

# NCSE Research Conference



Evaluation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Transition  
Pilot Programme –  
findings from an NCSE commissioned evaluation

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Beth Young, Associate Director, Fortia Insight (formerly RSM)



# Introduction

- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned RSM (now Fortia Insight) to evaluate the **Transition Pilot programme** (the ‘Pilot’)
- Designed to **help students with disabilities prepare for life after school**
  - Response to Action 1.5 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015–2024
  - Funded by the Department of Education and Youth
  - Delivered by the NCSE in partnership with schools and other stakeholders



# The Pilot

- **September 2023 to June 2024**
- **20 schools** in North Dublin and Galway
- Each school received **+12 hours** per week
- School staff chose **c.90 students** to participate



**In-school activities** included:

- Identifying suitable students
- Transition planning
- One-to-one and group support sessions



**Project Coordinator** seconded to:

- Organise staff training
- Curate resources via Padlet
- Facilitate shared learning days

# Evaluation aims

Assess the Pilot’s implementation, embeddedness, impact and scalability by:

- Reviewing evidence on transition practices
- Mapping current pathways
- Evaluating impact on:

Students



Schools & staff



Post-school settings

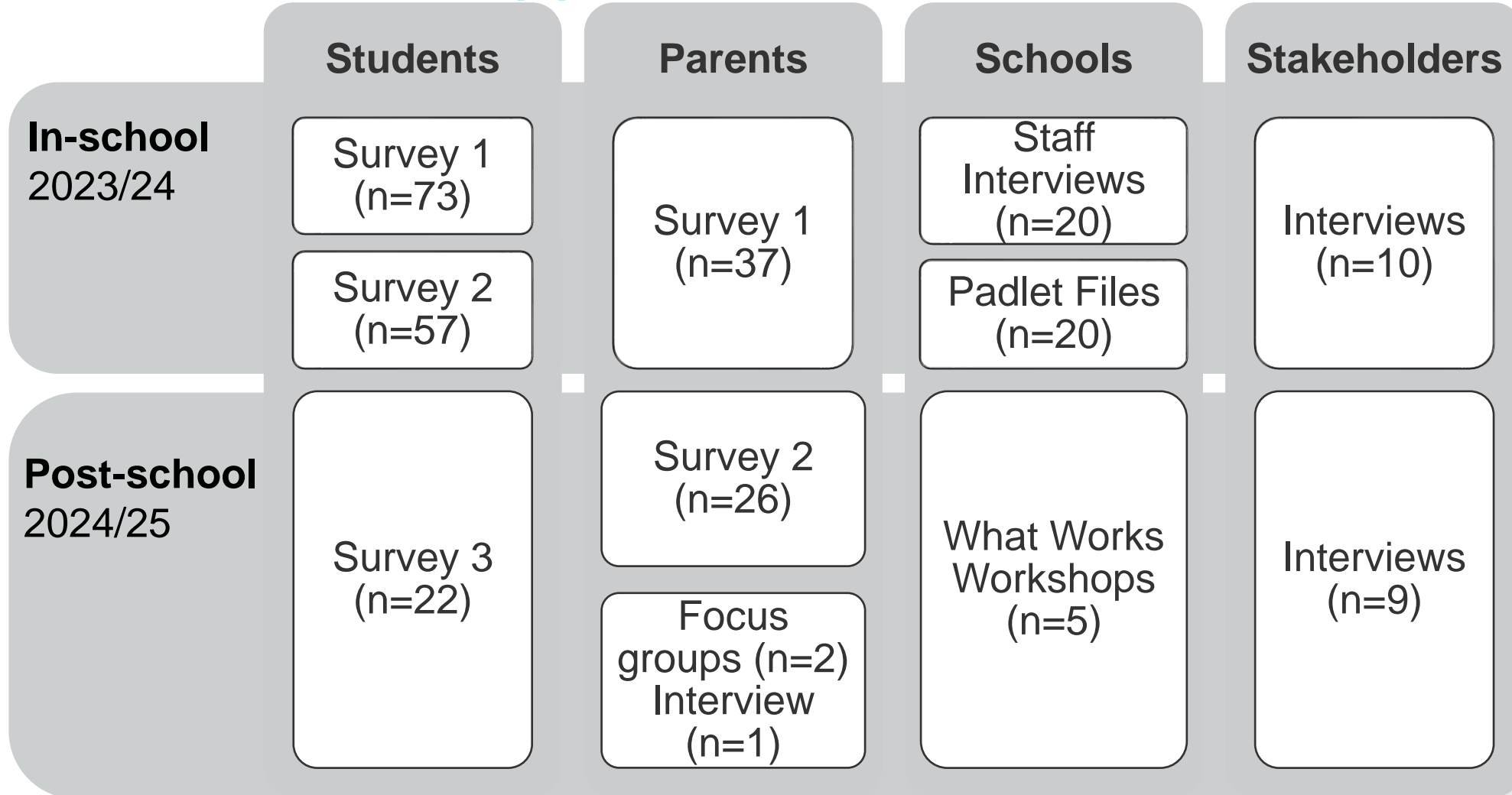


Stakeholders



- Identifying successful elements to inform any future scale-up

# Mixed methods approach



# Literature review

- **National and international evidence** on transition planning
- Reinforced **rationale** and potential to improve outcomes:
  - Effective transition support improves educational, employment and social outcomes
  - Success factors:
 

Early intervention

Active student involvement

Parental engagement

Whole-school approaches
  - Without structured support, students face disrupted transitions and reduced life chances
  - Gaps in current practice – lack of statutory planning requirements and inconsistent delivery

# Overarching findings

- Provides a **foundation for improving post-school outcomes** for students with disabilities
- Contributed to the **operationalisation of policy ambitions** such as the EPSEN Act (2004), New Directions (HSE, 2012), and the CES (Government of Ireland, 2015)
- Notable **positive impacts** on participating students, schools, and school staff

# Implementation

- **Largely delivered as intended**, with schools using flexible support time for tailored transition activities
  - Activities included profiling, life-skills workshops, work placements, and multidisciplinary planning
- **Effective delivery** was supported by:
  - Dedicated staffing and leadership
  - NCSE coordination and shared-learning forums
- **Operational challenges** affected consistency:
  - Staffing shortages, admin burden, limited employer engagement, and transport/funding constraints

# Embeddedness

- **Level of embeddedness varied:**
  - Some schools with stable personnel and clear routines showed early signs of habitual practices
  - Some schools reported limited awareness beyond those directly involved, raising concerns that early progress could be lost without dedicated support time
- **Stakeholders stressed the need for:**
  - Strong leadership
  - Dedicated roles
  - Sustained resources

# Impact on students

- Strong in-school support
- Increased awareness of post-school options
- Earlier engagement with external organisations
- Improved readiness for further education or work
- Enhanced independent living skills
- Potential to improve employment outcomes
- Helped keep students engaged
  - reducing the likelihood of dropout
  - supporting continued inclusion

**89%** of surveyed students transitioned to training or employment



**86%** reported being happy with their post-school destination



of surveyed parents saw gains in independent living skills



# Impact on schools

- **Enhanced staff knowledge** about transition planning
- Some schools **disseminated this knowledge to other staff** - improving their capacity to identify students in need of support
- Benefits for other students, including:
  - Students with disabilities who were not participating in the Pilot
  - Entire classes in some schools
- Shift toward shared responsibility for transitions within participating schools and across post-school settings

# Impact on post-school settings & other stakeholders

- Fostered **strong collaboration** among schools, statutory agencies (like the HSE), BITCI, the NLN, and local colleges.
- Encouraged more **active engagement** from some local employers with students with disabilities
- Raised the **profile of some special schools** within their local community
- Parents also reported **increased engagement** with schools and post-school organisations

# Scalability



**Strong endorsement for national expansion** – most interviewees said a national rollout was feasible and necessary

Successes observed in participating schools

Need for continued support beyond post-primary education



However, they also identified **several challenges.**

Workforce capacity and admin constraints

Lack of funding for transport and trip-related costs

Central coordination and learning activities

Standardised time allocation models

Variation in school commitment

Inter-agency coordination

# Implications for future phases and scale-up



Protected staff time  
and designated roles



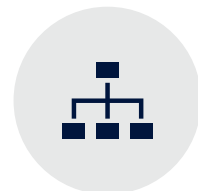
Earlier engagement and  
comprehensive planning



Robust infrastructure  
and resources



Enhanced inter-agency  
collaboration



System-level  
changes



Addressing  
workforce and  
funding gaps



Localised  
support  
networks

# Implications for future phases and scale-up contd

## Protected staff time and designated roles:



Current reliance on individual enthusiasm and flexible hours needs to shift into a formal structure to ensure consistency and continuity. The Project Coordinator model was highly praised, but scale-up will require building internal capacity, and gradually reducing external support to encourage school ownership.

## Earlier engagement and comprehensive planning:



Effective transition planning requires early engagement with students, parents, and external organisations. This includes initiating transition discussions and planning before the final year, so all stakeholders are informed and involved.

# Implications for future phases and scale-up

## Robust infrastructure and resources:



Practical coordination tools, accessible shared resources, and clear national guidance support effective delivery. This infrastructure should facilitate information exchange and reduce administrative burden.

## Enhanced inter-agency collaboration:




Aligned timelines and consistent approaches across various organisations (education, health, social care, employment), will help to overcome fragmented service delivery, supporting a more seamless transition for students. Efforts to foster collaboration beyond individual schools and reduce barriers between different sectors, were seen as crucial.

# Implications for future phases and scale-up

## System-level changes:

-  Increased collaboration, aligning timelines between different support agencies, greater consistency across settings, and inclusive cultures.

## Addressing workforce and funding gaps:

-  Investment in workforce supply and school capacity, alongside funding for essential activities like transportation would support meaningful implementation.

## Localised support networks:

-  Replacing national shared learning days with more localised county or regional support networks as the Pilot expands.

# Concluding remarks

- Aligned to **national goals** for inclusive education, independent living, and employment for students with disabilities
- **Bridges disconnects** between participating schools and post-school settings
- Contributed to the **evidence base** on effective transition planning
- Its continued development and scaled implementation, guided by the lessons learned from Phase 1, hold promise for ensuring all students with disabilities are equipped for **meaningful and fulfilling post-school pathways**

# Thank you

## Any questions?



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