

A Study of the Experiences of Post-Primary Students with Special Educational Needs in Ireland

Garry Squires

Abstract

This commissioned study explores the views of 223 students with special educational needs to understand their experiences of post-primary education. Thirty post-primary settings participated from across Ireland involving a range of types of educational setting. Students were interviewed in their educational settings individually, in pairs or as part of focus groups.

The findings were consistent with other previously conducted international studies and indicated that the views of Irish students are broadly similar to those of students with SEN in other countries. Students were able to comment on school culture and climate; relationships with teachers; relationships with peers; curriculum and teaching methods; identification of SEN; support arrangements; accreditation routes and examination supports; and, participation and engagement with learning. The majority of students were positive about their current provision. Those that had changed placement preferred their current placement.

We identified a large number of helpful and unhelpful approaches used in mainstream and other settings to help schools think more carefully about how to remove barriers to learning and participation. From this, we were able to make suggestions for recommendations to further improve the educational experience of students with special educational needs. The most important key lesson from the literature review and from the students who participated in the study was that the students want to be involved in key decisions about their education and support arrangements suggesting that planning needs to be more student-centred.

Biographical Note

Dr Garry Squires is a senior lecturer in educational psychology at the University of Manchester. He is also a registered educational psychologist who has worked extensively with schools and local authorities. His research interests are in the areas of special educational needs, inclusion, dyslexia, cognitive behavioural therapy, and mental health and wellbeing. <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Garry.Squires/personaldetails>