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Message from the Chairperson of Council

As the end of another year approaches it is time to reflect on the activities of NCSE during 2011. The beginning of the year was marked by the arrival of our new CEO, Teresa Griffin at the end of March.

This has been an extremely busy and productive year for NCSE. In early 2011, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) advised that it had become necessary, as part of the National Recovery Programme, to make certain adjustments to the scheme for the allocation of additional resource teaching hours and to place a cap on the number of whole time equivalent special needs assistant (SNA) posts in schools at 10, 575 posts. The NCSE introduced revised arrangements for the implementation of the above schemes, in cooperation with the Education Partners. We would like to thank the Education Partners and schools for their cooperation with the revised arrangements and in meeting deadlines for the submission of applications.

The Council is pleased that in the context of the current financial situation, the DES continues to prioritise special education. Substantial resources remain in place in schools to support pupils with special educational needs and in the recent budget, the overall number of SNAs and resource teachers are to be maintained at current levels. The Council is firmly committed to ensuring that available resources are allocated to schools in accordance with Government

policy and in a timely, consistent and fair manner so that the resources can be used to best effect in supporting pupils with special educational needs.

One of the ways in which the Council disseminates information on best practice in special education is through its publication programme which in 2011 included the following:

- *The Inclusive Education Framework*, a new resource for schools to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs.
- A new guide, *Children with Special Educational Needs – Information Booklet for Parents* which, for the first time, provides information to parents on the full range of educational supports available in schools for children with special educational needs.



In addition, four new research reports were published on the NCSE website on the following topics:

- *The education of children with emotional disturbance/behavioural difficulties*
- *Access to the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary classes*
- *The prevalence of special educational needs in Ireland*
- *An inventory of research and policy related publications in the field of special education.*

The third annual research conference was held in

November 2011 and featured interesting presentations from the NCSE research programme and on other important aspects of special education. We are pleased that participants' evaluations confirm that they found the presentations to be of a very high quality, with real relevance to their work and areas of interest. A full report of this conference is included in this issue of the newsletter.

The Council continues to develop its policy advice programme and submitted advice on the future role of special schools and classes to the Minister for Education and Skills in February, 2011. Advice on the education of children who are Deaf and hard of hearing has recently been submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills. It is intended that a formal launch of this paper will precede its publication in January 2012.

The Council is conscious that 2011 has been a difficult year for many families and that there continues to be economic problems ahead of us. We would like to assure you of our continued determination to work hard to achieve our strategic objectives in the interests of children with special educational needs and their families.

**On behalf of Council members and executive,
I would like to wish all our readers a very
Happy Christmas and a peaceful new year**

Sydney Blain

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the National Council for Special Education.

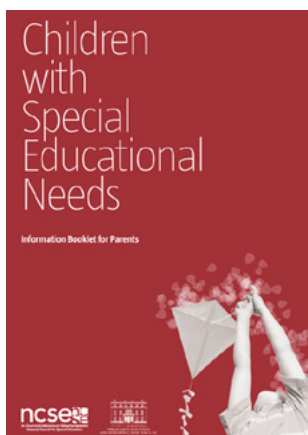
Update: NCSE policy advice

New information booklet for parents of children with special educational needs

The NCSE is pleased to announce a new publication *Children with Special Educational Needs – Information Booklet for Parents* which, for the first time, provides information to parents on the full range of educational supports available in schools for children with special educational needs.

A recent survey of parental views commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) showed that 87% of parents of children with special educational needs thought that their child was in the right school placement and 75% were satisfied with the support their child receives. However, the research identified the need for better information for parents.

Teresa Griffin, CEO, NCSE stated that: “It is vital for all parents to know what supports are available in schools across the country for their children with special educational needs. The NCSE works with many parents every day. This booklet provides answers to questions parents ask on a daily basis



about the educational options and supports available for their children with special educational needs.”

As well as giving information on the range of educational supports in schools, the booklet provides information on how a child’s educational needs are assessed and on what a child will learn at school.

Áine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council Primary, welcomed the new publication and said that “it will be a valuable and empowering resource for parents which will allow them for the first time to access all of this important information in one place.”

The information booklet can be downloaded from our [website](#). Hard copies are available from the local SENO or from NCSE head office.

The NCSE also intends to publish information pamphlets on different areas of Special Educational Needs. When published, these will be available in hard copy and on our website.

New policy advice

A policy advice paper on the *Education of children who are Deaf and hard of hearing* has recently been submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills. The significance of this policy advice paper is highlighted by research evidence suggesting that the academic achievement levels of Deaf and hard of hearing children remain significantly delayed compared to those of hearing children of similar ability.

The NCSE policy advice is based on evidence from national and international research and views expressed during a consultation process. A formal launch will precede the publication of this document in January 2012.

The following submissions have been prepared by the NCSE in recent months and are available to download from the [Publications – Policy section](#) of our website:

- The NCSE submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.
- Response from the NCSE to the Discussion Paper on a Regulatory Framework for School Enrolment.

Minister Quinn attends NCSE Council meeting



The Council was pleased to welcome Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, T.D. to a recent Council meeting held in Trim, Co. Meath.

New Member of Council



We welcome Maureen Costello as nominee of the Minister for Education and Skills onto the Council. Ms Costello is the Director of the National Educational Psychological Service. She replaces Teresa Griffin who was appointed CEO of the NCSE earlier this year.

Social skills and language club

BY HELEN MOLLOY, LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHER, BISHOP FOLEY NATIONAL SCHOOL, CARLOW, AND LORAIN FLEMING-FARRELL, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ORGANISER, CARLOW/KILDARE.

IN THIS ARTICLE, HELEN DESCRIBES HOW THE SOCIAL SKILLS AND LANGUAGE CLUB CAME ABOUT IN THE SCHOOL AND HOW IT WORKS

Background/rationale

Back in 2008 this club was initiated by a teacher who had observed the positive benefits of group participation in a relaxed but structured setting. At the time, the teacher was responsible for a pupil with ASD and had become concerned about his social interaction, social language and social development. In consultation with the EAL (English as an additional language) teacher, it was agreed that a very defined and structured setting could enable this pupil, along with other children from the EAL group, other resource students and students recommended by the class teacher, to experience a positive social learning environment in which their specific needs would be catered for.

This group and structure evolved over the years as the needs of the group changed and developed.

Aims

- To promote self esteem
- To provide an opportunity for each child to experience success
- To create a structured environment to encourage group participation
- To create a relaxed environment to promote social language.

How it works

This club has been a continuous work in progress based on the changing needs of the pupils. At the beginning of the school year we sit down as a working group – support teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs). We consult with class teachers for pupil recommendations and then we draw up a list of



pupils for the club (pupils with resource and EAL hours are included). The hour for the club is included as resource hours in the time table. We specify the individual needs of each pupil and then form the groups on the basis of these needs. The dynamics of a group is always different in reality to how it appears on paper. The working group therefore reviews the progress of the group and discuss problems and successes on a regular basis. We discuss it informally on a weekly basis and formally on a 6 – 8 week basis.

After the list of pupils has been decided, we then assign responsibilities to each adult. We have found that it is very important that everyone is involved in the running of the club as it creates ownership and responsibility. Everyone is looking out for the pupils and there is a real feeling of working together for the greater good. Also no-one ends up doing it all!

For the past three years we were fortunate to have five support teachers and five SNAs to accommodate 30 pupils. This year we have two support teachers and three SNAs to support 23 pupils. However we have four TY students from St. Mary's Academy, Carlow, who come to Bishop Foley's school to gain work experience. This is proving extremely beneficial. These students have been trained by us in the appropriate behaviour and language to be used in working with our pupils. We have also included visiting Spanish student teachers in helping us run the club. The EAL pupils developed a great relationship and felt solidarity with these students – in spite of accent and language difficulties.

The pupils enjoy learning through games and fun activities. They relax and even laugh despite themselves. It has created a lot of good energy in the school for these boys. We have worked on eye-contact, turn taking, good attitude, positive encouragement, modelling good behaviour, modelling social speech along with balance, fine and gross motor skills to mention a few. Some activities have been successful and some have not. The beauty of this club is that we are willing to try different things and if they work, well and good and if not then we go back to what does work. It is important to have an open mind and to always look out for activities which will suit the needs of the pupils. We have modified the stations, introduced new games and ideas, but basically have remained true to the format. It can be modified and organised and designed to suit the needs of any school setting!

There is a lot of work in the setting up and organising of the club. I won't lie and say to you that it is easy ... it isn't. It takes



a lot of energy and commitment BUT it has been so worth it for all the boys and adults that have been involved. Our school as a whole has benefitted in so many ways through this club. Some we will never know about.

If you start a club and feel like it isn't working, please don't give up. Give it more time or change things around until it begins to feel right. Nothing could be more rewarding than to see the boy who walked around the school with his eyes fixed on the ground for the last year, walk towards you on the corridor with a smile in his eyes

Helen Molloy, October 2011

As the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for the Carlow Kildare area over the past few years, I have been aware of the Social Skills and Language Club in Bishop Foley School, Carlow. I wasn't quite sure what was involved in this club but I regularly heard how wonderful it was. The pupils involved have a very positive attitude towards it and when I meet parents they comment on this. A positive attitude permeates throughout the school and can be witnessed in classrooms, on the school yard and especially in the Social Skills and Language Club.

Following my enquiries about the club to the school principal, Tony Crowe, the Learning Support teacher, Helen Molloy agreed to share her experience with me. I was delighted to accept her invitation to visit the club in action. My overall impression was that all the boys involved seemed really happy to be there, they were constantly engaged and at all times appeared to know what they were supposed to be doing and where they should be. I spoke with many of the boys and asked them what they liked best about this club. Their answers varied from air hockey to Lego and kurling. Staff felt that what is good about the club is that the boys are mixing with boys they wouldn't

usually mix with (several class levels involved). The Transition Year (TY) students involved commented that in the few weeks they have been involved they have noticed the boys' confidence develop and grow.

Over the session I visited, the groups spent ten minutes at a station and when the whistle sounded they moved onto the next station. Each station focused on different skills e.g. gross motor, fine motor, listening/language and interactive/co-operative. I'm not sure that the staff involved realise just how special this club is. If I had to put in a nutshell what makes it work, it would be the hard work that goes into preparing for each weekly session and the evident structure involved.

I wish to thank sincerely all those involved in Bishop Foley School Social Skills and Language Club for their generosity in sharing this wonderful activity with me. Special thanks to Helen Molloy and Helen O'Neill, who patiently answered all my questions, the pupils in the club, the SNAs and Transition Year students for their contributions and to Tony Crowe, the principal for facilitating my visits.

Loraine Fleming-Farrell

School resources

One of the main functions of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is to provide information to parents/guardians of children with special educational needs. One of the mechanisms available for achieving this is to provide information on the NCSE website. Following the completion of the allocation process, whereby applications for special educational needs are processed by the NCSE on foot of applications by schools, the NCSE has updated the information available to parents and schools on our website (<http://www.ncse.ie/statistics/national.asp>).

The statistics provide information to parents, schools and the general public on a school by school basis outlining the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) and the level of Resource Teaching Hours (RTH) allocated to each school. The information can also be accessed on a county basis culminating in an overall national figure for both SNAs and RTHs. The information will be updated periodically during the school year where additional applications for special education supports are processed.



NCSE 2011 Research Conference

More than 150 delegates attended the third annual research conference at Croke Park in November where they heard about the latest research and policy advice on special education from the NCSE. The conference was opened by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD and featured:

- the launch of the NCSE Inclusive Education Framework, a practical tool for schools;
- presentations on two recently completed NCSE studies on access to the curriculum for young primary school pupils by researchers from Bangor University and St Patrick's College Dublin; and on the prevalence of special educational needs by researchers from the Economic and Social Research Institute;
- a thought provoking presentation from guest speaker Professor Lani Florian, on inclusive practice and the implications for teacher education; and
- a paper on the NCSE's recent policy advice to the Minister on the role of special schools and classes.

All of the conference papers and the two NCSE research studies are now available on our website. The Inclusive Education Framework, the subject of another article in this newsletter, and the NCSE policy submission on the role of special schools and classes are also available on the website.

The one day event was attended by a wide range of education stakeholders, including parents, teachers, SNAs, academics, researchers, departmental officials, advocacy groups, educational psychologists, inspectors, and representatives from teacher unions and other national bodies. If you'd like to be put on the mailing list for next year's conference send us an email at NCSEResearch@ncse.ie.

Reports on the research presentations and policy paper are included on these pages of the newsletter.

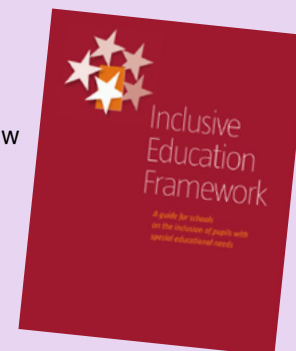


Teresa Griffin, CEO, NCSE welcomes Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald T.D.

At the launch of the NCSE Inclusive Education Framework; Back row L to R – Head of Research and Development: Jennifer Doran, Chairperson: Sydney Blain, CEO: Teresa Griffin, all NCSE. Front row L to R – Dr Seamus Hegarty, Dr Jean Ware and Professor Lani Florian.



NCSE Inclusive Framework



The NCSE recently launched a new resource for schools to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs. *The Inclusive Education Framework* signposts good inclusion practices and invites schools to show what they are already doing well; identify areas where they need to improve; put plans in place to address these areas; and rate their levels of inclusion. The framework comes with user-friendly tools to support this process.

Ms Michelle Doorley, Principal of Baile an Chuilinn National School in Carlow, who was involved in testing the framework said 'We, as a staff, found the framework very effective in supporting the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. It made inclusive education a priority to the whole school'.

Every school is encouraged to use this practical resource to prioritise inclusion with all staff and in all areas of school life. It will re-affirm the significant progress made to date. When a school decides to use this framework, they will receive a certificate of participation from the NCSE that can be displayed in the school, or on the school's website, as a public demonstration of the school's commitment to inclusion. Copies of the framework are available from special educational needs organisers or the NCSE head office and it is available to [download](#) on our website.

Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes – An exploration of the experiences of young pupils in primary school

This study, led by Dr Jean Ware at Bangor University, explored access to the curriculum among young pupils with a variety of special educational needs from junior infants to second class. Using a combination of classroom observations and interviews with pupils, parents, teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and other relevant professionals the study focused on 46 children in eleven case study schools.

The study found that teachers used a range of strategies to differentiate the curriculum for young children with SEN and that for the great majority of the case study children, these strategies were successful in facilitating access to the curriculum at a level appropriate to their needs, most of the time. Strategies used by teachers included adapting their classroom organisation, using additional or different resources, modifying the content of the lesson and occasionally modifying their expectations of pupils or using some form of specialist pedagogy. However, it also found that support from a special needs assistant (SNA) was overwhelmingly the most common form of differentiation.

The researchers identified a number of factors as important in facilitating curriculum access. These included:

- Support for the class teacher from: other teachers within the school with expertise in SEN; visiting teachers and other outside professionals; and parents.
- Support for children with SEN from the resource/learning support teacher and visiting professionals.
- The role of the SNA, both in working directly with the child with SEN and in carrying out other tasks.
- Leadership within the school from the principal and (where such a role existed) from the SEN co-ordinator, as well as a

co-ordinated approach to planning of SEN provision within the school.

- Collaborative planning and implementation of the IEP between parents, class teachers and school SEN staff.

Factors identified by the researchers as barriers to access were mainly the converse of those acting as facilitators. They included: lack of support; lack of time for collaborative planning; and no clear leadership in relation to SEN issues. In addition, three other factors emerged the study. These were:

- Lack of appropriate training opportunities: Teachers felt that their initial training had not equipped them to provide appropriately for pupils with SEN, and that continuous professional development (CPD) which would enable them to gain relevant expertise was not accessible to them.
- Child-related factors: The nature of the child's SEN (such as sensory impairments or moderate GLD) was perceived by teachers to provide a substantial barrier to access, either to the curriculum as a whole or to the curriculum at the same level as their peers.
- School-related factors: Missing particular curriculum subjects either through exemptions, or while being withdrawn for resource teaching, emerged as another obstacle to curriculum access.

Key issues which the researchers noted as arising from the study included:

- the role played by SNAs
- teachers feeling they lacked appropriate preparation to deal with pupils with SEN and access to CPD which would meet their needs

- lack of time for co-ordination between resource and class teachers and SNAs
- the differences between schools regarding the extent to which there was support for class teachers in facilitating access for pupils with SEN
- differences between schools regarding levels of overall planning in relation to SEN.

The study also found that the school experience of these pupils and their parents was generally a positive one. Almost all pupils liked school; relationships with other children, both in the playground and in the classroom, were generally positive and regarded by teachers and parents alike as an important aspect of being in mainstream education. Parents were generally very positive about their experience of school, though they were less positive about their experience of the formal assessment of SEN where lack of information to guide them through this process was a key issue. Relationships with staff were also generally positive, although the researchers found that a close supportive relationship with the SNA could become a barrier to full participation with peers.

ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM FOR PUPILS WITH A VARIETY OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM CLASSES. AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, NCSE Research Report No. 8, by Dr Jean Ware, Bangor University, Dr Cathal Butler, St Patrick's College (now at Bangor University), Christopher Robertson, Birmingham University, Dr Margaret O'Donnell, St Patrick's College and Magi Gould, Bangor University.

Click [here](#) to download the report.

New prevalence data on special educational and learning needs

An ESRI analysis of data on 8,578 nine year olds from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study has shown that up to 25% were identified by their teachers or parents as having some kind of special educational or learning need. The analysis of data from the GUI study was conducted for the NCSE and key findings were presented at the NCSE research conference by researchers Dr Joanne Banks and Dr Selina Mc Coy from the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Teachers and parents in the GUI study were asked if pupils had any of a broad range of needs and difficulties from complex to mild. These included for example physical disabilities, learning disabilities and difficulties, communication and co-ordination disorders, slow progress, chronic physical or mental health problems and emotional difficulties.

‘This estimate alerts us to the range of different learners that are in the classroom’ said Jennifer Doran, Head of Research and Development at the NCSE. ‘It underlines the importance of publishing our Inclusive Education Framework which aims to assist schools in practical ways to continue the very important work of including all pupils. The estimate does not necessarily mean that additional resources will be required to support all of these children, as these children have such a broad range of needs’.

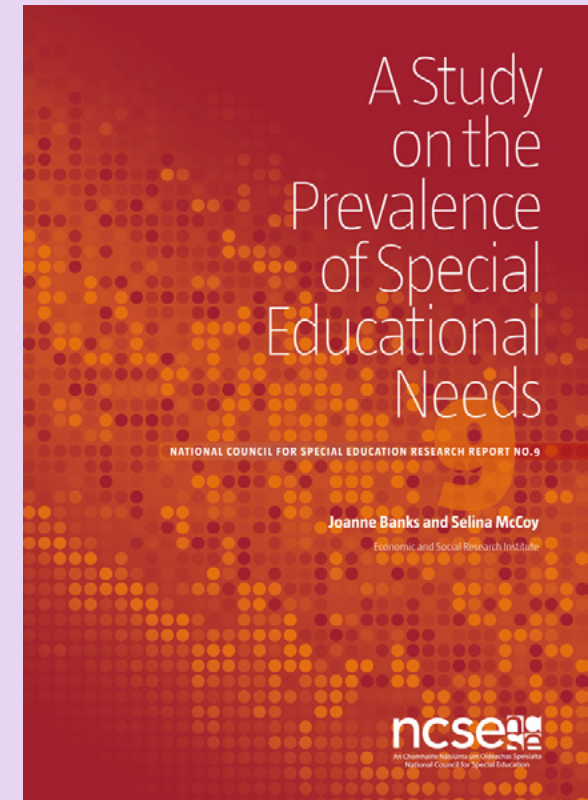
The report also collates available data on the level of support being provided for pupils with special educational needs across the education system. It notes for example that primary school returns for 2008 show that additional learning support was provided to up to 17% of the primary school

population through the General Allocation Model (though the authors advise caution on this figure) while a further 1.36% were in special schools. 2010 figures show that 4.4% of the primary and post primary school population with special educational needs were supported through lower pupil teacher ratios in special classes or through additional resource teaching hours provided to mainstream classes.

The authors of the report pointed out that this finding is in line with the outcomes of other recent studies internationally. In the Netherlands, researchers found a prevalence rate of 26 per cent in 2010 also based on parent and teacher reports. Similarly, earlier research in the UK concluded that teachers identified 26 per cent of children having a special educational need.

Between September 2007 and May 2008, the GUI study interviewed 8,578 nine-year-olds, their parents and their teachers on a wide range of issues. This analysis for the NCSE was carried out on the first wave of data from the GUI study.

A STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, NCSE Research Report No. 9, by Joanne Banks and Selina McCoy, the Economic and Social Research Institute is available at [this link](#).



NCSE advises Minister on the future role of special schools and classes

The policy advice on the future role of special schools and classes emphasises that the vast majority of pupils with special educational needs should be educated alongside their peers in mainstream settings. However, in line with the spirit of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, the policy advice recognises that there are some children whose needs are so severe or complex that this would not be in their best interests. Future educational provision for children whose needs cannot be met in mainstream classes, should in so far as possible be available locally, either in special classes integral to mainstream schools or in special schools or units on the same campus as mainstream schools.

‘In this approach, special classes and schools are viewed as being an important element in a fluid continuum of educational provision’, according to NCSE Special Education Advisor, Mary Byrne. ‘Placement in special schools or classes should only follow a full evaluation of why mainstream placements would not be beneficial, should maximise opportunities for inclusion with peers in mainstream and should be regularly reviewed’.

The NCSE policy advice paper recommends that the Department of Education and Skills initiate the development of a Code of Practice, to support and guide parents and professionals in placement decisions.

While acknowledging that the realisation of this vision will take time, the NCSE makes a number of further important recommendations on the future role of special schools and classes, including that:

- Special schools should be designated to serve those pupils within the community who require placement in a special

setting, rather than be limited to any specific category of disability.

- The designation of all special schools as primary schools should be examined particularly given the increasing number of pupils who seem to be transferring to special schools at or before post primary age.
- A review of programmes and certification offered to pupils with special educational needs of post primary age, in both special and mainstream schools should be undertaken by the NCCA to ensure a range of choices for pupils and parents.
- Planning of new mainstream schools should take into account the needs of pupils with special educational needs in the community. Major building programmes for new schools should consider locating special schools or units on-site. School building programmes, in areas where special schools are located, should consider the feasibility of including the special school requirements in any new school being built.
- Access to special classes throughout the country should be provided on a planned, equitable and transparent basis. Special classes should facilitate an inclusive approach which allows each child to join mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible.
- Quality of provision and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs in both special class and mainstream settings should continue to be monitored.
- Particular educational interventions may need to be provided on a temporary basis in specialist settings for some children, for example pupils with visual impairment who



At the Research Conference: L to R, Tom O’Sullivan, Council Member, Mary Byrne, Special Education Advisor, NCSE, Teresa Griffin, CEO, NCSE and Sydney Blain, Chairperson, NCSE

need to learn Braille or pupils who are Deaf and need to learn sign language.

The policy advice paper draws on national and international research in this area as well as discussions with the NCSE Consultative Forum. This forum includes representatives of parents, voluntary bodies, school management organisations, trade unions, the National Disability Authority, the Psychological Society of Ireland and others.

The NCSE policy advice paper on the future role of special schools and classes in Ireland is available on our [website](http://www.ncse.ie).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) General Assembly

Council member Seamus Hegarty ‘moonlights’ as Chair of IEA – the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. This is a global body whose mission is to improve learning and teaching by conducting large-scale comparative research studies. It was founded in 1958 and currently works in nearly 100 countries. Ireland’s membership is held by the Educational Research Centre at St Patrick’s College.

TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) are the principal studies carried out by IEA, but other areas covered include citizenship education, computer literacy and teacher education.

The Association holds an annual General Assembly to take stock of its various studies and their impact, consider new activities and attend to organisational matters. This year the General Assembly was hosted by the Irish Authorities, and Seamus – who has completed seven years as elected Chair – was particularly pleased to welcome a large and distinguished gathering of educators to his homeland this October. (As he makes a point of formally welcoming delegates in the language of the host country, his task in this respect was much easier than last year when the Assembly met in Botswana!)

Minister of Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn addressed delegates in the opening ceremony at the Grand Hotel Malahide and attested to the value of international comparative measures of student learning: in their absence, complacency and under-achievement are ever-present threats. The three days of Assembly business went very well, and the bumper attendance – the largest ever for an IEA

General Assembly – were very content with their visit to Ireland.

It was not all work, however. By convention, the host country invites delegates to a dinner and Brigid McManus, Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills, welcomed all to Farmleigh House. Delegates were captivated by the quiet elegance of the environs and the wonderful playing of harpist Laoise Kelly and fiddler Michelle O’Brien. Most delegates stayed on for a tour to Newgrange and Trim Castle which with the benefit of glorious Autumn sunshine gave them a memorable day – and ensured they travelled home with a treasure trove of Irish memories.



L to R Peter Archer, Director of the Educational Research Centre, Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills and Dr Seamus Hegarty, Chair of IEA.
© Photograph courtesy of Adrian O’Flaherty.



Update: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Bi-annual meeting

A bi-annual meeting of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education took place in Valetta, Malta on Thursday, 24th November 2011. This meeting included national representatives, national coordinators and Agency staff. The chairperson, Mr Per Gunvall, briefed the meeting and reported progress on Agency activities since the last bi-annual meeting in Bordeaux in April 2011.

Update on Agency projects

Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I)

The main objective of this project is to examine how all teachers are prepared via their initial training to be inclusive. It is also intended to develop a profile of inclusive teachers. The English version of the synthesis report has now been published and is available on the Agency TE4I web area, along with other project information at: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion>.

The project end point dissemination conference will be held from 29th February to 2nd March 2012 in Brussels. The profile of inclusive teachers is now being re-drafted and will be sent to country experts for comment by the end of the year. The final profile will be launched at the conference along with dissemination materials.

Irish experts on this project are Aine Lawlor, CEO, Teaching Council and Alan Sayles, Inspector, Department of Education and Skills (DES).

Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in the field of SNE (VET)

The main objective of this project is to identify and investigate key aspects of VET programmes for learners with special educational needs aged between 14 and 25 with a clear link to employment opportunities. The objective is not just to understand what works in VET, but also to gain a deeper understanding of why it works.

VET project activities focus mainly on the analysis of VET country practices. The objective is to analyse one example of practice in each of the countries involved in the project. The closing project conference is scheduled to take place in Cyprus in November 2012 where the project findings will be presented and discussed.

Irish country experts are Rory O'Sullivan, Principal, Killester College of Further Education and Finn O'Murchú, Inspector, DES.

Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education

This new 3 year priority project focuses upon the organisation of inclusive education within the public, compulsory school sector. The goal is to identify the factors within mainstream provision that are effective in directly supporting learners in inclusive settings. The role of special schools and the special sector in supporting mainstream settings is a particular focus and will be explored via a review of international and national research literature as well as a country survey of all participating countries.

A Project Advisory Group and external project advisers will be appointed to work alongside the Agency staff team.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Inclusion

This is a one year project update on the Agency ICT project which ended in 2011. The final project plan is available from the ICT project in the website. The project activities will focus upon a review of policy information and research literature relating to the use of ICT in inclusive education. It will also focus on the collection of information on participating countries' policy and practice for ICT for Inclusion in relation to the five themes identified for the project. All outputs from the project will be made available on the Agency website from 2012 onwards.

Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE)

The goal of this one-year project, which started in November 2010, has been to provide policy makers with clear proposals on mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education. The main project activities have focused upon two conferences held in 2011. All materials as well as full reports from both conferences are now available from the MIPIE project area on the Agency website: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/mapping-the-implementation-of-policy-for-inclusive-education>. An overview of data collection procedures currently being used in all countries is now being finalised and will shortly be available on the web area. The final project report presenting recommendations for future mapping work has been drafted and sent to all project experts and country representatives for comment. This document will be finalised and followed by a summary of recommendations translated into all Agency languages by the end of 2011.

Update on the work of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (continued)

Accessible Information Provision for Lifelong Learning (i-access)

The main aims of this project are to:

- i. use existing European and international policy and standards for information accessibility as a basis for discussing the implications and practical

implementation of accessible information provision within lifelong learning and

- ii. produce clear recommendations that can be used by information providers across Europe to support the provision of accessible information for lifelong learning for all learners who need it.

One of the key elements in the project work plan was an i-access conference held in Copenhagen in June 2011. A survey on i-access policy and a collection of i-access examples of practice has been completed and feedback is being collected on the conference report. A set of proposed recommendations on i-access is currently being drafted taking into account the key messages of the conference, the survey results and a policy review. Before finalising the recommendations, feedback on the draft will be collected from all experts as well as country representatives.

All material will be made available on the project web area at: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/i-access>.

Irish experts on this project are Madeline Hickey, Deputy Director, Special Education Support Service (SESS) and Shane Hogan, National Disability Authority (NDA).

Vocational Education and Training (VET) Study Visit : Policy and Practice in the Field of Special Needs Education – Dublin 15th-17th November 2011

The main aim of this project is to identify and investigate key aspects of VET programmes for learners with special educational needs aged between 14 and 25 with a clear link to employment opportunities.

The VET project activities focus mainly on the analysis of VET country practices through study visits. There are 27 countries involved in the project. The objective is to analyse one example of practice in each of the countries involved in the project. A total of 17 study visits have already taken place.

The Irish study visit took place between 15th and 17th November 2011. Participants on the study visit included Ms Inge Plackle, Belgium, Mr Edgar Pereira, Portugal, Mr Harald Weber (Agency staff-member) and the Irish country experts, Mr Rory O'Sullivan, Principal, Killester College of Further Education and Mr Finn O'Murchú, Inspector, DES.

During the study visit, Mr Seamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer, Further Education Section, DES presented an overview of Further Education and Training in Ireland. Ms Mary Lyons, FÁS made a presentation on Specialist Training Provision in Ireland. The group visited St Michael's

House Training Centre, Coolock, Killester College of Further Education and the Central Remedial Clinic – Training and Development Centre, Clontarf, Dublin 3.

The European Agency would like to extend sincere thanks to all those people who worked very hard to make this visit such a success, especially the many learners who made visits to the centres particularly worthwhile.



L to R Edgar Pereira, Portugal, Rory O'Sullivan Irish Country Expert and Inge Plackle, Belgium

Raising Achievement for all Learners – Qualify in Inclusive Education (RA4AL)

The RA4AL project started in November 2011 and aims to provide information to policy makers on quality education in inclusive settings as a strategy for raising achievement for all learners. This issue will be the focus during a European conference for country representatives as well as two key stakeholder groups: policy makers for general and inclusive education and educational researchers. The conference is scheduled to take place in June 2012 during the Danish EU Presidency.

The findings from the RA4AL project will be used as the basis for development work within the longer term projects already identified within the Agency's multi-annual work programme.

Agency publications 2011

Participation in Inclusive Education – A Framework for Developing Indicators. This report presents the main findings from the second phase of the Indicators project which aimed to develop a model for understanding participation within the context of inclusive education.

Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe – Challenges and Opportunities. This is a synthesis report based on the results of the thematic project on Teacher Education for Inclusion.

A document in the *Key Principles* series aimed at policy makers and practitioners has just been agreed and will be published at the end of 2011. Two reports have previously been published in this series. The latest document will provide a synthesis of the main findings that have emerged from Agency thematic work on supporting the inclusion of learners with special educational needs within mainstream provision.

Information on the activities of the Agency is available on the Agency's website: <http://www.european-agency.org/>.

Contact details for Irish representatives at the European Agency

National Representative Board Member:
Don Mahon,
Assistant Chief Inspector,
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National Coordinator:
Mary Byrne,
Special Education Advisor,
National Council for Special Education



On 7th November 2011 the European Agency hosted a European Hearing at the European Parliament in Brussels. This event aimed to give young people from across Europe an opportunity to express their views on Inclusive Education. There were 31 delegations (comprising 88 young delegates) from 27 countries participating in the event. Official representatives from the Ministries, European Institutions and key European and international organisations also attended the Hearing, with a total of 250 participants in attendance.

Young people with and without disabilities and/or special educational needs attended and gave their views, based on their own experiences. Ireland was represented at the Hearing by Dean Kelly and Robert Boyle, Rosmini Community School, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 and Simon McDougall, St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys, Cabra. The students were accompanied by their teachers, Mr Donal Digan, Rosmini Community School and Ms Joy Kealy, St Joseph's School.

The initial results of the Young Views on Inclusive Education – European Parliament Hearing 2011 are now available to download from the European Hearing web area at: <http://www.european-agency.org/news/the-initial-results-of-the-2011-young-views-on-inclusive-education2011-hearing>.

All of the young delegates' statements will be included in the final results of the Hearing, which the European Agency looks forward to publishing in the near future.

This event is organised by the Agency every four years with the next Hearing expected to take place in Brussels in 2015.

