

# Statement of Strategy 2017-2021

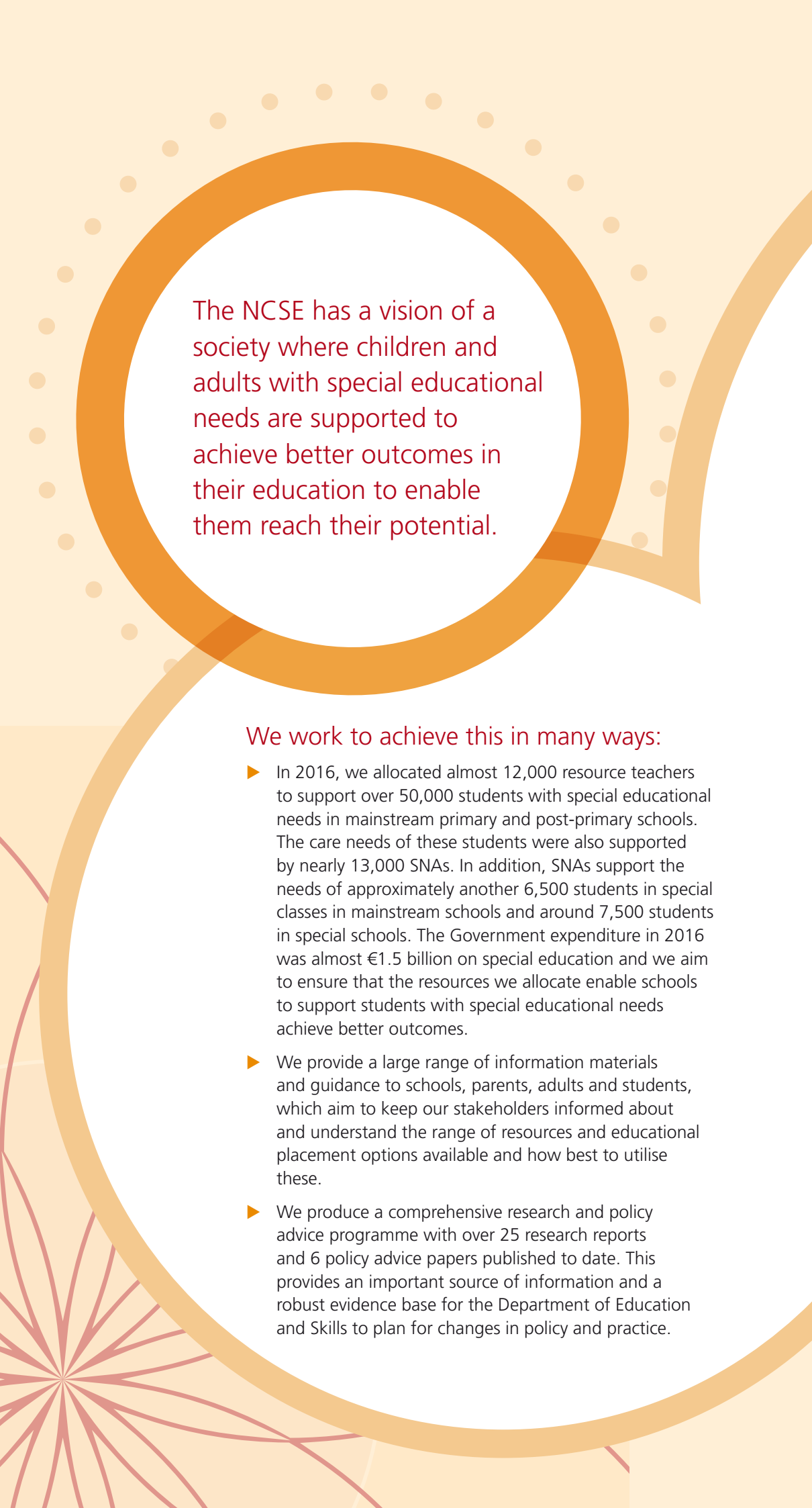






# Foreword

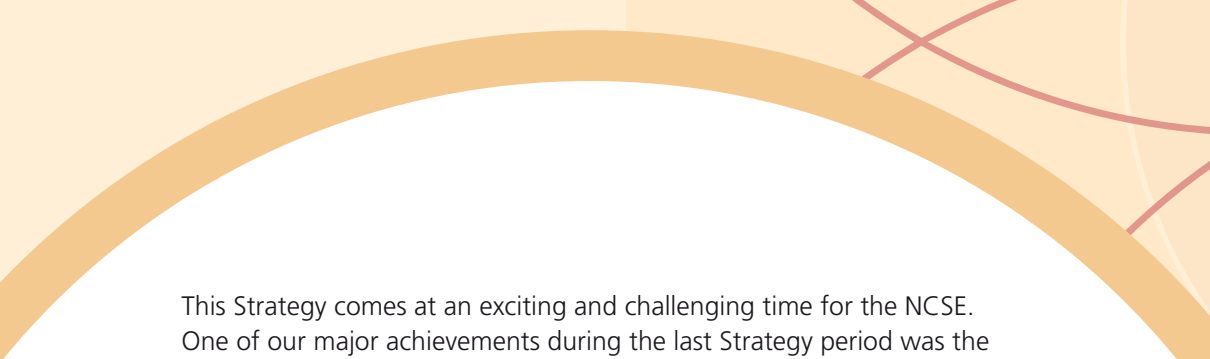
This is the third Statement of Strategy for the NCSE. Building on the strength of our last Strategy, this one will span 2017-2021 and provides a blueprint of what we intend to do, how we will do it, and the outcomes that will demonstrate our achievements over the next five years.



The NCSE has a vision of a society where children and adults with special educational needs are supported to achieve better outcomes in their education to enable them reach their potential.

### We work to achieve this in many ways:


- ▶ In 2016, we allocated almost 12,000 resource teachers to support over 50,000 students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. The care needs of these students were also supported by nearly 13,000 SNAs. In addition, SNAs support the needs of approximately another 6,500 students in special classes in mainstream schools and around 7,500 students in special schools. The Government expenditure in 2016 was almost €1.5 billion on special education and we aim to ensure that the resources we allocate enable schools to support students with special educational needs achieve better outcomes.
- ▶ We provide a large range of information materials and guidance to schools, parents, adults and students, which aim to keep our stakeholders informed about and understand the range of resources and educational placement options available and how best to utilise these.
- ▶ We produce a comprehensive research and policy advice programme with over 25 research reports and 6 policy advice papers published to date. This provides an important source of information and a robust evidence base for the Department of Education and Skills to plan for changes in policy and practice.




This Strategy comes at an exciting and challenging time for the NCSE. One of our major achievements during the last Strategy period was the publication of a proposed new model for allocating teaching resources for students with special educational needs.

This model became operational in September 2017. It will change the way in which some of our core activities will work, and how schools are allocated, will manage and deploy resources to students.

Our vision of students achieving better outcomes will be greatly helped with the development of the recently expanded specialist support service within the NCSE. The services of three supporting agencies – the Special Education Support Service, the National Behaviour Support Service and the Visiting Teacher Service have recently come together within the NCSE. The intention is to create one unified service for schools to support students with special educational needs. We know from our research that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes and this is particularly true for students with special educational needs. The development of this single support service means that the NCSE can support schools to build their capacity and expertise to develop good teaching practices and a more inclusive environment so that students can achieve better outcomes in their education. The extent to which we will be able to do this is dependent on the resources made available to the NCSE to develop the service. We also will also need to benchmark our services with those elsewhere to see what is required to contribute to the Minister's stated ambition of Ireland having the best education system in Europe within the next decade.




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The new model for allocating teaching resources arose out of our policy advice work which was supported by an extensive research base generated by the NCSE over the past number of years. Our research work needs to continue to grow to allow for innovative thinking to develop and for new policies and supports to be proposed. We enter this new strategy phase having recently started a major comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme. The scheme is currently costing over €420 million annually. We want to ensure that students are getting the right support to achieve their potential. We are consulting widely, reviewing the research evidence and current practice in our schools, as well as scoping practices internationally. We will identify what is working well with the scheme and what needs to change or improve and we look forward to completing the review and providing the advice to the Minister in due course.

An important issue raised with us regularly in our consultations with parents is the issue of post-school provision. Parents are fearful that placement options for their son or daughter to progress their education and training after school are limited and they are unsure about how to access supports. While we have produced some research and information in this area, we intend to strengthen our work over the course of this Strategy in the area of education and training for adults with special educational needs.

This Strategy sets out ambitious goals and actions for the NCSE. We need to ensure that our organisation is adequately resourced and staffed to achieve the outcomes we have set. A recent independent review of the organisation's capacity to deliver its core functions highlighted a number of challenges for the NCSE in delivering its current functions.



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The development of a new way of working with schools through the specialist support service and the growth of the organisation brings added challenges along with opportunities. The dispersed nature of our workforce will require modernisation of our infrastructure and support services. It's important that we continue to engage with the DES to ensure that the level of investment in the organisation enables us develop and deliver our strategic objectives.

Special education features strongly in the DES's Action Plan for Education 2016-2019. One of the five goals within it is to improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and those with special educational needs. It is our intention over the next five years to work with the DES, schools, parents, students and adults, and with other agencies, such as the HSE and Tusla in achieving this so that ultimately, students and adults with special educational needs are supported to achieve better outcomes.

# Mission Statement

We support an inclusive education system that enables students and adults with special educational needs to achieve their potential.

## Values

1. Student-centred: Students and adults with special educational needs are at the centre of what we do.
2. Equity and equality-focused: we allocate additional resources fairly to schools in line with the needs of students to receive an appropriate education.
3. Evidence-informed: We base policy advice on research evidence, national and international best practice, consultation with our stakeholders and expert knowledge.
4. Expert-led: We are experts in what we do and are a source of valuable information, guidance and support.
5. Consultation-focussed: We engage in regular and extensive consultation with our stakeholders.



# Vision

A society where children and adults with special educational needs are supported to achieve better outcomes in their education to enable them reach their potential.

# What we do

1. We plan, co-ordinate and review the provision of additional education supports to schools that enrol students with special educational needs in line with Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy.
2. We provide the Minister for Education and Skills with expert, independent, evidence-informed policy advice on special education for students and young adults.
3. We commission, conduct and share research on all aspects of special education.
4. We review and advise on the continuing options available in higher, adult and continuing education, rehabilitation and training for adults with special educational needs.
5. We provide information on special education to all who need it.
6. We adapt and respond to change while maintaining our core functions.

# Our Goals, Actions and Outcomes

## Goal 1

Support schools to enable students with special educational needs achieve better outcomes and ensure a range of educational placement options are available.

## Actions

- ▶ Allocate and review and allocate supports to all schools under DES schemes.
- ▶ Identify the need for and plan the establishment of special classes and special schools.
- ▶ Use models of best practice to inform advice, support and professional development to schools to build their capacity in the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs.
- ▶ Provide advice, information and support to parents.
- ▶ Report on the use of additional teaching resources and impact on students' learning outcomes.
- ▶ Maintain data on provision of special educational needs resources, analyse data and trends to inform planning and review.

# Outcomes

- ▶ Schools are resourced and have access to capacity building professional development and training opportunities which will enable them to support students with special educational needs achieve better outcomes.
- ▶ School leaders and parents are informed and understand the resources and range of educational placement options available.
- ▶ A range of educational placement options are available for students in line with need.
- ▶ Data are available on supports and services provided to schools.

# Our Goals, Actions and Outcomes

## Goal 2

Provide a research programme that identifies key issues, emerging trends and an evidence base to support the work of the NCSE and achievement of better outcomes for students with special educational needs.

## Actions

- ▶ Manage the annual programme of commissioned and in-house research.
- ▶ Publish and disseminate research reports and summary documents on key findings.
- ▶ Hold an annual Research Conference.
- ▶ Scope current and new research areas in special education.

# Outcomes

- ▶ NCSE activities are supported and informed by a robust evidence base arising from the research programme
- ▶ Our research outputs are used as a source of information by the DES, schools and other external stakeholders.
- ▶ NCSE is up to date on the most recent research evidence.

# Our Goals, Actions and Outcomes

## Goal 3

Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy and practice advice to the Minister for Education and Skills.

## Actions

- ▶ Identify and advise the DES on key areas for policy review and advice.
- ▶ Develop independent policy advice as requested by the Minister for Education and Skills, including advice on the SNA scheme.
- ▶ Scope current provision.
- ▶ Scope international practice and continue with European Agency for Inclusive and Special Needs Education work.
- ▶ Engage in extensive consultation with our education stakeholders, parents, students and advocacy groups and draw on expert knowledge and advice.
- ▶ Review the most recent national and international research evidence.

# Outcomes

- ▶ The Minister for Education and Skills will have an independent evidence base to plan for policy and practice in the area of special education.
- ▶ The NCSE is recognised as a source of independent expertise and knowledge on special education.

# Our Goals, Actions and Outcomes

## Goal 4

Review provision and advise on best practice in education and training for adults with special educational needs.

## Actions

- ▶ Engage with education, training and day service providers and adults to review current provision.
- ▶ Provide information for students and adults with disabilities and their parents on post school pathways, options and supports.
- ▶ Provide guidance and support to schools on planning post-school transition pathways.
- ▶ Research and review educational provision made for adults in a variety of education and training services.
- ▶ Develop best practice guidelines/advice on the education of adults with disabilities in a variety of education and training services.



# Outcomes

- ▶ Students and adults with disabilities and parents are informed about educational options and supports available.
- ▶ Schools are better informed and supported on how best to plan and support post-school transitions.
- ▶ Education and training and service providers are better informed about how best to plan and support students and adults with disabilities.

# Our Goals, Actions and Outcomes

## Goal 5

Maintain an effective organisation that complies with all legal and corporate requirements and manage information and communication strategies with parents, students, adults with disabilities, schools and the wider public.

## Actions

- ▶ Maintain governance and control processes in line with statutory regulations and The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and engage in the public service reform programme.
- ▶ Annual reporting on compliance with all business, corporate, governance and budget requirements in line with the Performance Delivery Agreement.
- ▶ Continue to review and develop our work and business processes and align as appropriate with budgets and shared services developments.
- ▶ Enhance and improve our internal communications systems.
- ▶ Put in place appropriate organisational structures to underpin our expanded remit and the delivery of services within available resources.
- ▶ Provide guidance and information to parents, students, adults with disabilities and schools on special education.
- ▶ Deliver our programme of information sessions with parents and engage in regular consultation sessions with parents and advocacy groups.
- ▶ Maintain public information on special education issues through engaging with the media and reviewing our website.

# Outcomes

- ▶ NCSE achieves its functions and meets all its statutory, regulatory and corporate governance obligations.
- ▶ The Minister for Education and Skills is fully informed about NCSE compliance with statutory requirements and the full programme of activity is delivered within timeframe and budget.
- ▶ NCSE is delivering on its broader mandate.
- ▶ Parents, students and adults with disabilities have access to information to make informed decisions about special education provision.
- ▶ Our stakeholders and the wider public have access to information on special education provision and are kept up to date on emerging special education issues.



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council for Special Education

