

NCSE Press Release 9th August 2016

NCSE seeks to reduce students feeling stigmatised in special classes

The NCSE is today publishing new *Guidelines for Setting up and Organising Special Classes*. Special classes are for some students with special educational needs who benefit from smaller class sizes.

NCSE¹ research carried out by the ESRI and TCD found that some teachers felt ill-equipped to teach in special classes due to the complex and diverse needs of students. However, once they had received training, teachers considered that their ability to meet need was greatly improved. The NCSE Guidelines highlight the need for school leaders to proactively plan to meet the continuing professional development needs of special class teachers to ensure that they are equipped to teach students with diverse special needs.

The research also highlighted that some students felt a stigma attached to attending special classes and felt they were not popular with their teachers. The NCSE guidelines recommends that school planning should include whole school policies in relation to the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs to mitigate the risk of students feeling stigmatised.

Jennifer Doran, Head of Research at the NCSE noted “our research highlighted a number of worrying issues regarding special classes, such as students feeling negative about attending special classes and teachers feeling unprepared to teach in these settings. That is why we developed these guidelines- to provide good practice points to schools to ensure that all students feel valued and welcomed under a whole school approach to inclusion”.

The guidelines also set out clearly how schools can set up and organise special classes to create a suitable learning environment to meet the needs of students enrolled. The research demonstrated that schools leaders were uncertain about how to establish classes and the best ways to provide for students within them. These guidelines feature a number of good practice points that will be useful to schools and practitioners in creating supportive and inclusive learning environments for students who are unable to be in a mainstream class.

The *Guidelines for Setting up and Organising Special Classes* and the research report- *Special Classes in Irish Schools* will be published today on the NCSE website- www.ncse.ie

ENDS

¹ *Special Classes in Irish Schools*- This research was conducted by the ESRI and TCD on behalf of the NCSE and is jointly published today by the NCSE/ESRI on both websites - www.ncse.ie and www.esri.ie. The research team comprised of- Joanne Banks, Selina McCoy, Denise Frawley and Gillian Kingston from the Economic and Social Research Institute and Michael Shevlin and Fiona Smyth, Trinity College Dublin.

Notes to editors

About Special Classes

- Special classes are one way in which mainstream schools can support some students with complex or severe special educational needs who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class for most or all of the day, such as students with moderate general learning disabilities or autism.
- They are smaller in size – ranging from six to eleven pupils to one teacher, depending on the category of need in the class. In addition, special classes have a baseline level of Special Need Assistant (SNA) support per class.
- Most special classes are formally sanctioned by the National Council for Special Education. Some schools operate special classes on an informal basis, not sanctioned by the NCSE, by pooling hours within the school to support students with a variety of needs.

About the NCSE

The NCSE provides schools with the additional educational supports they need to help children with special educational needs receive an appropriate education. The NCSE commissions and conducts research and provides expert, independent and evidence-informed policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on special education for children and young adults. Further information can be found on our website www.ncse.ie.