. Desforges and Lindsay (2010) recommend breaking the link between diagnosis of disabilities and access to services.

Support co-ordinators recommended a review of current allocation criteria, claiming that pupils presenting with severe manifestations of mild general learning or specific learning disabilities with 1.5 hours resource teaching at post-primary level (who are now provided for under a general allocation model rather than a specific allocation of resource hours) often had considerably greater needs than pupils with higher allocations on the basis of low incidence disabilities, such as ASD. Support co-ordinators in primary made similar observations and stressed the difficulties in meeting the needs of pupils with high incidence disabilities under the general allocation model. Respondents to the primary and the post-primary surveys also expressed concerns that the needs of pupils with MGLD and SLD were not met under current arrangements.

Recommendation 6

There is need for the DES to revise the policy on resource entitlement and devise more creative approaches to resource allocation to break the link between assessment and resource entitlement. This revision should incorporate procedures for taking cognisance of the views of school personnel and the use of school-based assessment data in the decision-making process for resource allocation. It should also provide for a review of individual cases of pupils with mild general or specific learning disabilities, currently provided for under the general allocation model (GAM) to ensure that the needs of those with the most severe manifestations of these disabilities are being met.

Ireland's resource allocation process depends on diagnosis by a professional for low incidence disabilities. Parents interviewed in this study recounted numerous instances of difficulties in getting access to professionals, securing assessments and accessing therapies where required. Their experiences would suggest that access to professional assessment which, in turn, frequently determines access to resources and therapeutic interventions, can vary according to school setting, e.g. mainstream or special, socio-economic circumstances and geographical location. This challenges the equity of the resource provision system. Historical factors may relate to those findings and the situation may have improved in this regard as, currently under the Disability Act 2005, if there is a suspicion of child up to five years presenting with a disability or special needs, then that child is entitled to an Assessment of Need. Also, some principals spoke positively about the support available to schools from HSE early interventions teams, while other parents whose children were accessing long-established clinical services also recounted positive experiences in this regard.

Parents from the case study schools reported instances of pupils perceived as requiring assessments but unable to access them because others were deemed of higher priority. Access to such assessments therefore depended on the school's or the parents' ability to fund private assessments. Respondents to the primary and post-primary surveys also highlighted waiting lists for professional assessments. In 70-80 per cent of primary and post-primary schools surveyed, it was reported that substantial numbers of pupils needing assessments were not prioritised for them. Parents reported other anomalies of having funded private assessments which were then not accepted by clinical services and of assessments conducted in hospital settings being duplicated again at local level. Children with the same diagnosis attending the same school, but in different classrooms, such as in a special class for pupils with ASD versus a mainstream classroom, could have to source services such as speech and language therapy from different agencies. This was because the clinical service only supported the pupils in the special unit. Also, those who transferred from the unit to the mainstream classroom in the same school lost their entitlement to clinical service support and parents had to seek alternative services 'in the community' even though the speech and language therapist was continuing to visit the school to support pupils in the unit.

Recommendation 7

For as long as access to resources for low incidence disabilities is mediated by access to professionals and a formal diagnosis, then access to such professionals must be equitable and should be determined by the level of a child's need, not by school setting, geographical location or socio-economic factors. This will require greater numbers of assessing professionals, including psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. Given the centrality of NEPS psychologists to the system of SEN provision, the number of psychologists employed by NEPS should be increased.

Recommendation 8

There is need for greater collaboration between health and educational professionals and between health professionals employed by different services to ensure the most efficient service delivery possible and one that is not characterised by the administrative anomalies and duplication of assessments highlighted by parents and teachers in this study. The HSE, DES and NCSE should establish a working group to consider inter-agency communication issues within the resource allocation system.

8.6 Resource Deployment

8.6.1 Deployment of Teachers

Considerable variability was noted in resource deployment in the case study schools, especially at post-primary level. Support co-ordinators expressed concern about some pupils being allocated resource hours who were unable to avail of them, due to timetabling issues or class organisational structures. It arose in particular for pupils with ASD and AD(H)D with five hours resource teaching, and school personnel who could not accommodate this support within the timetable. The support co-ordinators recommended that consultations should take place with school personnel at the time of resource allocation for a pupil in order to explore and possibly pre-empt deployment challenges. They also recommended that allocation and deployment should be reviewed by the SENOs to establish if additional support was effective and to establish if it needed to continue.

A considerable amount of additional support in post-primary is provided by subject teachers involved in SEN provision for only a few class periods each week. The nature of the input can be determined by teacher availability and his or her specialist subjects as much as by pupil needs. This predominantly arises because schools are not permitted to appoint specialist resource teachers with SEN qualifications if they exceed their overall teacher quota.

The responses to the post-primary surveys also indicated a significant variety of arrangements for deployment of additional teaching support, including a high prevalence of 'unofficial small classes' reported in a third of the post-primary schools. More than a half of these deployed additional teaching hours to reduce class size in particular subjects. Almost a fifth of second-level schools deploy additional hours in the form of special classes. Furthermore, almost a third identified placement in a Junior Certificate Schools Project (JCSP) class or a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) class as a means of deploying additional hours, even though they are not designated as classes for pupils with special educational needs, but for those at risk of disaffection and early school drop-out. One-to-one and small-group withdrawal are reported from practically all the schools surveyed, while in-class support in the form of shared teaching of classes occurs in about half the post-primary and almost two-thirds of the primary schools surveyed.

Support co-ordinators emphasised the challenges involved in co-ordinating and monitoring the inputs of large numbers of personnel involved in SEN provision. They also stressed the importance of curricular differentiation in the classroom as the starting point of SEN provision, but reported that mainstream class teachers do not feel confident in their capacity to differentiate the curriculum adequately to meet the increasing diversity of their pupils. In contrast, respondents interviewed during site visits to England and Finland expressed high levels of confidence in the capacity of their teachers to differentiate the curriculum appropriately.

Special schools constitute a particular form of resource deployment and form part of a continuum of provision for pupils with special educational needs, as outlined in the SERC Report (DES, 1993). There was evidence from the site visit to England of significant collaboration between special and mainstream schools, with dual enrolment of pupils and involvement of staff from special schools in supporting staff and pupils in mainstream schools. There was little evidence of such collaboration between special and mainstream schools in this study. However, the two special school principals expressed an interest in developing 'outreach services' to mainstream schools to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of the most intellectually challenged and the most behaviourally challenging pupils, which may reduce referrals to special schools.

Recommendation 9

At the point of allocation, arrangements for deployment of proposed additional teaching resources should be planned and discussed by school personnel and the SENOs to pre-empt difficulties that may arise in the school's capacity to facilitate their delivery.

Recommendation 10

Given the range of deployment methods used in schools, especially in post-primary, deployment of teaching resources should be reviewed collaboratively by school personnel and SENOs. They should explore deployment difficulties arising (e.g. if the school cannot facilitate delivery due to timetabling issues) to establish if the resources are adequate to meet the pupil's needs and to determine their continued need. This may require a change in DES policy to broaden the role of SENOs to incorporate such functions.

8.6.2 Deployment of SNAs

During interviews in the case study schools, more comment was generated about the role of SNAs and its centrality in the inclusion of the most challenged and challenging pupils in mainstream education than about any other professional. One second-level principal, reflecting the sentiments of other personnel in the school, declared that a reduction in SNAs would result in increased pupil exclusions. The SNAs were fulfilling a variety of caring and support duties with their pupils and these duties were fulfilled in various modes of deployment, some at individual and others at classroom level. Many participants in this study, including principals, support co-ordinators, psychologists and SENOs, stated that they regarded such personnel as an under-utilised resource in Irish schools. SNAs themselves concurred. A significant number of survey respondents also criticised the restriction of their role to care needs alone. School personnel recommended greater autonomy for school management in SNA deployment. Some SENOs suggested their role should be upgraded, with appropriate training, to a level similar to that of teaching assistant in England. These also play a significant role in the Finnish education system, as reported from the site visit there.

Most respondents from the case study schools and a substantial proportion of those who responded to the three national surveys, in primary, post-primary and special schools, regarded the allocation of SNAs as inadequate and criticised the recent reduction in SNA allocations. Respondents to the special school questionnaire emphasised that pupils attending schools for pupils with MGLD almost invariably also presented with accompanying conditions, frequently resulting in challenging behaviours. They said the allocation of SNAs was thus inadequate.

Recommendation 11

Deployment of SNAs needs to be reviewed to ensure the needs of pupils with the most severe difficulties are being met.

Recommendation 12

The role of special needs assistants in Irish classrooms should be reviewed in consultation with school personnel to grant more autonomy to schools in SNA deployment, such as possibly deploying them at classroom level instead of at individual pupil level in some instances.

Recommendation 13

Consideration should be given to creating Teaching Assistant posts within Irish schools. This would require the provision of appropriate training in preparation for that role. It would also require training for mainstream class teachers in managing such personnel.

8.7 Evaluation

The effectiveness of any resource allocation and deployment system is likely to be determined by the quality assurance procedures in place to ensure interventions are achieving desired outcomes. The main approach to monitoring pupil progress within the case study schools was on the basis of performance in standardised and in-house tests administered to all pupils. Some principals strongly advocated the need for more formal approaches to monitoring the progress of pupils who had been allocated additional resource support.

There was little systematic recording of progress of pupils with special educational needs other than in cases where individualised education plans had been formulated. The practice of individualised planning varied across the case study schools and was resisted in some post-primary schools, pending the provision of appropriate training for teachers in formulation and implementation of IEPs. Survey data indicate that such plans were used for pupils with low incidence disabilities in almost all primary and about 60 per cent

of post-primary schools. They were also frequently used for pupils with high incidence disabilities. However, qualitative comments on the questionnaires would suggest varied use of IEPs across schools. These comments also refer to post-primary resistance to them by one teaching union in particular, due to lack of training.

Significant emphasis is put on individual recording and monitoring of pupil performance within the Finnish system, including the widespread use of individualised plans. This practice is likely to intensify with the incorporation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach into the Finnish SEN provision system. This approach is characterised by constant monitoring of a pupil's response to documented intervention. The monitoring is based on performance on teacher-administered pedagogical tests, the anticipated outcome of which is a reduced need for referral for psychological assessment. It is characterised by a prompt, localised, systematic and documented response to a pupil's needs rather than a diagnostic explanation of those needs, by an external professional, often after a period of sustained failure. This approach was also favoured by Desforges and Lindsay (2010) as a means of reducing the need for diagnostic assessment.

There was strong emphasis on individual recording and progress monitoring in the English schools, where individualised plans are standard practice. Provision mapping has emerged in the UK as an alternative or a complementary approach to individualised planning. It is a group-based approach to education planning. Unlike IEPs, a provision map is not written for each child, but can be written for a year group or a subject group, and provision for an individual child can be highlighted within it. Management personnel in English schools monitor the effectiveness of the resource deployment system through a comprehensive system of peer monitoring and classroom observations. Similarly, in Finland, the Student Welfare Group (SWG), consisting of principal, psychologist, class teachers and SEN teachers, fulfils a similar role, also engaging in classroom observations and peer monitoring. No such culture of such peer observations or classroom monitoring by senior management exists in Irish schools.

Recommendation 14

More consistent and systematic approaches are needed in recording the progress of pupils with special educational needs receiving additional support to ensure they are making adequate progress.

Recommendation 15

The Department of Education and Skills should have some mechanism to monitor at least a sample of pupil assessment data to maintain an overview of how the overall system of resource provision is functioning. This could be done in conjunction with the assessments required under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011).

Recommendation 16

The Response to Intervention (RTI) approach should be explored for its applicability to the Irish system for identifying and responding to pupil need and for monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken to address those needs.

Recommendation 17

There is a need to resolve the issue of some resistance to formulation and implementation of IEPs in some mainstream schools due to perceived lack of training. In the absence of them being a mandatory requirement, a decision is needed on whether such plans are considered essential to resource deployment and review systems. Consideration should be given to introducing the concept of provision mapping to Irish schools to explore its usefulness and suitability either as a complement to, or as a possible alternative to, individualised planning.

All education systems are most challenged by challenging behaviour. Respondents from about two-thirds of mainstream schools surveyed, primary and post-primary, rated support available for this issue as either 'inadequate', or 'very inadequate'. However, most indicated that target pupils were benefiting from allocated support. This means the support is valued, but is not of sufficient level of provision. Almost three-quarters of special school respondents rated support for challenging behaviour as either 'inadequate' or 'very inadequate'. The two English schools visited as part of this study had access to behaviour support teams, who offered consultative and advisory services for pupils with challenging behaviour.

Just as with learning difficulties and SEN, challenging behaviour is not experienced equally across schools because it is intertwined with other factors such as social disadvantage and, possibly, cultural minority status. According to two DEIS principals, primary and post-primary, this interaction of factors can result in mental health issues among students, disaffection, reduced attendance, poor homework completion and early school drop-out. They state that the consequences include a reduced readiness to learn among pupils entering the primary system and likewise as they move up through the system, with negative consequences for their learning opportunities and those of their peers.

These schools operate at the frontline of social and educational disadvantage and they must be prioritised in resource allocation. In addition, their allocation must be protected in any reduction process. Principals emphasised the need for therapeutic and counselling inputs in these schools and for systemic, preventative initiatives in this regard. One participant called for a 'wrap-around' of services for the families of the most disadvantaged and challenging pupils delivered in conjunction with adequate support. Schools need this support to address this issue a form of which is available from the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) for post-primary schools. The benefits of NBSS support were evident in one case study school, in which a behaviour support classroom had been established. The service offers a continuum of support, albeit to a relatively small number of schools.

Recommendation 18

Schools need more specialist support from behaviour support specialists, such as that provided by the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), to tackle challenging behaviour. These services should be particularly targeted towards DEIS schools and include an emphasis on preventative initiatives in primary schools.

Recommendation 19

The combined issues of challenging behaviour and mental health status of pupils need priority intervention in the form of therapeutic and counselling inputs in schools, support from mental health professionals and support for families.

8.8 Conclusion

The findings emerging from this study emphasise that significant resources, financial, human and technological, are being provided within the Irish education system to support pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. The Irish Government is spending over €1 billion annually on this endeavour. For example, in 2011, DES spent a total of €1.3 billion on SEN provision and this amounted to 15 per cent of the total DES budget (DES, 2012 c). Study participants acknowledged and welcomed the substantial resources provided for pupils with special educational needs across primary, post-primary and special schools. They acknowledged that the processes of application for, and allocation of, additional resources have improved considerably in their timeliness and efficiency since the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the appointment of SENOs, who were regarded as a welcome human interface

between the Department and the schools. However, school personnel would welcome more involvement in the decision-making process around allocation and strongly recommended more consultation in this regard. They also demanded more autonomy in the deployment of allocated resources, though deployment practices in participating schools revealed considerable variations, indicating that they were adopting a flexible approach and were exercising more autonomy than is sometimes assumed. The predominant mode of deploying resource teaching hours is small-group withdrawal from mainstream classrooms with pupils with more complex needs being withdrawn on an individual basis. The role of SNAs generated more comment than the role of any other professional. This reflected their perceived positive contribution to the education of pupils with special needs and concerns that their numbers would be reduced. Participants believed SNAs constituted an underutilised resource in schools and recommended expansion of their roles and more flexibility in their deployment.

Participating parents were generally satisfied with the support for pupils with special educational needs across primary, second-level and special schools. They felt sufficiently involved in the process, felt well informed on relevant issues and thought that access to relevant school staff was appropriate. Likewise, pupils expressed general satisfaction with the support available and its delivery with the exception of pupils disaffected as a consequence of emotional, attention and behavioural difficulties. Parents emphasised the sense of commitment of school personnel across the three school types to meeting the needs of their children. The parents from the mainstream schools reported that they experienced a sense of inclusion of their children. Parents from special schools emphasised the importance of a continuing role for special schools within the Irish education system. They said their children's needs could not be met in mainstream education. Special school principals advocated an enhanced role for special schools to ensure an effective continuum of provision, characterised by dual enrolment of pupils, dual deployment of staff and the provision of outreach services by special school to mainstream schools.

The effective deployment of resources in schools depends on the organisational structures within them and participants concluded that the existing structures are not always conducive to effective deployment. They emphasised the need for co-ordination of the inputs of various personnel, both internal and external to the school, and for collaboration and communication between all involved. No formal post of support co-ordinator exists in Irish schools and such a post was deemed essential. Collaboration and communication, the hallmarks of an efficiently functioning system of SEN provision, require planning time and meeting opportunities. These are difficult to facilitate within the constraints of existing school timetables, especially in post-primary, but also in larger primary schools.

In addition to applying for, allocating and deploying additional resources, the final crucial aspect of a resource provision system relates to evaluation and review procedures in place to monitor their effectiveness. While in general resource provision was thought to be having the desired outcomes, some participants advocated a more systematic approach to monitoring its effectiveness. Some initiatives explored in this report, such as provision mapping and the Response to Intervention approach may be useful in this regard.

Access to professionals, assessments and diagnoses emerged from the interviews as one of the most contentious issues and possibly as the major defect of the additional resource provision system. Access to many aspects of the resource system depends on access to professionals and the experiences of parents would suggest that access to these professionals can vary according to education setting, socio-economic circumstances and geographical location. This seriously challenges the equity of the system and prompts an urgent review of the system of resource entitlement. This review should also take account of the system being largely based on a somewhat dated, and frequently questioned, medical, deficit model of disability and SEN. The trend in other jurisdictions is to break the link between assessment, diagnosis and resource entitlement, with greater emphasis on general recurrent models of resource allocation, based on historical records of needs

in schools and communities. Assessments, if and when conducted, are then focused on identifying needs and planning for interventions. The other major issues arising related to the inconsistent nature of support from healthcare professionals and the perceived lack of co-ordination between educational and health professionals and even between health professionals operating in different sectors of the health service. This lack of co-ordination was perceived as limiting the impact of what were perceived as very valuable inputs from healthcare professionals.

While participants in this study were, in some instances, recommending further resources and services or at least advocating the retention of existing levels, they acknowledged the economic realities within which the education system in Ireland has to function and had no unrealistic expectations of additional resources being available. They emphasised the need to protect the most disadvantaged schools and their pupils from any reductions in resources. They emphasised the need of all general allocations, including pupil-teacher ratio and SNA allocations, to favour the young and educationally disadvantaged. They recommended early, systemic preventative initiatives, both educational and therapeutic, to reduce subsequent educational failure and school disaffection.

In summary, study participants concluded that the Irish education system is well resourced in terms of financial, human and technological resources for pupils with special educational needs and that the application and allocation systems at school and SENO level are efficient. Resources are being deployed in a flexible manner, but there is a perceived need for greater monitoring of their effectiveness. A review of school structures and practices to enhance co-ordination and collaboration within schools was deemed necessary. Finally, a major challenge to the equity of the resource provision system related to access to external professionals for assessment and therapeutic intervention. Access to assessments prompts a review of the whole model on which the resource allocation system is predominantly based.

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