

## Stakeholder views on the NCSE - initial findings from an independent evaluation of the NCSE frontline services

Professor Deborah Robinson, University of Derby and Dr. Lisha O'Sullivan, Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick

### Abstract

In 2022, the NCSE commissioned an independent evaluation of their Frontline Services. The project team consists of a consortium of researchers from the University of Derby, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and IFF Research. The evaluation took place across 2022 and 2023 and deployed a mixed methods approach. This included a survey of 771 parents/carers and 558 school staff, in-depth interviews with 33 stakeholders (parent/carers, school staff, NCSE service deliverers), and in-depth case studies of 9 schools and 9 pupils with special educational needs who attended the schools. The case studies element was enacted by 6 teacher researchers, supported by researchers at MIC, and included an inclusive elicitation method that enabled researchers to access pupils' experiences of their own inclusion in school.

Initial findings indicate that the majority of school staff and parent/carers perceive the support provided by NCSE's frontline services are valuable. However, sentiments toward the NCSE and each of its front-line services were mixed and appear to be influenced by the quality of relationship with the Special Education Needs Officer (SENO); the stakeholder's experience of communication and how easeful or challenging it was; and whether the stakeholder perceived that a sufficient level of support or resource had resulted from their interaction with a service. Generally, considerations of the impact of a service were not in the forefront of participants' minds, with more focus being on experience of the process of getting (or not getting) additional support. However, analysis of the data arising from case studies has illustrated how frontline services function cumulatively to enable positive impacts, including pupils' meaningful engagement in their learning and their active participation within school communities. Pupils participating in the case studies felt a sense of belonging to their schools and narrated their own inclusion positively.

### Bios

**Deborah Robinson** is a Professor of Special Educational Needs, Disability, and Inclusion at the University of Derby. Deborah began her career working in an Inner London primary school in the 1980s, and her first class included children with disabilities. This was because the Local Authority had implemented a progressive policy of inclusion. Deborah worked as a SEND Co-ordinator and Deputy Principal with leadership focussed on inclusion. She has worked as a teacher educator for SEND and inclusion for many years and her specialist research has teacher education for SEND and inclusion. Her more recent research has investigated school leadership for inclusion and SEND in collaboration with 62 schools in the City of Derby. She directed an in-depth evaluation of Ireland's Access and Inclusion Model for the DCEDIY. Research on policies for SEND have also included an evaluation of Education Health and Care Plans for the DfE, and Statutory Assessment for pupils with Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties. Her most recent publications include a Special Issue of the British

Journal of Learning Difficulties, focussed on how education may catalyse social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities.

**Lisha O'Sullivan** is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Head of the Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. Lisha is a qualified play therapist and has extensive experience working with children and young people across education, community-based and therapeutic contexts. Lisha teaches on the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education (BAECCE) and the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programmes at MIC. Lisha's research interests include: the role of play in children's development; playful teaching and learning; inclusive pedagogical approaches; participatory research methods; teachers as researchers. Lisha has been involved in a number of research projects in the area of inclusive education including: the Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings (CEUD, NDA and DCYA), the Evaluation of In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project (NCSE), and the End of Year Three Evaluation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).