

National Council for Special Education Annual Report 2020



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National Council for Special Education

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Contents

NCSE Chairperson's Report to Ministers	2
Introduction: Our Strategic Approach	9
Main Achievements	10
Strategic Goal 1	15
1.1 Introduction	15
1.2 Continuity of Support through the COVID-19 Pandemic	16
1.3 Resourcing Schools in the 2019-20 School Year	18
1.4 Resourcing Schools in the 2019-20 School Year	20
1.5 NCSE Support Service for Schools	21
1.6 Implementation of the School Inclusion Model Pilot	23
Strategic Goal 2	31
2.1 Introduction	31
2.2 Our Publications and Completed Work	31
2.3 Ongoing Research in 2020	33
2.4 New Research	33
2.5 Research Conference 2020	34
Strategic Goal 3	39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Progress on Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes	39
3.3 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education	39
Strategic Goal 4	45
4.1 Introduction	45
4.2 Adult Education and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities (2015-24) Transition Planning	45
4.3 Disability Act 2005	45
Strategic Goal 5	49
5.1 Introduction	49
5.2 Further Development and Finalisation of the NCSE's Interim Management Structure	49
5.3 Delivering Online Educational Support and Resources to Students Model Recognised at Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards	50
5.4 Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) Leaders Award recognition for Promoting the Employment of Graduates with Disabilities	50
5.5 Information for Parents	50
5.6 Data Protection	51
5.7 Consultative Forum	51
5.8 Governance	53
5.9 The Council of the NCSE	54
Appendices	63
Appendix 1: Confirmation of Compliance with Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016	63
Appendix 2: NCSE Staffing	65
Appendix 3: Statistical Information for Academic Years 2011-12 to 2019-20	66
Appendix 4: Description of Disability Categories	68
Appendix 5: Glossary of Acronyms Used	71
Appendix 6: Infographic on main NCSE statistics	72

NCSE Chairperson's Report to Ministers

June 2021

Ms Norma Foley, TD
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 RC96

Ms Josepha Madigan, TD
Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion
Department of Education
Marlborough Street
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Dear Ministers

In line with the requirements of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, I am, as Chairperson of the National Council Special Education, honoured to present you with our annual report for 2020.

2020 was an unprecedented and challenging year for the education sector with the onset of the pandemic. The closure of schools was particularly difficult for our students and their parents. Schools provide important structure and support for students with special educational needs. When the schools closed, this removed those structures and changed the nature and level of access to supports. We know that many students with special educational needs struggled with the adjustment in life, both academically and socially.

The NCSE worked hard to quickly respond to alternative ways of providing supports and information to ensure that, in as much as possible, parents were supported with home schooling and teachers were provided with guidance and resources to enable them deliver remote learning. As the schools re-opened in September, the need to deliver our resources remotely continued and our suite of resources grew in response to need. Some essential activities did continue in schools and the nature of these and our response to the pandemic is outlined in this report.

The regional structure for NCSE support services progressed extensively in 2020. We have established ten teams across five regions. These teams comprise advisers, visiting teachers and special educational needs organisers (SENOs), and are led by team managers and regional managers who are responsible for delivering support to schools and families of children with special educational needs across five regions. In 2020 a number of these teams welcomed the recruitment of occupational therapists (OTs), speech and language therapist (SLTs), and behaviour practitioners to provide support to our advisers in building their capacity to support schools participating in the School Inclusion Model pilot project.

Together, these regional teams continued to provide a coordinated service to students, schools and families in 2020 through the public health crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work is supported by a policy and practice development unit comprising specialists leads with a range of clinical and educational specialisms. The unit plays a central role in ensuring NCSE supports are evidence-informed and underpinned by best practice. Behind this is an administrative structure in areas such as finance, business support services, human resources and IT that enables our frontline staff to focus on meeting the needs of students, families, teachers and schools.

The NCSE was fortunate to have moved to a new online business tool in early 2020 that enabled staff to continue their work remotely, with little interruption when the pandemic hit. The IT and business supports services moved quickly to ensure staff had the appropriate facilities and IT supports to work remotely in a fast and responsive way.

2020 also saw the launch of the School Inclusion Model pilot project, following from the recommendations of our policy advice to you in 2018. This ground-breaking initiative, led by your Department and managed by the NCSE, will introduce a range of supports into schools to assist students as required across 75 primary, post-primary and special schools in parts of Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare. It will also allow schools flexibility in how they deploy their special needs assistants. I am pleased to confirm that NCSE staff continue to work closely with officials from your Department to develop and implement this worthwhile initiative.

The development and implementation of the School Inclusion Model builds on and now includes the positive work arising from the In-School and Pre-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, which continued to be implemented in these schools and 75 preschools throughout 2019. Staff and students from participating settings have reported positively on their experience of the project so far. I look forward to reporting to you in 2020 on the learning arising from the formal evaluation of the project.

In addition to providing you with an annual report under the EPSEN Act, I am also required under the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies to report to you as follows:

- ▶ The NCSE is not a commercial State body. We have no subsidiaries, joint ventures or shareholdings. No commercially significant developments affected the NCSE in 2020. We do not anticipate any such developments.
- ▶ The financial position of the NCSE is as disclosed in our 2020 annual accounts which are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. These accounts, when audited, are submitted separately to you under Section 29 of the EPSEN Act and include, as required, my report, confirmations to you regarding the NCSE System of Internal Controls and the required governance statement and board members' report.
- ▶ The NCSE Council completed an evaluation of NCSE performance by reference to the annual plan and budget in December 2020.

- ▶ The NCSE has adopted the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and continues to be fully compliant with all aspects of it. We conducted an internal audit of our compliance with the code in 2020 which provided an independent verdict of substantial assurance of our compliance.
- ▶ In this context, I confirm that:
 - ▼ All appropriate procedures for financial reporting, internal audit, travel and asset disposals have been carried out.
 - ▼ The NCSE is adhering to Government policy on public procurement and implementing our current Corporate Procurement Plan. However, we identified non-compliance with guidelines in four new cases in 2020 and have disclosed this detail in our Statement of Internal Control in our annual accounts.
 - ▼ The NCSE is adhering to the relevant aspects and procedures of the public spending code.
 - ▼ The NCSE carried out an appropriate assessment of principal risks, including a description of these risks and, where appropriate, associated mitigation measures and strategies.
 - ▼ NCSE members comply with the NCSE Code of Business Conduct for Members of State Boards.
 - ▼ NCSE employees comply with the Code of Behaviour for Civil Servants.
 - ▼ Salaries payable to the chief executive and all employees comply with Government policy.
 - ▼ No directors' fees are payable to NCSE Council members. Individual Council members' expenses are detailed in the governance statement published separately to this report.
 - ▼ The NCSE complies with the guidelines for the appraisal and management of capital expenditure proposals.
 - ▼ The NCSE complies with Government travel policy requirements.
 - ▼ The NCSE expects no significant post-balance sheet events.

Further confirmations of compliance with the requirements of the Code are set out in Appendix 1.

During 2020, we continued to allocate SNA posts to all schools for the 2019-20 school year. As detailed in this report, by the end of the 2019-20 school year over 16,000 SNA posts were in place in schools to support over 39,500 students with additional care needs. Following the deferral of the implementation of the new frontloading model for mainstream SNA allocation, and the decision by Government that all mainstream SNA allocations would be retained for the 2020-21 school year at the level sanctioned for the 2019-20 school year, the NCSE opened an exceptional review process in April 2020.

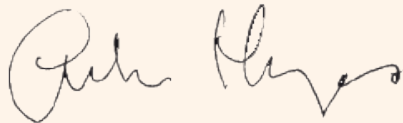
The process allowed schools to apply for an additional SNA allocation in exceptional circumstances. In addition to this, the NCSE continued to work with your Department in 2020 on the implementation of the special education teacher allocation process.

One of our key roles is to provide you with policy advice on the education of students with special needs. Work on our latest piece of policy advice on special schools and special classes in Ireland was well advanced during the year. We undertook some further consultations and completed our ongoing multi-strand research process. Council engaged and deliberated extensively on iterations of the report towards the end of the year. While the submission of the report was delayed due to the pandemic, we look forward to engaging with you and your officials on this matter when we submit the report in 2021.

Our annual research conference in November 2020 was held online for the first time due to the pandemic. This enabled a greater attendance on the day of almost 500 delegates. The conference was very topical for the year past and examined online and remote learning for students with special educational needs.

This annual report identifies our main achievements for 2020 and all the activities undertaken in relation to our five strategic goals for the year. The NCSE remains ready to provide any further information or clarification to you or your officials about any of those activities.

Yours sincerely



Joe Hayes
Chairperson
National Council for Special Education



Introduction

Our Strategic Approach

Introduction: Our Strategic Approach

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

In striving to achieve this vision, we have a number of activities arising from our functions as set out in Section 20 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004. Specifically, these include:

- ▶ Planning and coordinating the provision of education supports for children with special educational needs.
- ▶ Conducting and commissioning research.
- ▶ Advising the Minister for Education on policy for special education.
- ▶ Disseminating information, including best practice, on special education to parents, schools and other interested persons.
- ▶ Consulting voluntary bodies to ensure their knowledge and expertise inform the development of NCSE policy.
- ▶ Reviewing and advising on educational provision for adults with disabilities.

Table 1: NCSE Strategic Goals Statement of Strategy 2017-21

- ▶ **Goal 1:** Support schools to enable students with special educational needs achieve better outcomes and ensure a range of educational placement options are available.
- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **Goal 3:** Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy and practice advice to the Minister for Education.
- ▶ **Goal 4:** Review provision and advise on best practice in education and training for adults with special educational needs.
- ▶ **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.

Main Achievements

Some of our main achievements during 2020 are summarised below.

In the 2019-20 school year, the NCSE:

- ▶ Enabled over 39,500 students with special educational needs who also have significant care needs to access special needs assistant (SNA) support.
- ▶ Processed over 12,000 new applications from schools for students with special educational needs for access to SNA support.
- ▶ Processed over 4,300 new applications for school transport for students with special educational needs.
- ▶ Processed over 5,500 new applications for assistive technology/special equipment for students with special educational needs.
- ▶ Had established a total of 1,640 special classes in mainstream schools with places available for 10,395 students.

In 2020, the NCSE also:

- ▶ Published the report from the Evaluation of the In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project.
- ▶ Finalised our new structures to support students, schools and families, including the establishment of ten teams around the country which provide a coordinated service to students, families and schools. These are supported by an expanded policy and practice development team with enhanced administrative support capacity.
- ▶ Advanced the rollout of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) which supported 139 schools and early learning and care settings through the In-School and Pre-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project. SIM recruited new therapy resources to add multidisciplinary capacity to NCSE regional teams, and announced the first dedicated national training programme for special needs assistants with the inaugural class to begin in January 2021.
- ▶ Hosted our annual research conference online which enabled almost 500 delegates attend this year. The conference theme was topical examining online and remote learning for students with SEN.



Strategic Goal 1

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

Strategic Goal 1

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

1.1 Introduction

The NCSE plans, coordinates and reviews provision of additional education supports for schools that enrol students with special educational needs in line with Department of Education policy.

Each year over 4,000 schools can apply to their locally based NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) for a variety of resources depending on the needs in the school. They are:

- ▶ SNA (special needs assistant) support
- ▶ assistive technology/specialist equipment, and/or
- ▶ non-standard school transport arrangements

Most students with special educational needs are now educated in mainstream classes. However, provision ranging from full-time enrolment in the latter to full-time enrolment in special schools is available for students. The range of placement options includes:

- ▶ **A mainstream class** where the student with special educational needs may receive additional support from the class teacher through differentiation of the curriculum and/or additional teaching support provided by a special education teacher.
- ▶ **A special class in a mainstream school** with six to 11 students in each special class, depending on the particular special educational need.
- ▶ **A special school** for students with more complex special educational needs with classes ranging from six to 11 students, depending on the particular special educational need.

Furthermore, the Visiting Teacher Service provides advice and support to ensure the educational needs of children and young people who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired are met. This service is available from birth through to pre-school, primary and post-primary levels.

This section details our activities in resourcing schools in 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, the work of the NCSE Support Service and our work to implement the School Inclusion Model pilot project.

1.2 Continuity of Support through the COVID-19 Pandemic

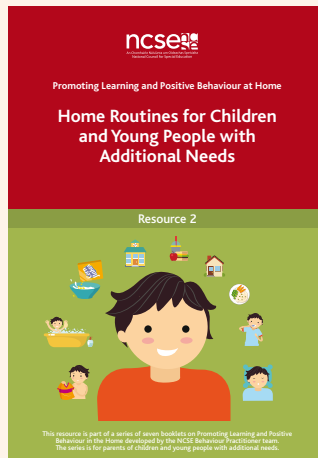
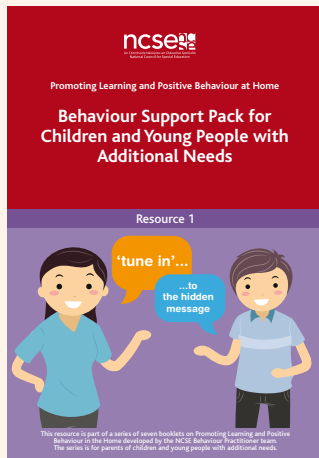
The closure of schools as a result of the pandemic was a significantly challenging time for students and their parents. The NCSE moved quickly to review and change how we supported schools and families during this time. Support ordinarily delivered in-school continued to be provided remotely and our teacher professional learning seminars were converted to online delivery for the 2020-21 school year. However, those venue-based seminars scheduled to take place in the 2019-20 school year, between March and May, were cancelled in response to public health advice and the closure of school buildings announced by Government on March 13th, 2020. This also affected the ability of NCSE staff to carry out school visits. In addition, there was a decline in requests for in-school support after the closure of school buildings was announced.

In response to this, and in order to support teachers and parents through the period of remote teaching and learning, the NCSE adapted existing support services and developed new resources. For example, teachers could apply for telephone support using the application system already in place for in-school support. A suite of new online resources for teachers and parents, including videos and resource booklets, was developed and published on the NCSE website. These included weekly resources for parents focused on a particular theme of the week including games, communications, science, as well as helpful apps.

“Theme of the Week” and links to useful apps for home learning such as “ChatterPix” & “Endless Reader” were published on the NCSE website to support home learning throughout 2020.

A series of seven booklets on promoting learning and positive behaviour at home has been developed. They each provide a full range of supports to the parents of children and young people with additional needs at primary and post-primary levels. Individual booklets consider a topic, give information on approaches to those topics along with advice on their practical application. Digital versions have been released online and print copies are available to parents through their local SENO.



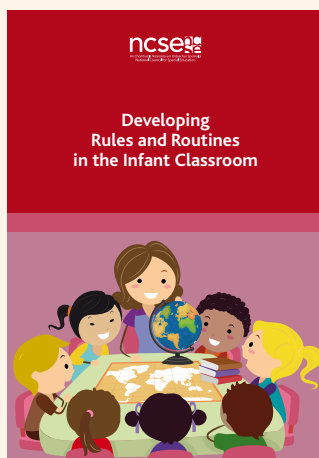


Further publications were developed in response to requests about areas of need and included:



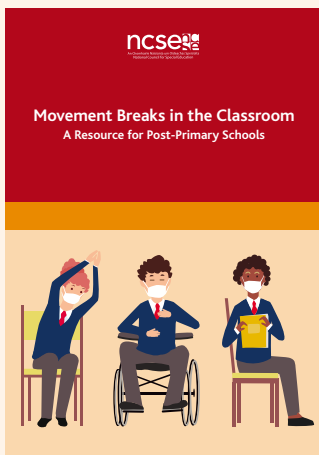
► Promoting Positive Behaviour and Learning in the Infant Classroom

This is a resource for infant class teachers supporting students struggling to settle into school due to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Coupled with the additional challenges presented by COVID-19, some students may face extra difficulties when settling into a new school setting.



► Developing Rules and Routines in the Infant Classroom

The aim in the infant classroom is to promote student wellbeing by fostering self-confidence and a sense of belonging. One way to achieve this is to establish clear and consistent rules and routines in the classroom. Such routines and clear guidance, particularly in the COVID-19 context, will help students experiencing anxiety in their back-to-school transition. This booklet aims to support teachers to develop strategies to promote positive behaviour and learning.



- ▶ **Movement Breaks in the Post-Primary Classroom, video and booklet**

This resource aims to instruct teachers on how to incorporate simple movement breaks into their classroom routine. They are encouraged to consider movement breaks to assist students regulate their energy levels and maintain concentration.

Another suite of online resources was developed to support the Department of Education's 2020 Summer Programme along with resources to support the move back to school.

Online resources for parents and teachers to support the Department of Education's Summer Programme 2020 and transitioning back to school were developed by the NCSE in 2020

In addition, special educational needs organisers (SENOs) and visiting teachers for students who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired continued to maintain contact with schools and parents by telephone and by email. In instances where public health advice allowed, a limited number of school visits proceeded later in 2020.

A new online school support portal was launched on September 1st, 2020 catering for applications for telephone assistance, email support, video conferencing, as well as school visits, in circumstances where public health advice permitted. This more flexible applications platform has ensured that the NCSE could continue providing support to schools in an appropriate format while complying with changing public health guidelines.

1.3 Resourcing Schools in the 2019-20 School Year¹

Applications for Additional Supports

In the 2019-20 school year SENOs processed over 22,000 applications for additional supports for students with special educational needs under three allocation schemes.

¹ The 2019-20 school year is from September 2019 to June 2020.

Table 1 below outlines the number of applications processed under each scheme.

Table 1: Summary of Applications Processed by NCSE for School Year 2019-20

Scheme	No of Applications
SNA	12,275
School transport	4,302
Assistive technology/specialist equipment	5,510
Total	22,087

Special Classes

10,395 places now available in 1,640 special classes in mainstream schools

SENOs sanctioned the establishment of 189 new special classes in the school year 2019-20. By the end of the school year there were 1,640 special classes in mainstream schools with 10,395 places available. This is a net increase of 1,059 places on the previous year.

Special Schools

In the 2019-20 school year over 7,900 students were enrolled in special schools supported by the NCSE. The NCSE allocated 1,231 teachers and 2,597 SNAs to special schools in 2019-20. The corresponding figures in the previous school year 2018-19 were 1,223 teachers and 2,528 SNAs.

SNA Support

By the end of the 2019-20 school year, over 39,500 students had been granted SNA support. This was an increase on the previous year's 36,500 students. SNA posts allocated to primary, post-primary and special schools by the end of 2019-20 also increased from 15,030 to 16,125.

A new frontloading model for mainstream SNA allocation whereby schools would no longer have to apply for SNA support for individual students in a mainstream setting, was to be introduced for the 2020-21 school year. COVID-19 restrictions, however, have delayed the roll-out of this new model. Instead, all mainstream SNA allocations were retained at the level sanctioned for the 2019-20 school year.

This revised model includes an exceptional review process through which schools can apply for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs that cannot be catered for within existing mainstream allocations. Further information on the SNA exceptional review process is set out in Department of Education Circular 0030/2020.

Special and mainstream schools with special classes continue to apply for SNA support for individual students in those particular settings.

Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocation Model

A new model for the allocation of special education teachers was introduced with effect from September 2017. Over 13,200 teachers were originally allocated in 2017 for the school years 2017-18 and 2018-19. A list of schools and their SET allocation is provided on the NCSE website.

The NCSE continued to support the model's implementation in 2020 through its local staff engaging with schools. Further information about the SET review process is set out in Department of Education Circulars 0013/2017, 0014/2017, 007/2019, and 008/20. NCSE Circular 04/2019 sets out the exceptional review application procedure.

1.4 Resourcing Schools in the 2019-20 School Year²

Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocations for schools were reprofiled during 2019 and that profile remains in effect for two years. However, schools can apply for a review of their SET allocation in light of exceptional circumstances. Eighty-six schools applied for an allocation review in 2020. Of those, 10 were put forward for review. COVID-19 measures delayed reviews until December 2020, however, and the outcomes are currently being processed.

13,620 special education teachers allocated to schools by end of 2020

In November 2020, a total of 284 schools received an increase in their SET hours in recognition of their status as developing schools or as a result of their significantly increased enrolment year on year. Of these, 70 were primary and 214 were post-primary schools. The total number of special education teachers in schools by December 31st, 2020 was 13,620.

The number of SNAs allocated to schools at that time is set out in Table 2 below.

² The 2019-20 school year is from September 2019 to June 2020.

Table 2: Number of SNA posts

	End 2019-20 School Year	End December 2020
SNA Posts	16,125	17,032

Under the SNA Exception Review Process established for the 2020-21 school year, 1,339 schools had applied to the NCSE for a review of their 2020-21 mainstream SNA allocation by December 31st, 2020. Of the 1,191 applications completed by that date, 704 schools received an increased allocation. This equates to an additional 495.5 SNA posts being allocated to schools by that date.

Schools wishing to appeal the outcome of their SNA Exceptional Review application could do so by submitting an application for appeal. By December 31st, 2020, 117 schools had submitted an appeal, of which 87 were concluded by that date. Table 3 provides a brief overview of the outcomes to those concluded appeals.

Table 3: Outcome of SNA Exceptional Review Appeals Processed by NCSE for School Year 2020-21

No of Appeals	Outcome
51	Not Upheld
6	Withdrawn
12	Invalid
18	Upheld

1.5 NCSE Support Service for Schools

For the 2020 calendar year:

- ▶ 168 external professional development courses were delivered;
- ▶ 93 whole school seminars were delivered;
- ▶ 5,370 teachers were engaged in professional development and learning at NCSE seminars and whole staff seminars;
- ▶ 7,819 professional development and learning days provided for NCSE seminars and whole staff seminars;
- ▶ 1,440 applications were received from schools for in-school support³ of which, 1,087 were from primary schools, 297 from post-primary and 56 from special schools.

3 In-school support may include the provision of assistance with SET implementation, provision of in-school support and the development and delivery of CPD to teachers.

In March 2020, the NCSE awarded a contract for a post-graduate certificate/diploma in special education to St Angela's College, NUIG. This offers a post-graduate qualification to 25 students teaching in the area of autism for primary, post-primary, and special schools.

In 2020, seven students graduated with a certificate, 12 graduated with a diploma and two with a masters.

NCSE also facilitates teachers working with pupils with autism in accessing specific courses through Middletown Centre for Autism: 375 teachers were trained in Middletown⁴ seminars in 2020.

Visiting Teacher Service

Our visiting teachers (VTs) support children who are deaf/hard of hearing and who are blind/visually impaired and their families. This support is provided in the home and in schools. The VTs are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss and/or visual impairment. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from time of referral through to the end of post-primary education. The VT supports children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual's needs. The VT's work involves liaising with other professionals and agencies such as audiological scientists, ophthalmology services, speech and language therapists, low vision specialists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staffs and with parents.

In 2020, 44 VTs provided support to 6,434 children. Of these, 1,331 are blind/visually impaired, and 5,103 are deaf/hard of hearing. Table 4 shows the educational or home setting of these children.

Table 4: Number of Children Supported by Visiting Teachers by Setting

Setting	Blind/Visually Impaired Children	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Children
Babies/pre-school/other	102	701
Primary school	524	2,299
Post-primary school	427	1,498
Special school	278	605
Total children	1,331	5,103

⁴ Middletown Centre for Autism is a North-South educational initiative established in 2007 with funding from the Department of Education (DE), Northern Ireland and the Department of Education (DE), Ireland.

Primary Language Curriculum Seminars for Special Schools 2019

Following an inter-agency agreement between the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the NCSE, we provided continuing professional development to special schoolteachers during the academic year 2019-20 during implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC). In 2020, 29 seminars were delivered to 425 teachers from 39 special schools by a team of six NCSE advisers, in addition to the provision of webinars and leadership seminars facilitated by the PDST. This brings to 70 the total number of seminars delivered during the 2019-20 school year, reaching a total of 1,264 teachers in 122 special schools.

1.6 Implementation of the School Inclusion Model Pilot

Following the publication of a Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme⁵ by NCSE, Government decided in early 2019 to establish a pilot of a new School Inclusion Model (SIM) for children with special educational and additional care needs.

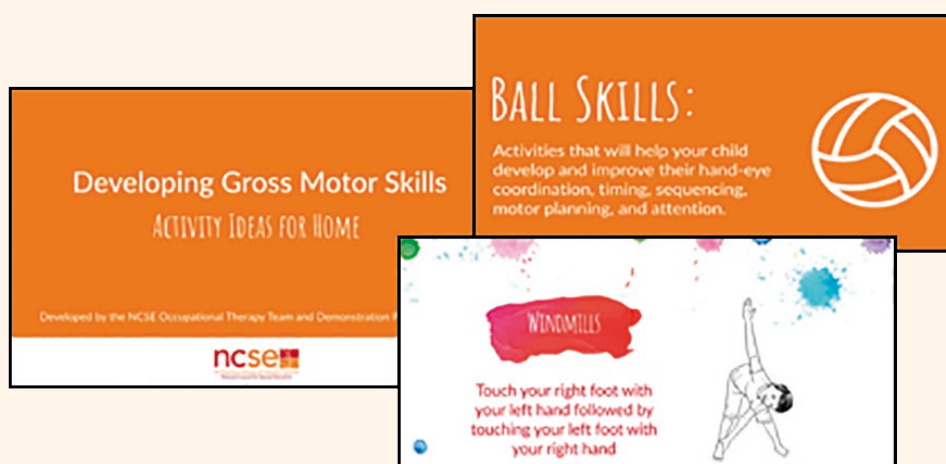
SIM will test a support model for schools that provides for a range of additional assistance, such as behavioural support, added psychological support services and therapy services. These will build teacher capacity, augment SNA resources and assist schools in building an inclusive culture.

Key elements of the model include:

- ▶ The further development of the demonstration project on in-school and early years therapy support. By the end of 2020, this project involved 74 schools and 66 early learning and care settings in the HSE community healthcare region of southwest Dublin, Kildare and west Wicklow (CHO 7). Nineteen speech and language therapists (SLTs) and 12 occupational therapists (OTs) delivered supports and capacity-building within these settings.
- ▶ The enhancement of NCSE regional teams in CHO 7 with four SLTs, two OTs and four behaviour practitioners all working to build regional team and school capacity to support students.
- ▶ A new frontloading allocation model for SNAs. A profiling system for special education teaching was used to allocate resources in advance breaking the link with the need for a diagnosis of disability to access SNA support.
- ▶ The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has been expanded to provide more intensive support. Additional psychologists have been recruited for the pilot giving greater access to the full range of in-school supports for students with complex educational needs.

5 <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NCSE-PAP6-Comprehensive-Review-SNA-Scheme.pdf>

- ▶ SNAs have been offered a new national training programme designed to equip them with the skills and knowledge to support students with additional care needs arising from significant medical, physical, emotional/behavioural, sensory, communication and other significant difficulties that pose a barrier to participating in school life. The training will emphasise the need for students to develop independence and resilience.
- ▶ A new national nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools will be developed. A cross agency planning group has been established to develop its scope, develop an application procedure for schools and plan how the service will be delivered. It will complement current provision provided through community-based services.
- ▶ Consultation with schools, teachers and parents is key to the model.



Arrangements have been made for an independent evaluation of the School Inclusion Model which will be conducted by the Education and Social Research Institute with Dublin City University. This will seek to determine the SIM's impact on students, SNAs, parents and the schools involved, including outcomes attained.

The NCSE continued to provide support to schools during the pandemic in 2020. In response to this, and to support teachers and parents during the period of remote teaching and learning, the SIM team worked with other NCSE staff to devise new resources such as videos and resource booklets.

Activity update

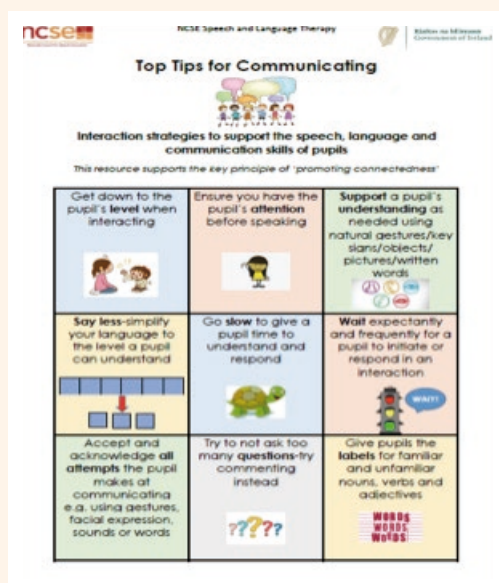
The Demonstration Project, delivered by a team of therapists seconded from the HSE, continued to build on the foundations established during its first year. In 2020, it delivered the following services until March 12th, 2020:

- ▶ 139 settings were supported: 53 primary, 14 post-primary and five special schools, and 67 early learning and care settings.
- ▶ 134 of these settings were supported through whole school/classroom training and events (Tier 1 in the Continuum of Support).
- ▶ The project provided coaching and mentoring to staff in these settings to build capacity to support students and children with additional needs. In total, 380 teachers and early learning and care practitioners were coached on specific student group supports (Tier 2) and 270 to support individual students (Tier 3).
- ▶ As part of the project's multi-tiered model of support, the following number of students was supported at group and individual level:
 - ▼ targeted group support (tier 2) – 905 students in 71 settings;
 - ▼ intensive individualised support (Tier 3) – 159 students in 73 settings.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, schools had to move to remote learning, and the In-School and Early Years Demonstration Project therapists were deployed back to the HSE to support the public health response. Government announced during the summer that the School Inclusion Model pilot would continue for the 2020-21 school year and that the NCSE had been sanctioned to directly recruit OTs and SLTs to support the project. Recruitment commenced in late 2020 with therapists to arrive in 2021.

A recruitment process for OTs, SLTs and behaviour practitioners to add multidisciplinary capacity to NCSE regional teams was completed in 2020, adding eight staff from these disciplines to teams working in the CHO 7 area.

An extensive range of teaching and learning resources has been developed by the therapists and behaviour practitioners to support schools and early learning centres in line with the national curricula. Many new resources have been published on the NCSE's website [ncse.ie](https://www.ncse.ie) to support parents and students during periods of home schooling due to COVID-19.



The frontloading allocation model for SNAs completed its first full calendar year of working with pilot schools. Guidelines were updated following school feedback on how the model should operate and consultations on its implementation are ongoing. A process was established to review exceptional cases from schools that may have insufficient SNA allocation to meet student need. These may apply to the NCSE for an exceptional allocation review.

The first dedicated national training programme was announced in September 2020 for all special needs assistants working in primary, post-primary and special schools at no cost to them. Following a public procurement process, the UCD School of Education along with UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems won a contract to develop and deliver the online course. It will consist of five modules delivered over a ten-month period covering inclusion, communications and language, and a range of special needs and information on caring for students with additional care needs. The inaugural class begins in January 2021 and will be delivered to 500 SNAs. In total, the programme will have 3,500 places over the next four years.



Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan, at the launch of the new national training programme for special needs assistants.



Strategic 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

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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

In 2020, we concluded our research to support the development of the policy advice along with two other research projects and the commissioning of a new study.

2.1 Introduction

Research is one of the NCSE's core roles. It expands our knowledge base, gives us an insight into how our education system and those in other jurisdictions are operating and what works best. This knowledge provides us with a strong evidence base to inform our policy advice to the Minister for Education on special education matters and we continue to disseminate our work to the research, policy and practice communities. In 2020, we concluded the research projects conducted to support the policy advice on special schools and special classes. In addition, the review of educational provision in adult day services and the evaluation of the In-School and Preschool Therapy Demonstration Project were finalised. This section provides an overview of our published and ongoing work as well as highlighting some newly commissioned research. It concludes with a summary of our research conference held in November.

In 2020, we concluded our research to support the development of the policy advice along with two other research projects and the commissioning of a new study

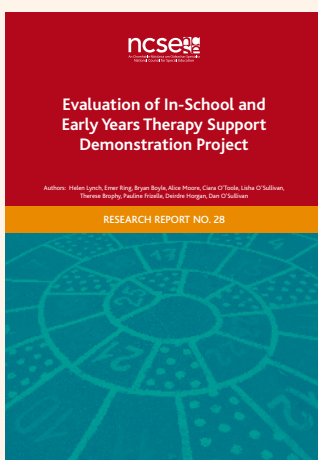
2.2 Our Publications and Completed Work

Evaluation of In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project

The evaluation of the first year of the In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project was published. This innovative project involved the development and implementation of a speech and language and occupational therapeutic support model for mainstream and special schools, and early years' settings. It saw a unique collaboration between the Departments of Health, Education and Children along with the HSE and the NCSE to deliver therapeutic supports and build capacity in 75 schools and 75 early years settings under a new model of provision.

The evaluation found a number of positive impacts arising from the first year. Educators reported that they had an increased ability to differentiate instruction as a result of therapists being in the setting. They also reported that the strategies and information they acquired during their work with therapists enabled them to identify needs, created more positive interactions with students/children and, notably, resulted in more positive academic engagement by students/children.

Students spoke positively about their experiences of the project while parents noted its potential to overcome waiting lists for therapy in the community, and the in-school nature of provision negating the need for children to be taken out of school to a clinic-based setting.



The evaluation noted challenges as well. There were significant delays in getting therapists in post and greater time than had been anticipated to ensure therapists were familiar with the requirements of an education environment. Therapists reported ongoing challenges arising from the management structure, including confusion over reporting lines and role clarity.

These findings presented important learning for the project's expansion. Government announced this commitment to expansion as part its 2021 budget. It committed to continuing the therapy project and expanding it to two other pilot areas in 2021 as part of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) expansion.

Review of Educational Provision in Adult Day Services

Work relating to this research concluded in 2020. The project focused on examining the provision of education and lifelong learning in adult day services delivered and/or funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The findings of the report to be published in 2021 include: the absence of any best practice framework nationally or internationally for the education of adults with disabilities in day services; the wide range of provision in these services that aims to contribute to both formal and informal learning; the need to enhance access to mainstream provision for adults with disabilities in more rural areas; and the need to further increase links with employers in some areas.

Suite of Research Relating to the Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes

We undertook a number of research projects and engaged with colleagues in the Department of Education Inspectorate on other work in support of the development of policy advice on educational provision for students in special schools and classes. The main projects finalised in 2020 included:

- ▶ A review of the research evidence relating to different aspects of educational provision in special and inclusive settings to identify evidence of outcomes and experiences for students with and without special educational needs.
- ▶ A cross-country/state review of specialist provision delivery in other administrations. The review examines how specialist placement and support are provided, how they are allocated, delivered and reviewed and student outcomes arising from such support.
- ▶ A review of up to 250 professional reports used as the basis for allocating students to special schools or classes.

While some evidence was found in undertaking this research, there is a relative dearth of high-quality, outcome-focused published studies. In addition, while all administrations that responded to our survey delivered some form of specialist provision such as special schools and/or classes, available administrative data was lacking on outcomes for students accessing this form of support.

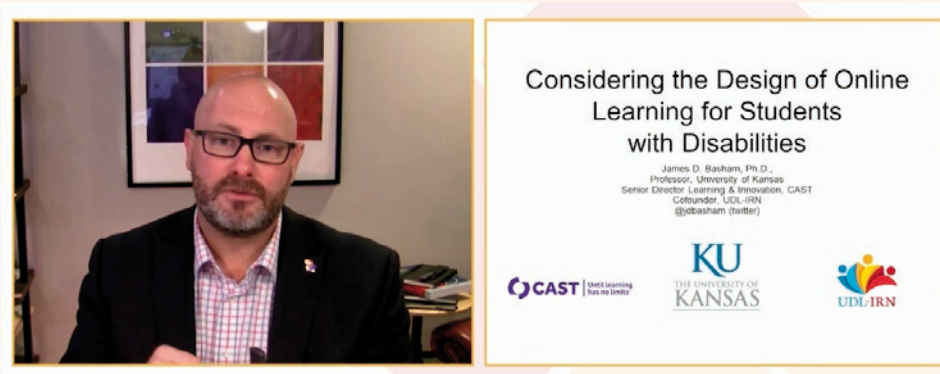
2.3 Ongoing Research in 2020

As part of the NCSE's management of the School Inclusion Model, a comprehensive evaluation of the project was commissioned in late 2019 to examine its development, implementation and outcomes. The study is being undertaken by the ESRI along with Dublin City University. The project implementation delay due to the pandemic, however, has imposed a natural delay on the evaluation to ensure that data is only captured as the project progresses. It is expected to recommence in 2021.

2.4 New Research

One new project commissioned in late 2020 will examine the experience and destination of young people with special educational and learning needs exiting the school system. The objective is to enhance our understanding of the data sources available on young people leaving school with a view to supporting the NCSE's role in planning and coordinating education services for adults with disabilities. The research will map those data sources to identify gaps in current knowledge. Subsequently, it will track cohorts of young people about whom less is known after they leave school (for example, those who remain at home), identifying and examining the reasons for their post-school destinations and their experiences of them.

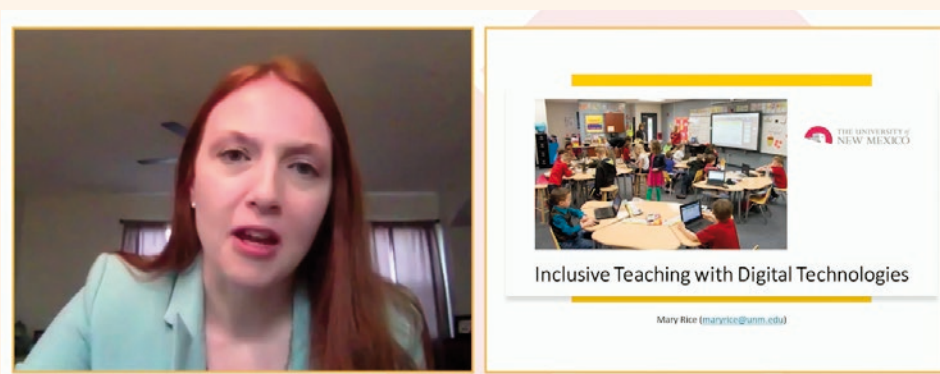
2.5 Research Conference 2020



James Basham, University of Kansas, speaking at the NCSE Research Conference.

The annual NCSE research conference took place on November 19th, 2020 in Croke Park Conference Centre. Over 250 delegates attended with a mix of teachers, adults with disabilities, parents, researchers, principals, academics, disability advocacy group representatives, psychologists, government department and agency officials and union representatives.

The conference looked at the theme of online learning and inclusion for students with special educational needs. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges for educators, students and parents in ensuring learning continued when schools closed. The conference heard from international experts engaged in this area on what works to support students with special educational needs in an online learning environment, what strategies teachers can use and what the future might look like as we learn to live with COVID-19. Conference explored the NCSE’s journey during the pandemic.



Mary Rice, University of New Mexico, speaking at the NCSE Research Conference.



Minister of State Josepha Madigan's opening address at the NCSE Research Conference 2020.





Strategic Goal 3

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

Strategic Goal 3

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

3.1 Introduction

A key role for the NCSE is to provide the Minister for Education with expert, independent, evidence-informed policy advice on the education of children with special educational needs. This section details the progress made on the policy advice on special schools and classes as well as our international work to learn from and share knowledge of special and inclusive education matters in other countries. The expanding area of our practice development role is also noted here.

3.2 Progress on Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes

During 2020, the NCSE significantly progressed its policy advice on special schools and classes. The consultation process continued with educational partners; the online consultation survey was completed; Council members received additional expert presentations; and the research strands were concluded by year end.

A further study visit to London investigated how England was responding to its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The UK's position is that special schools and resourced provision (similar to special classes) form part of an inclusive education system that is incompatible with the current interpretation of Article 24.

The NCSE visited two schools during this visit and engaged in discussions with academics, officials from the Department of Education (SEND section), Ofsted, as well as representatives from the Council for Disabled Children, National Children's Deaf Society and the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN).

Council met several times during the year to reflect on all the evidence strands and develop a draft paper. Though finalising this was delayed due to the pandemic, the NCSE expects to submit the advice paper to the Department of Education in 2021.

3.3 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The NCSE continued to support the work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE). This independent organisation, essentially a platform for collaboration for its member countries, works towards ensuring more inclusive education systems by building an evidence base through research and collaboration that informs its work.

During 2020, the NCSE both benefited from and contributed to the work of EASNIE by:

- ▶ Continuing to engage with representative board members and national coordinators on research work to support the development of our policy advice on special schools and classes;
- ▶ Publishing research on initial teacher education for inclusion using the EASNIE profile of inclusive teachers as a core reference and benchmark for the research. This served to further disseminate its work to NCSE stakeholders and research consumers;
- ▶ Providing information on special and inclusive education in Ireland to EASNIE and individual member-states.

Demonstrating Inclusive Science

FÉILTE, the Teaching Council's annual Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence, took place online in October 2020. This was one of the largest gatherings of teachers in Ireland and marked the first occasion a workshop was presented by an NCSE representative. *Demonstrating Inclusive Science* emphasised that students learn best when communication is very clear. Demonstrations of science can greatly enhance verbal communication. They can have great impact on and appeal to a variety of learning styles. Throughout the workshop attention was directed to students' various traits and characteristics that teachers need to be aware of.

NCSE sensory lead Madeline Hickey collaborated with David Keenahan of the Institute of Physics to design and deliver this workshop which can be viewed here <https://vimeo.com/463436632/99d5d89515>



David Keenahan of the Institute of Physics introducing a visual demonstration of acceleration in a way that supports the understanding of students.



Strategic Goal 4

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

Strategic Goal 4

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

4.1 Introduction

Under the EPSEN Act, 2004 the NCSE's role includes reviewing generally the provision made for people with disabilities to avail of further and higher education and training provision after they have completed school.

4.2 Adult Education and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities (2015-24) Transition Planning

The Adult Education and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) is a cross Government approach bringing together actions by different Departments and State agencies, including the NCSE, in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges affecting employment of people with disabilities.

One target of building skills, capacity and independence for young people with disabilities involves a commitment by the HSE and NCSE to develop a transition programme to meet their needs when leaving school and starting a career. The NCSE and HSE transition project group was established in 2019 and had agreed to explore a holistic approach to transition. To make further progress, the group determined the need to incorporate representatives from the other agencies and Departments. A meeting of the reconstituted oversight group with additional representatives from SOLAS, the Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) and Department of Education met early in 2020 to agree a revised work plan and timelines. The COVID-19 pandemic meant this group was unable to progress nevertheless but it reconvened in late 2020 and agreed an updated work plan and related timelines for 2021.

4.3 Disability Act 2005

During 2020 the NCSE engaged with relevant stakeholders on the implications of Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 with reference to sections that began for adults aged 18 in June 2020. However, the pandemic affected this engagement with stakeholders and engagement remains ongoing.



Strategic 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

Strategic 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

5.1 Introduction

In 2020 the NCSE continued to develop our organisation to ensure we were operating effectively and in compliance with all our statutory, regulatory and governance requirements. One of our key roles is to provide information to parents, schools and all our stakeholders on special education matters. Throughout the year, we engaged with our stakeholders in different ways, including through our staff, our website and social media. This section outlines our activities in these areas across the year.

5.2 Further Development and Finalisation of the NCSE's Interim Management Structure

In 2020, the NCSE continued to conclude the integration of staff and supports of special education services that transitioned to it in March 2017. Central to this work was creating ten teams across five regions covering the entire country. Each team now combines the expertise of SENOs, visiting teachers and advisers to meet the needs of students, schools and families with the goal of improving student outcomes. While these staff had been supported by interim team leaders with each region having an interim manager, all team manager and regional manager positions were filled on a permanent basis during 2020.

This work also involved establishing a policy and practice section in the organisation. While this maintains the NCSE's strong and longstanding focus on developing policy advice, it is now also responsible for practice development across the organisation, with the appointment of specialist leads to support this work. During the year all remaining specialist lead vacancies were filled. At head office, the IT and finance activities of the former organisations have been fully integrated into the NCSE.

Effecting significant change in any organisation is never without its challenges. For the NCSE these included bringing together organisations with their own distinct cultures and work practices while maintaining their high standards of service delivery to students with special educational needs, their families and schools.

5.3 Delivering Online Educational Support and Resources to Students Model Recognised at Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards

Each year, certain initiatives are shortlisted for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, which are all examples of best practice and innovation across Government Departments and offices. In 2020, following the challenges of COVID-19 restrictions, the NCSE's new model for delivering online educational support and resources to students was shortlisted, along with other initiatives, and selected as the overall winner in the Excellence in Innovation category.



Some of the members of the NCSE project team who were awarded a Civil Service Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award in 2020.

5.4 Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) Leaders Award recognition for Promoting the Employment of Graduates with Disabilities

Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) is a work placement programme to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities, and build employers' capacity to integrate disability into mainstream workplaces. Participating employers (WAM Leaders) collaborate with WAM to offer mentored and paid placements for the interested graduates. This partnership enables both parties to benefit from each other thus ensuring genuine learning opportunities for all. The NCSE's participation in the scheme earned it a WAM Leaders' award for promoting the employment of graduates with disabilities.

5.5 Information for Parents

Each year our SENOs deliver the NCSE's parental information programme which aims to inform parents and guardians of children starting school of the educational services and supports available in their areas. SENOs answer questions from parents/guardians and distribute the extensive range of NCSE information leaflets and booklets to them.

The pandemic disrupted delivery of these sessions. Before restrictions came into place, however, SENOs had already delivered 15 information sessions to over 240 parents. Feedback to SENOs was again very positive on the sessions and material available.

5.6 Data Protection

In compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the NCSE published a full Data Protection Statement on our website at <http://www.ncse.ie/ncse-data-protection>. This sets out how we collect personal data, how it is used and how individuals can interact with the NCSE about the data.

In 2020 we processed four Data Access Requests, in accordance with the regulations.

5.7 Consultative Forum

The NCSE engages with the Consultative Forum, appointed under the EPSEN Act, on special education matters. The Council appoints up to 17 members following a prescribed consultation process. In addition, three members are appointed by the Minister.

The forum met only once online – on January 28th, 2020 – due to COVID-19 restrictions. At this meeting, three topics were considered: possible implications arising out of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018; a draft framework for teacher professional learning; and thoughts for consideration in developing a new NCSE website.

Forum membership and attendance at the 2020 meeting are listed below.

NCSE Consultative Forum

Council-appointed Members		Attendance
Fidelma Brady	Education officer, Down Syndrome Ireland	1
Feargal Brougham	President, Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)	1
Miriam Colum	Lecturer in special educational needs, Marino Institute of Education	1
Marina Cusack	Special educational needs coordinator in a post-primary school	0
Lorraine Dempsey	Chairperson of Inclusion Ireland	0
Ciarán Finlay	Policy and public affairs advisor, National Disability Authority (NDA)	1
Padraig Flanagan	Principal, post-primary school	1

Council-appointed Members		Attendance
Margaret Flood	Education officer, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)	1
Martin Gallen	Senior educational psychologist, Donegal Education and Training Board	1
Paddy Greally	Retired children's services manager, Brothers of Charity	1
Ann Higgins	Principal, special school	1
Patricia McCarthy	Inclusion in education and society research team, Trinity College Dublin	1
Anne Melly	Disability specialist, Health Service Executive (HSE)	1
Anna Ní Chartúir	Special educational needs coordinator, Gaeltacht primary school	1
Gerard O'Carroll	Lecturer in inclusion, Institute of Technology, Tralee	1
Tracie Tobin	Principal, DEIS primary school	0
Madeline Hickey	Sensory lead, policy and practice development, NCSE	1

Members Appointed by Minister for Education		Attendance
Christine Chapple	Senior psychologist, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	1
Catriona Hanevy	Assistant principal officer, Department of Education	1
Paul Stevens	Primary inspector, Department of Education	1

5.8 Governance

Performance Management

The NCSE Statement of Strategy covers the period 2017-21. An annual work plan for 2020 based on the strategy was developed and approved by Council in December 2019 with progress reviewed quarterly, alongside associated risks. We conducted the annual review of our 2019 risk register and Council agreed an updated version for 2020 on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Annual Accounts

The 2020 annual accounts are expected to be presented to the Minister in June 2021 pending the audit's completion. The NCSE annual accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and, following audit, are submitted to the Minister and then laid before the Oireachtas and published on the NCSE website. The annual accounts are presented and published separately from this report.

Confirmation of Compliance with Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

The NCSE adopted the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016. All agencies are required to comply with the code's full requirements. Appendix 1 details the confirmations of NCSE compliance with the code.

In addition, in 2020, the NCSE commissioned an internal audit of compliance with the code. The auditors found no high or medium priority observations and concluded 'that substantial assurance can be placed on the sufficiency and operation of internal controls... relevant to compliance with the Code'.

Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015

The NCSE's chief executive is a designated public official under this Act.

5.9 The Council of the NCSE



NCSE Council 2019-22 with the chief executive officer: Back row (from left): Eamon Clavin, Anne Tansey, Peter Archer, Antoinette Nic Gearailt, Dharragh Hunt, Pat Goff and Don Mahon.

Front row (from left): Teresa Griffin, chief executive officer, Áine Lynch, Joe Hayes (chairperson), Deirbhile Nic Craith, Clodagh Ní Mhaoilchiaráin, Eileen Daly. Inset: Carol Cuffe, who resigned from the Council during 2020.

Our governance authority is the Council of the National Council for Special Education. It is appointed by the Minister for Education under Section 21 of the EPSEN Act, 2004. The term of office of chairperson and ordinary Council members expires on December 31st, 2022.

The Council, whose functions are set out in section 20 of the EPSEN Act, is accountable to the Minister for Education and responsible for ensuring good governance. Its work and responsibilities are set out in the EPSEN Act and Corporate Governance Guide for Council Members, which specifically set out matters reserved for the body. Its business and duties are further outlined in the Council Terms of Reference and Standing Orders. Standing items considered by Council include:

- ▶ declaration of interests
- ▶ reports from committees
- ▶ financial reports/management accounts
- ▶ performance report
- ▶ reserved matters, and
- ▶ review of risks associated with NCSE

The chief executive generally manages and controls staff, administration and Council business as set out in section 24 of the EPSEN Act. Regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the NCSE are the responsibility of the chief executive officer and senior management team as set out in the Council-approved Statement of Strategy (2017-21).

The Council is responsible for preparing the annual plan and financial statements. Confirmation that the latter provide a true and fair view of the NCSE's financial performance and position in 2020 is provided in our audited annual accounts which are published separately.

As required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Council reviewed its performance and that of its committees during the year.

The Council met on six occasions during 2020 and the following table contains details of individual members and their attendance.

Membership of the Council of the NCSE during 2019

Name	Details	Attendance
Joe Hayes* <i>Chairperson</i>	Former Irish ambassador to China, Denmark and Iceland, to the Czech Republic and Ukraine and latterly to Singapore, Indonesia, The Philippines, Brunei and Timor Leste	6
Don Mahon* <i>Deputy Chairperson</i>	Former assistant chief inspector in the Department of Education (DE)	6
Peter Archer	Former chief executive officer of the Educational Research Centre	6
Eamon Clavin	Divisional inspector in the Department of Education (DE)	6
Carol Cuffe	Head of social care, CHO 7, Health Service Executive	1†
Eileen Daly	Further and higher education disability officer and career guidance practitioner	6
Pat Goff	Deputy chief executive of the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)	6
Dharragh Hunt	Policy and public affairs adviser, National Disability Authority	6

Name	Details	Attendance
Áine Lynch*	Chief executive, the National Parents' Council Primary	5
Clodagh Ní Mhaoilchiaráin	Príomhoide, Gaelscoil Bhaile Brigín	5
Deirbhile Nic Craith	Assistant general secretary and director of education and research with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO).	6
Antoinette Nic Gearailt*	Former president of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)	6
Anne Tansey	Director of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the psychological service of the Department of Education (DE)	5

Those members whose names are denoted with an asterisk * are serving a second consecutive term on Council.

† Carol Cuffe retired from Council during 2020.



Minister for Education, Josepha Madigan, attending an online Council meeting on December 9th, 2020.

Council Committees

The Council created five committees under Section 33 of the EPSEN Act. These report in accordance with their terms of reference and governance guidelines as determined by the Council. Members each serve on one or more committees. In the case of the audit and risk committee, Council has appointed an external chairperson with relevant experience.

Audit and Risk (four meetings)	Attendance
Lisa Campbell, chairperson	4
Peter Archer	3
Don Mahon	4
Antoinette Nic Gearailt	4

Finance (five meetings)	Attendance
Antoinette Nic Gearailt, chairperson	4
Eileen Daly	4
Pat Goff	5
Deirbhile Nic Craith	4

Chief executive Performance (one meeting)* December 2020 meeting rescheduled to February 2021	Attendance
Joe Hayes, chairperson	1
Peter Archer	1
Antoinette Nic Gearailt	1

* Second meeting took place in Feb 2021.

Research (five meetings)	Attendance
Peter Archer, chairperson	5
Dharragh Hunt	5
Áine Lynch	4
Anne Tansey	4

Strategy and Policy (five meetings)	Attendance
Don Mahon, chairperson	5
Eamon Clavin	5
Carol Cuffe	2*
Clodagh Ní Mhaoilchiaráin	5

* Carol Cuffe retired from Council during 2020.



Appendices

Appendix 1

Confirmation of Compliance with Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016

NCSE System of Internal Control (SIC)

The Council is responsible for ensuring that an effective system of internal control is maintained and operated in accordance with Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 and for reviewing annually the effectiveness of the internal controls, including financial, operational and compliance controls and risk management processes and procedures. The system of internal control, which accords with guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has been in place in the NCSE for the year ended December 31st, 2020. Confirmation of the annual review of effectiveness of the NCSE System of Internal Control in 2020 is provided in the NCSE audited accounts that are published separately.

Schedule of Reserved and Delegated Functions

The Council has agreed a formal schedule of specific matters specifically reserved to it for decision to ensure its appropriate direction and control of the NCSE. Council has also agreed a schedule of delegations to the chief executive. More detail on these is available in the audited accounts published separately and in the Corporate Governance Guide for Council members.

Tax and Regulatory Compliance

There have been no communications concerning non-compliance with requirements of regulatory or tax authorities regarding any matter. The NCSE is not aware of any actual or possible non-compliance with laws or regulations that could affect our financial statements.

NCSE Travel Policy

Government policy on business travel is being complied with in all respects. The NCSE has developed and maintains its travel policy and procedures in accordance with Government requirements.

Procurement Policy

Government policy on public procurement is being applied in the NCSE together with adherence to the rules and procedures of the public spending code.

The NCSE avails of shared service arrangements and central drawdown contracts, including where possible those established by the Office of Government Procurement.

Disposal of Assets

Disposal of assets by the NCSE fully complies with requirements set down by the code of practice.

Confidential Disclosures

The NCSE has an agreed policy and procedures for dealing with protected disclosures in line with the Protected Disclosures Act (2014). No issues were raised under this procedure in 2020.

Child Protection

The NCSE has developed procedures and guidelines for staff on child protection and welfare matters as part of the new requirements enacted in 2017 under the Children First Act, 2015. The NCSE guidelines were updated again in June 2020 and are available on our website at www.ncse.ie. Any matters drawn to our attention in 2020 were processed in accordance with our procedures.

Audit

The NCSE has established an internal audit function and has agreed an internal audit charter. Council has appointed an Audit and Risk Committee with agreed terms of reference including oversight of the internal audit function, risk management and review of the draft annual accounts.

Annual Energy Efficiency Reporting

In 2020, the NCSE reported the organisation's energy performance in 2019 to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland as required under EU regulations. The NCSE continues to track progress towards the 2020 target outlined in the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2014, which underpins commitment to a 33 per cent energy saving for the public sector by 2020. It may not be possible to achieve this saving given the expansion of support services in recent years. The data for 2019 is provided below and is compared with the previously reported 2018 figures.

Table A1.1 Overview of NCSE Energy Usage 2019 and 2018

Energy Type	Units	2019*	2018
Electricity	MWh	208	140
Thermal	MWh	256	206
Renewable	MWh	0	0

* From 2019 NCSE has changed the methodology for reporting its energy consumption, based on advice from SEAI.

Appendix 2

NCSE Staffing

Grade	Staff in Post End 2020
Civil Servants	
Chief executive	1
Principal	4
Regional managers	5
Specialist lead	5
Assistant principal	7
Team managers	9
Behaviour practitioners	5
Occupational therapists	2
Speech and language therapists	2
Therapist Manager	1
Special educational needs organisers (SENO)	66
Higher executive officers	8
Administrative officer	1
Executive officers	10
Clerical officers	9
Intern	1
Sub-total (civil servants)	136
Advisers	49
Visiting teachers	42
Sub-total (public servants)	91
TOTAL	227

Appendix 3

Statistical Information for Academic Years 2011-12 to 2019-20

Statistical Information for Previous Academic Years 2011-12 to 2019-20

Tables 1-4 provide trend data for school years 2011-12 to 2019-20 in respect of NCSE resource allocation activity. There is an upward trend across the majority of areas.

Table 1: Applications Received from Schools for Access to Additional Resources⁶

Type of Applications	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
SNA	6,500	7,454	8,703	8,656	8,621	9,553	8,781	9,855	12,275
Transport	2,310	2,520	2,787	3,289	3,423	3,460	3,597	3,847	4,302
Assistive technology	2,215	2,721	2,882	2,928	3,564	4,686	4,157	4,453	5,510
LITH ⁷	14,490	13,935	15,952	16,209	18,177	19,384	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total applications	25,515	26,630	30,324	31,082	33,785	37,083	16,535	18,155	22,087

Table 2: Special Education Resources Allocated to Schools by the NCSE

Type of Posts	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
SNA	10,320	10,503	10,671	11,174	11,984	13,006	14,063	15,030	16,125
Low incidence teachers	5,265	5,265	5,722	6,204	6,823	7,427	N/A ⁶	N/A	N/A
Special school teachers	1,056	1,078	1,060	1,135	1,159	1,197	1,205	1,223	1,231
Special class teachers	602	695	823	956	1,136	1,304	1,480	1,663	1,865

⁶ The application process for low incidence teaching hours was replaced by the new model for allocating special education teacher for school year 2017-18.

Table 3: Numbers of Students Supported by NCSE Allocations

Students	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
SNA mainstream	12,150	13,268	13,907	15,101	16,874	18,513	19,571	20,550	22,628
LITH	29,426	32,480	35,763	38,414	42,931	47,065	N/A1	N/A	N/A
Special classes	3,286	3,684	4,353	4,706	5,472	6,393	7,390	8,410	9,259
Special schools	6,848	7,077	7,299	7,459	7,607	7,739	7,954	7,921	7,953

Table 4: Special Classes Type by Disability⁷

Type of Special Classes	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
ASD EI ⁸	34	49	72	96	118	127	130	132	132
ASD	296	364	439	531	647	762	917	1,067	1,241
Spelling and language	64	64	64	63	63	65	65	65	63
Mild GLD	73	71	67	65	64	62	57	59	57
Mod GLD	31	28	39	39	48	58	59	62	62
Hearing	15	16	16	15	17	16	16	16	18
EBD/SEBD	9	7	8	11	10	10	10	11	11
Other	26	29	32	35	41	49	50	51	56
Total	548	628	737	855	1,008	1,149	1,304	1,463	1,640

⁷ Early Intervention classes established for students of pre-school age with autism in mainstream schools.

Appendix 4

Description of Disability Categories⁸

High Incidence Disabilities

Disability Category	Description
Borderline mild general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range of 70 to 79.
Mild general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range 50 to 69.
Specific learning disability	Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as: Being of average intelligence or higher. Having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the second percentile on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.

Low Incidence Disabilities

Disability category	Description
Autism/autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	A psychiatrist or psychologist will have assessed and classified such pupils as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM-IV, DSM-V, or ICD-10 criteria.
Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems	Such pupils are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school.

8 Department of Education and Skills Circular SP ED 08/02.

Disability category	Description
Deaf/Hard of hearing	Such pupils have a hearing disability that is so serious it impairs significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech, thus preventing them from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. Most of them have been prescribed hearing aids and are availing of the services of a visiting teacher.
Moderate general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a moderate general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range 35 to 49.
Multiple disabilities	Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of the low incidence disabilities described.
Pupils with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome	Such pupils with an assessed syndrome, e.g. Down syndrome, William's syndrome and Tourette's syndrome in addition to any of the other low-incidence disabilities.
Physical disability	<p>Such pupils have permanent or protracted disabilities arising from such conditions as congenital deformities, spina bifida, dyspraxia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones or severe accidental injury. Because of the impairment of their physical function, they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities.</p> <p>Many require the use of a wheelchair, mobility or seating aid or other technological support.</p> <p>They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and coordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation, as for example severe dyspraxia.</p>
Severe and profound general learning disability	Such pupils have been assessed by a psychologist as having a severe or profound general learning disability. The pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed as being below 35. In addition, such pupils may have physical disabilities.

Disability category	Description
Severe emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems	The criteria for severe EBD are that the pupil is in the care of a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist for a severe clinical disorder. A very small number of pupils would be expected to fall within this category.
Specific speech and language disorder	Such pupils should meet each of the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Non-verbal or performance ability that must be within the average range or above, that is non-verbal or performance IQ of 90 or above. ▶ Assessed by a speech and language therapist and found to be at two or more standard deviations (SD) below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level (–2 SD or below, or below a standard score of 70) in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development. ▶ Two assessments: a psychological assessment and a speech and language assessment are necessary.
Blind/visual impairment	Such pupils have a visual disability so serious that it impairs significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from such conditions as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a visiting teacher.

Appendix 5

Glossary of Acronyms Used

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
CPD	Continuing professional development
DES	Department of Education
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EASNIE	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EBD	Emotional disturbance/behavioural disorder
ELC	Early learning centre
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
HSE	Health Service Executive
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ITE	Initial teacher education
IQ	Intelligence quotient
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OT	Occupational therapist
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SD	Standard deviation
SENO	Special educational needs organiser
SIC	System of Internal Control
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SNA	Special needs assistant
SLT	Speech and language therapist

Appendix 6

Infographic on main NCSE statistics

Number of Students Supported by SNAs

End of school year	SNA Posts	In Mainstream	In Special Classes	In Special Schools	
2019-20	16,125	22,628	9,259	7,953	
2018-19	15,030	20,550	8,410	7,921	



The NCSE opened

189

new special classes in 2019-20 compared to

164

new special classes in 2018-19

2019-20

Number of special classes

1,640

Number of special class places

10,395

2018-19

Number of special classes

1,463

Number of special class places

9,336

Number of Applications Processed in 2020 Compared to 2019

School Year	SNA	School Transport	Assistive technology/ specialist equipment	Total
2019-20	12,275	4,302	5,510	22,087
2018-19	9,855	3,847	4,453	18,155

For the 2020 Calendar Year



5,631

school-going children and

803

babies/preschool children were supported by 44 visiting teachers



1,440

applications were received from schools for in-school support



5,370

teachers were engaged in professional development and learning at NCSE seminars and whole staff seminars



7,819

professional development and learning days were provided at NCSE seminars and whole staff seminars



168

NCSE external courses and 93 whole staff seminars were delivered

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