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Message from the Chief Executive Officer

I am very pleased to have been recently appointed as Chief Executive Officer of the National Council for Special Education.

There is no doubt that my appointment comes at a difficult time when there are real and significant challenges facing all of us in the educational sector.

In his recent addresses to the various teacher conferences, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., was anxious to ensure that all of us were left in no doubt of the difficult road that lies ahead. He emphasised that he could not say that “the resources available for education can be improved” or that “the new Government can reverse earlier decisions that you may be critical of, or indeed to pretend that further difficult measures can be avoided.”

The Department of Education and Skills has advised the NCSE that we may no longer allocate resource teaching and special needs assistant posts on a demand-driven basis. A cap has been placed on the overall number of SNA posts. Teacher posts may not exceed the overall limit set out under the public sector employment control framework. Although I understand that the overall numbers of resource teaching and SNA posts available for the 2011/2012 school

year remains broadly in line with, or higher, than the numbers of such posts in place in schools at the end of December 2010, the increased demand for such posts will require the NCSE’s approach to the allocation of such posts to schools to change.

At the time of writing, the NCSE is engaged in ongoing discussions with the Department of Education and Skills on the development of the new allocations policy to be



implemented by the NCSE in allocating resource teaching and SNA posts to schools for the next school year. As part of this process, I have attended meetings with the various management bodies of both primary and post-primary schools.

Whatever revised arrangements are agreed, I can assure you that the NCSE will continue to be consistent, equitable and fair in our contacts with parents and schools. It is important to contextualise any change to current arrangements. Substantial resources will remain in place to support pupils with special educational needs. Government has provided for an increase in the number of resource teacher posts for the 2011/2012 school year. Government has also provided for 10,575 SNA posts to support pupils who have significant care needs. This is broadly in line with the number in place at the end of December 2010. The challenge to all of us is how to allocate and utilise these resources to best effect in supporting pupils with special educational needs.

One of the key functions of the NCSE is to conduct and commission research. A substantial body of research has been completed and is available on the NCSE’s website at www.ncse.ie. You will find

Articles to be considered for publication and comments about the newsletter may be emailed to: newsletter@ncse.ie.

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

Message from the CEO (Continued)

research into many areas of special education including Deaf education; Visual Impairment; Autism and Inclusion.

To augment our own commissioned work, we recently added an online database that provides reference information on research and policy publications in the field of special education on the island of Ireland since 2000. The database is publicly available on the research pages of our website and is a valuable information source for education stakeholders, researchers, policy makers, students and others interested parties. The database can be searched by theme, author, special needs category, journal title or institution. Please feel very welcome to visit our website and browse our research and this database. I do hope that you will find both our substantive research and this reference database to be a useful source of information.

I am pleased to advise you that the NCSE recently submitted our policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on the future role of special schools and special classes. We intend to publish this advice on our website in the near future.

Appointment of Ms Teresa Griffin as CEO

Council is pleased to announce the appointment of Ms Teresa Griffin who was appointed as CEO of the National Council for Special Education with effect from 31st March 2011.

Teresa has worked in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) since 1994. Prior to that time she worked in the Department of Labour and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. She has worked for a total of ten years in the Special Education Section of the DES having

headed the section as Principal Officer for the past five years. She also headed the school building section for three years following her appointment to Principal Officer.

Teresa graduated from the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), Dublin with an MA in Public Management and a Bachelor of Business Studies degree. She has served on the Council since January 2007. We look forward to working with Teresa and wish her every success in her new role.

New member of Council

We welcome Mr James O'Grady who replaces Ms Marie Kennedy as nominee of the Minister for Health and Children on the Council. Mr O'Grady is the former head of Disability Services with the H.S.E. and Disability Policy Advisor to the Office of the Minister for Disability and Mental Health at the Department of Health.

Retirement of Pat Curtin

Pat Curtin was appointed as the first Chief Executive Officer of the National Council for Special Education in 2003. He had a long and distinguished career in the Civil Service serving in a range of Government departments including the Departments of Finance, Agriculture and Education. Immediately prior to taking up his appointment as CEO, he worked in the Industrial Relations Section of the Department of Education and Skills where his skills as a negotiator were recognised by all parties.

As the first CEO, Pat was responsible for overseeing the establishment of the internal organisational structures of NCSE and the recruitment of staff. The role of the special educational needs organiser (SENO) was a new one in the Irish educational system, designed to provide a local service to children with special educational needs, their families and schools. Following the commencement of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004,

Pat oversaw the preparation and publication of the Implementation Report which was submitted to the Minister in October 2006. This document set out the NCSE's views and recommendations on a plan for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004. He guided the Council in its development of the first Statement of Strategy, 2008-2011 which identified the core objectives, key result areas and outcome measures for the four year plan.

As the first CEO, Pat played a pivotal role in establishing the vision for the way in which NCSE would carry out its statutory functions which included the commissioning and publication of research and the development of policy advice. He was deeply committed to the establishment of a system which met the special educational needs of children in a fair, efficient and effective manner. He was able to draw on his previous extensive experience within the wider Civil Service to establish a clear

understanding of the statutory parameters within which the Council exercised its varying degrees of independence. He used his considerable communication skills to represent the NCSE position in both written and spoken form.

The Council would like to recognise the significant contribution that Pat has made to Irish Public Service and in particular to the National Council for Special Education which became embedded in the educational landscape during his period in office. He had a major influence on shaping the future direction of special education in Ireland. His calm presence, integrity of purpose and astute leadership characterised his management of the NCSE. We would like to take his opportunity to send him and his family our very best wishes for his retirement.



Sydney Blain,
Chairperson

Allocation of Teaching and SNA Supports to Schools for the 2011/12 School Year

In recent months, some concern has been expressed by schools in relation to the level of supports that will be made available to meet the special educational needs of children arising from a disability. Consequently, parents of children with special educational needs who are enrolling their children in school are similarly concerned that they may be disadvantaged in relation to access to such supports.

In February 2011 the NCSE issued guidelines to schools outlining the manner in which teaching and special needs assistant (SNA) resources would be allocated to schools for the 2011/12 school year. These guidelines took into account the announcement of a national cap of 10,575 SNA whole-time equivalent posts. In addition, in recent weeks, the Department of Education and Skills has also signalled that the allocation of additional teaching supports must take place within the context of overall public sector numbers whereby the overall number of teaching posts cannot exceed specified limits.

Since 21st March of this year, the NCSE has engaged with schools in relation to the allocation of teaching and SNA supports to schools for the 2011/12 school year. A key element of this process is the submission of applications for such supports by schools to their local special educational needs organiser (SENO). Circular NCSE 04/11, which issued to schools in April, informed schools that the deadline for the submission of completed applications for teaching support is Friday 13th May.

SENOs are currently processing these applications for teaching and SNA support. While a ceiling has been placed on the

level of teaching and SNA supports which may be allocated to schools, it is important to note that the overall levels of teaching and SNA supports, which can be allocated to schools, is greater than that which was allocated for 2010/11.

It is recognised that these changes to the allocation process may have required some schools to bring forward the date for the submission of applications to their SENOs. In this regard, the NCSE wishes to acknowledge the co-operation provided by schools to the NCSE in recent weeks and would ask for continued co-operation in the next few weeks in order that decisions may issue before the end of June.



Online Statistics available

A new section has been added to the NCSE website under the title **STATISTICS**. This contains some useful statistics on the numbers of children in receipt of additional teaching hours or SNA support from the NCSE in 2010.

We receive many calls from individuals and organisations seeking this kind of information, and the tables accessible through this section should answer most general queries.

Over time we hope to publish additional statistics in this section and the details provided will be updated annually as they become available.

Further useful information is provided in the Publications section (Policy and Reports sub sections) and in the Research Reports section of our website.

The NCSE Annual report also provides some useful statistics.

Success Story at St Seachnall's

MAUREEN SMITH, SENO, MEATH SOUTH



We live and work in challenging times, and sometimes it is difficult to focus on the positive outcomes which we in the NCSE help to achieve.

I was surprised and delighted when, during an SNA review at St Seachnall's National School in Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath, Mary*, mother of John*, came to meet with me in order to acknowledge the help her son had received and to state the positive outcome which had resulted for him.

When I communicated this good news within the NCSE, it was suggested that this story deserved mention in our newsletter. To this end I met with Mary and members of the school staff in order to get the full story.

John has attended St Seachnall's from Junior Infants class. From the early stages it was evident that John was having difficulties. He refused to participate in class activities, was disruptive and at times engaged in behaviour which was dangerous. John was tearful going into school and it took him longer to settle in than it did his peers.

John's parents had difficulties with John at home. He was prone to tantrums, was oppositional and disrespectful to adults, including his parents. John's parents initially thought that this behaviour was a reaction to changes in his life – moving to a new area and the arrival of a baby brother. However, when John's teacher asked for a meeting they realised

* Parent and child names have been altered to protect the child's identity.



that there was something more to this behaviour than could be accounted for by these events. At this time other pupils in the class had access to SNA support and John had informal access to this support as a result.

John was referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services where he was diagnosed with a mixed disorder of conduct and emotion. He was granted 3.5 resource teaching hours and access to full time special needs assistant support.

Success Story at St Seachnall's (continued)

During this time the class teacher employed various strategies to help John to control his behaviour. These included time out with the learning support teachers, movement breaks when possible and rewards for desirable behaviour. Nonetheless there were incidents to report on an almost daily basis.

Communication between parents and school remained open and co-operative at all times. Strategies recommended by the HSE psychologist were implemented and an Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP) was drawn up.

John responded well to the attention he received. Improvement was gradual and really began to show at the end of first class and the beginning of second class. John's general behaviour, his attitude to his brother and to others improved. Mary states that this is a "work in progress."

The interventions offered by the HSE were very positive. John's parents found the meetings with the psychologist particularly useful, as they gave them insight into John's difficulties. Strategies were recommended which were helpful at home and in school.

Nowadays, John likes school. He does his homework straight away when he gets home.

John will still test the boundaries at home and in school, however his current teacher reports that incidents of undesirable behaviour are few and far between.

When asked how the family found the process of allocation, monitoring and deployment of support, Mary reported that

they were very satisfied. She feels that the NCSE have a very good system and that it would be a pity if it were to change.

John still has difficulties. He finds change very challenging, has difficulty with friendships and needs to be prepared well in advance for any event.

During the SNA review in St Seachnall's in January of this year it was found that John no longer requires access to SNA support. He is a bright boy who is aware of his difficulties in regulating his behaviour and temper and is doing his best to come to terms with this.

John's parents, teachers and the school principal, Mr Jim Gilligan, feel strongly that John has achieved success because of the supports he received at an early stage in his schooling, the co-operation and communication between home and school and the interventions offered by the HSE. All parties would wish that every pupil would have the same opportunities going forward.

The NCSE would like to thank sincerely Mary, Mr Gilligan and the class teacher who met with the special educational needs organiser (SENO) and made such an open and valuable contribution to this article.

We wish John all the best in the future.

I am sure that there are many similar success stories in schools around the country. It is nice to share this particular one.

Special Education

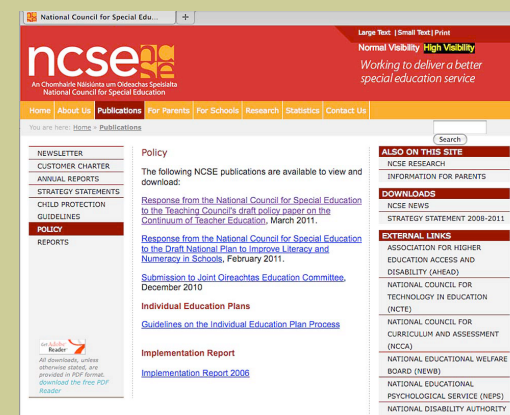
Update on NCSE Policy Advice Development

The council submitted a policy advice paper entitled 'The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland' to the Minister for Education and Skills in February, 2011.

The following submissions have also recently been prepared on behalf of the NCSE:

- A response to the Teaching Council's draft policy paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education submitted in March 2011 and
- A response to the Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools submitted in February 2011.

Both submissions are available on the NCSE website.



Recent Research Publications

TWO NEW RESEARCH REPORTS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED ON THE RESEARCH PAGES OF THE NCSE WEBSITE

A National Survey of Parental Attitudes to and Experiences of Local and National Special Education Services

In 2009, the NCSE sought the views of parents of children with special educational needs for the first time on a systematic basis through a large scale survey. Almost 1,400 parents of children with special educational needs responded to the survey providing insights into their views and experiences of issues such as finding and accessing a school; getting their child's needs assessed; school policy and resources; relationships between parents and schools and parents and SENOs; and overall satisfaction with the support being given to their child.

This report from the survey shows that the majority of parents were satisfied with their children's education and the services they received. Most parents felt that their child was welcomed at school and their needs were being met. The relationship between parents and schools played a central role in these positive experiences. Parents who were satisfied attributed this to a supportive ethos in the school, a good understanding of their child's needs among staff and good communication between schools and parents.

The findings however also showed a number of areas where parents had concerns about certain aspects of the education service. These areas included: getting their child's special need accepted or diagnosed; the process of applying for

supports or resources; the length of time taken to get support; and a perceived lack of resources. These issues and the recommendations from the authors will now be carefully considered by the NCSE in its work to provide clear and accessible information to parents on their entitlements.

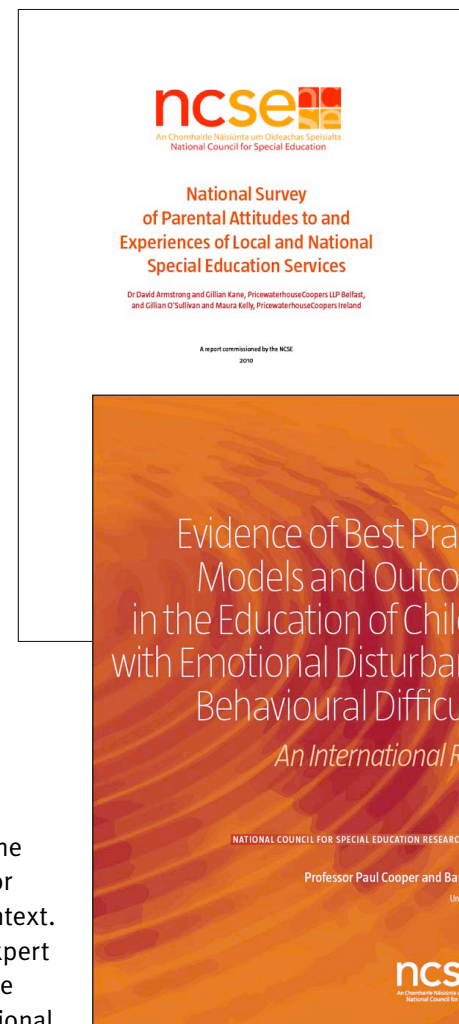
Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Children with Emotional Disturbance/ Behavioural Difficulties: An International Review

This report focuses on how best to address the needs of pupils with emotional disturbance or behavioural difficulties in an educational context. Professor Paul Cooper, a widely published expert in this area, provides a detailed account of the different approaches to understanding emotional and behavioural difficulties that have emerged in recent decades, and outlines the types of interventions

that have arisen from these approaches.

Most importantly however, Professor Cooper goes on to rigorously examine the international evidence to identify what programmes or interventions have been proven to work best. The report concludes with a discussion of how the most effective interventions might be relevant to the Irish context, and makes recommendations for action based on the report's analysis.

This report will be of great interest to policy makers and stakeholders working in the area, as well as to schools, teachers, psychologists, special educational needs organisers and others working on the ground who are endeavouring to address these problems at school and pupil level. The NCSE will also be drawing on the evidence in this research report to develop and refine its own policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on these matters in the future.



NCSE launches online database for research and policy publications in special education

The database provides reference information on research and policy publications in the field of special education on the island of Ireland since 2000. The database is publicly available on our website and is a valuable information source for education stakeholders, researchers, policy makers, students and others interested parties. The database can be searched by theme, author, special needs category, journal title or institution.

A report that provides an overview of the work undertaken to compile the list of publications in the database is also published on the research pages of the NCSE website. The report describes and categorises the material found and provides an overview of the key themes arising from this work.

A date for your diary...

The NCSE's third annual research conference will take place in the Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin on 16th November 2011.

The conference programme has yet to be finalised. However, presentations will be made to promote some of our research in key areas such as:

- curriculum issues for children with special educational needs at primary level; and
- the experiences of children with special educational needs transitioning from primary to post primary school.

In addition, the NCSE intends to highlight and launch the NCSE's 'Inclusive Education Framework: A guide for schools for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs' which we hope will engage every school in the country. Our policy advice activities are also likely to feature on the conference agenda. Further details will be posted on our website in the coming months.

European Journal of Special Needs Education

Special issue dedicated to research commissioned by the NCSE

A special issue of the EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION (Volume 26, Issue 1, 2011) recently published four sets of papers arising from research commissioned by the NCSE

This special issue comprises five sets of papers based on reviews of the literature in the area of special education. The first four sets of papers arose from work commissioned by the NCSE in 2008. The four literature reviews looked at the evidence from best practice provision and evidenced-based outcomes in the education of pupils who are deaf, visually impaired, with autistic spectrum disorder and pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Each of these resulted in a comprehensive report which provided the underpinning for the papers in this special issue. The full reports are available on www.ncse.ie. The fifth set of papers, on explicit memory studies in populations with intellectual disabilities, arose from a regular submission to the Journal.

The first paper in each set is a conventional research review, in most cases presenting a selection of findings from the full report available on the NCSE website. In recognition of the fact that practitioners seldom read technical papers, the authors were invited to produce a second, shorter paper exploring their findings from practitioner and policy maker

perspectives, and to present their reflections in an accessible way. The authors worked with teachers to better translate the research findings into classroom implications.

This direct pairing of technical and practitioner-oriented perspectives is relatively unusual, and it is hoped that the collection will be a useful addition to the literature for academics, practitioners and policy makers.



European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE): Update

The European Agency held its first bi-annual meeting for 2011 in Bordeaux, France, from the 4th-6th April, 2011. This meeting was attended by national representatives and national co-ordinators of participating countries and was chaired by the new chairperson of the Agency, Mr Per Gunvall, who is from Sweden.

A progress report on Agency activities from November 2010 to March 2011 was presented. Updates on a number of current projects were made by Agency staff members, including the Higher Education Access Guide (HEAG), Teacher Education for Inclusion project, and the Vocational Education and Training project.

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

New Thematic Projects

New thematic projects being planned by the Agency include:

Organisation of Provision to Promote Inclusion:

This is a new three year priority project which involves all member countries. Priorities for the project were presented for discussion at the bi-annual meeting in Bordeaux and an outline project plan will be developed on the basis of these discussions and presented for final approval in 2011.

i-accessibility: Providing Accessible Information for Lifelong Learning

The main aim of this one year project is to raise awareness of the issues concerning accessible information provision for

Lifelong Learning in order to facilitate positive developments in i-accessibility within the 27 member countries of the Agency. All countries have been requested to nominate two national experts to this project. Ireland has nominated two experts to this project: Shane Hogan, National Disability Authority and Madeline Hickey, Special Education Support Service. The Agency will host a major European conference in June in Copenhagen which will be attended by nominated policy experts and key stakeholders including National and EU level information providers, as well as private enterprises and representatives of the European Commission.

Raising Achievement for All Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education (RA4AL)

The Agency has submitted an application to the European Commission in support of this one year project. The project aims to address the provision of information on quality education in inclusive settings as a strategy for raising achievement for all learners. What are the factors that support raising achievement for all learners in inclusive settings and what are the implications, challenges and opportunities for policy makers in relation to this?

Contact Details for Irish Representatives at the European Agency

National Representative Board Member: Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills

National Coordinator: Mary Byrne, Special Education Advisor, National Council for Special Education

European Hearing

The Agency is holding a European Hearing devoted to Young Views on Inclusive Education in the European Parliament in Brussels on the 7th November 2011. This event aims to provide young people from across Europe, both with and without disabilities, the opportunity to have a real voice. They will express their own views and perspectives on inclusive education based on their experiences and highlight their requirements and hopes for the future. Each country is allowed a maximum of three young people per delegation aged between 14 to 18 years – two people with disabilities and one without. Two accompanying/supporting people are allowed per delegation. Arrangements for Ireland's representatives to the hearing are currently being finalised.



Dr Harold Hislop, on behalf of Co. Cork VEC, launches Team-Teaching Guidelines and accompanying DVD

Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, recently launched Guidelines for Team-Teaching and an accompanying DVD, produced by Co. Cork Vocational Education Committee (VEC), to assist primary and post-primary schools in introducing and sustaining effective team-teaching. In his address Dr Hislop acknowledged the benefits that can accrue from the use of team-teaching in the classroom situation.

The guidelines were prepared as a result of the experience of Co. Cork VEC schools and colleges in team-teaching. In the academic year 2007/2008, Co. Cork VEC initiated a pilot project to introduce team-teaching in their schools/colleges. The project commenced with seven schools/colleges, varying in size from 250 pupils to 700 pupils. Teachers were supported through cluster meetings over the school year, which provided them with an opportunity to work in teams to plan schemes and lessons, modes of assessment and teaching strategies. They were also provided with the opportunity to access professional development and to share experiences. The project was formally evaluated, through the use of questionnaires and interviews as well as the review of data on student progress, behaviour, attendance and engagement. Teacher professional development was also evaluated over a two year period. The above evaluations resulted in the production of guidelines and an accompanying DVD.

On 4th March 2011, at the launch ceremony, Cllr. Gerry Kelly, Cathaoirleach CCVEC, formally presented the Guidelines to the President of IVEA, Cllr. Noel O'Connor. IVEA intends to run a CPD Programme for teachers in the coming academic year at its new training centre in Naas.



Left to right: Cllr. Noel O'Connor (President of IVEA), Dr Harold Hislop (Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Skills), Ms Joan Russell (CEO, Co. Cork VEC), Professor Barrie Bennett (University of Toronto), Mr Michael Moriarty (General Secretary, IVEA) and Cllr. Gerry Kelly (Chairman, Co. Cork VEC).