

# Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland

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## Foreword

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was formally established in 2005 to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs, with particular emphasis on children. The NCSE has a statutory role to carry out research in the area of special education to help provide an evidence base to support its work.

In 2005, the Minister for Education and Science announced that a review of special schools and classes would be conducted. The review was carried out in two phases. Phase one was completed by researchers at the Special Education Department, St Patrick's College of Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Science (DES) in early 2007.

The DES subsequently requested the NCSE to commission phase two of the review and provided suggested terms of reference. The agreed terms of reference focused on key issues such as: the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post primary schools; issues related to dual enrolment; whether special schools should cater for specified categories of special needs or a broader/full range of special needs; and whether special schools should be used/developed as centres of excellence. Researchers at the Special Education Department, St. Patrick's College, completed phase two of the review on behalf of the NCSE.

This report from phase two of the review provides new insights and additional data on special schools and special classes. It highlights many challenges faced by the special school sector and key issues relating to the provision of education for children with special educational needs along a continuum of support. The findings from this report will make an important contribution to the NCSE's development of policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science, another statutory role of the NCSE.

This research will also help the NCSE to identify best practice issues and to disseminate information to schools, parents and other appropriate stakeholders.

**Pat Curtin,**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

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## Abbreviations

ABA	Applied behaviour analysis
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland
CICE	Church of Ireland College of Education
CPD	Continuous professional development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills [London]
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
FETAC	Further Education and Training Award Council
GAM	General Allocation Model
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLD	General learning disability
GTP	Graduate teacher programme
HSE	Health Service Executive
IATSE	Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education
ICEPE	Institute of Child Education and Psychology, Europe
ICT	Information and communications technology
IEP	Individual education plan
ILSA	Irish Learning Support Association
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
JC	Junior Certificate
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools Programme
LA	Local authority
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LDS	Leadership Development Service
LEA	Local Education Authority
MGLD	Mild general learning disabilities
ModGLD	Moderate general learning disabilities
MSEN	Masters in special educational needs
NCSL	National Council for School Leadership
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [London]

PD	Physical disability
PECS	Picture exchange communication system
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People [London]
SEBD	Severe emotional and behavioural disturbance
SEN	Special educational needs
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SES	Special Education Section, Department of Education and Science
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SEU	Special education units
SIE	Special/inclusive education
SNA	Special needs assistant
SPLD	Severe and profound learning disabilities
SSWG	Special schools working group [London]
TA	Teaching assistant
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Historically, special schools have played a significant role in educational provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland, through the efforts of parents and voluntary bodies in the 1950s to the current established educational option provided for by the state. The formal development of the special school system can be traced back to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Ireland, 1965). While the Commission favoured the special school model of provision for pupils with special educational needs, they also acknowledged the benefits of the special class model, particularly the opportunity for children with SEN to be educated with their peers in a mainstream setting. In the early 1990s, however, there was evidence of a growing dissatisfaction among parents and others with this segregated form of special education. The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Department of Education, 1993), which was of great importance in the development of special education in Ireland, made a number of recommendations. All of these recommendations were underpinned by seven key principles, including the provision of a continuum of services for children with SEN to meet a continuum of special educational needs. The Review Committee summed up its position regarding the integration of students with disabilities or special needs in a mainstream school system by stating that it favoured as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary. The findings and recommendations of the SERC Report have had a major influence on policy development in special education. In the White Paper on Education, Charting our Education Future (1995), the Government affirmed that its objective would be:

To ensure a continuum of provision for special educational needs, ranging from occasional help within the ordinary school to full-time education in a special school or unit, with students being enabled to move as necessary and practicable from one type of provision to another. Educational provision will be flexible, to allow for students with different needs, at various stages in their progress through the education system (p.24).

The more recent Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004, which provides a legislative basis for educational provision for pupils with SEN in Ireland, establishes the rights of children with special educational

needs to be included in mainstream settings. The preamble to the Act articulates this and the longer-term implications as follows:

... to provide that the education of people with [such] needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (p.5).

Current Government policy in Ireland is to encourage the maximum possible level of inclusion for SEN students in mainstream schools and to establish the necessary supports to facilitate this development. This policy trend gave rise to an uncertainty around the role and operation of special schools and special classes. It was thus timely and essential to conduct this review of special schools and classes and to examine their future role in addition to their role in the current educational context.

### **The Study**

This review of the role and operation of special schools and special classes was conducted in two phases. The first phase was commissioned by the special education section (SES) of the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the second by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Both studies were conducted by the special education department of St Patrick's College in Drumcondra.

The first phase, conducted between December 2005 and January 2007, was a questionnaire-based census of special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes. Two types of information were sought: quantitative information on provision (for example, pupil and teacher numbers; availability of support services; curricular provision) and more qualitative information on the role of special schools and classes and links with mainstream. It was always intended that the results from this first phase would be built on via a more in-depth second phase commissioned by the NCSE. The aims of Phase One were to:

- reaffirm the status of special schools with regard to their position on the continuum of provision for children with special educational needs
- consult special schools about their vision for the future
- identify which pupils were being catered for in special schools and classes

- explore whether (or not) the pupil population of special schools was changing
- provide the basis for a more in-depth study by the NCSE.

The second phase, conducted between November 2007 and November 2008, was designed to address three specific issues:

- (1) To review the role of special schools in the provision of education to pupils with SEN and in particular to examine ways in which special schools can act in a co-operative way with mainstream primary and post-primary schools to provide enhanced service to pupils with SEN and their parents.
- (2) To review the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN having particular regard to the principle of inclusive education as described in Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004).
- (3) To provide a review of international practice in the area of special education with a particular emphasis on the use of special schools and special classes.

More specifically the study examined:

- the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools
- the issues related to dual enrolment
- whether special schools should cater for specified categories of special needs or a broader/full range of special needs and what implications changes in the spectrum of special needs over time has in this regard
- whether special schools should be used/developed as centres of excellence and if so, in what areas and how should they be used.

This report incorporates information from both phases of the review in order to give as full a picture as possible within the constraints of time and budget.

## Methodology

### Phase one

Phase One of the review was a survey of all special schools and primary special classes commissioned by the special education section of the DES. This census involved the development of a questionnaire in conjunction with a number of key stakeholders (the special education and teacher education sections of the DES and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)). Questionnaires were circulated to a total of 410 schools (all 106 special schools and all 304 primary

schools with special classes on the lists provided by the DES) in May 2006. The overall response rate to the questionnaire was 78.2% (79.2% for special schools and 77.9% for primary schools with special classes).

### Phase two

Phase Two of the study was commissioned by the NCSE. Following careful consideration of the objectives and specified tasks of the study, and in particular the short time frame, the following approach was adopted. This approach initially comprised four stages, the fifth stage (submissions) was added following early discussions with the NCSE. In brief, the five stages were:

#### Stage 1

Questionnaires were distributed to principals of post-primary, mainstream schools with special classes. A revised and adapted version of the questionnaire from Phase One of the review was used, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, complementary data were obtained. The complexity of the issues involved in identifying post-primary schools with special classes is described and discussed in detail in the report. In total, 225 questionnaires were sent to post-primary schools: 27 to schools reported to have official special classes only; 120 to schools reported to have unofficial special classes only; and 78 to schools reported to have both official and unofficial classes. While concerted attempts were made to follow-up on non-respondents, the response rate was low.

#### Stage 2

A literature review of international practice in the area of special education was conducted with a particular emphasis on the roles of special schools and special classes. The role of special schools and classes was considered in the wider context of special educational provision and the inclusion debate. The literature review built on the methodology used by researchers at Birmingham University who conducted a literature review on the role of special schools for the DfES (Porter et al, 2002). The references cited in the 2002 review provided the starting point for the current review. Subsequently the databases and journals used in that review were searched and the review updated to 2008. In addition to this, a number of Irish education journals were hand-searched for the years 1998–2008. Research theses were also targeted in all the major Irish universities where educational research takes place and a number of websites were accessed for government papers and other international summary data.

### Stage 3

Focus group interviews involving relevant stakeholders (pupils, parents, teachers, principals, special needs assistants (SNAs)) were conducted. The purpose of the focus group interviews in this study was to explore and illuminate the principle issues in relation to the role and operation of special schools and classes in a dynamic manner. The findings from the recent survey of special schools and classes, which was conducted by the Special Education Department of St Patrick's College, informed the selection of schools and the stimulus questions and topics for the focus group interviews. In addition, more in-depth analysis of the findings from Phase One, in particular the participants' responses to relevant open-ended questions, was conducted.

Twenty-one focus groups were conducted in all and 140 focus group participants were selected from 28 schools in total (17 special schools and 11 mainstream schools). In selecting special schools, six schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD) were chosen (only five eventually took part), four schools for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities (ModGLD) and at least one from every other category of special school. There were two reasons for this choice; special schools for pupils with mild and moderate general learning disabilities are by far the largest categories in the country, and both the literature and the responses to the Phase One questionnaire indicated that schools for pupils with MGLD face particular challenges at present. Mainstream primary and post-primary schools were required to have special classes, additionally schools with a range of educational programmes and structures were selected (for example, Leaving Certificate Applied, dual placement, changes in pupil profile). Teachers selected included class teachers in both special and mainstream schools, special class teachers and resource/learning support teachers.

It was considered appropriate to have adult focus groups which were homogenous with regard to role (principal, teacher, SNA, parent). Participants were selected from groups of schools (special, mainstream primary with special classes, mainstream post-primary with special classes) in reasonably close proximity to each other to facilitate the composition and organisation of the focus groups. Selection also attended to geographical difference with three sites being chosen across Ireland. This approach ensured the heterogeneity of the focus groups.

Groups for teachers, principals and SNAs met at Education Centres. Focus groups for pupils and for parents were organised within schools, (mainstream, schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities, schools for pupils with physical

disabilities, and one school for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities). Principals were invited to select teachers and SNAs to participate in the focus groups. Pupils were selected by principals/teachers within schools and were grouped according to age. Parents of these pupils were invited by the principal to participate in the focus groups.

### Stage 4

A further level of enquiry using a case study approach in real-life contexts and using multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation, document analysis) was conducted to enhance and validate the findings. Three educational sites (including primary and post primary), where there was evidence of best practice in relation to the development of the role of special schools and provision for pupils with SEN in a mainstream setting were selected (two from Ireland and one from the UK) by triangulating information from the returned questionnaires (for the Irish case studies), key informants and publicly available inspection reports.

A two-day visit was made to each of the three case study schools by members of the project team (supplemented by a local expert in the case of the English school). During each visit two pupils were shadowed and observed. The observed pupils and their parents were interviewed. Interviews also took place with a wide variety of school staff, including staff from schools where shadowed pupils were dual placed.

### Stage 5

Submissions were invited from relevant organisations, and the public at large addressing the key research questions.

While five distinct stages emerged in the approach to the study, these stages were interrelated and interdependent and the findings were analysed and presented in a manner which addresses the specified tasks of the investigation.

## Main Findings

The findings are summarised under three main headings: role and operation of special schools, role and operation of special classes in mainstream schools and dual placement.

### Special schools

#### Complexity and range of pupil need in special schools

- In general the findings indicated that special schools are an important part of the continuum of educational provision for pupils with SEN.
- The study found evidence of increasing complexity and severity of pupil need in special schools, particularly in schools catering for pupils with MGLD and ModGLD. There is clear international agreement that part of the future role of special schools will be to cater for pupils with severe and complex needs.
- Special schools are catering for a group of students with complex needs and appear to have some success in doing so.
- A trend in schools for pupils with MGLD was the increasing number of admissions at post-primary transfer. The majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD are now of post-primary age. There is evidence from the study that those who move from mainstream to special school are likely to have additional needs and behavioural issues as well as MGLD. The study indicates that special schools were reasonably successful at retaining these pupils and that in some schools for pupils with MGLD a range of appropriate post-primary programmes was available in a flexible manner. The study also found evidence of structural and curricular gaps in many post-primary schools in relation to provision for pupils with MGLD. Overall, the evidence suggests that special schools are currently providing a valuable option for these pupils.
- Special schools contribute to pupils' well-being and happiness.
- There is evidence from the study that special schools provide students with access to appropriate curricula with emphasis on the development of life skills. This is facilitated through the informed preparation of IEPs.
- There is a perception among principals, teachers and some parents, from both mainstream and special schools, that special schools provide significant support to parents of children with SEN.
- Negative perceptions of special schools include that they can be a placement of last resort for children with some categories of SEN.

#### Support for mainstream schools

- A second, clear role envisaged for special schools into the future in the international literature is in supporting mainstream schools. The current study found that links of this type are valued but they tend to be of an informal and ad hoc nature based on the goodwill of those involved. In contrast, the English case

study school had links which were formalised and resourced as part of the local authority's overall support structure for pupils with SEN.

- Current international literature cautions against the transfer of expertise being seen as one-way (from special to mainstream schools). Special school principals in this study concurred with this view seeing the future as one in which special and mainstream schools would be involved in two-way collaboration.
- The concept of a Centre of Excellence was explored and was interpreted in a number of ways. One of the most common perceptions was that it provided expertise and/or resources to mainstream schools, though questions were raised as to whether all special schools had the resources and/or the expertise, for example in terms of staff qualifications, to fulfil this role.

### Staffing in special schools

Two issues investigated as part of the study have a major impact on the extent to which special schools feel equipped to cater for pupils with increasingly complex needs, namely the availability of appropriately trained teachers, and the support of a multi-disciplinary team.

- A finding from the review of the literature indicated that the key factor contributing to pupils' progress, including those with complex needs, was access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers, and recommended more access to appropriate training. In the current study, between one-quarter and one-third of teachers in special schools have undertaken specialist training at diploma level or higher. However, in addition, considerable numbers access relevant short courses and seminars provided mainly through the Special Education Support Service.
- The study found that nearly 40% of teachers in special schools have 'restricted recognition'. This is a term used by the DES to describe the recognition of Irish-trained teachers who hold Montessori qualifications, for teaching in early years' settings and special schools only. The term is also applied to teachers who are trained overseas who have not reached a specified level of fluency in Irish and subsequently are restricted to special schools and resource posts. The problems related to restricted recognition are outlined in the study.
- While the study did not specifically investigate the role, qualifications or training of SNAs, some participants were clear that access to training is required for SNAs in order to enhance the support they provide to pupils with SEN.
- There were major issues for special schools around the provision of multi-disciplinary support. There is wide variability between schools in the amount of

support available to pupils. Principals identified a plethora of service providers delivering such multidisciplinary support as is available, giving at least the impression of a lack of coordination between the different services.

### Special classes in mainstream schools

- It proved difficult to access a definitive list of schools with special class provision, particularly at post-primary level.
- As with special schools, concerns were raised about the extent to which special class teachers are adequately trained and about the level of multidisciplinary support.
- Both the current study and the international literature found high levels of satisfaction with special class provision.
- During Phase One of this study, which was conducted in 2006, participants expressed concern about the future of special classes for pupils with MGLD. There was a perception among the research participants that psychologists, for a variety of reasons, were no longer recommending special class placement for these pupils.<sup>1</sup>
- The perception of focus group participants in the present study was that special classes are an important part of the continuum of educational provision for pupils with special educational needs and they were perceived to have the following advantages:
  - Facilitation of inclusion within the mainstream class
  - Provision of a 'safe haven' for some pupils
  - A favourable pupil/teacher ratio
  - Enabling pupils to remain in their local area or not too far away from it
  - Enabling flexibility in the organisation of teaching and curriculum provision.
- The evidence from the study suggests that although the majority of special classes provide for pupils with somewhat less complex needs than special schools with the same designation, there is some overlap in the pupils who currently receive special school and special class provision.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the research reported here was conducted the DES have announced the closure of 108 special classes for pupils with MGLD in primary schools that have fewer than nine pupils. However, under the General Allocation Model (GAM) introduced in 2005, pupils with MGLD are included in the allocation of learning support/resource teachers which gives them automatic access to resources, and provides the principal with an opportunity to allocate support teaching in a flexible manner that best meets the needs of the children concerned. On the other hand, recent research conducted in the Irish context reported reduced support for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools since the introduction of GAM (Travers, 2007; Stevens and O' Moore, 2009). In this context, the current review of the GAM is very welcome and it is crucial that it considers the impact of the changes on pupils with mild general learning disabilities.

- Almost half the special classes in the primary schools (170) reported that pupils were remaining in class for the entire day. This figure suggests that many schools may not be taking full advantage of the situation of the special class to promote inclusion, where appropriate.
- Concern was expressed over the lack of continuity between special class provision in primary and post-primary schools.

### Dual placement

- There is much discussion in the literature about arrangements described as dual attendance/dual placement and dual enrolment/dual registration in which pupils spend some time at a special school and some at a mainstream school. The difference between these two types of arrangements concerns whether or not the pupil is officially on the roll of two schools simultaneously.
- The majority of participants in the current study indicated that they are in favour of some form of dual placement.
- Many participants in the study were unhappy with the current situation in which dual enrolment is not officially possible, meaning that any dual placement arrangements are informal and unresourced.
- Factors which contribute to successful linkages between mainstream and special schools are identified in the literature and were also identified by participants in the study. These include planning and coordination, parental support and good communication. Participants also identified time for collaboration, a dedicated coordinator, provision of SNA support, low pupil/teacher ratio, access to therapies for the pupil and administrative support as factors for successful dual placement. All of these factors, as were noted in the literature and by participants in the current study, have resource implications.
- Pupils' ability to adapt to attendance at two schools was of concern to a minority of adult participants, particularly in relation to pupils with ASD, and also to pupils who participated in focus groups.
- Some participants in the study highlighted access to curriculum subjects which may not be available in some special schools as one of the advantages of dual placement
- The current study found considerable dissatisfaction with the current policy which prohibits dual enrolment, and many participants advocated for a change to a clear official policy sanctioning dual enrolment as the most satisfactory way of resolving issues around resourcing and responsibility.

### Recommendations

#### Special schools

#### Complexity and range of pupil need in special schools

##### Recommendation 1

Special schools are catering for a group of students with complex needs, appear to have some success in doing so (though the evidence for this is limited), and should be enabled to continue to do so in the absence of evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these students.

##### Recommendation 2

The review found a trend both in Ireland and internationally towards the development of two distinct types of special school. While some special schools are catering for a wide range of categories of need, others cater exclusively for pupils from a specific category. In the absence of evidence favouring one of these types of special school, a range of special school provision should continue to be available catering both for specific categories of need and for a range of needs.

##### Recommendation 3

- (1) Further research is needed into the factors which lead to the comparative success of MGLD schools in retaining pupils in school and the implications for the whole post-primary sector evaluated.
- (2) A review of the curriculum and certification offered to pupils with MGLD of post-primary age in both special and mainstream schools is required to ensure a range of choices for pupils and their parents.

#### Support for mainstream schools/Centre of Excellence

##### Recommendation 4

Internationally, there has been a trend towards special schools providing Outreach and Inreach support for mainstream schools. One aspect of the future role of some special schools could be to provide Outreach and Inreach support for mainstream schools to enhance the provision these schools are able to make for pupils with SEN. It should be noted that the review found that not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role.

### Staffing of special schools

#### Recommendation 5

- (1) Special schools should receive resources and have access to continuous professional development (CPD) for staff to reflect the variety of roles which they fulfil, including opportunities to develop specialist skills appropriate to particular groups of pupils and collaborative working skills.
- (2) Such CPD should be available to all teachers working in special schools and classes in a timely manner.

#### Recommendation 6

- (1) Research should be carried out on teachers in special schools with a view to ascertaining:
  - their qualifications, both undergraduate and post graduate
  - the extent to which limitations in their qualification contributed to or brought about their employment in the setting in which they are working.
- (2) The terminology used to describe qualified teachers from other countries, and Irish-trained teachers with certain Montessori qualifications should be reviewed. The terminology chosen should reflect the groups of pupils for which the individual is appropriately qualified rather than the fact that there are some groups of pupils who they are precluded from teaching.

#### Recommendation 7

Given the central role of the principal teacher, programmes of professional development for principals should have a substantial element on special education.

#### Recommendation 8

A review of the training needs of SNAs should be conducted.

#### Recommendation 9

- (1) The way in which multi-disciplinary support is provided to pupils with special educational needs in all types of school needs to be urgently reviewed.
- (2) It was clear from the review that access to multi-disciplinary support is currently insufficient and inconsistent. More access to multi disciplinary teams is required and access needs to be available on the basis of need regardless of the setting in which the pupil is placed.

### Special classes in mainstream schools

#### Recommendation 10

An audit of special class provision in mainstream schools should be conducted and the database of classes subsequently regularly updated.

#### Recommendation 11

- (1) In the absence of evidence on the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of all pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, special classes should continue to be part of placement options.
- (2) The capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of pupils with MGLD should be evaluated before reducing the option of special class placement in the system.
- (3) Special classes should continue to be an alternative solution to special schools where the demographics would not support such a school.

#### Recommendation 12

- (1) Schools operating full-day special classes should develop and implement policies and plans outlining how the special class relates to other classes and consider options such as part-time and/or time-related placement.
- (2) Support services should be provided to all pupils who require them in special classes and inclusion of pupils from the special class in mainstream classes should not be used as a reason to withdraw such services when still required.

#### Recommendation 13

- (1) The issue of continuity of special classes between primary and post-primary levels needs to be dealt with as a priority and all future special classes should be set up as part of a coherent area plan at primary and post-primary level considering the type of special classes required, age ranges of the pupils and gender.
- (2) The criteria for the establishment of a special class at post-primary level need to be explicit.

### Issues relating to dual placement

#### Recommendation 14

Dual placement arrangements should be facilitated where these are seen as being in the best interests of the pupil in order to facilitate either educational or social inclusion. However, there is a need for clarity on how insurance, transport and substitute cover for teachers or SNAs facilitating such arrangements are funded and managed.

#### Recommendation 15

Dual placement arrangements should be facilitated in the future by co-locating mainstream and special schools.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Terms of Reference**

In February 2006, the Minister for Education and Science reported to the Seanad that a review of the role of special schools and classes had been commenced. This review was conducted in two phases: a survey of provision commissioned by the Special Education Section (SES) of the Department of Education and Science (DES) and a more in-depth review commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Both studies were conducted by the Special Education Department of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

#### **1.1.1 Phase one**

The first phase, conducted between December 2005 and January 2007, was a questionnaire-based census of special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes. No specific written terms of reference were provided, but substantial discussions took place with the SES, in relation to the drafting of the questionnaire.

Two types of information were sought: Quantitative information concerning provision (for example, pupil and teacher numbers, availability of support services, curricular provision) and more qualitative information about the experiences and perspectives of the participants (for example, principals' views of the current and future role of special schools and classes, issues around dual attendance and other links with mainstream).

#### **1.1.2 Phase two**

In response to a request from The Minister for Education and Science, the NCSE sought tenders for the second phase of the review in August 2007. The NCSE stated explicitly that this review would build on the report on a survey of provision of education in special schools and special classes by the Special Education Department of St Patrick's College. The review commenced in December 2007 and the final report was submitted to the NCSE in October 2009, following feedback from both external consultants and the NCSE Council.

The terms of reference for the second phase were:

- to review the role of special schools in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and in particular to examine ways in which

## 1. Introduction

special schools can act in a co-operative way with mainstream primary and post-primary schools to provide enhanced service to pupils with special educational needs and their parents

- to review the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education as described in Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland, 2004)
- to provide a review of international practice in the area of special education with a particular emphasis on the use of special schools and special classes.

More specifically, the review was to examine:

- (1) the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools
- (2) the issues related to dual enrolment
- (3) whether special schools should cater for specified categories of special needs or a broader/full range of special needs and what implications changes in the spectrum of special needs over time has in this regard
- (4) whether special schools should be used/developed as centres of excellence and if so, in what areas and how they should be used.

### 1.2 Limitations of the Scope of the Study

The terms of reference did not include any examination of alternative models of provision, nor of the challenges to mainstream posed by the increased emphasis on inclusive education in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). These issues were, therefore, outside the scope of the study. In addition, although there was no explicit mention in the terms of reference of curriculum issues, these were examined to a limited extent as part of the discussion of the provision made in special schools and special classes. Both phases were conducted to tight budgetary restrictions. In addition, Phase Two was also subject to an extremely tight timeline, being carried out over 12 months between December 2007 and December 2008. This report incorporates information from both phases of the review in order to give as full a picture as possible within the constraints of time and budget.

In addition to delineating the scope of the study, this introductory chapter outlines the key concepts involved.

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the international literature, as it relates to the research questions. Chapter 3 details the methodology for both phases of the study, and discusses the ethical issues involved and the steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Chapter 4 reports the main findings and outlines the limitations of the study. In Chapter 5 these findings are discussed in relation to the literature.: and the implications and recommendations for future policy and which emerge from the findings are presented.

### 1.3 Key Concepts and Terminology

Five concepts that are key to the review are discussed briefly below; special educational needs, special schools, special classes, dual enrolment and inclusive education. Each of these concepts, together with Centre of Excellence/resource centre, is more fully explored in Chapter 2.

#### 1.3.1 Special educational needs

A range of definitions of SEN has been used in Ireland over the decade and a half since the term was introduced in the report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Department of Education, 1993). For the purposes of the review, the definition used was that given in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004):

“special educational needs” means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly (EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004).

#### 1.3.2 Special schools

Fundamental to the review is the idea of a special school. However, while ‘special education’ and ‘special educational needs’ are both defined in a variety of reports and papers in both Ireland and elsewhere, the only approximation to a definition of a special school in the Irish context is a brief reference in the SERC report (Department of Education, 1993) “These are national schools which can cater for pupils from 4–18 years of age” (p.50). One consequence of the classification of all special schools as primary schools has been that the curriculum has traditionally been delivered by primary-trained teachers and, except in certain limited

## 1. Introduction

circumstances, which are outlined more fully in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.2) post-primary teachers are not regarded as qualified to teach in them. For the purpose of the present review, a special school is regarded as a primary school which caters exclusively for pupils with one or more categories of special educational need, regardless of the age range of pupils catered for, or the catchment area from which they come. Special schools are therefore defined primarily by the pupils for whom they cater; the definition is a pragmatic one, not one which embodies particular concepts or principles.

### 1.3.3 Special classes

The concept of a special class within the Irish Education system is difficult to define precisely. Like special schools, special classes in mainstream schools cater exclusively for pupils with special educational needs, with the majority of special classes admitting only pupils from a specific category. Circular 9/99 introduced revised procedures for the setting up of new special classes, including the teacher: pupil ratio for pupils with different categories of disability, and reminded schools that arrangements must be in place for the appropriate integration of special class pupils into mainstream classes. After its establishment in 2005, the NCSE assumed responsibility for the allocation of special educational resources to schools, and in March 2007 new guidance was issued by the NCSE, explaining how applications should be made for the establishment of a primary special class. This review sought to include all special classes at both primary and post-primary levels, regardless of the category and age-range of pupils admitted, with one exception. Classes specifically for children from the travelling community were not included since the children of travellers are not now generally regarded as having special educational needs simply by reason of their membership of the travelling community. Special classes in special schools (such as those for pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities and those for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)) were counted as part of the special school provision.

### 1.3.4 Dual enrolment and dual attendance

The terms of reference of the review specifically referred to “the issues related to dual enrolment”. The term ‘dual enrolment’ means that the child is simultaneously on the roll of two schools (usually one special and one mainstream), attending each school part-time. At present in Ireland, such arrangements have no official sanction, that is, it is not possible for a child to be simultaneously on the roll of two schools (Dail, 2003 and Hanafin, 2007). However, informal arrangements sometimes exist

between schools where a child, who is officially on the roll of one school (usually a special school), attends another school part-time (usually a mainstream school), without being on the roll of that school. Within this review, the term ‘dual attendance’ is used to refer to such arrangements.

### 1.3.5 Inclusive education

Although much used, the term ‘inclusive education’ is not defined in either the Education Act 1998, or the EPSEN Act (both Government of Ireland, 2004). It is thus the most difficult of the key concepts involved in this review to define succinctly. However, the Equality Authority (2005) has produced the following definition of *an inclusive school* (based on the Equal Status Acts of 2000 and 2004) as one which:

... prevents and combats discrimination. It is one that respects, values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation – gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community. It seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students across the nine grounds. Outcomes include access, participation, personal development and achieving education credentials (p.1).

It is not however, clear if the concepts of an ‘inclusive school’ and ‘inclusive education’ can be regarded as synonymous. This issue is explored in more depth in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### 1.4 Summary

This chapter has described the terms of reference of the review and the scope and limitations of the study. The structure of the report has been outlined and key concepts have been introduced.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to provide an overview of the current thinking with regard to the role of special schools and the role of special classes. Following this brief introduction an overview of the methodology used to gather literature is outlined. The main body of the review is focused on the current and future role of special schools and classes, with final sections focusing on continuous professional development in SEN and the implications for educational change and leadership.

The current and future roles of special schools and special classes need to be considered in the wider context of special educational provision and the inclusion debate. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines inclusion as:

... a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves change and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system (UNESCO, 2005, p.13).

The linking of the concept of inclusion with education in the mainstream school is in evidence in a number of policy documents that have impacted on the nature of SEN provision in Ireland in recent years (Department of Education, 1993; UNESCO, 1994; Government of Ireland, 2004). The focus on inclusion is often debated on the grounds of a rights-based agenda, rather than a needs-based agenda (Ainscow, 1997) and is therefore ideologically, but not necessarily pragmatically, grounded. The emphasis within inclusion on common placements and participation in learning experiences generates tensions when “set against the realities of limited teacher skills, exclusionary pressures in schools and, above all, substantive differences between learners” (Dyson, 2001, p.27). The concept of ‘difference’ can arise from a negative perspective, whereby it is synonymous with lower status and less value, or from a positive perspective whereby it reflects the recognition of individuality, individual needs and interests; therefore requiring a confrontation of “dilemmas of difference” (Norwich, 2002, p.496). If the emphasis within an education system is

## 2. Literature Review

on meeting the needs of all children then, as Wedell (1995) has pointed out, then that system needs to acknowledge the diversity existing within it (Wedell, 1995). Wedell further suggests that it is difficult to see how special educational needs can be effectively addressed in a system that presents problems for children in general (Wedell, 2005). Accepting these tensions and dilemmas assumes a continued struggle with ambivalence, a recognition that different rights will come into conflict and an acceptance “that what counts as progress and improvement can be problematic and can contain contradictions” (Norwich, 2002, p.498).

The theoretical tensions outlined above are reflected in the evidence of practical tensions on the ground. While key SEN policy documents espouse the importance of educating children with SEN with their peers, there is also an acceptance that more specialised settings may be needed in certain circumstances (Department of Education, 1993; UNESCO, 1994; Government of Ireland, 2004). The current and future roles of special schools and special classes are intertwined with the tensions inherent in the inclusion debate and how the system deals with those tensions in practice. It is the aim of this literature review to shed some light on the implications of those tensions in order to provide a context for the findings of this research.

### 2.2 Search Procedures

This literature review built on the methodology used by researchers at the University of Birmingham who conducted a literature review on the role of special schools for the (then) DfES (Porter et al, 2002). The references cited in that review provided the starting point for the current review. Subsequently, the databases and journals used in that review were searched and the review was updated to 2008. In addition to this, a number of Irish education journals were hand-searched for the years 1998–2008. Research theses at masters and doctoral level were also used. These theses were sourced in the libraries of major universities in Ireland. It is clear that a majority of these theses were not published in peer reviewed journals, leading to a dearth in published research in the area of special education in Ireland. While the theses used provide a valuable source of information on the Irish context, there are obvious limitations to the use of research that has not undergone peer review, with possible questions hanging over methodology, validity and reliability in the findings. Every care was taken to read each relevant thesis in its entirety before deciding to include or exclude it from this review. It is not within the scope of this review to discuss the potential drawbacks of each of these unpublished pieces of

## 2. Literature Review

work. Also, a number of websites were specifically targeted to access government papers and other international summary data (see Table 1).

**Table 1. List of sources used for the literature review**

Source type	Sources	Search terms
International databases	ERIC PSYCHINFO Index of Theses UK and Ireland Google Scholar	special schools, special classes, mainstream – special school links, dual enrolment
Journals	British Educational Research Journal British Journal of Special Education, Disability and Society Educational Psychology in Practice Educational Review, Exceptional Children European Journal of Special Needs Education International Journal of Disability International Journal of Inclusive Education Development and Education Journal of Special Education Support for Learning	indexes searched 2002 onwards
Irish journals	Learn (ILSA) Reach (IATSE) Irish Educational Studies (IES) Oideas	Hand-searched through the last 10 years
University libraries searched for theses	Dublin Institute of Technology Dublin City University University College Cork University College Dublin University College Galway University of Limerick National University of Ireland, Maynooth Trinity College Dublin St Angela's College Sligo Mary Immaculate College St Patrick's College, Drumcondra	special education, special needs, special schools, special classes
Websites	<a href="http://www.dcsf.gov.uk">www.dcsf.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://www.ofsted.gov.uk">www.ofsted.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://www.oecd.org">www.oecd.org</a> <a href="http://www.nclد.org">www.nclد.org</a> <a href="http://www.european-agency.org">www.european-agency.org</a>	

## 2. Literature Review

No attempt was made to apply set criteria in relation to the adequacy of the methodology for the inclusion or exclusion of the studies found; rather, all studies which fell within the relevant time period were considered whatever the methodology, sample size etc. In addition, some sources of information that fell outside the parameters outlined above were used where relevant. It should also be noted that, while the bulk of the review of literature was carried out in 2007/8, a very small number of references to key works published in 2009 were included retrospectively.

### 2.3 The Role of Special Schools

In this section of the literature review the role of the special school is discussed. First, the historical development of special schools in Ireland is described. Then, the current role of special schools is described under the following headings: outcomes for pupils in special schools, isolation, links between special and mainstream schools, the pupil profile in special schools, curriculum. Finally, the future role of special schools is explored.

#### 2.3.1 The development of special schools in Ireland

##### 2.3.1.1 Numbers of special schools

Perhaps surprisingly there is a lack of agreement about the number of special schools in Ireland. At the time of writing, according to the Special Education Support Service (Special Education Support Service (SESS), undated a) there were 129 special schools in Ireland, catering for pupils within 14 categories of SEN while 153 special schools are listed on the DES website for 2008–9 (DES, undated a). This discrepancy may be due to a lack of agreement as to what constitutes a special school. A similar discrepancy was also noted by the Special Education Department (2007) in terms of lists provided by the DES and the SESS.

There is no formal definition of a special school either in legislation or in policy. However, it can be inferred from policy documents that a school is considered to be *special* if it caters for a particular group of pupils based on learning needs arising from a disability and/or circumstances. These schools are unevenly distributed around the country, with no explicit policy in place determining how they are distributed. However, the overall pattern of distribution does coincide with that of the general population. Special schools are designated to cater for specific categories of need, ranging from MGLD, through to multiple disabilities, with the exception of the category of specific speech and language disorder, for which there are no

special schools. There is no specific policy document or legislation which can be used to describe the basis for the development of the specific categories of SEN being accommodated in special schools. However, it can be inferred from the Mental Health Act (Government of Ireland, 1953) that the medical model served as the basis for defining the categories of SEN used in Ireland. The categories used in Ireland are comparable to categories used in other nations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2000).

According to O’Keeffe (2004) the number of special schools in Ireland rose from 117 in 1992 to 125 in 2002. It is interesting to note that the number of special schools increased during an era of intense speculation regarding the future of this sector in the Irish education system, and in fact, as is shown by the figures given above, the number of special schools has continued to rise over the last five years. However, O’Keeffe also notes that the overall number of pupils enrolled in these schools dropped from 8,163 to 6,982 in the same time period (O’Keeffe, 2004).

### 2.3.1.2 The establishment of special schools in Ireland

The formal development of the special school system can be traced back to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965), although special schools, run by religious orders such as the Christian Brothers and the Dominican Sisters existed prior to this (Department of Education, 1993). The report signalled the establishment of a dedicated educational service for pupils with GLD (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007), validating an already growing trend (McGee, 1990) and ensuring official governmental adoption of the special school system, leading to an increase in the number of special schools, and special classes, with over 100 special schools existing by the mid-1970s (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). The following two decades were characterised by economic difficulties and, while there were some initiatives in relation to special education (Department of Education, 1977; Department of Education, 1983), it was to be the 1990s before special education was seriously addressed again. The publication of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report (Department of Education, 1993) and a landmark court case (*O’Donoghue v the Minister for Education and Others*, 1993) cleared the logjam in terms of debate and action in special education that had prevailed in the 1980s (McGee, 2004).

In 1992, the government published a Green Paper on education which identified a growing dissatisfaction among some parents and others with the segregated form of education for pupils with SEN, stating “Special schools were set up in earlier

stages of development because only in this way could children with disabilities get the specialised attention they needed. Increasingly, however, these children and their parents are reluctant to accept the separation from their peers which a special school system entails” (Government of Ireland, 1992, p.61). The Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1996) reflected the concerns of the Green Paper regarding the duality of mainstream and special schools.

The SERC Report (Department of Education, 1993) made a number of recommendations, all of which were underpinned by seven key principles, including the provision of a continuum of services for children with SEN. The report went on to describe a range of twelve possible models of special educational service that should form the range of choices for children and parents within the curriculum.

The continuum includes supported and unsupported inclusion in a mainstream school, part-time placements involving mainstream schools and special schools/classes and full-time placement in special schools. The importance of providing a continuum of provision was echoed by the National Education Convention (Coolahan, 1994) and the White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995). The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) also refers to a continuum of provision for pupils with SEN as one of the responsibilities of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). This multi-track approach to provision is mirrored in some countries in Europe such as Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland and the UK (Meijer, 2003). However, this model contrasts with other European countries such as Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway which opt for a model that includes all children with SEN in mainstream schools or Switzerland and Belgium which have a two-track approach with mainstream and special education provision separated out (Meijer, 2003).

**Table 2. Continuum of Provision of Special Educational Service – SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993)**

1. Full-time placement in an ordinary class without additional support
2. Full-time placement in an ordinary class, with additional support in class
3. Full-time placement in an ordinary class with withdrawal for short regular tutorial sessions
4. Part-time placement in a special class, spending more time in the ordinary class
5. Full-time placement in a special class
6. Part-time placement in a special class, spending less time in the ordinary class
7. Part-time placement in a special school, spending more time in the ordinary school
8. Part-time placement in a special school, spending more time in the special school
9. Full-time placement in a day special school
10. Full-time placement in a 5-day residential special school
11. Full-time placement in a 7-day residential special school
12. Part-time placement in a child education and development centre and part-time in a special school

In summary, special schools have existed in Ireland on a formal basis for over 40 years. However, while it is clear that the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) influenced the growth in special school provision, the rationale for geographical location and/or SEN designation is not as obvious.

### **2.3.2 Current role of special schools**

The debate around the role of the special school or indeed, the very existence of special schools, is often fraught with emotion with some protagonists referring to the “survivors of special schools” (Cook, Swain and French, 2001, p.293) while others talk of the possible need for self-help groups for those who value special schools once they have been “airbrushed from history” (O’Keeffe, 2004, p.3). The tensions over separate settings are based on two seemingly opposing values; educational experiences tailored to meet the individual needs of children on the one hand and the acknowledgement of the importance of instilling a sense of belonging on the other (Norwich, 2008). This debate exists in the context of national and international policy and legislation espousing the ideal of children with SEN being educated with their peers unless it is not in the best interests of the child with SEN or the other children to do so (Department of Education, 1993; UNESCO, 1994;

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Government of Ireland, 1996; Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1997; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001; Government of Ireland, 2004; US Congress, 2004). “Within this context, opinions are still divided between those who promote inclusion for all pupils regardless of their disabilities and difficulties and those who see a continuing role for special schools to cater for those with the most complex needs” (Porter et al, 2002, p.9).

### 2.3.2.1 Outcomes

What characterises the debate around the role of the special school and indeed, the role of any type of school in providing for pupils with SEN, is the lack of evidence, one way or another, regarding the effectiveness of the provision in terms of learning outcomes (Porter et al, 2002). One reason why studies in this area are so scarce is that they present a number of methodological problems (DfEE, 1998). Arguments regarding the role of the special school tend to centre on the moral or ethical issues surrounding what is perceived as segregated education rather than on the quality of the education they provide. In the UK, the Special Schools Working Group (SSWG) (2003a) states that, arguably, it is more difficult to measure attainment in a special school than in a mainstream school because the children for whom the schools cater are generally operating at or below the levels of attainment of their peers. While this conclusion must be called into question, it may go some way towards highlighting the underlying reason as to why there is such a dearth of information on outcomes for pupils with SEN in special schools. Ofsted (2006) concluded that there was little difference in the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils across primary and post-primary mainstream schools and special schools. That is pupils were as likely to make good progress with their academic, personal and social development in both mainstream and special schools. It was also found that mainstream teachers had better subject knowledge than their special school counterparts, while special schools had a particular strength in carefully matching the skills and interests of staff to the needs of groups of pupils. Schools that ensured that pupils with learning disabilities/difficulties made outstanding progress in all areas were good or outstanding in terms of ethos, provision of specialist staff, and focused, professional development for all staff, regardless of the setting. High quality, experienced teachers as well as good leadership were the keys to success in terms of pupil attainment. This finding is echoed by Hattie (2005) who states that the major influence on student learning is the teacher rather than the educational setting or the level of difficulty experienced by the child.

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Parents are generally supportive of their children's provision regardless of the nature of the setting (Porter et al, 2002). Nugent (2007) agrees but found that the greatest satisfaction levels among parents of children with dyslexia were recorded for special units and schools. However, in general "parents generally regard their child's happiness as the primary measure of success, and place less emphasis on educational outcomes" (Nugent, 2007, p.53).

Hornby and Kidd (2001) report that high levels of unemployment were found among a group of young people with ModGLD (UK classification; equivalent of MGLD in Ireland) who had transferred from special to mainstream school. However, it is possible that this group of young people may have had such difficulties anyway even if they had remained in the special school. Gilligan (2008) conducted a study to investigate the post-school outcomes of pupils from a special school for pupils with MGLD in Ireland and discovered that the unemployment rate among the pupils in her sample was 23 per cent as compared to the national average of 5.5 per cent at the time of the study. This mirrors an earlier study which found an unemployment rate of three times the national average among a similar cohort of pupils (Fahey, 2005). While there is a slight difference in figures from these two studies, which may be attributed to changing economic circumstances over time and/or the differences brought about by the urban and rural settings of each, nonetheless, it is clear that employment outcomes for pupils with mild GLD are not as good as those of the general population. What is not clear is whether there are particular factors within either mainstream or special schools that impact on this outcome. The principals participating in Dempsey's (2005) study did not see attendance at a special school as impeding or inhibiting inclusion in society at a later stage in the student's life. Dyson, Meagher and Robson (2002) conducted a study with the aim of examining the extent to which education pre-16 is matched by support pathways on leaving and how the personal resources of the young people contribute to their progress along those pathways. Of the 502 participants in the study, 76 had attended special schools. Dyson et al (2002) found that the pupils from special schools had negative attitudes regarding teachers and curriculum in special schools, but that the pupils from mainstream schools exhibited a higher level of negative attitudes in relation to their experiences in school, concluding that it is not a special school versus mainstream argument but more to do with the quality and effectiveness of both settings and how young people can become disaffected.

Motherway (2009) conducted a study in a special school that caters for pupils with MGLD of post-primary age only. He based the framework of his study on the

'dilemmas of difference' model as espoused by Norwich (2008). He found that the pupils in the school did experience a dilemma in terms of identification and location. He notes that "while the positive views indicate that students like the school, nonetheless many are conscious of their difference in attending a special school, and conscious of how others may view them by virtue of their attendance there" (p.145). In contrast, Motherway (2009) did not find the existence of a dilemma of difference in relation to curriculum. While students were able to identify a difference in terms of curricular modification, they appeared to view the curriculum provided as a source of satisfaction and pride which seems to be the result of the close alignment of the curriculum with that available in mainstream post-primary schools. It should be noted that this particular school provides the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and Further Education and Training Award Council (FETAC) courses. Motherway's (2009) findings mirror those of Farrell (1998) who conducted an evaluation of the introduction of post-primary programmes in a special school for pupils with mild GLD and found that accessing mainstream curricula reduced the isolating effects of attending a special school.

### 2.3.2.2 Isolation

McCarthy and Kenny (2006) conducted a qualitative study on special schools in Ireland with the aim of identifying issues facing such schools, educational values and practices therein and the position of those schools given the ideological and legislative thrust towards full mainstream inclusion. Teachers and principals from special schools around the country participated in focus groups. McCarthy and Kenny (2006) found that a sense of isolation was a recurrent theme, with special schools "suffering from a bunker mentality brought about by their position on the side-lines during the expansion of the policy of inclusion. They feel that they have a contribution to make towards constructing new practice, but have largely been bypassed" (p.7). This feeling of isolation is mirrored in other studies (Allan and Brown, 2001; Porter et al, 2002; Beresford, Stokes and Morris, 2003; SSWG, 2003a; Norwich and Gray, 2006; Department of Education NI, 2006; Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008). Norwich and Gray (2006) state that "the push towards mainstreaming during the 1990s left special schools feeling 'done to' rather than 'done with'" (p.32). Teachers and principals in the sector are experiencing discomfort, not with the ideology of inclusion in mainstream schools per se, but rather with the lack of clarity created as a consequence in relation to where they fit into the jigsaw of the educational system, if at all.

### 2.3.2.3 Current links with mainstream schools

In recent years, it has become clear that some special schools and mainstream schools in Ireland have developed links (Shevlin, 1999; Buckley, 2000; Walsh and de Paor, 2000; de Paor, 2007). Buckley (2000) conducted a survey of all Irish special schools in 2000. Of the 121 special schools surveyed, 104 responded (86% response rate). Of those that responded, 60 schools (58%) had developed links with mainstream schools and 44 (42%) had not. There were some differences in the number of schools in different categories reporting links. Within the ModGLD category, 25 of the 31 schools responding (81%) reported that they had established links with mainstream schools as compared to 16 of the 29 (55%) schools for pupils with MGLD. All of the five special schools for pupils with physical disabilities responding (100%) had links with mainstream schools. Based on data reported by 54 of the responding schools, 161 mainstream primary and post-primary schools are involved in links with these schools. Buckley (2000) found that there was variation in the nature of the links established, including:

- The most common types of links between the schools in this study were exchange of pupils in both directions (47%), staff, material resources and pupils moving in both directions (21%) and pupils going from the mainstream to the special school only (19%)
- Pupils of mainly post-primary age were involved in links. Selection of individual pupils to participate in links arrangements was frequently based on teachers' judgements and appeared to be entirely the responsibility of the special school
- In terms of regular weekly links, the schools for pupils with physical disabilities have the highest involvement with 13.5% of total enrolment spending some time in mainstream each week as compared to 7.3% of total enrolment of pupils with MGLD and 11.9% of pupils with moderate GLD. "When examined closely, most special school pupils are spending most of the time in their own school and if involved in link activities, are so to a limited degree" (p.101)
- Of a total of 3,994 students, 2,451 (61%) were involved in links (data based on information from 92 special schools)
- In nearly two-thirds (65%) of schools where pupils were involved with links, 20 or fewer pupils actually participated. Often one class was more involved than others indicating that initiatives may be left to individual teachers
- Attendance in classes in mainstream school is not necessarily an indication that meaningful work is taking place and there appeared to be greater flexibility in

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terms of timetabling within special and primary schools than in post-primary schools

- Most subjects and activities engaged in by pupils on links programmes are in the non-academic areas of the curriculum
- Special schools initiate contact with mainstream schools. There was no evidence that pupils with SEN enrolled in mainstream schools were visiting special schools. In terms of pupils visiting from mainstream, work experience emerged as a major motivation.

Many of Buckley's (2000) findings reflect those elsewhere in the literature (Porter et al, 2002; Department of Education NI, 2006). However, Buckley's (2000) findings were not reflected in Stevens's (2007) study. Stevens (2007) examined educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools and special schools, comparing findings of surveys conducted in 1989 and 2004. He found that contact between the special schools for pupils with MGLD and primary schools had actually decreased over the 15-year period of the study. Further, he notes contact between the special schools themselves rose during the same period, which perhaps may have been a reaction to the growing feeling of isolation described in the section above.

There is a dearth of literature in terms of evaluation of such links between special and mainstream schools (Porter et al, 2002). De Paor (2007) conducted a case study evaluation of the links programme established between her special school and the mainstream schools involved. Most of the participants surveyed (teachers and parents) saw establishment of social connections with peers and raised self-esteem as the most positive outcomes of the links programme. While it is reported that the pupils involved in the links programme had increased access to a wider curriculum, it was not clear if the links programme had any effect on their overall academic progression and attainment. Further, there is some evidence that links between special and mainstream schools may be viewed as a way of securing the future of special schools as well as supporting mainstream schools (Shevlin et al, 2008).

### 2.3.2.4 Pupil profile

There is a perception across the sector that pupils attending special schools are presenting with increasingly serious needs (Buckley, 2000; Porter et al, 2002; Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), 2002; SSWG, 2003a; McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; Department of Education NI, 2006; Special Education Department,

2007), with the possible exception of special schools for pupils with a specific learning disability (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006). The schools seem to be catering for pupils with more serious needs than they were originally designated for, and therefore, the range of needs within any one school is much wider than was the case historically (McCarthy and Kenny; INTO, 2006). In a study in Scotland, Head and Pirrie (2007) had similar findings and concluded that “at a time when special schools are becoming less ‘specialised’ in that they are now required to provide for an increasingly diverse and complex range of needs, they are increasingly being asked to become more ‘special’ in that the increased range of needs requires them to develop new skills and approaches” (p.95). Norwich and Gray (2006) report that special schools often see children with complex needs, which do not fit easily into an already defined category, as additional to or different from the population of pupils for which they were originally designated. They go on to say that the admission of this cohort of pupils with more serious needs “forced schools to be more flexible and responsive, but typically in an unplanned and reactive way. It also led to some defensiveness and feelings among special school head teachers and staff nationally that they were being ‘excluded’ from developments and undervalued in a system that exhorted inclusion, value and participation” (p.33). Stevens (2007) found that the percentage of pupils with mild GLD placed in special schools dropped from 34% in 1989 to 13% in 2004. Further, 90% of the special school teachers he surveyed believed the introduction of the resource teacher model in mainstream primary school had a negative effect on pupil enrolments in special schools for pupils with MGLD.

There is also a trend in Irish special schools for an increased intake of pupils in the senior part of the school as those pupils make the transition from mainstream primary to post-primary school and cannot cope in the post-primary system (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; Special Education Department, 2007). The SERC report (Department of Education, 1993) expressed concern that the Special Education Section of the Department of Education formed part of the Primary Branch, which gave rise to administrative difficulties when decisions on special educational provision were being made at post-primary level. The committee recommended that the Department of Education “should restructure the administration of Special Education within the Department to include both primary and post-primary sections” (Department of Education, 1993, p.75). The remit of the NCSE would seem to partly fulfil this recommendation in relation to the allocation of resources. In addition, the pace of change in terms of special education provision put pressure on the system. The increase in the number of pupils accessing special

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educational resources in primary schools following Minister Martin's 'automatic entitlement' speech in 1998 (DES, 1998), was felt some time later in the post-primary sector. The number of pupils applying for extra teaching resources in post-primary schools rose from 3,000 in the school year 2001/2 to 12,500 two years later (Farrell, 2004).

Another aspect to this element of the current role of special schools is the perception of staff of special schools that pupils that traditionally would have been eligible to apply for enrolment are not actually being presented with the option following assessment (Allan and Browne, 2001; O'Keeffe, 2004). McCarthy and Kenny (2006) state that there is a need for "advisors and gatekeepers to present all options, without prejudice, so that parents can make informed choice on the placement of their child. The right to avail of inclusion in mainstream should be underpinned by a full knowledge of the available options" (p.9). Baker (2007), writing in the context of UK developments, highlights the fact that legislation promises that everything will be done to provide a place in mainstream for parents who seek that provision. However, in relation to the option of attending a special school, he makes the point that: "No reference, however, is made to the rights of parents who want a special school place for their child with SEN or that everything should be done to enable a place to be made available for their child" (p.74).

The introduction of the General Allocation Model created a situation whereby schools no longer need to acquire a psychological assessment for children with high incidence SEN as extra support is now provided for this group automatically (DES, 2005). The staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning has the advantage of enabling schools to put in place the necessary provision without recourse to formal assessments, thus avoiding a potentially lengthy wait before provision can be made. In addition, the staged approach enables teachers to develop their approaches to issues around identification of additional needs and the manner in which they meet those needs. On the other hand, children with some types of SEN (for example specific learning disability, MGLD) which previously required a formal diagnosis no longer need to be formally diagnosed by a psychologist to access support at primary level. As a formal diagnosis is necessary to access some types of provision, this reduces the possible range of options available to these children. Further, the method by which teaching resources are allocated in mainstream post-primary schools differs from that in primary schools (NCSE, 2009) as the GAM does not apply to that sector of educational provision. While the allocation of resource hours for pupils with low

incidence disabilities is the same as that in primary schools, application for and allocation of support teaching for pupils with high incidence disabilities is not.

### 2.3.2.5 Curriculum

Compared with mainstream schools, special schools have had great autonomy in terms of the curriculum that they offer to pupils (Norwich and Gray, 2006). O’Keefe (2004) regards the autonomy to tailor curricula and create programmes to suit individual needs as a great advantage of the special school. However, Stevens (2007) found that 88% of the teachers in special schools for pupils with mild GLD that he surveyed reported using the curriculum guidelines for pupils with general learning difficulties (NCCA, 2002, 2007).

Given the fact that special schools have historically been administered through the primary section of the DES and are still considered to be, officially, primary schools, the emphasis traditionally has been on adapting the mainstream primary curriculum. However, it is clear from the study conducted by the Special Education Department (2007) that a number of special schools are accessing mainstream post-primary programmes. Of the 83 special schools responding, four stated that they were offering the Leaving Certificate (LC), seven the LCA, 25 the Junior Certificate (JC), 16 the JCSP and 39 were offering courses accredited by FETAC, with some schools offering two or more of these courses. However, there was considerable overlap among these figures, whereby some schools were offering some or all of these courses. What is not clear from this study is the underlying rationale upon which special schools base decisions on whether or not to access post-primary programmes. Even among schools of the same category, there is huge variation in the type of programmes offered (Buckley, 2000), which may create difficulties for parents when trying to determine the relative merits of different types of educational settings across the continuum of provision. Shevlin et al (2008) found that the limited curricular access for pupils of post-primary age was concerning and that the “perceived lack of teacher expectations for these children was noted as a severe limitation on the efficacy of the education received in certain special schools” (p.148). It should be noted however, that the provision of additional staffing for post-primary education (mainly vocational subjects) that has been allocated directly to special schools by the Special Education Section of the DES through the VEC co-operation hours scheme does provide access to a wider range of subjects for post-primary aged pupils attending special schools.

### 2.3.3 Future role of special schools

Having examined the literature on the current role of the special school, this section explores the potential future role of these schools, in terms of providing for children with more complex needs, links with mainstream schools, dual placement, and providing for primary and post-primary aged children.

There seems to be agreement throughout Irish and international policy documents and research literature that there is a role for special schools, albeit that the actual nature of that role is unclear (Mittler, 2003). What is clear is that “the future role for special schools is limited and is inter-connected with ordinary schooling and educational processes” (Norwich, 2008, p.142). In his survey of Irish special school principals regarding the future of special schools, Dempsey (2005) found that 67.1% believed that the future of special schools now depends on the limitations of ordinary schools, although a sizeable minority (20.9%) disagreed. However, it can be questioned whether this is something new in terms of influencing special school provision. Mittler (2003) states that children were sent to special schools “at a time when it seemed impossible for regular schools to meet their needs” (p.5). It could be argued that the role of the special school has always been limited by what is going on (or not) in mainstream education. Fish (1984) states that “the future of special schools now depends more on the limitations of ordinary schools to deal effectively with individual differences. It no longer depends on the belief that there is a separate group of children for whom they provide the only educational answers” (p.7). Baker (2007) reflects that “special schools and inclusion should be two sides of the same coin, each complementing the other in meeting and supporting the special educational needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in our schools” (p.76). Mainstream and special schools need to strive towards commonality in terms of a range of aspects of schooling, including identification, curriculum, teaching, placement and participation (Norwich, 2008).

In his study, Norwich (2008) found five main reasons for a future role for special schools:

- (1) ‘children’s characteristics’ particularly in relation to pupils with more significant needs
- (2) ‘provision available’ in terms of aiding children to move back to mainstream and providing a safer environment
- (3) ‘professional and school specialisation’ in that special schools could provide outreach support and specialist professionals
- (4) ‘stakeholder’s interests’

(5) that special schools were a more economic use of resources (iv and v were not mentioned by many participants in the study).

These findings are mirrored in the Irish context (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006).

When the evidence from policy and from the research literature is distilled, two clear reasons emerge for maintaining special schools into the future – provision for pupils with significant and complex needs and collaboration with and/or provision of support and advice to mainstream schools as illustrated by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994).

... such special schools can represent a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools. The staff of these special institutions possess the expertise needed for early screening and identification of children with disabilities. Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools. Finally, special schools or units within inclusive schools may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools (p.12).

There are plentiful references in both policy and research literature to both of these criteria as defining the future role of special schools within the context of a continuum of provision. However, an analysis of what that means on the ground is generally not provided and difficult to extrapolate.

### 2.3.3.1 Providing for pupils with more complex needs

Porter et al (2002) found that “there is international evidence to suggest agreement that specialist provision will continue to be required for pupils with SLD, PMLD, severe autism, and EBD” (p.12). This view is also reflected in UK policy (DfES, 2003; DfES, 2004). It is also clear within the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) that special schools still have a place to “provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools” (p.12). The study conducted by the Special Education Department (2007) found that 508 (21.7%) of the 2,336 pupils in schools for pupils with MGLD were reported as having primary disabilities other than MGLD. The study also found that “these schools are not only catering for pupils with a wide range of primary disabilities, they also have considerable numbers of pupils who have two or more disabilities” (Special Education Department, 2007, p.8). Therefore, it appears that special schools are still catering

mainly for pupils who fall into their original categorical designation. However, many of these pupils have additional disabilities and so have more complex needs than those with only the disability indicated by the category label. Or, in some cases, the pupils' primary disability is other than that of the designation of the school but they may have that designation as an additional disability. If we define 'complex needs' within the limitations of each of the existing categories, all of the existing special schools have a role to play in providing education for this group of pupils. What is needed is a shared understanding of what 'complex needs' actually means (Norwich and Gray, 2006). ). A useful contribution to the resolution of this problem is to be found in the work of Rosengard, Laing, Ridley and Hunter (2007). Their recent review of the literature discusses the problems associated with the variable interpretations given to this term in considerable depth. They also provide some useful reflection on the use of the term, particularly in relation to pupils with SEN. According to Rosengard et al. the term 'complex needs' can usefully be thought of as encompassing both breadth *and* depth of need (our emphasis). Thus pupils with complex needs may have several different needs, none of which may individually be of particular severity, but which, taken together, mean that support is required from several different services to ensure those needs are met. However, according to Rosengard et al. complex needs is also a term used in the literature for *depth* of need where the individual pupil has a severe or profound level of disability; this includes not only those with severe or profound GLDs but also others, such as those with sight disabilities or who are blind and have 'additional needs' (RNIB, 2001). Furthermore pupils are seen as having complex needs where they present with challenging behaviour (eg Bond, 2004).

The absence of a shared understanding of 'complex needs' notwithstanding, the changing profile of the school has implications for practice. Schools will be expected to "provide a range of interventions which address low support needs, commonly occurring needs, rarely occurring needs, and high support needs" (Department of Education NI, 2006, p.11). In the context of changing pupil profiles, the literature does not provide convincing evidence that the staffs of special schools possess greater levels of expertise and experience extent than staffs of mainstream schools which are also experiencing a changing pupil profile in relation to SEN.

### 2.3.3.2 Linking special and mainstream schools

#### *Supporting mainstream schools*

Norwich and Gray (2006) conclude that all special schools should be linked to ordinary/general provision in terms of organisation and governance and Norwich

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(2008) goes on to say that schools that are not linked to mainstream schools cannot be included in a “flexible interacting continua of provision ... as these do not represent a balance between common and separate provision” (p.141).

An examination of the situation in the UK reveals at least six conceptualisations of how special and mainstream schools could be linked (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Concepts relevant to the role of the special school**

Term	Reference	Description
Centre of Excellence	SSWG (2003b); Department of Education, NI (2006)	Providing training and outreach
Resource Centre	Chapple (1999); Meijer (2003); Lambert (2003); Dempsey (2005); Head and Pirrie (2007); Lewis and Rayner (2002)	Supporting mainstream schools, short-term placements, developing and distributing teaching materials and methods
Outreach	Ofsted (2005); South West SEN Regional Partnerships (2005)	Delivering training to schools, support for individual pupils, modelling of lessons, sharing resources, providing workshops for parents
Specialist Schools	Government of UK (1998)	A special school may become a specialist school in a particular field and share their expertise, particularly with their mainstream counterparts, to support inclusion among special and mainstream schools across the country
Cluster	Gains (1996); Porter et al. (2000); DfES (2003); Mittler (2003); Lindsay et al. (2005)	Sharing expertise
Federation	Government of UK (2002); Lindsay et al. (2005)	A special school working/collaborating with a group of schools to foster inclusive practice

Clearly, a number of models exist in terms of the numbers of different ways that a special school can provide support or link with mainstream schools. It is generally unclear exactly what is meant by each of the above models, beyond providing advice and support to mainstream schools; nor is there clarity regarding the implications for the work of the special school. Indeed, although many of these concepts are mentioned in governmental reports, a clear definition of what these terms mean is often not provided. A brief glimpse at the descriptions used in Table

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3 above shows a large amount of overlap between these competing concepts. For example, a specialist school could act as both a Centre of Excellence or as a resource centre, whilst also being part of a cluster or federation.

With regard to the general notion of special schools providing support or outreach to the mainstream, Porter et al (2002) conclude that special school teachers may feel ill-prepared for such a role and there is no evidence to say they can do it! It is also fair to assume, that providing advice and support will imply a substantial change in the role of the teachers within the school who will therefore require training (McTague, 2005).

A key facet of centres of excellence, resource centres, and specialist schools appears to be their capacity to provide an outreach service. The outreach role of a special school in supporting mainstream schools needs to be clearly defined so that the necessary planning and preparation can be put in place. Dessent (1984) identifies four requirements for successful outreach from the special school – commitment from principal and staff of the special school towards meeting the needs of children outside the special school; role of special school outreach should fit with the needs of all the schools in the area; adequate staffing and resources; and, an organisational structure that will ensure maintenance of the service over time. It may also be the case that excellence and expertise reside in mainstream schools and indeed, there may be much that special schools in Ireland could learn from mainstream, especially given the considerable changes they have undergone in the past ten years in relation to catering for pupils with SEN. Indeed, “a more recent view is to be very guarded against presumptions of a one-way transfer of expertise” (Lambert, 2003, p.45).

One example of what special schools becoming resource centres might look like in practice is to be found in Norway. Since 1992 Norway has closed twenty of its forty special schools and the other twenty have been turned into state resource centres, some of which are intended to provide support for specific categories of disability Meijer (2003). Meijer outlines five aspects to a special school acting as a resource centre for mainstream schools:

- Provision for training and courses for teachers and other professionals
- Development and dissemination of materials and methods
- Support for mainstream schools and parents
- Short-time or part-time help for individual pupils
- Support in entering the labour market.

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In Ireland, the SESS has piloted a project over the last two years entitled “The special school as a resource” (SESS, undated b) with the focus on teacher partnerships between a special school and three mainstream post-primary schools. The main aims of the project are to:

- develop a professional/collaborative relationship between mainstream and special schools
- develop a professional/collaborative partnership between teachers in a mainstream and a special school
- enhance and develop teacher effectiveness in catering for students with special educational needs in all schools involved
- create a climate of openness in schools that will facilitate the sharing of expertise and of experiences of good practice.

This project was not completed at the time of writing and so the findings were not available; however published in the future should be considered in terms of informing practice.

In the 83 special schools that participated in the first phase of this study (Special Education Department, 2007) there were 864 DES employed teachers. Of those, 392 had restricted recognition, 17 provisional recognition and 14 were unqualified. Teachers from these schools held third level accredited qualifications from 12 different courses. It was not possible to find the total number of teachers with specialist qualifications because some teachers may have completed more than one course. However, 238 teachers held a diploma in special education which represents 27.5% of the teaching population in the schools responding. Even taking into account the fact that some other teachers hold other specialist qualifications, it is difficult to see how the system can expect special schools to provide outreach support to mainstream schools considering the low rate of upskilled teachers in those schools particularly in terms of the role outlined by Meijer (2003) above.

### *Dual attendance of pupils in mainstream and special schools*

Some of the linkage arrangements described in the literature are those involving pupils of special schools spending some time in mainstream schools. A variety of terms are used to describe this practice, including “dual enrolment”, “dual registration”, “dual placement”, and “dual attendance”. The commonality between these practices is that a child spends a part of their time in a special school and part of their time in a mainstream school. The key difference where dual enrolment/dual registration is concerned is that the child is officially enrolled in both schools. This

has obvious budgetary ramifications in terms of the number of pupils on the books of each school. In order to establish links between special and mainstream schools that are workable, it is important to analyse the perceptions of the people already involved in terms of the facilitators and barriers inherent in such a collaborative venture. It must be remembered, however, at least some of the views expressed in the literature may arise from vested interest and the fact that the participants have already invested a lot of time and effort into a links programme.

### *Planning*

Both systemic planning (Fletcher-Campbell and Kingston, 2001) and school planning (Buckley, 2000; Porter et al, 2002; de Paor, 2007) are identified as facilitators of good links arrangements. The participants in de Paor's (2007) study unanimously agreed that links programmes should be recognised on a national basis. Failure to do so results in quite a piecemeal approach (Fletcher-Campbell and Kingston, 2001). The lack of local education structures such as regional education boards (Government of Ireland, 1995) translates to quite a centralised model of national administration of education provision. In the UK, each LEA is expected to have a policy on SEN (DfES, 2001) to allow for decentralised planning. The only comparable model currently in Ireland is that of the SENO, whose role could potentially include planning for dual enrolment.

Effective planning within schools is also important. Difficulties in organisation can be perceived as barriers to actually establishing links in the first instance (Buckley, 2000). It is important that roles are clear while ensuring flexibility and openness to change at the same time (Porter et al, 2002). Walsh and de Paor (2000) and de Paor (2007) also found that co-ordination was a key facilitator to establishing and maintaining links successfully. If it is accepted that a co-ordinator is necessary for successful links between schools then the associated duties with such a role need to be defined and factored into the named person's workload. Indeed, the implications for staffing appear to go beyond the need of a named co-ordinator as the roles and duties of other teachers and SNAs may be altered by involvement in links (Buckley, 2000; Walsh and de Paor, 2000). Training could also facilitate linkage arrangements (SSWG, 2003a) and, depending on the nature of the links, could actually be necessary especially if staff in special schools are to be expected to facilitate training of staff in the mainstream schools (or vice versa).

Buckley (2000) found that some of the special schools he surveyed stated that they had not established links with mainstream schools because they did not deem it suitable to their pupil population. The lower rate of involvement of special schools

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for MGLD may be attributed to behaviour management issues, the self-consciousness and awareness of those pupils and the possible lack of tolerance of peers towards this group of students as opposed to those with more obvious learning or physical difficulties. The relationship between the child and the learning environment is also important in terms of planning and “how they pick up cues and respond to new demands are crucial factors in the transfer process” (McTague, 2005, p.105). The interest level in the mainstream school can also be a factor when considering facilitators and barriers (Lambert, 2004), especially in light of the fact that most links arrangements are initiated by the special school (Buckley, 2000) and therefore the mainstream schools are reacting to a request. Parental anxiety or disinterest (Lambert, 2004; Gibb, Tunbridge, Chua and Frederickson, 2007) may also act as barriers to successful linkage arrangements and therefore schools need to supply parents with clear information in order to enable them to make an informed decision.

Table 2 above (options 7 and 8) indicates that dual placement was amongst the options recommended by the SERC (Department of Education, 1993). Indeed the White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995) recommended that all pupils with SEN in Ireland be registered with a special school, regardless of where they were receiving their education. This issue was also addressed by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1996). Around the same time in the UK, it was recommended that all children be registered on the roll of a mainstream school even if they were placed in a special school for a period of time (DfEE, 1997). Walsh and de Paor (2000) recommend the facility of dual enrolment be introduced into the education system. Facilitation of dual enrolment was also recommended by the INTO (2002). In the UK, a similar view was taken by 21% of those responding to the report of the SSWG (2003b) with dual attendance being seen as a good way to encourage more pupil movement. Evans and Lunt (2002) sent out a questionnaire to 160 LEAs in the UK, and from the 60 responses gathered, found that 78% of LEAs included provision for an inclusive practice termed “part-time placement in special and in mainstream schools”. However, while this provides some evidence that dual attendance is quite widespread in the UK and part of policy, it is unclear whether dual attendance actually means that the children concerned were dual enrolled/registered in two schools.

As is clear from this discussion, even when only dual enrolment is considered more than one option is being referred to. Consequently, it is important to clarify the exact

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nature of dual enrolment. Is it to be a facility whereby all pupils with SEN are dual enrolled or will it be applied just to those partaking in links arrangements? Certainly, if teachers are to be encouraged to support more than just the children with SEN attending their own schools, dual enrolment may provide the mechanism whereby links arrangements could be defined and evaluated.

### *Cost*

There is widespread agreement that there is a need to factor in the additional costs around linkage arrangements between special and mainstream schools (Walsh and de Paor, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell and Kingston, 2001; Porter et al, 2002; Lambert 2003, 2004; SSWG, 2003b). In the future, if linking in with mainstream schools is to be the role of the special school, costs need to be addressed, particularly in relation to transport and staffing. By the same token, this implies that the effectiveness of such programmes needs to be evaluated.

### *Time*

Certainly, the cost of linkage arrangements in terms of time appears to be of concern (Buckley, 2000; Lambert, 2003; Lindsay et al, 2005) and needs to be addressed as part of an evaluation of linkage programmes. On the other hand, de Paor (2007) found that time travelling was not identified as a major difficulty overall. Any concerns that were voiced came from parents and SNAs while teachers in the post-primary schools were unaware of the amount of time spent travelling.

### *Curriculum*

In facilitating pupils to access both mainstream and special provision, decisions need to be made regarding the overall curriculum being accessed by the pupils in question. The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1996) recommended that a system of standards be applied to special schools and that “the option of access to mainstream certification must be available to those in specialist education settings” (p.179). Given the historical autonomy enjoyed by special schools since the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965), this recommendation is strong, especially considering the use of the word ‘must’. Links arrangements may go some way towards addressing such a curricular need (INTO, 2002). However, care must be taken to ensure that teachers and pupils are clear on the overall curriculum the pupils are accessing and where the ‘new’ subjects fit into that, as pupils may sometimes perceive the work being carried out in the mainstream to be more important than that of the special school (Buckley, 2000). The inflexibility of

timetabling structures in mainstream post-primary schools may also be a barrier to links arrangements (Buckley, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell and Kingston, 2001) and require imaginative planning.

### 2.3.4 Providing for pupils of primary and post-primary age

The Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) felt that it was important that pupils with GLD remain in school for as long as possible. It was hoped that the special schools structure would facilitate this group of students in prolonging their time in the school system at a time when many children finished their education upon leaving primary school at the age of twelve. The Commission was also clear that the special school should consist of two clearly differentiated stages corresponding to pre-adolescent and adolescent stages in child development. That clarity of differentiation varies widely even today across the special school system. The Commission's recommendation has been addressed over the years (Department of Education, 1993; Coolahan, 1994; Government of Ireland, 1996). Given the increase in the numbers of pupils enrolling in special schools at post-primary age (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; INTO, 2006; Special Education Department, 2007) and the views of pupils in relation to curriculum and stigma (Drislane, 1992; Farrell, 1998; Fahey, 2005) some standardisation in the work of the special school in terms of curriculum and certification for senior pupils (Government of Ireland, 1996) may be warranted when defining the future of the special school. "The differentiation between primary and post-primary pupils is important, according to teachers, for the self-esteem of the pupils who are aware that their peers in mainstream post-primary schools are treated differently to primary pupils" (INTO, 2002, p.16).

## 2.4 The Role of Special Classes

In this section the role of special classes is discussed. A brief description of the development of special classes will set the context for this discussion, followed by a focus on key themes arising in the literature. These include the place of special classes in the continuum of provision, their ability to facilitate inclusion, curriculum issues, and issues arising specifically in mainstream post-primary schools. This will be followed by a focus on the potential future role of special classes.

### 2.4.1 Context

#### 2.4.1.1 Numbers of special classes

Identification of the total number of special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Ireland and the numbers of pupils currently being catered for by these classes is difficult. The INTO (2006) reported that the number of pupils in special classes in mainstream primary schools rose from 2,578 in 1984 to 9,340 in 2004, representing an increase in the percentage of primary pupils enrolled in such classes from under 0.5% to just over 2.1% during the same period (this information was sourced from an analysis of DES statistical reports). On the other hand Stevens and O'Moore (2009) note a downward trend in the number of children attending special classes for pupils with mild GLD, from a high of 2,805 pupils attending such classes in 1999, to a figure of 1,405 in 2008.

The most recently published Statistical Report (DES, 2008) reports figures for the academic year 2005/6. The term *special class* is not explicitly used; however the report does state that the number of mainstream primary schools in the Republic of Ireland totals 3,160 and goes on to report the “number of ordinary schools with pupils with special needs” (p.25) as totalling 571. Given the commonly held belief that there are children with SEN in almost every mainstream primary school in Ireland, it might be extrapolated that the report is actually referring to schools that include special classes. The Statistical Report (DES, 2008) states that the number of “pupils in ordinary classes in ordinary schools” (p.26) is 441,966 and the number of “pupils with special needs in ordinary schools” (p.26) totals 9,296 or 2% of the total number of primary pupils reflecting the INTO (2006) figures. Examination of the summary of education key statistics for the decade 1993–2003 (DES, undated b) provides some illumination of the nature of “national schools with pupils with special needs” (p.1) as a linked footnote alludes to the nature of special classes. Summary key statistics provided subsequently for the decades ending 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 omit the category of ‘national schools with pupils with special needs’ (DES, undated b).

When comparing the Statistical Report for 2005/6 (DES, 2008) to the list of schools with special classes on the DES website (DES, undated c), the assumption that the former document is referring to special classes can be called into question. For example, the Statistical Report claims that the “number of ordinary schools with pupils with special needs” (p.25) in Carlow totals six. However, the DES website lists only one school with a special class for that county. There is no information in either the statistical report or the DES website that provides information regarding

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the number of special classes at post-primary level. Table 4 details the number of primary schools with special classes for a range of categories of SEN. It is important to note that some of the schools may have more than one special class catering for either the same or different categories of SEN and therefore the figures in Table 4 do not represent either the total number of primary schools with special classes or the total number of special classes at primary level.

**Table 4. Mainstream primary schools with special classes for particular categories of SEN (Information regarding numbers of special classes extrapolated from the DES website 18/11/08)**

Category of SEN	Number of Schools with Special Classes
MGLD	206
ModGLD	14
Severe/profound GLD	6
Multiple disabilities	4
Specific speech and language disorder	46
Specific learning disabilities	11
ASD – early intervention classes	6
ASD	66
Asperger Syndrome	4
ADHD	1
EBD	9
Severe EBD	1
Hearing impairment	8
Physical disabilities	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>

Circular 9/99 (DES, 1999) was issued to mainstream primary schools outlining procedures for the establishment of new special classes. However, the DES cannot enforce the establishment of special classes as it does not directly manage the majority of schools in the state and there is no legislative requirement on schools to provide special classes (McGee, 2004).

The apparent growth of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with ASD (INTO, 2006) may account for some of the increase in special class provision.

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According to the Task Force on ASD (DES, 2001), there were 40 special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with ASD/Asperger Syndrome, including three pre-school classes as well as 47 classes for pupils with ASD in special schools. By 2008 that number had increased to 36 classes in mainstream post-primary schools, 162 in mainstream primary schools, 101 in special schools, 35 pre-school classes (of which 13 are in special schools) and five classes in mainstream primary schools specifically for pupils with Asperger Syndrome (figures supplied by the DES, November 2008). This represents almost a 400% increase in special classes over a period of seven years for this group of pupils, although it should be noted that these figures are somewhat at odds with those listed in Table 4. This development is all the more significant when placed in the context of the 199 recommendations of the Task Force on Autism (DES, 2001). While the report did recommend that a 'range of suitable options be developed' (p.352) and that provision be available, as appropriate, as a 'choice/combination of home based, mainstream or specialist settings' (p.354) it is interesting to note that the establishment of special classes was not explicitly recommended except for pupils with ASD aged five and under in mainstream and special schools.

In contrast, the Task Force on Dyslexia (Government of Ireland, 2002) did recommend the establishment of additional special classes in mainstream primary schools, and that the limit on enrolment in such classes be extended from two to three years if needed. The Task Force (Government of Ireland, 2002) did not make any recommendations in relation to special classes in post-primary schools. An evaluation of special classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorders (DES Inspectorate, 2005a) recommends the establishment of additional special classes, in particular in counties where there is currently no specialist provision. The report also highlights the fact that there is a need for provision for accommodation both for a classroom for teaching, and additional room for speech therapy.

In September 2005, Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005b) was disseminated to all teachers in mainstream primary schools. This circular changed the manner in which resources would be allocated to mainstream schools as flagged in Circular 24/03 (DES, 2003a). A key change was the division of the already existing categories of SEN into two umbrella categories – high and low incidence SEN – and the introduction of the General Allocation Model whereby extra teaching supports would automatically be allocated to schools for the pupils in the high incidence category while the children in the low incidence category would still attract a specific number

of hours depending on the results of formal assessments. The big difference in terms of practice on the ground was that while allocation of teachers remained the remit of the DES, the actual deployment of teachers in the school was now the full responsibility of the principal. In other words, once the principal had the GAM allocation for the children in the high incidence group and the individual allocation of hours for the pupils in the low incidence group, s/he could now deploy the hours in the manner s/he thought best suited the needs of the pupil and the school. The circular refers to learning support and resource teachers throughout. While Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005b) emphasises the importance of a whole school approach, there is no reference made to the existence of special classes in some mainstream primary schools nor is there any discussion regarding the interface of the special class model with the new model of provision in mainstream schools.

### 2.4.1.2 The establishment of special classes in Ireland

The Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) felt that there were some advantages to the special class model – the child with GLD would be educated with his peers and parents may not be so afraid of the stigma of the special class as opposed to the special school especially as there was a chance that s/he might rejoin the mainstream class. Also, a specially trained teacher in a mainstream school was viewed in a positive light by the Commission. However, the Commission worried that the wide range of ages and the isolation of the teacher as the only one in the school teaching children with significant level of need may result in the children not achieving their full potential and recommended that there be separate junior and senior special classes in order to address the issue of the potential for a wide age range in such classes. In general, the Commission favoured the special school model of provision for pupils with SEN over that of the special class. However, it must be remembered that the Commission reported at a time when inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream classes was not really an option; indeed, for many children, schooling finished at twelve years of age. Despite the Commission's preference for the special school model of provision, numbers of special classes in mainstream schools increased in the years following the report and Circular 23/77 formally outlined the procedures for establishing special classes. The Commission reported that there were 31 "special classes for slow-learning pupils" (p.189) including three 'remedial' classes, in mainstream primary schools. (Department of Education, 1977). By the time the SERC report (Department of Education, 1993) was published the number of classes for pupils with a mild general learning disability in mainstream primary schools totalled 155. There was

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also a large number of special classes catering for pupils with other SEN. The report estimated that there were 48 special classes for pupils with MGLD at post-primary level at that time.

There are special classes in other countries, often operating under different titles, such as resource rooms or special units which are not always directly comparable with the Irish model. The different terminologies used also make it difficult to access literature on these models, which are briefly, if ever, mentioned in any international literature. Meijer (2003) provides examples of a number of countries using a special class model and, for the purposes of his research, the special class was regarded as a segregated setting (although it was noted that this was an arbitrary decision). Similarly, OECD (2000, 2005) found that there was less information provided on the nature of special class provision as compared to that of the special school. From the few countries who gave detailed data on special classes, the main finding across these countries was a relatively small class size of between three and 14 (OECD, 2000). From the data in the two OECD reports (2000, 2005), it can be stated that some form of special class model for certain categories of SEN are used in the following countries: the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Slovak Republic, Turkey, USA, Hungary, Portugal, New Zealand, Finland, Austria and Greece.

### 2.4.2 Current role of special classes

In comparison to the debate regarding the role of the special school, it is more difficult to find evidence of the debate around the current and/or future role of the special class in the literature (Stevens and O'Moore, 2009). Given the opaque nature of the identification of special classes on the ground in Ireland as outlined above, this is perhaps not surprising. In addition, the special class model is often linked with the special school model in the SEN provision debate and special classes become more or less invisible as attention focuses mainly on the role of the special school.

#### 2.4.2.1 Place in continuum of provision

McDonnell (2003) notes that during the 1970s in Ireland “gaps in provision were particularly evident in new and expanding areas where the perceived needs were met by establishing special classes attached to mainstream schools rather than through special schools” (p.260). The existence of special classes as part of a continuum of provision is not purely an Irish phenomenon. As mentioned previously, there is evidence of use of the special class model throughout Europe (OECD,

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2000, 2005). The SERC report (Department of Education, 1993) recommended that the “network of special classes in designated ordinary primary and post-primary schools should be expanded in accordance with identified needs” (p.175). The members of the review committee were particularly concerned with appropriate provision for pupils with serious levels of need in mainstream schools and were of the opinion that provision for these children in mainstream classes “may be detrimental to the welfare of both the special pupil and of other pupils” (p.174) and therefore special classes for particular groups of children should be established in one school in a particular area. However, the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1996) was concerned that the designation of particular mainstream schools to cater for pupils with SEN would create a situation in which other schools would abdicate their responsibilities to enrol pupils with SEN.

Stevens (2007) found that in 1989, two thirds (66%, n = 1,229) of the school-going population of pupils with mild GLD were enrolled in special classes, with the remaining third (34%, n = 635) in special schools (1,894 pupils in total). By 2004, he found that 40% of all primary pupils with mild GLD were in special classes, while 13% were enrolled in special schools and the remaining 47% attended primary schools with resource teachers (3,890 pupils in total). As was the case with their special school colleagues, 75% of the special class teachers surveyed believed that the establishment of the resource teacher model had had a negative effect on pupil enrolments in special classes for MGLD. Also, considering the continuum of provision available in Ireland it is worrying that Stevens (2007) found children up to the age of 18 years enrolled in special classes in mainstream primary schools in both 1989 and 2004, “emphasising the availability of adequate post-primary facilities” (p.330).

Stevens and O’Moore (2009) report a further shift in the placement of pupils with mild GLD between 2004 and 2007 which they attribute to the introduction of the GAM. They report that by 2007 only 9% of such pupils were in special schools and 27% in special classes and 64% in mainstream classes. Most recently, 118 classes for pupils with MGLD with fewer than nine pupils have been suppressed.

Studies by Travers (2007) and Stevens and O’ Moore (2009) raise very serious concerns about the level of support being provided to pupils with mild general learning disabilities under the GAM. In a study of 137 schools, Travers (2007) found that 67% of the learning support/resource teachers reported reduced support for pupils with MGLD since the introduction of the GAM. He also found that the

average caseload of the new learning support/resource teacher was 21 (a combination of pupils with high incidence SEN and pupils with milder difficulties in literacy and numeracy) compared to a caseload of up to 11 (pupils with assessed SEN) under the previous model for resource teachers. Stevens and O'Moore (2009) report that in 2004, the mean amount of time per day spent by pupils with mild general learning disabilities with a resource teacher was 50 minutes and that 29% of resource teachers felt that this was insufficient. Since the introduction of the GAM this has fallen to 20 minutes. The authors emphasise the import of this change: "This finding is extremely important as it illustrates that the introduction of the GAM has significantly reduced the period of supplementary teaching for MGLD pupils" (p.174)). On the other hand, the increased flexibility with regard to the deployment of the teaching resources allocated to the school for SEN accorded to principals by Circular 02/05 provides the principal with an opportunity to allocate support teaching in a flexible manner that best meets the needs of the children concerned. Additionally the use of a range of support models such as team teaching, grouping of pupils (as well as one-to-one where necessary), encouraged in Circular 02/05, should provide more effective support for learning. This development needs to be balanced against the reduction in supplementary teaching identified by Stevens and O'Moore.

### 2.4.2.2 Facilitation of inclusion in mainstream schools

Warnock (1978) saw the role of the special class playing a part in the 'integration' of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools (DfES, 2004). However, there is some evidence to show that children in special classes can actually be quite marginalised within the mainstream setting, both by the attitudes and actions of teachers in the mainstream classes that the children with SEN may attend on a part-time basis and also by the other children in the mainstream class who may not be willing to associate with the children in the special class (Angelides and Michailidou, 2007). These issues were not reflected in research carried out by Breathnach (2005) who interviewed past pupils of one special class for MGLD. The past-pupils, now grown up, were very positive regarding their experience in the special class and felt they had received support was appropriate to their needs. Indeed, they rejected the suggestion that enrolment in a mainstream class with support from a learning support teacher would have met their needs.

Dunne (1993) reports on the findings of a survey of 77 special class teachers of pupils with borderline MGLD and MGLD. She found that approximately 50 per cent of the special class teachers felt that the principal and class teachers were

supportive of the pupils in the special class attending some lessons in the mainstream classroom. Dunne (1993) identifies large class sizes as being a possible reason for resistance, with teachers perhaps viewing the pupils with SEN as adding to an already high workload. Feerick (1996) conducted a study in 1993 ascertaining the attitudes of pupils in mainstream classes towards their special class peers. She found that the children in the special class were perceived to be generally the same as their regular class peers. Children did not commit themselves to a particular stereotype of the children in the special class (although they did have a fairly positive stereotype of themselves) and she found no evidence to suggest that regular class children held either a very strong positive or negative attitude toward children in the special class. However, it should be acknowledged that both of the studies cited above are now fifteen years old and it is possible that the findings may not be relevant in today's context.

The importance of the integration of pupils from the special class into the mainstream class is also highlighted in policy documents. Circular 9/99 (DES, 1999) states that the children in special classes have been counted on the ordinary roll for the purpose of promoting the integration of pupils from the special class into the mainstream class. The post-primary guidelines (DES, 2007) state that pupils in the special class "should be taught separately in the special class setting only when it is in their interests and at points in their timetable when they are unable to participate beneficially in lessons in mainstream classes" (p.53). In reviewing Irish studies undertaken into special class integration between 1970 and 1993, Stevens (2007) concludes that integration is primarily of a social nature with little structured curricular interaction. His own research corroborated this finding and highlighted the fact that joint special class / mainstream class activities fell from 70% in 1989 to 47% in 2004 with only 6% of shared activities in the core elements of the curriculum. Stevens (2007) raises the possibility that the introduction of the resource teacher model of provision may actually reduce efforts of teachers to integrate children in the special class into mainstream class activities.

### 2.4.2.3 Curriculum

As is the case in special schools, there is no 'special' curriculum for special classes in mainstream primary schools. The primary curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and the curriculum guidelines for teacher of pupils with general learning disabilities (NCCA, 2002, 2007) are the basis of curriculum planning and implementation in special classes. Stevens (2007) found that 84% of the special class teachers he surveyed

used the curriculum guidelines (NCCA, 2002, 2007) with 87% of those teachers using Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to plan for children with MGLD.

At post-primary level, the Department of Education (1986) circulated curriculum guidelines for pupils in special classes for MGLD in mainstream, post-primary schools. The guidelines outlined the assessment procedures for access to the special class as well as staffing and timetabling issues, with specific reference to the integration of special class pupils into mainstream classes for some subjects where possible. The guidelines further recommended that pupils in the special class for MGLD should have access to the following subjects – Irish, English, maths, social and environmental studies, PE, music and two practical subjects. The guidelines go on to outline the aspects of each of these subjects that should be covered. The rationale for issuing curriculum guidelines for special classes in post-primary is not explicitly clear, although the reference to transition issues from primary to post-primary school and the differences between the two types of schooling is made in the document and it could be that these perceived differences necessitated specific guidelines for the post-primary sector. The fact that curriculum guidelines were devised for the teachers of special classes in post-primary schools indicates that the establishment of these classes was taken seriously and that potential difficulties regarding transition and curriculum were thought about, identified and addressed to some degree. The guidelines from 1986 have since been superseded by the curriculum guidelines from the NCCA (2002, 2007) and by the inclusion guidelines (DES, 2007).

#### 2.4.2.4 Special classes in post-primary schools

The exact number of special classes in Irish mainstream post-primary schools is not clear. The SERC Report (Department of Education, 1993) estimated that there were 48 special classes for pupils with mild GLD in post-primary schools. In a survey conducted by Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) in 2003, it is reported that 63 of the 373 post-primary schools surveyed had 'special education units' (SEUs) and that the students in those units were the only ones in the study sample taking the JCSP programme. AHEAD (2003) also found that 4% of the schools surveyed had formulated written school plans for students with disabilities; interestingly this percentage rose to 13% in the case of schools with SEUs. However, this survey reported one year before the passing of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and therefore the situation may have changed since then. Pringle (2008) conducted a study focusing on school completion for pupils who had attended a special class at primary level. He found

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that the availability of programmes such as the JCSP in post-primary schools was an important factor in ensuring that pupils who had attended a special class at primary level went on to achieve in post-primary school.

Most special classes are designated for students with mild or moderate GLD and there is a rising number of classes for pupils with ASD in recent times; usually these classes have a resource teacher designated to teach the class, but there may be variations of this model in different schools (DES, 2007). The existence of a special class/unit may reassure parents and the students themselves (Maras and Aveling, 2006). However, where the special class becomes interchangeable with learning support or behaviour units, the effectiveness is diluted. “Such spaces are most effective if they are available specifically for students with statements of special educational needs; available as and when they are needed (including break times); and are not associated with punishment” (Maras and Aveling, 2006, p.201). Markussen (2004) was critical of special classes and indeed the withdrawal model of support in the senior cycle of Norwegian secondary schools. He found that neither special classes nor individual tuition helped the students with SEN, as a group, to achieve better than they would have done otherwise. He concludes that “special education as practiced in the upper secondary school today contributes to maintain, and partly reinforce, the difference” (p.45).

The nature of post-primary schooling differs considerably from the primary system (Naughton, 2003). Children have to adjust from having one teacher to many different teachers and subjects (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004). The focus on examinations at post-primary has a profound impact on the nature of assessment, not just in third and sixth year but in all years (Naughton, 2003). The balance between meeting the needs of all of the pupils in relation to the examination system and meeting the needs of pupils with SEN is a difficult one in the post-primary system. The learning difficulties experienced by some children are often exacerbated by the system and it can be difficult to define success for children “who will never totally catch up with their peers in a society which sees examination results as the main indicator of success” (Lovey, 2002, p.56). There have been a number of innovations in relation to post-primary programmes in the last 15 years such as the introduction of the JCSP, foundation levels of assessment in the core subjects of English, Irish and Maths in junior cycle and the LCA in senior cycle which have made the post-primary curriculum more accessible to a number of students. However, not all schools offer all of these programmes. Also, there appears to be a drop-off in the numbers of pupils with SEN progressing to from

junior to senior cycle, (AHEAD, 2003; Farrell, 2004) although the reason for this is not clear. The trend to stream children into particular classes on the basis of ability appears to be changing, especially in relation to the first year cohort where the majority of schools are reported to be using mixed-ability classes (Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland [ASTI], 2005; Church of Ireland College of Education [CICE], 2005a; DES, 2007) and Smyth, McCoy and Darmody (2004) found that the streaming of first-year pupils on the basis of entrance exams had a deleterious effect on the self-esteem of those in the lower stream.

Again, the manner in which the special class model interfaces with the structures in post-primary schools is not clear. Nor is it possible to define the role of the special class in terms of the current trend to ensure mixed ability teaching at least in junior cycle.

### 2.4.3 Future role of special classes

Since Minister Martin's 'automatic entitlement' speech (DES, 1998) the number of children with SEN being supported by resource and learning support teachers has greatly increased with the emphasis in terms of policy on that model of provision (DES, 2005b) without reference to the special class model. McGee (2004) states

There are special classes, with a track record of excellence over many years, whose continued existence is in question, not because of any policy decision but mostly, it would seem, because the psychologist, who may or may not be knowledgeable about special education and who may not have any measure of the quality of the special class, automatically refers pupils assessed to resource teaching. Some highly effective principals, who would testify strongly to the excellence of their special class, seem strangely disempowered in this situation. They would need to appreciate that the system has not taken any position on the relative merits of these forms of provision ... In the circumstance it behoves the principal to be much more pro-active in relation to the assessment process; he/she may find that dialogue on an issue of principle is warranted or simply that the psychologist needs to be educated on the issue (p.77).

Nugent (2007) found that while parents of pupils with dyslexia expressed satisfaction with regard to all types of SEN services, levels of satisfaction were higher for the more specialist settings. She goes on to say,

While the inclusion movement encourages the closure of special schools and units, parents are telling us that they and their children actually prefer this type of provision (at least for short term placement at primary age). Where such specialist services exist, they are highly rated. One of the important implications of this research is that professionals ... if they accept the findings of this research, have a duty of care to advise parents of the likelihood that they and their children will be happier with specialist services (pp.58–59).

Kidd and Hornby's (1993) findings echo Nugent's (2007). They found much higher satisfaction ratings among twenty-nine students and their parents of being integrated in a unit in a mainstream school than in mainstream classes after transferring from a special school. The evaluation of special class provision for pupils with specific speech and language disorder (DES, 2005a) also recorded a very high rate of satisfaction (94%) among parents with 88% seeing the enrolment as extremely or very beneficial to the academic progress of their child. However, the nature of that academic progress is not clear; indeed, the evaluation found that there was inconsistency across schools in terms of collaboration between staff in assessing progress and that some records of progress were restricted to English and mathematics only. The report recommends that 'staff members should be able to draw comparisons between a pupil's progress and the initial assessment on referral to the class' (p.77). Again, the evaluation report is unclear regarding the effectiveness of special classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorder in terms of educational outcomes. In spite of this the report recommends that the SENOs should investigate the need for provision of special classes in certain areas, suggesting that at least in terms of this group of students, the authors did see a role for the special class into the future. The DES Inspectorate (2006) found that special classes for pupils with ASD were effective in terms of appropriate provision for this group of children but again, it is not clear from the report whether the special class model is any more or less effective than other educational settings in terms of educational outcomes.

In contrast, the special classes for pupils with MGLD, which have been in existence for a number of decades, have not been subject to evaluation by the DES in February 2009 it was announced that special classes designated for students with mild GLD, which fail to maintain nine pupils in the class, would be suppressed (Stevens and O'Moore, 2009). This suppression has been criticised (INTO, 2009; Flynn and Doyle, 2009; O'Fathartha, 2009 cited in Stevens and O'Moore, 2009) on

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the grounds that it will place additional pressure on the mainstream schools, as well as eroding parental choice. Further, there are issues in relation to removing one option from the continuum of provision for one particular group of children with SEN while simultaneously increasing availability of that same option for another group as outlined by Travers (2009).

To close down special classes without first systematically investigating the impact of the recent dramatic changes in provision for pupils with mild general learning disabilities is regrettable, as a very viable flexible option of provision is being lost to many schools and may lead to many pupils not receiving an appropriate education. Ironically, the value of special classes/units is readily seen for other pupils with special educational needs, for example, for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (Travers, 2009, p.9).

Given the lack of evidence on the efficacy, or otherwise, of special class provision in terms of educational outcomes it is hard to discern a basis for decision-making about the future role of special classes. Currently, the future role of the special class within the continuum of provision for all categories of SEN seems to be defined by something other than educational/learning outcomes when decisions are being made regarding continuation of existence, creation of new classes or suppression of classes.

It must also be remembered that Nugent's (2007) research focused on specialist settings that have a time limit for enrolment. While this time limit exists for special classes for pupils with specific learning disabilities and for pupils with specific speech and language disorder (DES Inspectorate, 2005a), this is not the case for all special classes. Perhaps part of the debate around the future of special class provision needs to focus on the time limit aspect of enrolment in a special class for all categories of SEN. Circular 23/77 (Department of Education, 1977) states that "placement in a special class should be looked upon as a serious educational intervention and should be regularly reviewed by the principal and special class teacher. The child should be reassessed if there is a doubt concerning the suitability of his placement" (p.2).

### 2.5 Professional Development

Teachers in Ireland are not required to have a specialist qualification in addition to the basic teacher qualification required of all teachers in order to work in a specialist role such as learning support/resource teacher, or in a special setting such as a

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special class or school (McGee, 1990). While the report on pre-service teacher education made a number of recommendations regarding SEN input for student teachers (DES, 2002), there remains variation in practice across the colleges of education (Kearns and Shevlin, 2006). The implication must be that teachers emerging from pre-service courses do so with different experiences, levels of knowledge and competencies in terms of teaching pupils with SEN.

Ireland has provided CPD for teachers of pupils with special educational needs in general since 1961. (A diploma for teachers of the deaf was established shortly before this at University College Dublin). Initially the participants in the diploma in the teaching of mentally and physically handicapped children (as it was then called) were mainly from special schools for pupils with MGLD, although some were from special classes in mainstream schools, or worked with pupils with a physical disability. In 1967 the course was expanded to cater for 25 teachers a year, and teachers from schools for pupils with moderate GLD were included (McGee, 2004). The full-time one year course at St Patrick's College (which was open to primary teachers only) remained the only such course funded by the Teacher Education Section of the DES in Ireland until 2001, when a course for second level resource teachers began in the Church of Ireland College of Education. A further expansion followed in 2003, with courses for resource teachers being provided at Mary Immaculate College Limerick, St Angela's College Sligo and University College Dublin. A diploma in remedial and special education was provided at University College Dublin from the early 1980s, however participants in this course were not funded by the TES until the expansion of 2003. From 2003 all the courses, including the previously full-time course in St Patrick's College were delivered on a block-release pattern (DES, 2003b), as a response to the rapidly increasing numbers of teachers with specialist roles for teaching pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

Thus, the Irish state has recognised the need for in-service professional development in SEN for teachers for a number of decades. The establishment of a fully funded, post-graduate, in-service course in special education in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra could be seen as a remarkable initiative on the part of the state in that it was 'light years away from any other continuing professional development opportunities available to teachers' (McGee, 2004, p.69) and it was made at a time when heavy demands were being made on the system because of the expansion of educational services generally (Kelleghan, 1985).

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Over the same time period CPD was gradually provided for Remedial Teachers (subsequently, Learning Support Teachers) initially at St Patrick's College (from 1973) and subsequently at a number of other colleges, until by 2001 there were six such courses ( Dáil Debates, 2001). These courses were also fully funded by the state. According to McGee, in 1990 approximately 50% of teachers working in special education held the diploma and the majority of those in learning support positions had a learning support qualification (McGee, 1990).

The introduction of GAM (DES, 2005b) effectively changed some teachers' role from that of a learning support teacher only to that of learning support/resource teacher and their remit incorporated a wider range of pupils with more serious levels of SEN. In 2006, in response to this change the special education and learning support courses were combined into the combined Post-Graduate Diploma Programme of Continuing Professional Development for Teachers involved in Learning Support and Special Education which, since that date has been offered at seven colleges, giving a total of 300 places per annum.

In addition, graduate certificate courses in ASD have been offered in two colleges of education; again, these courses are funded by the state (DES, 2009b; 2009c). Between 2004 and 2009, the DES funded a full-time Masters in SEN in St Patrick's College for teachers who had completed a special education diploma in any of the Irish colleges of education and, in 2007, the DES part-funded a new online course for class teachers on special/inclusive education (SIE) which was delivered as a collaboration between St Patrick's College and the Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe (ICEPE).

While there have been a number of changes in the content and model of in-service education for teachers in the last six years, what remains constant is the recognition by the state that such professional development for teachers in specialist SEN roles, delivered and certified by third level institutions, should be supported.

In addition to these accredited courses, the state has funded Induction Courses lasting five to seven days for teachers with a variety of SEN roles (teachers of pupils with severe and profound GLD, teachers of pupils with ASDs, teachers of pupils with Language and Communication Impairments, resource teachers). Many hundreds of teachers have participated in such courses. For example, between 1995 and 2009 some 350 teachers participated in the seven day induction course for teachers of pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties.

### 2.5.1 The role of the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

In 2003, the SESS was established with the aim of enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in mainstream primary and post-primary schools and in special schools with particular reference to the education of pupils with special educational needs. The role of the SESS is to

... provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers through a menu of options based on each individual teacher's needs and preferences. CPD is provided through funding of post-graduate programmes, school-based seminars, school-based projects and action-research, external experts, conferences, telephone, e-mail, publications, on-line learning and building on the existing expertise of teachers and schools through developing CPD programmes locally, regionally and at national level (DES, undated d).

The support of the SESS is provided in four ways:

- (1) in-school support
- (2) individual professional development
- (3) group professional initiatives
- (4) telephone helpline and e-mail support  
(SESS, undated)

The work of the SESS is fully funded by the state.

### 2.5.2 Other provision

Other organisations, such as the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) and the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) among others, have also provided access to training in SEN for teachers, some of which is certified in terms of attendance. Such courses vary from one-week, online courses to two-hour, one-off seminars in education centres.

### 2.5.3 Impact of professional development

The NCSE (2006) notes a systemic obsession with inputs that is endemic with little or no attention being paid to outputs in term of SEN provision, highlighting, in very tangible terms, the lack of evaluation of practice. Without such evaluation of practice it will continue to prove difficult to effectively plan ahead and anticipate change. However, it must also be remembered care needs to be taken in deciding

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what evidence is collected and how it is used; ensuring that we measure what we value rather than valuing what is measured (Ainscow, 2005).

Similarly, despite the considerable public resources expended on professional development in SEN for teachers, there has been little research on the impact of in-service courses on teaching and learning. This dearth of research evidence is evident not only in Ireland but internationally (Garet et al, 2001). However, from the research that is available, some key factors influencing the effectiveness of in-service professional development can be identified.

The importance of the link between the needs of the individual teacher and those of the school is a recurring theme. In a longitudinal study carried out in the United States by Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon and Birman (2002), it was found that professional development was more effective in terms of changing teachers' classroom practice when it has "collective participation of teachers from the same school, department or grade and active learning opportunities, such as reviewing student work or obtaining feedback on teaching ..." (p.102). In a recent Irish study, it was found that professional development that focuses on individual change without addressing the simultaneous need for organisational and/or managerial change may not be effective (Johnston, Murchan, Loxley, Fitzgerald and Quinn, 2007). However, in a review of funded post-graduate training courses for teachers in the UK, it was found that a significant proportion of the participants reported that their head-teachers expressed little interest in the course of study, even though much of the assessed work on the course focused on ways to improve management, teaching and learning in the school (Ofsted, 2001). In order to ensure that the professional development of one teacher can be used to optimum effect in a school in terms of influencing practice of others, the role of the principal occupies a critical and influential position in terms of creating a culture in the school that encourages and fosters change (Loxley et al, 2007). However, principals themselves need training to enable them to be effective in supporting teachers' professional development and promoting change within their schools (Loxley et al, 2007). This last point was echoed by the findings of the research carried out by CICE (2005a) whereby specialist training in SEN for principals was seen as a necessary part of whole-school development in SEN:

... specialised training for principals is a necessary part of whole-school development in special educational needs. Principals are pivotal to the welfare of special educational needs in all schools. They are the driving force in the formation of school culture; they have first hand frequent contact with

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students, parents and with Boards of Management and are probably the single greatest influence on the effectiveness of the in-school management team. Principals are required to facilitate the in-school planning and timetabling essential to the implementation of special educational needs' initiatives (p.52).

In order for principals to make decisions regarding appropriate professional development for individual teachers or for whole staff development, the system needs to offer strategic, systematic and coherent professional development (Desimone et al, 2002). Participation in professional development is largely an individual teacher's decision, and choices are made from a range of disparate courses on offer (Sykes, 1996).

Another factor that appears to influence the effectiveness of professional development on teaching and learning is time and duration of the in-service course. "Professional development is likely to be of a higher quality if it is both sustained over time and involves a substantial number of hours" (Garet et al, 2001, p. 933). Short courses and in-service days do not appear to be adequate for teachers of children with SEN (Shevlin et al, 2008). School based support should be designed to support teachers over a period of time and to allow for observation of changes in practice and reflection by teachers on their own practice (Johnston et al, 2007). Professional development needs to be intensive, sustained over a period of time and aligned with standards and assessments, connected in a coherent way to other professional development experiences (Garet et al, 2001). In addition, during that time, teachers need to apply what they have learned to their own teaching situation. In its review of in-service training in the UK, Ofsted (2001) found that weaker courses did not always allow participants to demonstrate skills in a real context. Courses need to provide opportunities for reflection on practice in order to develop a deeper understanding of teaching and learning as opposed to participants being passive recipients of information (Desimone, 2002). Provision of this type of sustained professional development challenges the system in terms of financial costs and providers may feel a responsibility to reach large numbers of teachers; however, according to Garet a focus on breadth in terms of number of teachers served comes at the expense of depth in terms of quality of experience and ultimate effectiveness in the classroom (Garet et al, 2001).

### 2.5.4 Evaluation of Irish SEN in-service provision

Considering the length of time that funded in-service in SEN has been provided to teachers and taking into account the significant increase in the amount of investment in professional development in this area in recent years, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the effectiveness of this in-service provision in terms of impact in the schools and on the practice of the participants concerned. Only five evaluative studies were identified, none of which has been published in a peer review journal.

In 1996, shortly after the start of induction courses for teachers of pupils with severe and profound GLD (in 1995) the DES funded a small evaluation study. The study included observations of teachers who had participated in the first course, and those about to participate in the second course, and detailed questionnaires to the group who had taken the course. Observed differences between the two groups included more evidence of planning and recording amongst those who had taken the course, and greater success at eliciting responses from their pupils. (Ware, McGee and Porter, 1996).

CICE (2005b) conducted an evaluation into the learning support course provided in that institution. The research was carried out by an external researcher under the supervision of a steering committee made up of staff from the college. Questionnaires were sent to 220 teachers who had completed the course between 1994 and 2001. A total of 112 teachers responded (51% response rate) from both primary and post-primary schools. Eighty-seven per cent of the respondents rated the course very highly. Aspects of the course most frequently cited by respondents as influencing their current practice included; “practical experience gained of teaching literacy, the multi-sensory approach to teaching, programme planning for individual needs, identification of pupils with learning difficulties and development of suitable programmes for these students” (p.24.). This evaluation did not include any measures of classroom practice pre-or post course being based solely on questionnaire responses. The length of the course was commented on by participants, 42% considering it to be too short. In addition, 95% of respondents agreed that they would value the opportunity to do a follow-up course.

Another recent questionnaire study evaluated the certificate course in ASD in St Patrick’s College (Prunty, Balfe and Hayes, 2007). This was an internal evaluation, carried out by staff delivering the course. A questionnaire was distributed to 107 participants who had completed the course between 2001 and 2006. Seventy-seven teachers replied (72% response rate). Teachers rated the core elements of

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the course (eg educational implications of ASD, communication and social needs of pupils with ASD, challenging behaviour, specific approaches, assessment and individual programme planning and record keeping) either as beneficial or very beneficial. Findings were similar for the supervised teaching practicum for teachers who participated in this element of the course (36%). When invited to make further comments at the end of the questionnaire, eleven (23%) respondents expressed the benefits of the course in terms of gaining a better understanding of the complex needs of children with ASD and being better 'equipped to face the challenge' and a 'better teacher in class'. Overall the teachers who participated in the survey perceived participation on the course to have changed their practice in relation to teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers also expressed an interest in continuing professional development by engaging with further studies in special education (75%) and ongoing communication with colleagues who are teaching pupils with ASD.

The SIE in-service, online course has been externally evaluated very recently (Sayles, 2009). Information was gathered from a range of sources including review of on-line content, review of forum postings in 2009, review of archived live classrooms, review of five module evaluation reports and administration and analysis of an online inclusion course student survey. Thirteen research questions were identified. The author reports conclusively on the findings for the first ten questions. However, the final three research questions referred directly to the professional development of course participants and the author concludes that "it has not been possible or practicable to establish a truly objective proof of the participants' professional development, ie an increase in skill and competence which might be afforded by an exercise such as observing and comparing the teachers' practice prior to or after course completion" (p.37). Again, this illustrates the difficulties inherent in accurately measuring effect on practice. However, Sayles (2009) reports that 96% of the teachers participating on the course believed that there had been a positive impact on their practice. State funding for this course was revoked earlier this year, prior to the completion of the evaluation.

Wynne (2004) investigated the impact of in-service training on teachers in special schools for pupils with MGLD. She too found that teachers reported changes in practice in terms of better approaches to assessment and individual planning as well as an increase in confidence which manifested itself in classroom practice and liaising with professionals. The benefits to the whole school were not commented on as favourably as those to the teacher, with participating principals suggesting that the focus of individual training be moved to the whole school. In addition, some teachers

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participating reported that sharing the new ideas and approaches garnered on the in-service course was not always welcomed on their return to school.

As is clear from the international literature which does exist, issues relating to professional development are interwoven with issues surrounding leadership, both within schools and within the educational system itself.

### 2.6 Educational Change and Leadership

In addressing the future role of special schools and classes there is a need to acknowledge the change process and the implications for leadership. Changes in individual schools are more likely to be effective if there is wider systemic change (Ainscow, 2005). Of course it is important that individual schools have some autonomy but to work towards effective change within one part of the education sector without acknowledging the changes required in the overall system is not a good strategy (Fullan, 2005). The changing nature of the inclusion debate and the continuous shifting of the spotlight from one part of the educational sector to the other has resulted in a somewhat disjointed approach to large-scale reform. Fullan also highlights a problem inherent in large-scale reform, that is “the *terms* travel well, but the underlying *conceptualisation and thinking* do not” (p.10).

Change also requires capacity within the system to ensure that it is effective; the introduction of new policies need to include plans for capacity building so that they will be implemented in practice and in the manner that was intended (Fullan, 2005).

The principal is the nerve centre of school improvement. When the principal leadership is strong even the most challenged schools thrive. When it is weak schools fail or badly underperform. But the principalship itself is not thriving. If anything, it is reeling because of heightened expectations and corresponding neglect of re-examining and repositioning the role suitable to the needs of the system in the twenty-first century (Fullan and Irish Primary Principal’s Network (IPPN), 2006, p.1).

Schools are experiencing a number of changes at present, not all of which are associated with the changing nature of SEN provision. For effective implementation of those changes the system needs to be “laced with leaders who are trained to think in bigger terms and to act in ways that affect larger parts of the system as a whole: the new theoreticians” (Fullan, 2005, p.27). Effective and sustainable leadership within the school requires building capacity (Burnett, 2003; National Council for School Leadership (NCSL), 2005). Dray and O’Brien (2003) found that

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middle management structures in Irish primary schools were not as utilised as they should be and questioned their value for money. Distributing leadership has a positive influence on student performance (Harris, 2006; Crockett, 2007) and it is important that principals are willing to work with and through teams (Ainscow, Fox and Coupe O’Kane, 2003; Harris, 2006). “There are three categories of people: the ones that make things happen; the ones that watch things happen and the ones that wonder what the hell is happening” (Prashnig, 1998, cited in Burnett, 2003, p.2). In order to lead change and to lead people, it is important that principals have a vision for their schools (Newton and Tarrant, 1992; NSCL, 2005). However, it must also be remembered that leaders can be powerful and so can groups, which means they can be “powerfully wrong” (Fullan, 2001, p.8). The vision of the principal must fit in with the wider systemic aims and policies and they in turn, must be clear and make sense in the context of the school.

Ainscow et al (2003) carried out a literature review in relation to leadership in special schools and concluded:

It can be argued that those in leadership roles in special schools should seek to develop organisational cultures that encourage experimentation and collective problem-solving in response to the challenge of pupils’ diversity. Such cultures are necessary in order that more effective ways of responding to the increasingly challenging populations within the special schools. It may also be that they are also the most important gift that the special education community can offer to the movement towards more inclusive forms of education (p.26).

While the attention of the system has turned to the role of the special school and there is evidence of debate and analysis in Ireland in recent times (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; Special Education Department, 2007), the same cannot be said of the role of the special class (McGee, 2004). However, in both cases, it seems clear that any future attempts to redefine the role of either will have implications for leadership, at both school and systemic levels.

A variety of publications from the National Council for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services in the UK offer some evidence that inclusive practice is facilitated by strong leadership (eg Kugelmass, 2003, NCSL, 2009)

While the attention of the system has turned to the role of the special school and there is evidence of debate and analysis in Ireland in recent times (McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; Special Education Department, 2007), the same cannot be said of the

role of the special class (McGee, 2004). However, in both cases, it seems clear that any future attempts to redefine the role of either will have implications for leadership, at both school and systemic levels.

### 2.7 Conclusion

The research on special schools focused on a number of key topics, including pupil outcomes, isolation, links with mainstream schools, and the pupil profile. With regard to outcomes, there is no conclusive evidence either way on the effectiveness of any type of school, including special schools. Indeed, the evidence that does exist does not point to the overwhelming superiority of any one type of provision (DfEE, 1998). Meanwhile, the evidence in the Irish literature shows some links being made between special and mainstream schools. This is encouraging given the sense of 'isolation' which has been mentioned as a theme for special schools in Ireland. However, practice in schools has moved ahead of official policy, which does not provide a framework for formal links between mainstream and special schools. The lack of a framework gives rise to difficulties for schools in procuring the necessary additional resources to establish and operate links programmes between schools. With regards to the profile of students in special schools, three sets of trends are reported in the literature in terms of the population of special schools: students with more complex needs enrolled in special schools, students enrolling in special schools having failed to thrive in post-primary schools, students not being presented with the option of going to a special school following assessment.

Looking at the potential future role of special schools, three key concepts were identified from the literature. First, a common future role seen for special schools is to provide for children with more complex needs. This specific term does however need to be defined very carefully. Second, a special school can be more closely linked to mainstream schools. A number of potential models are discussed, including centres of excellence, resource centres, and the special school being part of a cluster or federation of schools. There is a large overlap in these concepts in that they expect the special school to provide some form of outreach to mainstream schools. Third, children could participate in dual attendance arrangements between a special and a mainstream school. There are potential difficulties here in terms of time and planning in particular in order to make this model work.

This literature review attempted to highlight the unique aspects of the special class system in Ireland, whilst recognising the relatively meagre amount of information

that exists in relation to these classes in both terms of government documents and the research literature. The special class does appear to be perceived as having a place in the continuum of provision for children with SEN as evidenced by the evaluation of such classes (DES Inspectorate, 2005a; 2006) and the significant increase in this model of provision for some groups of children. However, while this model can be seen by some as an “inclusive” setting (Warnock, 1978), others can view it as a segregated form of schooling (Meijer, 2003). The role of the special class within the continuum of provision is often overshadowed by the debate on the role of the special school.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Phase One

Phase One of the review was a survey of all special schools and mainstream primary school special classes commissioned by the Special Education Section of the DES. This census involved the development of a questionnaire in conjunction with a number of key stakeholders (the special education and teacher education sections of the DES, NEPs).

The aims of Phase One were to:

- Reaffirm the status of special schools with regard to their position on the continuum of provision for children with special educational needs
- Consult special schools about their vision for the future
- Identify which pupils were being catered for in special schools and mainstream primary school special classes
- Explore whether the pupil population of special schools was changing
- Provide the basis for a more in depth study by the NCSE.

The advantages and limitations of questionnaires are well-known having been much reported in the methodological literature (eg Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Robson, 2002). However, not only was Phase One of the review specifically commissioned as a questionnaire census, but a postal questionnaire was the most appropriate instrument for obtaining the types of information required. Use of a postal questionnaire enabled the entire population of special schools and primary schools with special classes to be surveyed, rather than relying on a sample. It enabled principal teachers to take time to look up information which was not readily to hand, thus enhancing the accuracy and detail of the responses, and facilitated considered responses to the open questions. The combination of closed and open questions meant that there was ample opportunity for respondents to express their views as well as providing detailed figures to support these views and provide a basis for future policy development. Furthermore, the combination of a questionnaire census with a range of other methods in Phase Two of the review enabled the research team to obtain a comprehensive picture on which to base the recommendations which are to be found in the final chapter of this report.

A draft questionnaire was piloted with a convenience sample of four principals of special schools and no difficulties were found with any of the questions by those responding to the pilot questionnaire.

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The final questionnaire (see Appendix I) consisted of 23 questions and was designed to collect quantitative data about:

- the pupils in the school/ class (age nature of disabilities etc)
- the curriculum
- the organisation of classes
- staffing (numbers of teachers and SNAs, teachers' qualifications and short courses attended)
- multi-disciplinary support services (educational psychology, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy etc.).

Together with qualitative data about:

- changes in the school population over time
- the current and future role of special schools/ mainstream primary special classes
- dual placement and other types of collaboration between special and mainstream schools.

Concurrent with the development of the questionnaire, efforts were made to identify all special schools and primary schools with special classes, in order to ensure that all relevant schools had the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire. In order to try and achieve this, a number of different lists of special schools and primary schools with special classes were consulted, from which it became clear that there was no overall definitive list of provision for either category. We therefore decided to base the study on the lists provided by the DES. Not included for the purposes of this study were schools for travellers and those catering for young offenders. (The decision to exclude these categories was reached in consultation with the DES.)

Questionnaires were circulated to a total of 410 schools (all 106 special schools and all 304 primary schools with special classes on the lists provided by the DES) in May 2006. See Table 5 for details. In relation to the special schools, it should be noted that there is a considerable degree of discrepancy between different sources as to the number of schools designated for pupils with different SEN; for example the DES list gives one (1) school for pupils with severe, emotional and behaviour disturbance (SEBD), while the Special Education Support Service (SESS) website lists nine (9). This difference may be due to the fact that different lists are designed to serve different purposes. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter from the Principal Officer in the Special Education Section of the DES, in order to

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reassure schools about the purpose of the research. Schools which failed to return the questionnaire by the deadline were contacted by letter and then telephone.

**Table 5. Questionnaires distributed and returned by school type**

Designation of School (from DES website)	Number of schools to whom questionnaires sent	Number returned
<b>Mainstream primary school with special class/es</b>	304	235
<b>Special Schools</b>		
Physical disability	7	5
Hearing impairment	3	2
Visual impairment	1	1
Emotional disturbance/severe emotional disturbance	10	6
Mild general learning disabilities (MGLD)	30	28
Moderate general learning disabilities (ModGLD)	33	29
Severe and profound GLD	5	3
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	5	4
Specific learning disability (Reading Schools)	4	2
Multiple disability	1	1
Other	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>319</b>

#### 3.2 Phase Two

Phase Two of the study was commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Following careful consideration of the objectives and specified tasks of the study, and in particular the short time frame, the following approach was adopted. This approach initially comprised four stages, the fifth stage (submissions) was added following early discussions with the NCSE. In brief, the five stages were:

**Stage 1:** Questionnaires to principals of post-primary, mainstream schools with special classes. A revised and adapted version of the questionnaire from Phase One of the review was used, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, complementary data were obtained.

### 3. Methodology

**Stage 2:** A review of international practice in the area of special education with a particular emphasis on the roles of special schools and special classes.

**Stage 3:** Focus group interviews involving relevant stakeholders (teachers, principals, special needs assistants, parents, pupils).

**Stage 4:** A further level of enquiry using a case study approach in real-life contexts and using multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation, document analysis) was conducted to enhance and validate the findings.

**Stage 5:** Submissions were invited from relevant organisations and the public at large.

Table 6 shows how these five stages were intended to address the research questions.

**Table 6. Links between research stages and questions**

Research questions	Method used to investigate this issue
1. Review the role of special schools	Questionnaires to special schools (open-ended questions), focus groups (general themes addressed), case study (looking at best practice exemplars), submissions (views of key stakeholders), literature review
1.1 The potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools	Questionnaires (open questions), focus groups, case study (looking at examples of where this was applicable)
1.2 The special school as a Centre of Excellence	Focus groups, submissions case studies, literature review
1.3 Issues around dual enrolment	Open-ended questions in all questionnaires, focus groups, examples in case study
1.4 Single or multi-category schools	Focus groups and case studies
2. Role of special classes	Open-ended question in questionnaires to mainstream primary and post-primary schools with special classes, literature review, focus groups
3. Review of international policy and practice	Literature review

#### 3.2.1 Ethical approval

Prior to the commencement of the research, approval was sought and gained from the research ethics committee of St Patrick's College. This was particularly

important, as it was envisaged that both the focus groups and the case studies would include interviews with children and young people with SEN. Every member of the research team also successfully applied for Garda clearance.

#### 3.2.2 Stage 1 Questionnaire to post-primary schools with special classes

The methodology for the questionnaire is broken down into the following sections:

- (1) Identifying post-primary schools with special classes;
- (2) Designing the questionnaire;
- (3) Piloting the questionnaire; and
- (4) Questionnaire returns and follow-ups.

##### *Identifying post-primary schools with special classes*

As had been done in Phase One for primary schools with special classes, so in Phase Two special effort had to be made to identify post-primary schools with special classes, as there was no up-to-date definitive list. A list (of 42 schools) believed to have special classes was supplied by the NCSE, but this was known to have been compiled some months previously, and was not believed to be exhaustive.

Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggested that there were at least as many informal special classes (classes set up by the school itself to cater for students with special educational needs) at post-primary level as there were DES-sanctioned classes.

After much discussion amongst the research team it was decided that both types of special class should be included in the survey. It was further agreed that the best way to identify schools with special classes at post-primary level was to circulate a very brief preliminary questionnaire to all post-primary schools asking them whether or not they had a special class for students with special needs.

This 'mini-questionnaire' consisted of an A5 postcard containing a brief statement about the research, and three questions each of which could be answered by ticking the appropriate box. These questions asked:

- (1) Whether or not the school had a special class which had been approved by the DES.
- (2) Whether some or all of the students in the special class had a psychological assessment, to give some indication that it was indeed a DES approved special class.
- (3) Whether the school had set up their own unofficial class to cater for students with special needs.

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The mini questionnaire was sent to all post-primary schools in Ireland (n = 732) including the 42 schools on the list supplied by the NCSE in December 2007.

The list of post-primary schools was taken from the DES website ([http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ppschools\\_epl.xls](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ppschools_epl.xls)).

By January 2008 only 470 of the 732 post-primary schools had responded to the mini questionnaire. There were 18 schools from the NCSE list amongst the non-responders. Each of these 18 schools was contacted individually by telephone, and in addition 10% of the remaining 244 non-responding schools were also contacted by phone to ask whether or not they had a special class. Of the 18 schools on the NCSE list, three (3) said they did not have any special classes, one (1) school was uncontactable despite multiple attempts and one school said that their class was not officially designated, in spite of it being on the NCSE list. The 24 additional non-responding schools contacted were chosen using a random number generator. As none of these schools had a special class, it was decided that there was no need to follow-up the remaining non-respondents, as it did not seem likely that they would have special classes.

Taking into account responses to the phone calls made to schools on the NCSE list, a total of 488 responses (67%) were received (See Table 7).

**Table 7. Questionnaires distributed and returned – post-primary schools**

	Number of schools
Schools who have DES approved special classes only	27
Schools who have DES approved special classes and have set up their own special classes	78
Schools who have set up their own official classes only	120
<b>Total number of schools with special classes (formal and informal)</b>	<b>225</b>
Schools who do not have any type of special class	263
<b>Total</b>	<b>488</b>

#### *Design, piloting and distribution of questionnaires*

The post-primary questionnaire was a revised and adapted version of the questionnaire from Phase One of the review in order to ensure that, as far as possible, complementary data were obtained. It consisted of four sections covering the same areas as the Phase One questionnaire:

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- (1) special classes and students
- (2) teachers and resources
- (3) curriculum
- (4) open questions.

The front page of the questionnaire gave a brief rationale for it being sent to the school, (based on the mini-questionnaire returned, and the type of special class/es they had). Principal teachers/SEN co-ordinators were asked to fill in the questionnaire as quickly as possible and return it. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter from the Director of Special Education at St Patrick's College but not by an official DES letter requesting cooperation, as the primary and special schools questionnaire had been.

Some questions were modified to make them more relevant to mainstream post-primary schools, and some new questions were added to ensure that all the research questions were specifically addressed. For example, a question was added about when the class was set up in order to try and ascertain if the nature of special class provision in post-primary schools was changing. Other additional questions included the year group the class was attached to, and how pupils in the special class were catered for at senior cycle. A question was also added about the total number of students in the school with psychological assessments, in the hope that it would be possible to ascertain the proportion of students with assessed special educational needs being catered for in the special class.

#### *Piloting the questionnaire*

The questionnaire was printed in three formats:

- (1) For schools who said they had a DES-sanctioned special class only.
- (2) For schools who said they had a DES-sanctioned special class, and had set up their own unofficial class.
- (3) For schools who said they had set up their own unofficial class only.

The three sets of questionnaires were printed in different colours to differentiate between them. The format and questions were the same, with one exception. For the questionnaire for the schools who had both DES –sanctioned and unofficial classes, an extra section was included in question 2, asking which of the classes were DES sanctioned.

A convenience sample of 16 schools (which were thought likely to respond rapidly to the pilot questionnaire) was chosen from the 225 post-primary schools identified

as having special classes via the mini questionnaire. This relatively large pilot sample was necessary to ensure representation of the vocational schools, post-primary schools and community schools with both DES-sanctioned and unofficial special classes. Seven of the 16 pilot questionnaires were returned.

Following analysis of the pilot data, a number of revisions were made to all three versions of the questionnaire. In particular the question requesting information on short courses attended was removed because it had not been completed by those returning the pilot questionnaire. In addition the format of the questionnaire for schools with unofficial classes was adjusted to match the types of classes which had emerged from the pilot (see Appendix II).

The revised questionnaires were circulated to all 225 schools which had special classes with a return deadline of February 29th 2008. Because of the low response rate to the pilot, questionnaires were addressed to special needs co-ordinators. Table 8 gives details of the numbers of each type of questionnaire sent.

**Table 8. Numbers of post-primary schools receiving each type of questionnaire**

Type of questionnaire	Number sent
Official special classes only	27
Unofficial special classes only	120
Official and unofficial classes	78
Total	225

The initial response rate to the questionnaire was low, so following the return deadline, phone calls requesting the return of the questionnaire were made to all non-responding schools. In addition, a second copy of the questionnaire was sent to all schools with official classes, accompanied by a letter from the NCSE's head of research and development encouraging schools to respond.

#### **3.2.3 Stage 2 review of the international literature**

The methodology for the review of the literature has been dealt with in section 2.2.

#### **3.2.4 Stage 3 focus groups**

The aim of the focus group is to get closer to participants' understanding of and perspectives on certain issues. The focus group interview can be used as a self-contained means of data collection (Osborne and Collins, 2001) or as a

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supplementary research technique. The purpose of the focus group interviews in this study was to explore and illuminate the principle issues in relation to the role and operation of special schools and classes in a dynamic manner. It utilised the group interaction to challenge and probe the views and positions espoused by individual members in a non-threatening, relatively naturalised social context (Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996). The primary goal of the focus groups was thus to explore the range of attitudes, values and beliefs that were commonly held by key stakeholders, the strength of feeling and the reasons for those beliefs (Vaughan et al, 1996). It was one of a wide range of data collection methods.

#### *Participants and setting*

Identifying and recruiting participants is one of the most important aspects of focus group research (Vaughn et al, 1996; Greenbaum, 2000). Validity requires that participants are competent to answer the research questions, but reliability demands variety in terms of participants being able to provide a range of responses to the research questions. It is not the intention of focus group methodology to yield generalisable data so random sampling is not considered necessary. Nevertheless, it is important to employ a systematic strategy when deciding on group composition (Millward, 2000).

For the purposes of the current study, the most relevant sections of the population were considered to be: pupils with SEN, parents, teachers, principals and special needs assistants. The inclusion of other groups (such as representative of boards of management) were also considered, but limitations of time and budgetary constraints meant that these individuals could not be included in focus groups. It was considered appropriate to have adult focus groups which were homogenous with regard to role (principal, teacher, special needs assistant, parent). Participants were selected from groups of schools (special, mainstream primary with special classes, mainstream post-primary with special classes) in reasonably close proximity to each other to facilitate the composition and organisation of the focus groups; in this respect these groups were heterogeneous. Three locations nationwide were selected (Dublin/Wicklow/Carlow, Donegal/Sligo/Leitrim/Roscommon, Limerick/Clare/Kerry/Cork) in attempt to ensure that views of those in different geographical locations were represented. The selection of schools within these areas was informed by data from the questionnaire.

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Twenty-one focus groups were conducted in all (See Table 9 for details) and focus group participants were chosen from 28 schools in total (17 special schools and 11 mainstream schools – see Table 10 for details).

**Table 9. Focus groups and participants**

	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Participants (proposed numbers of participants in italics)</b>
Total	21	140 ( <i>156</i> )
Pupils	6	34 ( <i>36</i> )
Parents	6	26 ( <i>36</i> )
Principals	3	28 ( <i>28</i> )
Teachers	3	28 ( <i>28</i> )
SNAs	3	24 ( <i>28</i> )

**Table 10. Focus groups – Special schools**

MGLD	5
ModGLD	4
SPLD	1
Multi-category	1
Physical disability	1
EBD	1
Reading School	1
ASD	1
Preschool	1
Sensory impairment	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>

In selecting special schools six schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities were chosen (only five eventually took part), four schools for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities and at least one from every other category of special school. There were two reasons for this choice; special schools for pupils with mild and moderate general learning disabilities are by far the largest categories in the country, and both the literature, and the responses to the Phase One questionnaire indicated that schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities face particular challenges at present. Mainstream primary and post-primary schools were required to have special classes, additionally schools with a range of

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educational programmes and structures were selected (eg Leaving Cert Applied, dual placement, changes in pupil profile). Teachers selected included class teachers in both special and mainstream schools, special class teachers and resource/learning support teachers.

The size of the focus group must also be considered. Morgan (1997) suggests six to ten people. However, a small group is better for reliable results as it gives each participant more time to raise facts and arguments. Also, the small group may be easier to manage and it may be easier to obtain a clear recording of the session. Choice of setting is also important and there needs to be a balance between the needs of the research and the needs of the participants (Millward, 2000). The setting should set the tone of the research as professional and, where possible, be on neutral ground. The two prime considerations are convenience and comfort.

In the current study focus groups were organised to contain between six and 10 participants, and this was achieved in the great majority of cases, with 140/156 intended participants actually participating – see Table 9 for details. However, some groups, especially those comprised of parents contained fewer than six participants. Groups for teachers, principals and SNAs met at Education Centres, in order to provide a venue which was comfortable but neutral and professional; coffee and lunch were provided. Focus groups for pupils and for parents were organised within schools, (mainstream, schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities, schools for pupils with physical disabilities, and one school for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities), as the convenience of participants in this instance was judged to outweigh the desirability of a neutral venue. Principals were invited to select teachers and special needs assistants to participate in the focus groups. Selection of pupils required particularly careful consideration. Pupils were selected by principals/ teachers within schools and were grouped according to age. Parents of these pupils were invited by the principal to participate in the focus groups.

#### *The focus group stimuli: adults*

The ‘focusing’ component of focus group research, which is one of its distinguishing features, refers to the character of the discussion in relation to a particular stimulus object, event or situation (Morgan and Krueger, 1997). For the purposes of this present study, participants were presented with relevant stimulus questions inviting a variety of opinion and phraseology concerning the topic in the Irish context, in order to establish relevant dimensions of attitudes from the different stakeholders and generate themes, topics, hypotheses that derived from the insights of the group (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) (See Appendix III). It was hoped that the

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focus group interviews would yield in-depth information about the issues being addressed (Millward, 2000) and potentially raise issues in relation to the role of special schools and classes that had not previously been considered.

#### *The focus group stimuli: children*

Accessing the views of children with disabilities in authentic and reliable ways is a challenge (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). Methodological issues need to be addressed as well as finding appropriate ways of giving children the fullest opportunity to participate. However, the research team considered that it was vital to consult pupils themselves in conducting the review. To facilitate this specific stimulus questions and guidelines for moderators running the pupil focus groups, and warm up activities were used to help break the ice (See Appendix III). It is important to consider the emotional demands of the research task when eliciting the views of children with disabilities (Freedman, 2001). Emotional support can be provided by the presence of a familiar adult, to reduce in the participants a sense of anxiety of the perceived task (Lewis and Porter, 2004). However, caution is necessary in ensuring that the child's responses are not distorted by the presence of a familiar adult (Lewis, 2002). In the current study, it was initially agreed that there would be two of the research team present (moderator and observer) and that a familiar adult would be stationed nearby, but not in the room. This was modified following the pilot children's focus group.

#### *Moderator*

The person leading the focus group is usually referred to as the moderator. The role of the moderator is to ensure that participants discuss each of the research questions, to ask for clarification or further discussion and to offer a brief summary at certain points in the discussion (Field, 2000). This corrective process of summarising and clarifying points facilitates the interpretation of issues (Tiberius, 2001). In the present study, guidelines for moderators were devised based on the research questions and a training session organised (See Appendix IV). At the moderators' training session, focus statements and questions were clarified, the role of the moderator was outlined and the procedure for the focus group discussion was finalised. The guidelines for moderators were modified following the training session. In addition in the current study, an observer was present together with the moderator at each focus group, the observer's role was to note names of speakers where possible, and check off relevant issues as they arose in the discussion.

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#### *Piloting of focus group procedure*

Pilot focus groups were conducted for both adults and children. The adult pilot group consisted of an opportunity sample of teachers from mainstream and special schools, who were taking a course at St Patrick's College and a principal of a mainstream primary school with a special class. Feedback from the pilot participants and discussion amongst the research team led to some modifications to the procedure. It was decided to give participants a list of the stimulus questions both before and after the focus group discussion in the form of a template for participants to complete individually. It was also decided that if the issue of dual placement did not arise during the discussion it would be probed in order to ensure that this research question was fully addressed. It was also agreed that participants would be asked to introduce themselves and their teaching setting so that the views expressed could be linked to the speaker's educational setting and role. Following the children's pilot and a request from one principal, it was agreed that the familiar adult would remain in the room.

It was later decided that the adult pilot group discussion had provided valuable insights into the research questions and written informed consent was obtained from the participants to incorporate the data in the main study.

In the main study adult focus group participants were initially invited to record their views about each statement on paper (Osborne and Collins, 2001). Participants were then invited to reveal their views, which in some cases exposed a divergence of opinion and led to extended discussion and challenge, in a few cases the moderator had to prompt participation. Each focus group concluded by the moderator asking each participant to reflect on the discussion and record their views about each of the research questions again. Each focus group lasted between one and one and a half hours. (The student focus groups generally lasted between 40 and 50 minutes.)

#### *Consent and assent*

Letters outlining the purpose of the study as a whole, and the nature of the focus groups were sent to all principals and chairs of boards of management of participating schools, and signed informed consent was obtained from all adult participants before the start of each focus group. In the case of child participants, signed informed consent was obtained from parents, children's assent was obtained before the start of the focus group. In addition a familiar adult was stationed nearby and the moderator ensured that all children were aware that they could leave at any time and go to this individual.

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#### *Data collection and recording*

Focus groups usually generate qualitative data in the form of transcripts from audiotape or videotape. In the present study, the focus group discussion was audio taped using a good quality digital recorder and field notes were written by the moderators following the discussion.

#### **3.2.5 Stage 4 case studies**

The purpose of the case studies was to enhance and validate the findings from the other stages of the study using multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation, document analysis) in real-life contexts (Bassey, 1999; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Robson, 2002). Three educational sites (including primary and post primary), where there was evidence of best practice in relation to the development of the role of Special schools and provision for pupils with SEN in a mainstream setting were selected (two from Ireland and one from the UK) by triangulating information from the returned questionnaires (for the Irish case studies), key informants and publicly available inspection reports.

Information from returned questionnaires included the categories of pupils served, the types of special class attached to mainstream schools, resources, specialist qualifications held by staff, curricular programmes offered (including access to state certification) and features of interest noted from open-ended questions such as dual placement and collaboration.

Key informants included special education course providers, other experts in the field of SEN, and staff working in relevant agencies and services for people with SEN such as the inspectorate and NEPS. Informants in Ireland were telephoned by the stage coordinator, and those in the UK were contacted by e-mail.

Schools which emerged as potentially interesting from more than one source were discussed by the research team and a shortlist formed. Principals of schools on the short-list were contacted by telephone by the stage coordinator to check on information from the questionnaires to ascertain their willingness to participate and to confirm their availability during the required timeframe.

Once the three schools had been provisionally selected, further telephone contact followed, formal permission for the case study was requested from the Chair of the Board of Management for Irish case studies and from the Chair of the Governing Body for the English case study. Informed consent letters were sent to the principal

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of each school for distribution to all participants (See Appendix V). Additionally, a preliminary visit was made to the English school and to the Post-Primary school.

A two-day visit was made to each of the three case study schools by members of the project team (supplemented by a local expert in the case of the English school). During each visit two pupils were shadowed and observed, the observed pupils and their parents were interviewed. Interviews also took place with all types of school staff, including staff from schools where shadowed pupils were dual-placed.

Tables 11, 12 and 13 detail the data collected during these visits.

#### *Case study 1*

Irish special school catering for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities, severe and profound general learning disabilities and ASD.

**Table 11. Data collected during case study 1**

Activity	People involved
Shadowing and observation of two pupils	One 11-year-old boy, ASD (low functioning), integrated class in special school One 11-year-old boy, ASD (high functioning) (dual placement) who spends four days in his own local primary school and one day in special school
22 interviews conducted	Principal Deputy principal Chairperson BOM Parents (2) Teachers (10) Pupil (1) SNAs (4) Speech and language therapist Nurse

Documents were also collected in relation to school policies and procedures, eg dual placement policy, services within school; planning and record keeping procedures, IEPs, parent information, SNA training, CPD for teachers, pupils integrated into local primary and post-primary schools.

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#### *Case study 2*

Irish post-primary school.

**Table 12. Data collected during case study 2**

Activity	People involved
Shadowing and observation of two students	One 18-year-old boy, Down syndrome in transition year One 14-year-old boy, Asperger syndrome, in second year
18 interviews	Principal Deputy principal SENCO Teachers (9) SNAs (3) Parents (2) Student (1)

Documents were also collected in relation to school policies and procedures, eg policies, planning, recording and monitoring systems, IEPs etc.

#### *Case study 3*

The third case study was an English special school catering for pupils with mild general learning disabilities, and ASD. There was a reconnaissance visit by one researcher to meet key personnel, collect background information and relevant policy documents (eg dual placement, outreach, planning and recording systems, IEPs, prospectus, etc), organise consent forms and finalise the case study visit arrangements.

This was followed by a two-day visit to the school by three members of the project team, supported by a local expert. During these two days the following happened:

**Table 13. Data collected during case study 3**

Activity	People involved
Shadowing and observation of two students	One 14-year-old boy, with acquired brain injury who had experienced dual placement over two years (5th and 6th class) in the special school and his local primary school One Year 9 (3rd year) boy with a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome who attends the Autism Base at the special school but who is also 'included' in the main body of the special school for Science, English, Maths and ICT
23 interviews	2 students 2 parents 1 deputy headteacher (post-primary) 1 acting headteacher, 1 acting deputy headteacher (primary) 1 head of autism base 1 assistant head of autism base 1 counsellor 1 manager of Early Bird Training Programme 5 teachers 3 teaching assistants 1 administrator/bursar 1 principal of mainstream school (dual enrolment) 2 therapists (interviewed together).

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed and field notes were written by the interviewers.

#### 3.2.6 Stage 5 submissions

Relevant stakeholders, (disability and equality groups, teacher unions and representative bodies, Irish universities and colleges of teacher education, school management bodies, parents' group school support services) were invited by letter or e-mail to make a submission of not more than two pages addressing three questions emerging from the research questions namely:

- Can you outline what you regard as the future role of special schools in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs?
- Can you describe what you regard as the future role of special classes in mainstream schools?
- Can you outline your views on the potential for special and mainstream schools working together in the future?

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Those invited to make submissions were encouraged to respond online (via surveymonkey) by e-mail or by letter.

In addition a public call for submissions was made via an advertisement in the Education Supplement of The Irish Times in the first week of May 2008. Respondents were directed to a link on the St Patrick's College website via which they could respond online using surveymonkey ICT software. A word limit of 1,000 words was applied to each survey response. The survey was kept online for four weeks following the running of the advertisement.

(A full list of submissions invited and received is given in Appendix VI)

### 3.3 Data Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Quantitative data

All quantitative data from both sets of questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS version 14 and cleaned prior to analysis. Analyses were then performed as appropriate.

#### 3.3.2 Qualitative data

All interviews were transcribed by professional transcribers and returned to the project team as word documents which were then imported into Nvivo-8 (QSR 2008). Nvivo is a specialist software tool developed as a computer aided qualitative data analysis system, over the past 20 years, and Nvivo 8 allows for the direct importation of data in a variety of media. The decision to use Nvivo was taken in order to allow efficient and transparent analysis of the very large quantity of data collected, particularly during Phase Two.

NVivo was also selected because it facilitates the production of a clear audit trail. All processes and stages of coding were tracked in order to show the stages of the analysis (see Appendix VII).

A specialist software consultant (Ben Meehan) was retained to assist in the use of Nvivo; with his assistance a database was designed to optimise the data and enable a thorough interrogation especially for unforeseen questions which might arise during the analytical process.

All qualitative data (open-ended questions from questionnaires, focus groups interviews and field notes, case study interviews, documentation and field notes, submissions) were transcribed and imported into NVivo. Demographic details

(participant type, school type) were also imported. It was therefore possible to examine how attitudes and beliefs (for example about the role of the special class) were related to factors such as participant role (eg special school principal). This was extremely helpful in understanding and interpreting the findings (Appendix shows the relationship in the database between the contents of a case node (what participants said) and the demographic tables (who they are).

#### 3.3.2.1 Phases of analysis

Following data importation, data was linked. The following data types were formally linked in the database sources, field notes and observations digital data sources. Data analysis then followed the seven-stage process outlined below

##### *Phase 1: broad coding*

The qualitative data was initially read through chronologically to generate broad participant driven categories (free nodes) from the data up with no references to the research question.

##### *Phase 2: grouping themes into categories*

The research question was then introduced and categories were created (tree nodes). The free nodes created in Phase 1 were then grouped logically under the relevant theme from the research question. Some categories went to more than one theme while some were superfluous to the enquiry and were distilled at this stage of the analysis.

##### *Phase 3: coding by perspective*

Each of the major themes of the study was then split down by the participant perspectives. This process was automated using the demographic tables. These new nodes now contained the data coded under each category and theme exclusive to each participant perspective.

##### *Phase 4: 'coding on' – imposing a hierarchy*

The major themes developed and populated in phases two and three were 'coded on' into their constituent parts. The example in the Appendix VII shows the theme, 'Dual Enrolment' was coded on to its 'children'. These 'children' in this example are weighted according to coding references. These references demonstrate their importance to the participants by virtue of the number times each topic was raised. This process resulted in a 'hierarchical coding tree' which catalogued the emergent issues for the participants under scrutiny.

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#### *Phase 5: generating summary statements using memos*

This phase of analysis involved the generating of memos which were designed to summarise what the researchers' believed, at that point of the analytical process, were a true representation of the combined attitudes and beliefs of study participants under each of the research questions.

#### *Phase 6: testing summary statements using queries and distilling data*

Phase 6 involved testing the memos against the data for supporting evidence. Some of the supporting data lay in existing nodes, some however, involved further interrogation of the data as complexities of some findings required raising questions by means of database queries (cross tabular) where the supporting evidence lay across and between themes in the coding tree. Frequently, such queries resulted in generating new nodes as data was gathered from disparate existing nodes in order to test a stated belief in a given summary statement. This process was developed to serve as a 'rule for inclusion' to distil data down to the core relevant supporting nodes and to validate each and every finding as being supported in the data.

#### *Phase 7: synthesising summary statements and generating an outcome Statement*

Phase 7 involved synthesising the data into a coherent, well supported outcome statement. As some findings transcend or intersect with other major emergent themes, a synthesising process rather than a simple merging of the summary statements generated in phase 6 was used in this phase.

#### *Reliability and trustworthiness*

Nodes hold data which has been coded from sources. Definitions for all nodes in this study were discussed and agreed by the research team for clarity and to test for coding consistency. As there were multiple coders, inter-rater reliability testing was conducted and benchmarked at 80% agreement.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter reports the findings of the study. The data is organised into three main sections; with each of these major sections being further broken down into sub-sections. The first section is concerned with the findings in relation to special schools, and the second with the findings in relation to special classes. Within each main section, basic data with regard to the current pupil population, staffing, and other resources available are reported first. This sets the context for the findings in relation to the future role of special schools and special classes to be reported. The second section is concerned with the findings with regard to special classes. A third main section reports findings in relation to dual attendance and views on dual enrolment. In all sections, findings from Phase One (conducted in 2006) and Phase Two (conducted in 2008) of the study are integrated as appropriate, in order to give a holistic picture of special schools and classes in Ireland and to address the specific research questions in the terms of reference for Phase Two.

### **4.2 Special Schools**

Qualitative data about the current and possible future roles of special schools is available from both Phase One and Phase Two, of the study. However, quantitative data about the population, staffing and resourcing of special schools which is, unfortunately, only available from Phase One of the study, is presented first in order to provide the context for the qualitative findings.

Questionnaires were circulated to all 106 special schools in Ireland in May 2006. Replies were received from 84 schools (79.2%) (For details see Table 5). One school, a hospital school with a fluctuating pupil population was eventually excluded from the analysis, thus the analysis was based on 83 schools. There were a total of 4942 pupils, 864 teachers and 1156 SNAs funded by the DES in these 83 schools. Most of the data were of high quality however, responses to one or two questions were somewhat problematic, where this is the case it is clearly indicated in the relevant sections.

#### **4.2.1 Current pupil population**

Table 14 shows the primary disabilities of pupils reported by different types of special school.

## 4. Findings

**Table 14. Primary disability of pupils by designation of school**

Official DES designation of school (no. of schools)	Primary disability of pupil											
	Physical disability	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems	SEBD	MGLD	ModGLD	Severe/profound GLD	Autism/autistic spectrum disorders	Specific learning disability	Multiple disabilities	Total pupils
Physical disability (5)	132										75	207
Hearing impairment (2)		104					1			2	7	114
Visual impairment (1)			16								15	31
Emotional/disturbance and/or behavioural problems (6)				38	99				32	1	3	173
MGLD (28)	6	2	2	12	20	1,828	193	37	63	12	161	2,336
ModGLD (29)				4	1	2	1,013	386	152		51	1,609
Severe/profound GLD (3)								113			37	150
Autism/autistic spectrum disorders (4)	1			3					131			135
Specific learning disability (2)										134		134
Multiple disabilities (1)											43	43
Other school (2)											10	10
<b>Total (83)</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>1,830</b>	<b>1,207</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>4,942</b>

## 4. Findings

### 4.2.2 Range of pupil needs catered for by different types of special school

When the range of pupils' needs is examined according to the official designation of the school which they attend (see Table 14), it is clear that schools for pupils with ModGLD and those for pupils with MGLD are catering for a very diverse pupil population. The 28 schools for pupils with MGLD whose principals responded to the Phase 1 questionnaire have a total of 2,336 pupils of whom only 1,828 are said to have mild GLD as their primary impairment (see Table 15).

**Table 15. Disabilities of pupils in schools designated as schools for pupils with MGLD**

MGLD	1,828
ModGLD	193
Severe/profound GLD	37
Physical disability	6
Severe emotional disturbance	20
Emotional disturbance/behaviour problems	12
Hearing impairment	2
Visual impairment	2
Autistic spectrum disorders	63
Specific learning disability	12
Multiple disability	161
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,336</b>
	<b>336</b>

It should be noted that 161 pupils in schools for pupils with MGLD were reported to have a multiple disability. The official definition of multiple disability, which was included in the questionnaire is: "Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more low incidence disabilities" Unfortunately, data supplied in response to Question 10 did not enable us to identify the specific conditions that made up pupils' multiple disabilities. However, it seems possible that some pupils entered in this category did not fit this definition. It appears, therefore, that this category is being used by principals to highlight the increasing complexity of pupils' needs, especially in schools for pupils with MGLD or ModGLD. These schools are not only catering for pupils with a wide range of primary disabilities, they also have considerable numbers of pupils who have two or more disabilities (for example both a MGLD and a mild visual impairment).

## 4. Findings

The increasing complexity of pupil need in special schools is also highlighted in response to Question 2 (What is the official DES designation of your school) The designation offered by many principals in response to this question did not match with that on the DES list. This was particularly the case for schools originally designated for pupils with ModGLD and schools for pupils with physical disabilities. The principals in these schools included their special classes within the designation of their school eg ‘moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities’, this could be taken as indicating that they wish to draw attention to the range and complexity of pupil needs for which the school caters. Alternatively it may indicate that they see pupils with severe and profound GLD, or ASD, who are notionally in special classes attached to their school, as an integral part of the school. This latter view is given credence by the fact that many principals of schools for pupils with ModGLD with large numbers of pupils with SPLD and/or ASD did not respond to question 8 which asked about numbers of special classes. Additionally, some schools officially designated for pupils with ModGLD report that the majority of their classes are now catering for pupils with SPLD, and in some cases the majority of pupils in the school are also reported to be in the SPLD category. Replies to the open question on recent changes in pupil population confirm that these schools are now admitting more pupils with severe and profound levels of GLD and with multiple disabilities.

### 4.2.3 Staffing in special schools

#### 4.2.3.1 Teachers

The quantitative data collected in Phase One of the review includes some limited information about the qualifications and training of teachers in special schools. This information is particularly relevant to one of the major focuses of the research, namely “the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools”.

There were a total of 864 DES-funded teachers (including principal teachers) in the 83 special schools included in the analysis and 4,942 pupils giving an overall teacher: pupil ratio of 1:5.7 or 1:6.3 if principals are excluded. More than half the schools (46) have additional teachers funded other than by the DES, giving an additional 124 teachers. It is not clear from the responses how many of these teachers were part time.

### 4.2.3.2 Initial qualifications of teachers working in special schools

The questionnaire did not ask for details of teachers' initial qualifications, except to ask how many of them held restricted or provisional recognition or were unqualified. Consequently it is not possible to say how many were qualified through a Bachelor of Education Degree, and how many through a Postgraduate Diploma; nor is it possible to say how many teachers held a post-primary qualification, or had trained abroad. Three hundred and ninety two (392) (39%) of teachers in special schools were reported to have restricted recognition, 17 provisional recognition and 14 were said to be unqualified.

### 4.2.3.3 Continuing professional development in special educational needs

Data were available on the continuing development opportunities available to teachers from both the Phase One questionnaire and the qualitative data collected during Phase Two. The questionnaire requested details on the additional training undertaken and the specialist qualifications held by the teachers. However, it is difficult to give an accurate picture of the numbers of teachers who hold specialist qualifications, or have undertaken additional training as some teachers undoubtedly hold more than one specialist qualification (for example both a diploma in learning support and a diploma in special education, or both a diploma and a masters in special education). Additionally those who have availed of the various non-accredited training opportunities may well have availed of more than one such opportunity and/or also have taken part in accredited training. Consequently numbers are reported separately for each type of specialist training, but it needs to be borne in mind that these numbers cannot be summed to give an overall number of those with some specialist training.

### 4.2.3.4 Accredited courses

From a total of 988 teachers working in the 83 special schools, 238 (27.6%), held a special education qualification (diploma) recognised for the payment of an allowance from the DES. Thirty-two teachers had a graduate certificate in ASD obtained either through St Patrick's College or the University of Birmingham, and 10 had a diploma in ASD. Thirty nine teachers held a diploma for teachers of the deaf and one held a diploma for teachers of the blind (it should be borne in mind that the visiting teacher service was not included in this survey). Five teachers hold the BCABA qualification from Trinity College. There was wide variation between schools in the percentage of teachers holding qualifications in special education and four schools had no teachers with such qualifications. Fifty-one teachers have

a masters degree in special educational needs or a masters degree in education specialising in special education and three have a masters degree in ASD. Table 16 gives details of teachers holding accredited qualifications by type of special school.

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**Table 16. Breakdown of teacher qualifications by school type**

DES designation of school	Total no. of schools responding	Total no. of teachers	Dip in Special Ed.	Dip in Learning Support	Cert in ASD	Birg Cert in ASD	Birg Dip in ASD	MSEN	M.Ed (spec ed)	Masters in Autism	Dip for teachers of the Deaf	Dip for teachers of the Blind	BCABA – ABA course (Trinity)	Other Qualifications
<b>Special Schools</b>														
Physical disability	5	58	25	6	0	0	0	4	8	0	0	0	0	0
Hearing impairment	2	42	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	29	0	0	0
Visual impairment	1	6	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
EBD	6	34	17	3	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
MGLD	28	316	85	6	3	5	2	4	13	2	3	0	2	0
ModGLD	29	327	88	11	9	8	5	7	7	1	2	0	1	2
Severe/ profound GLD	3	21	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
ASD	4	30	7	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	3	0	2	0
Specific learning disability	2	17	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple disabilities	1	9	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other school	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

### 4.2.3.5 Non-accredited courses

Table 17 gives details of numbers of staff in the various types of special school who had taken a wide variety of short courses. It is particularly important to note that it is not possible to add together the numbers who have completed courses in this section, for example, one teacher may well have taken four different online courses in four successive summers. It is also likely that it is in the area of non-accredited short-courses that there is likely to have been most change since the data was collected in 2006, as significant additional training opportunities have been provided since the establishment of the SESS.

### 4.2.3.6 SESS seminars

Also of particular note is the number of teachers who had participated in SESS Seminars. For example, the majority of teachers in schools for pupils with MGLD had attended a seminar on challenging behaviour, which emerged as an issue of particular concern for this group of teachers. These seminars were highly praised by teachers participating in the focus groups in Phase 2 (see below).

### 4.2.3.7 Induction courses

One hundred and twenty-six teachers from special schools have completed an induction course in an aspect of special education. One hundred and twelve of these teachers have completed an induction course for teachers of pupils with severe and profound GLD. Thus approximately half the 210 teachers who have taken this course since 1995 are currently working in the 83 special schools which responded to the questionnaire. Unfortunately, however, it is not possible to tell from the data if these teachers are still working with pupils with severe and profound GLD. Sixteen have completed an induction course for resource teachers and nine have completed an induction course in another aspect of special education.

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**Table 17. Short courses by school type – special schools**

DES designation of school	Total no. of schools responding	Total no. of teachers	Induction course for resource teachers	Induction course for teachers of children with severe and profound GLD	Other induction courses	Profexel online autism training course	Profexel online positive behaviour training course	Profexel online dyslexia training course	Profexel online inclusion training course	Profexel ABA training course	Profexel ADHD training course
Physical disability	5	58	0	7	0	6	1	0	1	2	3
Hearing impairment	2	42	0	0	0	2	3	5	4	5	3
Visual impairment	1	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
EBD	6	34	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2
MGLD	28	316	8	7	4	29	17	2	2	9	8
ModGLD	29	315	6	77	5	39	21	6	6	20	8
Severe/profound GLD	3	21	0	14	0	1	2	0	0	2	0
ASD	4	30	0	0	0	4	4	7	0	7	3
Specific learning disability	2	17	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Multiple disabilities	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other school	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>

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**Table 17b Short courses by school type – special schools**

DES designation of school	Total no. of schools responding	Total no. of teachers	SESS seminars on autism	SESS seminars on dyslexia	SESS seminars on 2 <sup>nd</sup> level SEN	SESS seminars on challenging behaviour	SESS seminars on dyspraxia	SESS local initiatives funded courses	TEACCH	PECS	Applied Behaviour Analysis
Physical disability	5	58	1	0	0	2	0	4	2	5	0
Hearing impairment	2	42	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	2	0
Visual impairment	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
EBD	6	34	1	0	0	9	0	8	1	2	1
MGLD	28	316	10	9	14	255	7	10	49	44	20
ModGLD	29	315	26	3	0	28	3	73	84	109	11
Severe/profound GLD	3	21	8	2	0	1	0	0	8	11	3
ASD	4	30	4	0	2	3	0	6	10	17	3
Specific learning disability	2	17	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple disabilities	1	9	9	0	0	9	0	9	9	9	2
Other school	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>40</b>

Data collected in Phase Two of the study demonstrates that, although the special school participants saw the training/ development opportunities they had as beneficial, they also felt there was insufficient access to relevant training, this comment from the a special school principal was typical.

What just comes to my mind around teacher training and the in-service and so on, is the SESS is wonderful in terms of the support that they provide. But say for example, if I have say, maybe four teachers who I feel could really benefit from attending a course, I mean, I can't, really can't do that in terms of, generally speaking, it's one person can attend anyway per school, because of the numbers, and so on. So let's say we had the revised primary curriculum, I mean, how many days, a phenomenal amount of days in terms of training. But there is, I couldn't even mention an equivalent, nowhere near it, or even a consideration around what in-service special schools, not just a teacher in the school, might need (Source: Principal focus group, principal from a special school for pupils with physical disabilities).

### *Perceptions of expertise of the staff in the special school*

The issue of the training/ expertise of special school staff was raised a number of times by participants during focus group discussions, in Phase Two, although there was no explicit question on this issue. Participants were divided on this issue with some seeing teachers in special schools as highly expert by virtue of either their qualifications or their experience and others (often within special schools themselves) pointing to a lack of expertise or disparities in qualifications and expertise from school to school (See Table 18).

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**Table 18. Focus group participants perceptions of special school teachers' qualifications by participant type and school type**

Participant type	Special school teachers are qualified, or have expertise in SEN	Special school teachers lack qualifications
Teacher	4	1
Principal	9	3
Parent	0	2
SNA	2	0
Submission	2	1
School type		
Special school	10	5
Main primary	6	2
Main post-primary	0	1

The following quotes are typical of the range of views expressed:

There's an assumption there's expertise and there are a lot of teachers in the school who are qualified with Special Ed courses (Source: Pilot focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

I think they have a very important role, a very very important role because that's where the expertise is. The staff are all trained within the various given areas and usually all the resources are there (Source: Pilot focus group, unidentified speaker).

Yeah, the experience and the knowledge that is there in special schools. That really is a resource that should be used (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a mainstream primary school with classes for pupils with MGLD, ModGLD, PD, ASD and EBD).

You know, oh, the child's in a special school, therefore the teacher can do everything, and work wonders. And it goes back to teacher training. And most people that are working in special schools have had no special school training. They get it from experience (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with dyslexia).

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Caution against naivety of classifying special schools as centres of expertise/excellence without any specialist training or support must be exercised (Source: Submission, from a special school for pupils with MGLD/ASD).

### 4.2.3.8 Special needs assistants

Data on numbers of special needs assistants are available from the Phase One questionnaire and in addition some Phase Two participants commented on the role and training of SNAs. However, no specific questions were asked about this issue since there was a separate review of SNA provision being carried out by the DES/VFM at the same time as Phase Two; therefore only the quantitative data gathered in Phase One is reported here.

There were 1,156 SNAs funded by the DES in the 83 special schools giving an SNA: pupil ratio 1:4.27. Together with the DES-funded teachers (excluding principals) this gives a staff pupil ratio of 1: 2.55. There are also 59 care assistants (in 17 schools) and 34 schools stated that they had at least one nurse (though some of these may not be full-time).

### 4.2.3.9 Role and training of special needs assistants

A lack of relevant training for SNAs was mentioned by a number of participants in Phase Two, including the SNAs themselves:

Yeah well maybe then there could be more training courses, even while here as an SNA. Whereas there would be more courses offered to SNAs while in employment that they could go for a day here or there or two days or whatever like to gather up more information about what they are carrying out in the classroom that is maybe available to the teachers so that the same would be available to the SNAs as well. This would be maybe even prior to the, this would be during their employment, that would be helpful too. At the moment I don't believe there is that many courses offered to help them, you know to help them carry out ... (Source: Source: Case study interview SNA, Irish special school).

So you know, in terms of qualifications, and I absolutely agree with you, you can have some excellent special needs assistants. They're not teachers, and they haven't got the same training. And it's very different. It does that whole sort of diversity of pupil, raises the issue of you know, in terms of working in the classroom for teachers, how special needs assistants feed back to the

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teachers (Source: Principal focus group, principal from a mainstream primary with SPLD, specific speech and language special classes).

### 4.2.3.10 Access to multi-disciplinary support

Access to multi-disciplinary support emerged as a major issue in both phases of the review. In the Phase One questionnaire special schools were asked to identify multidisciplinary services they received. The data showed that, with only one or two exceptions, services were available only on a part-time or ad-hoc basis, with many schools receiving no service from a number of professionals within the multi-disciplinary team (see Table 19). The inadequacy of specialist services and the need for support from a multi-disciplinary team was also the issue mentioned most frequently by principals in their responses to the final open question in Phase One of the review (“Are there any other issues you think are important in catering for children with special needs?”)

**Table 19. Numbers of schools receiving some service**

Service	Special schools
Educational psychology	40 (48.2%)
Speech therapy	70 (84.3%)
Social worker	53 (63.9%)
Occupational therapy	49 (59.0%)
Physiotherapy	46 (55.4%)
Psychiatry	22 (25.5%)
Clinical psychology	39 (47.0%)
Counselling	13 (15.7%)
Family support	20 (24.1%)

Even where a school has some level of service from some of the professionals listed in Table 19, these professionals are unlikely to constitute a multi-disciplinary team. Where the school does have a multi-disciplinary team there may still be issues about the amount of support available, the participants quoted below are typical.

There is. I mean, we have a multi-D team. But there’s a waiting list. And just because they come to our school doesn’t automatically. And it’s got less and less over the years. And we’ve less control over the situation. I mean, we have more people available. We’ve OTs and physios, and the dental service comes, you know, two days a week. We, the services are all there, but you

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can't access them unless they decide (Source: Focus group teachers, teacher from a special school for pupils with ModGLD).

It's coping, but just barely coping. But that system can be strengthened if we had multi-d teams as standard practice in every school setting (Source: Principals focus group, principal from a special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD).

Children have great physical needs. I mean the lower down the spectrum they go, the more the physical needs they have really. So you need the input of a multi-D team. You need a physio programme, you need a walking programme, you may need a feeding programme, you need a toileting programme. You need all of those things, and you need them all integrated into their daily programme. So it's getting away a little bit from the academics. Now the children that can do academics, of course we provide that. But we're seeing more and more the other needs (Source: Teachers focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with ModGLD).

More broadly, data from the two phases combined suggests that, although there are differing perceptions of the extent to which special schools are well-resourced the great majority of references from participants of all types are to the lack of resources within special schools as is shown in Table 20.

**Table 20. Perceptions of resources available to special schools**

Participant type	Special schools have resources	Special schools lack resources
Teacher	8	10
Principal	5	42
Parent	1	8
SNA	5	3
Chair BOM	0	1
Deputy Principal	1	1
Submission	2	4
School type		
Special school	19	56
Main primary	4	6
Main post-primary	0	3

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Amongst those who felt that the resources available in special schools contribute to their ability to be a Centre of Excellence were the following:

The staff are all trained within the various given areas and usually all the resources are there. Like there could be music therapy, play therapy, speech and language therapist, behavioural therapists. They are there and they are available. So I think they are very important as a centre of expertise in dealing with special needs (Source: Pilot focus group, unattributable voice).

Many special schools also benefit from Clinical Supports on site, which are vital to ensure a comprehensive team approach in meeting the many needs of pupils. In these circumstances the schools are enabled to fully implement the requirements of the EPSEN Act (2004) with reference to the provision of support services and the integration of these services into a child centred IEP (Source: Submission: Special schools' organisation).

However, much more frequent were comments about the lack of resources and the impact that had on the quality of provision:

Yeah, but even...like that battle for the OT has been going on. \_\_\_ [teacher's name] has attended meetings three or four times a year. And every single meeting she recorded that they needed an OT in the school and it just became a matter of form, every meeting she said it. And one day she got a letter to say, you have an OT. And to say that she was shocked...but it was literally...now the thing with speech therapists, we begged and borrowed, we threatened to get our own and everything like that but it's very difficult to get private speech therapists attached to the school because then the Health board don't want anything to do with it. And then there's the whole issue of...that a junior speech therapist is supposed to have a senior working with them. And it becomes so it's almost impossible. But I think that's something that has to be addressed (Source: Parent focus group, parent of a child in a special school for pupils with MGLD).

In this school we have no access to NEPS except on the scheme of refunding one psychological assessment per year. Need a consultative psych. Occupational therapy could play a more major role in special education speech therapy and occupational therapy should be funded by the DES not HSE (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

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A major obstacle to appropriate education is, of course, lack of services. Speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and behavioural intervention specialists must be employed directly by the Department of Education and Science in order to rectify this problem (Source: Submission, disability organisation).

### 4.2.4 Summary

This section has presented data relating to both the pupil population of special schools, and the resources available to them in terms of staffing and access to multidisciplinary supports. Findings relating to the role of the special school are now discussed in the light of this contextual information.

### 4.2.5 The role of the special school

A total of eight themes were identified from the qualitative data in relation to the current and future roles for special schools:

- (1) support for mainstream
- (2) caters well for specific categories of SEN
- (3) well-being and happiness
- (4) meeting individual needs
- (5) continuum of provision
- (6) support for parents
- (7) catering for pupils who are extremely difficult to place
- (8) children returning from post-primary.

A number of these themes can be seen as directly related to the central issues of the review namely; the potential for special schools to offer expertise and services to mainstream primary and post-primary schools the idea of the special school as a Centre of Excellence, and catering for pupils with specific categories of SEN.

'Support for mainstream' was overwhelmingly the most frequently mentioned of the eight themes, and this is unsurprising given the central focus of the review on this aspect of the role of the special school. This overall theme is split down to two subthemes; expertise and collaboration with mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and the special school as a Centre of Excellence. Findings in relation to these aspects of the role of the special school are dealt with next, followed by findings related to the other seven themes.

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### 4.2.6 Expertise and collaboration with mainstream primary and post-primary schools

This section deals with the support currently offered by special to mainstream schools and the perceived potential for special schools to offer expertise to mainstream schools particularly in regard to playing a greater role in helping to provide for the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings.

The English case study school, had pioneered such a role for itself under the leadership of a dynamic principal during the decade preceding the visit of the research team, and learning about the way this role was managed within a locally administered system with formal structures in place with regard to special-mainstream school links was one of the focuses of the English case study which is reported more fully at the end of this section.

#### 4.2.6.1 Types of Links Currently in Place

With regard to the current position in Ireland, evidence from the Phase One questionnaire data (Question 20) shows that special schools had a number of different types of links with mainstream schools, both primary and post-primary. A total of 62 of the 83 respondents to the Special School Questionnaire answered this question, with 56 of these schools reporting links of some sort with mainstream.

Table 21 details the range and variety of these links. It should be noted that many schools had more than one type of link, and that it is possible that the 21 non-responders to this question include a disproportionate number of those whose schools had no links.

**Table 21. Links between special and mainstream schools**

Type of link	No of schools	Percentage of those who replied to this question	Percentage of sample
With post-primary schools	33	53.2%	39.7%
With primary schools	16	25.8%	19.5%
With special classes	3	4.8%	3.6%

The majority of these links involve visits by adults or mainstream pupils to the special school; only 13 of the respondents reported that they visited other schools either to participate in classes or for other events or forms of collaboration. Many of the special–primary school links involved collaboration for first communion and confirmation.

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**Table 22. Nature of links between special and mainstream schools**

Type of link	No of schools	Percentage of those who replied to this question	Percentage of sample
Visits from teachers and SNAs to Special school	15	24.1%	18.1%
Teacher exchange with schools in UK or Europe	4	6.5%	4.8%
Work experience for transition year students	28	45.2%	33.7%
Fast friends/class participation	16	25.8%	19.5%
Shared classes in both schools (primary level)	2	3.2%	2.4%
Collaboration with special classes	3	4.8%	3.6%

There was considerable evidence both from the open questions in the Phase One questionnaires and Phase Two focus groups and case study interviews, that current links between special and mainstream schools are informal, ad hoc, and based on the goodwill of those involved. Table 23 (which summarises comments from these data sources) shows that this issue is mainly of concern to teachers and principals in special schools, although those in mainstream primary schools also see it as an issue.

**Table 23. Informal and ad-hoc nature of special-mainstream links**

Participant type	No of participants expressing concern about the informal/ ad-hoc nature of links
Unknown	2
Teacher	11
Principal	20
Parent	3
SNA	3
Deputy principal	2
School type	
Special school	26
Main primary	12
Main post-primary	1

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Typical responses included:

People ringing and saying, you know, have you ever come across a child like this? And I say, right, it's down to the goodwill of the teacher at this stage. (Source: Principal focus group, principal from a special school for pupils with PD)

And that's a problem that our school has now, that you will have teachers knocking on your door. You'll have desperate teachers coming looking for help, 'Look it, I just can't handle this child any longer. Where am I going to go? What can I do about him? You know, I can't pass him onto somebody else.' So we've had teachers come and seek help, and it doesn't, it's not that you have to teach them, you know, you don't have to sit them down and give them huge amounts of training. You give them pointers. You give them ideas on material, on how to handle behaviour. And a lot of the times, there's simple little things that you tell them to do work. You know, it doesn't always work, because we don't always have the problems either because I mean we wouldn't be having difficulties with our kids if we had all the solutions, but I definitely think that yeah, the kids need to be offered a choice, you know (Source: Teachers' focus group, teacher from a special school for children with MGLD/ModGLD/severe and profound GLD).

A clear view emerged from the data that there was a need for such links to be formalised. This view was expressed by both special school and mainstream principals, for example:

Ongoing communication between schools to be professionally facilitated - not just haphazard – NB structures to be put in place (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

Networking – a formal network between the special school and local schools to share experiences and facilitate the support for children around IEPs; planning IEPs, sharing resources etc. Clear guidelines for the application process for special schools and create an awareness of same (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

Support mechanisms for frequent structured meetings between mainstream and special teachers in order to modify both the mainstream and special classroom in terms of instructions, curriculum and behavioural norms in

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order to decrease the differences between each (Source: special school questionnaire, school for pupils with EBD).

These comments from one principal exemplify the tensions involved in special school teachers supporting mainstream colleagues.

Well first of all, I'm not quite sure what a Centre of Excellence is. I'm not quite sure what, what your resource is. I suspect that say, if our school was to become a resource, that, or a Centre of Excellence, I would be utterly convinced that it's all going to be in one direction, which is away from us, into other areas. But, which is fine if you had the resources. But again, if, if you're going to use, or use the expertise of your, of our own teachers in our school to support teachers who are in mainstream schools, then you're going to give away teachers from our own school, who have got the expertise that we require in our own school. Okay? (Source: Principal Focus group, principal of a special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD/severe profound GLD).

However, data from the English case study suggests that the presence of formal structures did not entirely alleviate tensions such as these, with a number of individuals mentioning the difficulties of balancing their responsibilities towards the pupils in their special school class with supporting mainstream colleagues.

### **4.2.7 The special school as a Centre of Excellence**

The concept of the special school as a Centre of Excellence which emerges from the data overall is multi-faceted, with the special school being seen as a Centre of Excellence by some participants in terms of the provision it makes for pupils with specific categories of SEN and as a centre for training or research, as well as in terms of supporting other schools. However, some participants see the term 'Centre of Excellence' as lacking a clear definition (See Table 24).

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**Table 24. Functions and roles mentioned for a Centre of Excellence**

Type of participant	Supporting other schools	Catering well for children in the school	Centre for training or research	Centre of excellence for a specific category of needs	Lack of clarity of what a Centre of Excellence is
Unknown	1	1	0	0	0
Teacher	2	3	0	0	1
Principal	9	1	2	0	2
Parent	3	0	3	1	1
Deputy principal	1	0	0	0	0
Submission	0	1	0	2	0
School type					
Special school	11	3	4	0	4
Mainstream primary	3	1	1	0	0
Mainstream post-primary	1	1	0	1	0

As can be seen from Table 24 the most frequently mentioned way in which special schools are or could develop as centres of excellence is in supporting mainstream schools. This view was held by some participants from mainstream schools as well as by those in special schools.

I think in the future, I think, what the main thing would be is the level of specialism and expertise amongst, I think, really, what I think the biggest force is the people, that, you know, you have teachers maybe here 25 years that, that we could become, well, like, my own feeling is that we could become a centre for other schools to tap into (Source: Irish case study special school).

... special schools are centres of excellence which mainstream schools would like to access for information and advice (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a mainstream school with classes for pupils with specific speech and language and MGLD).

### 4.2.8 A Centre of Excellence for specific categories of SEN

Another role for special schools which emerged strongly from the data was in excellence in meeting the needs of specific categories of pupils with SEN. Some participants specifically included this in their idea of the special school as a Centre of Excellence:

Special schools need to become centres of excellence in the areas that they know best and begin outreach programmes to schools. Special schools also have much to offer in regard to curricular adaptation and differentiation.

While the NCCA Guidelines are welcome, mainstream teachers are finding it difficult to differentiate at a meaningful level. One way forward, would be using special school teachers in differentiating the textbooks for the various classes (Source: Submission, unidentified submitter).

... we are centres of excellence. But we, she is saying that we would become centres of excellence that could be dipped in and out of. We are centres of excellence in what we do (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD/severe and profound GLD and ASD).

Special schools are a centre of 'best practice' in meeting the educational needs of pupils with a learning disability. They provide a pupil-centred curriculum that suits the need of each pupil and has a long-term focus on these needs (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school for pupils with ModGLD).

The idea that special schools cater well for pupils with specific categories of SEN was not always linked to the concept of 'a Centre of Excellence, it also emerged strongly from the qualitative data overall, with 51 statements being made in support of this idea, mainly by special school principals and parents of pupils attending special schools. It should be noted however, that there was also a significant minority of participants (13) who felt that the special school did not cater well for some categories of pupils with SEN. In some instances the same participant highlights the fact that the particular school caters well for some categories of pupil and is less appropriate for others.

This comment from the deputy head teacher of the English case-study school is typical of those supporting the idea that the special school makes particularly good provision to meet the needs of some groups of pupils:

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Right. Okay. I think the, the pupils that we support best are those who have the speech and language issues, the generally low self-esteem, those lower ability pupils who need that smaller group setting, and who can have an opportunity to raise their confidence and have concentrated work, and can then, we can, we can build those up. Those are the pupils, I think, that we, the pupils who need, perhaps, help on a one-to-one basis with their handwriting, an opportunity to be encouraged to talk, and those, those sort of pupils (Source: English case study, deputy principal interview).

The following statement from a parent also mentions the alternative or more flexible curriculum, and the emphasis on life skills offered by the special school which can be seen as an important aspect of the way in which it caters for the needs of particular pupils:

I wouldn't disagree with what the ladies are saying, that George (pseudonym) himself now like...exams and Junior Cert and Leaving Cert results would be no good to George (pseudonym) at the end of the day, like he's Down syndrome so he's not...we know from his capabilities at the moment like, he'll never put down a job as a lawyer or a solicitor or a doctor or something like that. So basically the school here prepares him for life rather than prepares him educationally-wise, to give him qualifications and exam results [inaudible – background noise] prepares him for life, and tries to prepare him for the next step on for the workplace or wherever (Source: Parents focus group, parent of a child with Down syndrome, in a special school).

Some parents felt, however, that in order for their children to make effective progress they were better placed within a mainstream school, for example:

That would be my problem. Like, as we've talked about \_\_\_ (special school), we all went to see \_\_\_(special school) independently, and I mean the minute I walked in, I just said "no way". Because, speech was the main thing ... I mean, our daughters are speaking, and they all speak with different degrees of speech but I mean, my daughter has come on so much better since she went into the special class, in the mainstream school. 'Cause she's meeting other people, 'cause you have to mix. But if she went to \_\_\_ (special school) and didn't speak there'd be, as you say, grunting and groaning. And then what happens when they become teenagers and adults and when they suddenly go backwards? But it's ... the caring is there and the looking after

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them is wonderful, but they need to be brought on and help their speech. And the only way they learn is by copying. They copy everything (Source: Parent focus group, Parent of a child in a special class in a mainstream, post-primary school).

It should be noted that the same issue emerged in relation to special classes, with some participants expressing the view that special classes are most effective when they cater for pupils with a specific category of need (especially speech and language impairment or specific learning difficulties).

### 4.2.9 Centre of Excellence as a centre for training and research

One of the ways in which some participants in the current study see the future of special schools developing is towards being Centres of Excellence offering training and research facilities. One special school principal explicitly envisaged combining this role with that of catering well for those children for whom inclusion in mainstream is permanently or temporarily not a viable option.

By being centres of excellence where other teachers can come for periods to further their knowledge. By providing supportive learning environments for children who are unable to cope with mainstream (this might be at different periods in their lives) (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school for pupils with multiple disabilities).

If special schools are to act as resource services or 'Centre of Excellence', there is a need to ensure their capacity to act in such a way. However, the data reported above raise some serious questions about their ability to do this, in two important areas: the availability of a multi-disciplinary team, and the training and expertise of the staff in at least some schools. These issues will be further discussed in relation to the international literature in the next chapter.

### 4.2.10 Other roles

The other themes which emerged from the qualitative data in Phase Two also relate to the role of the special schools as perceived by the participants, although not explicitly to the research questions in the terms of reference. Data relating to these remaining six themes are briefly reported here. Where relevant these themes are further discussed in relation to the international literature in the next chapter.

### 4.2.10.1 Happiness and well-being

Special schools were seen by their pupils, parents and staff as contributing to the well being and happiness of the pupils who attend them as well as to their educational progress. Forty-eight participants, many of them pupils or parents felt that the special school played a positive role in this regard. These two excerpts from parent focus groups are typical:

I have a son \_\_\_. He's 13 at the moment. He suffered ... developed epilepsy when he was two and a half and he suffered a stroke when he was four, which left him with no speech and paralysed on the right side but that has all come back, pretty well. He has a slight weakness on the right side and the speech is good. He's quite happy here. He likes the school. He does cookery and all that. While it's going on in the class, he takes part in it (Source: Parent focus group, Parent of a child in a special school).

I'd just like to say that, sort of adding to what I said before, that we were under the advice for years of educational specialists who advised us that mainstream would suit our child better but eventually she would need to move on to a different level. But having said all that, the improvement in her educationally and in her happiness since she came here over the course of, you know, almost a year now, has been so dramatic that we would have to question really, whether we've been doing the right thing or the wrong thing by not sending her here before. And I certainly feel that she should have been here a few years ago. But as I say, we were following the advice of an educational psychologist for the last few years who advised us to leave her in [the local primary school]. But in hindsight I think she'd have been an awful lot better off out here, a lot earlier (Source: Parent focus group, Parent of a child in a special school).

In the Irish case study, special school staff and parents agreed that the special school provided an environment that was safe and happy, while also offering pupils opportunities for challenge and high achievement.

The parent of a child who was shadowed said:

\_\_\_ would not cope in mainstream or mild school – could not communicate or understand all the language used in a 'class of all talking children';...without the special school, \_\_\_ would be 'locked up' , 'institutionalised'.... I would be

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lost without it (the special school) and only because I have been there and done that in two other schools (Source: Parent interview, case study).

This mother's view was that her child was happy in school which she summarized in the words, "a child that will willingly go on the bus in the morning".

The acting head teacher of the English case study school also emphasised the importance of enjoyment as a motivating factor for their pupils. This extract from an interview with the parent of a child from that school who was shadowed, demonstrates that there is a delicate balance between a child being happy and being challenged with regard to academic skills:

Interviewer: And how do you find this school, or how do you find he's progressing in this school?

Mother: I don't think there would've been another school that he'd have been able to go to....So, yeah, and it's fantastic. He loves it. He does love it. ...Obviously, you know, you just want him to do the best he can do..... So, but after getting the head round the fact that he wasn't going to get any better, yes, I mean, this is a lovely school, and I wouldn't want him anywhere else, to be honest.

The following comment from a special school questionnaire makes explicit the link between the achievement and happiness:

To provide individualised specialised non-competitive education suitable to the specific needs of each child in an environment of total acceptance. Special schools are part of a continuum of provision for pupils with disabilities. Parents have more choices for their children because of their continued existence. Our key role is the holistic approach in developing each child to his/her maximum potential and in turn lead as independent, happy and balanced life as possible (Source: special school questionnaire, school for pupils with ModGLD).

### 4.2.10.2 Meeting individual needs

Another important aspect of the special school is that curriculum provides opportunities for the child to learn important life skills and social skills, as mentioned above, and in addition has sufficient staffing to give 1:1 support.

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Well, to be honest with you, I don't ... I would see no way that Brian (pseudonym) would be the person he is today if we had shoehorned him into mainstream. And we wanted to. We really did. This was a last resort, really, until we came in the door. It would have been a disaster. He's 16 today. He would not be able to stand on his own feet, I'm quite confident, in mainstream. Because he would have been just educationally and socially, he took a long time to get where he is today (Parent of a child with ModGLD in a special school).

And because the school is prepared to put in high levels of staffing those children who need the additional one to one on top of the small class groupings, we're able to do that. We're also becoming more and more flexible (Source: English Case study teacher, working in Autism base).

Well I have an individual education plan done from the start of \_\_\_ (student's name) school here, I never had that in the other schools. We are involved in that plan from starting to finish, we are brought up and it is explained to us, it has told us where he is, how he is, what to expect, if we don't agree with it we can up and say it to them. We are listened to (Source: Case study parent of child with Autism, in Irish special school).

So, I think as, as, we, as we're getting the students, we're accommodating their needs, you know. Because we do the ASDAN<sup>2</sup> as well (Source: Case study teacher interview, Irish special school).

### 4.2.10.3 Part of the continuum of provision

A number of special schools explicitly mentioned their role as part of the continuum of provision when describing the curriculum they offer. The comments below show that they see adapting to a changing pupil population and making appropriate provision for each child as parts of their role. This perspective needs to be set alongside the view held by some participants that they cater best for specified categories of need.

Often it is forgotten that the special school provides a holistic education where a fully rounded student emerges at 18. Special schools do provide education

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<sup>2</sup> ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) is a British accreditation system which seeks "The advancement of education, by providing opportunities for all learners to develop their personal and social attributes and levels of achievement through ASDAN awards and resources" (ASDAN 2009),

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in a different environment, however often their very difference is also their strength. The special school is a vital, intrinsic and ever-changing part of the education continuum, often ahead of mainstream, often questioning teaching approaches and seeking student success (Source: special school questionnaire, school for pupils with MGLD).

Both special and mainstream schools see the special school as offering provision for some children who cannot be catered for in a mainstream school. The special school is also mentioned as offering a type of provision not available in mainstream environments. For example, the principal of the Irish post-primary case study school, who was highly committed to meeting the needs of all pupils who applied to his school, none the less felt that occasionally a pupil would need special school provision:

I'll put it to you like this: initially, when the child comes in through our doors, I would always feel that we can cater for them. Now, there are sometimes, and it's very rare, but there are sometimes children where we can reach them, we can cope with them. They will, in some senses, have a, I believe, a worthwhile experience with us, but their particular needs are so immense that it's virtually impossible to meet them within the confines of, you know, what is broadly a normal second-level school (Source: case study principal interview).

Some submissions also made the point that pupils with certain categories of SEN were likely to need more than could be provided in mainstream:

I believe that special schools will continue to play a pivotal role in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. The expertise built up over the years, the variety of approaches used and the small sizes do encourage the need for such schools. It is clear that certain children, particularly those with Profound/Severe GLD, with severe autism and some children with particular physical/sensory disabilities will continue to need more than what a mainstream school can offer (Source: submission, unidentified individual).

Additionally, children with low incidence special needs may require more individual attention than other children, which a special school can perhaps provide, but is not feasible in an integrated mainstream setting (Source: submission, Early Childhood organisation).

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### 4.2.10.4 Support for parents

Another function that the special school can provide is to support the parents of children with SEN. This theme emerged strongly from the data with 56 references, and, interestingly, this view was expressed by a significant number of participants from mainstream primary schools as well as by those from special schools (See Table 25).

**Table 25. Support for parents**

<b>Participant type</b>	<b>Support for parents from school</b>
Unknown	3
Teacher	11
Principal	31
Parent	7
SNA	1
Speech and language therapist	1
Deputy principal	1
Submission	1
<b>School type</b>	
Unknown	3
Special school	32
Mainstream primary	18

### 4.2.10.5 Catering for pupils who are extremely difficult to place

Related to the need for a continuum of provision in order to ensure that all pupils are appropriately provided for, is the expectation that special schools will accommodate those pupils who are unwanted by mainstream schools or those who the mainstream setting finds impossible to cope with. The qualitative data showed that in addition to the complexity of need mentioned above a few special school staff felt that the school was a place of last resort for children for whom mainstream schools were failing to cater well, especially at post-primary. These concerns were mentioned by all types of participant. Some participants viewed this use of the special school in a very negative way, speaking of it as pupils being ‘dumped’ in the special school.

There was a tradition there, and it’s still going on, behavioural problems. Mainstream schools have behavioural problems, they go ‘send them on

down to the school'. So not only do you have learning disabilities, behavioural problems, diagnoses and we don't get the support that we should. And we kind of fall in between everything. You know, we're part of the primary school curriculum, ... our school only deals with secondary age children. So it's kind of ... it needs to be more structured and a lot more ... (Source: Pilot focus group, teacher in a special school for pupils with MGLD).

I wouldn't want special schools to be just for children with challenging behaviour, or to be seen that children with challenging behaviour would be referred to schools like ourselves, just because of their challenging behaviour. Because there are other complex needs as well. And I think that often it's challenging behaviour that is seen, and is being dealt with by dumping youngsters into maybe a special school setting (Source: Principal Focus Group, Principal in a special school for pupils with MGLD).

Because we have these other brighter, behaviourally challenged children coming in on top us, they're being dumped from other schools too (Source: teacher focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

### 4.2.10.6 Pupils entering the special school at transition to post-primary

Another issue for special schools, especially those for pupils with MGLD, is the extent to which they are now catering for pupils who have attended mainstream primary schools but are unable to cope in post-primary, or find it very hard to gain a suitable place. All types of school staff who participated in focus groups mentioned this issue:

I mean we have no children left in school, well there's I think three left in school who would be primary school age. We are essentially a secondary school for children with mild learning disabilities. But yet we're not in any category for that. So the whole nature of the children that come in, even their age, because they can manage ... you know they're doing really well in mainstream with the supports they have now, which they didn't previously. But the second they hit secondary school, that's when things start to crumble. And they come into us ... you know they might not be enrolling for September by the end of the year, we have four or five or six more children that have come in from after Christmas because their self-esteem has been destroyed by the mainstream. And really it's not so much the academic as their self-esteem and they just can't cope with the new environment, and

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they come to us then. So even the general child has changed over the past number of year and that has to be looked at as well (Source: Pilot focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

We have more of an intake of pupils over 12, over 13 in our school than we do of junior age (Source: SNA focus group, SNA from a special school for pupils with ModGLD, ASD).

Well, in our school, we, at the moment, we're trying to divide our school into senior and junior school because we have children up to the age of 18. We would have a lot of kids coming to our school, who have kind of failed at second level. And they mightn't necessarily have a moderate learning difficulty, but they're just not coping in the system (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD/severe and profound GLD).

A similar situation was reported by staff in the English case study school:

Yes we do. We are absolutely, well we are full anyway, we are full. I've only got a little bit of space in years four and nine at the moment I think but we are actually having to stream some classes for certain subjects. But yes we are overflowing but we do find that at secondary age you get all these pupils suddenly wanting to come and we are having to say no because we are bursting (Source: Case study teacher interview, English special school).

This change in age profile is also evident from the quantitative data collected in Phase One as can be seen from Table 26.

**Table 26. Ages of pupils in MGLD schools**

Age band	3 + under	4–8	9–12	13–15	16–18	19 + over
<b>MGLD schools</b>	4	200	473	690	634	11

Table 26 also suggests that MGLD schools experience considerable success in retaining older pupils within the school system.

While the transfer of pupils to MGLD schools at transition from primary to post-primary school is not seen as entirely negative, some participants perceived a tension between the likelihood that pupils will remain in school longer, if receiving appropriate provision in relation to life skills and certification in the special school, and education in the more inclusive setting of a mainstream post-primary school.

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There was also some concern expressed that these pupils who tend to be relatively intellectually able are amongst the most difficult to cater for effectively.

**Table 27. Post-primary programmes on offer in special schools (of the 83 schools responding to the Phase One questionnaire)**

	Leaving Cert	Leaving Cert Applied	Junior Cert	JCSP	NCVA/FETAC
<b>Number of schools offering programme</b>	4	7	25	16	39
<b>MGLD schools offering programme</b>	2	5	15	9	18

Table 27 shows the range of post-primary level programmes offered by schools for pupils with MGLD (in the 28 schools responding). However, given that some programmes are offered by very few schools (eg Leaving Cert, Leaving Cert Applied), it seems likely that a more restricted range of programmes is on offer in any individual school.

The acting principal of the English case study school expressed similar concerns:

So at the moment we have got four students out of the school, so they are on our books, secondary students and some of them we are having to provide work for and teaching time for and others, I mean that is with additional funding from County as well. They will provide us with extra funding but still you've to provide the teachers because they are exam boys you know and they have to have teaching as well (Source: Interview with acting principal, English case study).

Two special schools were visited for case studies, one in Ireland and one in England. Both were selected on the basis of expert advice as examples of exemplary practice in providing for pupils with SEN. These two cases studies are reported in some detail in this chapter, as examples of the way two different special schools are developing and expanding their role in order to enhance the service they offer to pupils with SEN and their parents.

### 4.2.11 Case study in an Irish special school

#### *Background information*

The Irish special school case study was conducted in a special school situated in a provincial town. The school caters for pupils with moderate, severe and profound

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general learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils come from a wide geographic and social catchment area and can avail of a free bus service with bus escorts, funded by the DES.

The school places “great emphasis on the entitlement of our students to access a relevant, progressive and challenging curriculum” (school prospectus) and offers a wide range of academic, practical, social, self help and extra curricular programmes. These include the primary school curriculum, the NCCA curriculum guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities, the Junior Certificate and FETAC, ASDAN and work experience programmes. All pupils have an individual education plan (IEP).

### *Students*

The school has a total population of 107 students. Those with moderate general learning disabilities are divided into junior and senior school areas, with four classes in each area. There are four classes in the special care unit which caters for pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities. Three classes are dedicated to pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and some of these pupils are also integrated into other classes within the school. The school has been involved in developing integration with other primary and post-primary schools since 1996. According to the principal; in consultation with parents and pupils’ own local schools, thirteen pupils are currently dually placed in both schools.

There has been a significant change in the population of the school over the past five years. Numbers have increased from 90 to 107+ pupils; there are now many more pupils with ASD and with multiple disabilities; pupils with SPLD appear to have more sensory difficulties; there has been an increase in the number of students in the borderline mild / moderate GLD range transferring at post-primary age because they cannot cope with mainstream post-primary school; more pupils are availing of the dual placement facilities (questionnaire; interviews).

### *Staff*

- Principal
- Deputy principal
- 15 teachers
- 1 speech and language therapist
- 2 nurses
- 33 special needs assistants (SNAs)
- 2 care assistants

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- Part-time physiotherapist and occupational therapist
- Other services eg psychology, psychiatry, social work, paediatrics, counselling and family support are provided as required.

### *Links with mainstream schools*

Staff in the Irish special school case study appeared to view dual placement as part of a much broader issue concerning various types of links which existed between their school and other mainstream primary and post-primary schools. The whole staff discussed this specific issue and compiled a written report for the research team. They listed some links, other than those pertaining to dual enrolment, that currently exist between them and other schools. For example:

- senior classes link up with Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) classes in the local comprehensive school
- transition year students do work experience in the special school.

Senior pupils from both the special and mainstream schools visit each other for social interaction and in relation to the Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) programme. (Source: Written report by staff)

This Irish special school has been offering dual placement to its pupils where appropriate for many years and there has been a teacher with a designated post of responsibility for dual placement since 1996. The school prospectus, which is designed primarily for parents, contains a paragraph explaining and offering dual placement. Because their pupils come from a wide catchment area, the school encourages dual placement with the mainstream schools in the pupils' own local area, rather than in the locality of the special school.

At the time the case study was conducted 12 pupils were spending various amounts of time, ranging from a few hours to four days a week, in primary and post-primary mainstream schools. The school has a written policy on dual placement which includes the procedures for implementing dual placement, an outline of the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders (eg parents, staff of both schools), protocols and forms for keeping records of children's progress and of meetings, decisions and consent forms. Procedures, structures and systems have evolved over the years and the special school offers ongoing support to the mainstream schools in which their pupils are dually placed.

The teachers and SNAs who had been involved in dual placement spoke of the amount of support they give and the time they spend passing information about

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pupils, accessing support from speech and language therapy and facilitating teacher and SNA visits from mainstream schools.

... the support and incredible service the school gives to mainstream – training in the SNAs, a whole Saturday morning on ASD, working with the dual enrolment schools (Source: Teacher with post of responsibility for dual placement).

Another teacher who has a pupil dually placed in a post-primary school spoke of the mutual benefits of dual placement:

It's a real two-way sharing of expertise ... there are particular needs of senior pupils. I would like to have joint inservice with the SNAs. We have very good communication and support with our linked schools (Source: Teacher special school).

### *Facilitation of links such as dual placement*

The report which the staff compiled on linkages, including dual placement, listed a number of factors that staff felt facilitated these links, such as:

- Willingness of both schools to get involved
- Level of expertise and knowledge of the special school staff
- Choosing a topic/project on which both sets of pupils could work together eg sport, art/craft, drama
- Willingness of post-primary school to divert from timetable
- Willingness of staff to take transition year students into their classes.

The following quote from the staff's written report illustrates the collaborative nature of the links:

Again, as regards dual enrolment the links are facilitated by sharing of knowledge and expertise, support provided by special school to mainstream and understanding and empathy of whole school approach in secondary mainstream schools (Source: Staff's written report).

One of the pupils, Y, who was shadowed as part of the Irish special school case study, was dually placed in his local primary mainstream school. His grandmother reported that the family was very happy with the dual placement arrangements and that as well as improving significantly in his learning (especially in English) and behaviour, he now mixed with the children in his own locality.

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Yeah and the kids, neighbours and stuff like that ... meeting with them ... he goes to football with them, so you know (Source: Y's grandmother).

The principal and teacher in the mainstream primary school also agreed that Y had benefited from dual placement with the principal commenting that:

I wouldn't be surprised if he's grown out of \_\_\_ (special school). He's doing fine and we can cope here well with him (Source: Principal of mainstream school).

When asked what facilitated the dual placement, the principal said:

\_\_\_ (special school) has been invaluable in establishing a base of what he knows and the basics ... they've done a wonderful job ... they've laid the foundations ... and of course I've small numbers , only 15 in 5th and 6th class. I used to have 30. I couldn't do it without [special school] and without the small numbers (Source: Principal of mainstream primary school where Y is dual placed).

There were some problems however in relation to the same pupil during his one day a week in the special school. These problems related to discipline and managing behaviour.

[Y] is competitive and can be very grumpy for example, they previously used a stars-based behavioural programme and the other children collected more stars when he was in his other school and this made him upset to be behind [in collecting his stars] when he returned to the school (Source: Field notes from interview with Y's class teacher).

Y himself spoke of some issues such as harder work in mainstream school, being worried about next year, in 6th class, when he would be fulltime in mainstream yet also wanting to leave the special school because he had grown out of it and liked the boys and football in the mainstream school (Source: Field notes from with Y).

Another pupil's teacher talked about gains in social awareness and functioning as a consequence of his experience with dual placement, which had progressed to Y spending four days per week in the mainstream school.

In the written report compiled by the special school staff they listed the following as barriers or obstacles to linkages such as dual placement:

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- Time and demands of the curriculum in mainstream and post primary
- The 'closed door' attitude of mainstream teachers
- Mainstream teachers 'feel ashamed' to ask for help with difficult students and try to cope alone
- Schools situated on different campuses
- Fear of the unknown – mainstream teachers don't feel they know enough about special education and special schools to get involved in teacher exchange, just as special school teachers feel they would be overwhelmed by 27+ junior infants.

Both the facilitators and barriers mentioned by these staff are in agreement with those reported in the literature, and also with those reported by staff in the English case study special school, and consequently are those which need addressing in order to enhance provision for pupils with SEN (see recommendations).

### 4.2.12 Case study in an English school for pupils with MGLD

#### *Background information*

The English case study was conducted in a large special school designated as a specialist technology college on the outskirts of a small town in the south-west of England. The school caters for students with moderate (UK) general learning difficulties and autism. The school also supports students with learning difficulties in an outreach capacity in over 30 mainstream schools.

The school is one of the few special schools in the country which have been successful in achieving the status of a Leading Edge Partnership School. The Leading Edge Partnership programme is about post-primary schools working in partnership to solve some of the most intractable problems in education and to address some of the most critical learning challenges facing the education system. The programme aims to ensure that as many teachers as possible have the opportunity to share what they do and equally to have access to the work of others.

The school was chosen for the case study because it is clearly regarded as a Centre of Excellence, and has well-developed provision in regard both to offering expertise to other schools and offering training, two characteristics of such centres frequently mentioned in the literature. It has been rated as excellent or outstanding since at least 2001, achieving a rating of outstanding in its most recent Ofsted report in 2006. It is a training school. As centres of excellence for training, Training Schools act as experts in adult learning and the transfer of skills, and provide a venue for high quality professional development.

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### *Students*

The school has a total population of 185 students. Children are generally grouped in age-appropriate classes. The majority of the students (88) are enrolled in the post-primary (11–16 years old) department with 64 in the primary (3–11 years old) department. The school also has an autism base (3–19 years old) which caters for 33 students with autism whose functional capacity lies in the moderate range of learning difficulties.

The ratio of boys to girls in the school is 132:53.

### *Staff*

- Headteacher
- 3 heads of department
- 27 teachers
- 55 teaching assistants
- 6 admin staff
- 1 site manager
- 1 IT technician
- 1 counsellor
- 3 kitchen staff
- 13 school meals supervisors
- 5 cleaners

The aims of the school's Inclusion Policy, which include offering all pupils 'the maximum opportunities for personal growth and an appropriate and successful educational experience', are reflected in practices relating to curriculum and pedagogy, management of behaviour and admissions policy.

### *Curriculum and pedagogy*

The school offers a curriculum, which is tailored to the needs of the individual pupil. Pupils have access to a 'differentiated and flexible' curriculum, which is linked to their individual education plans (Inclusion policy). All pupils follow programmes of study across each of the key stages in English (including literacy), PSHE and Citizenship, Music, Maths (including numeracy), Physical Education, Outdoor and Environmental Education, Art, Science, History, Geography, French, Design and technology, Religious Education, Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The curriculum also includes informal programmes such as musical events, drama classes, sporting fixtures, residential and community links. Throughout the school and

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within each class group, pupils may be taught as a whole class group, grouped in different ways for particular activities or taught individually. There was evidence in classrooms of a range of teaching methodologies (eg direct teaching, peer support, interactive approaches) and some specialist approaches (eg TEACCH, PECS) for pupils with autism. There was also evidence of systematic planning for teaching (eg long and short-term curriculum plans; records of pupil progress with evidence of self-assessment and self-recording; personal portfolios; class timetables; individual visual schedules for pupils with autism; individual education plans; functional assessment of behaviour followed by individual behaviour plans; inclusion plan for pupils from the Autism Base who are included in the main body of the school) (Source: observation and field notes; document analysis).

Funding for the school's Technology College Status is used to enhance the curriculum in Maths, Science, ICT and Design and technology. A teacher who had previously been in mainstream noted this excellence in technology but also the skills of teachers in the school:

They had ways of doing things; flexibility of thought, imagination, ways of putting something across to children and then perhaps if it doesn't work, finding another way, finding another way, finding another way ... (Source: teacher).

The deputy headteacher, head of post primary, spoke in detail about the post-primary department's curriculum and overall structure and organisation. For example:

And then, from half, half past nine, for the rest of the day, pupils move around for different lessons. We have technology specialists. We have PE specialists, and so on. And so they will move around with those, to those lessons. We try to keep, if, if their tutor is, is generally, a more general teacher, in that they can deliver their literacy and their numeracy, then we would try and make sure that they have those sessions with that tutor. But again, we split them down again in groups for literacy and numeracy, so they're in much smaller groups for those sessions. So we, we go on till 11 in the morning. They have a break at 11, it's 11.15. Some sessions, like science and technology, are double sessions, so they (Source: Deputy headteacher).

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Her account depicted a highly organised but flexible provision characterised by carefully differentiated ‘subject’ teaching. This teaching is provided by teachers – and teaching assistants (TAs) – with appropriate subject knowledge and the ability to relate this to the needs of children and young people.

She also felt that the school was confident about adapting national curriculum guidance to the needs of their learners. Staff did not feel obliged to ‘jump’ and follow every new piece of government advice or guidance. It was more important to provide a personalised/differentiated curriculum:

No. We’re, we’re very, we’ve always taken ... when I came here, as I said, there was, this, the curriculum was not structured at all. So over the years it, it’s built up and built up, and it, at one point it became very structured, as you say. But we’ve always been confident enough, I suppose, in saying that if we think this is right for our pupils, we will do it. And if that means going against the grain slightly, then, then we will do that, because we feel we can justify it. Yes, we’ll make sure they have a broad, balanced curriculum, and we want, we feel our pupils are entitled to have access to all the subjects that any mainstream school would have. But we do it in a way that we feel is right, meets the needs of our pupils. So if we’re doing humanities, we, we may well do the subject that’s appropriate for year nine or whatever.

But we will do it in a way that we feel meets their needs better. And if it means rewriting, like, the literacy, when the British literacy strategy came out we rewrote it two, three years behind, so that it fitted our pupils. You know. So we adapted to suit the needs of our pupils. And we feel that that’s justified, and we will stand up to Ofsted and say, well, you know, ‘This is what we think is right,’ and, and, we don’t, you know, we, we’ve been quite bold, and we’ve had a head who’s supported us in doing that, whereas I know some schools perhaps wouldn’t have that, and would feel that they would be constrained with, you know, we’ve got to do, you know, two hours of this and six hours of that. So, so we’ve taken, yes, we’ve taken the broad picture, but we’ve, you know, we’ve met the needs of our pupils (Source: Deputy headteacher).

In this specialist setting it seems possible to provide access to a mainstream national curriculum and to provide the kind of flexibility that is essential for learners with a diverse range of needs (interviewer’s field notes).

## 4. Findings

Discussion with the deputy headteacher also focused on a particular feature of the school's curriculum provision related to opportunities for accredited learning. Students are given the opportunity to take public examinations that their peers in mainstream also take. At the same time, they can follow courses that provide alternative accreditation (eg ASDAN) and pursue valued learning that is not accredited. The implication of changing student needs was that curriculum differentiation became increasingly important.

Which means there has to be alternative courses. You can't just lump them all into one, sort of, course at the end of it and make it fit them all. Because it's not going to. There needs to be something more that's going to have higher expectations (Source: Deputy headteacher).

The Year 11 co-ordinator agreed that for some learners GCSE accreditation would be most appropriate, but for others a much more vocational and practical curriculum would be appropriate.

It'd be hugely vocational and life skills based, I think. I'd like to do things like the, at the moment we do bronze and silver ASDAN, as award. I'd quite like to do gold. Vocational. Things that are just going to boost their confidence, boost their self-esteem and get them out and ready to be employed, almost. You know, because it – they do work experience at ... College, but it's very low-key to begin with. I know those who've done their two weeks and do brilliantly. You know. They go along and, we're constantly ... how much better these students are than mainstream students they get, they're brilliant. They work really hard. So they're capable of doing more. I'd have them out doing work experience, lots of vocational stuff (Source: Year 11 co-ordinator).

The school has a dedicated Year 11 tutor and coordinator for careers, work experience and initial travel training and this is regarded as key to supporting transitions from school to college/employment for students in their last year of school. The role is a demanding one and much effort is put into ensuring that students are as prepared as they can be for leaving school. Much of the work with other education, training and work experience providers focuses on trying to organize appropriate transitions and next placements. This necessitates spending a lot of time liaising with colleges, employers etc. This work takes priority over 'supporting' other schools.

## 4. Findings

She expressed concern about post-16 college provision, noting that difficulties had been experienced in getting 'mainstream course' places for some students. This concern is also echoed in comments from the co-ordinator of post-16 transitions.

Accessing post-16 placement is problematic and can lead to inappropriate 'separate/specialist' provision:

We have generally a choice between, well, at the moment, three colleges ... I was hugely dissatisfied with (one college in particular), because we weren't getting the courses that our students were suitable for. They were getting the fairly bog-standard special needs [course for] special schools.

Repetition of what they'd had here, and lack of expectation. Real lack of expectation. And the thing we have here is incredibly high expectations for children. You know, they achieve the very, very best they can. And we've had students walk out with five GCSEs, albeit low grades, but they have walked out with five GCSEs, so they're capable of, I've had Ds in English for them. Which is pretty good. Some are walking out with better than they would, or with lower ability in mainstream are (Source: Year 11 co-ordinator).

However, college staff changes indicate that difficulties referred to here might be overcome.

Taken over the SEN department, and they produced new courses, and it's looking good. I went to see them on Tuesday, and it's looking good. It's looking like they might be able to, sort of, cater courses for our students. Which is brilliant. That's how it should be (Source: Year 11 co-ordinator).

Sometimes this provision can be highly appropriate and well matched to the needs of learners and their possible employment opportunities (eg in horticulture). For some students, the school thinks it could make better provision of its own and may develop this [subject to the views of a new headteacher]. The school already runs autism specific post-16 provision, but this is not available to non-ASD students.

Occasionally, students moved from school directly into employment.

We had some applying for apprenticeships last year. One lad applied for an apprenticeship with Paragon, who's the local trainer provider, got it, and then left. He's now working in a garage. Which is fine, he will do brilliantly, he will do brilliantly just because he's that sort of lad. We've had one lad going to work, which I think was the right decision. He, he could've gone to college

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and he could've got training, but he had quite poor literacy. And going into a pub and getting some training and that sort of thing was probably the right way to go for him. Because he's, he, he would've struggled with college, whatever college we sent him to. So I think, for him, again, it was the right decision to make (Source: Year 11 co-ordinator).

### *Management of behaviour*

The school has a code of conduct which all members of the school have agreed. There was evidence of this code throughout the school with more specific guidelines and reminders for particular groups/pupils. These included visual reminders of rules, procedures and expectations; well-organised and clear procedures for transitions between classes; social stories to explain the rules of behaviour in social situations; positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviour using praise/reward systems/ descriptive feedback; recognition of individual achievements 'golden time'. A detailed behaviour policy has been developed with input from all involved with the school to promote the consistency of expectation, approach and response. There is a systematic approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour from on the spot response for minor problems, to consultation with parents and head teacher for serious or continuing problems. Individual Behaviour Support Plans are in place where relevant (Source: observation and field notes; document analysis).

The deputy head teacher referred to the changing population in the school and the need to address behavioural issues:

But we, we are finding that we also have a great number of pupils who have, who perhaps are, are borderline MLD, shall we say. But quite complex behavioural issues as well. So they're – and the behaviour is possibly more than the, the learning, if you like (Source: Deputy Headteacher).

She referred to a particularly interesting area of provision within the post-primary department [in addition to Autism specific provision]. This was a 'nurture group' for students experiencing social and emotional problems. This recently established 'withdrawal' provision acknowledges the need to provide a more relaxed/less intimidating curriculum offer – on a time limited basis – for some students.

[Those] who we felt their emotional, social needs were far greater than any of their creature needs. We've got some very damaged children there, from abuse, issues at home, and the attachment disorders, and all that that goes

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with it. And we decided to trial this group and take them out of their classes. And the way it's going to work, but it's all very new at the moment, but the idea is they've got a set room, which has been partly set up at the classroom, partly with sofas and a more comfortable area, table, and the idea is that, that they will do all those things they've missed out on. So they will sit down and have a meal together and talk. And they will talk a bit more about their feelings, and they'll talk a bit more about how they deal with their anger, and, and all those side of issues. They will do some curriculum as well, and, as and when Mark feels it's appropriate, they will go out and join their correct peer groups (Source: Deputy Headteacher).

She noted the school might need to develop 'more spaces' of this kind in the future.

I think some of those more extreme behaviours, I think we have got the right policies in place for them. And I think we've, we are, you know, we are constantly looking at our curriculum, how we adapt the timetable for, for these guys with, you know, with some weird and wacky behaviours. But what we're finding is that we haven't actually got the right buildings for them, because where we might need withdrawal rooms, and, and even more (Source: Deputy Headteacher).

The introduction of a 'nurture group' shows that flexibility of provision – within provision - is possible. It also shows that within a specialist setting difficulties in responding to the needs of some students presents a continuing challenge to teachers (and other staff).

'New build' facilities have provided opportunities for enhanced teaching and learning to take place. However, more 'appropriate spaces' are needed for some students (eg withdrawal/nurture rooms).

### *Admissions*

Children are usually recommended for a place at the school through the Admissions Panel following discussions with parents and relevant professionals. Children usually have a statement of special educational need following a multi-disciplinary assessment. The statement and the suitability of the child's placement are updated annually through the Annual Review report and in-depth meeting.

With regard to enrolment, the deputy headteacher more generally noted that the school was not short of referrals. These took place at familiar school entry points

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(starting primary), but also in the year before or after post-primary schooling started. Referrals could also be related to general policies of inclusion.

I would say, probably at the younger level. But we've also seen quite a lot come in at year seven, seven. And whether this is because of the inclusion agenda and, and pupils are coping in primary and not coping then when they get to secondary level. And we've had a few year 10s, year nines referred to us, which seems incredible that they would get to that stage and then need to come to a special school (Source: Deputy Headteacher).

The school very much sees itself as offering expertise to other schools, (both special and mainstream). The main ways in which expertise is offered is through outreach and training.

### *Outreach*

The outreach system is formalised with requests for support going via the LEA and the special schools heads meeting together to decide which school will take each referral. The system is described by the acting headteacher in response to the interviewer's question.

Interviewer: So if there is an individual school wants outreach does it apply through County?

Headteacher: Yes it does, it applies through County. County then bring, they bring all the applications to the meeting and we will share them out between the different schools. You know we will say 'Well he is just on your patch and you know the family or you know the school so you do it' or I will say 'Well this is the fifth one we have had from this school so it shows we are not being effective at the school' because we are delivering it to the school rather than to the pupil so what do we do, do we say no more for this school, we will give it to another school, you know give the time to another school who have asked. So it is quite good for us all to be there (Source: Acting headteacher).

Although the outreach started as support to individual children for whom mainstream schools requested help, there is now an emphasis on working with the whole school to upskill mainstream staff as a whole:

I think the outreach, the thing with the outreach is that again, it's where outreach has developed. I think a few years ago outreach would have been a

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bit more traditional almost like a peripatetic role; you would go into the school, you would meet with the SENCO, you would meet with the TA and that would probably be it. You would do something for an individual child, and come away. Whether it was followed up, you would hope it was followed up so you would go back in a few weeks time ... But it was very isolated. What you weren't aware of was whether you were actually changing the culture of the school if the head even knew that you'd been in the school. If any subject teachers even knew who on earth you were. So it's trying to get more value for your input basically (Source: Teacher).

I did one in it for a little boy in the middle school who's in the year eight. And I made some suggestions. I made a whole list of things that could be done to help the child in terms of listening, concentration, focus at the start of a lesson etc. But I asked if it could be brought up at a meeting. So they took it forward. They had a meeting of the teaching assistants, so the resources were shared. When I went back again, the ideas, resource were actually shared by TAs for some other kids as well. So the input for the one child was actually, actually benefited definitely three or four other kids. So it's simple things like that really. You need to make sure that you get the maximum benefit for your time. You can't just go in, deal with them and move away. And also any reports, very simply you make sure the head's involved. You make sure he's cc'd on everything and if possible meet the head and say, 'Hello, this is what I'm here to do.' Otherwise it just goes on separately (Source: Teacher).

Yeah, that's how it's changed. Yeah, you have to try to evaluate it. Just for your own job satisfaction ... And obviously for the next time you go into the next school, you need to know if what you're doing is right (Source: Teacher).

The head of the ASD Base concurs that the aim of outreach is to increase the capacity of the mainstream school:

By working with the teacher and the teaching assistants yes, we don't generally offer support for individual pupils, we don't work in that kind of ongoing fashion and the idea behind the outreach is to increase the capacity of the school to be able to cope so we do work with staff (Source: Head ASD Base).

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Individual members of staff have a specific time allocation for outreach varying from 10 to 20% of their time – (each offers support in their particular area of expertise) and the school receives annual funding from the LEA to support this work. This funding could be used to buy additional staffing if the school chose to apply it in that way.

In addition to supporting pupils and teachers in mainstream schools, the outreach teachers also identify pupils who might benefit from placement in the special school.

Parents can be wary and fearful that special schools are on a recruitment drive but they are reassured that our outreach is to support inclusion (Source: Head ASD Base).

There is also a scheme in place in the school whereby a teacher from a mainstream school can spend two weeks in the special school to learn about teaching pupils with SEN. The teacher shadows a special school teacher for the first week then teaches for the second week.

The teacher who runs Outreach and Early Bird (parent programmes) – and used to run the school's Autism Unit – has developed a clear role for herself. This involves providing outreach support to local schools, but also involves important Inreach support. She also provides 'indirect' support [to staff in schools] and expertise by running a Masters module in Autism in collaboration with a university in the region. Her work on the Early Bird training programme for parents of children with ASD had a direct impact on families but also impacts on schooling.

Balancing these commitments was not easy, and had led to a role change as services developed.

We got to the point where it was no longer to be possible, I felt, head of the base, and conduct Outreach, and do Early Bird, and serve anybody as well as we wanted to. Because I think if you have a job as head of the base, you might be able to juggle outreach with it, or you might be able, but if you're away too much, you, you can't meet everybody's needs (Source: Early Bird Co-ordinator).

Unlike other teachers, she does not run a class, and her role appears to replicate that of a local authority (LA) support service. At the same time, working from a school base seems to be important. It provides a good centre for parents to visit (for

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the Early Bird courses) but also offers a key Inreach resource for schools (eg those receiving outreach support and advice).

[O]ne of the major uses of (the school) as well is as an in-reach resource. Because there's nothing like actually seeing it. I mean, you can talk to a teaching assistant until you're blue in the face about, 'This is what a visual schedule looks like,' but I think one of the hardest things is to get people to understand what it is actively to use a visual schedule. And some of them say it's not until they come into (the school) and spend a bit of time in the classroom and see it ... (Source: Early Bird Co-ordinator).

Outreach has been developed across the LEA and all special schools are involved, usually dividing requests for assistance on a geographical basis.

The school's 'specialisms' [specialist/leading edge/specialist school/college status] had clearly contributed to developing the post-primary section of the school in terms of enabling the development of quality subject teaching facilities and enabling staff development of many kinds at many levels [for trainee teachers, teachers, teaching assistants and a range of other staff] . For example:

There was this feeling in the past that some elements of staff were, were, you know, unless you, unless you screamed, you didn't get any training, sort of thing. And so our head was very keen that everybody should be involved in training. And so we've got this culture now, that anybody who wants to train will be given that opportunity. The, the status, if you like, has given us the money to fund things like TAs, training TAs for mainstream schools and coming in and working with us, or shadowing our TAs. We've got midday supervisors. We felt that a lot of our issues particularly were at lunchtimes with people, so we felt we needed to give the midday supervisors some formal training. You know. How do they play with children? What can they do to de-escalate situations, and so on. And that went on to our senior day supervisors, so then actually taking on the course, running the course for new dinner ladies, and then (Source: Deputy head/head of post primary).

These 'specialisms' also raised the profile of the school in the local education and wider community, showing that 'special schools' had something valuable to offer.

The Acting Deputy head in charge of Primary is an Advanced Skills Teacher who spends 20% of her time out of the classroom delivering training for the local authority (20 days of her time is paid for by the LEA).

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Most of her outreach focuses on the training of teaching assistants (TAs). Some of this is non-specialist induction. Some of it is more specialist, drawing on her extensive professional experience.

She provides 'in-reach too' and this involves letting teachers and TAs observe what goes on in a special school, training sessions and contributions to the Graduate Teacher (GTP) programme.

### *Training*

The school is a training school and in addition to taking GTP students they teach a module on autism on Plymouth's SEN Diploma, are involved in early Bird training (ASD parent training) and one staff member is a TEACCH tutor.

Also in terms of teaching styles and teaching strategies, we do make contributions on training days as well. We've actually gone out and got involved in the CPD sessions, subject based or just in terms of general teaching guidance (Source: Teacher).

I am the 'Team TEACCH' co-ordinator, tutor co-ordinator, the team teaches the ... So I run the courses for updating and training staff ... I mean, we've got four "Team TEACCH" tutors here but because the others have more rigid timetable commitments so I run those courses and use tutors as and when I need them (Source: Head of ASD Unit).

Interviewer: "So are those courses for the staff here or for people outside?"

Yeah, both, both, yes they are, yes they are for the staff here to keep everybody up to date .....and also as a county we have regular co-ordinators meetings and then if there is any other people around who need training then we kind of do that jointly ... So I do that and I also do some of the workshops on the GTP (Source: Head of ASD Unit).

No interviewee could think of examples of 'equal partnerships' except in the case of the other special schools with whom they are a member of a 'leading edge' partnership (indeed they were doubtful even in the case of the other local special schools though one interviewee thought that over time it might balance out).

The acting headteacher summed it up like this:

... we are a leading edge partner school so we do have partnership schools but we support the other special, our sister schools, we support so there is

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this SSHAD the special schools Heads meeting where they all get together and support each other. We have supported our sister school because they didn't do very well in Ofsted so all their staff came here, spent a day here, looking at all our documents, looking at all our work, you know how we dealt with things, looked at our structure and then we have been over there to help them with certain things which has worked quite well. So that sort of partnership, is that what you mean by partnership? (Source: Acting headteacher).

The former headteacher of the school was a member of the Outreach Working Group, made up of special school headteachers, outreach managers and practitioners, which formulated the resource: 'Effective Outreach from Special Schools: A Practical Handbook' (December, 2005). This handbook was commissioned by the SEN Regional Partnership as a resource for special schools in providing outreach services 'in supporting the inclusion agenda'.

The role played by teachers who undertake outreach work or provide training in this school is in some ways not dissimilar from that of an SESS associate, with the main difference perhaps being the extent to which outreach and training is seen as a whole-school function of a special school which is also rated as outstanding in terms of the provision it makes for pupils within the school. The advantages and disadvantages of the two models will be discussed under "Implications".

### *Dual enrolment*

Staff in the English case study school appeared to see dual enrolment as part of a much broader issue about making appropriate placement decisions for individual pupils, and dual enrolment was relatively uncommon in this school. Although pupils were involved in a number of links with mainstream, these tended to be one-off projects with groups of pupils. One particularly interesting example was the involvement of Year 10 pupils, who had gained a nationally accredited first aid certificate, in teaching basic resuscitation to children in local primary schools.

The issues around dual enrolment were discussed in an interview with the mother of one pupil with ASD who attended the school's autism base but was 'included' in the main body of the school for Maths, Literacy, Science and ICT. According to his mother, this inclusion within the main body of the school met the pupil's needs for:

... conversation, the interacting on his level with others, especially his peers because he's extremely able to converse and you know, some of the classes

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he's been in the (autism) bases, the children have been a lot less able to converse with him (Source: mother of pupil shadowed during the study).

This pupil is also involved in after school clubs organised by the school, for example drama, where there is an opportunity to integrate with other pupils.

Dual enrolment (special school and mainstream) for this particular child had already been discussed at a team meeting but it never actually happened as the child "was going through quite a difficult time... and every year in review ... we talk about whether or not that could be a possibility" (Source: Mother).

The social inclusion/dual enrolment of another child with SEN into a mainstream primary school one afternoon a week was considered a success by the pupil, his mother, his teacher and teaching assistant, and the principal/teacher of the receiving school. The programme had been discontinued, because it had achieved its objective of enabling the pupil concerned to have friends in the area where he lived. In addition, the child's peers had moved onto mainstream post-primary school and it was felt that it would be too difficult to operate a similar model of dual enrolment at post-primary level. According to these key informants there were a number of considerations that contributed to the success of the dual enrolment programme.

- *Being clear about the goal of inclusion*

There were some people who were quite sceptical among the staff I think about its uses because \_\_\_ (name of pupil) has got quite a low working level how would that benefit him but I think once you get beyond, you know I kept saying to people as did \_\_\_ (deputy headteacher), there is no academic expectation whatsoever and the headmaster at the receiving school was also quite anxious about the level of work but I kept saying to him don't worry if he just sits there and draws a picture and colours it in that's fine we are not here for anything academic and I think once people got rid of that then they can see the benefits and I agreed to do it I am happy to do it as long as I felt he wasn't being harmed by the experience (Source: Teaching Assistant).

- *Giving inclusion a chance to work*

I knew at first there would be problems he would be reluctant to go ... I also felt that given a period of time he would settle and he would enjoy ... but equally bearing in mind ... in what I knew of Mike [pseudonym] and his

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personality there was no way I was going to get into a situation ... nobody would have wanted to see that where I arrive with him in the car if he had been sat in floods of tears sort of saying right get out we got to go in ... that would have never happened I would have turned around and driven back ... but it never got to that stage (Source: Teaching Assistant).

- *Blending in*

His mum bought a sweatshirt and a t-shirt so he blended in with all the other children and also I think for Mike 'I am taking off \_\_\_ [Special school] and I am putting on \_\_\_ [ Mainstream school] (Source: Teaching assistant).

- *Being clear about your role as teaching assistant*

Some of the children were not the most well behaved of children but all the time I went there I never told any of the children off or rebuked them or said anything in any way, one because it wasn't my place to, it's not my school they are not my children and also I felt that for Mike if these children perceived Mike is with this woman who tells you off they wouldn't be drawn to him. I saw children misbehaving and sometimes they could draw Mike into it but if I felt that it was in the normal bounds of behaviour I just sat back and let it go (Source: Teaching assistant).

- *Communication about targets*

We were also conscious of the things that they were working on with Mike and one of the key things with him was his memory and so we were aware that that was a target for him and we would try and support that within the school and... so his memory would be harder for him to cope with in our school because he was only with us for one afternoon a week but he had a tray in the classroom so if you asked him to get something we would have to build in ... an opportunity for Mike to think it through and to remember where his tray was rather than saying as soon as he said 'oh I cant remember where it is' 'oh it's over there we were aware that that was one of his targets so we didn't straight away answer it for him (Source: Principal of Mainstream School).

- *The success of the social inclusion*

One of the buddies is one of his best friends now in the village ... and they have great fun together ... and Mike has even been able to start youth club

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... and I can actually leave him, it's the first time I've been able to take him to a club and leave him without me having to find someone to go with him ... because they all know him so well ... he knows all the boys so that is a real positive thing too. I would never have been able to do that if nobody knew him (Source: Mother).

He's my friend those two were my buddies (pointing at photographs from file) ... I liked it and I found it hard ... I made this friend ... and he is very good with computers, he can create his own games (Source: Student).

- *Factors contributing to success of inclusion*

It worked exceptionally well...It was done properly ... instead of 'oh you know that meeting we arranged well I'm too busy and we can't have it', if you planned to meet every half term, meet every term. You keep good records, he had a one to one who took him there, he was at his ease it was little things like his mum bought him a sweatshirt for that school ... I believe he didn't feel like an extra in either he felt like he belonged ... \_\_ (the teaching assistant) ... is quite meticulous in her notes ... cause it can be quite when you've got \_\_ (name of special school) putting demands, the new school putting demands, the family putting demands, actually \_\_ (her) organisational skills probably helped quite a lot with that ... just considered all his needs and he enjoyed it (Source: Special school teacher).

These factors (with the exception of making efforts to enable the child from the special school to blend into the mainstream class) are the same as those mentioned by participants from Irish schools as needing to be in place to enable dual enrolment to be successful namely; time for meetings, planning, communication and being clear about aims.

### 4.3 Special Classes

Quantitative data about the population, staffing and resourcing of special classes in primary schools is available from Phase One of the review, and for special classes in post-primary schools from Phase Two of the review. Qualitative data about the current and future role of special classes in primary schools in the light of the pupils for whom they are catering and the resources available to them is available from both Phase One and Phase Two for special classes in primary schools and from Phase Two for special classes in post-primary schools.

## 4. Findings

### 4.3.1 Special classes in primary schools

Questionnaires were circulated to all 304 primary schools listed by the DES as having one or more special classes in May 2006. Replies were received from a total of 237 (77.9%) of these schools (including two phone calls to say that the school had no special class). Five principals returned the questionnaire although they had no special class in their school; these five schools are excluded from the remainder of the analysis. Thus 230 questionnaires returned from primary schools with special classes were included in the analysis. It is, of course, possible that additional schools amongst the 67 not returning the questionnaire do not have a special class, but it is also possible that some schools with special classes were not on the original list provided by the DES, and did not receive a questionnaire. There were 400\* official special classes attached to these 230 National Schools, and 2499 pupils in the 385 of these classes for which pupil numbers were given.

Just over half the schools (55.2%) had only one class attached, while 15 (6.5%) had four or more special classes (see Table 28).

**Table 28. Number of primary schools with different numbers of special classes**

									Total
No of classes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	404*
No of schools	127	62	26	7	4	2	1	1	230

\*The discrepancy in Table 28 is explained by the fact that three principals who had more than one special class subdivided the pupils into more 'classes' than officially existed. In one case the principal stated that this was done in order to meet the needs of pupils with severe EBD.

#### 4.3.1.1 Current pupil population

Table 29 shows the number of special classes by category of disability for which they were originally designated and the total number of pupils in these classes.

##### *Diversity and complexity of need of pupils in primary special classes*

Like special schools for pupils with MGLD, special classes in primary schools originally designated for these pupils cater for a diverse range of needs. However the proportion of pupils with more complex needs appears considerably lower than in special schools. See Table 30. Classes designated for pupils with other disabilities cater almost exclusively for those pupils for whom they are designated.

## 4. Findings

**Table 29. Special classes in primary schools**

Original designation	Number of classes	Number of classes reporting pupil numbers	Total number of pupils (for those classes reporting nos.)	Mean no of pupils per class for categories with 10 or more classes	Range (ie minimum and maximum no of pupils per class)
MGLD	211	204	1,512	7.41	2–14
ASD	77	75	349	4.65	1–8
Speech and language	54	51	333	6.53	4–10
ModGLD	15	14	71	5	2–9
Specific learning disabilities	15	14	119	8.5	4–11
Hearing impairment	10	10	30	3	1–6
EBD	8	7	39		2–9
Severe and profound GLD	6	6	29	-	3–6
Multiple	3	3	13	-	4–5
SEBD	1	1	4	-	
Visual impairment	0	0	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>385*</b>	<b>2,499</b>	<b>6.5</b>	

\*Fifteen classes did not report pupil numbers consequently numbers are only available for 385 of the 400 classes.

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**Table 30. Primary disability of pupils in special classes for pupils with MGLD**

<b>Disability of pupil</b>	<b>Nos</b>
MGLD	1222
ModGLD	78
Severe/profound GLD	5
Physical disability	19
Severe emotional disturbance	8
Emotional disturbance/behaviour problems	54
Hearing impairment	20
Visual impairment	9
Autistic spectrum disorders	31
Specific learning disability	41
Multiple disability	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,531</b>

### 4.3.1.2 Ages of pupils in special classes

Principals of mainstream primary schools with special classes were asked the age of the pupils in these classes (Question 4). However this question received insufficient responses for the data to be analysable except for the largest group of classes (those for pupils with MGLD). As can be seen from Table 31 below the age trend in special classes for pupils with MGLD appears to replicate that in special schools for this category of pupil. Like special schools, special classes for pupils with MGLD attached to primary schools have an excess of older pupils, including some of post-primary age. Some pupils in classes for pupils with ModGLD are also of post-primary age. It is possible that this age distribution reflects both the difficulty of finding suitable placements at post-primary level, and a tendency not to suggest special class placement for young children with MGLD (see below). Some individual classes also cater for a wide age range, with a few schools reporting pupils aged 4–15 within one class. Further research into the age distribution of pupils in special provision is needed in order to plan effectively for the future.

**Table 31. Ages of pupils in MGLD schools and classes**

Age Band	3 + under	4–8	9–12	13–15	16–18	19 + over
MGLD schools	4	200	473	690	634	11
MGLD classes*		246	819	48		

\*Numbers based on 38 classes for which pupil ages were given.

### 4.3.2 Special classes in post-primary schools

Questionnaires were circulated to the 225 post-primary schools which had responded to the preliminary mini-questionnaire (See Chapter 3) saying they had official or unofficial special classes in February 2008.

Although the original intention of the research team was to examine the role played by both official and unofficial classes at post-primary level, data returned from schools in relation to unofficial special classes proved extremely difficult to interpret and is not discussed in this section, which refers only to the special classes from the 41 schools which stated that they had one or more special classes officially designated as such by the DES. These 41 schools had a total of 55 special classes between them. A majority of schools had only one officially designated special class (See Table 32).

**Table 32. Numbers of post-primary schools with different numbers of DES-designated special classes**

				Total
<b>Number of classes</b>	1 special class	2 special classes	3 special classes	<b>55 special classes</b>
<b>Number of schools</b>	32	4	5	<b>42 schools</b>

Table 33 shows the different types of classes that are attached to schools, the most common type of class being 'other', a type of class which typically contained pupils with a variety of different types of special needs.

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**Table 33. Special classes attached to post-primary schools by type**

Type of special class	Number of special classes
MGLD	11
ModGLD	8
ASD	14
Emotional disturbance and/ or behavioural problems ED/BD	3
Other	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>55 classes</b>

Table 34 below indicates that a majority of the special classes on which data was given were set up within the last three to four years.

**Table 34. When special classes were founded**

Year the class was founded	Number of classes
1970s/1980s	7
1990s	6
2000	1
2003	1
2004	1
2005	7
2006	7
2007	12
No date given	13
<b>Total Number of Classes</b>	<b>55</b>

The data presented in Table 34 suggest that following a period in which almost no new special classes were sanctioned at post-primary level, new classes were once again sanctioned from 2005 onwards. The majority of these newer classes are for pupils with ASD, although a smaller number of classes for pupils with moderate general learning disabilities have also been sanctioned in recent years (See Table 35).

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**Table 35. When the different types of special class were founded**

	1970s/1980s	1990s	2000s	Unknown	Total
MGLD5	5	1	3	2	11
ModGLD	0	0	6	2	8
ASD	0	0	13	1	14
Emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems ED/BD	0	0	0	3	3
Other	2	5	7	5	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>55</b>

There is no comparable data on the date of establishment of the classes in primary schools, since this question was only asked in the post-primary questionnaire.

### 4.3.3 Staffing in special classes

#### *Qualifications and continuing professional development of teachers in special classes in primary schools*

As for teachers in special schools, the quantitative data collected in Phase One of the review includes some limited information about the qualifications and training of teachers in special classes in primary schools, both in relation to initial training and to continuing professional development.

#### *Initial qualifications of teachers working in special classes in primary schools*

The questionnaire did not ask for details of teachers' initial qualifications, except to ask how many of them held restricted or provisional recognition or were unqualified. Consequently it is not possible to say how many were qualified through a Bachelor of Education Degree, and how many through a Postgraduate Diploma; nor is it possible to say how many teachers had trained abroad. Ninety-five (24%) of the 400 teachers in special classes in primary schools are reported to have restricted recognition, 21 provisional recognition and two are said to be unqualified.

#### *Continuing professional development in special educational needs*

The issues in relation to access to appropriate professional development for teachers in special classes are very similar to those for teachers in special schools (see Section 4.2.3). The need for on-going professional training was one of the three main issues cited by the principals of mainstream primary schools with special classes. The main areas of training needs were in PECS ABA and sign language. A number reported the need for training in SEN for the principals. In fact data from the Phase One questionnaire suggests that teachers from special classes in primary

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schools had availed of both accredited training and short-courses to at least the same extent as their special school colleagues with 26.5% holding a diploma in special education and 13.4% a diploma in learning support (See Table 36 and Table 38).

It is important to note that only 114 primary schools (50%) have at least one teacher with a diploma in either special education or learning support in one or more of their special classes. Schools with no teacher with an SEN qualification were just as likely to be situated in Dublin as to be in a rural area.

### *Qualifications and continuing professional development of teachers in special classes in post-primary schools*

Data in relation to the SEN qualifications of teachers who work with the special class in post-primary schools are given in Table 37. It should be borne in mind that the organisation of post-primary schools means that several teachers may work with the special class for different subjects.

**Table 36. Qualifications of teachers in special classes in primary schools by type**

Total no of teachers from total of 230 schools responding	400
<b>Qualification</b>	
Diploma in Special Educational Needs	106
Diploma in Learning Support	54
Certificate in the Education of Pupils with ASD	15
Certificate in ASD (Birmingham)	7
Diploma in ASD (Birmingham)	4
Masters in Special Educational Needs	5
M.Ed (special education option)	15
Masters in Autism	4
Diploma for teachers of the Deaf	7
Diploma for teachers of the Blind	0
BCABA – ABA course (Trinity)	4
Other qualifications	0

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**Table 37. Qualifications of teachers teaching special classes: post-primary schools**

Type of qualification	Number of teachers who hold this qualification teaching special class/es			
	1 teacher	2 teachers	3 teachers	4 teachers
Advanced/Graduate/Higher National /Post-Graduate Diploma in Special Education	10 schools	4 schools	3 schools	1 school
Graduate/Higher Diploma in Learning Support	7 schools	3 schools	2 schools	
Graduate Certificate in the Education of Students with Autism (ASD), St Patrick's College Drumcondra	2 schools	-	-	-
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Certificate	-	-	-	-
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Diploma	-	-	-	-
Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN)	5 schools	-	-	-
Masters in Education (specialising in Special Education)	2 schools	-	-	-
Masters in Autism	1 school	-	-	-
Diploma for teachers of the Deaf	-	-	-	-
Diploma for teachers of the Blind	-	-	1 school	-
BCABA – Preparatory ABA course (trinity college)	1 school	1 school	-	-

The apparent lack of teachers at post-primary level holding qualifications in ASD probably reflects both the recent establishment of these classes at post-primary level, and the fact that the Certificate Course at St Patrick's College only began admitting post-primary teachers in 2007.

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**Table 38. Short courses taken by special class teachers in mainstream primary schools**

	Total no of schools responding	Total no of teachers
Special class	230	400
<b>Type of course</b>		
Induction course for resource teachers		148
Induction course for teachers of children with severe and profound GLD		11
Other induction courses		30
Profexel online autism training course		68
Profexel online positive behaviour training course		57
Profexel online dyslexia training course		104
Profexel online inclusion training course		34
Profexel ABA training course		40
Profexel ADHD training course		65

As noted earlier, this data is not available for special class teachers in post-primary schools.

### *Access to multi-disciplinary support*

Many participants spoke about the need for additional support for special classes. Like principals in special schools the principals of mainstream schools with special classes (both primary and post-primary) identified the lack of access to psychological and clinical services as a major issue in their responses to the Questionnaire (See Table 39). Principals felt these supports should be in place prior to the pupil with SEN attending school. They also experienced lack of assessments due to the lack of access to a psychologist. Nine primary principals specifically identified the need for these supports for students with SEBD.

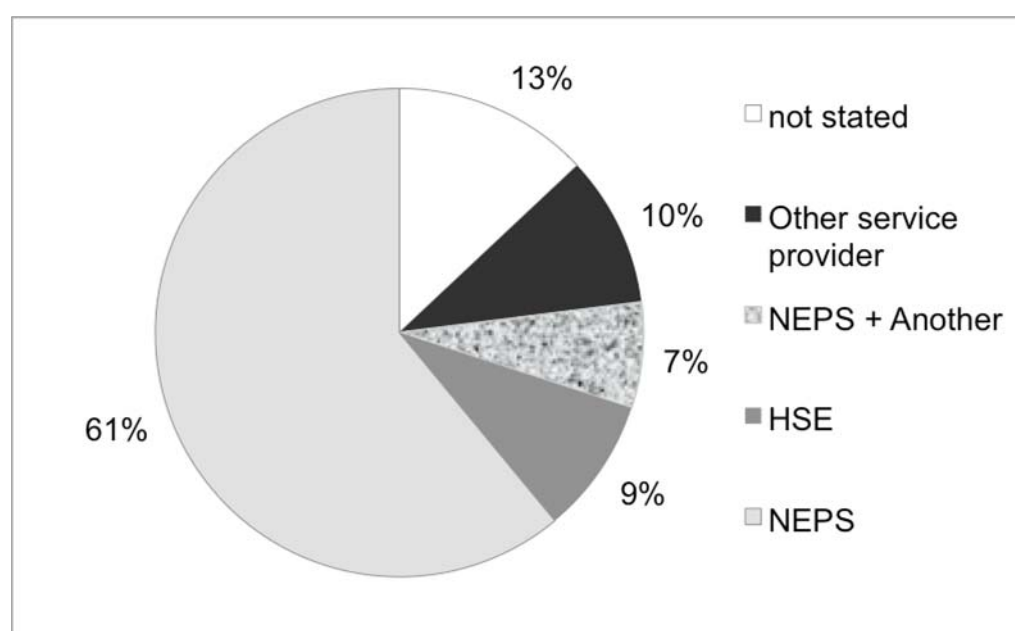
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**Table 39. Numbers of schools receiving some service**

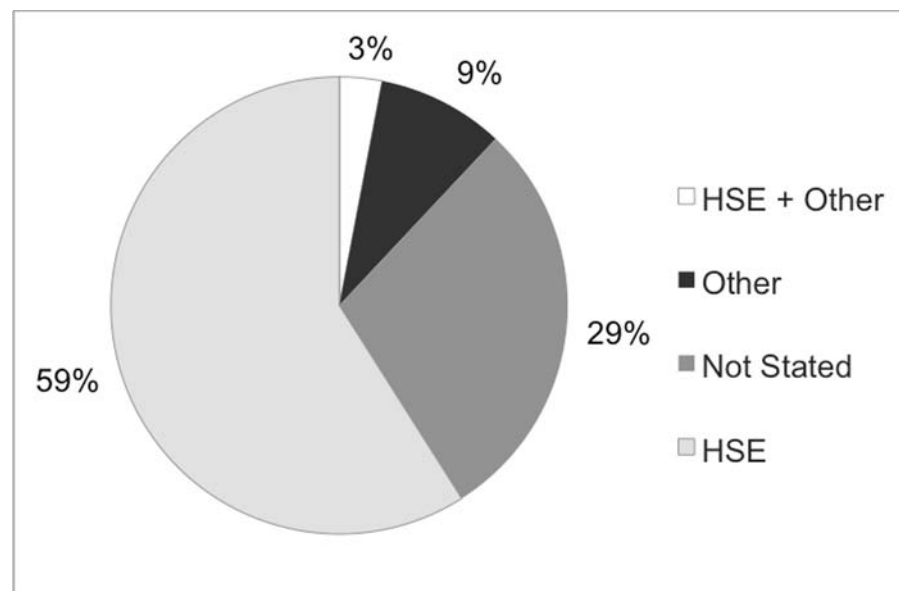
Service	National schools with special classes		Post-primary schools with special classes	
Educational psychology	110	(47.8%)	27	(49.1%)
Speech therapy	140	(60.9%)	21	(38.2%)
Social worker	37	(16.1%)	16	(29.1%)
Occupational therapy	66	(28.7%)	18	(32.7%)
Physiotherapy	19	(8.3%)	8	(14.5%)
Psychiatry	15	(6.5%)	6	(10.9%)
Clinical psychology	33	(14.3%)	3	(0.5%)
Counselling	31	(13.5%)	17	(30.9%)
Family support	33	(14.3%)	18	(32.7%)

Another issue which emerged from the Phase 1 Questionnaires with regard to multi-disciplinary support was the range of different providers who were named as providing the services. For example the position with regard to educational psychology services and speech therapy services is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below. It is clear from Figures 1 and 2 that in some schools multi disciplinary support available from NEPS or for the HSE is supplemented from other sources and it seems that in some instances this can lead to confusion as to how multidisciplinary support in general is funded.

**Figure 1 Schools with special classes: psychology service provider n = 110**



**Figure 2 Schools with special classes: speech and language service provider  
n = 140**



Some schools had no access to these services; the following quote from the principal of such a school is typical:

The provision of clinical services (OT/SLT/Psychologist etc) is a major issue. The DES needs to look at providing these services directly to mainstream schools. Since our special class opened in Jan. '05 we have had no support of any kind. (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with HI, ASD.)

### 4.3.4 Special classes: qualitative data – key issues and evidence

Analysis of the qualitative data showed that special classes are perceived as an effective form of provision by parents, teachers, principals, and those who made submissions, with 61 out of 71 references to the effectiveness of special classes being positive. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was widespread support for the future role of special classes as part of a continuum of provision to address a continuum of need. It should be noted, however, that the great majority of responses were in relation to special classes attached to mainstream primary schools. The difficulties identifying special classes at post-primary level and the low response to the questionnaire have been dealt with above.

This section has presented data relating to the pupil population of classes, and the resources available to them in terms of staffing and access to multidisciplinary

supports. Findings in relation to the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education are now discussed in the light of this information.

### 4.3.5 Special classes and the principle of inclusive education

Advantages of special classes mentioned by a number of participants were:

- facilitation of inclusion within the mainstream class
- provision of a 'safe haven' for some pupils
- a favourable pupil: teacher ratio
- enabling pupils to remain in their local area or not too far from it
- enabling flexibility in the organisation of teaching and curriculum provision.

By far the most frequently mentioned advantage of the special class was the fact that it was an educationally and socially inclusive model (106 references in total). Both educational and social inclusion were mentioned as advantages of the special class by all types of participant and at both primary and post-primary levels. The other frequently mentioned advantages listed above can, in the main, be seen as directly related to the perceived inclusiveness of the special class model.

#### *Educational inclusion*

In Phase One of this study, information was collected on the organisation of special classes in mainstream primary schools (See Table 40). This table shows that over half the special classes were making some provision for including pupils within the mainstream. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in the period since these data were collected provision for including pupils from the special class with their mainstream peers has increased. It is also possible that the number of schools reporting that pupils spent all day in the special class has been inflated by schools' perception that special class provision is under threat, a concern which was clearly expressed by participants in Phase Two (see below).

**Table 40. Organisation of special classes**

Organisation	No of Schools*
All day in special class	170
Mornings only in special class	40
Afternoons only in special class	5
Split (half group spend morning, and half afternoon in special class)	7
Out of class for one subject	83
Out of class for two subjects	25
Fully integrated	56

\*Numbers do not add to 230 as some schools with more than one class use different forms of organisation in different classes.

Many schools with special classes have a policy which outlines how the special class interacts with the rest of the school. As these pupils are also counted in the mainstream roll for teacher allocation purposes these schools assign each pupil to a mainstream class as well and have specific times when each pupil joins their mainstream class peers. In some schools this is for non academic subjects only and in others it is for more.

... by having dedicated special classes located within mainstream schools. This provides a learning environment suited to the children's needs through experienced specialized teachers working in a favourable P/T ratio, while at the same time providing for integration opportunities with mainstream pupils. I am convinced that pupils being educated under those arrangements are potentially receiving the best possible education (Source: mainstream primary school questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with ASD, EBD).

### *Social inclusion – remaining in their local area*

There were 19 references to the special class as enabling the child to stay in or closer to their local area for example:

While many disabilities can be coped with in mainstream classes, there will always be children who need more than resource hours. We would support special classes in mainstream schools as a way of supporting such children while they can remain part of their local community (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

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One questionnaire respondent felt particularly strongly about this issue:

Each town should have special classes in mainstream school. Children should not have to travel for this provision. My concern is that we do not provide special classes for children with low incidence special needs (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

A minority of participants, who felt that there was a danger that children in special classes can be isolated from their mainstream peers, expressed a contrary view:

In many ways the establishment of special classes within mainstream appears to offer an opportunity for greater inclusion. However there is a danger of it resulting in a new form of segregation of these pupils unless there is a conscious effort to ensure that every possible interaction between these classes and the mainstream classes is utilised (Source: Submission, IMPACT SNA branch).

My problem with a special class in a mainstream school is that it's automatic segregation (Source: Parent focus group, parent of a child in a special school for pupils with multiple disabilities).

By contrast, for some participants, the special class seemed to provide an answer to the dilemma of special school versus isolation in mainstream.

And then the option of here came up and this was the best of both worlds 'cause they have the special class, the special attention and yet they're still in mainstream, still mixing. So to me this is definitely the best of both worlds (Source: Parent focus group, Parent of a child in a in a primary school with a special class for pupils with ModGLD).

Again first and foremost teachers should have fluent Irish Sign Language to meet the needs of these Deaf children. Would be ideal to have more than one Deaf child in a Special class for Social Skills reason. Lots of Deaf children in Mainstream are lonely (often these children are placed individually in different schools) and do not interact well socially with their hearing peers (Source: Submission, unnamed individual).

This issue arose particularly for pupils with a moderate general learning disability at the senior end of primary schools:

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I think special classes should be used for children who maybe would not find mainstream class manageable or who outgrow the class. They could gradually spend more and more time in the special class. Now there is no middle ground. For my child who has Down syndrome it is all or nothing. It can be demoralising to be in a class where most of what is being taught is not relevant and the use of SNAs only isolates children more. While integration may work in the early years, later on the social isolation and awareness can lead to difficulties and there is no choice but special school, even if the child does not need to attend one for any particular reason, has no behaviour problems, just needs peers and to learn at their own pace. I feel special classes are a much better option than special schools. There are very few options for parents. There is nothing else available. I would send my child to a special class if I could find one (Source: Submission 30, Parent of a child in a special school).

### *The special class as a 'safe haven'*

The description of the special class as a 'safe haven' may, at first, seem incompatible with the principle of inclusion. However, it is clear that at least some of those who used this description saw it as a way of enabling pupils who might not be able to cope fulltime in the mainstream *class* to remain in the mainstream *school* with as much integration as appropriate.

A positive environment where children feel valued, safe and happy is important. All negativity to be discouraged with the aim of creating a family type atmosphere of trust and respect. In my view SEN children benefit from and enjoy participating with their mainstream classmates in non academic subjects only, eg PE, computers and art. Special class enables them to learn at their own pace the other subjects, with ample scope for explanations, repetition help and consolidation (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

### **4.3.6 Uncertainty about the future of special classes**

Given their overwhelmingly positive view about special classes, it is not surprising that some participants expressed strong concern about what they perceived to be a threat to special classes for pupils with MGLD either from psychologists reluctant to recommend special class placement, or from the general allocation model. In addition, 21% of mainstream principals responding to the Phase One Questionnaire

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reported a drop in numbers in the special class. The following comments are typical of those who were concerned about the future of special classes:

It has been our experience that no pupils in this school has been recommended special class placement since 2002. All pupils assessed since that have been recommended Resource Teaching hours or Language Support - hence the low number of pupils in special class (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

Pupils with mild/borderline learning disabilities who need special class supports which are not possible to provide under the general allocation model. Resource teaching support alone for some pupils in this category in mainstreams schools is insufficient (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

The general allocation system is unfair. It has meant a disimprovement for certain categories of special needs (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school special classes for pupils with mild and ModGLD).

Children are no longer being assessed as 'special class'. Instead they are allowed resource hours and learning support. The criteria for allowing a child to attend special class must have changed and this is causing major problems in maintaining these classes at primary level (Source: mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

The views expressed here also gain support from the age profile of pupils in primary special classes. However, it should be noted that one respondent felt that the GAM offered a better model of inclusion.

### *Issues in relation to special classes in post-primary schools*

Two main issues arise specifically for special classes at the post-primary level: 1) Transition from primary to post-primary schools; and 2) the incidence of unofficial special classes and other forms of special needs provision at the post-primary level.

### *Transition from primary to post-primary schools*

A major issue for all those concerned with pupils with SEN is how they will be catered for at the post-primary level. This issue has already been addressed in the section on special schools. However, here it is worth mentioning the related issue of lack of continuity between special class provision in primary and post-primary schools. It was mentioned by participants from mainstream primary schools with special classes six times, and by participants from mainstream post-primary schools with special classes five times.

The efficacy of special classes in mainstream primary schools is compromised by the lack of continuous services into 2nd level (Source: Submission, from a teacher).

In order to facilitate children moving from the secure almost 1-1 environment of a special class, a dual enrolment arrangement with the 2nd level school, in our case \_\_\_ (local post-primary school), for the first year at least would ease the pupil into the very different 2nd level environment (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with HI).

If we hadn't got the other two classes set up in secondary schools for these children from the special classes, they would be lost. The good work would be gone (Source: Principal focus group, principal from a Mainstream Primary school teacher with special classes for pupils with MGLD, SSLD, PD).

### *The incidence of unofficial special classes and other forms of special needs provision at the post-primary level*

In this section so far, only the DES-recognised special classes at post-primary level have been discussed. However, responses to the questionnaires sent to post-primary schools included a number from post-primary schools running unofficial classes. Twenty three schools stated that they had their own unofficial classes. These schools had between one and five special classes within the school, giving a total of 58 unofficial special classes (Table 41). Table 42 shows that these classes often catered for a wide range of ages, and also that a majority of these unofficial classes covered only the junior cycle at post-primary. These unofficial classes had a range of between 4 and 22 students per class. Pupils were allocated to these classes as a consequence of assessments, exam scores (often from internal

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exams), parental wishes, specific literacy or numeracy difficulties, as well as behavioural difficulties.

**Table 41. Number and frequency of unofficial special classes in post-primary schools**

Number of classes	Frequency
1	7
2	3
3	9
4	2
5	2

**Table 42. Age range of children in the unofficial special classes**

Age range	Frequency
12–14	10
12–17	5
13–15	11
14–16	8
14–18	1
15–17	4
16–19	1

**Table 43. Class year to which class is attached to**

Class attached to	Frequency
1st	14
2nd	13
3rd	10
5th	2
6th	1
1st–4th	1

Table 44 below shows the variety of special needs catered for in these special classes, with MGLD being the most common.

**Table 44. Most common forms of SEN**

SEN	Frequency
Mild	23
Borderline mild	3
ADHD	1
Down syndrome	1
Low average	3
SLD	8

These findings show that there are schools, other than those which have officially been allocated special classes, attempting to cater for the needs of children with SEN in post-primary level through the organisation of special classes. Indeed, despite the recent upsurge in special classes at post-primary level, the post-primary school visited for a case study did not in fact operate a ‘traditional’ special class model. This post-primary school was selected as a case study on the basis of expert recommendations and because it fitted the criteria for the case study schools, which, in addition to showing “evidence of best practice in relation to the development of the role of special schools”, was to show “evidence of best practice in relation to provision for pupils with SEN in a mainstream setting” (see Executive Summary). Some background information is supplied on this school before describing the educational provision the school makes for pupils with SEN.

### **4.3.7 Case Study of an Irish Post-Primary School**

#### *Background information*

The school visited is a co-educational, post primary, community school, catering for approximately 355 boys and girls from a wide geographic and social catchment area. It is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative of the Department of Education and Science (DES), which makes it unrepresentative of the majority of post-primary schools. However, as stated above, this school was recommended above any other as an example of good practice by more individuals with expertise in the field. The school offers a wide range of subjects, academic and practical in a non-denominational setting. In addition to providing post-primary education, it operates very successful Post Leaving Certificate courses and has a wide range of courses available to the public through its Adult Education Department. The school is committed to and proud of its links with the community. Local sports clubs and organisations avail of its facilities, which

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according to its website, make it truly “a school for the community”. The school operates an open enrolment policy. As the principal said

Now, I suppose our responsibility and our mission, as I see it, is that whoever comes in through our doors and becomes part of our school community, that it’s our responsibility to make sure that they achieve the potential that they have, and that’s the guarantee that we give to first-year parents or the parents coming in. And as a result I suppose we’ve had to be innovative. I think creative and particularly responsive to the needs of pupils because of all of the ranges that children are at and doing will vary from time to time ... so the question of creating I suppose a timetable that will deliver the curriculum appropriately... (Source: Principal).

### *Pupils*

The principal explained the complexity of enrolment in the school by describing the large number of pupils who needed additional support. Of the 355 students in the school, 16% have been formally assessed as having special educational needs (SEN). A further 20+% have learning support needs in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There are approximately 20 pupils from the travelling community. Additionally, 12.5% of the pupil population are from outside Ireland.

### *Provision of support for pupils with SEN*

It was clear from the interviews and school documents that the special educational provision for pupils in this school has evolved and changed over the years. The principal, senior management staff and the teacher with overall responsibility for coordinating special needs provision in the school described this process of evolution in terms of different approaches they had tried in order to meet the needs of pupils and ensure access to the curriculum for all. This was described in terms of milestones, of needing to be imaginative and creative in order to respond to the changing and varying needs of their pupils. Their response was also linked to the changes in the allocation of resources for pupils with special educational needs. They devised a number of innovative and flexible ways of catering for pupils with SEN such as ‘banding’, re-allocating ‘resource hours’, modifying and differentiating the curriculum, providing in-class support through team and co-teaching as well as through the SNAs.

### *Special class*

The first major milestone was the move from the ‘traditional’ model of special class to mainstreaming all pupils with additional learning needs, using a system known as

banding. As stated above, the school does not have any special classes for pupils with SEN. Although they did have what staff referred to in the interviews as a “remedial class” in the early 1980s, they made a principled, whole-school decision to move away from a special class model of support for pupils with SEN. The principal, the teacher with overall responsibility for coordinating special needs provision in the school and a number of teachers explained their rationale for this decision on the basis that the special class, in its traditional format, was unable to cater for the needs of all the pupils. In their opinion, one special class was insufficient for the large numbers of pupils requiring additional support; it had led to serious disciplinary problems; it was difficult to operate in practical terms, for example, when teachers were absent; pupils and staff were unhappy with the provision; and it was not in keeping with the inclusive ethos of the school.

### *Banding*

Banding involves serious re-organisation of the entire school timetable so that all pupils can be integrated into mainstream classes. The researchers observed and confirmed in interviews that the following subjects Irish, English, Maths, History and Geography, were timetabled at the same time for all students at different levels, so that pupils could slot into their appropriate level. Students in 1st Year take four of these subjects but the pupils with SEN take three of these and have ‘learning support’ as their fourth subject. Thus, for this school, ‘learning support’ became a subject option, without the stigma that often accompanies such an option, for those pupils who needed additional learning support.

### *Resource hours*

The principal, senior management staff and the teacher with overall responsibility for coordinating special needs provision in the school described a process of evolution in terms of how they now cater for pupils with SEN. This was described by the principal in terms of milestones in response to the needs of the pupils as they emerged as well as in response to the allocation of resources for SEN over the years. The first major milestone was the move from the traditional model of special class to mainstreaming all pupils. This was followed by a re-conceptualisation of the allocation of resource hours for pupils. When the school was allocated “resource hours” per pupil ten years ago, they tried withdrawing pupils for support in small groups or on a one to one basis but again experienced a range of problems. The deputy principal explained:

There was a milestone when we began to develop modes of team teaching, of resourcing kids as the resources came on stream. There were milestones

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when there was concern about the number of special needs students that we had to deal with (Source: Principal).

So we do have to explain this to the parents. If your son has five hours, I mean to us, the best thing is that he's integrated in the school with all his classes, and not being maybe segregated for half the day. So it does allow us to maybe have more options and smaller classes. And again, I think it's one of the reasons why we believe we're doing well (Source: Deputy principal).

### *In-class support*

The principal again described the staff's process of searching for the most appropriate ways of providing for pupils with SEN.

The school, led mostly by the principal and the teacher with overall responsibility for coordinating special needs provision in the school re-conceptualised a complete revision of how the school should provide for pupils with SEN. They engaged lecturers from the Teacher Education College, where some of their staff had completed post-graduate study in learning support/resource teaching, to speak to the whole staff. All staff engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) and all staff 'bought into' the new system. Observation by the researchers testify to an ethos and culture of inclusion which seemed to permeate the whole school. All staff are now involved in team teaching and 90+% of all pupils' support is delivered in class – where the teacher qualified in the subject area works with support from the resource teacher and/or SNA, depending on the pupils' needs. The two pupils who were shadowed for this research were observed to be participating and working well in their classes. They were supported by the support teacher and SNA; the curriculum was differentiated for them through the use of teacher questioning, explanations and adapted work demands and expectations. The other more able pupils were supportive and helped in an unobtrusive, natural way when appropriate.

### *Provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties*

All staff interviewed spoke of their commitment to providing an appropriate education and worthwhile experience for all the pupils in the school. The principal described how in recent years the school identified a very small group of about twenty pupils for whom they felt they were not catering sufficiently. This was a particularly disadvantaged group of pupils who had significant emotional and behavioural needs.

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There was a milestone, I suppose, maybe about three years ago where all that we had done, we still realised as a staff group, we weren't reaching that group of students – behaviour difficulties. But again, I suppose we had grown in confidence that we realised that there had to be a reason for this, and it had - and you know, after you know, quite serious analysis where the problems were, we were able then to see, 'Well, look, this is where they are.' And what we were able to do then, because all of those children were resource children, was rather than delivering the resources to them, as we were delivering it to all the other children, we developed a parallel sort of methodology, which was in keeping with our philosophy. You know, that it was a resource centre that they would find acceptance in, you know, and that they would have a relationship with the people there so that if a crisis did occur, they would go there – as a comfort zone and – as a resource area until they had, you know, resolved whatever it was and then return (Source: Principal).

This resource centre does not operate as a 'traditional' special class. Instead, pupils are referred to this centre if and when it is felt they need and will benefit from it. The deputy principal explained:

Initially Room X was designed for the children with emotional behavioural difficulties. And they had, one of the requirements was that they must have had a psychological assessment on that, identifying emotional and behavioural difficulties. And there would be, I'm not sure what the number is ... Probably they might be coming out of the classes that maybe they have a little difficulty in ...in some stages, where some classes or times when they're simply not fit to manage the classroom situation, the SNA would bring them to the room. Bring the work, hopefully, from the class and are asked to do that work then, they're not missing out on what's going on the class at the same time (Source: Deputy principal).

There is an interesting parallel here with the English case study special school which had recently formed a nurture group for a similar-sounding group of pupils. See Section 4.2.12.

### *An inclusive school*

The inclusive model operated by this school is one example of how the needs of children with SEN can be met at the post-primary level. It was clear that this school had many of the elements referred to in the literature as necessary for the effective

## 4. Findings

provision for pupils with SEN. There was a pervasive inclusive, caring atmosphere and culture throughout the school which was obvious to the research visitors; strong and effective leadership led to a collegial, 'can do' attitude amongst staff and pupils; staff engaged in continuous professional development and had high levels of expertise and specialist knowledge in the area of SEN; they were open to sharing with and supporting each other. However, the extent to which the set-up of the school was influenced by the principal must be emphasised. Nevertheless, the principal stated and reiterated many times during the two-day research visit how much he valued and respected his staff:

Well I'm very fortunate – I have great people (Source: Principal).

### 4.4 Issues Related to Dual Enrolment

One aspect of the way in which special schools can act collaboratively with mainstream schools is through dual enrolment. Issues relating to dual enrolment and dual placement were specifically addressed as part of the Review with all participants being explicitly asked for their views on these topics.

#### 4.4.1 Attitudes to dual enrolment

Tables 45 and 46 show that participants displayed a mix of positive and negative attitudes towards dual placement, with some groups being significantly more positive than others. There is a discrepancy between the quantitative data (Phase One and Phase Two questionnaires) and the qualitative data. Principals (88% in favour), parents (75% in favour) and those making submissions were the most positive groups and pupils the least positive (38% in favour). However, it should be borne in mind that the qualitative data may be skewed in favour of dual placement by the fact that one of the criteria for selecting the case study schools was that dual placement was working successfully, and by the high representation of special schools within the focus groups.

**Table 45. Questionnaire responses to questions on dual placement**

	Special schools	Primary schools with special classes	Post-primary schools with special classes
Have dual placement	34.5%	13.2%	7.9%
Would welcome dual placement	64.3%	40.9%	14.3%

## 4. Findings

**Table 46. Attitudes to dual placement**

Type of participant	Nos expressing negative attitudes	Nos expressing positive attitude
Unknown	2	8
Teacher	6	10
Principal	7	51
Parent	2	6
SNA	3	6
Student	26	16
Speech and language therapist	0	1
Chair BOM	0	1
Deputy principal	1	1
Submission	0	6
Type of school		
Special school	31	42
Mainstream primary	5	37
Mainstream post-primary	3	9

Typical comments from those expressing positive attitudes included:

I have to say the dual enrolment is brilliant (Source: Principal focus group, principal of a special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD/severe and profound GLD, ASD).

I think it would be of great benefit to lots of pupils we're speaking about, because they could have the best of both worlds (Source: Principal of a special school for pupils with MGLD/severe and profound GLD).

Dual placement workable if very well structured (Source: Mainstream primary school with a special class for pupils with MGLD).

One principal (who had worked in a school in the UK) expressed dismay at the idea of introducing dual placement to Irish schools.

Having fought the cause of gaining approval for dual enrolment we discovered that in practice it did not work. Pupils with insecurities, vulnerabilities and special needs found it very difficult to spend school time in two settings. We discovered through trial and error that a model of placing pupils back into mainstream was much more successful. Very few pupils

## 4. Findings

could manage going to school in two separate places. It caused divided loyalties. If they made friends in their 'new' school, then they weren't around for two or three days and they lost the connection. At the first bit of trouble they opted to go back to the security of the special school. A model of preparing them for mainstream and total reintegration from day one was much more successful (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

Pupils from a range of different types of special school who participated in the focus groups seemed mostly to share this principal's doubts about dual placement. For example the majority of pupils participating in a focus group in their PD special school were opposed to the idea; as shown in the following exchange:

Interviewer: What do you think of that, Paul (pseudonym), what do you think about going to two different schools?

Paul: I wouldn't be able

Interviewer: Why wouldn't you be able?

Paul: You'd be seeing different faces everyday, you'd be going back and forth and back and forth and back and forth

Interviewer: all the time yeah so you think there would be too many people and too many faces and getting used to it all

Paul: yeah better in the one school

Interviewer: better in the one school

Group: yeah

(Pupils' focus group in a special school for pupils with PD).

The following exchange shows that pupils were aware of the differences between mainstream and special schools and that there were disadvantages to attending a special school but are affirming that this is where they preferred to be:

Interviewer 1: And if you had the choice, you could be here some of the time and in that school some of the time, would you like that, would you like to be in your sister's school some of the time and this school some of the time?

Hazel (pseudonym): That is a hard question now. Well I love this school, it gives me a lot of help and sometimes like people would skit you over a

## 4. Findings

school like this, they'd say, you have something wrong with you because you are going to this school, you are dumb, and all that. But really I'd rather be in this school all the time.

Interviewer 1: Even though people slag you about coming here?

Hazel: I don't care, I just ignore people like that because you shouldn't really judge people should you?

Interviewer 1: So you are happy in this school. Even if you could, you don't really think you want to go to the school that your sister is in.

Hazel: No.

Interviewer 1: Why?

Hazel: It would be hard... like we are in one class and we have to go into different subjects and imagine getting up after 45 minutes and going into another class and there would be all movement and I am not very good at that.

Interviewer 1: Ok, anybody else? The rest of you are sure you don't want to be in 2 schools.

Damien (pseudonym): Yes.

Interviewer 1: Ok that is great, so you think it would make it hard because of the movement around to different classes. Is there anything else that any of you want to tell me about this school that you think Pauric (pseudonym) and myself should know? Or Pauric do you think there is anything that I didn't ask? Pauric is supposed to be reminding me of the things that I forget if he's listening!

(Pupils' focus group, special school for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD and severe and profound GLD)

Some pupils in one focus group expressed the view that dual placement might give them access to subjects which were unavailable in their special school.

Chris (Pseudonym): Let's say you could do maths in one school and English in the other school.

## 4. Findings

Interviewer 1: That's a good point, that you could divide up the subjects maybe, is that what you are saying. Or what about maybe going to one of the local secondary schools and maybe doing, you know Chris you said earlier on about metalwork, maybe if there was a school that did metal work that you could go there to do a few blocks of time and do metalwork there, do you think that would work? Would you like to do that?

Chris (Pseudonym): Yes.

Interviewer 1: And then you'd be able to do your metalwork wouldn't you.

It should be noted that none of the pupils who participated in these discussions had experienced dual placement, although some had attended mainstream schools prior to moving to a special school.

### **4.4.2 Suitability of dual placement for pupils with different types of SEN**

There were very few references (three principals and one SNA) to the suitability or otherwise of dual placement for pupils with different categories of SEN. Similarly there was little reference to dual placement being unsuitable for children from specific SEN categories. Two teachers did query the benefits of dual placement for a child with Autism, particularly if there is a lack of communication between the two schools.

And you know ... kids within the autistic spectrum, like, any change to the routine at all upsets them. And that completely, you know, you get used to one teacher, one style, or one routine, and then they have to, the following day they find it very difficult to adapt (Source: Teacher focus group, from a special school for pupils with ASD).

### **4.4.3 Factors thought to contribute to the success of dual placement**

Participants were also asked what needed to be in place if dual placement was to be successful. Most mentioned was communication (51 times). Communication between the participating school staff (teachers, SNAs, principals) and parents was considered very important in the context of a dual placement arrangement.

## 4. Findings

### *Communication*

**Table 47. Factors contributing to the success of dual placement: communication**

Type of participant	No of participants
Teacher	9
Principal	26
Parent	2
SNA	7
Student	0
Nurse	0
Speech and language therapist	1
Chair BOM	0
Deputy principal	1
Submission	1
Type of school	
Special school	26
Mainstream primary	18
Mainstream post-primary	5

ibuted the failure of a dual placement arrangement in her school to lack of communication between staff.

Now, this year, for instance, up to about a month ago, we had one child who was attending mainstream one day a week ...and we were getting no feedback from the school at all. Neither was the parent. And the child just became very withdrawn and very upset at home, and nobody knew what was going on. It turned out she was not happy in the mainstream school. But teacher in that school hadn't made that, you know, hadn't taken note of it, hadn't reported to the parent. We've had no contact from the school, with the result that the child is now attending our school five days a week. She's refusing to go to mainstream. So I think if she had had a little bit of support...if there had been some way for the teacher in the mainstream to come to us or if there had been some link between the two, it may not have got to that stage (Source: SNA focus group, SNA from a special school for pupils with ModGLD, ASD).

## 4. Findings

### *Time*

Several participants highlighted the need to find time to meet, collaborate and co-operate.

Time for collaboration between schools, parents and agencies (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with ASD).

... facilitating the above. It may involve substitute cover – teachers from both schools should be able to spend time in the others setting, getting to know the environment in which the child who may have dual enrolment will operate. They need time out to plan, evaluate (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with MGLD/ModGLD).

Time to plan and prepare programme with other school and to agree routines and procedures (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire from a primary school with special class for pupils with MGLD).

Staff in special schools, particularly primary classes, do not have free time to enable co-ordinated planning to organise dual enrolment of individual students. It would be necessary to establish a post within the special school and also in the mainstream school to enable staff to establish structures that would ensure a student could experience successful dual enrolment. With careful planning and resource input, dual enrolment could be very successful (Source: Submission, from a teacher).

As can be seen from these comments, the need for time was strongly linked by principals and teachers to the need for dual placement to be carefully planned and structured, see Table 48.

**Table 48. Factors contributing to the success of dual placement: planning and record keeping**

Type of participant	No of participants
Unknown	3
Teacher	5
Principal	18
Parent	1
SNA	1
Student	0
Nurse	0
Speech and language therapist	0
Chair BOM	0
Deputy principal	1
Submission	0
Type of school	
Special school	13
Mainstream primary	13
Mainstream post-primary	3

### 4.4.4 Perceived barriers to dual placement

Participants identified two major barriers to dual placement, difficulties with transport between schools (or from home to two different schools) and the lack of a clear policy.

#### *Difficulties with transport*

As can be seen from Table 49 below, many participants highlighted transport as an issue in relation to dual placement. Participants felt that transport should be considered prior to implementing a programme of dual placement and a number of schools saw transport difficulties as presenting a barrier to dual placement.

## 4. Findings

**Table 49. Barriers to dual placement: difficulties with transport**

Type of participant	No of participants
Unknown	10
Teacher	7
Principal	18
Parent	1
SNA	2
Student	0
Nurse	0
Speech and language therapist	0
Chair BOM	0
Deputy principal	1
Submission	1
Type of school	
Special school	10
Mainstream primary	17
Mainstream post-primary	10

Transport was particularly a problem identified by mainstream schools with no nearby special school; there were concerns about children spending a lot of time travelling between schools. The need to release personnel to travel with the child was also mentioned. The following comments were typical:

The nearest special school is quite a distance away so the practicalities of 'sharing' pupils would be difficult (Source: Mainstream post-primary questionnaire, from a post-primary school with an unofficial special class).

I would be concerned about children being sent to a school far away from their base school for long periods. This can involve taxi journeys of up to one hour morning and evening (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with a special class for pupils with ASD).

Indeed one school spoke of the difficulties they faced when trying to operate a system of dual placement:

And because of distance again, the child ... didn't actually arrive until half-past-ten in the morning (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a

## 4. Findings

mainstream primary school with special classes for pupils with ASD, EBD, MGLD/ModGLD/severe and profound GLD, SLD).

One submission emphasised the need to avoid placing unnecessary pressure on parents and schools.

Logistics such as transport between the schools needs to be a consideration, to lessen the burden on parents and school (Source: Submission, Early Childhood organisation).

Conversely, being in walking distance of the collaborating school was mentioned as a facilitator of dual placement.

### *Dissatisfaction with current policy*

Dissatisfaction with current policy was expressed by principals, teachers and SNAs in special schools, mainstream primary, and mainstream post-primary schools. The current policy as outlined in circular 24/02 prohibits pupils being on two roll books. This policy is considered unsatisfactory by a number of participants in the study, particularly principals, who clearly regard it as a very significant barrier (See Table 50).

**Table 50. Barriers to dual placement: current policy**

Type of participant	No of participants
Unknown	3
Teacher	4
Principal	22
Parent	0
SNA	2
Student	0
Nurse	0
Speech and language therapist	0
Chair BOM	0
Deputy principal	1
Submission	0
School type	
Special school	14
Mainstream primary	12
Mainstream post-primary	2

## 4. Findings

The following comments are typical:

Look, strictly speaking, the Department of Education only allow you put the child's name on one roll. Right. Now I wouldn't have a child on the school whose name wasn't on the school's roll book, and I wouldn't expect his school to have the child either. So we had to abandon the dual attendance policy (Source: Principal focus group, principal from a special school for pupils with MGLD).

There were concerns in relation to insurance. Clarifying issues in relation to insurance and capitation is considered necessary in order to support a dual placement arrangement.

We would be prepared to accept into our special class a child who is enrolled in another school. There are probably insurance implications that would need to be addressed. Similarly, we would be prepared to accept into a mainstream class for some part of the day a child who is enrolled in a special school (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire).

Dual enrolment guidelines from the Department of Education covering issues such as insurance, capitation, SNA support, access to multi-disciplinary support, time for teachers from both schools to meet together in school time (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school for pupils with ModGLD).

### *Over reliance on goodwill*

Related to the current policy prohibiting dual enrolment is the issue of dual placement initiatives being dependent on the goodwill of staff involved. An SNA, a teacher, and a principal commented how, to date, dual placement programmes in operation have relied on the goodwill of staff involved.

But we have been doing that with very little resources or very little support ... from the department. It's just the goodwill of, you know, teachers going out and meeting up and liaising and developing programmes and working on IEPs and all of that (Source: Teacher focus group, teacher from a special school for pupils with mild, moderate severe and profound GLD).

However, one principal asserts that goodwill is not enough.

## 4. Findings

It is a very difficult role to fulfil bearing in mind the lack of supports available even in special classes in mainstream schools. Good will is not enough - partial enrolment with properly funded, well resourced outreach centres with access to all the necessary therapies is, in my opinion, the way to go forward (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with MGLD and SSLD).

This theme also emerged strongly in relation to special schools offering support to mainstream, and in both instances reliance on goodwill alone seems to present problems for the long term sustainability of initiatives in collaboration.

### *Lack of clarity about responsibility*

The issue of responsibility was raised by a small number of participants (two teachers and four principals). Among the views expressed by these participants, it was felt that there would need to be discussion around responsibilities and such responsibilities would need to be clearly defined prior to implementing dual placement.

I'd have some reservations about dual enrolment. In theory ... if you're trying to get ... access to the more, you know, technical subjects and that. But like it would probably be quite difficult to collaborate ... and for teachers to collaborate and meet the needs of the student because who's ultimately responsible for that student if it's student is enrolled in two schools, you know? And it could be worse off if there was a behavioural incident in one school and it had to lead to an exclusion or a suspension. Then what happens then? Does the special school take up the responsibility or what happens (Source: pilot focus group, teacher from a post-primary school with a class for pupils with ASD).

Overall responsibility to remain with one school for writing up and implementing of IEP (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with Special classes for pupils with MGLD and SSLD).

The paperwork around dual enrolment would also need to be clear and responsibilities clearly defined (Source: special school questionnaire, from a special school with pupils with severe and profound GLD, ASD).

### 4.4.5 Resource implications of dual placement

Participants mentioned a number of other resource implications arising from the need to collaborate with staff in other schools, and administer the scheme. For example, appointing a co-ordinator to liaise between schools was suggested as a means of facilitating a dual placement arrangement by a number of participants.

Co-ordinator employed to establish the liaison and develop procedures  
(Source: Mainstream post-primary questionnaire, from a post-primary school with a special class for pupils with ASD).

Facilitating a dual placement arrangement also has implications for teacher workload. Thus, increasing staff numbers and providing substitute cover were suggested.

An increase in the SEN teacher numbers, even 0.5 extra allocation would be needed to facilitate the co-ordination within the schools and between schools  
(Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with MGLD, EBD, PD).

If dual enrolment is to be considered the special school must be given extra administrative support and also a teacher to liaise with teachers in each mainstream class when a number of pupils in the special school are involved  
(Source: Submission, Provider).

Clear guidelines would have to be drawn up to deal with issues such as transport, liaison between schools, teacher workload, criteria for inclusion in dual attendance etc (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special class for children with MGLD).

Additional suggested resources to support dual placement include: access to therapies for the dually placed child, access to a special class in the mainstream school, pupil teacher ratio of 20:1, and administrative support.

By providing a range of services eg mainstreaming, dual enrolment, special class placement, special class placement with integration in age appropriate class for suitable subjects. Accommodating pupils with SEN in mainstream classes can only be successful if pupil teacher ratio is 20:1 (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire, from a primary school with special classes for pupils with HI, SSLD and MGLD).

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### *Special needs assistants*

The need for an SNA (or someone familiar with the child) to accompany the child to the mainstream school was highlighted by a range of participants including SNAs and students themselves (See Table 51).

**Table 51. Resources required for dual placement: familiar adult to accompany pupil**

Type of participant	No of participants
Unknown	1
Teacher	6
Principal	12
Parent	2
SNA	9
Student	3
Nurse	0
Speech and language therapist	0
Chair BOM	0
Deputy principal	1
Submission	1
Type of school	
Special school	21
Mainstream primary	10
Mainstream post-primary	1

These comments from a range of participants are typical:

Oh, someone familiar with both schools, with the child. That would have been ideal, like a classroom assistant, yeah (Source: SNA focus group).

Pupil would have to have one-to-one support to facilitate dual attendance in certain circumstances (Source: Mainstream primary questionnaire).

### 4.4.6 Models of dual placement

Some schools described models of dual placement that they were operating. In general students from special schools attended local mainstream schools for one or two days per week.

We have about 10 children who attend ...the mainstream school for part of the week, and attend us for the other part of the week (Source: Focus group teacher from a special school for pupils with ModGLD).

One school described how they operate a system of dual placement with a view to integrating pupils full time into mainstream education.

We have a system of dual enrolment at the junior end, so some of our pupils would attend their local primary school, and they will come to us. And they'd usually maybe start with us four days a week and one, and then it would be increased until, if they can cope fulltime, they will be fulltime in the local primary school. Or we would have situations where children failed, we'll say, in their primary school and came to us, and then once they've settled down and we got structure in place, and they began to make progress, we then started reintegrating them into the primary school. But we have been doing that with very little resources or very little support ...from the department. It's just the goodwill of, you know, teachers going out and meeting up and liaising in and developing programmes and working on IEPs and all of that (Source: Teacher focus group, from a special school for pupils with MGLD/MoGLD severe and profound GLD, ASD).

### 4.4.7 Ways to move forward on dual placement: The need for a pilot scheme

The possibility of setting up a pilot scheme (to explore the benefits of a programme of dual placement) was suggested by two questionnaire respondents (one from a special school and another from a mainstream primary school) and one submission.

It would be interesting if pilot schemes could be set up (for example the special school in which I work is next door to a mainstream community school) to see any challenges, difficulties and successes that could emerge. It would also be necessary for parents to be involved in the establishment of such schemes. Their input would be vital (Source: Submission, from a teacher).

## 4. Findings

Just over a third of special schools are operating some form of dual placement. The majority would be in favour of dual enrolment if there was a clear DES policy permitting it, and the resourcing implications and logistical difficulties were resolved.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter relates the main findings of the review to the international literature, and discusses the implications for the future role of special schools and classes in Ireland. The need for further research in a number of areas is also highlighted. As in the previous chapter, issues relating to special schools are dealt with first, followed by issues related to special classes; finally dual placement is discussed. In each instance the recommendation appears at the head of the relevant section, and the evidence on which the recommendation is based is then presented and discussed.

### 5.2 Special Schools

#### 5.2.1 Complexity and range of pupil need in special schools

##### Recommendation 1

**Special schools are catering for a group of students with complex needs, appear to have some success in doing so (though the evidence for this is limited), and should be enabled to continue to do so in the absence of evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these students.**

There has been much international debate about how to classify complexity of need and the term 'complex' is reported in the literature to be rather vague and lacking in definition (eg, Norwich and Grey, 2006; Rosengard, Laing, Ridley and Hunter; 2007). In their recent review of the literature Rosengard, et al highlight the difficulty of reaching a consensus with regard to 'multiple and complex needs', but also provide some useful reflection on the use of the term, particularly in relation to pupils with SEN. According to Rosengard et al the term 'complex needs' can usefully be thought of as encompassing both breadth and depth of need (our emphasis). Thus pupils with complex needs may have several different needs, requiring support from several different services to ensure those needs are met. However, according to Rosengard et al complex needs is also a term used in the literature for depth of need where the individual pupil has a severe or profound level of disability; this includes not only those with severe or profound GLDs but also others, such as those with sight disabilities or who are blind and have 'additional

needs' (RNIB, 2001). Furthermore pupils are seen as having complex needs where they present with challenging behaviour (eg Bond, 2004).

The review found evidence of significant complexity and severity of pupil need in special schools; particularly those for pupils with MGLD and ModGLD. *Breadth* of need was reflected in the population of MLD special schools as reported in this research (see Table 15 Section 4.2.2). From this table it can be seen that schools for pupils with MGLD are not only catering for pupils with a large number of different primary disabilities but also for a large number of pupils with two or more disabilities. Complexity in terms of *depth* of need was found in schools for pupils with ModGLD which were catering for a higher number of pupils with severe and profound GLD and with ASD than they had in the past. These findings accord with reports in both the Irish and the international literature (Buckley, 2000; Porter et al, 2002; INTO, 2002a; SSWG, 2003a; McCarthy and Kenny, 2006; Department of Education NI, 2006). Although the international literature is divided on the future of special schools, one role which is suggested is to cater for pupils with severe and complex needs (Porter et al, 2002; UNESCO, 1994; DfES, 2003).

### Recommendation 2

**The review found a trend both in Ireland and internationally towards the development of two distinct types of special school. While some special schools are catering for a wide range of categories of need, others cater exclusively for pupils from a specific category. In the absence of evidence favouring one of these types of special school, a range of special school provision should continue to be available catering both for specific categories of need and for a range of needs.**

Participants were divided on whether special schools are most effective when they cater for one specific category of need, or for a wider range of needs. The review found no firm evidence to illuminate this issue; and the issue of complexity of needs, discussed above, suggests that it may be over-simplistic to think in terms of schools catering only for specific categories of need. Furthermore, in rural areas, special schools are currently catering for pupils with a wide range of needs, due to demographic considerations.

### Recommendation 3

- (1) Further research is needed into the factors which lead to the comparative success of MGLD schools in retaining pupils in school and the implications for the whole post-primary sector evaluated.**
- (2) A review of the curriculum and certification offered to pupils with MGLD of post-primary age in both special and mainstream schools is required to ensure a range of choices for pupils and their parents.**

A somewhat contradictory trend in schools for pupils with MGLD was the increasing number of admissions at post-primary transfer. Indeed, the majority of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD are now of post-primary age. Data from phase one showed that of the age profiles of 2,012 pupils given by principals of schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities, 677 were in the 4–12 age range and 1,335 in the 13–19 age range. There is evidence from the current review that those who move from mainstream to special school at this juncture are likely to have additional needs and behavioural issues as well as MGLD; a similar trend was reported by the English case study school. This increasing diversity and complexity of need in special schools brings the tensions surrounding their future role into sharp focus, not only in Ireland, but internationally, as has been highlighted by both Norwich and Gray (2006) in England and Head and Pirrie (2007) in Scotland. A particular tension in regard to post-primary aged pupils with mild GLD is how best to retain them in school and provide access to appropriate certification and other courses for them. This was an issue which both the English case study school and the Irish Post-Primary case study school were attempting to tackle. No Irish data could be discovered in relation to whether pupils with MGLD are disproportionately represented amongst early school leavers from mainstream post-primary schools. In England, although data is published each year (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway> accessed 7.09.09) as to the overall numbers of pupils of different age categories for each disability category, these are not split by type of school attended, so no comparison data are available.

However, the fact that the majority of early school leavers in Ireland cite school factors as the main factor influencing their decision, suggests that there are curriculum issues to be addressed (McCoy, Kelly and Watson, 2007). The evidence from the current study is that special schools were successful at retaining pupils with MGLD, and that in some special schools for pupils with MGLD a range of appropriate post-primary programmes were available in a flexible manner. Motherway's study (albeit of provision in only one special school) suggests that this

flexible availability of carefully tailored programmes may be critical for this group of pupils (Motherway, 2009). Overall the evidence therefore suggests that special schools are currently providing a valuable option for these pupils. However, the current study did not focus on the capacity of post-primary schools to meet the needs of all pupils with mild general learning disabilities. Issues were raised by participants that require further research such as the lack of continuity in special class provision between some primary and post-primary schools, the unavailability of suitable programmes such as the JCSP and lack of flexibility. It is acknowledged that since the start of this review the NCCA has commenced a major review of education at senior cycle and work on curriculum provision for pupils with SEN at junior cycle. Additionally FETAC has been developing certification options at levels 1 and 2 of the National Qualifications Framework. It is in the light of the absence of evidence in relation to post-primary schools' capacity to meet the needs of pupils with mild general learning disabilities and the success of special schools in retaining such pupils in the system that the recommendations above are made.

### 5.2.2 Support for mainstream schools/Centre of Excellence

#### Recommendation 4

**Internationally, there has been a trend towards special schools providing Outreach and Inreach support for mainstream schools. One aspect of the future role of some special schools could be to provide Outreach and Inreach support for mainstream schools to enhance the provision these schools are able to make for pupils with SEN. It should be noted that the review found that not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role.**

One important role envisaged for special schools into the future in the international literature is in supporting mainstream schools (eg SSWG, 2003a; 2003b). Indeed Norwich (2008) argues that in the future special schools should only exist where they are linked to mainstream schools. In a study designed to assess educational provision for pupils with SEN in Europe, Meijer (2003) found that the transformation of special schools into resource centres is a common trend. The Irish literature suggests that around half the special schools in the country have links with mainstream (Buckley, 2000). However, this figure includes a range of different types of links; not all schools with links offer support to mainstream. Indeed in the current study, the type of link mentioned most frequently by special schools was providing work experience for post-primary students. Only a minority of links

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involved Outreach or Inreach support, with fewer than a quarter of the special schools facilitating visits by mainstream teachers or SNAs and even fewer visiting mainstream schools.

With specific regard to support for mainstream schools, the current review found that links of this type are valued; but, they tend to be of an informal and ad hoc nature and based on the goodwill of those involved. This was seen as an issue by mainstream, as well as special, schools. By contrast the English case study special school had links which were formalised and resourced as part of the local authority's overall support structure for pupils with SEN. Models of inreach and outreach support to increase the capacity of the mainstream school were described by staff in this school. For example, staff from the Autism Unit provide outreach support to mainstream schools with an emphasis on working with the whole school to upskill staff. Teachers from mainstream schools spend time in the special school to enhance their teaching of pupils with SEN. The special school also provides indirect support and expertise to schools by running post-graduate courses in collaboration with colleges of education and universities. In-house training for staff of the special school is also available as required. Staff have specific time allocation for outreach work and the school receives funding from the LEA to support their work. This approach is in tune with the current international literature which highlights adequate staffing and resourcing as being essential to special schools acting as resource or outreach centres (Meijer, 2003).

In order to enable special schools and mainstream schools in Ireland to interact effectively with one another, policies need to be drawn up in relation to Outreach and Inreach support. A key consideration is the capacity of the special school to act as a resource or outreach centre. Porter et al (2002) conclude that special school teachers may feel ill-equipped for such a role, and such a role may not be appropriate for all special schools. Current international literature cautions against the transfer of expertise being seen as one-way (from special to mainstream schools). Special school principals in this study concurred with this view seeing the future as one in which special and mainstream schools would be involved in two way collaboration. The findings of the current review, the SESS pilot and the international literature should be taken into account in formulating future policy in this area.

### 5.2.3 Staffing of special schools

#### Recommendation 5

- (1) Special schools should receive resources and have access to continuous professional development for staff to reflect the variety of roles which they fulfil, including opportunities to develop specialist skills appropriate to particular groups of pupils and collaborative working skills**
- (2) Such CPD should be available to all teachers working in special schools and classes in a timely manner.**

It is clear from the current study that many pupils in special schools have extremely complex needs. Their teachers therefore require a wide range of strategies and methodologies to enable them to meet these needs. Ofsted (2006), in a wide ranging review of special educational provision in England found that the key factor contributing to pupils' progress, including those with complex needs, was access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers, and recommended more access to appropriate training. In addition, if teachers from special schools are to advise and support mainstream colleagues, they will need to have the opportunity to develop consultation skills. The international literature (eg Porter et al 2002, McTague, 2005) is clear that teachers who are expected to fulfil these roles need continuous professional development to enable them to do so.

The Teacher Education Section of the DES has in recent years provided more opportunities for teachers in special education to enhance their knowledge and skills through an expansion of accredited training programmes and through initiatives such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS), which aims to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in relation to special educational provision. However, Phase 1 of the present review identified gaps in relation to specialist qualifications for teachers in special schools, a much smaller percentage of whom now have an accredited qualification in SEN than in 1990 (McGee, 1990). The current review found that only between one-quarter and one-third of teachers in special schools have undertaken specialist training at diploma level or higher compared with the approximately 50% reported by McGee in 1990. However, many of the current cohort of special school teachers have undertaken a wide variety of short-courses and school-based CPD under the auspices of the SESS, an option much less available in 1990. It appears from the current review that a minority of

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teachers do not avail of training, even when it is available, and these teachers may need additional encouragement to do so.

There is little research-based literature evaluating the impact of either accredited courses or other forms of CPD on outcomes for pupils. However, in England Ofsted have undertaken several studies in this area in the last decade (Ofsted, 2002, 2004) These studies used a variety of methods to evaluate the impact of CPD, including observations of teaching and discussions with headteachers in participants' schools, and conclude that a range of factors have a bearing on the impact of accredited courses, but that there is clear evidence that teachers participating in accredited courses can impact on pupil progress. Ofsted (2002) are less positive about CPD made up of shorter courses and in-school training days, suggesting that the portfolio of courses accessed by individual teachers are often insufficiently planned to be coherent and do not demonstrate value for money.

While participants in Phase Two of the review viewed training/development opportunities as beneficial, they also felt that there was insufficient access to relevant training and were divided in their perceptions of expertise of the staff in the special school. To fulfil the future role of the special school as a resource for mainstream schools, opportunities for access to continuing professional development in SEN for staff, through the range of providers of teacher education in SEN, is essential. Such continuous professional development needs to be structured in a way which enables teachers to build a coherent range of competencies and principal teachers to select and deploy staff to use these competences effectively.

Current international literature also cautions against the transfer of expertise being seen as one-way (from special to mainstream schools) (Lambert, 2003). Results from the Phase One questionnaires showed that the majority of special schools envisaged future relationships between mainstream and special schools in which sharing of expertise was a two-way process, for the mutual benefit of staff and pupils in both schools. The SESS project which was ongoing at the time of this review emphasises collaboration to enable all schools within the partnership to make better provision (SESS, 2008), and this approach accords with that suggested in the international literature with regard to clusters and federations (Lindsay, 2005).

Two other issues investigated as part of the review have a substantial impact on the extent to which special schools feel equipped to cater for pupils with increasingly

complex needs, namely the initial training of teachers, and the support of a multi-disciplinary team.

### Recommendation 6

- (1) Research should be carried out on teachers in special schools with a view to ascertaining:**
  - their qualifications, both undergraduate and postgraduate and
  - the extent to which limitations in their qualification contributed to or brought about their employment in the setting in which they are working.
- (2) The terminology used to describe qualified teachers from other countries, and Irish-trained teachers with certain Montessori qualifications should be reviewed. The terminology chosen should reflect the groups of pupils for which the individual is appropriately qualified rather than the fact that there are some groups of pupils who they are precluded from teaching.**

There are particular issues with regard to the initial training of teachers working in special schools in Ireland; these relate to the classification of special schools as primary schools and to restricted recognition. The fact that special schools in Ireland are regarded as primary schools means that teachers with post-primary (rather than primary) qualifications can only teach in them if either they are hired through VEC to teach specific practical subjects or as a class teacher if the school is running post-primary programmes. This may result in a scarcity of teachers with relevant knowledge for the delivery of post-primary programmes in some special schools. Ofsted's (2006) study found that teachers in mainstream schools in England have better subject knowledge than those in special schools. However, the current review did not seek information on teachers' initial qualifications, thus further research into this area is needed.

Restricted recognition is a somewhat emotive issue. Restricted recognition grants eligibility for teachers to teach in certain categories of special school and in the categories of special classes in mainstream schools where Irish is not a curricular requirement (Circular 0140/2006, p.14). This is the term used by the DES to describe the recognition of Irish-trained teachers who hold certain Montessori qualifications, for teaching in early years settings and special schools only and of teachers trained overseas, whose teacher education qualifies them as special education teachers but who have not reached the specified level of fluency in Irish

for teaching in mainstream primary Classes. The review found that nearly 40% of teachers in special schools have restricted recognition. There are some problems related to restricted recognition. For example, a minority of participants in this study had a perception of teachers in special schools as less well-qualified than their mainstream colleagues, and this appeared to be due in part to the issue of restricted recognition. Discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this review, but is one which deserves further consideration in the light of differing policies in similar circumstances elsewhere (eg in Wales). Second, two recent studies in Ireland have found that a significant number of teachers in special schools would not have chosen to work there if they had been eligible to work in a mainstream school (Ware, Julian and McGee, 2005; Stevens and O'Moore, 2009). These findings reflect international studies showing that recruitment and retention are both less strong in special than in mainstream education (Brownell, Hirsch and Seo, 2004).

### Recommendation 7

**Given the central role of the principal teacher, programmes of professional development for principals should have a substantial element on special education.**

The drive towards inclusion over recent years means that all schools (both mainstream and special) are now catering for pupils with special educational needs, thus all principal teachers are responsible for ensuring that the needs of these pupils are met within their schools. In a substantial study by the Church of Ireland College of Education (2005a) of post-primary teachers, participants saw the principal's role as pivotal in relation to SEN, and recommended that they should receive inservice in this area. The need for courses of professional development for new and aspiring principal teachers, in order to help them fulfil their roles effectively is generally acknowledged, both in Ireland, where according to the Leadership Development for Schools Service (LDS) over 95% of new primary principals take the Misneach Course ([www.lds21.com](http://www.lds21.com)), and elsewhere. In addition the LDS has offered a special series of CPD events for principals of special schools and modules within other courses on special educational needs. To date there appears to be little hard research evidence of the impact of such courses on progress and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs within mainstream schools. However, a variety of publications from the National Council for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services in the UK offer some evidence that inclusive practice is facilitated by strong leadership, and that the academic progress of pupils is

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enhanced by engagement with school leadership development programmes (eg Kugelmass, 2003; NCSL, 2009).

### Recommendation 8

**A review of the training needs of SNAs should be conducted.**

The study did not specifically investigate the role, qualifications or training of Special Needs Assistants as a separate Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme was being conducted by the Department of Education and Science at the same time as this review. However, some participants, including SNAs themselves, were clear that access to training is required for SNAs in order to enhance the support they provide to pupils with SEN.

### Recommendation 9

**(1) The way in which multi-disciplinary support is provided to pupils with special educational needs in all types of school needs to be urgently reviewed.**

**(2) It was clear from the review that access to multi-disciplinary support is currently insufficient and inconsistent. More access to multi disciplinary teams is required and access needs to be available on the basis of need regardless of the setting in which the pupil is placed.**

There were major issues for all types of school around the provision of multi-disciplinary support. One advantage of a special school, as pointed out by some participants, can be the support of a multi-disciplinary team, and in a few instances this was clearly working well; but few schools claimed to have access to such a team. Principals of all types of school identified a plethora of agencies delivering such multidisciplinary support as is available, giving at least the impression of a lack of coordination between the different services, with support being delivered by individual services, rather than a team approach being in place. Where access was available, it was often under the auspices of the school's patron body. There are basic two routes through which multi-disciplinary support funded by the HSE is delivered to pupils, direct from the HSE through community services, and from the HSE via an intermediate service provider (usually the school's patron body). In some instances this second model of provision appeared to lead to a lack of clarity in schools about the source of funding for multidisciplinary support. In a few instances this may be because HSE funding was being supplemented from other sources in order to enhance the level of service available. Indeed, a few principals

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made it clear that HSE (or in the case of Educational Psychology NEPS) provision, regarded as inadequate, was being supplemented with funding from other sources, such as funds raised by parents.

Additionally there is very wide variability between schools in the amount of support available to pupils. This conclusion is supported by a DES evaluation of educational provision for pupils with ASD (DES, 2006). This evaluation was conducted across five settings: ABA centres, dedicated special school for pupils with ASD, special schools for pupils with general learning disabilities, special classes for pupils with ASD in mainstream schools and ordinary classes in mainstream schools. Provision of multidisciplinary support in all settings varied considerably between centres or schools and in some cases such support did not exist. This evaluation similarly found that many schools did not have sufficient access to a full multi-disciplinary team. Where support was available, it was generally funded by the HSE, but was sometimes paid for by the Board of Management or privately by parents. Parents from all educational settings expressed concern about the lack of access to multi-disciplinary support services.

Similar variability was identified in the recent Bercow review of speech therapy services in England (Bercow, 2008). That report concludes that removing this variability and ensuring that provision is made on the basis of assessed need is a matter of equity. Although the causes of variability may differ between England and Ireland, there was a similar perception from some participants of a lack of equity in provision of multidisciplinary support, and the extent to which that support is coherent. However, if more access, and more consistent access to multidisciplinary support is to be provided, this has implications not just for education, but for the HSE, which, as the discussion above makes clear are the primary funders of multidisciplinary support in Ireland.

### 5.3 Special Classes in Mainstream Schools

#### 5.3.1 Numbers of special classes in primary and post-primary schools

##### Recommendation 10

**An audit of special class provision in mainstream schools should be conducted and the data base of classes subsequently regularly updated.**

At both primary and post-primary level, but more especially at post-primary level, it proved difficult for the researchers to access a definitive list of schools with special class provision. At the most basic level, the available lists were compiled 12 to 18 months prior to being made available to the researchers, and, at a time when special class provision was growing for certain categories of pupils, did not reflect the current situation. With regard to unofficial special classes in post-primary schools; where pupils are streamed by ability there appears sometimes to be a grey area between the bottom stream, and a special class. After a painstaking methodological process, the research team were able to be relatively confident that they had succeeded in contacting over 90% of post-primary schools with official special classes.

### Recommendation 11

- (1) In the absence of evidence on the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of all pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, special classes should continue to be part of placement options.**
- (2) The capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of pupils with mild general learning disabilities should be evaluated before reducing the option of special class placement in the system.**
- (3) Special classes should continue to be an alternative solution to special schools where the demographics would not support such a school.**

The situation with regard to special classes in primary school has changed dramatically since the research reported here was conducted. In February 2009, the DES wrote to 119 schools instructing them to close their classes for pupils with mild GLD (128 classes in total) from the start of the 2009–2010 school year. Forty schools appealed this decision and on June 15th 2009 it was announced that 10 classes had been reprieved. The 118 classes which are to close represent half of the primary special classes for pupils with MGLD which were surveyed for Phase One of this research. In relation to these closures a ministerial spokesman is cited as saying that the vast majority of parents want their child included in a mainstream class. However, both the current review, and previous studies by both Kidd and Hornby (1993) and Nugent (2007) found high levels of satisfaction with special class provision. Kidd and Hornby (1993) for example, found much higher

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satisfaction ratings among twenty-nine students and their parents of being integrated in a unit in a mainstream school than in mainstream classes after transferring from a special school. On the other hand, it should be remembered that other studies have reported that most parents express satisfaction with their child's current provision (Porter et al, 2002). Nonetheless, an option worth assessing would be the expansion of alternatives under the GAM to include part time placement in an integrated special class/resource room for pupils whose needs are not being fully met in the mainstream class. This would have the advantage of preserving a continuum of provision, and is a form of provision found to be effective elsewhere (eg Ofsted, 2006).

This study found that concern was already felt by participants, around the future of special classes for pupils with MGLD, at the time Phase One of this review was conducted in 2006. This concern predated the introduction of the GAM, but was considerably heightened by it. Under the GAM pupils with mild general learning disabilities are included in the allocation of learning support/resource teachers. On the one hand this gives them automatic access to resources without the need to wait for a scarce external assessment. On the other hand there is a risk that they will not be identified as having a special educational need, or that resources under the GAM will be insufficient to meet the needs of some within the group. Where pupils are identified, there was a perception amongst the research participants that psychologists, for a variety of reasons, are no longer recommending special class placement for these pupils. Principals in schools with special classes for pupils with mild general learning disabilities were particularly vocal in raising these concerns, which they foresaw would have major implications for the future of special classes for this category of pupil. By contrast the review found that numbers of special classes for pupils with ASDs had increased over the previous three years, a trend which has continued, according to recent DES figures (DES 2008). The GAM introduced many positive features such as a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning and greater flexibility in the deployment of resources. However, research is required on how schools are interpreting the staged approach and utilising the flexibility in meeting the needs of pupils with high incidence special educational needs.

Stevens and O'Moore (2009) report a dramatic shift in the placement of pupils with mild general learning disabilities from the introduction of the resource teacher model and again after the introduction of the GAM (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.2). In addition both Stevens and O'Moore (2009) and Travers (2007) found reduced

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levels of learning support/ resource teaching for pupils with mild general learning disabilities since the introduction of the GAM (see Section 2.4.2). There is an urgent need to evaluate the impact of these changes and whether the new model of support under the GAM is capable of meeting the needs of pupils with mild general learning disabilities before reducing the option of special class placement in the system. Given the fact that Stevens and O'Moore also report that pupils with mild general learning disabilities in special classes tend to have more additional needs than those in mainstream classes there is a real possibility that more pupils may be transferred to special schools as the number of special classes available are reduced. In this context, the current review of the GAM is very welcome and it is crucial that it considers the impact of the changes on pupils with mild general learning disabilities.

In general, there is little evidence in the international literature that one model of special educational provision is more effective than another; for example Ofsted (2006) suggest that the most important contributory factor in the effectiveness of provision for pupils with SEN is not its location (special school, resourced provision in mainstream<sup>3</sup> or mainstream class) but access to a specialist teacher. However, the same report also states that for pupils with a range of special needs, once this was available, it was pupils in mainstream resourced provision who made most progress. Lindsay (2003) cites a study by Mills et al in which the most positive academic outcomes were for resourced mainstream provision as opposed to either special schools or full inclusion in mainstream classes; however, it is not clear if this 'resourced provision' was more similar to special class or resource teaching provision.

Investigation of the academic progress made by pupils in different sorts of provision was outside the scope of the current review. However, special classes were perceived to have other advantages:

- facilitation of inclusion within the mainstream class
- provision of a 'safe haven' for some pupils
- a favourable pupil teacher ratio
- enabling pupils to remain in their local area or not too far from it
- enabling flexibility in the organisation of teaching and curriculum provision.

The evidence from the study suggests that although the majority of special classes provide for pupils with somewhat less complex needs than special schools with the

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<sup>3</sup> Resourced provision in mainstream in England approximates to special class provision in Ireland.

same designation, there is some overlap in the pupils who currently receive special school and special class provision. Which pupils are in schools and which are in classes is to some extent a matter of history, and to some extent a matter of demographics, with some classes for pupils with low incidence disabilities in particular serving more rural areas, where there may not be enough pupils for a category specific special school. Such classes provide an alternative solution to a generic special school.

Other recent reports on specialist provision for different groups of pupils with SEN in Ireland have recommended increases in special class provision especially in areas where specialist provision is lacking (Government of Ireland, 2002, DES, 2005).

### Recommendation 12

- (1) Schools operating full-day special classes should develop and implement policies and plans outlining how the special class relates to other classes and consider options such as part time and/or time related placement.**
- (2) Support services should be provided to all pupils who require them in special classes and inclusion of pupils from the special class in mainstream classes should not be used as a reason to withdraw such services when still required.**

Almost half the special classes in the primary schools (170) reported that pupils were remaining in the class for the entire day. This is surprising given department of education policy and the flexibility of the special class model practised in many schools. In order to fulfil their potential in facilitating inclusion schools should have a policy outlining how the special class interacts with other classes, as directed in Circular 9/99. Any perceived disincentive to this such as withdrawal of external support services should be eliminated.

### Recommendation 13

- (1) The issue of continuity of special classes between primary and post-primary levels needs to be dealt with as a priority and all future special classes should be set up as part of a coherent area plan at primary and post-primary level considering the type of special classes required, age ranges of the pupils and gender.**

### **(2) The criteria for the establishment of a special class at post-primary level need to be explicit.**

Parents in particular reported concern over the lack of continuity of special classes at post-primary level, and the much smaller numbers of classes at this level suggests that in many areas no post-primary class is available.

### **5.4 Issues Relating to Dual Placement**

#### **Recommendation 14**

**Dual placement arrangements should be facilitated where these are seen as being in the best interests of the pupil in order to facilitate either educational or social inclusion. However, there is a need for clarity on how insurance, transport and substitute cover for teachers or SNAs facilitating such arrangements are funded and managed.**

#### **Recommendation 15**

**Dual placement arrangements should be facilitated in the future by co-locating mainstream and special schools.**

There is much discussion in the literature about arrangements about both dual attendance/dual placement and dual enrolment/dual registration in which pupils spend some time at a special school and some at a mainstream school. The difference between these two types of arrangements concerns whether or not the pupil is officially on the roll of two schools simultaneously. Many participants in the current study were unhappy with the current situation in which dual enrolment is not possible, meaning that any dual attendance arrangements are informal, and unresourced.

There is also much discussion in the literature of factors which need to be in place to ensure successful linkages (including dual enrolment) between special and mainstream schools. These include planning at all levels (Fletcher-Campbell and Kington, 2001; Buckley, 2000; Porter et al, 2002; De Paor, 2007) coordination (De Paor, 2007; Walsh and De Paor, 2000) parental support (Gibb, Tunbridge, Chua and Frederickson, 2007; Lambert, 2003) and pupils' ability to adapt to the mores of the two learning environments (McTague, 2005). Similarly there is discussion of factors which inhibit or detract from the success of linkage schemes including particularly the costs in staff time and travelling between schools. Planning and co-ordination were particularly mentioned as important issues by participants in the

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current review. The need for good communication was additionally mentioned as a major factor; this may be subsumed under 'co-ordination' in the literature. All these factors, as is noted in both the literature and by participants in the current study have resource (and therefore cost) implications particularly in terms of staff time.

Pupils' ability to adapt to attendance at two schools was of concern to a minority of adult participants, particularly in relation to pupils with ASD and also to pupils who participated in focus groups. This is an issue that requires to be addressed in relation to any such arrangements in the future.

As in the literature, (Buckley, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell and Kington, 2001; INTO, 2002) some participants in the current study highlighted access to curriculum subjects which may not be available in some special schools as one of the advantages of dual attendance. Issues around curriculum were also highlighted as a potential area of difficulty both by pupils in the current study, and in the literature.

There is, however, a substantial difference between the findings of the current review and the reports in the literature in one critical area, which is that of policy. The current study found much confusion and concern over what was erroneously perceived to be the lack of a clear policy in relation to dual enrolment arrangements; additionally many participants advocated for official policy to be changed to sanction dual enrolment. By contrast the literature reports that policy in England actively encourages arrangements of various types which facilitate part-time attendance by pupils at mainstream and special schools in (Evans and Lunt, 2002). In the researchers' view, the benefits of dual *enrolment* advocated for by the participants could be achieved for Irish pupils with SEN by dual *placement* if the issues of resourcing, insurance and transport were addressed. In England the policy of co-locating new special schools with mainstream schools helps to overcome some of the logistical barriers to dual placement.

### 5.5 Summary

This report consists of two main parts. In Chapter 2, the international literature in relation to the current and future role of special schools and classes in the context of inclusion, was reviewed with particular regard for the Irish context. In Chapter 4, the findings of this research study which investigated the current and future roles of special schools in Ireland are reported. This chapter links the two parts of the review and draws out the implications for the future of provision in Ireland. It includes a number of recommendations, each of which is firmly based on the discussion which precedes it. The research team commends these

recommendations, which are drawn together at the end of the Report for convenience, to the NCSE, for consideration and action.

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# Appendices 1–7

## Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland

By

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NCSE RESEARCH REPORTS NO: 4

For office use only Que. No.

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRINCIPALS OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire. Please answer all questions as fully as possible. Your views and comments are an important part of this process.

**Name of School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address of School:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Roll Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **School Telephone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **School Fax Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

Q. 1 How many pupils are in your school? \_\_\_\_\_

Q. 2 What is the official DES designation of your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 3 What are the **primary** assessed disabilities of the pupils in your school?

Disability	No of Pupils
Physical Disability	
Hearing impairment	
Visual Impairment	
Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems	
Severe Emotional Disturbance	
Mild General Learning Disability	
Moderate General Learning Disability	
Severe /Profound General Learning Disability	
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	
Specific Learning Disability	
Multiple Disabilities *	
Total	

Please check that this total is the same as the total number of pupils in your school (as given in Q. 1).

\_\_\_\_\_

\* Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more low incidence disabilities

## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

- Q. 4 Please provide the specific number of pupils in each of the following age ranges for the school years outlined below:

Age	30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2003	30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2004	30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2005
3 years and under			
4 – 8 years			
9 – 12 years			
13 – 15 years			
16 – 18 years			
19 years and older			

- Q. 5 In terms of any children who are awaiting enrolment in your school, please indicate the number of children who are eligible for enrolment based on an assessment. \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. 6 Number of years since last Psychological Assessment

**Please indicate the approximate number of pupils currently in your school who have had a psychological assessment:**

in the last 3 years \_\_\_\_\_

between 3 and 6 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

more than 6 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

If you have precise information on this, you may wish to record it in the table below:

Number of years since last psychological assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	More than 9
Number of pupils										

- Q. 7 How are pupils grouped in your school e.g. age range, disability etc.

Please describe \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

- Q. 8 In some special schools there are special classes for pupils with disabilities other than that for which the school is designated (for example a school for pupils with moderate GLDs may have special classes for pupils with SPLD or ASDs). Do you have any such classes? YES / NO

How many special classes do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

What is their designation?

Disability	No of Classes
Physical Disability	
Hearing impairment	
Visual Impairment	
Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems	
Severe Emotional Disturbance	
Mild General Learning Disability	
Moderate General Learning Disability	
Severe /Profound General Learning Disability	
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	
Specific Learning Disability	
Multiple Disabilities *	
<b>Total</b>	

- a) How many of these classes, if any, currently have **temporary status**? \_\_\_\_\_
- b) How many of these special classes, if any, are off-site? \_\_\_\_\_
- c) What is the designation of the off-site class(es)? \_\_\_\_\_
- d) What distance from your school are the class(es)? km \_\_\_\_\_ miles \_\_\_\_\_

- Q. 9 If there have been significant changes in your pupil population over the last five years, please describe them

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\* Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of low incidence disabilities

## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

- Q. 10 How many pupils in your school have the following disabilities **in addition** to the primary disability listed in Q. 3 above? Do not list the primary disability for which your school caters.

Disability	No of Pupils
Physical Disability	
Hearing impairment	
Visual Impairment	
Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems	
Severe Emotional Disturbance	
Mild General Learning Disability	
Moderate General Learning Disability	
Severe /Profound General Learning Disability	
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	
Specific Learning Disability	

- Q. 11 Please indicate the number of core staff in your school:

Staff	Number
Teachers funded by DES	
Other teachers	
Special Needs Assistants funded by DES	
Care assistants	
Nurses	
Other (please specify)	

- Q. 12 How many of the teachers listed above

have Restricted Recognition?	
have Provisional Recognition?	
are Unqualified?	

## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

Q. 13 Are services provided by personnel other than those at Q.12 above? If yes, please identify using the table below

Service	Yes or No	Full time (please tick)	Part time (please tick)	If part-time hours per week Number of hours	Provided by (e.g. HSE, NEPS, Service Provider etc)
Educational Psychology	Y / N				
Speech and Language Therapy	Y / N				
Social Work	Y / N				
Occupational Therapy	Y / N				
Physiotherapy	Y / N				
Psychiatry	Y / N				
Clinical Psychology	Y / N				
Counselling	Y / N				
Family Support	Y / N				
Other (Please specify)	Y / N				

a) Which three of the above services do you consider to be most essential for your school (whether or not you currently have these services)?

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b) Are any of the above posts currently vacant? If yes, please specify.

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Q. 14 a) Who is your school patron?

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Q. 14 b) Is the patron a service provider? \_\_\_\_\_

Please give details \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

Q. 15 a) How many of your teaching staff have qualifications in the area of special needs?

Qualifications	Number of staff
Advanced /Graduate /Higher National /Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education	
Graduate/Higher Diploma in Learning Support	
Graduate Certificate in the Education of Pupils with Autism (ASD)	
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Certificate	
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Diploma	
Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN)	
Masters in Education (specialising in Special Education)	
Masters in Autism	
Diploma for Teachers of the Deaf	
Diploma for Teachers of the Blind	
BCABA -Preparatory ABA Course (Trinity College)	
Others:(Please specify)	

Q. 15 b) How many of your teachers have attended short-term courses provided through various in-service providers (i.e. Colleges/Third-Level Institutions, On-line, Special Education Support Service, etc.) in recent years?

Courses	Number of staff	
Induction Courses ( <i>Severe &amp; Profound, Resource Teachers etc</i> )	RT	
	S & P	
	Other	
On-line training courses (Profexcel)	Aut	
	Pos Behav	
	Dys	
	Incl	
	ABA	
	ADHD	
Special Education Support Service (SESS) seminars	Aut	
	Dys	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> -Level	
	Ch. Behav	
	Dyspraxia	
SESS Local Initiatives funded –courses		
TEACCH		
PECS		
Applied Behaviour Analysis ( <i>Beechpark Services, POAC, etc</i> )		
Others ( <i>please specify</i> )		

## Appendix 1: Special School Questionnaire

Q. 16 In Please give details of the curriculum/programmes being carried out in your school.

Programme type	Please tick as appropriate
<b>Primary</b>	
<b>Primary Curriculum</b>	
Are any subjects omitted? Please specify.	
NCCA Draft Curriculum Guidelines for pupils with General Learning Disabilities	
<b>Post-Primary</b>	
Leaving Certificate	
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	
Leaving Certificate Applied	
Junior Certificate	
Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP)	
NCVA/FETAC	
NCCA Draft Curriculum Guidelines for pupils with General Learning Disabilities	
<b>Other</b> please specify	
What other activities do you do during school time (e.g. horse riding, work experience):	

Q. 17 In your view, what is the key role of special schools today?

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Q. 18 How can this role be supported? \_\_\_\_\_

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Q. 19 Some special schools facilitate arrangements whereby certain pupils attend both their school and another school locally, e.g. mainstream, for different parts of the school day/week.

- a) Does your school facilitate dual attendance arrangements? YES / NO
- b) Would your school like to have dual enrolment/attendance arrangements in place YES / NO
- c) What would need to be put in place or what changes would be required to support such an arrangement? Please explain.

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Q. 20 Does your school collaborate with other schools in the provision of services to pupils with special needs e.g. teacher exchange, joint classes (e.g. PE), transition year support projects etc.

YES / NO

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

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**Looking to the future:**

Q. 21 How, in your view, can special schools contribute most to meeting special education needs of children and young people?

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Q. 22 a) What kind of relationship should exist between special schools and mainstream schools?

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Q. 22 b) How can this be achieved?

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Q. 23 Are there other issues you think are important in catering for children with special needs?

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your input is much appreciated.

## Section 1. Special Classes and Students

Q. 1

- a) How many special classes do you have? \_\_\_\_
- b) How many students in total are enrolled in these classes? \_\_\_\_
- c) How many of these special classes, if any, currently have **temporary status**?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d) How many of these special classes, if any, are in temporary accommodation?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 2

- a) Please select the **category** of special class(es) that is / are currently operating in your school, and for each class, indicate the **number** of students catered for. (Use **Class 1, 2 and 3** to indicate the different class(es), and for the rest of the questionnaire use the same number to refer to these classes [ if you select class 1 as catering for students with **MILD General Learning Disabilities**, refer to this class as class 1 for the rest of the questionnaire]).

Disability	Tick here	Number of students	Number of Students	Number of Students
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Mild General Learning Disability (MGLD)				
Moderate General Learning Disability (MODGLD)				
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)				
Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems (ED/BD)				
Other				

If you have ticked the “Other” category, please describe the nature of the special needs of the students in this class

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b) Please state the year when these special class(es) were founded

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Please state the year when these classes were founded			

Q. 3

a) Please tick the most appropriate option in the table below which best describes how the students in the special classes are taught. (Please always refer to the same class as 'class 1' etc in each table, as per Question 2)

Amount of time in special class each day (approximately)	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
The students are together all day, and have the same teacher for the majority of the week			
The students are together all day, and are taught by different teachers, according to the subject being taught			
The students are together all day, some students are withdrawn for additional learning support/resource teaching			
Some students remain in the special class all week, others are integrated into mainstream classes for some subjects			
Most students are included in mainstream classes, but are withdrawn to the special class for teaching in specific subjects			
Students are fully integrated into a mainstream class			
Other			

If you ticked other, please describe the nature of the teaching provision for the class and students

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- b) How many years do students remain in the special classes? (please tick the most appropriate option)

Amount of time students remain in the special classes	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
One year or less			
Two to three years			
The students are never fully integrated into mainstream classes			

- c) How is it decided which students go into the special class?

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Q. 4

- a) Please indicate the year group your special class(es) are attached to (*if the class is not attached to a particular year group, please state “Not Applicable”*), and the age range of the students in each of the special classes

Class	Year Group attached to	Age Range
<i>Example: Class X</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> year</i>	<i>14-16 years old</i>
Class 1		
Class 2		
Class 3		

**b) If you have anything to add, please comment here**

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**c) If your special class(es) exist(s) at junior cycle only, please outline how the students are included in the senior cycle.**

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**Q.5** Please indicate the number of students in your special class(es) who have had a psychological assessment

	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>	<b>Class 3</b>
Number of students with psychological assessments			

**Q. 6**

a) How many students have applied for a place in your special class(es) for September 2008 with a psychological assessment?

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b) How many students have applied for a place in your special class(es) in September 2008, without, or awaiting a psychological assessment?

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Q.7

- a) Please describe the original designation of your special classes (remembering the class number designated in question 2), and describe the range of disabilities currently presenting in these classes

Special Class	Original designation of class	Range of Disabilities currently catered for
<b>Example</b>	MILD General learning disabilities	6 MILD GLD, 1 ASD, 1 MOD GLD
<b>Class 1</b>		
<b>Class 2</b>		
<b>Class 3</b>		

- b) If there are students in the special classes without a psychological assessment, please describe the nature of their special educational needs

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Q.8 If there have been significant changes in the population of your special classes over the last five years, please describe them

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Q.9

- a) How many students in your school as a whole have a psychological assessment?

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- b) How many students are there in your school?

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## Section 2: Teachers and Resources

Q.10

Please indicate the number of core staff in your school:

Staff	Number
Teachers funded by DES / VEC	
Other teachers	
Special Needs Assistants funded by DES	
Care assistants	
Nurses	
Other (please specify)	

- a) How many special needs assistants are attached to your special class?

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- b) Please describe any challenges faced by special needs assistants in your special class(es)

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Q.11

a) How many teachers are directly involved in teaching the special class(es)?

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b) in addition to their subject degree (e.g. BA, BSc), how many teachers involved in teaching the special classes or its students have:

Qualifications	Number of Teachers
H Dip or equivalent	
Qualifications as primary teachers	
Other	

If you have selected other, please describe the nature of the qualification

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c) How many of your special class teachers are ex-quota?

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Q.11 Are services provided by personnel other than those at Q.10 above? If yes, please identify using the table below, by circling as appropriate

Service	Yes or No
Educational Psychology	Y / N
Speech and Language Therapy	Y / N
Social Work	Y / N
Occupational Therapy	Y / N
Physiotherapy	Y / N
Psychiatry	Y / N
Clinical Psychology	Y / N
Counselling	Y / N
Family Support	Y / N
Other	Y / N

If you answered yes for the “other” category, please identify the personnel who provide the services

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Q.12 How many of your teachers teaching the special class teachers and other teaching staff (teachers not teaching the special class) have qualifications in the area of special needs?

Qualifications	Teachers teaching the Special Class	Teachers not teaching the Special Class
Advanced /Graduate /Higher National /Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education		
Graduate/Higher Diploma in Learning Support		
Graduate Certificate in the Education of Students with Autism (ASD), St. Patrick’s College Drumcondra		
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Certificate		
University of Birmingham Autism Course – Diploma		
Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN)		
Masters in Education (specialising in Special Education)		
Masters in Autism		
Diploma for Teachers of the Deaf		
Diploma for Teachers of the Blind		
BCABA -Preparatory ABA Course (Trinity College)		
Others:(Please specify)		

### Section 3. Curriculum

Q.13

- a) Please give details of the curriculum/programmes being carried out in your school, both in mainstream classes, and for each of your special classes.

Programme type	Please tick as appropriate			
	Mainstream classes	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Leaving Certificate				
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme				
Leaving Certificate Applied				
Transition Year				
Junior Certificate				
Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP)				
NCVA/FETAC				
NCCA Curriculum Guidelines for students with General Learning Disabilities				
Primary Curriculum				
Other				

If you ticked “Other”, please specify

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- b) How many students in the special classes have an exemption from Irish?

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- c) How many of the students from the special classes are accessing Irish?

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- d) Are there any subjects specifically targeted for the special classes?  
Yes / No (please circle as appropriate).

If Yes, please describe

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- e) Are there any subjects specifically omitted for the special class? Yes / No  
(please circle as appropriate).

If yes, please describe

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- f) How many students in your class(es) are expected to sit state exams?

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- g) How many students in your special class(es) will be eligible for Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations (RACE) ?

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## Section 4: Open Questions

This section contains more open-ended questions, please take the time to express your views on the topics raised below.

Q.14 Some schools facilitate arrangements whereby certain pupils attend both their school and another school locally, e.g. a special school, for different parts of the school day/week.

- a) Does your school facilitate dual attendance arrangements?  
YES / NO
- b) Would your school like to have dual enrolment/attendance arrangements in place YES / NO
- c) What needs to be put in place or what changes are required to support such an arrangement? Please explain.

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Q.15 Does your school collaborate with other schools in the provision of services to pupils with special needs e.g. teacher exchange, joint classes (e.g. PE), transition year support projects etc. (“other schools” refers to both other mainstream schools AND special schools). Please indicate

YES / NO

Please explain

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Q.16

- a) How can mainstream schools contribute most to meeting the needs of students and young people with SEN?

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- b) Are there particular groups of students with SEN for whom mainstream schools are not meeting their particular needs?

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Q.17

- a) What kind of relationship should exist between mainstream schools and special schools?

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b) How can this be achieved?

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Q.18 There is an argument that special classes in mainstream schools should cater for specified categories of students with Special Education Needs, rather than a full range of Special Educational needs. What is your view on this? (Please tick appropriate box for **each** statement)

Statement	Yes (agree)	No (disagree)
Special classes in mainstream schools should cater for specified categories of students with special educational needs only		
Special classes in mainstream schools should cater for the full range of special educational needs		
There are some students with Special Educational Needs whose needs cannot be catered for within the special class in your school		

Q.19 How effective are special classes in meeting the needs of students with SEN in mainstream schools?

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Q.20 Any other comments you wish to make about special classes?

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your input is much appreciated.

### Stimulus Questions: Children

#### Special schools

##### *Introductions*

Informed assent

Nameplates

Name, age, name of teacher, TV programme, pets etc.

***(In your view, what role do special schools have in providing for pupils with special educational needs today?)***

- Were you in **another school** before you came here?
- Can you tell me a little bit about that school (if relevant)
  
- What do you like doing when you are at school? In the class?
- What were you doing this morning/yesterday in class?
- Do you like the type of work you do in school?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?
- Is there anything you **don't like doing** at school?
  
- Would you like to do any **other type of work** or learn about other things in school?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?
  
- Who **helps** you in school?
- How do you feel about the help that they give you?  
Too much / too little
- Are you happy when you work with this person?
- Do you like your teachers?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?  
What do you like / not like?
  
- Who do you like to play with in school?
- Why do you like hanging out / playing with them?
- (How) do they help you in school?
- Do you hang out with the same friends at home?  
Why?

*(What are your views on the potential linkages between special and mainstream schools in the future?)*

- Can you remember any **other teachers visiting your class**?
- How did you feel when the other teachers were in your class?
- Do you think that your teachers would be able to help teachers from other schools be good teachers?
  
- Ask first do you like this school?
- Would you like to be in a **different school**?  
Why?
- Would you like if you could go to **two different schools** – maybe here for some things and a different school to do other things? Relate back to subjects of interest they have mentioned.
  
- What do you think might make this hard for you?

### Manistream schools

#### *Introduction*

Informed assent

Nameplates

Name, age, name of teacher, TV programme, pets etc.

***(In your view, what role do special schools have in providing for pupils with special educational needs today?)***

- Were you in **another school** before you came here? (PP or from background)
- Can you tell me a little bit about that school (if relevant)
  
- Who do you like to **play/hang out** with in school?
- Why do you like playing/hanging out with them?
- Do you hang out with the same friends at home?  
Why?
  
- What do you like doing when you are at school? In the class?
- What were you doing this morning/yesterday in class?
- Do you like the work you do in school?
- Can you tell me a little more about this?
- Is there anything you **don't like** doing at school?
  
- Do you work in any other teacher's class?
- Can you tell me a little more about this?

***(There are some students in your school who go to a lot of different teachers' classes and then go to one teacher who will help them with their maths or reading.)***

- Would you like to work like that or do you prefer staying in (name of class teacher)'s class for most of the day?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?
  
- Would you like to do any **other type of work** or learn about other things in school?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?

- Who **helps** you in school?
- How do you feel about the help that they give you?  
Too much / too little
- Are you happy when you work with this person?
- Do you like your teachers?  
Can you tell me a little more about this?  
What do you like / not like?
- Do the children in this school help each other with their work?
- Do you help others?
- Do they help you?

***(What are your views on the potential linkages between special and mainstream schools in the future?)***

- Can you remember any **other teachers** visiting your class?
- How did you feel when the other teachers were in your class?
- Do you think that your teachers would be able to help teachers from other schools be good teachers?
  
- Do you like this school?
- Would you like to be in a **different** school?  
Why?
- Would you like if you could go to two different schools – maybe here for some things and a different school to do other things? Relate back to subjects of interest they have mentioned.
  
- What do you think might make this hard for you?
  
- Anything else you would like to say?

Summary of main points by moderator

**Useful background information on the children**

Name of student	
Name of main teacher	
Name of SNA(s)	
Is the child integrated into any mainstream classes	

### Focus Groups: Stimulus Questions Adults

#### Special schools

- In your view, what role do special schools have in providing for pupils with special educational needs today?
- How can the potential of special schools be optimised?
- Do you feel special schools should cater for specified categories of special needs or a broader/full range of special needs?
- What are the implications of each of these positions?
- There has been some discussion about the establishment of centres of excellence – what are your views on this?

#### Mainstream schools

- In your opinion, how effective are special classes in mainstream schools in providing for pupils with special educational needs with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education?
- How can this role be supported?
- Should special classes in mainstream schools cater for specified categories of students with special educational needs, rather than a full range of special educational needs?
- Should special classes operate differently to a resource teacher model – in what ways?
- How, in your view, can mainstream schools contribute most to meeting the special educational needs of children and young people?
- Are there particular groups of students with special educational needs for whom mainstream schools are not meeting their needs? Can their needs be met in mainstream schools?

#### Linkages

- What are your views on the potential linkages between special and mainstream schools in the future?
- What are the barriers/obstacles to linkages?
- What supports need to be put in place to facilitate dual enrolment?
- Should special schools be used/developed as centres of excellence or should more equal partnerships between schools be developed perhaps as part of a cluster of expertise?

- What are the barriers to achieving this?
- What supports/structures are needed to overcome these **barriers**?

Focus group research has been defined as 'a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher' (Morgan, 1996, p. 130)

Approximate length of time for focus group discussion: (1–1½ hours)

1. Give a copy of **plain language statement** to each student and read aloud. Ask students to sign consent forms in presence of a familiar adult (eg special needs assistant). Assure students that this adult will be nearby if they wish to withdraw from the study at any stage.
2. Remind students of the rules of working in a group (eg. listening to others, taking turns). Assure them that everyone will have an opportunity to express their views. Explain that the discussion will last until the bell rings for break/sos.
3. **Icebreakers:**
  - Introduce audio equipment and explain that the discussion is being recorded as we need to have an accurate record of what is said.
  - Introductions (name, age, family, pets, transport to school, where they live etc)
  - Students write names on nameplates.
4. **Present the stimulus** questions which have been modified to suit needs of students (attached).
5. Use **visual** stimuli (eg. pictures of different types of schools, subjects etc) when possible to engage and motivate students.
6. **Audiotape** focus group discussion (using two/three tape recorders).
7. Encourage all students to participate and to respect other participants' views.
8. While the discussion is taking place, the **observer** will keep a record of the main issues and summarise these for the moderator. The observer will also monitor the audio equipment, act as timekeeper and write field notes if necessary.
9. Moderator feeds back the summary to students.
10. Thank students and conclude discussion.
11. Store **data** (tapes and comment sheets) securely.

## Anonymised Consent Letter for Board of Management

**ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA**  
(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department  
Telephone: +353-1-8842031  
Fax: +353-1-8842294



Chairperson

Board of Management

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Dear Chairperson,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received funding from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to carry out a study of the role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs. More specifically, the review will examine the potential for special schools and mainstream primary and post-primary schools to pool their expertise. In addition, the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs, with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education, will be a focus of the review.

We have already gathered a lot of information from a variety of sources and the next phase of the research involves case studies using multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation and document analysis). Three educational sites where there is evidence of work in relation to the development of the role of special schools and classes, are being selected for these case studies. Having consulted with various relevant agencies and people in the field with regard to identifying schools that display evidence of good practice, your school was highly recommended.

Therefore, we are now seeking permission of the Board of Management to progress with the case study aspect of the study. We have already been in contact with the principal, X, who has kindly agreed to be involved. Participation will involve observation of two pupils from your school over a one or two day period, followed up by interviews with their principal, teachers, special needs assistants, parents, the pupils themselves and any other professionals involved with these pupils. The venue for the case study will be the school. Document analysis will also be conducted, in consultation with the principal. Participation in this research study by individual members of the school community will be on a voluntary basis. Each individual will be free to choose whether or not to participate, and individuals will be free to withdraw their consent at any time.

Your school and every member of the school community will be given a pseudonym to help preserve anonymity and within the limitations of the law, confidentiality will be respected at all times. Every effort will be taken to ensure that neither your school nor any individual will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the research. However, in view of the fact that the sample is small, anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

There is no anticipated perceived risk to the school or its members as a result of participation in this research study. It is hoped that participation in the study will provide schools with an opportunity to reflect on their policy and practice in relation to their role in the current educational context. It will also provide an opportunity for your school to “showcase” the good practice in which you are already involved. Furthermore, recommendations from the study will benefit other schools in the system by informing decisions relating to the future role of special schools and special classes in Ireland. A summary of the findings will be sent to all participating schools.

If you give permission for your school to participate in the study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to X. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jean Ware

Director of Special Education

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**Research: The role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland**

**Consent Form**

Board of Management

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*We have read about the study on the role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland and we understand what is involved.*

**We give consent to members of our school community to participate in this study which will be conducted by staff of the Special Education Department, St Patrick’s College.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson of Board of Management**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Anonymised Consent Letter for Parents

**ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA**  
(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department

Telephone: +353-1-8842031

Fax: +353-1-8842294



6<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Dear Parents,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received money from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to carry out a study of how special schools and special classes operate. Some children with special educational needs attend special schools or special classes in ordinary mainstream schools. We are especially interested in how special schools and special classes work to support the wide range of children with special educational needs. We are also interested in how special schools and special classes make links with mainstream schools.

The Board of Management has given us permission to work with your child's school. We have been in contact with the principal, X and we are now asking you to give consent for your child to take part in this study. If you allow your child to take part, he/she will be observed in his/her class and in the school and then interviewed by us. We would also like to hear your views and so we would appreciate it if we could also interview you as part of the study.

The interview will take place at your child's school on a date and time agreed with you and the principal and will take approximately one hour. The discussion will be audio-taped for accuracy.

It is entirely up to you whether or not to agree to take part in the study. You are free to opt in or out at any time. If you do not want to take part it will make no difference to how your child is treated in school. If you do agree, we will do everything possible to make sure that the study is confidential. That means that we will not use your real name or the real name of the school during the study or later when we are writing up the results of the study. We do not believe that you will come to any harm by taking part in the study. Instead, we hope that your child's school will learn a lot by participating and that your child and other children will be helped by what we learn.

If you are willing to take part in the study, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to the principal, X. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jean Ware'.

Dr Jean Ware

Director of Special Education

**Consent Form (Parents)**

I have read about the study on the ‘Review of the Role and Operation of Special Schools and Special Classes’. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study. I understand what is involved.

I am willing to take part in the study. Yes  No

I am willing to give permission for my child to take part in the study. Yes  No

Name of Child (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent (print name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Anonymised Consent Letter for Staff

**ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA**  
(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department

Telephone: +353-1-8842031

Fax: +353-1-8842294



4<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Dear Staff Member,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College, Dublin, has received funding from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in Ireland to carry out a study of the role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs. More specifically, the review will examine the potential for special schools and mainstream primary and post-primary schools to pool their expertise. In addition, the role of special classes in mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs, with particular regard to the principle of inclusive education, will be a focus of the review.

We have already conducted much of our research in Ireland. The next phase of the research involves case studies using multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation and data analysis). Three educational sites, one of which is to be outside of Ireland, where there is evidence of practice in relation to the development of the role of special schools and classes, are being selected for these case studies. Having consulted with various relevant agencies and people in the field with regard to identifying schools that display evidence of good practice, your school was highly recommended.

Therefore, we are now seeking your permission to progress with this aspect of the study. We have already been in contact with the Governing Body and with X, who have kindly agreed to be involved. Participation will involve observation of two pupils from your school over a one or two day period, followed up by interviews with their head and deputy head teachers, class teachers, teaching assistants, parents, the pupils themselves and any other professionals involved with these pupils. The venue for the case study will be the school. Document analysis will also be conducted, in consultation with the head teacher, unit and team managers. Participation in this research study by individual members of the school community will be on a voluntary basis. Each individual will be free to choose whether or not to participate, and individuals will be free to withdraw their consent at any time.

Your school and every member of the school community will be given a pseudonym to help preserve anonymity and within the limitations of the law, confidentiality will be respected at all times. Every effort will be taken to ensure that neither your school nor any individual will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the research. However, in view of the fact that the sample is small, anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

There is no anticipated perceived risk to the school or its members as a result of participation in this research study. It is hoped that participation in the study will provide schools with an opportunity to reflect on their policy and practice in relation to their role in the current educational context. It will also provide an opportunity for your school to "showcase" the good practice in which you are already involved. Furthermore, recommendations from the study will benefit the Irish educational system by informing decisions relating to the future role of special schools and special classes in Ireland. A summary of the findings will be sent to your school.

If you give your permission to participate in the study, please complete the attached consent form and we could collect it from X. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jean Ware

Director of Special Education

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**Research: The role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland**

**Consent Form**

*I have read about the study on the role and operation of special schools and special classes in Ireland and I understand what is involved.*

**I give my consent to participate in this study which will be conducted by staff of the Special Education Department, St Patrick's College, Dublin, Ireland.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 6: Submissions

List of organisations for which letters calling for submissions were sent from, and organisations from which submissions were received

Organisation	Acronym	Submissions Received
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	INTO	Received
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland	ASTI	-
Teachers' Union of Ireland	TUI	-
Primary Principals and Deputy-Principals	IPPN	-
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals	NAPD	Received
Irish Learning Support Teachers' Organisation	ILSA	-
Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education	IATSE	-
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment	NCCA	-
Special Education Support Services	SESS	-
National Disability Authority	NDA	-
Centre for Excellence in Universal Design	CEUD	-
Dochas		-
The Equality Authority		-
National Educational Psychological Services	NEPS	-
Second Level Support Service	SLSS	Received
School Development Planning Initiative	SDPI	-
Irish Vocational Education Association	IVEA	-
Further Education and Training Awards Council	FETAC	-
National Centre for Guidance in Education	NCGE	-
National Education Welfare Board	NEWB	-
National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education Schools	NABMSE	Received
Catholic Primary School Management Association	CPSMA	-
Church of Ireland Board of Education		-
Joint Managerial Body for Secondary Schools, Ireland	JMB	-

## Appendix 6: Submissions

Organisation	Acronym	Submissions Received
The Secondary Education Committee (Protestant Schools)		-
National Parents Council	NPC	-
National Parents Council (Post Primary)	NPCPP	-
	IMPACT	Received (SNA branch)
Teaching Council		-
Educate Together		-
Foras Patrúnachta na Scoileanna Lan Ghaeilge		-
St. Patrick's College		-
Froebel College of Education		-
Marino Institute of Education		-
The Church of Ireland College of Education		-
Hibernia College		-
Department of Education & Professional Studies	University of Limerick	-
St. Angela's College		-
Department of Education		-
University College Cork	UCC	-
Education Department		-
Education Department,	NUI	-
Education House		-
National University of Ireland	NUI	-
School of Education and Lifelong Learning		-
University College Dublin	UCD	-
Education Studies	DCU	-
School of Education		-
City of Dublin	VEC	-
Irish Nurses' Organisation	INO	-
Youth Reach		-
Youth Encounter Project Schools		-
Inspectorate		-
Ombudsman for Children		Received
Union of Secondary Students	USS	-

## Appendix 6: Submissions

Organisation	Acronym	Submissions Received
Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education		Received
Centre for Independent Living		-
HSE Head Office		-
School Development Planning Support		Received
Home School Liaison Service		-
Leadership Development for Schools		-
Primary Curriculum Support Programme		-
Curriculum Development Unit		-
Co Action West Cork		-
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools	ACCS	-
National Learning Network, Disability Support Service		Received
Children's Act Advisory Board		-
Visiting Teacher Service		-
Enable Ireland		-
National Institute for Intellectual Disability	NIID	-
Inclusion Ireland – National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability		Received (plus personal submission from the president)
Down Syndrome Ireland		-
National Federation of Voluntary Bodies		Received
HADD Family Support Group		Received
Dyslexia Association of Ireland		Received
Conference of Religious of Ireland	CORI	-
The Irish Society for Autism		Received
Aspire – The Aspergers Syndrome Association of Ireland		Received
Dyspraxia Association of Ireland		-
Principals' Support Network for Pupils with a Mild General Learning Difficulty		-
Principals' Support Network for Pupils with a Moderate/Severe GLD		Received
Principals' Support Network for Pupils with a Physical Disability		Received
St. John of God Services		-

## Appendix 6: Submissions

Organisation	Acronym	Submissions Received
Parents		Unnamed parents x 3
Students		Unnamed students x 1
Teachers		Unnamed teachers x 6
Principals		Unnamed principals x 3
Other submitters		Unnamed submitter x 1
		Named schools x 7
		Named teacher x 1
		South Dublin County Council
		Irish Primary Principals Network
		Catholic Institute for Deaf People / The Irish Deaf Society / Deaf Hear
		Irish sign-language co-ordinator, St Joseph's

### **Data Collection, Storage and Analysis Methods for Review of Special Schools and special Classes Research Project**

#### **Data sources**

The study endeavoured to collect as rich and varied data set as possible. Data was collected by the following means:

- Quantitative questionnaire sent to over 235 primary schools with special classes
- Qualitative open-ended questions included in quantitative survey.
- Case study (semi-structured interviews conducted with 21 stakeholders in special schools including Teachers, Principals, Deputy Principals, Students, Special Needs Assistants (SNA's) Chairs of Board of Management, Nurses and Mothers
- One pilot study focus groups
- Three focus groups with twenty five SNA's
- Six focus groups with 35 students
- Three focus groups with twenty nine teachers
- Six focus groups with thirty parents
- Three focus groups with twenty five principals
- Sixty three qualitative questionnaires returned from post primary schools
- Two hundred and thirty six qualitative questionnaires returned from primary schools
- Ninety four qualitative questionnaires returned from special schools
- Forty nine submissions from interested parties.
- Audio recordings of all source interviews and focus groups
- Field notes from researchers
- Observations from case studies
- School documents
- Demographics recorded against all participant organisations and individuals

#### **Research question (focus of enquiry)**

Consideration of the four research questions led to the development of topic guides for use during the in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

#### **Database compilation**

The data, once collected, was imported into a software product known as NVivo. This package is a specialist software tool developed solely as a computer aided

qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS) and is recognised globally as a reputable tool for managing and supporting this type of analytical work. Developed by Professor Lyn Richards (Latrobe University, Melbourne) and her company QSR International, NVivo is now standard software in most universities in Ireland. NVivo has two principal benefits. These are:

- Efficiency
- Transparency

### ***Efficiency***

NVivo offers efficiency, because it allows the research team the ability to explore avenues of enquiry which would not be possible (given normal time constraints) to conduct in a manual system. Such efficiencies allow the research team to rule out as well as rule in propositions or emerging hypotheses throughout the analytical process. In addition, NVivo allows for the automation of many administrative tasks associated with qualitative data analysis which frees the researchers' time thereby facilitating reflection on the interpretive aspects of the data.

### ***Transparency***

Qualitative researchers are sometimes accused of being ad-hoc, subjective, unscientific or undisciplined in their approach to analysing data. NVivo allows for maintaining a clear audit trail to dispel such concerns. All process and stages of coding are tracked in such a way as to facilitate a clear demonstration of the rigorous approach taken in conducting the analysis.

### **Database Design**

The database was designed to optimise the data and was created with such architecture so that it would be robust and thus facilitate a thorough interrogation especially for unforeseen questions which might arise during the analytical process.

### **Data Importation**

All sources were transcribed and imported into NVivo. Demographic details were also imported. Data was organised into a folder hierarchy by data type (for example, focus groups or questionnaires) so as to track their source. NVivo stores data in 'nodes' which are repositories for themes and categories and one such node type is a case node which is a single file which stores each participant's contribution from any source be it their questionnaire or their individual contributions to a focus

group. These case nodes, once populated, are then physically linked to the demographics tables and their returns from the quantitative survey which facilitate integration between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research data. Thus, intangibles such as attitude and beliefs (for example, data coded in a node which hosts all references to expertise) can be intersected with tangibles such as 'participant type' in order to ascertain the various perspectives on 'expertise' which facilitates comprehensive analyses in order to help the researcher understand the phenomenon under scrutiny. shows the relationship in the database between the contents of a case node (what participants said) and the demographic tables (who they are).

### **Linking**

NVivo is a type of database known as a 'relational database'. This type of database facilitates linking all relevant data generated during the data gathering and importation process. The following data types were formally linked in the database:

- Sources
- Field Notes and Observations
- Memos
- Digital Data

### **Field notes and observations**

Observations from the field were fully integrated with the main data set. For example, during one case study, the researcher noted elements around the classroom which added to the peaceful, yet well organised atmosphere of the class. This observation was then embedded in the text and tracked throughout the study as anywhere this piece of text was coded to also carried the observation.

### **Memos**

Memos served three purposes in this study. These were:

- Giving Context to Sources
- Generating Proposition Statements
- Recording and sharing researchers' thoughts among the team.

### ***Giving context to sources***

Memos were used to give context to an entire source such as an interview or focus group. This was done to demonstrate that the relationship between key

observations and field notes were linked by memos where such memos referred to the source as a whole rather than a specific moment in the interview.

### ***Generating summary statements***

Memos were used to raise and track summary statements as part of the analytical process. This process is set out under coding framework; Phase 5 of the coding process.

### ***Recording and sharing researchers' thoughts among the team***

Memos were used to record researchers' thoughts and share them among the other members of the research team. For example, the theme 'centre of excellence' emerged as nodes under several categories during the enquiry. One such memo clearly shares one researcher's thoughts on this recurring theme.

### **Digital data**

All audio recordings were imported into the database and linked at relevant points to the transcripts to offer a more holistic view of the data where the audio data added richness to the meaning. Audio was coded directly to nodes as appropriate.

### **Coding framework**

Nodes hold data which has been coded from sources. All nodes created in the study were defined by the researcher for clarity and to aid the research supervision process and to test for coding consistency. As there were multiple coders, inter-rater reliability testing was conducted and benchmarked at 80% agreement.

Five types of nodes were used to analyse the data. These were:

- Free Nodes
- Tree nodes
- Case nodes
- Relationship nodes
- Matrix nodes

### ***Free nodes***

Free nodes are stand alone repository used for broad, thematic, participant driven coding known as themes.

### ***Tree nodes***

Tree nodes are similar to free nodes with two exceptions:

- They can have relationships with other nodes and thus may be grouped into categories of themes.
- They can have 'children' and thereby have a hierarchy imposed on them.

### ***Case nodes***

Case Nodes were used to generate a case file which holds all data related to an individual participant and which is physically linked to their demographic details and results of quantitative survey. The case node is designed for tracking participants throughout the study.

### ***Relationship nodes***

Relationship nodes were used to formally log relationships across and between disparate themes and categories. For example, the theme 'centre of excellence' recurred under several categories.

### ***Matrix nodes***

Matrix nodes were used to intersect disparate nodes with cases and demographics. They were also used to analyse qualitative coding. For example, how often something was raised prompted or unprompted (number of coding references) or how animated a person was about something (number of words coded).

### **Application of nodes in this study**

A coding framework was used to apply the five types of nodes as detailed above. The guidelines for this coding methodology were drawn up by the project leader and agreed at several team meetings.

The coding framework involved seven stages of coding. These were:

Phase 1: broad coding

Phase 2: grouping themes into categories

Phase 3: coding X perspective

Phase 4: coding on / imposing a hierarchy

Phase 5: generating summary statements using memos

Phase 6: testing summary statements using queries & distilling data

Phase 7: synthesising summary statements and generating an outcome statement.

### ***Phase 1: broad coding***

Reading through the qualitative data chronologically and generating broad participant driven categories (free nodes) from the data up with no references to the research question.

### ***Phase 2: grouping themes into categories***

Introducing the research question and creating categories (tree nodes) and grouping the categories generated in phase 1 logically under the relevant theme from the research question. Some categories went to more than one theme while some were superfluous to the enquiry and were distilled at this stage of the analysis.

### ***Phase 3: coding by perspective***

Each of the major themes of the study was then split down by the participant perspectives. This process was automated using the demographic tables. These new nodes now contained the data coded under each category and theme exclusive to each participant perspective

### ***Phase 4: 'coding on' imposing a hierarchy***

The major themes developed and populated in phases two and three were 'coded on' into their constituent parts. For example, 'Dual Enrolment' was coded on to its 'children'. These 'children' in this example are weighted according to coding references. These references demonstrate their importance to the participants by virtue of the number times each topic was raised. This process resulted in a 'hierarchical coding tree', which catalogued the emergent issues for the participants under scrutiny.

### ***Phase 5: generating summary statements using memos:***

This phase of analysis involved the generating of memos which were designed to summarise what the researchers' believed, at that point of the analytical process, were a true representation of the combined attitudes and beliefs of study participants under each of the research questions coded to date.

### ***Phase 6: testing summary statements using queries and distilling data:***

Phase 6 involved testing the summary statements against the data for supporting 'evidence' which backs up the empirical findings recorded in the memos. Some of the supporting data lay in existing nodes, some however, involved further

interrogation of the data as complexities of some findings required raising questions by means of database queries (cross tabular) where the supporting evidence lay across and between themes in the coding tree. Frequently, such queries resulted in generating new nodes as data was gathered from disparate existing nodes in order to test a stated belief in a given summary statement. For example, a summary statement which claimed that special school staff were frustrated by the ad-hoc nature of sharing expertise with main stream schools and that there was not enough recognition of the fact that these teachers also had full time-tables of their own. It further asserted that special school staff felt that their cooperation was often taken for granted. The memo in question referred to a node (coded theme) which had been named 'Sharing Expertise'. A Boolean query looking at the demographics behind the node revealed that the assertion that these views were predominately coming from staff in special schools was upheld and supported by the data. This process was developed to serve as a 'rule for inclusion' to distil data down to the core relevant supporting nodes and to validate each and every finding as being supported in the data.

### ***Phase 7: synthesising summary statements and generating an outcome statement***

Phase 7 involved synthesising the data into a coherent, well supported outcome statement. As some findings transcend or intersect with other major emergent themes, a synthesising process rather than a simple merging of the summary statements generated in phase 6 was used to cohere meanings embedded in the data into a final outcome statement.

### **Additional tools**

In support of the coding framework as outlined, other database tools were used to enhance understanding of the data during the various stages of analysis. These included:

- Conceptual Mapping
- Database Queries
- Database Reports
- Data Sub-sets

### ***Conceptual mapping***

Conceptual mapping was aided by a database tool known as a modeller. This tool allows the researcher to use mind mapping techniques to explore meanings at

different stages of analysis and may also be used to visually demonstrate processes such as stages of coding or concepts emerging from the study.

### ***Database queries***

Data interrogation involved using standard database logic to ask questions of the data. This process is known as ‘running queries’ Such database queries include:

- Text Searches
- Boolean Queries
- Compound Queries
- Coding Frequency Queries
- Coding Comparison Queries

### *Text searches and validation*

A text search finds a ‘character string’ (for example, the pattern of letters that make up a word or series of words) and codes the finds to a node or, alternatively, makes a set of the finds (for example, a set of people who have used a particular phrase or expression). This tool allows the researcher to explore the context in which people used certain key words or phrases. **All text searches were validated.** Validation involves going through the text references found by a query and ‘**uncoding**’ incorrect context. It further involves re-reading relevant transcripts to find references or units of meaning where the particular language used in the search was not used by the participant but where the meaning is the same.

For example, a node called ‘special classes’ had 1511 references from 112 participants. This node was qualitatively ‘coded on’ into its constituent parts. Part of that process involved a text search on data already coded to ‘special classes’ using the term ‘inclusive’ to find the context in which people talk about inclusivity when referring to ‘special classes’. This query also yielded an analysis of who, amongst the 112 people who raised special classes, were most concerned with inclusivity.

### *Boolean queries*

A ‘Boolean Query’ is a multi-criteria search using an ‘operator’ (for example, ‘and’ or ‘greater than’ or ‘near’) to gather or distil data from the transcripts or audio files. For example, a boolean query looking for content coded to the node ‘curriculum and assessment’ ‘AND’ where the case attribute equals a certain value (parent for example) yields a table showing the breakdown of participant types who are concerned about ‘curriculum and assessment’.

### *Compound queries*

Compound queries were used to further test proposition statements. For example, a compound query seeking data coded to the node 'role of special school' where the surrounding text is coded to hearing impaired (HI) produced a set of child nodes offering a breakdown of categories of special educational needs (categories of SEN).

### *Coding frequency queries*

Coding frequency queries were used to test emergent patterns in the coding itself where such patterns could not be obvious to the coder during the coding process whilst the researcher is immersed in line by line detailed coding. Such coding frequency queries were used to establish how often a topic arose compared to how much time the same topic took up during the interviews and focus groups. For example, one research question focuses on the role of the special school. The 'coding on' process identified specific concerns of study participants regarding the role of special schools. The coding frequency query was then used to consider two aspects of this data sub-set. These two aspects were:

1. How often participants raised these issue to give a general weighting of the concerns?
2. How much time did each topic take up to establish how animated people were on each topic?

These weightings change when looked at from both perspectives as Table 1 demonstrates:

**Table 1: Change of weighting of participants' concerns**

A : Role of Special School	Coding References	B : Role of Special School	Volume of Text Coded
6: continuing role	299	6: continuing role	20039
9: mainstream role	180	1: centre of excellence	10426
1: centre of excellence	104	7: role other	7123
8: resource centre	76	9: mainstream role	6956
7: role other	73	8: resource centre	4686
3: safe haven	44	3: safe haven	4514
4: alternative curriculum	31	4: alternative curriculum	2490
5: last resort	24	5: last resort	1990
2: dumping ground	11	2: dumping ground	863

*Coding comparison queries*

Coding comparison queries allow for interrogation of the data for coding consistency. As there were multiple coders working on the data, inter-rater reliability testing was conducted to ensure that coders' understanding of the definitions of the nodes they were coding to were clear and consistent. A coding comparison query examines the coding patterns of several coders against a given set of nodes and test for 'agreement'. A benchmark of 80% was set by the project leader as a minimum for agreement levels for this study.

**Database reports**

The qualitative database used in this study was a dynamic database and the changes occurring throughout the process were often recorded by deploying database reports which acted as a snapshot in time for recording processes for audit trail purposes.

**Database sub-sets**

Sub sets were used in the study to divide parts of the database for the purposes of running queries and conducting comparative analysis. A query which produces a node based on a given criteria is then amended to be re-run to produce a second set of results which can then be compared. For example, during the coding on by perspective stage of coding, nodes were subdivided into sets using the demographic tables to compare and contrast differing perspectives on the same theme.

