

Reflecting on the Last Two Decades and the Major Reform Agenda

Prof Emer Ring,

Dean of Early Childhood and Teacher Education,

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick,

Thursday 9th November 2022.

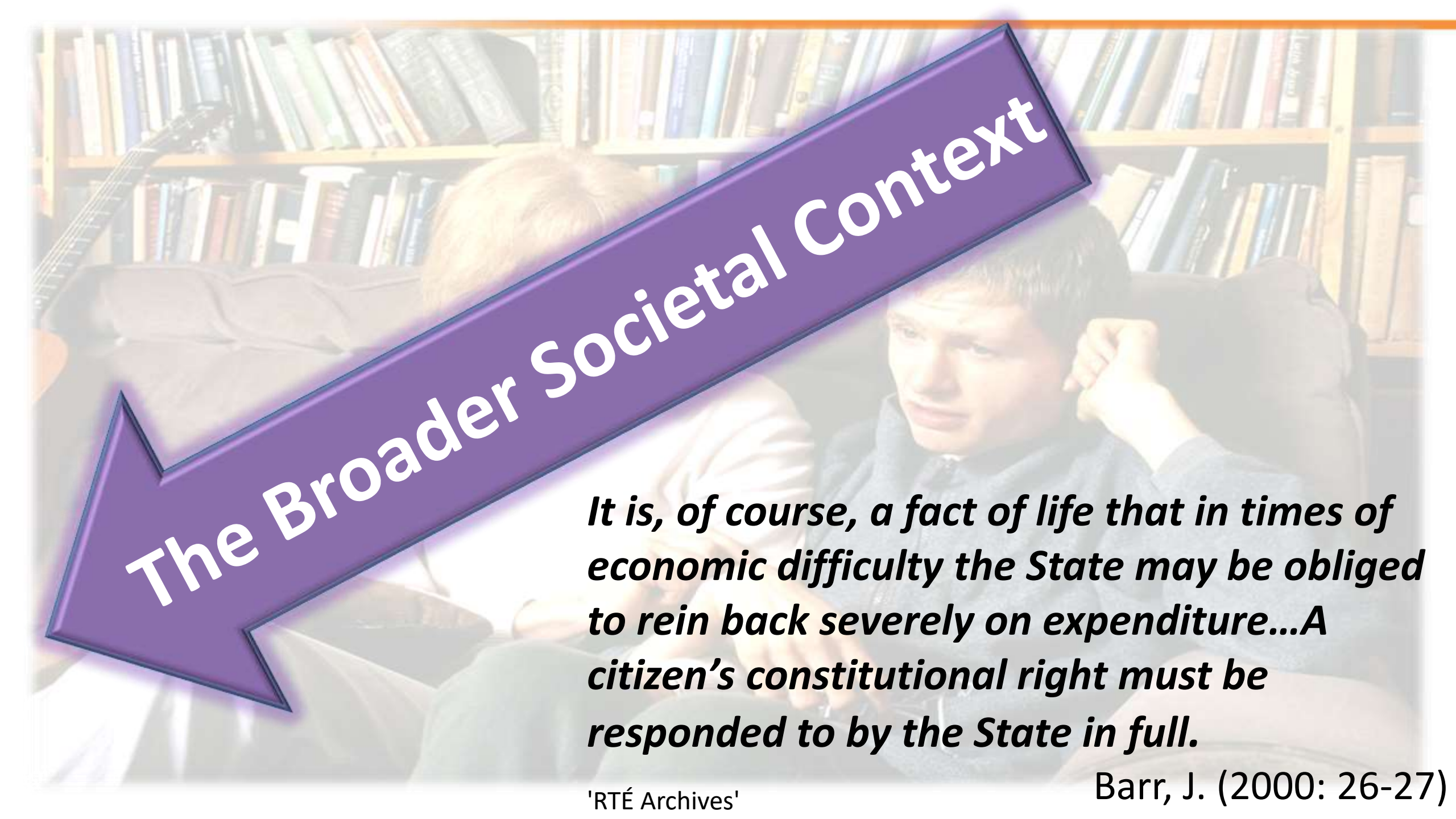
Overview

Broader Societal Context

A Desire for Change

Milestones of the Reform Agenda

Looking towards the Future



The Broader Societal Context

It is, of course, a fact of life that in times of economic difficulty the State may be obliged to rein back severely on expenditure...A citizen's constitutional right must be responded to by the State in full.

A Rapidly Evolving National and International Environment

- Financial Crisis 2008
- Economic Recession
- COVID -19 Pandemic
- Global Unrest
- Post-recessionary Resurgence
- Teacher Shortages





A Desire for Change

Hughes (2021)

Government Policy

Special Education across
Europe in 2003

Trends in provision in 18
European countries

European Agency for Development in Special
Needs Education

Current government policy is to encourage the maximum possible level of inclusion of pupils with special needs into mainstream schools and to put into place the necessary special supports to facilitate this development.

A Multi-track Approach

One-Track Approach

- Inclusion of almost all children within mainstream education – Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway.

Two-Track Approach

- Two distinct mainstream and special systems - Belgium and Switzerland.

Multi-Track Approach

- Multiple approaches– Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland and the United Kingdom - Germany and the Netherlands moving towards approach.

An Enlightened Rhetoric Underpinned by a Rights-Based Approach

Proclamation
of the
Irish Republic
1916

Article 10 -1922

Article 42.4
1937

European
Convention
on
Human
Rights

1950

Universal
Declaration
Human
on
Human
Rights

1955

United
Nations
Convention
on
the Rights
of the
Child

1989

United
Nations
Convention
on the Rights
of Persons
with
Disabilities

2006

Irish
Legislative
Context

From 1998



United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Article 28 – Article 23

1. States Parties recognize the **right of the child to education**, and with a view to **achieving this right progressively....basis of equal opportunity**, they shall, in particular:

(a) **Make primary education compulsory** and...**free** to all;

(b) Encourage the development of **different forms of secondary education...available** and **accessible to every child**,

(c) Make **higher education accessible** to all **on the basis of capacity...**



Article 3 UNCRC



1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the **best interests** of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 12 UNCRC



1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views **the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child**, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in **any judicial and administrative proceedings** affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 1

The purpose of the present Convention is to **promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.**

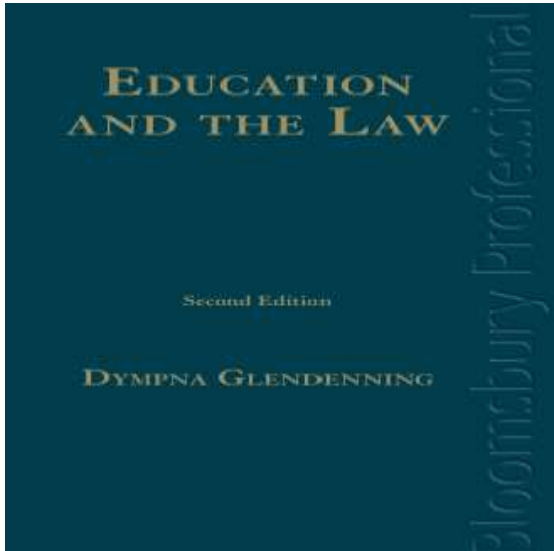


Article 24 – UNCRPD

1. States Parties recognize **the right of persons with disabilities to education**. With a view to realizing this right **without discrimination** and on the basis of **equal opportunity**, States Parties shall **ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning...**
2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:
 - (a) Persons with disabilities **are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability**, and that children with disabilities are not excluded... **on the basis of disability**;
 - (b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education **on an equal basis with others** in the **communities in which they live**;



Legislative Context: A Revolution in Educational Legislation*



Law alone can devise the structures within which education can be equitably delivered

Glendenning (2012:9)

- Education Act, 1998
- Education (Welfare) Act, 2000
- Equal Status Acts 2000-2028
- Disability Act 2005
- Education (Amendment) Act 2012
- Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018
- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004

*Hardiman, J. (2001: 711)



Visit gov.ie/uncrpd



Disability rights are human rights

Advancing the United Nations
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

in
Ireland

Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Learn more about what this means using the links below.

Litigation Seemed to be Driving Policy and Not Always Perhaps in the Right Direction*



O'Halloran (2000)

*Hughes (2021)

The National Council for Special Education

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2008 - 2011

FOREWORD

This Strategic Plan is being published at a time when the provision of special education in Ireland is about to undergo a sea change with the progressive implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act).

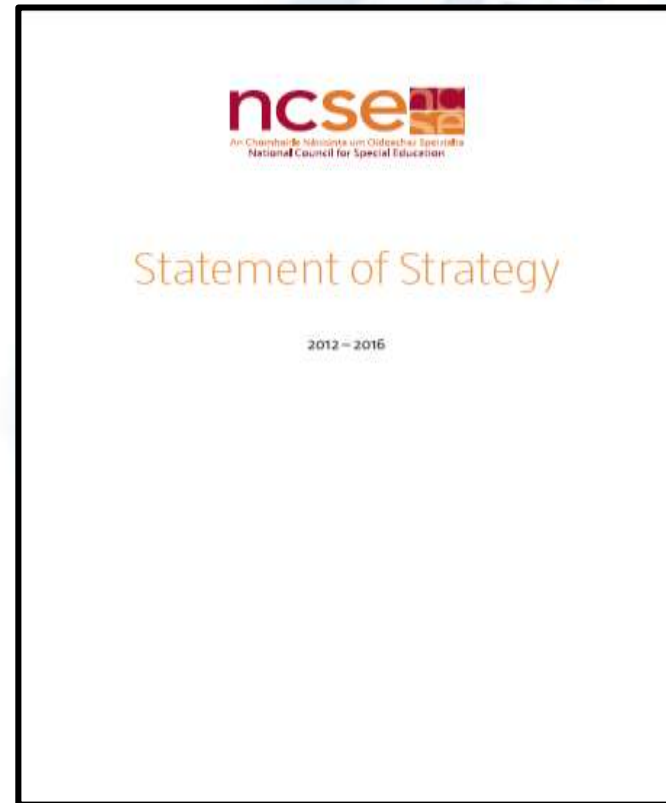
The plan reflects the functions of the National Council for Special Education as established under the Act and sets the key priorities of the Council in addressing the major change agenda envisaged by the EPSEN Act. The implementation of the EPSEN Act and embedding of its concept of inclusive education, underpinned by a series of statutory rights, will require a co-ordinated and sustained commitment by the many stakeholders involved in delivering on the vision and practicalities of the Act. While this plan sets out the key priorities and objectives of the Council and the action plan for achieving these objectives its delivery will require a collaborative approach by all who plan, support and deliver services to persons with special educational needs.

The key focus of this plan is provision of appropriate educational supports and improved educational outcomes for persons, and particularly children, with special educational needs. Its success will be judged on that basis.

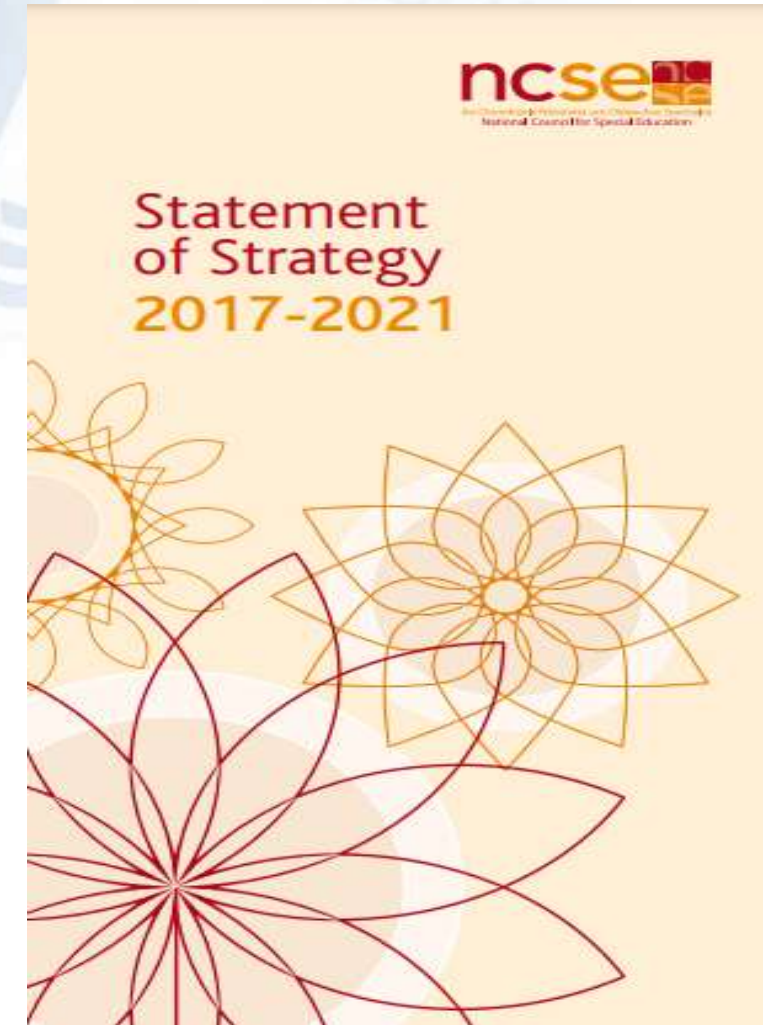
Delivery on the priorities set out in this statement will ensure that children with special educational needs receive appropriate education in an inclusive environment and achieve outcomes in accordance with their abilities.

Sydney Blain

5



2012-2016

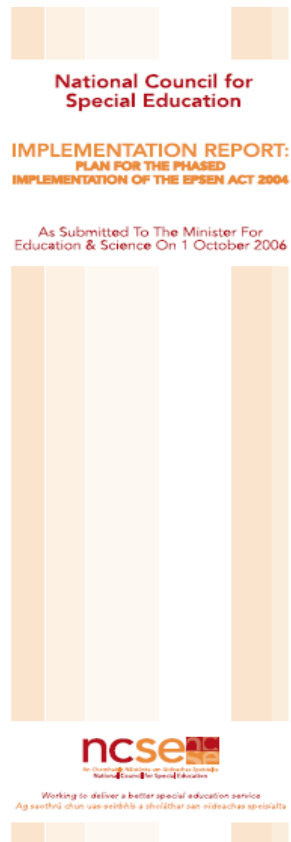


2017-2021

2008-2011

Ireland is about to undergo a sea change with the progressive implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act). The plan reflects the functions of the National Council for Special Education as established under the Act and sets the key priorities of the Council in addressing the major change agenda envisaged by the EPSEN Act. The implementation of the EPSEN Act and embedding of its concept of inclusive education, underpinned by a series of statutory rights, will require a co-ordinated and sustained commitment by the many stakeholders involved in delivering on the vision and practicalities of the Act.

The NCSE: A Tabula Rasa with a Difference

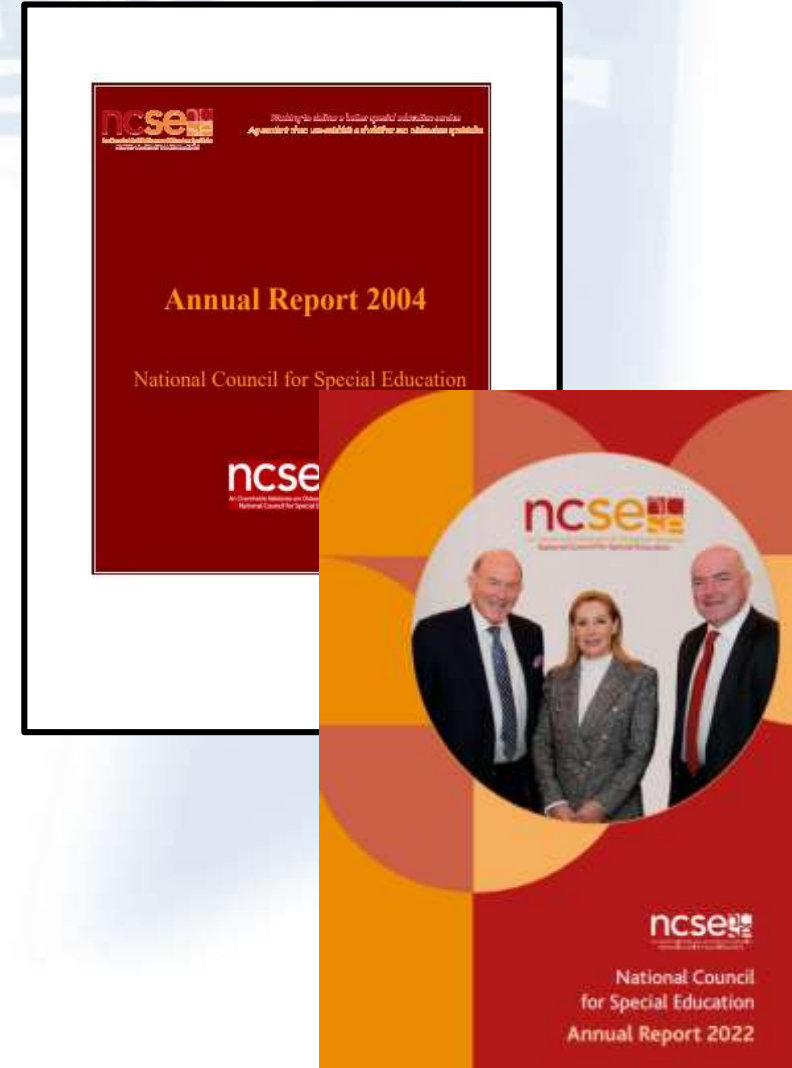


- Proclivity for Pragmatic Gradualism (Coolahan, 1989: 62)
- The future shape of education in Ireland needed to comprehend the broad principles of the EPSEN Act, 2004 (NCSE 2006:7)
- Not solely about additionality but the effective utilisation of existing resources (NCSE 2006:9)

An Analysis of NCSE Annual Reports from 2004-2022

Our children and young adults with special educational needs represent a very special cohort of our citizens whose needs and requirements have not been particularly well met in the past. There is a long road to travel in providing an educational regime for them which will change their lives and our hopes and expectations for them.

Tom Murray (2004)



From Pragmatic Gradualism to Coherent Policy Development

Commissioning research has been fundamental to the NCSE's ability to provide good policy advice. I think people forget that when the NCSE was established there was very little good research on special education in Ireland... I think in terms of what the NCSE does regarding its research, consultations with key stakeholders – you know that every year we are out there and we are talking about what should be happening and what needs to change – we have developed a very coherent approach to how you develop policy advice.

Teresa Griffin, CEO National Council for Special Education 2011-2022 (2022)

Research-led Agenda Across the System

Logos for An tSiol, An tSiol, and An tSiol.

An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland

COMMISSIONED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
2022

ncse
National Council for Special Education

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

Authors: Helen Lynch, Eoin Ring, Bryan Bayle, Aislinn Ryan, Cara O'Toole, Saffa O'Sullivan, Thomas Brophy, Pauline Truitt, Deirdre Morgan, Lisa O'Sullivan

RESEARCH REPORT NO. 28

A Systematic Literature Review to Support the Curriculum Specification Development for the area of Wellbeing

APRIL 2023

MIC
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
COLLEGE MAIRIE SAN SMAL

FINAL REPORT
February, 2023

MIC
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
COLLEGE MAIRIE SAN SMAL

STEM
EDUCATION
FOR ALL

ncse
National Council for Special Education

An Evaluation of Education Provision for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Ireland

Authors: Dáire King (Principal Investigator), Margaret Egan (Researcher), Claire Griffin, Salla Long, Isabella McCafferty, Mary Mahoney, Tanya O'Shea, Anne O'Brien, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Maria Ryan, Eileen Wall, with Beth Madden and Sarah Cribben (Research Associates)

RESEARCH REPORT NO. 21

Illustration of five diverse children holding hands.

Logos for MIC, An tSiol, and Maynooth University.

Linc
LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSION
IN THE EARLY YEARS
CEANNAIREACHT DO CHUMSIÚ
SNA LUATHBHLIANTA

Interim Evaluation of the Leadership for INclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme
17 June 2019

LINC (December 2017) led to evaluation of the leadership for INclusion in the early years LINC Programme, located in Ring, Rahilly, Bawn, Bawn, Adcocks, Bawn, Tuohy, Bawn, Cavan, Cavan, Cavan and Cavan 2019.

Focus on the Teacher-as-Researcher

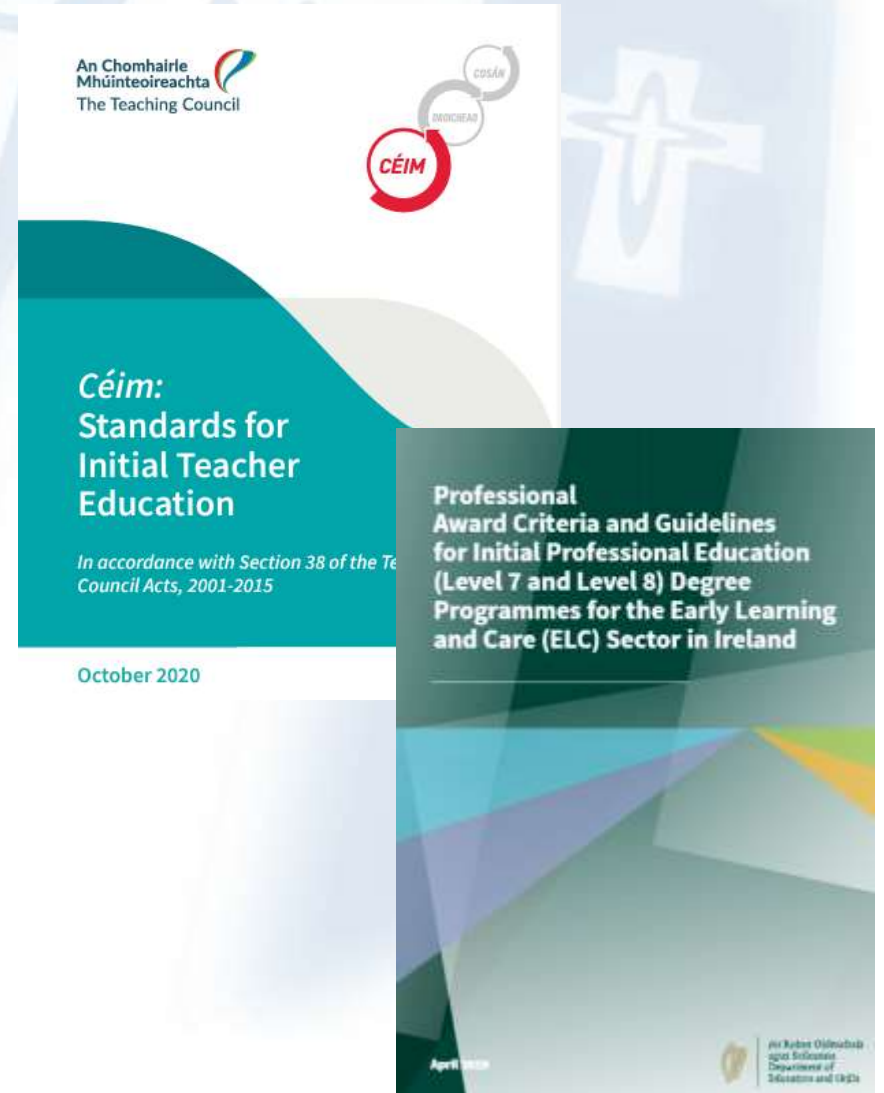


<https://www.mic.ul.ie/faculty-of-education/cumhacht>

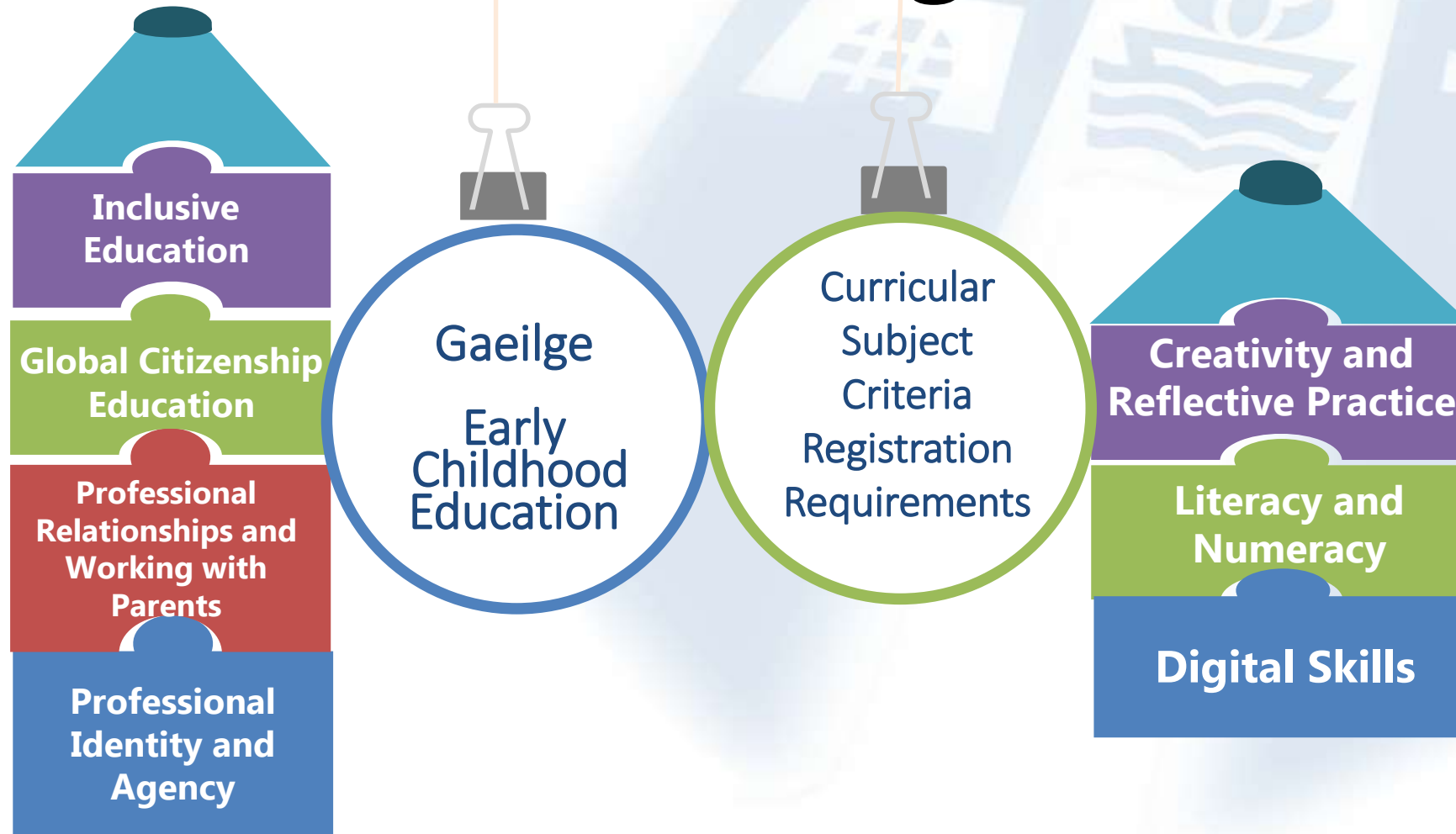
Professional Preparation

*As I've been looking at the education system more widely, I think more and more that **achieving optimal educational outcomes for children is heavily reliant on the skill of the workforce.** The vision and attitude of the workforce in terms of **inclusion** and respecting **human rights**, and their commitment to being **child-centred** is essential. Their behaviour, attitude and philosophy, but also their skill set is hugely important. Delivery of **high-quality undergraduate training** and **CPD** right through their career is crucial.*

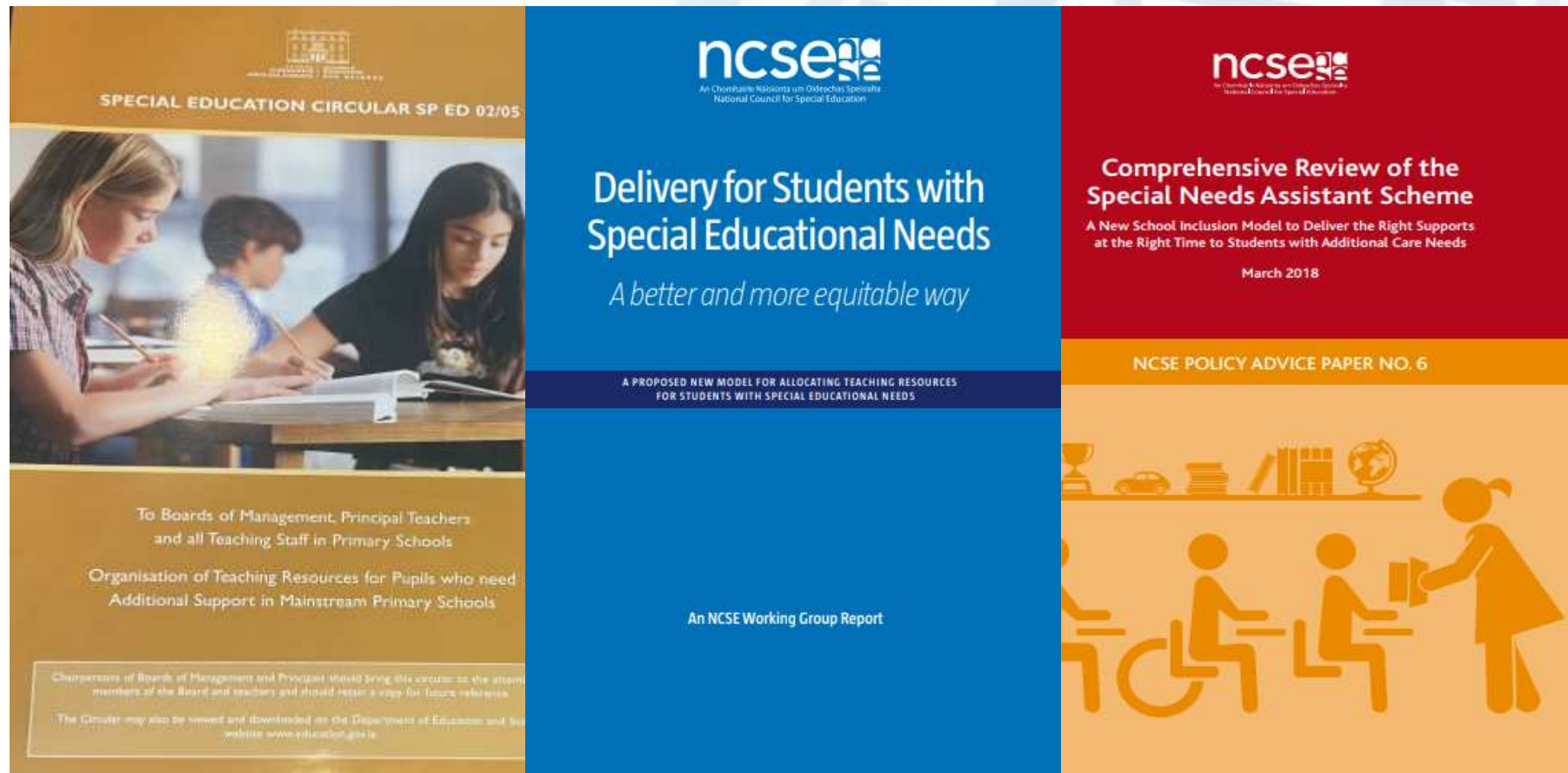
McNally, B. (2022)



Core Elements of Initial Teacher Education Programmes



A More Responsive Approach to Resource Allocation



2005

2014

2018

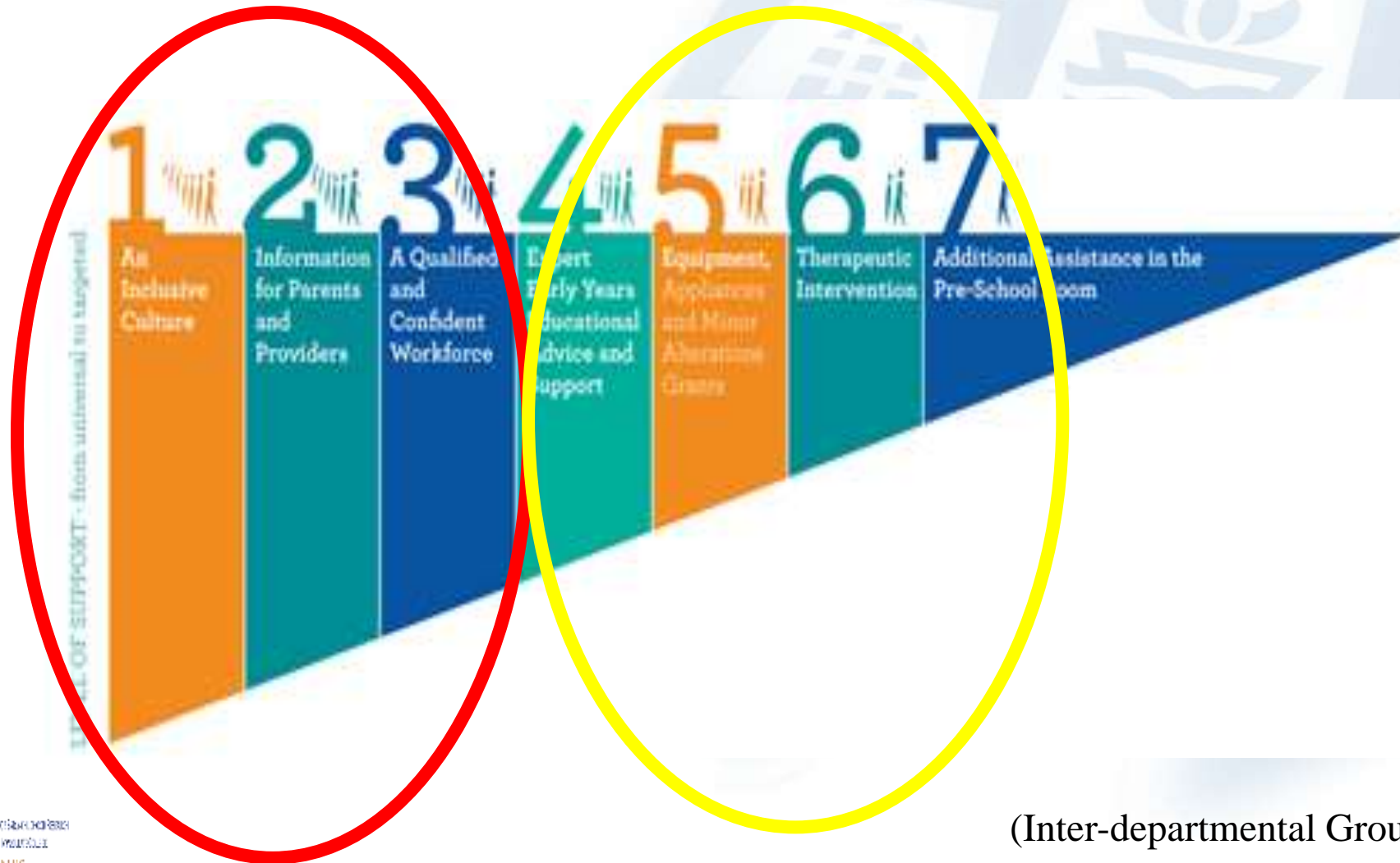
Establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children 2005



Everything happens incrementally. The only thing that happened with the big bang was free secondary education...O'Malley announced it and that was it. Everything else is incremental, effecting change at national level and particularly on enabling inter-departmental collaboration. No department has enough funding for everything they have to do. They also have their priorities. There's the Minister, what's in the programme for government has to be done.

Langford (2022)

The Access and Inclusion Model



The Appointment of the first Minister for State with Responsibility for Special Education



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[Consultations](#)

[Pub](#)

[Press release](#)

Minister Josepha Madigan vows to be a strong advocate for educational equality and opportunity in her new role in Special Education and Inclusion

From [Department of Education](#)

Published on 2 July 2020

Last updated on 2 July 2020

Minister of State Josepha Madigan TD has today begun her new role at the Department of Education with responsibility for Special Education and

Investment in Provision: A Snapshot

Budget 2023 in Numbers

€9.6 billion	2023 Budget of the Department of Education
686 teaching posts	206 special education teachers 438 special class teachers 42 teachers in special schools
20,368	Special Needs assistants – increase 1,194 from 2022
450	School building projects
54	Additional NEPS Psychologists
€2 million	Assistive technology in Education.
€13 million	Additional funding for NCSE

Investment in Provision: A Snapshot

Budget 2024 in Numbers

€10.65 billion	2023 Budget of the Department of Education
774 teaching posts	205 special education teachers 477 special class teachers 62 teachers in special schools
21,584	Special Needs assistants – increase 1,216 from 2023
500	School building projects
€92 million	Additional funding to school transport services
€5 million	Counselling services
€4 million	Professional Masters in Education initiative.

Department of Education (2023)

A photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest with trees in autumn foliage. A large, dark red arrow with a black outline is superimposed over the path, pointing from the bottom left towards the top right. The text "Looking towards the Future" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the arrow.

Looking towards the Future



Education as a Resource-Dependent Right

Pat Curtin, the first CEO of the NCSE summarises the predicament as not always being the “**what**” but rather the “**how**”, and advising of the need for shifting the focus to **how** children’s needs can be met within the time and resources available, advising that “we’re always going to have to operate within budgets. So, I think the focus has to continue to be on **innovation** and **different approaches** as well as of course **resources**”

Curtin (2022)

The Power of Ongoing Inter-departmental Policy Making



Translating Inter-departmental Policy Making into Practice





Linc

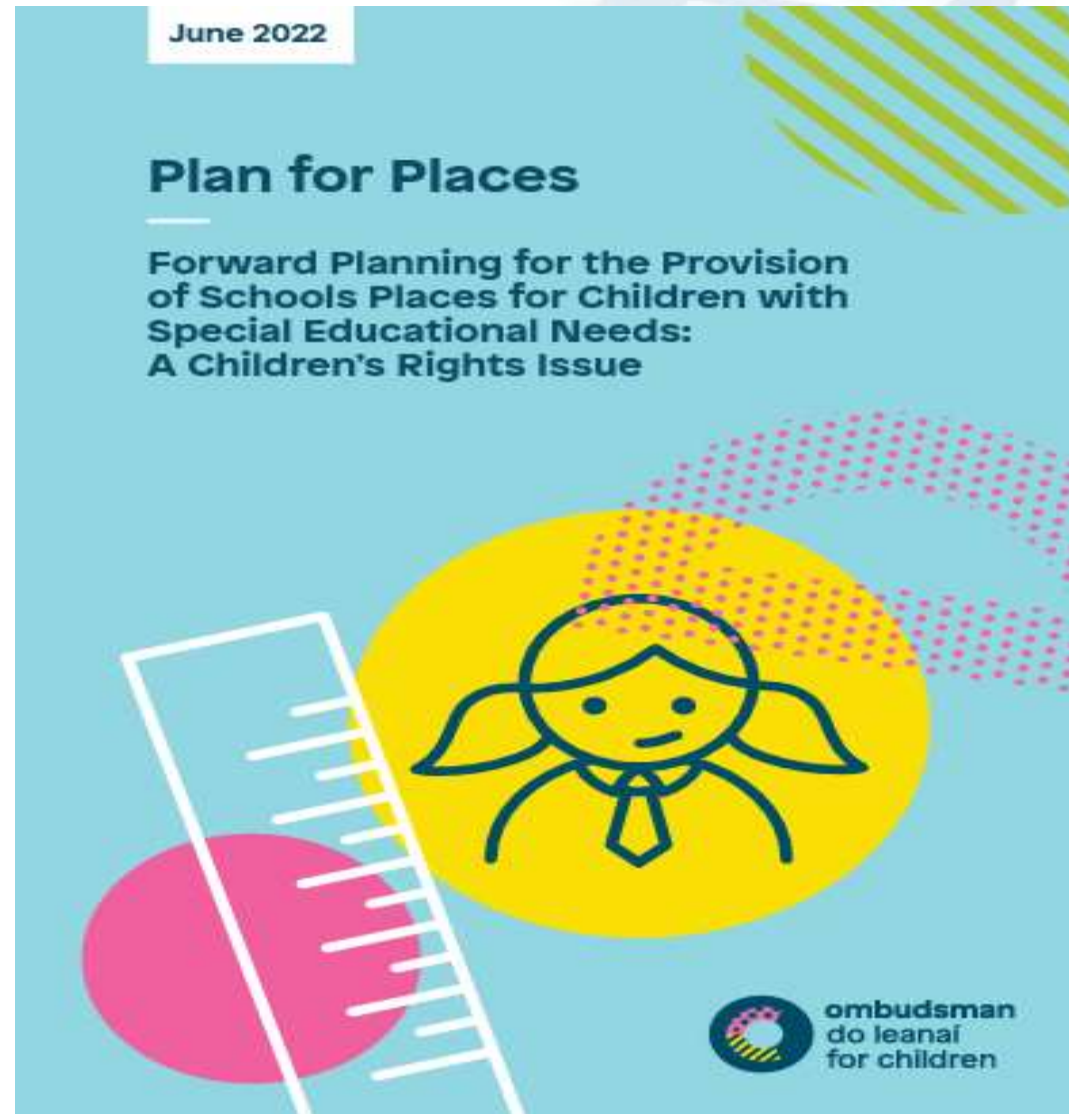
LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSION
IN THE EARLY YEARS

CEANNAIREACHT DO CHUIMSIÚ
SNA LUATHBHLIANTA

A Robust Legislative Basis

In an ideal world, children with disabilities would be able to have their health and educational needs assessed and be provided with the services to meet those needs in a timely manner. The Oireachtas legislated in 2004, through the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act, 2004 (“the EPSEN Act”), for such an ideal world in relation to educational needs assessment and education provision for children with disabilities. As we do not live in such an ideal world, some seventeen years later crucial parts of the EPSEN Act have not been commenced.

Forward Planning for School Places



A Wrap-Around System



If a child comes into us in first year and is presenting with a particular need, we try to meet the need as best we can. However, there are times when we won't be able to do so and that's when parents become disappointed and the child becomes frustrated. All schools do their best in this regard and end up trying to give as much time and resources that are available. This is when outside supports are needed the most.

Rose Desmond (2022)

Access to Opportunities Beyond School

I think what could be done better is that people like me are informed of what they can do. I know Simon Harris is bringing it in I believe. I follow him on Instagram and I heard it. I was so happy because I know I'm so fortunate to be able to do this and I know it's not the case for everyone and it breaks my heart. I can see so much potential in people with additional needs. It is about giving them the encouragement and the shove on and that's like what I had in my first year. You know, when I see people with additional needs, if they put their mind to it they can do absolutely everything.



<https://www.mic.ul.ie/life-at-mic/arts-culture/exhibitions>

Building an Inclusive Education System



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/metaphorical-musings-travelling-along-roads-journey-stephen-weller>



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Thank you

*Míle
Buíochas*

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