Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes

An exploration of the experiences of young pupils in primary school

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An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes

Foreword

The NCSE is delighted to publish this research on how young primary school pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes are accessing the curriculum. The NCSE has a statutory role to carry out research in the area of special education, in order to help build an evidence base to support its work. The NCSE also has a statutory responsibility to provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on special education matters, and to disseminate information on best practice to parents and stakeholders.

The NCSE research programme has a very valuable contribution to make to this work. Reports from the programme, including this one, form one key source of evidence that will assist the NCSE to develop policy advice to the Minister. Research reports also provide valuable insights which will help inform NCSE efforts to improve the delivery of services, as well as a valuable source of information on best practice for schools, parents and other relevant stakeholders.

This report focuses on how young primary school pupils with a range of special educational needs in mainstream classes are accessing the curriculum. Based on a combination of classroom observations, and interviews with pupils, teachers, parents and SNAs, the study provides useful insights into what is happening in the classroom, how the curriculum is being delivered and how pupils are engaging with it.

Drawing on this, the authors identify factors that they consider facilitate or impede access to the curriculum for these pupils. The authors also make a number of recommendations that they consider could potentially improve access to the curriculum for pupils. These recommendations deal with issues such as collaboration between practitioners to support pupils, continuous professional development and the provision of in-class support.

This report should be of great interest to parents as well as practitioners, policy makers and all those who are working to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Teresa Griffin,
Chief Executive Officer

Acknowledgements

Key terms

Continuous professional development, co-ordination, curriculum access, differentiation, inclusion, initial teacher training, mainstream primary schools, special educational needs, special needs assistants, time for collaboration.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
ABA	Applied behaviour analysis
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – Symptoms include inattention, difficulties with sustained attention, difficulties in organisation, difficulties in following directions, forgetfulness, as well as hyperactive symptoms including fidgeting and impulsivity.
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder – Autism is a disability that affects the normal development of the brain in areas of social interaction and communication. The first signs of autism usually appear as developmental delays before the age of three. Autism is described as a 'spectrum' disorder. This means that the symptoms and characteristics of autism can present themselves in a wide variety of combinations and can range from mild to severe.
AT	Assistive technology – Assistive technology is a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities and includes the process used in selecting, locating and using them. AT promotes greater independence by enabling people to perform tasks that they would otherwise be unable to accomplish, or have great difficulty accomplishing.
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEd	Bachelor of Education
Cochlear implant	A device with both externally worn and surgically implanted parts that provides electrical stimulation to the hearing nerve endings (neurons) in the inner ear. The electrical stimulation of nerve endings is interpreted by the brain as sound. These can provide access to sound frequencies (or pitches) for which a hearing aid would be ineffective for persons with severe/profound hearing loss.
CPD	Continuous professional development
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau (Britain)
DCFS	Department for Children, Families and Schools (England), previously known as DfES (Department for Education and Schools).
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – The DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support, in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.
DES	Department of Education and Skills (previously Science)
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
Dynavox	Portable dynamic display device with synthesised speech and digitised speech for aiding children to speak and engage in lessons.
Dyslexia	A learning disability that is manifested by difficulties in reading and spelling. It is not necessarily associated with hearing loss or with cognitive disabilities but is assumed to be neurological in origin.
Dyspraxia	Students diagnosed with dyspraxia find it exceptionally difficult to acquire the movement skills that are expected of them in everyday life and are often referred to as 'clumsy'. Such students do not suffer from any known neurological condition and their difficulties are not

explicable in terms of a generalised delay in development. Students may have difficulty co-ordinating their movements, perceptions and thoughts. They exhibit difficulty with everyday tasks such as buttoning shirts and using a knife and fork and may confuse left and right. Dyspraxia can also effect speech production, making the child's speech difficult to comprehend.

EDBP   Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems. In the Irish context, the DES defines emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems as follows for resource allocation purposes: 'Such pupils are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school' (see DES Special Education, Circular 02/05). This definition of the term is used in this report.

EdD   Doctor of Education

EPPI-Centre   The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London).

EPSEN   Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act

FETAC   Further Education and Training Awards Council

GAM   General allocation model. The general allocation model within the Irish education system provides additional teaching resources to assist schools in making appropriate provision for pupils who are eligible for learning-support teaching, pupils with mild speech and language difficulties, pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD and pupils who have special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities.

GLD   General learning disability

Grad Dip   Graduate Diploma

HI   Hearing impairment. In the Irish context, the DES defines hearing impairment as follows for resource allocation purposes: 'Such pupils have a hearing disability that is so serious to impair significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech, thus preventing them from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. The great majority of them have been prescribed hearing aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher' (see DES Special Education Circular 02/05). This is the definition of the term as used in this report.

HMI   Her Majesty's Inspectorate

ICEPE   Institute of Child Education and Psychology (Europe)

ICT   Information and communication technologies

IDEIA   Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

IEP   Individual education plan

Mild GLD   Mild general learning disability. In the Irish context, the DES defines mild general learning disabilities as follows: 'Students with mild general learning disabilities have significantly below-average general intellectual functioning. This is reflected in a slow rate of maturation, reduced learning capacity and inadequate social adjustment. Students' cognitive functioning ranges from IQ 50 to

	70 on standardised IQ tests' (Department of Education, 1993).
Moderate GLD	Moderate general learning disability. In the Irish context, the DES defines moderate general learning disability, for the purposes of resource allocation, as follows: 'A student with a moderate general learning disability is likely to display significant delay in reaching developmental milestones. These students may have impaired development and learning ability in respect of basic literacy and numeracy, language and communication, mobility and leisure skills, motor co-ordination and social and personal development. The pupil's full-scale IQ score will have been assessed in the range 35–49' (Department of Education, 1993).
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NFER	The National Foundation for Educational Research
Numicon	Numicon is a multi-sensory maths teaching programme using Numicon maths shapes in a series of practical teaching activities.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education (England)
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Programme
PE	Physical education
PGCE	Post-graduate Certificate in Education
PD	Physical disability. In the Irish context the DES defines physical disability as follows: 'Such children have permanent or protracted disabilities arising from conditions such as congenital deformities, spina bifida, dyspraxia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones or severe accidental injury. Because of the impairment of their physical function, they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities. Many require the use of a wheelchair, a mobility or seating aid or other technological support. They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation, as for example, in the case of severe dyspraxia for resource allocation purposes' (see DES Special Education Circular 02/05). This definition of the term is used in this report.
Precision teaching	Precision teaching is a method of helping students develop fluency or automaticity in the performance of academic skills. Precision teaching involves being aware of the relationship between teaching and learning, measuring student performance regularly and frequently and analysing the measurements to develop instructional and motivational strategies.
Provision mapping	An at-a-glance way of showing the range of provision the school makes for children with additional needs, through additional staffing or peer support. Important aspects of the provision map include that it has to be costed to be effective, it needs to be maintained annually, as well as reviewed and revised termly, based on the shifting needs of the SEN pupil population.
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
SEN	Special educational needs

SENCO	Special educational needs co-ordinator – The member of staff who is responsible for co-ordinating special needs provision within a school in England.
SENO	Special educational needs organiser – SENOs are the local contact points for parents of children with disabilities. Their role is to assist parents in securing education services for their children in their journey through the education system. SENOs are assigned responsibility for schools within a particular geographical area. They will work closely with all stakeholders, including children, parents, schools and the health services in working to provide a better education service.
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESE	Social, environmental and scientific education
SESS	Special Education Support Service – The role of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) is to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.
Severe/profound GLD	Severe and profound general learning disability. In the Irish context the DES defines physical disability, for resource allocation purposes, as follows: 'Students with severe to profound general learning disabilities are likely to be severely impaired in their functioning in respect of a basic awareness and understanding of themselves, of the people around them and of the world they live in. Insofar as IQ (Intelligence Quotient) may be used as an indicator of general learning disability, a student with a severe general learning disability is described as having an IQ in the range of 20 to 35 on standardised IQ tests, and a student with a profound general learning disability is described as having an IQ under 20' (DES, 1993). This definition is used in this report.
SNA	Special needs assistant
SPHE	Social, personal and health education
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
VI	Visual impairment. In the Irish context, the DES defines visual impairment, for resource allocation purposes, as follows: 'Such pupils have a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams, and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from such conditions, such as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa' (See DES Special Education Circular 02/05). This definition is used in this report.

Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes

Executive summary

Introduction

In October 2008, the National Council for Special Education invited tenders for the conduct of a study to explore the implementation of the curriculum in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of special educational needs (SEN); and to explore the experiences of these particular pupils in gaining access to the curriculum. A team from the College of Education and Lifelong Learning, Bangor University, the School of Education, University of Birmingham and St Patrick's College Dublin responded to this invitation and was awarded the contract in December 2008. This team carried out the work between January 2009 and May 2010.

Recent Irish educational policy relating to the area of SEN has been in keeping with the international trend towards inclusive policy, laid out in the Salamanca statement on special needs education (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (Ireland, 2004) states that children with SEN should be educated, 'in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs' (p7) unless other circumstances do not permit this. It is clear that the current policy context strongly supports the idea that people with SEN should be educated in an inclusive environment.

A number of conditions need to be fulfilled if inclusive education is to become a reality:

- A curriculum needs to be in place which is capable of setting suitable learning challenges for the diversity of learners (including those with SEN)

- Teachers need to be equipped to respond to pupils' diverse learning needs

- Potential barriers to learning and assessment need to be overcome so that children with SEN can access the breadth of the curriculum at a level which meets their learning needs.

The Study

The study focused on the five key research questions laid out in the tender document:

1. How is the curriculum being implemented and differentiated in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN?

2. How are pupils with SEN and their parents experiencing the curriculum in these settings?

3. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN in these settings?

4. What are the challenges involved for teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum in these mainstream primary school classes?

5. What are the challenges for pupils with SEN in gaining access to the curriculum in these settings?

Methodology

We considered that multiple case studies were the most appropriate method to address the research questions given above. A series of case studies were undertaken in a variety of mainstream schools. Case studies focused on individual children and the contexts in which their education took place. Case studies included classroom observations and interviews with the child; their parents; classroom teachers; special needs assistants (SNAs); learning support or resource teachers; and other relevant professionals. Where possible, relevant documentation related to the child was also obtained and analysed.

School Selection Process

The NCSE provided us with a list of the different categories of need in each mainstream primary school in the Republic of Ireland. This list was used to select schools catering for pupils with a range of SEN for inclusion in a preliminary survey. The questionnaire asked for basic demographic data about the school, its teachers and its pupils. A final question asked if they would be interested in taking part in a case study.

Based on the data gathered in this survey, and assistance from contacts working in the field of special education, eleven schools were selected who were willing to participate in the case studies. These eleven schools varied on a number of factors: geographical location, size, disadvantaged status and the range and number of children with SEN in the school.

Case Studies

We collected data mainly by means of observations and semi-structured interviews. We conducted a total of 39 classroom observations which included 46 children (there were two group observations) in the eleven case study schools. These observations covered pupils with a range of SEN. These pupils ranged from those with high incidence special needs covered under the general allocation model (GAM), through to low incidence special needs including severe/profound general learning disabilities (GLDs). The case studies included six children in junior infants, seven in senior infants, 21 in first class and nine in second class, and in addition three children with severe/profound GLDs of various ages, who were included within a first class. We interviewed 23 children, 19 parents, 34 classroom teachers, 24 SNAs, 13 learning support or resource teachers, two principals and one special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

Main Findings

Implementation and differentiation of the curriculum

In line with the international literature, we interpreted the term differentiation to mean: adjustments to classroom organisation and management, lesson content, learning outcomes, resources, pedagogy and assessment methods. We found that:

- Teachers did use a range of strategies to differentiate the curriculum for young children with sen by, adapting their classroom organisation, using additional or different resources, modifying the content of the lesson and occasionally modifying their expectations of pupils or using some form of specialist pedagogy.

- Most of these strategies were used only by a minority of teachers for a small percentage of the time.

- Support from a special needs assistant (SNA) was overwhelmingly the most common form of differentiation, occurring nearly five times as frequently as all other forms of differentiation combined.

- Support from an SNA was combined for some of the time with other differentiation strategies.

- Very few class teachers and learning support or resource teachers were working together within the classroom; however where this was in place, participants were very positive about its impact on children's learning.

- There was very little use of assistive technology (AT) or of additional or different resources; when they were employed, additional or different resources were used most frequently in mathematics.

Overall we judged that for the great majority of the case study children, the various differentiation strategies were successful in facilitating access to the curriculum at a level appropriate to their needs, most of the time. However, the three children with hearing impairment (HI) we observed were less likely to gain access to the curriculum than children with other types of SEN. In all cases interviewees suggested that this was at least in part due to late diagnosis and delays in providing the appropriate AT.

The school experience of young pupils with SEN and their parents

The school experience of these pupils and their parents was generally a positive one. We found that:

- Almost all pupils liked school and were able to tell us about things they enjoyed, and a minority also told us about things they did not enjoy.

- Relationships with other children, both in the playground and in the classroom, were generally positive and regarded by teachers and parents alike as an important aspect of being in mainstream education.

- Relationships with staff were also generally positive, although we found that a close supportive relationship with the SNA could become a barrier to full participation with peers.

- Parents were generally very positive about their experience of school; good communication with the school was important to them and felt to be in place.

- Parents were much less positive about their experience of the formal assessment of SEN. Lack of information to guide them through this process was a key issue.

Assessment and progress

Evidence in relation to progress was almost exclusively in the form of responses to interview questions by adults. Most measurement of progress seemed to be informal, although three teachers were using more formal measures on a regular basis. These teachers were using a combination of regular tests and checking progress on specific individual education plan (IEP) targets. We found that:

- progress was difficult to measure for some children

- most children with SEN were seen to be making good progress, although there were a few exceptions

- parents, in particular, were pleased with the amount of progress their children were making

- social and emotional progress were seen as being important. For a small number of children, progress in these areas was seen as more important than academic development.

Factors facilitating curriculum access

A number of factors emerged as being important in facilitating curriculum access:

- Support for the class teacher from:

    1. other teachers within the school with expertise in SEN

    2. visiting teachers and other outside professionals

    3. parents.

- Support for children with SEN from the resource/learning support teacher and visiting professionals.

- The role of the SNA, both in working directly with the child with SEN and in carrying out other tasks.

- Leadership within the school from the principal and (where such a role existed) from the SEN co-ordinator, as well as a co-ordinated approach to planning of SEN provision within the school.

- Collaborative planning and implementation of the IEP between parents, class teachers and school SEN staff.

Factors acting as barriers to curriculum access

The factors acting as barriers to access were mainly the converse of those acting as facilitators. They included:

- lack of support

- lack of time for collaborative planning

- no clear leadership in relation to SEN issues.

In addition, three other factors were very salient barriers, especially from the perspective of the teachers we interviewed, as outlined below.

- Lack of appropriate training opportunities:

  Teachers felt that their initial training had not equipped them to provide appropriately for pupils with SEN, and that continuous professional development (CPD) which would enable them to gain relevant expertise was not accessible to them.

- Child-related factors:

  The nature of the child's SEN (such as sensory impairments or moderate GLD) was perceived by teachers to provide a substantial barrier to access. Missing school, for example through frequent illness, was also perceived as a barrier to access.

- School-related factors:

  Missing particular curriculum subjects either through exemptions, or while being withdrawn for resource teaching, emerged as another obstacle to curriculum access.

A number of issues emerged from the study:

- the role played by SNAs

- teachers feeling they lacked appropriate preparation to deal with pupils with SEN and access to CPD which would meet their needs

- lack of time for co-ordination between resource and class teachers and SNAs

- the differences between schools regarding the extent to which there was support for class teachers in facilitating access for pupils with SEN

- differences between schools regarding levels of overall planning in relation to SEN.

Recommendations

In the light of our findings we recommend that:

Recommendation 1:

Time should be built into the school week to enable teachers to collaborate in relation to provision for pupils with SEN.

Recommendation 2

Consideration should be given to ensuring that initial teacher education courses include both theoretical input on teaching pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms and practical classroom experience of working with one or more pupils with SEN. Topics covered should include recent research on ways in which pupils with SEN can be supported, such as co-teaching and the principles of universal design and of differentiation. Such input should also demonstrate how these methods can be applied to facilitate the inclusion of a diverse range of pupils. Consideration might also be given to teaching skills for accessing relevant information, as required.

Recommendation 3

All teachers, including class teachers in mainstream schools, should have access to CPD on SEN, including ready access to information about the availability of such CPD. Online and modular courses enabling teachers to access CPD when relevant in relation to their own teaching should be widely available. As finances allow, such CPD should be funded by the state.

Recommendation 4

All activities undertaken by SNAs in support of children with SEN should be clearly under the direction of a teacher and should be consistent with the research evidence on the effective deployment of teaching assistants. The role of SNAs should be extended to include maintaining on-task behaviour for children with SEN under the direction of a teacher. The minimum educational standards required for SNAs should be reviewed and SNAs should receive appropriate training for the roles they undertake.

Recommendation 5

A review should be conducted of the evidence base for the current policy on exemptions from Irish for pupils with SEN, which should include a comparative study of practice in other countries.

Recommendation 6

In order for IEPs to be as effective as possible for children with SEN, further training is required for all relevant staff and co-ordination needs to be in place in all schools.

Recommendation 7

Primary schools should have a post of responsibility for the co-ordination of SEN provision within the school. This teacher should receive relevant CPD to enable them to co-ordinate provision and support colleagues. In larger schools this might be the responsibility of an assistant or deputy principal.

In addition, as a result of this study a number of issues emerged that we believe need further research. These are listed below, under four main themes.

1. Research is needed into ways in which relevant SEN-related CPD can be made accessible to mainstream classroom teachers. Such research should cover issues such as the format, timing, cost and publicising of courses, as well as other factors likely to make them more or less attractive to teachers.

2. Further research is needed on the role and effectiveness of SNAs and other forms of classroom support in Ireland, including the most effective way to allocate SNAs. Research is also needed to establish the extent to which children with SEN in mainstream classes interact with SNAs rather than with teachers.

3. Research should be carried out into ways in which curriculum access can best be facilitated for children with sensory impairment and those with moderate and severe/profound GLD. It should address the tension between suitable physical facilities for children with severe SEN and the provision of opportunities for inclusion, and how this can be best resolved or minimised.

4. Research is required into the extent to which teachers in mainstream classrooms continue to be successful in facilitating access to the curriculum for children with SEN during the later primary and post-primary years.

1 Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

In October 2008, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) invited tenders for the conduct of a study to explore the implementation of the curriculum in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN, and to explore the experiences of these particular pupils in gaining access to the curriculum. A team from the College of Education and Lifelong Learning, Bangor University, the School of Education, University of Birmingham and St Patrick's College Dublin responded to this invitation and was awarded the contract in December 2008. This team carried out the work between January 2009 and May 2010.

1.2 Research Questions

The study was focused around five key research questions.

1. How is the curriculum being implemented and differentiated in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN?

2. How are pupils with SEN and their parents experiencing the curriculum in these settings?

3. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN in these settings?

4. What are the challenges involved for teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum in these mainstream primary school classes?

5. What are the challenges for pupils with SEN in gaining access to the curriculum in these settings?

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

Chapters 2 and 3 lay out the context to the study in policy and literature, as it relates to the research questions. Chapter 4 details the methodology for the study, and discusses the ethical issues involved. Chapters 5 to 7 report the main findings and outline the limitations of the study. In Chapter 8, these findings are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter three. Finally, the implications of the findings and recommendations for future policy and research are presented.

1.3 Key Concepts

This section briefly discusses two concepts that are central to this study: differentiation and curriculum access. Both these concepts are more fully explored in Chapter 3.

1.3.1 Differentiation

There are a number of different definitions of differentiation. One of the most well-known is that given by Renzulli and Reis (1997), which states that 'differentiation is the adjustment of the teaching process according to the learning needs of the pupils' Renzulli and Reis go on to talk about five dimensions of differentiation. The first four of these – content, process, products and classroom organisation and management – are common to many of the definitions of differentiation. In an Irish context Griffin (2010) defines differentiation as, 'the adaptation of lesson content, teaching methodology, learning outcomes, resources and assessment' (Hibernia, 2010). In this report we use the term differentiation to encompass the variety of strategies that teachers employ to try and ensure that they are enabling all pupils to learn, and achieve the aims and goals of the curriculum. We interpret differentiation as including adjustments to classroom organisation and management, lesson content (including the provision of additional content), learning outcomes, resources (including additional staff support), pedagogy, and assessment methods.

1.3.2 Curriculum access

We take the term 'curriculum access' to mean the extent to which an individual child is enabled to participate in the same breadth of curriculum as other children of the same age and at a level appropriate to their needs.

1.4 Summary

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

2 The Policy Context

This chapter attempts to place the study within the context of international and Irish policy. The general background of inclusive policy is discussed first, and provides the context for a discussion of current Irish policy in relation to inclusion and the curriculum.

2.1 International Developments

The Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) set a strong tone internationally for the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools. The Republic of Ireland followed this lead. The Special Education Review Committee (Department of Education, 1993) stated that children with SEN should be integrated into the mainstream as much as possible. The 1998 Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) explicitly recognised the educational rights of children with SEN for the first time. Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) states that children with SEN should be educated in an inclusive environment, noting specifically that they should be:

> educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with –
> (a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act; or
> (b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (p7).

These explicit policies have obvious repercussions for mainstream schools. Both schools and teachers need to be equipped to include children with SEN, and the suitability of the primary school curriculum in meeting the needs of these children needs to be examined. The challenge of supporting and furthering inclusive policies on a national level is widely debated.

More recently, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) has impacted on international developments in supporting persons with disabilities to participate fully in a free society. Article 24 of the convention is concerned specifically with education, and it gives further impetus to inclusive education stating, for example, that the state shall ensure that:

> ... persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, on the basis of disability. (Article 24, para 2 (a))

The Republic of Ireland signed the convention in 2007, but has yet to ratify it. Further impetus to the implementation of Article 24 of the convention has been provided by the recent publication of policy guidelines on inclusion in education by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2009.

In conclusion, it is clear that the policy context strongly supports the idea that people with SEN should have access to an appropriate education in an inclusive environment. Additionally, as is clear in the review of national policy documents that follows, during the last decade education policy in Ireland has been moving strongly in the direction of inclusion.

2.2 The Irish Primary Curriculum

The current Irish primary school curriculum was launched in 1999. It was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The curriculum is child or learner centred, with a particular focus on the notion that there are different kinds of learning and that individual children learn in different ways. The curriculum identifies three primary aims for primary education:

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual

- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society

- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

Areas included in the primary curriculum include: languages (Irish and English); mathematics; social, environmental and scientific education (SESE, including history, geography and science); arts education (music, visual arts, drama); physical education (PE); and social, personal and health education (SPHE). Each of these areas has its own set of documents (including the curriculum and a set of teacher guidelines for each subject), indicating not only the content to be learned, but exemplifying a wide range of approaches to learning. Concepts and skills are outlined in subject areas at each class level and their development is approached through active engagement with the curriculum content.

While the primary curriculum in and of itself may not include unique content for children with SEN, it does nonetheless outline the principles of differentiation, which are firmly embedded throughout it. This can be seen in the strong emphasis on:

- making allowance for individual difference

- using different approaches and methodologies in the teaching and learning tasks

- the importance of the child's need to interact with the learning task

- locating the learning as much as possible in the child's immediate environment

- the need for collaborative learning

- the need to recognise difference in children's learning styles and individual strengths

- the need to connect the learning to what is already known and to revisit and reinforce the learning across all curriculum subjects

- the need to adapt and interpret the curriculum where necessary to meet individual differences

- the need for assessment to support individual needs.

This approach to the curriculum is more adaptive than prescriptive, which may be seen as a positive indicator of its capacity to include children with SEN. This is further demonstrated by the variety of approaches to assessment it offers. The curriculum notes that assessment is integral to all areas of the curriculum, and it refers to a variety of assessment tools. These range from informal methods such as teacher observation, class work, homework and discussion with pupils, through to formal tools such as diagnostic and standardised tests. It is intended that in planning procedures for teaching, learning and assessment, schools and teachers will select those that best meet their needs at a particular time.

2.2.1 Assessment in the Irish primary curriculum

The only formal assessment stipulated for children from junior infants to second class is in relation to English reading and mathematics. This is set out in Circular 0138/2006 (Department of Education and Science, 2006), which formalises a practice of assessment at the end of first class and/or the beginning of second class which was in fact being practised on a widespread basis before the circular was passed. This circular, however, does not specify the tests that schools must use, meaning that each school can choose from a range of tests.

The NCCA (2007) has also published a set of guidelines in relation to assessment in the primary curriculum. This set of guidelines describes assessment as:

> ... the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using, and reporting information about a child's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes. (NCCA, 2007, p7)

Assessment shows what the child learns and how the child learns; two types of assessment are identified, assessment of learning, and assessment for learning. Assessment for learning generally occurs within the context of lessons, whereas assessment of learning would generally follow a lesson, and is carried out in order to measure whether children have mastered its content. Assessment of learning can help to ensure that children are achieving curriculum objectives. Assessment for learning on the other hand focuses on:

- where are children now in their learning?
- where are children going in their learning?
- how will children get to the next point in their learning? (NCCA, 2007, p9)

In addition to this, a variety of assessment methods are described on a continuum ranging from child-led methods to teacher-led ones. These assessment methods include self-assessment, conferencing, portfolio assessment, concept mapping, questioning, teacher-observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, and standardised testing.

Circular 0138/2006 states that children must be formally assessed in English and mathematics twice during the primary school years: at the end of first class or beginning

of second class, and at the end of fourth class or the beginning of fifth class. Thus only one set of standardised tests are mandatory for children before the end of second class, meaning that much assessment in this part of the curriculum is at the discretion of the teacher.

2.2.2 Guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities

Shortly before the publication of the primary curriculum, the NCCA set up a series of working parties. Their role was to provide guidelines to assist teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities (GLD) in implementing the curriculum and meeting the learning needs of their pupils. These guidelines were published in draft form in 2002 (NCCA, 2002). They aim to provide teachers with information on the potentially difficult areas for difficulty that pupils with GLD and the impact of these difficulties on teaching and learning. They offer advice on school and classroom planning and suggest a variety of differentiated teaching approaches and methodologies. They advise on planning for individual educational needs and provide examples of good practice. Teachers are expected to select materials from the guidelines that are appropriate to each student's personal strengths and learning needs. These guidelines are divided by subject areas, as well as by level of learning difficulty. They were finalised and disseminated following a lengthy consultative process (NCCA, 2007).

2.2.3 Other relevant official publications

In addition to the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and the *NCCA Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (20002, 2007), there are also *Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000), *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (NCSE, 2006) and *Special Educational Needs, A Continuum of Support* produced by the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) in 2007. Another source of information for teachers about different categories of need is *Signposts* (SESS, 2008). These publications aim to support schools in developing more inclusive practices for children with SEN. *The Learning Support Guidelines* describe the current support model and shows how to effectively implement learning support at whole-school level through the development of a strong partnership between teachers. This occurs through the process of assessment of needs, and the adaptation of suitable approaches to learning and teaching at classroom level, which ensures that children with SEN are accessing a broad, balanced, relevant and appropriate education.

The within-class and group approach to learning support advocated in the guidelines was strengthened in 2003 by the issue of a circular (Circular 24/03):

> Although children with SEN may learn at a different pace and in a different way from other children, they need to belong to a peer group and to mix with children of different abilities in a variety of situations. Research on mixed ability teaching illustrates that children of lower ability benefit greatly and children of average or above ability are not academically disadvantaged. However, the practice has developed in recent years of using resource hours for individual tuition only. An exclusive reliance on this approach is contrary to the principle of

integration in teaching and learning. Wherever possible, schools should provide additional help for children in the mainstream classroom or, if necessary, in small groups. (DES, 2003, p2–3)

This circular makes clear that official policy is for children with SEN to receive support within the mainstream classroom as far as is possible.

The NEPS continuum of support is designed to be used in conjunction with the Learning Support Guidelines and the guidelines on the individual plan process. It describes a model for assessment and intervention at classroom level, school level, and a 'school support plus' level:

> The focus of the guidelines is on the process schools and teachers may use to identify and cater for the special educational needs of individual pupils in proportion to the impact of those needs on their learning and socialisation. The process moves from simple classroom based interventions to more specialised and individualised interventions, whereby external service providers deliver input in terms of more detailed and in-depth assessments and intervention programmes. (DES, 2007 p2)

In addition to describing an ongoing assessment process, designed to ensure schools are able to meet the needs of children with SEN, *A Continuum of Support* provides details on a wide variety of ways in which teaching can be differentiated in the mainstream classroom.

2.3 Curriculum Review

In 2003, the NCCA initiated a review of the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA 2005, 2008); methods included a survey of teachers and case studies of six schools which involved interviews with children, parents, teachers and principals. The report on the first phase of review (covering the subjects of English, visual arts and mathematics) was published in 2005, with the report on the second phase (covering Gaeilge, science and SPHE) being published in 2008. They raised the following issues that were pertinent to SEN:

- Insufficient time for individual assessment, particularly in large classrooms that also include children with SEN

- Difficulties in finding suitable diagnostic tests for pupils with SEN, and a need for school policies with regards to identifying and supporting children with SEN

- The particular opportunities offered by the visual arts curriculum to include children with special needs

- The importance of parent/teacher meetings in supporting children with SEN.

More generally, teachers found it challenging to deliver the curriculum and assessment, and to cater for the range of children's abilities within the time available. These issues clearly interact with teachers needing time to engage in individual assessments and differentiated teaching.

2.4 The Special Needs Assistant (SNA)

One key member of staff who can assist the classroom teacher is the SNA, whose duties are explicitly stated in Circular 07/02 (Department of Education and Science, 2002). SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. These assistants may work on a full-time or part-time basis, and may be shared among named pupils who have been allocated support from a SNA. It is the principal's responsibility to assign duties to the SNA. These duties are explicitly non-teaching, but can include:

- preparing and tidying the classroom where the child with SEN is being taught

- helping the child to board and alight from buses, and escorting the child when necessary

- helping children with disabilities with typing or writing

- assisting with clothing, feeding and hygiene

- assisting in mobility where necessary

- assisting in supervision during assembly and break times

- accompanying individuals or groups who are withdrawn from the class temporarily

- general assistance to teachers in non-teaching duties.

The circular states that children with general learning difficulties would not typically require an SNA, and that applications should be considered where the child has a medical condition or physical/sensory impairment, or where a child's behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils. Applications should be based on assessments of need and should include a justification of why the SNA is necessary.

The number of SNAs has increased greatly in recent years, rising to over 8,800 by 2009 (NCSE, 2010). This has led to concerns regarding the grounds for SNA allocations to schools on the part of the DES. In January 2005, the responsibility for the allocation of SNAs to schools was transferred from the DES to the NCSE. According to the NCSE (2010), an initial review of schools carried out as part of the Department's value for money and policy analysis review of the SNA indicated that:

> … there were instances where the work being carried out by the SNAs did not reflect the basis for the allocation of the post and where the level of SNA resources in some schools was greater than the proper application of the criteria would allow. (NCSE, 2010, p1)

Subsequently, it was requested that the NCSE arrange for its Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) to further review the practice of SNA allocation in all schools to ensure that the criteria set out for SNA employment (DES Circular 07/02) were properly met.

2.5 Teacher Pre-service and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The final area to be described in detail is the level of teacher pre-service and in-service preparation. Pre-service training for primary teaching is available at five Irish institutions of higher education as an undergraduate degree; four institutions as a graduate diploma; and on a part-time basis through Hibernia College. In the past, not all colleges included preparation to teach pupils with SEN within pre-service training. However, all now offer discrete courses as part of the Bachelor of Education (BEd), designed to prepare teachers for working with students with SEN. These courses vary in the extent to which student teachers have the opportunity to gain experience working with SEN pupils in the classroom, and in the exact content and emphasis of the course.

A variety of post-graduate qualifications in SEN are also available at a number of colleges, and by distance learning, including:

- Online diploma in special/inclusive education

- Graduate/post-graduate certificate/diploma in the education of children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

- Graduate/post-graduate diplomas in SEN

- Masters in special educational needs

- Masters in learning support

- Generic masters courses with the opportunity to specialise in the area of SEN.

One of the entry requirements for many of these courses is being currently in a special education post (such as a resource or learning support post). Consequently, mainstream class teachers are not eligible for many of these courses.

A wide variety of non-award bearing CPD is available through a variety of providers in the form of evening and summer courses. Support is also provided by groups such as the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (who provide input in relation to the primary curriculum) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS), who provide in-school support and advice; individual professional development through in-service courses; e-learning modules; and group professional development initiatives such as in-service training days at an individual school. The SESS also provides information via their website on a wide variety of courses relating to all aspects of SEN (http://www.sess.ie/).

3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the research questions. Following a brief introduction to some of the issues in the inclusion debate, five main areas are addressed:

• primary curricula in general

• children's perspectives on school, and specifically with regard to inclusion

• parents' perspectives

• factors that impede curriculum access for children with SEN

• factors that support curriculum access for children with SEN.

3.2 Inclusive Policy in an International Context

The current international trend towards inclusion is usually seen as being rooted in the *Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994), which advocates equality of opportunity with regards to access to mainstream schools. It does so from the premise that mainstream or inclusive learning environments strongly contribute to social cohesion:

> Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (p ix)

Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) highlight the fact that social cohesion is not the only driver towards inclusive education. They argue that potential financial savings also play a significant part and refer to Tomlinson's (1982) argument that it is cheaper to educate children with SEN in mainstream rather than special schools. The more recent UNESCO *Guidelines for Inclusion* (UNESCO, 2005) reiterate the idea that inclusive education can be more cost-effective than separate special provision. However, the guidelines also express concerns about the privatisation of education which may lead to:

> ... cost-cutting in areas that are essential for educational access for all. (UNESCO, 2005, p18)

According to this document, and the more recent Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (UNESCO, 2009), inclusion is underpinned not solely by the notion of rights, or by ensuring that the needs of all children are met, but by viewing it as an effective way of reaching the millennium development goals. Furthermore, this later document explicitly widens the definition of inclusion well beyond its origins in special education to address issues of exclusion and marginalisation. The concept of inclusion is therefore

a contested one with questions remaining as to its underpinnings and its purposes. However, education and curriculum are both central issues in these UNESCO documents, which, among other things, discuss the characteristics of an inclusive curriculum with a particular emphasis on flexibility.

3.3 Curricula Comparison and Reviews

Recent developments in relation to the Irish curriculum were described briefly in the previous chapter, alongside the reviews conducted by the NCCA. Internationally, it is clear that developments in primary school curriculum provision have been fraught with tensions during the past two decades. These tensions have been concerned, on the one hand, with raising standards in core subjects – most notably in literacy and mathematics – and on the other, with providing a nurturing and rich educational experience.

In England, two major reviews of the primary school curriculum have taken place in recent years, that known as the Rose Review (Rose, 2009) commissioned by the Government and the independent Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2009). Both reviews take account of a range of international perspectives on the primary curriculum and both argue that curriculum and pedagogy are intermeshed. The Cambridge Primary Review also considers, in very great detail, a vast array of other factors that shape primary education, including its philosophical underpinnings; teacher education; parenting children's lives beyond school settings; and aspects of diversity and inclusion.

Referring to curriculum provision for all children, the Rose Review advocates less prescription in curriculum content and pedagogy. In doing this, and drawing on both an earlier report by Rose (2006) and a review of services for children and young people (Bercow, 2008), the review highlights the importance of curriculum flexibility that is responsive to individual needs. It also emphasises the importance of focusing on children's spoken communication and the need for this to be developed intensively.

The Cambridge Primary Review, although it draws very different conclusions to the Rose Review, makes similar points regarding the importance of developing a more engaging curriculum which places a strong emphasis on interaction and dialogue. In an interim report, submitted as part of the Cambridge Primary Review, Daniels and Porter (2007) suggest that curriculum and pedagogy aligned with whole-class teaching approaches, required of national strategies in England during the past decade, may have contributed to the higher prevalence of children with particular needs (e.g. speech, language and communication needs, ASD, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties). This suggestion of an interaction between curriculum and pedagogy and the level of identification of SEN is not new (see for example Wedell, 1983), but its re-emergence as a possible consequence of the concentration on 'the standards agenda' in England is of concern, especially when Daniels and Porter also express concern about exclusion rates for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Problems of 'high stakes' testing are also referred to in the Cambridge Primary Review. Links between assessment, curriculum provision dominated by testing and the negative impact of these on children with SEN have been described in detail across a range of European contexts by Watkins (2007) in a project of the European Agency for

Development in Special Needs Education. Drawing on research by, among others, Black and Wiliam (2002) and Black *et al* (2003), the European Agency project calls for the use of assessment approaches that operate as part of classroom decision-making about teaching and learning.

Different national approaches to the curriculum are intriguingly informed by a complex interplay of values and policy imperatives concerning standards. The need to challenge the latter from an equity perspective has been raised recently by Dyson *et al* (2010), who argue for a radical overhaul of the narrowly conceived education system in England, a system that continues to fail the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

In Scandinavia, these dilemmas can be found in approaches to the preparation of special education teachers. In a comparative review of training in Finland and Norway, Hausstatter and Takala (2008) identify links between curriculum provision and the way that special education pedagogy is deployed. In Norway, it is shaped by a discourse of inclusion whereas in Finland, much greater emphasis is placed on the national goal of high-quality education. In both contexts, there appear to be advantages and disadvantages, and the benefits of one approach versus another for children, in terms of educational and wider outcomes, are difficult to discern. This emphasises the fact that curriculum provision for children with SEN is, and perhaps always will be, characterised by dilemmas related to inclusiveness and quality or effectiveness (a point which is extensively argued by Norwich, 2007).

This brief overview of international literature on curricula provides an insight into some salient aspects of the Irish primary curriculum. It has a strong philosophical underpinning in terms of being child-focused and is non-prescriptive in terms of lesson content. It also attempts to encourage variation and differentiation in teaching methods. However, as the NCCA Review (2005) notes, the implementation of the primary curriculum in Ireland has raised similar issues to those discussed in the international literature and similar tensions are emerging between inclusion and effective provision for pupils with SEN.

3.4 Children's Perspectives

Moving beyond the design and framework of the curriculum as a set of documents, what is the experience of the curriculum, as reported by children with SEN and their parents? While there has been relatively little work done in these areas, either in Ireland or internationally, what has been documented is described below.

Children's perspectives on their own experiences of education are important not only in providing insights, but also due to the increased prominence given to the voice of the child in government policy and law. Shevlin and Rose (2008) talk about children as 'partners' in making choices about their own education, with Irish and English policy documents stating that schools need to pay closer attention to the views of their pupils. However, being able to achieve this has proved difficult (Shevlin and Rose, 2008). For example, it is interesting to note that in the literature they quote in their article, most English studies on getting children more involved in their education are directed at teachers or at schools rather than the children. This point is also made in a detailed

review of developments in pupil participation in the United Kingdom (UK) by May (2005).

One document which attempts to provide a voice for children with SEN is the disabled children's manifesto for change, *Every Disabled Child Matters* (2009). This document, drawing from the voice of the child and addressing British political parties ahead of the 2010 election, calls for a number of key principles to be adhered to in relation to children with disabilities:

- they should be listened to

- they should be involved in key decisions about their education and support

- there should be recognition that individuals will vary in terms of their needs and services required

- there should be an acknowledgement of the barriers faced by these children.

However, there is a paucity of research which specifically examines children's views of the curriculum. The NCCA *Primary curriculum review* (NCCA, 2005) provides some data from focus groups conducted with children in six case study schools. Questions looked at favoured and unfavoured subjects; collaborative learning; active learning; inquiry-based learning; and authentic learning. Irish was mentioned as a subject not liked as it involved too much work. The review states that liking subjects was linked to being able to engage in collaborative learning; active learning; ICT-based learning; and real-world studies or projects. For example, active learning would involve hands-on activities, physical activities and play and games, with evidence including statements on liking PE. The children were also enthusiastic with regards to information and communication technologies (ICT) for project work, for spell-checking in order to support their writing, as well as specific mathematics programmes. However, it is not clear whether or not any children with SEN were included in these focus groups.

A study in England conducted on behalf of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) looked at pupil's experiences of, and perspectives on, the national curriculum and assessment (Lord and Jones, 2006). It was based on a meta-analysis of English research into children's perspectives. Perhaps the most important statement they make in relation to the current study is the observation that SEN has not been used as a factor in the studies which form the basis of their report.

However, some of the general findings are worth summarising. First, it is noted that children's enthusiasm wanes with age, with the primary school period being the one where children are most enthusiastic and most likely to find school enjoyable. Like the *Primary curriculum review* (NCCA, 2005), they found that learners appreciate supportive and collaborative approaches, and particularly a variety of teaching and learning approaches and activities. More negatively, they highlight 'too much writing' and other forms of overload. Finally, pupils appreciate clear and explicit markers with which to gauge their progress in the curriculum.

These findings may or may not be relevant to children with SEN, though it is difficult to say within a context where the perspectives of children with SEN have rarely been explicitly sought. The closest the review comes to talking about findings for children

with SEN is to speak about 'lower ability' pupils. They tend to have lower levels of engagement and enjoyment of the curriculum and are more likely to feel that the curriculum content may be either too challenging or not challenging enough. Moreover, demotivation may set in once they realise that their ability to achieve valued grades is limited.

Some insight into children's perspectives on the curriculum is also provided in a cohort study in Northern Ireland (Harland *et al*, 2003), This study tracked a cohort of pupils aged from eleven to 18 years. The most relevant immediate finding was that pupil's felt that the curriculum over-emphasised academic subjects in preference to more practical and creative areas, which they tended to enjoy more. However, like the NFER study, Harland *et al* do not explicitly include the views of pupils with SEN. Furthermore, this study tracked children through secondary school while the current study relates to children at the beginning of primary school.

The lack of specific research eliciting the views of children with SEN is not surprising, given the many issues relating to interviewing children with SEN (Kelly, 2007; NDA, 2009). Literature on how best to elicit the views of children with SEN has begun to emerge in the last decade (Lewis and Porter, 2004; 2007). Irish studies are also beginning to emerge (O'Donnell, 2003; O'Keeffe, 2009). For example, O'Donnell (2003) conducted a series of interviews with children following their transition from a special education setting to a mainstream primary school. These pupils reported difficulties in a variety of areas, particularly with mathematics, writing, reading and Irish. They felt that they performed poorly in tests, and sometimes felt left out of things at school – an example given is that they can be left out of PE due to schools lacking suitable transport. However, they did also report positive aspects, with a majority of the children interviewed saying that they enjoyed schoolwork and were able to keep up with others in their class at least some of the time. O'Keeffe (2009) conducted in-depth case studies of children with moderate GLDs in mainstream schools around the time of transition from primary to post-primary, interviewing his participants over an extended period. His study participants varied in their views of school and the extent to which they could access the mainstream curriculum. However, the young people themselves were generally more positive than the adults around them. Nugent (2009) also provides some interesting data, in comparing the views of children with dyslexia who are educated in mainstream and special settings on their educational experiences. Interviews were carried out with 100 children in this study, which also included a school-life questionnaire. The striking finding is the commonality between the settings, with children in mainstream classes feeling, for example, that 'I do good work most days in school', although these children also commonly stated that they found the work too hard. It is also worth noting that there were concerns that children receiving resource support would report feeling socially different to their mainstream peers, which Nugent ascribes to the 'stigma' arising from being withdrawn from the classroom. Bishton (2007) reports similar findings in comparing views of children from mainstream and special education settings, based on a variety of research methods to fully gain access to children's voices. For children in mainstream settings, the social aspect was more important than for those in special educational settings. Children in mainstream settings did however highlight the importance of relationships over and above liking or disliking

subjects. Similarly, it is worth noting the potential negative effect that special education placement can have on aspects such as self-esteem and perception of their own abilities (Battle and Blowers, 1982), although Vaughn, Haager, Hogan and Kouzekanani (1992) provide evidence that primary school students attending learning support classes do not experience lower self-esteem or peer acceptance as a result of this.

In summary, literature on children's perspectives fails to provide a clear picture as to the effects of inclusion in a mainstream setting for children with SEN, with differing views on children's happiness and curriculum access arising from different studies.

3.5 Parental Perspectives

In addition to children's perspectives, parental perspectives are also highly relevant. Barriers to accessing the views of parents are more easily addressed than those for children. The *Primary curriculum review* (NCCA, 2003) included input from parents as well as children, from the same six case study schools. The main findings included:

- parents' need for support in order to be involved in their child's learning

- the role of parental involvement with homework, either by supervision or by providing encouragement to their children

- parents' expressed lack of understanding of the approaches and methodologies adopted by the schools (examples include literacy and issues of pronunciation of words in Irish and the types of books children use to learn to read)

- the role of teachers as a support to the parent, through communication, meetings, etc

- parents' experience of a lack of information about their child's learning can present as a large barrier

- parents desire for their child to receive a broad and balanced education.

Again, it is important to note that these are not necessarily the views of parents of children with SEN. It is also important to note that concerns for parents of children with SEN may stem from more general issues in relation to their child, rather than specific aspects of the curriculum. Indeed, a further piece of work by the NCCA (2008) focused on reporting levels to parents, and found that parents of children with SEN receiving more information from the school than other parents; this was also a finding of a study by Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004). However, in the NCCA study, satisfaction with the type of information received was not necessarily universal, with parents expressing dissatisfaction about the information they are given:

> I don't think they give you a grade or anything – they just tell you their progress. (p64)

In a report on educational provision for children with SEN in Irish primary schools (Kenny, Shevlin and Loxley, 2005), a number of important points are made. First, while there may be issues for children in accessing the curriculum due to the nature of their disabilities, access can also be blocked for other reasons, such as difficulty in obtaining

the appropriate supports. The issue of consultation with the Department of Education and Science (DES) was raised by advocacy groups. Gaining access to mainstream schools was mentioned as a concern for parents, who reported difficulties in finding a place for their child in a mainstream school.

The general consensus emerging from the research literature outlined above seems to be that parents are interested in and willing to take part in their child's education, but need support and communication from the school in order to do so. There is some consensus that parents of children with SEN are well supported, but this is not a universal finding. These findings are similar to those presented in the final report of an 18-month inquiry into SEN and parental confidence in England (Lamb, 2009; Robertson, 2010). The concerns of parents of children with SEN in Ireland regarding access to mainstream primary schools need to be addressed and specific attention needs to be paid to aspects of the curriculum.

3.6 Barriers Experienced by Teachers in Including Children with SEN

The research literature identifies four barriers faced by teachers in including children with SEN: attitudes, time, difficulties in collaboration and lack of teacher competence. These are of course in addition to issues that the child and family may have in getting access to a school, which we briefly touched on above.

3.6.1 Teacher attitudes

For a child to be successfully given access to the curriculum in a mainstream classroom, it is essential that the teacher in that classroom has a positive attitude towards this practice. Negative teacher attitudes are widely cited in the research literature as a barrier to including students with SEN (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009; Carrington, 1999; Avramidis and Kalyva, 2002; Clough and Garner, 2003). In a comprehensive literature review of this subject, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) provide the insight that teachers' attitudes tend to be affected by the type of disability with which they are presented. In addition to this, attitudes are also affected by the availability of support, with teachers who had greater support having more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEN.

3.6.2 Time issues

The issue of time constraints also frequently appears in the research literature (Smith and Leonard, 2005; Talmor *et al*, 2005; Horne and Timmons, 2009; Drudy and Kinsella, 2009). Teachers repeatedly state that they lack the time required to carry out administrative duties such as planning, differentiating their teaching and meeting with colleagues (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009; Smith and Leonard, 2005; Anderson, 2007). Teachers also mention not having enough time to cater sufficiently for the needs of their pupils with additional learning needs and cite concerns over IEPs; gaps in students' learning; and lack of readiness for grade level as additional pressures (Hart, 1998; Tod, 1999; Gibb *et al*, 2007). This can have a strong emotional impact on teachers, with some reporting feelings of guilt due to the conflicts inherent in trying to give equal time and attention to students with and without SEN (Talmor, Reiter and Feigin, 2005).

A study by Anderson, Klassen and Georgiou (2007) provides a good example of teachers' time-related concerns. In this study, Anderson *et al* surveyed 162 Australian primary teachers regarding their beliefs and perceived needs in relation to inclusion. Forced-choice and open-ended questions provided quantitative and qualitative data about these teachers' attitudes and practices. While the majority of the teachers (85 per cent) listed benefits, 95 per cent reported drawbacks to teaching in inclusive classrooms. Of the four main types of disadvantages listed, two related to the issue of time. These time-related disadvantages were:

> (a) time constraints imposed on teachers and (b) time constraints imposed on non-disabled children. (Anderson *et al*, 2007, p138)

As well as reporting lack of time for preparation and meetings, the teachers in the Anderson study spoke of time constraints in class for 'disabled as well as non-disabled students' (p138); constant interruptions and disruptions; and the teacher having to 'spread herself or himself too thin' (p138).

3.6.3 Difficulties in collaboration

An important factor for teachers in including children with SEN in mainstream classes is the need for collaboration and support in order to achieve this. Again, time is essential for effective collaboration. Concerns were raised by key informants, including teachers and school principals, in Drudy and Kinsella's (2009) examination of Ireland's progress towards an inclusive education system. Their analysis of Irish policy and legislation regarding the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools was augmented by empirical data from interviews with key informants in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Italy and the United States of America (USA).

Issues raised by participants included difficulties for educators in co-ordinating and working collaboratively with the different sectors of the education process. Co-ordination between the areas of health, welfare and education were perceived as being particularly difficult, especially at post-primary level. Hanko (2004) also identified the difficulty of liaison between professionals as a barrier to inclusion, citing such specific issues as the time it takes to improve such liaison, difficulties in fostering the appropriate attitude, and relationships within schools and across the services boundaries, in order to promote collaboration. She claims that:

> ... territorialism is rife within education, health care and social work. (Hanko, 2004, p62)

As in similar studies, Drudy and Kinsella's participants also cited as barriers, namely the:

> ... lack of opportunities for, or an unwillingness on the part of school personnel, to engage in collaborative problem-solving relating to the effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009, p657)

It is apparent that collaboration is difficult to achieve both generally and in the context of SEN.

3.6.4 Lack of teacher competence

A final barrier frequently mentioned in the literature in terms of inclusion is based on teachers' competence to teach children with SEN. Much has been written about the need to match teaching skill to the individual needs of students and to adapt teaching approaches and methodologies for students with SEN in order to ensure progress in learning (Westwood, 2007; Slavin, 2003). Many teachers report a lack of confidence and competence in teaching students with SEN, particularly those with behaviour difficulties and those with more complex intellectual disabilities (Farrell *et al*, 2007; Forlin *et al*, 2008; Idol, 2006; Tangen, 2005). In the Irish context, O'Donnell (2009) provides evidence that a majority of 244 recently qualified mainstream teachers surveyed do not feel that they have the knowledge and competencies necessary to include children with SEN in their classrooms. Furthermore, they lack confidence in relation to inclusion. Shevlin *et al* (2009) suggest that this lack of knowledge and confidence amongst teachers in Ireland stems from inadequate training opportunities. Mainstream teachers in their study reported that their initial teacher training qualifications lacked SEN components, and this was said to have had a dramatic impact on teachers' ability to provide appropriate learning environments for children with SEN.

A recent OECD report, based on a teaching and learning international survey (OECD, 2009), provides an insight into the CPD opportunities taken by post-primary teachers in Ireland in comparison with their peers in other OECD countries. Within the 18-month period prior to the survey, Irish post-primary teachers averaged the least number of days of CPD, which was five. This contrasts with the highest number of days (40) in Mexico. In addition, over 50 per cent of the Irish teachers wanted more CPD. The same study found that there was an unmet need for CPD in SEN. If this trend is paralleled amongst primary teachers we would expect to find both low levels of CPD in general and more specifically of CPD in relation to children with SEN.

Teachers in Australia have been shown to have similar concerns: the two areas of most concern to teachers in the Australian study conducted by Forlin *et al* (2008) included their own perceived professional competency and classroom issues. This study was based on an investigation of mainstream teachers' concerns in relation to coping with inclusion. Forlin *et al* conducted a survey of concerns regarding inclusion identified by 228 teachers from eleven schools within 16 districts across Western Australia. Teachers' perceived professional competency included issues such as:

> ... insufficient pre-service training to cater adequately for a child with an intellectual disability in their classroom ... difficulty monitoring other students when attending to the student [with SEN] ... and reduced ability to teach other students as effectively as they would like when including a student with an intellectual disability in their class. (Forlin *et al*, 2008, pp255–256)

A major concern reported by the teachers was their lack of competence in teaching and assessing students' progress. Forlin *et al* (2008) also provide an indication of how difficult it can be for teachers by giving examples of coping strategies such as, 'keeping others from knowing how bad things really are'. This type of coping strategy serves to indicate the teacher's lack of confidence or competence in dealing with students with

SEN, and such strategies are in themselves barriers to asking for help or finding another way to deal with situations.

3.7 Factors Facilitating Access to the Curriculum

Having briefly looked at a range of barriers to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream classes, the next section focuses on research findings regarding the following specific practices which can enable successful inclusion and curricular access for children with SEN: general teaching methods; classroom organisation; IEPs; differentiation; in-class support; withdrawal; assistive technologies and additional curriculum content.

3.7.1 General teaching methods

One current debate in regards to special needs is whether or not children with SEN require a different type of teaching, or whether they simply need 'good teaching' (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). This debate centres on whether or not the aims, areas, programme objectives and pedagogic strategies for children with SEN are in fact qualitatively different from those for children without SEN. It is clear that basic facets of teaching such as planning and discipline should overlap. However, as Daniels and Porter (2007) note, the majority of children with SEN require teaching approaches that are based on careful assessment and opportunities for practice and transfer. The use of carefully targeted interventions is also important and these are likely to be most effective when teachers have appropriate specialist knowledge and skills (Ofsted, 2006; Alexander, 2009; Rose, 2009) and the ability to use these flexibly, taking account of individual needs. Teachers also need to be able share their knowledge with other adults who might be providing additional support to children.

With regards to discipline, Schumm and Vaughn (1992) state that mainstream teachers are more willing to accept into their class children without emotional and/or behavioural issues. On the other hand, Idol (2006) conducted an evaluation of eight inclusive schools in America and noted that the teachers in the schools perceived themselves as being skilled in maintaining discipline in a classroom which included children with disabilities.

In relation to planning, Fuchs (1992) identified differences between teachers in mainstream and those in special education in both their planning and their adaptation of lessons for children with SEN. Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon and Rothlein (1994) looked at practices of mainstream teachers in trying to include children with SEN. They surveyed 60 teachers across primary and post-primary equivalent settings in America. their findings indicated a great variety in the extent to which teachers plan how to include children with SEN in a mainstream class. However, regardless of whether the planning needed for children with SEN is qualitatively different from that for children without such needs, it must be acknowledged that there are quantitative differences, with more time being required for planning in order to facilitate inclusion (Myles and Simpson, 1989). This time, particularly when it is focused on aspects of collaborative practice and support

for children with conduct disorders of various kinds, is important in reducing the risk of exclusion and highlights the extended role of the teacher (Daniels and Porter, 2007).

An aspect of general teaching methods that is often overlooked pertains to values and the importance of challenging discriminatory practice. This is important for teachers who may take a lead role in inclusive policy development in a school, and for those who co-ordinate provision (e.g. SENCOs). As Corbett (2001) and Cole (2005) have shown, key school staff members often work as advocates on behalf of children and their families. To do this they will need to have a thorough understanding of issues that can disadvantage, exclude and discriminate against children with SEN. This is likely to include a thorough knowledge and understanding of the concept of curriculum access and what this should mean for children in schools (Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2002).

3.7.2 Classroom organisation

The way in which the classroom is organised can play an important part in facilitating access to the curriculum. Ware (1994) identifies three aspects of classroom organisation: time, people (staff and pupils) and environment, all of which can contribute to curriculum access. Eccles (1999) notes that the use of whole-class (undifferentiated) instruction or within-class ability grouping can emphasise and highlight ability differences. Such distinctions can lead to increased social comparison and differential teacher treatment of learners with different abilities (Eccles, Midgley and Alderson, 1984). Where this is the case, the organisation of pupils negatively promotes:

> … achievement status hierarchies, differentiated competence beliefs between low and high achievers, and friendship selection patterns based primarily on similarities in academic abilities. (p511)

This can result in lower-ability children feeling less competent and less worthy than their more able peers (Covington, 1984; Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984, both of whom are cited in Eccles, 1999). Such lower-achieving children may also come to be perceived by their peers as less desirable friends compared to higher-achieving children, which exacerbates their social isolation and lowers their sense of self-worth.

Against this backdrop there has been an increasing amount of support for co-operative or collaborative group work. It is argued that cooperative learning can be more effective than both independent learning and competition (Long, 2000). For example, following their extensive review of 122 studies, Johnson and Johnson (1987) reasoned that co-operative learning not only led to better learning, but also to higher forms of self-esteem and improved social skills. By being a contributing member to a group project, individuals are said to develop a sense of value in relation to others and to improve their ability to interact with other children. Similarly, Slavin (1990) has argued that the co-operative learning context – through which students work in small groups and receive rewards or recognition based on whole-group performance – can lead to increases in student achievement, self-esteem and social acceptance among students of different abilities.

Eccles (1999) extends Slavin's (1990) point by noting that when students are supported to develop the social skills necessary for group work, co-operative groups can provide an array of opportunities for students of diverse abilities to participate in the learning process. This can lead to an increase in the amount of social or peer learning support, and increased contact among students of different abilities, leading to the potential fostering of new friendships, thus reducing social isolation. Similarly, Long (2000) argues that much classroom work is competitive in nature in the sense that individual student output is marked and compared with other students. Long (2000) argues that this has the effect of decreasing student motivation and may lead to oppositional interaction between pupils. Citing Johnson and Johnson (1987), Long (2000) describes how students often try to discourage each others' work by engaging in poor communication with other students and hiding information from them.

Despite the reported benefits of co-operative learning, Galton *et al* (1999) observed that most work in primary school classrooms was carried out on an individual basis. Although grouped seating is typically in operation, Galton *et al* (1999) found that most children work alone and independently, and are involved in task-related interactions only 13.5 per cent of the time. These interactions tend to revolve around practical work of some kind, with the nature of the interaction being brief and confined to the exchange of simple information. Furthermore, pupils are said to interact at group level with the teacher for 3.7 per cent of the time, but this type of interaction typically consists of students receiving information from the teacher, with little or no interaction between group members. Research by Gavienas (1997) found that teachers avoided collaborative group work for fear that it would lead to anti-social behaviour. In an earlier study, Galton *et al* (1980) found that teachers avoided group work due to the amount of preparation and organisation required. Similar observations have been made by Ainscow (1999).

Long (2000) notes:

> Unfortunately, busy teachers have to respond to the ongoing demands of covering the curriculum, and an individualised learning approach required less time to manage. (p143)

More recently, in Wales, there has been a dramatic move away from a focus on individual work and towards more group and interactive approaches, as a result of the introduction of the Foundation Phase (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). However, the impact of this change has not yet been evaluated.

A particular issue for children with SEN is ability grouping. Primary schools typically consist of children with a wide range of abilities who are grouped into classes according to age. However, Hutchinson (1994) and Sukhnandan and Lee (1998) have noted that ability grouping within the primary classroom is becoming increasingly common. Hallam (1999) states that in England, up to two thirds of primary schools have adopted ability grouping of some kind in an attempt to improve standards. Such ability grouping is more commonly applied to older primary school children, particularly in the field of mathematics. This type of grouping within the primary context is within-class. However, many schemes for raising the achievement of lower attainers in literacy and numeracy in primary school (e.g. reading recovery) depend on targeting those with the lowest

level of achievement. In contrast, secondary schools typically allocate children to sets, streams or classes according to their ability in a particular subject. In some subjects (such as mathematics), children are placed in sets early on in their secondary schools careers with more practical subjects retaining the mixed-ability model found in primary schools. Evidence regarding the efficacy of ability grouping suggests that while it may make planning and delivery easier for the teacher, it does not necessarily enhance the amount of student learning (Earl, 2003; Sukhnandan and Lee, 1998). For example, Lunn (1970) and Rutter *et al* (1970) (both cited in Long, 2000) have found that at both primary and secondary levels there is little difference between the achievements of streamed students versus the achievement of un-streamed students across schools. However, the research did find a range of negative consequences within schools. For example, research has found that there can be difficulties with self-perception and behaviour when lower-attaining students are grouped according to ability. Further, teachers are said to have altered their expectations of lower-ability groups and give less time to lesson preparation, leading to students performing worse than their academically equivalent peers in mixed-ability groups.

Boaler (1997) has found that grouping in mathematics can lead to difficulties in the higher sets, with some students struggling to keep up with the top-achievers. A longitudinal study conducted in Ireland (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004) in post-primary schools indicated that by the second year of post-primary school, streaming led to a drop in educational aspirations, greater disaffection and disengagement from school life for those in the lower streams. In contrast to the above research, Long (2000) has reported that a wide-scale literature review by Sukhnandan and Lee (1998) found that streaming and setting had no positive or negative effects compared with mixed-ability teaching.

It appears that approaches such as attempting to group pupils by ability and group have both potential benefits and negative consequences. This suggests that it is too simplistic to think in terms of pupil grouping alone.

3.7.3 IEPs

Individual education plans (IEPs) have been used in both the USA and the UK for a number of years and are mandatory for children with SEN in both jurisdictions. In Ireland, although some schools have been making use of IEPs or similar documents for a number of years, they were officially introduced much more recently in the EPSEN Act (2004). However, IEPS are not yet mandatory as the commencement of the relevant sections of the Act have been delayed, due in part to budgetary constraints. Despite this, guidelines on the preparation of IEPs have been issued (NCSE, 2006). This guidance states that:

> The Individual Education Plan is developed through a collaborative process involving the school, parents, the student (where appropriate) and other relevant personnel and agencies. It refers to the adapted or modified aspects of the educational programme and focuses on priority learning needs, although the student may also have other learning needs that will not require the same

degree of planning and monitoring. Not every aspect of the curriculum and school life needs to be modified for every student with SEN – only those areas of identified need arising from assessment should be covered. The amount of adaptation and support will vary according to the individual learning needs of each student. Some students with more complex needs may require significant educational modifications. (NCSE, 2006, p4)

The National Disability Authority reported on IEPs in 2005. They recommended that IEPs should serve to indicate modifications to the general education programme, rather than providing a unique curriculum (McCausland, 2005). This point is reiterated by both the NCSE guidance and NEPs (2007). General strategies that can be incorporated include:

- adaptations to the physical environment
- adaptations to content and delivery of lessons
- modifications to resources
- use of assistive technology (AT)
- use of support personnel.

It is important that all relevant people are informed of, and involved in, drawing up the IEP. Furthermore, the IEP should include:

- explicit timeframes
- dates for review
- outlines of the roles and responsibility of each IEP team member
- statements indicating priority learning areas and goals linked to the curriculum
- key teaching strategies that may be used
- details on the duty of care where there are health or therapy needs.

Monitoring of the IEP is also important, and should involve regular reports on the effectiveness of its implementation. Evaluation is also an important aspect of the IEP. Evaluation should include:

- looking at student performance and progress
- implementation issues
- comparisons between the child and their peers in terms of attainment and whether they are closing any gaps
- whether the IEP helps the child to access the curriculum (this is perhaps the most important point in relation to the current study).

It is also noted that the implementation of IEPs can only be realised properly where the relevant authorities support the policy with the necessary resources and support identified in planning.

International research on IEPs has not been wholly positive. Fisher and Frey (2001) conducted a qualitative study of the experiences of students with disabilities in

mainstream primary and post-primary equivalent mainstream schools, in order to assess the extent to which they were accessing the curriculum available to them. A major theme arising from a combination of observations and interviews with teachers, parents and students was a 'disconnect between IEP and classroom curriculum and instruction'. (p148). The IEP was not mentioned in the interviews and neither did they observe any examples of teachers using the IEP in order to adapt or differentiate lessons for the children being observed. Cooper (1996) baldly asks whether IEPs are 'a waste of space' (p115), commenting that they are a bureaucratic necessity and a piece of paperwork, rather than a basis for lesson planning or adaptation. Cooper also reports findings from another study indicating negative student attitudes towards the IEP due to their lack of involvement in preparing the plan. Goddard (1997) is also critical of the IEP, stating that its focus is overly 'behavioural', due to the IEP reducing the learning of the child to achieving 'behavioural objectives'.

On a positive note, Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker (2000) look at measures which can improve IEPs. They focus on the quality of the goals and objectives in the IEP, stating that an intervention directed in this area helped relevant personnel in special education improve the quality of IEPs produced. In England, during the past five years the reliance on IEPs has been reduced in some mainstream schools through the use of provision mapping[1] (Gross, 2008), an approach to monitoring and intervention that is regarded as more appropriate, manageable and less bureaucratic (Gross, 2000). The approach has not entirely replaced IEPs in primary schools, but it has reduced the need to use them with all children who might be experiencing difficulties in learning. The effectiveness of provision mapping has not, as yet, been formally evaluated.

One final relevant study to be mentioned here was conducted by Agran, Alper and Wehmeyer (2002). They focused on an aspect of IEPs mandated in the USA following the IDEA amendments in 1997 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997), namely that IEPs should include details on the student's participation in the curriculum. Some of the 84 teachers responding to a questionnaire on this issue felt that children with severe disabilities should not be expected to achieve the same standards of participation in the curriculum as their peers.

3.7.4 Differentiation

Differentiation is an important way of facilitating access to the curriculum for children with SEN. There are a number of different definitions of differentiation. These definitions tend to vary in the level of detail and the language used to express the underlying concept, rather than in the concept itself, which has been described succinctly in a number of well-known definitions such as those proposed by Perner (2002): 'using strategies that address student strengths, interests, skills, and readiness in flexible learning environments' (p12) or by Renzuilli and Reis (1997): '[d]ifferentiation is the adjustment of the teaching process according to the learning needs of the pupils.'

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1   Provision mapping is a succinct and inclusive way of showing the range of provision available to pupils throughout the school. It is a strategic management approach which provides an 'at a glance' way of showing all the provision that the school makes which is additional to and different from that which is offered through the school's differentiated curriculum.

Visser (1993) is unusual in providing a definition of differentiation explicitly focusing on the curriculum. His definition is also remarkable in that it constrains differentiation to that which takes place in a group situation:

> Differentiation is the process whereby teachers meet the need for progress through the curriculum by selecting appropriate teaching methods to match the individual student's learning strategies, within a group situation. (p7)

Renzulli and Reis (1997) go on to talk about five dimensions of differentiation:

- content
- process
- products
- classroom organisation and management
- the teacher's own commitment to change themselves in to a learner.

Stradling and Saunders (1993) talk about six types of differentiation:

- task
- outcome
- resource
- support
- time/pace
- dialogue – where the dialogue with pupils differs either in terms of the language used or in the amount of questioning to ascertain a student's understanding of a concept.

Despite the superficial difference in language, there is considerable overlap between these two lists (and indeed with other definitions): a common feature of both is that modifications will be necessary to teaching methods, resources and assessment methods.

In an Irish context, Griffin defines differentiation as:

> ... the adaptation of lesson content, teaching methodology, learning outcomes, resources and assessment. (Hibernia, 2010)

Stradling and Saunders (1993) state that differentiation arises as a response to diversity in the classroom, following the adoption of a more inclusive education policy. The commonalities between the different definitions highlight three key facts about differentiation. Differentiation involves a change in teaching. Second, it is supposed to be predicated upon the needs and abilities of the pupils. Third, and of particular importance to the current study, the type and extent of differentiation is related to the curriculum with which the teacher is working.

In the UK, O'Brien (1998) states that every child is entitled to a curriculum that is 'broad, balanced, relevant, and differentiated' (O'Brien, 1998, p150). Different teaching

approaches, materials, or indeed curricula may be used to ensure that all children in the class are given access to a relevant curriculum experience. King-Sears (2008) addresses a fallacy linked with differentiation, which is that it may distract from the achievement of other students in the class. She points out that using differentiation can potentially lead to greater achievement in exams and assessments, given that differentiation is responsive to the needs of all students.

A number of examples of differentiation are given in the literature. Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) document practices such as the provision of easier work for one group or part of the class, the provision of different learning objectives and the use of different strategies. The simplest way that differentiation can be achieved is to use different worksheets, with different numbers of tasks or differences in the level of difficulty in the tasks set.

Stradling and Saunders (1993) highlight a number of barriers which can arise to impede differentiation occurring in a school setting, where the teachers' ability to differentiate must be supported by special education staff such as resource teachers. Barriers include:

- lack of SEN staff in the school

- potential difficulties in collaboration between the classroom teachers and SEN staff

- tension between mixed-ability teaching as opposed to focused intervention (e.g. the debate about streaming different ability groups)

- possibility of overload for the teachers

- scale of change that operating differentiation at a school and a class level can bring about (e.g. if the school generally operates a withdrawal policy for learning support and resource teaching).

This provides a good insight into why differentiation may not be taken up on a school level or by individual teachers.

A more recent development from differentiation is the idea of universal design. Blamires (1999) describes universal design as proposing the provision of multiple:

- representations of content

- options for expression and control

- options for engagement and motivation.

Udvari-Solner, Villa and Thousand (2005) concur with this list. By implementing these three goals throughout the universal design for learning process of designing curricula (understood here as goals, methods, materials and assessments, CAST, 2008), teachers are said to create better learning environments for students by pre-empting and overcoming the barriers to curriculum access. These are clearly related to the dimensions of differentiation already discussed.

Universal design is described as an approach used to construct curricula which from the outset appeals to the diverse needs of all learners (CAST, 2008). The approach contrasts with 'after the fact' or 'retrofit' approaches (Udvari-Solner, Villa and Thousand, 2005, p138). In a retrofit approach, teachers attempt to accommodate individual students by modifying existing curricula materials, teaching strategies and assessment methods.

The aim is to 'fit' students into pre-existing frameworks that were not originally designed to accommodate all learners. Universal design motivates and guides the construction of learning environments that are flexible enough to accommodate all learners in the first place, without the need for extensive, costly and time-consuming modifications at a later date.

A learning environment structured by universal design may be thought of as a 'pre-differentiated' environment, in the sense that the curricula, materials, methods etc are designed with diversity in mind and are thus flexible enough to accommodate students with a range of abilities. Such a learning environment is said to be achieved through the implementation of the three goals of universal design for learning (Rose and Meyer, 2002).

Various forms of literature exist that present flexible guidelines on how to implement the goals of universal design for learning and engage in a process of universal design. These guidelines are not typically prescriptive but act as a set of strategies that teachers can draw from to build-in the options and flexibility necessary to maximise student learning opportunities (CAST, 2008). Further, universal design is not a process that replaces differentiation, but a process that encourages teachers to make use of good practice by building such practice into curricula as standard, as CAST (2008) explains:

> The challenge of diversity is not merely to differentiate the curriculum but to do so effectively. To do that, [universal design for learning] depends upon identifying practices that have proven effective not just for the "average" student, if such a student exists, but for those students who are distinctly "not average" …. (p7)

The implication here is that the range of strategies used to provide access to the curriculum are not separate to universal design but integral to it. Research literature that disseminates examples of good practice can support the universal design process by providing teachers with conceptual resources and classroom strategies that aid design. It is worth noting that the act of drawing from research also suggests that the universal design process is not a static, 'one-off' event of engaging with current examples of best practice, but a process that requires teachers to continually update their knowledge and skills in the field and draw from new forms research and practice.

Not all authors, however, see differentiation as universally positive. Some research literature points out negative aspects of differentiation (Hart, 1991; 1996; O'Brien, 1998).

O'Brien (1998) notes that the practice of using easier tasks as a form of differentiation can lower pupil expectations and opportunities. Egelund (2000) notes that in Denmark, despite the small class sizes:

> … it is not possible to differentiate instruction enough to fulfil the needs of more than two-thirds of the pupils. (Egelund, 2000, p96)

Bowers (1997) looked at the views of children, based on a series of group interviews with 713 children in 27 schools across London. A number of comments covered differentiation

of the curriculum according to needs. One student objected to having an extra adult in the class to differentiate 'because it makes my friends feel stupid' (Bowers, 1997, p225). Bowers also cites American research by Fulk and Smith (1995) opposing any type of modification of teaching approach, due to issues of equity and fairness.

3.7.5 In-class support

Another form of support potentially available to the mainstream class teacher is in-class support. This can occur through the presence of an SNA or having an extra professional in the class to enable co-teaching.

3.7.5.1 In-class support through the deployment of an SNA

Logan (2006) describes the increase in the number of SNAs in Ireland over the last decade as a means to promote inclusion. However, the role of the SNA in Ireland has been limited to meeting the 'care needs' of children. Through a combination of survey and case study data, Logan (2006) shows conflicts between the supposed and actual job the SNA does, given that some SNAs do not work with one specific child, but with a class, and that the job of the SNA is not necessarily simply one of care, but in practice often impinges into the sphere of education (See section 2.4).

Lawlor and Cregan's (2003) research showed that SNAs' practice was also evolving to include more educational duties, in addition to the duty of care in a special school context. A similar finding emerges from the work of Carrig (2004), who surveyed SNAs and teachers in a special school about the duties of SNAs.

Drawing international comparisons with the work of the SNA in Ireland is difficult, as support personnel in the classroom have a range of different titles and roles. In Northern Ireland and England there are teaching assistants or learning support assistants; in Finland there are classroom assistants; while a common term in the American literature is 'paraprofessional' (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer and Doyle, 2001).

More importantly, support personnel in different jurisdictions have a variety of roles, some of which differ significantly from that of an SNA in Ireland. For example, Rose and O'Neill (2009) compared SNAs in Ireland with teaching assistants in England and found considerable differences. In England, the teaching assistant's role is seen in part as supporting teachers by assisting in curriculum delivery and classroom management. In Ireland, SNAs are seen more as providing either full time or part time care support to individual students.

3.7.5.2 Teaching assistants in England

Lindsay (2007) provides a review of the various roles of teaching assistants in England. Teaching assistants have held many roles, and indeed have worked under different titles. Lindsay's (2007) comments are similar to those of Logan (2006) in describing the lack of clarity of the role of these teaching assistants, which have often been left up to the teacher. A variety of types of support are described, including:

> ... direct teaching of academic skills, life skills or vocational skills; supporting pupils with challenging behaviour to prevent or ameliorate possible disruption and optimize both conduct and learning; facilitating interactions with other pupils; and providing personal care or supporting self-help skills in children, e.g. toileting and feeding. (Lindsay, 2007, p14)

The role of the teaching assistant is said to vary from school to school. For example, teaching assistants may support individual pupils, a group of pupils or support the teacher in the classroom. Some schools employ teaching assistants with a specialism such as English as an additional language, the creative arts or in a particular aspect of SEN.

Teaching assistants are meant to work under the guidance or supervision of the classroom teacher. The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) (website: **www.tda.gov.uk**) officially identifies a range of duties and tasks in which teaching assistants may engage. Day-to-day tasks are said to include:

- planning, delivering and evaluating teaching and learning activities
- preparing the classroom for lessons
- helping pupils who need extra support to complete tasks, individually and in groups
- observing pupil performance and reporting on observations to the teacher
- supervising art and craft activities and displaying work
- looking after children who are upset or have had accidents
- playing educational games with children and encouraging younger children to learn through play
- setting up ICT resources and supporting teaching and learning through the use of ICT
- listening to pupils read, reading to them or telling them stories
- helping with outings and sports events
- carrying out routine administrative tasks.

Teaching assistants are not required to lead lessons, but they may supervise a class when the teacher is unavailable. Teaching assistants who have achieved higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status may be expected to take classes as part of their day-to-day duties.

At present there are no mandatory qualifications or requirements for teaching assistants, though the TDA notes that increased competition for teaching assistant places in schools has meant that employers often select candidates with a range of qualifications. Teaching assistants typically attend a four-day induction programme. Watson and Robbins (2008) summarise the *Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordination Centre* (EPPI-Centre) literature review (2007) on the qualifications and training for teaching assistants in the UK. The review has identified that (as of 2006) there were 147,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants in schools in England. This figure represents a significant rise since 1997 when the figure was 61,300.

In 2005, the TDA published the *Career Development Framework for School Support Staff*. The types of qualifications available for teaching assistants include the following:

- National vocational qualifications (NVQs)

- Vocationally related qualifications (VRQs)

- Vocational qualification for support work in schools

- Higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status

- Foundation degrees.

However, Nasen (formerly the National Association of Special Educational Needs) has publicly expressed concern over the use of unqualified staff to support vulnerable children. They argue that such staff should be well-trained and suitably qualified (Education and Skills Committee, 2006). Watson and Robbins (2008) describe how the apparent lack of qualifications among support staff is reflected in a survey conducted by University of Plymouth and the DfES in 2002, in which it is claimed that 39.4 per cent of teaching assistants in primary schools and 34.2 per cent in secondary schools have 'no qualifications relevant to their practice' (Watson and Robbins, 2008, p15).

3.7.5.3 Classroom support personnel in other countries

Looking beyond England, Takkala (2007) provides a comprehensive list of tasks undertaken by classroom assistants in Finland. These exemplify the complex nature of the role of the assistant in the classroom.

- Assisting the pupil

- Assisting the teacher

- Assisting/teaching an individual, a small group, or half a class

- Teaching the whole class

- Discussions with the teacher/another adult

- Discussions with a pupil

- Supporting behaviour

- Waiting/observing/listening

- Nurturing

- Moving from one place to another

- Organising/preparing things in the classroom.

Groom and Rose (2005), in a study of the role of teaching assistants in supporting the inclusion of pupils with social emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream classes, identify the following aspects of the TA's role which contribute to successful practice:

- time for establishing individual positive relationships with pupils

- good listening skills

- working with pupil in class, on a one-to-one and across contexts including lunchtimes/playgrounds

- qualities of fairness, patience and tolerance
- understanding of pupils' difficulties
- have a range of strategies to deploy.

(Groom and Rose, 2005; p29)

Moran and Abbott's (2002) study highlights the important role of the teaching assistant in Northern Irish schools in promoting inclusion. They conducted interviews in a variety of schools. The teaching assistant was stated to have multiple roles. They provide:

- individual support
- support for small groups
- work within the confines of learning programmes laid out by the teacher
- a means to establish a good rapport with pupils
- a way to liaise with other teachers.

It is clear that a teaching assistant can take a range of roles, and that the position requires a number of skills. Jerwood (1999), based on her own experience as a SENCO in an English secondary school, notes that teaching assistants are most effective in a setting where they are working with teachers who have good management skills.

A further issue arising from Lindsay's literature review is the potential overlap between the role of the teaching assistant and the teacher. Lindsay notes a general lack of empirical evidence on the positive impact that teaching assistants have on children. Blatchford, Barrett, Brown, and Webster (2009) provide some evidence of the impact of teaching assistants, through systematic observation of pupils in 49 primary and secondary schools. A key finding was that the support staff allowed for more individual attention, more teaching, better classroom control and more engagement from the pupils. However, in the final report of their longitudinal study of the role of support staff, including teaching assistants, in schools in England and Wales, Blatchford *et al* (2009) raise major concerns about the effectiveness of teaching assistant support provided to children. These can be summarised as follows:

- Children, particularly low-attaining children and those with SEN have more contact with teaching assistants than they do with their teachers, and often this is provided in small groups.
- Teacher assistant support, although it has a positive impact on attention and distractibility, has a negative impact on children's progress (in English, mathematics and science).

Too often, it appears that teaching assistants are used as providers of alternative support rather than additional support for children with SEN in mainstream primary and secondary classrooms. Their impact on children's progress also raises concerns, particularly given the high number of such staff now working in schools in a number of countries. However, the role of teaching assistants is highly valued by teachers because of their perceived contribution to good quality teaching and classroom control

(Blatchford *et al*, 2009). This perspective is supported, with regard to carefully targeted interventions, by Farrell, Alborz, Howes and Pearson (2010).

The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2009) referred to the use of teaching assistants instead of teachers as unacceptable, calling instead for their work to be reframed as complementary to that of teachers. Alborz *et al* (2009), in an extensive review of research evidence, highlight the problems already referred to here, but they also note that teaching assistants can have a positive impact on children's progress when they focus on discrete well-defined areas of learning (e.g. basic literacy skills). They also have an important role to play in ensuring that children can participate in class as well as discrete group activities without experiencing the stigma of highly focused adult support. This point is also made by Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004), who use detailed case study evidence to show how this affords children with Down syndrome opportunities to show that they can achieve in ways that are visible to their peers. Importantly, this has a powerful knock-on effect, as it fosters the development of friendship. This vital aspect of support is less tangible than those related to academic impact, but of great significance to children and their families.

There is also an issue about the need for appropriate training for these assistants. Moran and Abbott (2007) note that many adults who assist in the classroom may not have appropriate qualifications. Lindsay (2007) also points out that in many studies the qualifications of teaching assistants were an issue of concern. However, Groom and Rose (2005) found that those responsible for recruiting teaching assistants valued previous experience more highly than specific academic qualifications. Teaching assistants in Groom and Rose's study did have access to a variety of training opportunities after appointment, although there were sometimes difficulties in accessing this training. Alborz *et al* (2009) and Blatchford *et al* (2009) pinpoint problems associated with teaching assistant support, and indicate how these might be addressed through training and more careful deployment. Any developments in this area need, of course, to involve teachers as well as teaching assistants.

Research into approaches that support effective collaboration of this kind has been carried out by Vincett, Cremin and Thomas (Cremin, Thomas and Vincett, 2003; Vincett, Cremin and Thomas, 2005). One of the three approaches they found to be effective, namely reflective teamwork, was applied in two Irish primary schools (O'Brien, 2010) This small-scale study highlighted the role that educational psychologists can play in supporting teachers and SNAs to work together, using a model of reflective teamwork. It also showed the strengths and weaknesses of the approach when applied in a new context. More importantly, it raised issues about definitions and expectations of SNAs; in particular, the need for time to be available for teachers and SNAs to plan collaboratively was highlighted. Study participants also pointed out that the training provided should be adapted to take account of the role of the SNA in Ireland, as outlined in Circular 15/05 (DES, 2005)

3.7.5.4 Co-teaching

Co-teaching is another form of in-class support for class teachers. A definition of co-teaching is provided by Bauwens and Hourcade (1995):

… restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a coactive and co-ordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviourally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings. (Bauwens and Hourcade, 1995, p46)

Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles (1997) describe five basic models of co-teaching:

1. One teach – one assist

2. Station teaching: each teacher focuses on one part of a lesson, teaching to small groups and moving from station to station

3. Parallel teaching: teachers are working on the same content and plan together, but split the class to provide the same lesson to smaller groups

4. Alternative teaching: one teacher works with a smaller group to re-teach or supplement what is being taught to the rest of the class

5. Team teaching: both teachers are working co-operatively to teach the students in one group.

Moving away from the organisation level of the classroom, co-teaching can also be divided depending on the work of the teacher (Sands, Moleskin and French, 2000). Four models are described:

1. Tag team, whereby one teaches a part of the lesson, and the other follows.

2. Speak and add, whereby one teaches, with the other adding additional information where necessary.

3. Speak and chart, whereby one teaches and the second documents on overhead projector, whiteboard or similar.

4. Duet, with both teaching simultaneously.

These two sets of models provide a good insight into the rich potential of team teaching. Trent, Driver, Wood, Parrott, Martin and Smith (2003) note the lack of knowledge on the actual practice that occurs in co-teaching environments. Using a combination of observation and interview data, their study focused on the relationship between the teachers, changes in instruction in co-teaching environments and the benefits of the system.

The need to develop a relationship and common planning is emphasised in order for co-teaching to be properly implemented. An important aspect is to ensure the roles of the two teachers are clear, particularly in the context of the classroom teacher having mastery in the area of the curriculum, while the co-teacher has special education expertise and has greater mastery in pinpointing potential areas of difficulty and preparing differentiated materials for children with difficulties. Interestingly, the teachers who took part in the Trent *et al* (2003) study found that the boundaries between their roles became more fluid over time with the special needs teacher engaging with the mainstream curriculum and the mainstream teacher in adapting materials.

The teachers state clearly the benefits of being able to co-operate in the classroom with knowledgeable and experienced colleagues. For the pupils, the obvious benefits were

that they could now be included in the classroom, rather than feeling isolated due to withdrawal. Though no standardised assessments were provided as evidence of the benefits to students, Trent *et al* (2003) state that informal measures indicate benefits of co-teaching for students with and without disabilities. It should be noted that the generalisation of these findings is questionable, as the situation involved two teachers who stated that the method was compatible with their own teaching styles to begin with.

Welch (2000) does attempt to provide standardised findings to support the notion that co-teaching can lead to improvements in academic attainment in students. This is a rarity in the research literature; Welch, Brownell and Sheridan (1999) indicate that most literature around co-teaching either provides anecdotal evidence or merely gives advice on how to implement co-teaching models. Pre- and post- tests of literacy skills indicated statistically significant gains in literacy skills for children in both the classes involved in the study. Scores improved for pupils both with and without learning disabilities, although improvements were not significant for pupils with learning disabilities alone, probably due to small group sizes.

Welch's findings were corroborated by qualitative data from the teachers. Both pairs of teachers were generally positive about all aspects of this approach, other than the additional time needed for collaborative planning; they also expressed an intention to continue co-teaching the following year. There were, however, some teething troubles. One pair of teachers did not feel they needed to engage in the recommended pre-planning dialogue, as they already knew each other well. The special education teacher in this pair became frustrated at not being fully involved in the planning. She eventually aired these feelings to her classroom teacher partner, and the difficulties were resolved. As Welch points out, this provides an interesting insight into the process involved in collaborative planning and working (Welch, 2000).

Co-teaching can of course be problematic. Managing a co-teaching environment can be very difficult. Challenges identified by Friend (2007) include a lack of:

- curriculum knowledge on behalf of the co-teacher

- collaboration (or conflicting perspectives of the role of the two teachers)

- time for planning.

The issue of conflict between teachers is described anecdotally, with one teacher describing how she felt relegated to a teaching assistant role as the class teacher exerts domination, which is similar to the situation described by Welch (2000).

3.7.6 Withdrawal

Another common method by which inclusion and curriculum access in mainstream schools is supported is through the withdrawal of children with SEN for teaching by a resource or learning support teacher for discrete periods on a daily or weekly basis. This withdrawal can occur on an individual or a small-group basis.

One question that must be addressed is where 'withdrawal' stands as an option in the context of inclusion. For example, Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) place it

alongside special classes as a form of segregated provision. Vlachou (2006) provides an insight into the withdrawal practices in Greece. He attempted to challenge the common perception that the use of support rooms and part-time withdrawal are the best ways to achieve inclusion by administering questionnaires and conducting interviews with a group of 63 special education teachers working in mainstream schools. One finding from this study was that the main role of the special teacher is to teach children in withdrawal situations, rather than collaborating and working towards greater inclusion into the mainstream classroom for children with SEN.

Another important issue is the prevalence of withdrawal in comparison with in-class support. Though no information is currently available in Ireland, Croll (2001) conducted a survey of 46 English primary schools to provide an overview of the educational experiences of children who had statements of SEN in primary classrooms. At that time, out of 114 children with statements, only 36 spent the whole week in class, with 24 out of 114 children spending five or more hours each week withdrawn from the mainstream classroom. A further 25 children spent from one to two hours a week being withdrawn from class, and 29 spent three to four hours a week withdrawn from class. An OECD report (2005) indicates that information about the provision for students receiving additional resources while being included in a mainstream classroom is very difficult to source at a national level.

Another critical issue with regard to withdrawal is the extent to which there is co-ordination of teaching between the classroom and the withdrawal situation. A report by Eivers, Shiel, Perkins and Cosgrove (2005) suggests that there is a lack of co-ordination in a significant proportion of Irish primary schools. In the report on reading standards in Irish primary schools, nearly 20 per cent of the teachers who responded to the survey stated that they were not personally aware of the learning support guidelines introduced in Ireland in 2000 (DES, 2000), with over a quarter of teachers stating there was little or no integration between the child's learning in the classroom, and the child's learning within learning support.

Anderson (2009) provides an additional insight into the views of pupils on withdrawal. She worked with four pupils with dyslexia in their final years in an English primary school. An important aspect of the pupil's views can perhaps be summed up by the title of the article: 'they're telling me what I already know instead of what I don't know'. Though some benefits are noted, such as increases in confidence and self-esteem, the main findings are negative with students feeling they are missing out on what is happening in the mainstream classroom and issues around the content and pacing of what they are taught during withdrawal.

On the other hand, Norwich and Kelly (2004) in a study of 101 pupils at primary and post-primary schools found that their preferred form of support was withdrawal, as opposed to in-class support. Reasons for preferring withdrawal included better quality of support on offer, a quiet environment offering less distractions, the avoidance of bullying and being with friends. An influential inspection review report focusing on the English context, *Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught?* (Ofsted, 2006), identified mainstream resource bases (units) that used a judicious blend of withdrawal and mainstream classroom provision as a particularly effective form of provision. Although

these settings needed to analyse the use of teaching assistants more critically, they were particularly good at specialist teaching within the context of providing children with access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The best of these resource bases ensured that children attending them had regular and meaningful opportunities to work alongside their peers in mainstream classes.

In Finland, part-time withdrawal for children experiencing difficulties in learning is the norm. This is provided without recourse to labelling or IEPs (Takala, Pirtmaa and Tormanen, 2009), and often on a temporary basis for a short period of time (e.g. four to eight weeks). Withdrawal teaching provided by teachers with extensive SEN training focuses on core subjects of literacy (first language), mathematics, foreign languages (second and third language acquisition is the norm in Finnish schools) and behaviour-focused support. The model is not without its difficulties, but its fluid nature is interesting, and potentially 'destigmatises' additional or discrete support.

3.7.7 Assistive technologies

Another way in which curriculum access for children with SEN can be facilitated is through the use of AT. Part of the current American legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2001; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement (IDEIA) Act, 2004) deals directly with AT. The IDEIA defines AT as:

> … any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. (section 300.5)

These must be taken into consideration in an IEP for a child with a disability.

Benedict and Baumgardner (2009) attempt to provide an overview of the extent to which children with 'special health care needs' in America require AT. Drawing on a national survey, they note that 49 per cent of children with special health care needs require AT, though not all of these children actually have access to the relevant AT.

Lee and Templeton (2008) note a variety of barriers to the successful implementation and use of AT. These include:

- lack of funding

- lack of family participation

- lack of availability of devices

- lack of qualified personnel to provide advice on which pieces of technology would be beneficial, and training teachers to use these pieces of technology optimally.

Lahm (2003) highlights the need for there to be AT specialists employed by school districts and to provide input to IEPs to ensure that the IEP accurately reflects the child's needs. Lahm (2003) also provides an overview of the type of training that is required for specialists in this area.

Sze (2009) provides a review of the literature in the field of AT. Key findings are that the research focuses on how to implement AT rather than on outcomes, the sparsity of

proper intervention studies in the area, and mainstream teachers' lack of comfort in using these types of technology.

Examples of pieces of AT are:

- instructional software on computers

- AT for people with a visual impairment, such as Braille readers and writers, magnifying equipment, etc

- AT for people with a hearing Impairment (HI), such as hearing aids, communicative devices used by the teacher

- AT for people with a physical disability, including wheelchairs, seats, tables, switches and similar technological devices

- low-tech pieces of AT, such as grips for pens, pencils, slanted desks, adapted paper, talking calculators, etc.

3.7.8   Additional curriculum content

There is general agreement in the literature that, for many children with sensory disabilities and physical disabilities AT alone may be insufficient to support curriculum access and additional curriculum content is needed. For example, McDonough, Sticken and Haack (2006) note that students with a visual impairment need additional knowledge and skills in order to have the same level of curriculum access as their peers. Main areas identified where additional content is necessary are those such as mobility and independence (Douglas, McCall, McLinden, Pavey, Ware and Farrell, 2009), and communication, through Braille or sign language. Mobility is an important issue for children with visual impairment and for children with a physical disability who may require additional physiotherapy or other physical supports in order to achieve the same levels of mobility as other children. For students who are deaf or have a significant hearing impairment, the opportunity to learn sign language from an early age is widely seen as being critical in maximising educational achievement (Marschark, 2009).

Douglas *et al* (2009) argue that interventions and teaching are necessary in order for children with visual impairment to acquire orientation and mobility skills. For these children, additional teaching is also required to compensate for the incidental learning that occurs for children without visual impairment. Marschak (2009) makes similar arguments in relation to children who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, pointing out that evidence suggests that they may need long-term intensive help in developing flexible approaches to problem-solving and integrating information from different sources. Teaching mobility, and the physical therapies that many children with a physical disability need, require specialist skills, which most mainstream class teachers are unlikely to have. Similarly, teaching alternative communication systems such as sign language or Braille require specialist skills and knowledge. There is general agreement in the literature that access to specialist teaching in these areas is vital if children with sensory and/or a physical disability are to gain the fullest possible access to the curriculum.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has reviewed international literature in a number of areas of direct relevance to the current study: primary curricula, children's and parents' perspectives, and factors which facilitate or impede access. The evidence is complex, and sometimes contradictory, with different approaches being favoured in different countries. Consequently, few firm conclusions can be drawn about what strategies are most likely to be successful in a particular context. However, some pointers emerge regarding elements which need to be present if children with SEN are to be enabled to gain the fullest possible access the curriculum. Perhaps the clearest of these is that children with SEN need access to teachers with appropriate specialist knowledge and skills. It is much less clear if there is one optimum way of providing this. Additionally it is clear that a range of other supports, such as AT, differentiated resources and additional personnel can facilitate access, but that these need to be effectively deployed to have a positive effect on children's access to the curriculum.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The methodology is divided as follows:

- the initial survey, to identify schools catering for pupils with a range of SEN in the age range specified in the contract (junior infants to second class)

- the school selection process

- the case study

- designing observation schedules for the case study

- designing interview schedules for the case study

- the collection of documents

- piloting and validating the research instruments

- ethical issues

- data analysis

- limitations.

As proposed in the tender and agreed in the contract, multiple case studies comprised the main method we used to address the research questions. We decided that this was the most appropriate strategy because it would allow us to broaden and deepen our understanding of the issues around curriculum access for young children with special needs in mainstream classrooms.

Sampling of attributes is not regarded as the most important feature of a set of multiple case studies:

> ... sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority. Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance. (Stake, 1995, p6)

Nonetheless, we felt that it was important to try and ensure that all varieties of SEN were represented within the case studies. Where possible, we carried out several case studies within one school. While this was partly for reasons of expediency, a more important reason was that the literature suggests that school-level factors are likely to play a part in the extent to which children with SEN experience access to the curriculum. We therefore hoped that several cases within each of a number of schools would throw light on these school-level factors.

A necessary first step, therefore, was for the research team to identify suitable schools for the case studies. We were assisted in identifying suitable schools by the NCSE, who provided an anonymised listing of the distribution of pupils with low incidence SEN in the relevant age groups across mainstream primary schools. For each child, the list gave the category of SEN; the class they were in; and the school where they were enrolled but not, of course, the child's name. There were over 3,000 pupils, enrolled in over 1,000

different schools on the list. We used a modification of random sampling (Robson, 2002) sending questionnaires to ten per cent of the schools on the list, except where fewer than 20 schools had pupils in a particular category of SEN; in these cases we sent questionnaires to all the relevant schools. This selection method resulted in us sending questionnaires to 230 schools in total.

4.2 Content of the Questionnaire

The main aim of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4) was to enable us to select suitable schools for case studies. In order to do this we needed:

1.   more detailed information about the school and the pupils with SEN

2.   to know whether or not the school was potentially interested in participating in a case study.

The questionnaire requested information on numbers of pupils with both high and low incidence SEN in junior infants to second class, and on other factors which the literature suggests may impact on the way in which schools provide for pupils with SEN, namely:

•   socio-economic background (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) status)

•   proportion of international children

•   age range catered for

•   whether or not it had a special class or classes

•   school size

•   religious affiliation

•   number of support and resource teachers.

The accompanying letter gave a brief overview of the study as a whole and of what would be involved if they chose to participate in a case study. Schools interested in taking part in a case study were invited to indicate their interest by returning a tear-off slip (see Appendix 1(c)).

4.2.1 Findings from the initial survey

One hundred of the 230 schools to which we sent questionnaires replied, a response rate of 43.5 per cent. Of these 100, 45 schools (19.6 per cent of the original sample) expressed an initial interest in participating in a case study.

Tables 1 and 2 give basic information in relation to the 100 schools returning questionnaires, and the 45 schools expressing an interest in participating in a case study.

Table 1 Number of schools returning the questionnaire by type (Schools expressing an interest in parentheses)

Age range catered for		Gender of pupils		DEIS status		Special class	
Junior school	12 (9)	Boys	13 (8)	DEIS	25 (10)	Yes	12 (6)
Senior school	4 (1)	Girls	4 (1)	Non-DEIS	75 (35)	No	88 (39)
Primary school	82 (35)	Mixed	81 (36)				
Missing data	2		2				
Total	100 (45)		100 (45)		100 (45)		100 (45)

Table 2 shows the total number of special classes catering for pupils with different types of need, in both the 100 schools which returned the questionnaire and the 45 schools which expressed an interest in taking part in a case study.

Table 2 Special classes in schools returning the questionnaire (Schools expressing an interest in parentheses)

Type of class	Number of classes
ASD	11 (3)
Mild GLD	4 (2)
Moderate GLD	3 (1)
Specific speech and language disorder	4 (1)
Severe/profound GLD	1 (1)

Table 3 Mean statistics for schools returning the questionnaire

	Mean	Mean for the schools interested in taking part
Number of students	207.9	249.5
Number of international students	25.9	32.2
Number of GAM teachers	1.4	1.68
Number of resource teachers	1.2	1.38
Number of language support teachers	0.98	1.29
Number of teachers for travellers	0.2	0.2

As can be seen from Table 3, the profile of schools which expressed an interest in taking part in a case study is very similar to that of the 100 schools that replied to the survey. For example, they have a similar ratio of resource teachers to pupils, and similar proportions of international students. However, schools which expressed an interest in taking part have more pupils than those that did not. It is also possible that the schools showing an interest in further participation differed in other important respects from the total sample. For example, principals of these schools may have been more confident about their SEN provision; this has implications for the generalisability of the study.

Table 4 gives details of the number of schools catering for pupils with different types of disability within their mainstream classes (junior infants to second class), for both the 100 schools who returned the questionnaire and the 45 which expressed an interest in taking part in a case study.

Table 4 Number of schools catering for each category of need and number of pupils with different types of need in schools returning the questionnaire (N=100) and those interested in participating in a case study (N=45)

Category of need	Number of schools who had pupils in each SEN category among those returning the questionnaire (N=100)	Number of pupils (in the 100 schools)	Number of schools from those interested in taking part in a case study (N=45)	Number of pupils (in the 45 schools interested in further participation)
Physical disability	42	72	24	49
Hearing impairment	22	27	9	12
Visual impairment	13	16	8	9
Emotional disturbance	40	97	22	60
Severe emotional disturbance	14	20	7	10
Borderline mild general learning disability	33	93	19	65
Moderate general learning disability	24	27	11	13
Severe/profound general learning disability	3	4	1	1
Autistic spectrum disorder	46	96	27	41
Specific learning disability	23	51	11	26
Assessed syndrome	21	47	10	31
Specific speech and language disorder	53	127	24	70
Multiple disabilities	18	23	8	13

The categories of low incidence disability included in Table 4 are as defined in Circular 02/05 (Definitions of these categories are to be found in the glossary). We also requested information about total numbers of children with SEN (including those being catered for under the GAM) on the initial questionnaire. However, the quality of information provided varied greatly between schools, so information about total numbers of children with SEN is not included here.

4.3 Selecting the Case Study Schools

We shortlisted schools for the case studies from the 45 which indicated an initial interest in taking part, based on the factors listed in Table 5. This involved a number of steps.

Table 5 Factors involved in the school selection process

Categories of SEN covered in the school
Region
Number of children in the school
Classes the children were in
School size
DEIS status
Special class
Single sex or mixed school
Religious affiliation

We gave precedence to ensuring that pupils with all categories of SEN were included. Therefore, schools that stated they had students in the lowest incidence categories of SEN and/or those least frequently provided for in mainstream classes of need were more likely to be included on the final shortlist as this increased the possibility that at least one child would be observed for every category of need.

A second consideration was the number of categories of SEN in a school, so that case studies in one school could cover a range of SEN. We selected schools from five regions (Dublin, the rest of Leinster, Connacht, Munster and Ulster), and of a range of sizes. We also tried to ensure that there were at least one of each of the following: a single sex school; a junior school; a school with a special class; a school designated as having DEIS status; a Gaeltacht school; a Gaelscoil[2]; and a school that was not affiliated to the Catholic Church.

This process gave us an initial shortlist of 25 schools. We then considered pragmatic factors, such as clustering, which would enable the case studies to be carried out as effectively as possible, in order to reduce this to the final shortlist of 15 schools. These clusters included sets of schools in Munster, Ulster and Connacht which were within one hour's drive of each other, so that the researchers could visit the schools within each cluster schools within one trip. We contacted these 15 schools by letter (see Appendix 1(a) to ensure that they were still willing and able to take part in a case study. In addition, as no Gaeltacht schools or Gaelscoileanna returned the initial questionnaire, we recruited one Gaeltacht school and two Gaelscoileanna via a contact who had carried out research into SEN provision in these schools.

Once we had established initial contact by letter, we then telephoned the schools to arrange the case study visits. We found it impossible to find mutually convenient times for the case studies in some of the shortlisted schools due to factors such as whole-school inspections. These were replaced with other schools from the initial list of 25 where possible.

About a month before the case study visit was due to take place, we contacted the principal again, and asked them to make an initial selection of pupils and contact

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2   A Gaeltacht school is a school where teaching takes place through the medium of Irish, in an area of the country where Irish is the language predominantly spoken. A Gaelscoil is a school where teaching takes places through the medium of Irish, in an area of the country where English is the language predominantly spoken.

parents for permission (see Appendix 1(a). We discussed with principals the range of pupils we wished to see, if possible, and asked to see the range of ways in which the school facilitated curriculum access for these pupils. In some schools where the principal and teachers were willing to take part, it emerged that parents of the pupils with SEN did not wish to participate. These schools had to withdraw at this stage.

As we wanted to ensure that pupils with all categories of SEN were included in case studies, at this point we approached some additional schools, through contacts in the field. Two schools were recruited in this way.

4.3.1 The final list of schools

Table 6 below shows the final list of schools which we visited for case studies. They include schools from across the Republic of Ireland, including urban and rural locations; large and small schools; single sex and mixed schools; schools with DEIS status; and schools that had special classes. We observed 46 children with SEN in total from all SEN categories, comprising 30 with low incidence SEN and 16 who were provided for under the GAM. We anticipated having the opportunity to observe new Irish children in a number of schools who stated that they had a significant population of new Irish children. In fact, only one of the case study children, pupil I1, was not from an Irish background. Pupil I1 came from an Eastern European background.

Table 6 Details of schools participating in case studies

School	Numbers of pupils/ categories of SEN observed	Number of pupils on school roll	Gender of pupils	Special classes	DEIS status
School A	1(PD)	393	Mixed	X	X
School B	4 (HI,ASD, EDBP, GAM)	433	Mixed	X	X
School C	2 (GAM, PD)	163	Mixed	Yes	X
School D	2 (Multiple disability, ASD)	353	Mixed	X	X
School E	4 (PD x2, ASD, GAM)	186	Mixed	X	Yes
School F	2 (ASD, PD)	150	Mixed	X	X
School G	4 (VI, PD, ASD, moderate GLD)	703	Mixed	Yes	X
School H	11 (Severe/profound GLD x3* EDPB x2, ASD x3, GAM x3)	186	Mixed	Yes	X
School I	4 (ASD, moderate GLD, PD, HI)	618	Mixed	X	Yes
School J	6 (PD, specific speech and language disorder, GAM x4)	281	Mixed	Yes	Yes
School K	6 (GAM)**	146	Boys	No	Yes

*   This group of three pupils formed the basis of one case study.

**   This group of six pupils formed the basis of one case study

4.4 The Case Studies

Case studies involve collecting data from multiple sources using a variety of methods within a real-world context (Bassey, 1999; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). We used observations and semi-structured interviews to collect data relevant to the research questions. In addition we collected copies of documents where these were available and

relevant to the questions. The focus for each case study was an individual child with SEN; however, in most instances we carried out several case studies within each school.

Table 7 shows the relationship between data collection methods and sources and the research questions.

Table 7 Research questions and data sources

Research question	Data collection methods and sources
1. How the curriculum is being implemented and differentiated	Observations, interviews with teachers and SNAs
2. How pupils with SEN and their parents are experiencing the curriculum	Interviews with pupils, interviews with parents, interviews with teachers and SNAs
3. The factors which contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN	Observations of pupils, field notes, interviews, documents
4. The challenges involved for teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum	Interviews with teachers, observations
5. The challenges for pupils with SEN in gaining access to the curriculum	Observations, interviews with pupils, teachers, parents and SNAs documents

Figure 1 Relationship of data sources and case studies within one school
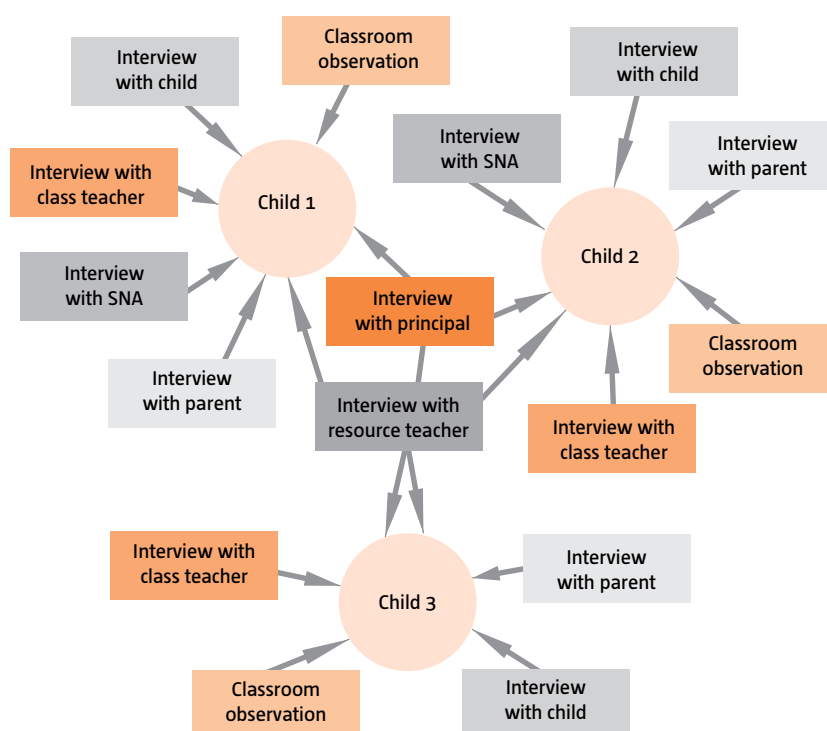
Figure 1 shows the possible data sources and their relationship to the case study children within one school. As indicated in Figure 1, not all possible data sources were available for every child. We observed every child who was the focus of a case study and interviewed the child and all relevant adults as far as possible. However, we were only

able to conduct meaningful interviews with 31 children, and although the research team were flexible in accommodating parents' schedules, not all parents were able to make themselves available for interview. Some children did not have the support of an SNA, and in one or two instances a member of staff was absent.

4.5 Observations

4.5.1 Development of the observation schedule

An important part of each case study was observing how teachers and other professionals facilitate children's access to the mainstream curriculum, and how in turn children experience the curriculum. An appropriate observation schedule should attempt to be comprehensive in covering all elements relevant to the research questions. We examined the literature for observation schedules relating to inclusion and access to the curriculum; we also examined the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), a questionnaire-based instrument intended to help schools evaluate and improve their own practice.

Despite extensive searching of the literature, the only observation schedule we found which addressed the issue of *access* to the curriculum for children with SEN in mainstream classrooms was that devised by Dobbins and de la Mere (1993) for their study of the inclusion of pupils with a visual impairment, shortly after the introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales. Dobbins and de la Mere suggest that access to the curriculum can be usefully defined as the extent to which the various tasks which comprise the lesson are or are not achievable by the pupil with SEN. They further suggest:

> Simplistically, maximum access is seen as that which is experienced by ordinary pupils, and which can be achieved by pupils with special educational needs when special educational provision meets these special needs. (Dobbins and de la Mere, 1993, p49)

Thus, in considering the extent to which an individual pupil with SEN has been enabled to access the curriculum in a way which is equivalent to their peers, Dobbins and de la Mere include access which occurs with the help of any special provision available to them (such as the assistance of an additional adult, a differentiated worksheet etc.).

In designing the observation schedule used in the current study, we used this model, with its focus on how children were provided with access to the curriculum equivalent to that experienced by their peers, taking the special provision made for them as a starting point.

Aspects of the *Index for Inclusion* (especially some of the indicators in dimension C, evolving inclusive practices, and particularly C1.1: 'Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind' and C1.2: 'Lessons encourage the participation of all students') were reflected in the observation schedule. However, as the Index for Inclusion is generally focused on the school, and is intended to be completed over the course of a school term or longer, much of it was not applicable to the development of our observation schedule. Aspects of the *Index for Inclusion* were also taken into account in designing the interview schedules and in informing the data analysis.

The advisory committee also played a role in the design of the research instruments; members gave helpful feedback on several drafts of these tools. More general discussions were also held during advisory committee meetings about the nature of the research, particularly about the complex interaction between ethical and practical issues with regard to parental consent.

Table 8 indicates the variety of elements covered in the observation. The observation schedule (see Appendix 3) allowed observers to document the relevant details of the observation, both on a minute-by-minute basis, and afterwards as a summary document. The focus was on the behaviours of the key participants – the case study child, the teacher, the SNA or other staff member, and the rest of the class. We considered that the observation schedule needed to capture six key elements:

- identifying and cataloguing the lessons and tasks observed
- detailing any differentiation which occurred for the case study child
- the interaction of the teacher, both with the class, and with the child
- the behaviour of any other staff members, such as an SNA or learning support teacher, who spent significant periods of time in the class during the observation period
- the behaviour of the class and of the child
- the extent to which the child was engaged with, and accomplishing the tasks set.

In addition, the observation schedule included space for additional notes. We believe that, by covering these aspects, the completed observation schedules provided a comprehensive overview of the lessons observed, which was readily understandable to the whole research team.

Table 8 Elements included in the observation schedule

Details of the class, teacher, child and SNA
Differentiation strategies employed by the teacher and SNA
Lessons and tasks covered by the class and by the child
Interaction between the teacher and children/class
Interaction between the SNA and children/class
Behaviour of the child and of the class
Checklist of the extent to which the child is accessing the curriculum

A checklist was an important part of the observation schedule, which the observer completed for each task, indicating their view of the extent to which the child was accessing the curriculum. As stated above, we based this checklist on the work of Dobbins and de la Mere (1993), and developed it to be as comprehensive as possible.

Dobbins and de la Mere (1993) had *access* to extensive information about the nature of each child's visual impairment and used video-recording to enable them to make detailed assessments of the extent to which the tasks observed were achievable for the individual children, both before and after any special provision had been taken into account (ranging from one point for tasks which were judged fully achievable to five points for tasks which had a visual component judged to be beyond the pupil).

As we intended to conduct case studies in a number of different schools and classes, we did not anticipate having either access to sufficient information, or time to assess whether a specific task was easy or difficult for a specific child (given their particular SEN). Additionally, we felt that, in relation to the relatively simple tasks that children were given in junior and senior infant classes in primary schools, it would be difficult to measure either potential achievability or actual achievement of the tasks set on a rating scale. Consequently we decided to modify Dobbins and de la Mere's approach. Instead of the potential and actual achievability of the task, for each of the 46 case study children we observed whether or not the child:

1. was engaged in the task
2. accomplished the task
3. was being differentiated for, or had additional support
4. was doing the same task as his/her peers.

A checklist was constructed of ten different options, based on the interaction between these four dimensions. This continuum was refined following discussion and the piloting process, to form the checklist included in the observation schedule (see Table 9).

Table 9 Access checklist from the observation schedule

Rating of curriculum access
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is achieving on:*
the same tasks as the rest of the class without additional support
the same tasks as the rest of the class but with additional support
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not achieving on:
the same tasks as the rest of the class without additional support
the same tasks as the rest of the class with additional support
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.
The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/aims with or without additional support.
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson.

*   We initially referred to the child with SEN achieving on the same tasks as their peers as this was the terminology used by Dobbins and de le Mere; however in analysing the data we came to the conclusion that it would be more accurate to refer to the child accomplishing the same tasks as their peers, and so this is the term which is used in discussing the findings in subsequent chapters.

In addition to this, the observation schedule included space for field notes, including personal reflections, additional details about the school or the class, or other information gained from speaking to people outside of interview situations. This

observation schedule, including the checklist, was used to observe each of the 46 case study children.

The aim for each case study was to observe children in at least two lessons selected by the class teacher: one in which they found it easy to facilitate curriculum access for the child, and one in which they found it more challenging.

4.5.2 Conducting the observations

When observing in the classroom, we made every attempt to be unobtrusive, to both the children and the teacher. The observer sat at the back of the class, or in a spot designated by the teacher. The observer would go around from table to table while the children were writing or engaged in other work, and observe the work of the child who was the focus of the observation. We made every effort to ensure that this was done discretely, and that the child did not become nervous or unsettled as a result of the observer being in the classroom.

We aimed to observe two lessons in different subject areas for each child. A lesson was defined as a continuous period of work in one area of the curriculum, such as Irish, English or SPHE.

Most (though not all) lessons were made up of several discrete activities. We adopted Dobbins and de le Mere's term 'task' for these activities and, like them, included as a task each discrete activity which was an intentional part of the lesson content. Dobbins and de le Mere list 39 discrete tasks which they observed as part of their study, including:

- listening to the teacher introducing the lesson
- working on the blackboard
- watching the teacher presenting material on the blackboard
- completing a worksheet
- reading silently
- engaging in group discussion as directed by the teacher
- carrying out practical work.

We similarly defined a task as a discrete subdivision of a lesson. An English lesson, for example, could begin with the teacher explaining a new concept to the child. This first component might involve simply listening to the teacher, or answering questions when asked. A second task within the same lesson might involve a worksheet, a workbook, or the copybook. The third and final task in the same lesson might be a question-and-answer session to assess the children's learning. We also observed brief lessons which consisted of just one task. Such brief lessons took place at various points during the day. For example, yesterday's spellings might be briefly revised at the start of the day, or a verse of a song which was being learned might be recited between two longer lessons. In both these instances, the lesson consists of just one activity and therefore one task.

We followed Dobbins and de le Mere in including as tasks those discrete aspects of the lesson in which a child was expected to listen or watch, rather than simply those in which

they were engaged in written, spoken or practical activity. We also followed Dobbins and de la Mere in giving precedence to the child's access to the curriculum (i.e. the content of the lesson), as this was the main focus of the study, rather than the level of accomplishment of the task.

The fact that we observed entire lessons enabled us to judge both engagement and accomplishment for each individual task, and also to note the provision of support and differentiation when relevant. For example, we were able to use the evidence of a child attending to the teacher's lesson introduction and then raising their hand and answering correctly to conclude that they were not only engaged with the task, but had accomplished it, in the same manner as the other children in the class. If, on the other hand, the child appeared engaged, but the SNA re-explained the introduction to them in simpler language, or prompted them to raise their hand, we judged them to be accomplishing the task with differentiation or support as appropriate. Of course in any mainstream class, the children accomplish the majority of tasks set by the teacher at a variety of levels, and the teacher applies either explicit or implicit criteria to judge whether the child's accomplishment is sufficient to enable further learning. If we were uncertain as to whether the level at which the child had accomplished the task (with or without support) was within the range for the class as a whole, we were able to check this during the interview with the class teacher.

Examples of the lessons and tasks observed in the current study are given in section 5.2.8.1.

4.6 Interviews

The second main source of data within the case studies was semi-structured interviews with teachers, SNAs, parents and the children themselves. We designed these to complement the observations; giving us information about aspects of the research questions which could not easily be observed. They enabled us to access the perspectives of teachers, SNAs, parents and the children themselves about the child's access to the curriculum and the child's progress. They also enabled us to collect information about factors which might influence curriculum access, such as the organisation of SEN provision within the school and staff access to training. Additionally, they enabled us to check on the typicality of the lessons we had observed (e.g. whether or not there had been any unusual circumstances in terms of the staff and children present, variations in behaviour etc.) and, where necessary, to clarify aspects of the observation (see Appendix 4).

4.6.1 Interviews with teachers and SNAs

Topics covered in interviews with class teachers, resource teachers and SNAs included:

- whether the lessons observed were typical

- differentiation, both in relation to the observed lessons and more generally

- whether the child generally has full access to the curriculum as defined in this study[3]

- any other assistance that the child receives

- the planning process

- information about IEPs and lesson plans

- how children's needs are assessed

- how children's learning is monitored

- the level of support the teacher is getting

- interaction with parents

- qualifications and training specific to SEN

- previous experience.

4.6.2 Interviews with parents

Topics covered in the interviews with parents included:

- background information about the child

- their views on the child's access to the curriculum

- support provided for the child

- communication with the school

- participation in the IEP process.

Parents were also given the opportunity to raise any other issues they wished to in relation to provision for their child's SEN. Interviews with parents were conducted on school premises at a time convenient to the parent, or in some instances by telephone. In one school, two parents opted to be interviewed together.

4.6.3 Interviews with pupils

In recent years, there has been a growing amount of research on obtaining the views of children with SEN. This research has demonstrated that it is possible for quite young children, including those with SEN, to express their views. We took this research into account when designing the interviews for the children. The interview began with talking to the child about the lessons we had observed, and the work they had been doing and if they had enjoyed the class, the lessons. We also asked them what they liked and did not like at school; who helps them at school, and if there was anything about the school they would wish to change. We used simple language, and words familiar to the child. We asked, where possible, to interview the child immediately after the second lesson observed, but due to the constraints of the situation this was not always possible. We tried to ensure that the interviews were conducted in an environment where the children

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3   We take the term 'curriculum access' to mean the extent to which an individual child is enabled to participate in the same breadth of curriculum as other children of the same age and at a level appropriate to their needs (see p. 26).

were comfortable, most often the classroom or resource room, and a familiar adult was sometimes present to reassure the child. If the child showed any signs of discomfort or unwillingness to engage in the interview, the interview was halted. Some children were interviewed as a member of a small group or with a friend, rather than individually.

As noted above, the advisory committee discussed, and gave feedback on, several versions of the interview schedules, in particular the children's interview schedule.

4.7   Collection of Documents

We asked to see the IEPs (for the case study children) and assessment documents in all the case study schools, and requested copies of them. We also asked about relevant school policies and requested copies of these as well. However, not all the case study children had IEPs, and in a visit lasting one to two days, in many instances it proved difficult to obtain copies of the documentation we were shown.

We did not ask for copies of children's work, relying instead on observing their work during class. It would clearly have been outside the scope of our study to collect copies of work from children who were not the specific subjects of our case studies, whereas we could observe their work during the course of the lesson. In some instances we were offered and took copies of the work of the case study child.

4.8   Piloting and Validation of the Research Instruments

4.8.1   Piloting

We piloted the research instruments in two schools. In the School 1 a total of five pupils of second and third class age were observed for one lesson in each of two classes. We checked reliabilities in relation to the number of discrete tasks into which the lesson was divided, the extent to which access was achieved and the strategies used by the teacher. The observers agreed about all these aspects following discussion, with 100 per cent agreement in all instances in how the observers split up a lesson into tasks, and the assessment of curriculum access based on the checklist set out in Table 9.

We interviewed both class teachers and the relevant pupils from each class. There was no SNA present in either class at the time of the observation. There were no problems with the adult interviews. Exploration with the teachers at the conclusion of the interview revealed that they had enjoyed the interview, but did not share our understanding of what was meant by asking if a lesson was 'typical'. For example, one teacher did not report the absence of an SNA as being untypical, whereas it was our understanding from subsequent discussions that this was indeed untypical. We noted that additional probes might prove necessary for this question.

We regarded a lesson as 'typical' if the usual staff and children were present and fulfilling their normal roles within the lesson (excluding the occasional absence of one or two children). A lesson would not be 'typical' if a usual member of staff was unexpectedly absent (for example if an SNA was absent) or extra children were present (for example if children who would normally be with the resource teacher at that time were in the

classroom). We saw it as important to check the typicality of the lesson, as changes to staff or pupils present might impact on the ways in which the teacher provided curriculum access for the case study child; knowing if a lesson was 'untypical' would highlight to the interviewer the need to explore ways the teacher provided curriculum access, which had not been observed.

We interviewed the pupils in two class groups, at their own request. They proved well able to talk about the lesson and their likes and dislikes, and volunteered that they asked other pupils for help, although the observers had not been able to see this at the time. However, one pupil commented that it was 'a bit scary' being observed. Several factors, most notably the number of observers, combined to make the observations high profile in this class, and this probably accounts for this remark. School 1 used an assessment for learning scheme,[4] which meant that these pupils were accustomed to being asked what they had achieved successfully and what they had found difficult. Aside from this, the only difficulty encountered with the observation in School 1 was lack of space for recording the number of discrete tasks within a lesson on the observation schedule, a problem which was easy to rectify.

Minor modifications were made to the research instruments to reflect these issues before the second pilot. In the second pilot, we observed two pupils (one from junior infants and one from second class) and carried out interviews with the class teachers. There were no problems. (See Appendices 3 and 4 for copies of the Observation and Interview Schedules).

4.8.2 Reliability observations

We carried out reliability observations on four occasions, which the research team believed comprised a reasonable balance between the additional disruption caused to a class in having two observers present simultaneously, and ensuring that the observation categories were being used consistently by different observers. In all cases, following discussion and comparison of completed observation schedules, the two observers agreed on the content of what had been observed and judgements on how engaged the child was in the curriculum, their behaviour, and aspects of the teaching, as well as the number of tasks that children engaged in for each lesson.

4.9 Ethical Issues

We submitted a detailed outline of both parts of the study to the ethics task group of the College of Education and Lifelong Learning at Bangor University and received ethical clearance from them. All changes to the research instruments were also submitted to the ethics task group. The first part of the study (the initial questionnaire) raised no unusual ethical issues. However, the second part (case studies) did raise some potentially complex ethical considerations. These included:

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4   Assessment for learning consists of three key processes: 1) finding out where a learner is; 2) making explicit where they need to get to; and 3) showing the learner how to get there, so that they can take action (Assessment Reform Group, 1999).

- making adult participants, especially parents, aware that there would be no negative consequences to refusing consent to the study

- the age of the children involved, and the care needed to ensure that they were able to give or withhold assent

- teachers being asked to identify lessons in which they find it challenging to enable pupils with SEN to access the curriculum

- safeguarding issues in relation to interviews with young children.

4.9.1 Informed consent from adult participants

We provided school principals with a plain language statement and consent form (see Appendix 1(a) and then discussed details in relation to the study by telephone. Teachers and SNAs were provided with individual plain language statements and consent forms (see Appendices 1 (d) and 1(e). In practice, we did not observe any lessons in which teachers found it particularly challenging to provide access for the pupil due to the practicalities of carrying out the case studies. This meant that in the great majority of cases we simply observed the child in two successive lessons which were convenient for the school and the researchers.

We asked school principals to select suitable children, contact parents in whatever way they felt was most appropriate and to pass on the documentation to them. We asked parents to give consent for their child to be observed and interviewed and for them to be interviewed themselves (see Appendix 1(c)) Some parents declined to take part in the study. Principals were also supplied with a letter to all parents in the relevant classrooms which outlined the study and made it clear that they could withdraw their child from the classroom while the researchers were present if they so wished. No parent chose to withdraw their child.

On arrival at a school, the researchers checked with the principal that all relevant consent forms had been received, and obtained any which were outstanding. At the beginning of each adult interview, we gave a brief explanation of the project and checked that the interviewee was happy to go ahead.

4.9.2 Safeguarding and assent from child participants

We ensured that all members of the research team had an up-to-date clear Criminal Records Bureau check or Garda clearance as appropriate. Wherever possible we interviewed children in a familiar environment, their classroom or the resource room, and/or with a familiar adult present. We interviewed some children in a small group, where, after consulting with people who knew the child well, we felt this was the best option. At the start of the interview, we asked the child if they were happy to talk to us about the lesson in which we'd been observing, and about their school. If the child showed any signs of discomfort or unwillingness to engage in the interview, we ended the interview.

4.9.3 Other issues

On one occasion we opted not to interview a parent who had given permission for their child to be observed, because the principal was concerned that the prospect of the interview was causing the parent some anxiety. We took steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all participants.

4.10 Data Analysis

4.10.1 Analysis of data from the preliminary questionnaire

Data from the preliminary questionnaire were coded and entered into SPSS version 15 and cleaned prior to analysis. Analyses were then performed as appropriate.

4.10.2 Analysis of case study data

As the individual child (or in two cases group of children) was the case study unit, each piece of data (interviews, field notes, observations) was given an identification number linking it to an individual child. Some data were given multiple identification numbers to link them to several children from the same school (for example interviews with principal teachers). The case study data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Each member of the research team typed up and summarised their own observations using the same pro-forma as was employed in the observation itself (See Appendix 4). We used SPSS to explore children's access to the curriculum using the quantitative data from the curriculum access checklists that were completed for each child by the observers.

The elements in this SPSS dataset are shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Elements included in the SPSS dataset

Child's identification number
The school the child was in
The class the child was in
The category of SEN
The lesson type
The observer's measure of the child's access to the curriculum

A professional transcriber transcribed all the interviews and returned them to the project team as Word documents. The transcribed interviews, together with the qualitative aspects of the observation schedules and field notes were then imported into Nvivo-8. Nvivo 8 allows for the direct importation of data in a variety of media. We decided to use Nvivo because it has the capacity to integrate and track data from a variety of sources, and is thus very suitable for the analysis of case study data. NVivo was also selected because it facilitates the production of a clear audit trail. This was particularly useful in identifying factors which act as facilitators or barriers to curriculum access. Additionally two members of the project team had used it successfully during a previous project.

We generated categories for coding the data through an iterative process.

Initial categories (tree nodes) were generated from two main sources:

- the five key research questions

- a discussion between members of the research team following reading and hand coding of the data from one of the schools in which the case studies had been conducted.

We then applied the categories and sub-categories thus generated to the data from a second school, and finalised them (modifying and tightening definitions for categories and subcategories if necessary) during a further discussion between members of the project team. All the data were then coded to these nodes and sub-nodes. Some additional nodes were created during the coding process, and after further discussion, we agreed that some nodes needed to be coded on, creating a hierarchical coding tree.

The next phase of analysis involved the research team generating memos which were designed to summarise what the researchers believed, at that point of the analytical process, to be a true representation of the qualitative data under each of the research questions.

4.10.3 Reliability and trustworthiness

Nodes in Nvivo hold data which have been coded from sources. We used three methods to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data which emerged from NVivo. First, we carefully defined each category and subcategory which was being used for coding purposes in NVivo. This ensured that the coders had a shared understanding of which content should be assigned to each category. Second, the two primary coders began the process by talking through a set of three interviews, coding specific statements to ensure that they were confident that they were coding data to the same categories. Third, the interviews in relation to one school were coded by both coders. NVivo showed over 90 per cent agreement between the two coders in relation to the coding of this set of data to categories and sub-categories. Each of two main coders coded approximately 50 per cent of the interviews and observation schedules.

4.11 Limitations of the Study

A number of factors limit the generalisability of this study. Firstly, it consists of a set of exploratory case studies. In exploratory case studies balance, variety and the opportunity to learn take precedence over representativeness. Consequently, in selecting schools for the case studies, we tried to ensure that that all varieties of SEN were represented, together with a range of other factors which our reading of the literature led us to believe might have an impact on access to the curriculum for young children with SEN.

For this reason, it is not possible to generalise from our findings to give an overall picture of curriculum access for young children with SEN in Ireland, for example with relation to the frequency of use of different types of differentiation. However, the use of multiple case studies does allow us to comment on the factors which impact on children's curriculum access, and those which support or challenge teachers in providing that

access. Factors which are common between all the case studies or which distinguish some from others also provide insight into how these factors interact.

We initially recruited schools via a questionnaire survey and then added to the sample through personal contacts. It is possible that both those who expressed an interest in taking part in the case study through the questionnaire, and those of our personal contacts who responded, were unlike those who did not respond. Participation was potentially quite demanding of teachers as it involved classroom observation and it seems quite possible that schools and teachers who were reasonably confident about their practice, or had a particular interest in SEN issues, were more likely to agree to a study of this type. There was some evidence of this in that some of our contacts who were personally interested in participating were unable to persuade colleagues to agree.

It is also possible that teachers who agreed to take part chose to teach a lesson they had prepared especially for us. We do not think this happened as principals tended to make the final arrangements for classroom observations on the first morning of our school visit, and the researchers were given considerable flexibility in deciding on the most appropriate schedule of observations and interviews.

We also depended on principal teachers to recruit children and their parents for the case studies. It might be argued that they were likely to only recruit those who were likely to be complimentary about the way the school was providing for their child, and that those who thought highly of the school were also more likely to participate. Thus the way in which children were recruited for the case studies suggests that they and their parents might have had a particularly positive experience of school, and that inclusion was likely to be working well for these particular young children.

Despite these limitations, we are confident that we have been able to learn a great deal from this project, and that our findings illuminate important aspects of policy and practice in enabling access to the curriculum for young children with SEN in mainstream classrooms.

5 Implementation and Differentiation of the Curriculum

The next three chapters report the findings of this study in relation to the research questions (see Figure 2). In this chapter, we give an overview of the data collected and report the results in relation to the implementation and differentiation of the curriculum (research question 1). A major section within this chapter presents data on the use of support, which is an issue of relevance to several of the research questions.

Figure 2 Research questions

1. How is the curriculum being implemented and differentiated in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN?
2. How are pupils with SEN and their parents experiencing the curriculum in these settings?
3. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN in these settings?
4. What are the challenges involved for teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum in these mainstream primary school classes?
5. What are the challenges for pupils with SEN in gaining access to the curriculum in these settings?

5.1 Overview of Data

As indicated in chapter two, we intended to conduct case studies in up to 15 schools. In fact we conducted 39 case studies in a total of 11 schools (see Table 11). Two of these case studies involved groups of children (one group of six pupils and one group of three); thus a total of 46 pupils were involved in the case studies. In addition, three additional pupils with severe/profound GLD were observed within their own class setting, because it had proved extremely difficult to find schools which catered for pupils with severe/profound GLDs within the mainstream.

Table 11 gives details of the data collected for each case, arranged by school. A total of 31 pupils, 21 parents, 34 class teachers, 24 SNAs, 13 resource teachers, one special needs co-ordinator[5] and two principals were interviewed in the course of the case studies, and observations were conducted in a total of 91 lessons.

Table 12 summarises the data collected for each school. Some interviewees worked with more than one case study child, consequently some pieces of data contributed to more than one case study. Table 11 shows the number of pieces of data relating to each case study while Table 12 shows the total number of interviews and observations, and additional data sources collected from each school.

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5   The duties relating to the coordination of SEN provision which this teacher carried out were assigned to her as a post-holder, and subject to change when post-holder's duties were reviewed by the principal. It was not therefore a formal position within the school.

Table 11 Data collected for each case study

School	Children observed			Interviews					
	Identifier	Age, class	SEN category	Child	Parent	Class teacher	SNA	Resource Teacher	Other
School A	A1	First class	PD	X	X	X	X		
School B	B1	First class	ASD	X		X	X		
	B2	First class	EDBP	X	X	X	X		
	B3	Senior infants	HI	X	X	X			
	B4	Junior infants	GAM (ADD)	X		X	X		
School C	C1	Second class	GAM			X			Principal
	C2	Senior infants	HI			X	X	X	
School D	D1	First class	Multiple disabilities	X	X	X		X	Fieldnote special needs co-ordinator
	D2	Junior infants (repeat)	ASD	X		X	X	X	
School E	E1	Senior infants	PD	X	X	X	X	X	
	E2	Junior infants	ASD	X	X	X	X	X	Additional SNA
	E3	First class	PD	X	X		X	X	
	E4	First class (repeat)	GAM		X		X	X	
School F	F1	Junior infants	Assessed syndrome		X	X	X		
	F2	Second class	ASD			X	X		
School G	G1	Second class	VI	X		X	X	X	Principal
	G2	First class	PD	X		X		X	
	G3	First class	ASD			X		X	
	G4	First class	Moderate GLD	X		X	X	X	
School H	H1	Junior infants	EDBP			X	X		
	H2	Second class (Split First/Second class)	GAM (Mild GLD)			X			Fieldnote
	H3	Second class (Split Second/Third class)	GAM (Mild GLD)	X		X			
	H4	Second class (Split First/Second class)	GAM (Mild GLD)			X			Fieldnote
	H5	Second class (Split Second/Third class)	ASD	X	X	X		X	
	H6	Second class (Split Second/Third class)	EDBP	X	X	X			
	H7 (group)	Various	Severe/profound GLD		X two parents interviewed together	X	X		Fieldnote
	H8	Senior infants	ASD		X	X	X		
	H9	First class	ASD	X	X	X		X	
School I	I1	First class	ASD	X			X		
	I2	Senior infants	MOD GLD			X	X		
	I3	First class	Assessed Syndrome			X	X	X	
	I4	First class	HI			X			
School J	J1	Senior infants	GAM (dyspraxia)		X	X	X		
	J2	Second class	PD	X	X	X	X		
	J3	Senior infants	GAM (ADHD)	X	X	X			
	J4	First class	GAM (Mild GLD)	X	X	X			
	J5	First class	GAM (ADHD)	X	X	X	X		
	J6	Senior infants	Specific speech and language disorder	X		X			
School K	K1 (group in co-teaching)	First class	GAM	X		X		X	Additional teacher

Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes

Table 12 Total number of observations, interviews and additional data collected by school

School	Obser-vations	Child interviews	Parent interviews	Class teacher interviews	SNA interviews	Resource/LT interviews	Other	Reliability observations
A	1	1	1	1	1			
B	4	4	2	4	3			
C	2			2	1	1	1 principal	
D	2	2	1	2	1	2	1 special needs co-ordinator	1 Reliability observation (D2)
E	4	3	4	3	5	3	IEP Field note on precision teaching, Precision teaching record sheets	1 Reliability observation (E3)
F	2		1	2	2			
G	4	3		4	2	3	1 Principal, lesson and education plans	
H	9	5 (including 1 group interview with two children recorded as a fieldnote)	5	6	3	2	1 Field note on group interview with two pupils (additional to the individual interviews)	1 Reliability observation
I	4	1		3	3	1		
J	6	4 (including 1 group interview with two children)	5	5	3			1 Reliability observation
K	1	1 (group interview with 6 children)		2		1		
Totals	39	24 (31 children)	19	34	24	13		

5.1.1 The children observed

Table 13 lists the number of children observed for each category of SEN, using the DES SEN categories as laid out in Circular 02/05 (see glossary for further details of these categories). As might be expected, the largest category is children with high incidence SEN being catered for under the GAM. This group consisted of ten individual case studies and one group case study. A variety of high incidence categories of SEN is included in

this grouping, for example children with mild GLD, dyspraxia and ADD/ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). In addition there were a number of children described by their schools as 'weak'; these children probably had learning support needs, but had not yet been tested on standardised tests to confirm that they were achieving at or below the tenth percentile in reading or mathematics. Additionally, children within one category sometimes had a wide range of needs. For example, one child who had ASD could also have been described as 'exceptionally able' while others had moderate GLD.

Table 13 Children observed by category of SEN and class

Category of SEN	Number of children	Classes
Children allocated for under the GAM	16 (10 individual observations + 1 group of 6)	1 x junior infants, 2 x senior infants, 9 x first class, 4 x second class
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	9	2 x junior infants, 1 x senior infants, 4 x first class, 2 x second class
Physical disability	5	1 x senior infants, 3 x first class, 1 x second class
Emotional disturbance	3	1 x junior infants, 1 x first class, 1 x second class
Hearing impairment	3	2 x senior infants, 1 x first class
Assessed syndrome	2	1 x junior infants, 1 x first class
Moderate general learning disability	2	1 x senior infants, 1 x first class
Multiple disabilities	1	1 x first class
Visual impairment	1	1 x second class
Specific speech and language disorder	1	1 x senior infants
Severe/profound general learning disability	3 (group observation) + 3 (observed in special class)	3 x special class
Total number of children observed	46 (+3 with severe/profound GLD observed in special class)	5 x junior infants, 8 x senior infants, 21 x first class, 9 x second class, 3 x special class

None of the children we observed for the case studies had been formally assessed as having dyslexia, again due to their young age. However, a number of teachers and parents did suspect that children were in fact dyslexic (a pupil in school K, pupil J5, pupils H5 and H9). All other categories of need are represented in the case studies. It should be noted however that it proved extremely difficult to find schools which catered for pupils with severe/profound GLDs within the mainstream. One small school catering for one such child within the mainstream which initially agreed to take part in the project had to withdraw due to a whole school inspection. Two schools which had special classes with some part-time integration of pupils with severe/profound GLDs were therefore approached. One of these two schools was unable to take part due to the number of teachers participating in CPD, however, the other school, school H, was able to participate.

Table 14 shows how the observed lessons were distributed between classes and across the curriculum. This table shows clearly that half the observations took place during

literacy and numeracy lessons. It also shows that we were able to observe more lessons in first and second class than in junior and senior infants.

Table 15 shows the number of tasks observed in these different lessons, by age group. It is clear from this table that on average a lesson was made up of two tasks.

Table 14 Number of lessons observed by subject area and class

Lesson type	Number of lessons	Lessons in Junior infants	Lessons in Senior infants	Lessons in First class	Lessons in Second class
Arts	20	2	6	7	4
English	27	5	4	11	7
Homework	3	-	-	2	1
Irish	7	-	2	3	2
Mathematics	19	4	2	7	6
News	2	-	1	1	-
PE	4	-	1	3	-
Playtime	1	1	-	-	-
Religion	1	-	1	-	-
Lessons taught in a special class	1	-	-	-	-
SESE	3	1	1	1	-
SPHE	4	-	-	1	3
Total	92	13	18	36	23

Table 15 Number of tasks observed by subject area and class

Lesson type	Number of lessons	Number of tasks	Tasks in Junior infants	Tasks in Senior infants	Tasks in First class	Tasks in Second class
Arts	20	33	4	10	9	8
English	27	68	17	9	27	15
Homework	3	3	-	-	2	1
Irish	7	12	-	6	3	3
Mathematics	19	40	11	4	13	12
News	2	2	-	1	1	-
PE	4	12	-	3	9	-
Playtime	1	1	1	-	-	-
Religion	1	1	-	1	-	-
Lessons taught in a special class	1	2	-	-	-	-
SESE	3	5	1	1	3	-
SPHE	4	8	-	-	1	7
Total	92	187*	34	35	68	46

*   This total includes two tasks taught to pupils in a special class for pupils with ASD, and two tasks taught to pupils with SPLD, who were included in a mainstream class but were older than the other pupils in the study.

The distribution of observations between different curriculum areas and classes probably reflects a combination of factors:

- the children involved in the study were young, and teachers focused on ensuring that they acquired the basics

- visits to schools lasted one to two days; numeracy and literacy occur on a daily basis with many other subjects occurring only weekly

- for practical reasons, most observations took place in the morning, and teachers often focused on literacy and numeracy in the mornings when children are more alert

- children in infants (especially junior infants) are less likely to have been either formally or informally assessed as having SEN.

In the following sections quotations taken from the qualitative data are referenced by the child's ID number and the speaker. Thus, children are referred to simply as H3, E4 etc while adults are referred to by the child's number and their role in relation to that child. For example, H3 teacher references the class teacher in school H who taught child 3, while H4, H5 resource teacher references the teacher in school H who provided resource teaching for both H4 and H5.

5.2 Implementation and Differentiation of the Curriculum

One key objective of the research was to describe the ways in which teachers implement and differentiate the curriculum for young pupils with SEN.

As discussed in Chapter 3, despite some differences of emphasis, the international literature broadly agrees that differentiation means adjustments to one or more of: classroom organisation and management; lesson content; learning outcomes; resources; pedagogy; and assessment methods. However, while teachers in the current study used the entire range of differentiation strategies listed here, individual instances of differentiation which we observed could not all be fitted easily into just one of these categories. Teachers often used a combination of strategies so, for example, we saw few instances of pedagogy being adapted to meet the child's needs which did not also include additional or different resources. In particular, additional support was used in conjunction with every other type of differentiation.

The role of classroom assistants in differentiating the curriculum for children with SEN is a particularly important and often contentious issue. In the international literature, support is usually dealt with separately from differentiation. However, the data which we discuss in this chapter suggests that it is appropriate to conceptualise additional support, as experienced by the children in this study, as one aspect of differentiating through resources. Additional support, and in particular the role of the SNA in providing that support, formed a substantial proportion of our data. The children we observed were receiving additional support for over half of the tasks in which we saw them engaged (see Table 17).

In the remainder of this chapter, we first report our findings in relation to the SNA as an agent of differentiation, followed by the other forms of differentiation mentioned

in the literature: classroom organisation and management; lesson content; learning outcomes; pedagogy; resources; and assessment methods.

5.2.1 The SNA as an agent of differentiation

Additional support (from an SNA) was the most frequent way in which the curriculum was differentiated to enable children with SEN to access it. Table 16 below indicates the different ways that SNAs acted as an agent of differentiation. SNAs were observed giving physical assistance for writing tasks and in PE lessons. SNAs also re-explained concepts to pupils with SEN, to help them follow work that they may not have grasped first time. Some examples of the types of differentiation supported by SNAs are given below. It should be noted that some of these go considerably beyond the role of the SNA as defined in Circular 07/02, and that in some instances SNAs appeared to be making teaching decisions without referring to a teacher.

Table 16 Themes in relation to the SNA as an agent of differentiation

Theme	Number of references
Verbal prompting	42
Re-explaining concepts and providing alternative tasks	41
Physical assistance	13
Writing or reading for the child	7
Total	103

5.2.1.1 Physical assistance

We observed SNAs giving physical assistance to children on a number of occasions, and interviewees also mentioned occasions on which children received physical assistance. Thirteen instances were noted in NVivo, with assistance being provided to pupils with ASD, VI, dyspraxia, severe/profound GLD, and children catered for under the GAM, as well those with physical disabilities. Examples of physical assistance included an SNA working hand-over-hand with a child to do some colouring in or writing; helping a child with physical disabilities to join in PE through moving them in wheelchair; and giving pupils physical assistance to move around or use the toilet.

5.2.1.2 Re-explaining concepts and providing alternative tasks

One frequent way in which the SNAs we observed differentiated the curriculum was by actively re-interpreting and simplifying the teacher's instructions for the child. Forty-one references were made to this practice in eight of the eleven case study schools. One teacher explains in detail the job of re-interpreting the teacher's work for the child:

> I mean basically my concern is about him not understanding what's going in and it's like I have a back up, do you know what I mean, she's there to re-explain everything and to basically help him when I can't because I'm going around everybody else and I can kind of rest assured that you know she'll re-explain it if he didn't get it because I'm kind of concerned if he's not getting it because he

won't tell me but she'll kind of ask him the questions, the follow on discreetly to see if he gets it you know. (School D, teacher D2)

SNAs also provided alternative tasks in PE, as teacher E2 explained:

… at this age group they do a lot of work regards bean bags, hoops, balls, things like that, and that sort of work is necessary for him too. Now we obviously have to differentiate regards if I set a task, as in to jump on two legs, he would find that very difficult, so the SNA would be with him and she would say to him right E2 we'll just jump on the one so we would differentiate like that. (School E, teacher E2)

We also occasionally observed SNAs doing separate work from the rest of the class with the pupil they were supporting. In some instances, this was because the pupil concerned was using AT such as a Brailler (Pupil G1), or Numicon (Pupil G4) which made the tasks undertaken by the pupils concerned rather different from those done by the rest of the class.

An example in relation to Pupil I2, a child diagnosed with Down syndrome and moderate GLD, gives a clear picture of a number of different differentiation strategies being combined, including the SNA supporting the pupil by re-interpreting concepts and by helping him stay focused.

The first lesson is science. The teacher uses a BBC website to do an experiment looking at how flowers need heat, sun and water to grow, and experiments with complex variables to see how it affects growth. He asks relatively complex questions to the class, but simpler ones to Pupil I2. They talk about thermometers to check temperatures, etc. The SNA is also beside Pupil I2 reiterating and pointing out important things to Pupil I2. She has to redirect him frequently. (School I, observation I2)

This observation provides examples of redirection, but there is also clear indication of the SNA doing separate work with the child in the classroom to teach the child at a level appropriate to him.

5.2.1.3 Verbal prompting

We observed many occasions on which the SNA prompted the child to think through a task. This involves redirecting the child to relevant aspects of the task, or reminding them of the instructions given by the teacher. Nineteen references to verbal prompting were coded as 'academic' because the SNA focused directly on academic aspects of the task, for example, using a prompt to jog the child's memory or directing them to a specific part of the task.

We also coded 23 references to non-academic prompting, which focused more on getting the child simply to pay attention, or to behave.

The following observation provides an example of academic prompting, although it is clear from the observer's comment that D1 also received support from the SNA in terms of non-academic prompting:

The SNA actively gave Pupil D1 some advice on tasks – perhaps interpreting/ repeating teacher instructions. Access to the SNA was very helpful to Pupil D1 (in terms of giving access to learning/curriculum and receiving guidance on behaviour – knowing when to calm down). (School D, observation D1)

For some children, non-academic prompting included regular prompts to help them stay on task. One SNA described it as follows:

He's no problem doing his work, you just need to keep encouraging him, he might go into a bit of a daydream looking out of the window and all that. You just have to keep him, he's well able for his work, there's no bother at all with his work, just to keep encouraging him and saying come on now we'll finish this but everything is always finished, there's no bother with him. (School E, SNA E3)

Another SNA states that she has to prompt the child to put up his hand in order to get opportunities to answer questions (School E, SNA E4). In both these instances, prompting by the SNA facilitates access for the child in question.

5.2.1.4 Writing or reading for the child

Finally, some children needed help with simple tasks such as reading or writing. We coded seven instances of this. A number of SNAs helped pupils to write down their homework in homework diaries (B1, E4, J2), either due to the child being slow in writing, or to ensure that what was written in the homework diary was accurate.

In some instances they also needed to assist the children in their reading:

Reading, you always have to be there with reading and maths and mental maths. The questions have to be read to E4 because he's not capable of reading the standard. He's quite capable of doing the answers most of the time but he won't be able to read the question. (School E, SNA E4)

5.2.2 Classroom organisation and management

In this section we deal mainly with issues relating to classroom organisation. Issues relating to overall school planning are dealt with in Chapter 7.

Teachers clearly took the needs of individual pupils with SEN into account in their overall organisation of the class. Twenty-one references were made to this type of organisation, with practices noted ranging from simply placing a child with a hearing impairment near the front of the class to make it easier for them to lip read, to giving a child with elective mutism a choice of who to sit by in order to maximise the chance of him/her talking to their neighbour. We also observed a few instances of teachers choosing to differentiate through grouping by ability.

The following less usual instances of the use of differentiation by means of flexible classroom organisation (each seen in only one case) are worth noting.

One teacher in school D gathered the children most likely to need support at the table where D2 was sitting with his SNA for writing and also grouped the children in terms of ability for reading:

> Most of the people on that table, like we moved kind of all the people who find writing difficult to the yellow table [Interviewer 'I did wonder'] Yeah so that they could be with the SNA. I try and be subtle in the way I do the groupings you know. I group them in terms of reading as well but in terms of general ability I try to mix them around a bit. It depends on what we're doing to have them in groups because sometimes I don't feel that it helps. It helps in terms of reading but the writing group we only really did that for convenience so that you know we'd know initially who to go to. (School D, teacher D2)

This teacher clearly uses a range of different groupings within the class in order to implement and differentiate the curriculum as effectively as possible, and also to make efficient use of the SNA who supports D2. The planned use of the SNA within the writing lesson was evident to the observer:

> The SNA has an important role to play and sits at a "target table" for most of the lesson, supporting D2 and other children on his table. She does move away on occasions. Her approach to support is positive and she appears to mediate teacher instructions and deal with potential problems of behaviour – nipping these in the bud. At times she takes a lead role when working with a small group of children – teaching. (School D, observation D2)

In a further instance the teacher of a split first/second class, where the six second class children all had high incidence SEN, taught new concepts which she expected the second class children to find difficult while the first class children got on with work they could do with little assistance.

Another teacher was observed to use a system of 'stations' during a mathematics lesson, which consisted of a group rotation. Group A: with teacher; Group B: independent; and Group C: with SNA.

> The "station" system is familiar to the children and they are comfortable with it. So too, are the teacher and SNA. The ten-minute station activities are well organised and supported with resources that are in place and "ready to use". The activities seem brief but allow a momentum to be maintained and most pupils seem happy to work in this routine. A few children seem not to complete activities but do not express a concern about this. The approach to classroom management is one that the teacher experienced when training to be a teacher. (School J, observation J5)

In these examples, the overall layout and planning of the classroom contributes to facilitating access to the curriculum within the mainstream classroom for children with a variety of SEN.

5.2.2.1 Co-teaching

Teachers in only two of the case study schools used co-teaching for part of the day, and one of these schools was specifically recruited because co-teaching was in use. Interestingly, both of these were DEIS schools, whose status provides them with additional teaching resources, which probably contributed to their ability to implement a co-teaching policy.

A resource teacher in school E describes a co-teaching session which takes place in senior infants:

> On a Friday I go in but it wouldn't be just for E1 because I'd go in and do English with their teacher and the resource teacher. We work in really small groups. We do phonics, vocabulary building and their reading so then they all kind of get their own individual time with the teacher. It's about four children to each teacher on a Friday for about 30–45 minutes but that's the only time I go into the class then … It works really well. We do it in two of the senior infants' classes and it works really well, it's excellent. She used to do it last year because there was more time allowed, I think nearly every day, and their reading and their sight vocabulary and everything is coming along leaps and bounds because of it, it's very, very good. (School E, resource teacher E1)

Unfortunately, due to staff sickness, we were not able to observe either of the co-teaching sessions taking place in school E. However, we did observe co-teaching in school K. During this 'power hour for literacy', pupils were grouped by ability – this was apparent in the observation and confirmed in an interview with the teacher:

> Power hour for literacy is observed. These children are split into five groups, based on tests at the beginning of the year and reviewed at Christmas (with some movement of children). The two class teachers, two resource teachers and a speech and language teacher join in and this adds up to the resource hours for the two classes, four hours a week. Work includes a phonics lesson, a new book, yesterday's book, and a two-day old book, as well as some spelling/writing work. These give the children intense bursts of a number of things during the day, with different levels of work for the different groups. (School K, observation K1)

One class teacher described how the grouping of the children occurred:

> … we tested them from the beginning and just one by one they went down to a test with the principal just to see where they were at, so we grouped them really with their ability so as it's gone on we've kind of rejigged them to see, some have gone back down and then others have moved on, so basically that's the way it's been done. (School K, Teacher K1)

In this small DEIS school (146 pupils), the resource hours for two classes (four hours in total) were combined to give all the pupils intensive small group teaching for literacy.

Classroom organisation was an important part of the team teaching programme run in School K. The team teaching was split between two first class groups, and therefore

occurred in two classrooms. There were five teachers, each of whom sat at their own table: three in one classroom and two in the other. The children moved from one table to another, in order, every ten minutes, with each teacher having their own set area of literacy to work on. Careful planning was clearly required in order for this arrangement to run smoothly, particularly with all the transitions from one table to another, and from one classroom to another. The transitions occurred smoothly, indicating a well-planned and executed programme. School K had only started on this programme in the current school year; however, they were quite enthusiastic about the process, and teacher K1 stated:

> … we definitely think there are benefits to it in their reading and their attention, focusing their attention for ten minutes. (School K, teacher K1)

5.2.3 Lesson content

We observed a number of lessons where the content was modified and/or reduced for the case study child. There was a considerable overlap between this category and that of differentiation by adapting learning outcomes or teacher expectations. Differentiation of lesson content was frequently combined with additional or different resources and extra support.

> It would be a sort of average lesson that I'd be doing you know most days, the maths, the additioning within ten, is what we're focusing on at the minute. Now the rest of the class they might be, you know, they could be adding three numbers up to ten or, you know, reading problems and solving them whether they're adding or taking away, so G4's as you could see from the sheet was differentiated where he just had five addition sums to do with two numbers. (School G, teacher G4)

The linked observation shows that not only is the teacher differentiating by level within the same general content area, but the child observed receives additional support from the SNA and particular materials to help him achieve.

> Numeracy – a worksheet is given to the class, differentiated into three streams. Again the child is assisted by the SNA, and uses Numicon. (School G, observation G4)

Differentiation by level is also supplemented by both additional resources and extra support as in the following example:

> … this maths workbook-based activity is differentiated for groups/individuals. Children carry out a range of tens and units related activities and J4 – with a few other children – works at a much simpler level than most of the class. She, together with another child, has access to additional resources to help with calculating. The teacher helps J4 get started and returns to check on her progress. J4 looks for and appreciates this support. (School J, observation J4)

Content was similarly differentiated for homework:

> [Interviewer: 'So you say those two children have different homework, obviously I'd ask the class teacher this if she was here, does the class teacher set that?'] She does indeed yes. She sources it from a different book they're using. It's more or less the same as they're doing, just a different level. (School E, SNA E4)

In some cases the child with SEN was working on very different content from their peers:

> [Interviewer: 'Right. She's starting from the very beginning.'] She is. I mean, the resource teacher has a list of words now that he's trying to get her to understand like "ball" and "sit" and "window" and stuff you would be teaching a small baby, you know. (School C, teacher C2)

> [Pupil] I2 does different work, just colouring in pictures and doing literacy work, matching words to pictures, and spelling (words like sun, seed, and rain). The SNA is clearly doing different work with him. [Pupil] I2 was simply asked to draw a picture of the plant growing on the screen, rather than noting versions of the three different experiments the teacher did. (School I, observation I2)

In the one school where we observed children with severe/profound GLDs who spent a small part of the week in a mainstream class, the teacher of the special class (referring to the NCCA Draft Curriculum Guidelines for teachers of students with severe/profound GLDs,(NCCA, 2002) commented:

> Of course there's the severe and profound curriculum so we're working really through that. (School H, special class teacher H7)

From her perspective, it seems that the primary curriculum is not able to be differentiated to meet the needs of pupils with severe/profound GLD, and she views the draft guidelines as an alternative curriculum. Nevertheless these pupils were regarded by both school staff and parents as benefitting from being in a mainstream school (see below).

It must be noted however that modification of lesson content was not the most common way that children with SEN were catered for; as Table 17 indicates, only 21 out of 187 or 12 per cent of tasks involved instances where the observed children were engaged in tasks that were modified for them, rather than the same tasks as the rest of the class.

5.2.3.1 Additional content

Some children were seen as needing additional content that provided them with extra practice in areas they found difficult, such as fine or gross motor skills. This additional content clearly formed part of the overall strategy for enabling them to access the curriculum, as shown in the following examples:

> [Pupil] I3 gets one-to-one time with the resource teacher. He works on frames learning how to button, zip and open Velcro. He appears to have major

difficulty in opening the buttons as he has left hemiplegia, making fine finger movements very difficult for him. He works on many different trays to increase his fine finger dexterity. Teacher counts the number of trays completed and when he hears the number, C is very pleased. He then completes an obstacle course which focuses on developing gross motor skills. He completes all tasks and appears to really enjoy this part of the exercise programme. (School I, observation I3)

You know it's his motor skills, so in the future he will be using a computer instead of a pencil, so generally when I'm doing Irish in the morning the SNA would work with H6 with play putty or different things to try and strengthen ... (School H, teacher H6)

... we would do extra activities with him regards moving, walking, catching, you know, how to hold things and passing things to other people, we would do a lot of extra work with him. (School E, teacher E2)

Additional content was particularly important for children with visual or hearing impairments. For these pupils, additional content focused on alternative means of communication. Sign language was mentioned in relation to three children: B3, J1 and I4. Child J1 did not have a HI, but the nature of his needs (dyspraxia which made speech difficult) meant that it was easier for him to communicate through sign language. However, it seemed that in all schools, the focus for children with hearing impairment was on gaining access to speech through the use of hearing aids, so there is no in-depth discussion of issues around additional content in relation to sign language. Child G1, who has a visual impairment was learning to use a Brailler to write. She was supported in this both during class English lessons and by the resource teacher during resource hours.

Support for providing appropriate additional content and adapting pedagogy for children with sensory impairments was provided by the visiting teacher:

We get a visiting teacher [who] comes every two weeks just to give us some fresh ideas because it's the first time I've ever dealt with somebody with no language at all because when she did come at the beginning she had no language. (School C, resource teacher C2)

This quote illustrates the benefits that a visiting teacher can provide in ensuring that the resource or learning support teacher is able to provide appropriate additional content and support for children with sensory impairments.

5.2.4 Learning outcomes

As discussed above (Section 5.2.3) there was considerable overlap between the category of adapting lesson content and that of adapting learning outcomes. Some examples have already been given, where adapting the lesson content inevitably led to a change in learning outcomes. Some teachers stated clearly in interviews that they were aiming for different learning outcomes for the pupil with SEN:

> Is he able to access the curriculum? I would say yes, but my expectations of what he can do would be lower than those of the other children. (School B, teacher B4)

However, in some instances, although the teacher altered their expectations for the pupil with SEN, it seemed to be simply the number of examples the child was expected to complete that was reduced, rather than the level; the teacher was aiming for the same learning outcome for the pupil with SEN although the number of tasks they were expected to do when the class was working individually was reduced. This type of adaptation was noted in eight of the observed lessons.

The following is a typical instance:

> I might have to say to the SNA, look if we get half of that done that'll be more than adequate because there might be a little level of discussion between her and F2 when they're doing it so I don't expect him to give me the full quota but the work he's doing is of a similar nature. Likewise with maths, he might do three sums instead of the six sums but that's because we'd be taking time to see that he's following. (School F, teacher F2)

5.2.5 Resources

In addition to support by an additional adult (usually an SNA) we observed teachers employing a range of low- and high-tech resources to facilitate curriculum access; often this took the form of supplementary resources, such as a visual timetable, additional books or concrete materials in mathematics. Low-tech aids were most evident in mathematics and included number cards, a number square and Numicon, (used by three of the children observed). High-tech equipment included a Brailler for a child with a visual impairment and a Dynavox box. In addition, one child (B3) had sound amplification provided within the classroom and was supported with sign language by the teacher in areas of the curriculum where access was difficult for him.

Children were not always enthusiastic about the aids provided to facilitate access for them, for example:

> He's a very bright boy overall and he does join in a lot and even when he doesn't join in he's usually following it so obviously the oral language is his main problem but he can still, what I find difficult is his Dynavox box, he does not choose to use it. It is his main source of communication but he chooses to use expressive language and expressive body language rather than the Dynavox so trying to get him to get effective use of the Dynavox is difficult. (School J, teacher J1)

5.2.5.1 Use of worksheets

Teachers used some form of worksheet or workbook in 25 of the 91 lessons we observed. This included six English lessons (out of 27); 12 mathematics lessons (out of 18); one Irish lesson (out of seven); two SESE lessons (out of three); and three SPHE lessons (out of four). Therefore, it appears that worksheets were less popular in language lessons

(Irish and English) and more popular in science and mathematics. The frequent use of worksheets in relation to some curriculum subjects rather than others is interesting.

Worksheets and workbooks can be utilised in a number of different ways, and can potentially contribute to differentiation. We observed worksheets being used to provide differentiation in a mathematics lesson on one occasion, when three different levels of worksheet were given to different children in the class. On a number of other occasions however, teachers differentiated by not expecting specific children with SEN to finish the worksheet. On two occasions, teachers used workbooks when one or more children finished a particular task early; these children were asked to carry on and do work in the workbook. It was not clear whether this was being used as an opportunity to extend these children.

With these exceptions, however, in the lessons we observed the same worksheet was used for the whole class at the same point in the lesson. For example, they were sometimes used as the final part of a lesson; on these occasions, the teacher would first describe a concept and then work through the worksheet aloud, before asking the children to fill in the worksheet themselves. In a number of instances, children were asked to fill in worksheets as groups. For example, in an SPHE lesson each group of children was asked to write down up to ten statements from the safe cross code. Children could also be asked to work independently on a worksheet, during which time the teacher may do some other work. In the observation of child C1, while the class as a whole did some individual work on a workbook, the teacher did reading with a number of small groups of children.

5.2.6 Pedagogy

We saw relatively few examples of adapted pedagogy that were not combined with other types of differentiation, particularly additional or different resources.

Two notable exceptions to this were the use of reward systems by some teachers with individual pupils with SEN and the use of precision teaching in school E. According to one of the SNAs, all SNAs in school E have had some introductory training in precision teaching from the educational psychologist:

> Well we all did training at the first inset of it when it was brought into the school. (School E, SNA E4)

She then explained that one of her colleagues (also an SNA) has been fully trained in precision teaching by the educational psychologist and had passed this training on to her:

> ... then after that it was really, you know, learning myself, doing this, studying that, and I also got help from, one of the SNAs got a full whack of training so she sat in for weeks and weeks and the girl I'm working with now, so from her then she passed the information down to me for E4. So that's where I got my training for that. (School E, SNA E4)

School E also ran a reading recovery programme, but we did not observe this, as our focus was on provision in the mainstream class.

Additionally, one teacher in school was observed to use a more gentle tone of voice and simpler language to a child with moderate GLDs (observation I2).

5.2.7 Assessment methods

We did not see any examples of adapted or different assessment, but this is unsurprising given that we only spent one to two days in each school. We did, however, observe children with physical or sensory needs being offered alternative ways to respond to the tasks set by the teacher, and were also told of other examples during interviews. For example, in a task which involved pairing rime and onset, G2 was given cut out letters so he could physically put the onset in front of the rime, thus dispensing with the need to write. He also had the support of his learning support teacher for this task. This strategy clearly enabled the teacher to assess whether or not G2 had grasped the concept, without the need for him to write.

5.2.8 The extent to which children were observed to engage in and accomplish tasks and access to the curriculum

Overall, as can be seen from Table 17, the great majority of the case study children were engaging with and accomplishing the same tasks as the rest of the class (with or without support) most of the time. Table 17 indicates that the most common category assigned by the observers was that, with additional support, the case study children were successfully doing the same tasks as the rest of the class.

The case study children also engaged in the same tasks as the remainder of the class without additional support for nearly a third of the time. There were relatively few occasions on which children did not engage with the task at all. These latter instances included:

- one example of a child on the autistic spectrum who was allowed to put his head down and rest for part of a lesson (Child B1)

- another child on the autistic spectrum who decided not to participate in an Irish lesson, calling the reading he was supposed to do 'stupid and silly' (G3, Observation)

- two children who were observed simultaneously by two observers during an SPHE lesson, one catered for under GAM and one with emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems (EDBP), who did not engage in an SPHE lesson, by not paying attention to the teacher or not engaging in a group writing activity (Children H3 and H6)

- a child with severe/profound GLD who was behaving in an agitated manner, and was taken out of the room during a drama lesson (Child H7)

- a child with moderate GLD who did not join in with the rest of the class when they sang a song (Child I2).

In all but one of these instances (the SPHE lesson involving two children), children did not engage with the curriculum despite the support of an additional adult. As a consequence of the low number of examples of children failing to engage with the lesson while being observed, and the lack of obvious common themes between these instances, we were unable to identify any factors which might provide specific barriers to these children accessing the curriculum.

Table 17 Overall levels of task accomplishment and pupil engagement

Rating of task accomplishment	Number of tasks	Percentage of tasks overall (%)*
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is accomplishing:	158	84.4
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	61	32.6
the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support	76	40.6
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	7	3.7
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	14	7.5
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not accomplishing:	20	10.7
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	6	3.2
the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support	13	7
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	1	0.5
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	0	0
The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson	9	4.8
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/aims, with or without additional support.	0	0
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson.	9	4.8
Total	187	100

*Percentages in tables may not total 100 due to rounding.

The remainder of this section examines the extent to which pupils were observed to engage with and accomplish tasks in relation to various factors likely to influence the extent of engagement and task accomplishment. In Chapter 8, we discuss the implications of these findings, together with the other data collected for curriculum access.

5.2.8.1 Accomplishment of tasks in relation to curriculum subjects

Table 18 shows task accomplishment in relation to the three most frequently observed lesson types.

Table 18 Accomplishment of tasks and pupil engagement by subject

Rating of task accomplishment (Number of tasks per subject)	English (68 tasks)	Arts (32 tasks)	Maths (40 tasks)
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is accomplishing:	60 (88.2%)	25 (88.2%)	34 (86.1%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	19 (27.9%)	14 (43.8%)	17 (42.5%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support	32 (47.1%)	10 (31.3%)	13 (33.5%)
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	2 (2.9%)	0	3 (7.5%)
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	7 (10.3%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (2.6%)
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not accomplishing:			
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	2 (2.9%)	1 (3.1%)	2 (5.1%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support	3 (4.4%)	4 (12.5%)	3 (7.7%)
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	0	0	0
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support,	0	0	0
The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson			
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/aims, with or without additional support.	0	0	0
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson.	3 (4.4%)	2 (6.3%)	0 0.0%

As can be seen from Table 18, children required (or were given) substantially more support in English than in mathematics or visual arts. In English, the children we observed were engaged in the same tasks as the rest of the class, without differentiation for much of the time, but in order to accomplish these tasks they received support in more than 50 per cent of them. This suggests that the support of another adult, usually an SNA, is a major facilitator of access as assessed by engagement in and accomplishment of tasks, and this was confirmed in the interviews (see below). Differentiation of tasks without additional support is almost non-existent, with only two instances being observed in English lessons, and three in maths.

Some typical examples of lessons and tasks observed in these subject areas are given below. In these examples, teachers used a variety of strategies to enable children with a range of SEN to engage with the curriculum and accomplish the tasks set to the curriculum for children.

Examples of English lessons included:

> In literacy, the teacher is introducing the letter "M". They go through the sounds of letters, matching them to the alphabet (Task 1). They then think of "M" words (Task 2). She does a number of activities including a guessing game (Task 3) … and letter bingo (Task 4). This seems a very good method to keep the children alert and interested. She reinforces how one would draw the letter "M", practising it in the air with the class multiple times throughout the lesson, before doing a workbook sheet-based task at the end of the lesson where the children have practice in writing down "M" (Task 5) and colouring in the items on the page ("M" word objects such as masks etc) (Task 6). (School E, observation E2)

All children, including E2, were given the same tasks in this lesson, and E2 engaged with all of these tasks, accomplishing on each of them, though he was sometimes slower to complete a task than some others in the class.

Lessons in visual arts were the next most frequently observed. Speech and drama, in particular, was observed on a number of occasions.

One example of a drama lesson observed involved the child who displayed elective mutism (pupil C1). This lesson involved only one task (performing a drama), which the child clearly accomplished as shown in the following extract from the observation. The child was explicitly given a non-talking, but central role:

> The drama involves all the children and is performed at the top of the class. The drama is called the pink monster, with C1 playing the titular monster. It is a silent role. She enjoys dressing up all in pink and acting, as the other children speak and act around her (a pair of adults find a pink monster and take her in). The teacher is very enthusiastic as are all the children. (School C, observation C1)

Another drama lesson was seen in school H. A child on the autistic spectrum who was beginning a period of transition from a special class to the mainstream was in the junior

infants' class for speech and drama. Although the pupil seemed to enjoy the lesson, he was not always engaged in the class:

> Pupil H8 comes in for speech and drama, as part of his transition programme. He has an SNA with him who stays with him when they are seated. The lesson starts with a marching song for Pupil H8 (Task 1). He follows, but is not following the marching movements of the other children (i.e. how arms and legs move).
>
> Following this, the children do a poem (Task 2). The class seems to know it and may well have learned it and do it regularly in class. It is not clear if Pupil H8 knows it. The children go and stand on the steps to say it aloud. Pupil H8 stands up with four other boys as one of the groups. He does not seem to know the poem, and doesn't speak, or stay still, keeping turning around rather than looking out towards the class.
>
> Finally, the class do a rainbow folks drama (Task 3). Pupil H8 plays one of the clouds, but it is not clear how active he is and [if he is] following what is going on. (School H, observation H8)

In mathematics, as with arts and English, children were frequently working on the same tasks as the rest of the class, with or without additional support. The example below is of a child who, though she has an SNA, is not given any additional academic input in order to do the mathematics tasks set out by the teacher, although she was occasionally redirected to focus on the task:

> In maths they start by counting aloud (Task 1), before doing a whole class activity doing counting on and adding up to 10 (Task 2). The class has a number line laid out at the top of the class with one child on the line and another giving out instructions so that everyone gets a chance. The observed girl does reading out and feels included. Next the teacher puts up a workbook page on the board, and goes over the examples and work, and lets the class do the work (Task 3). The task is to start at a number and "go on X" … The SNA had organised the workbook and hands out the workbooks, seamlessly and quickly. The child is able to do the work on her own, but gets distracted, wants attention, and needs to be redirected, though the child looks for attention more than probably necessary. Children who finish early do an extra page. The child does finish hers, and isn't too slow, but doesn't get the extra page. (School E, observation E1)

Another mathematics lesson also consisted of three tasks: counting in tens; oral addition and subtraction; and completing a worksheet. For Pupil G4 (who had moderate GLD), each of these tasks was differentiated to meet his needs, and he also received additional support from the SNA. For example, for the third task he received the easiest of three graded worksheets and was also helped by the SNA to use Numicon to work out the answers. With this additional support he accomplished the differentiated task set.

The next most frequently observed lessons were PE and Irish (12 tasks each).

Children, particularly those with physical disabilities, often required additional support to engage in PE lessons (children were given support in eleven of the 12 tasks observed in PE).

Seven Irish lessons (consisting of a total of 12 tasks) were observed and lessons were also routinely conducted through Irish in the two Gaelscoils (Schools A and B) and a Gaeltacht school (School F). Case study children who participated in Irish lessons appeared to be engaged and to accomplish the same tasks as the rest of the class, though it should be noted that about 20 per cent of the case study children were exempt from Irish.

In the two Gaelscoils, children accomplished the same tasks as the rest of the class without additional support in 6 of the 21 tasks observed. They also accomplished the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support, in 13 of the 21 tasks observed. In the Gaeltacht school (School F) one child accomplished the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support. The other child, who had an assessed syndrome (F1) attempted the same tasks as the rest of the class, but did not accomplish them. There is no evidence from these findings that the extent to which children engaged with and accomplished tasks differed according to whether they were presented in English or Irish.

5.2.8.2 Accomplishment of tasks in relation to SEN category

Table 19 shows the extent to which tasks were accomplished by SEN category for children in the three most frequent categories of SEN. Despite the range of different needs with which children on the autistic spectrum can present, this group were able to accomplish the same tasks as the rest of the class, either with or without additional assistance, for 86 per cent of the time. Children with physical disabilities accomplished the same tasks as their peers 92 per cent of the time. The teachers we observed rarely differentiated tasks for either of these groups. However, for children being provided for under the GAM, teachers differentiated one in every eight tasks.

Table 19 Accomplishment of tasks by SEN category – ASD, GAM and PD

Rating of task accomplishment	Autistic spectrum disorder (52 tasks)	General allocation model (49 tasks)	Physical disabilities (25 tasks)
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is accomplishing:	45 (86.4%)	43 (87.7%)	23 (92%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	18 (34.6%)	15 (30.6%)	9 (36%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support	23 (44.2%)	22 (44.9%)	13 (52%)
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	2 (3.8%)	0	0
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	2 (3.8%)	6 (12.2%)	1 (4%)
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not accomplishing:			
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	1 (1.9%)	1 (2%)	0
the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support	4 (7.7%)	2 (4.1%)	1 (4%)
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	0	0	1 (4%)
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	0	0	0
The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson			
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/ aims, with or without additional support.	0	0	0
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson.	2 (3.8%)	3 (6.1%)	0

Table 20 Accomplishment of tasks by SEN category (other categories)

Category of SEN	Number of tasks observed	Number of tasks where children were receiving additional support	Number of tasks where the child is accomplishing on the same tasks as the rest of the class
Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems (3 children)	23	10	19
Hearing impairment (3 children)	10	10	5
Moderate GLD (2 children)	9	6	0

The small numbers of children we observed in other categories of SEN make it very difficult for us to draw any firm conclusions. Nonetheless, it appears that children with

EDBP follow a similar pattern to that in Table 19, engaging with and accomplishing the same tasks as their peers for the majority of the time, with support for approximately half the tasks. Children with a hearing impairment received additional support for all the tasks we observed, but only accomplished the same tasks as their peers for half the time. The one child observed with a visual impairment showed a similar pattern, though in her case (Pupil G1) she was able to accomplish tasks with additional support from an SNA. Neither of the two children with moderate GLD accomplished the same tasks as their peers while we were observing them. However, they were accomplishing on tasks similar to those given to their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs.

In terms of curriculum access, as assessed by engagement in and accomplishment of tasks, the level of access experienced by the young children with sensory impairments and those with moderate GLDs is an important issue. However, the low numbers of children involved mean that it is not possible to generalise from these findings to all young children with sensory impairments or moderate GLD in Ireland.

With regard to children with severe/profound GLD, who we observed in school H, parents and teachers were agreed that access to the social aspects of the curriculum was the main purpose of inclusion for these pupils. Interviews and field notes showed that, in the opinion of all the adult participants, access to the social aspects of the curriculum was enhanced for these pupils by being educated within a mainstream school. For example, the class teacher described how they had been able to capitalise on a shared interest in Liverpool football club between one of the pupils with severe/profound GLD and the sixth class children:

> Here we had a great rapport with the sixth class children, a really great rapport and [pupil H7[6]] used to wheel himself in …. They'd have had chats about Liverpool and the football and you know. (School H, Teacher H7)

Both teacher H7 and the parents of pupils with severe/profound GLD who were interviewed described a break-time rota system to facilitate social interaction between the sixth class pupils and some of the pupils with severe/profound learning disabilities. It is clear from the description given by the parent of one of the pupils that the rota is structured to develop her son's communication skills:

> … they have a rota, [pupil H7] goes out and walks you know because he's learning how to walk and they have a rota of who gets to go with [pupil H7] and he has choices then of who he wants to pick. (School H, Parent H7)

5.2.9 Accomplishment of tasks in relation to year group

In this final section, we examine task accomplishment and engagement in the curriculum in relation to year group (see Table 21). An interesting pattern emerges from this analysis. Children in junior infants are relatively unlikely to receive additional support; nonetheless, they accomplish approximately the same proportion of the tasks they are given as children in other classes. The level of task accomplishment drops

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6   This refers to one specific pupil within the group case study H7.

considerably in senior infants, and does not regain the 80 per cent level until second class, at which stage the children we observed were receiving additional support for slightly more than 50 per cent of the time. These observations were supported by the interview data, with teachers stating that there was little problem with providing curriculum access for the young children in junior infants.

Table 21 Level of task accomplishment in relation to year group (number of tasks in brackets)[7]

Rating of task accomplishment	Junior infants (34 tasks)	Senior infants (37 tasks)	First class (68 tasks)	Second class (46 tasks)
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is accomplishing:	29 (84.2%)	29 (78.3%)	61 (89.7%)	39 (84.4%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	25 (73.5%)	10 (27%)	12 (17.6%)	14 (30.4%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support	3 (8.8%)	13 (35.1%)	37 (54.4%)	23 (50%)
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	0	2 (5.4%)	5 (7.4%)	0
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	1 (2.9%)	4 (10.8%)	7 (10.3%)	2 (4.4%)
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not accomplishing:				
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	1 (2.9%)	6 (16.2%)	4 (5.9%)	1 (2.2%)
the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support	4 (11.8%)	0	1 (1.5%)	1 (2.2%)
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	0	1 (2.7%)	0	0
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support.	0	0	0	0
The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson				
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/aims, with or without additional support.	0	0	0	0

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7   Based on a group of five children in junior infants; eight children in senior infants; 16 children in first class; and nine children in second class.

5.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have given an overview of the data collected and examined in relation to research question 1: How is the curriculum being implemented and differentiated in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN?

In the lessons we observed, young children with SEN were accomplishing the same tasks as their peers with or without additional support 73 per cent of the time. In addition, they accomplished on tasks which were similar, but differentiated to meet their needs, an additional eleven per cent of the time. Children were supported in engaging with and accomplishing tasks by an adult (almost always an SNA) for about 50 per cent of the time. This was most common form of adaptation employed.

However, we also observed teachers using a range of high- and low-tech aids and a variety of forms of classroom organisation to ensure that children were able to accomplish on the tasks they were set. By contrast, we saw very few examples of specialist pedagogy being employed, and although worksheets were frequently used, they were only rarely differentiated.

Overall, in terms of curriculum access as assessed through engagement with and accomplishment of tasks, these young children were accessing the curriculum over 80 per cent of the time. The extent to which children were able to engage with, and accomplish on, the tasks set varied between curriculum subjects and between children with different types of SEN and children of different ages. Children with ASD and with a physical disability were most likely to accomplish the tasks set, while the small number of children with sensory impairments we observed were much less likely to do so, even though they were more likely to receive support.

6 Factors that Contribute to Pupil and Parent Experiences of the Curriculum

In this chapter, we present the findings in relation to research questions 2 and 3:

1. How are pupils with SEN and their parents experiencing the curriculum in these settings?

2. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN in these settings?

The combination of interviews with and observations of a range of participants provided multiple opportunities to see how children experience the curriculum and in turn to ascertain the views of their parents. This chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 6.1 reports findings in relation to pupils' experiences of the curriculum; section 6.2 reports findings in relation to learning outcomes and pupil progress; and section 6.3 reports findings in relation to parents' experiences.

6.1 How Pupils with SEN Experience the Curriculum

The findings in this section are based on the case study observations, interviews with the children themselves and the views of adults about the children's experience Consequently findings in this section are based on both direct and indirect sources of evidence.

Three main themes emerged in relation to pupils' experience of the curriculum. These included:

•   liking school and specific subjects

•   disliking school and/or specific subjects

•   relationships with other people in the school.

6.1.1 Liking school and/or specific subjects

Most of the children interviewed were able and willing to tell us about aspects of school which they liked. Twenty-one of the 31 children interviewed made a total of 97 statements about aspects of school that they liked. They mentioned a range of subjects and no specific subject stood out as particularly popular. Children were discriminating when talking about their likes and dislikes; for example, one child said: 'I do like the teachers but I don't like the work. (School B, pupil B1). Another child said that he liked doing speech and drama '[b]ecause all the rest is work. (School H, pupil H6). He expands this answer with: 'I like it when you get to learn new poems, like you get to come home and tell it to your mum. (School H, pupil H6). By chance, one of the lessons in which we observed H6 was speech and drama. Amongst other activities, the lesson involved the children reciting a poem in small groups; H6 was clearly motivated by this lesson.

Some children selected the less academic aspects of school as the things they liked:

> I like, you know when we're not going out into the yard, we get to play with toys or do our colouring book. (School E, pupil E1)

Adults, giving their perceptions of what it was about school that the children liked, tended to concentrate on its less academic aspects. For example, one SNA noted a child's like of playtime:

> Playtime he loves. We have from 9.20–9.40am they come in and there's toys on the table and he will play and he'll pretend to be something. (School D, SNA D2)

Another SNA similarly focuses on the non-academic aspects of the school:

> And he loves, once a week he goes around watering the flowers. He likes to do different little activities outside of academic stuff you know, which he enjoys very much. (School E, SNA E2)

Parents also frequently noted that their children liked school, with statements from 18 of the 19 parents interviewed being coded to this node. For example, one parent stated: 'It's a little bit more intimate and it's very suitable for her and she loves going to school' (School A, parent A1). Another parent said that their child was no different from many others in claiming that they hate school when in fact they like it: 'Even though he'll say he hates it because he wants to be like everybody else' (School B, parent B2).

Another parent takes the view that she cannot expect that her child will like every aspect of school:

> ... he seems to be happy enough in general, like coming to school and being in the class you know, I don't get any feedback, I suppose there's things that he wants to do and he can't do and he has to learn that just because he wants to do it and can't do it, you know, it's not going to happen just because he wants it to. I think all in all he seems to enjoy going into the mainstream class. He's just got to learn to sit there and be quiet. (School H, parent H5)

In school H, two parents of children with severe/profound GLDs were interviewed. Both stated very strongly that their children like school, for example, parent 2 said:

> ... very sociable child, always was from day one, smiley, interacting, you know, good eye contact, so from day one going to school was just the bee's knees for him, loves coming in here, loves coming on the bus, you know, out and about seeing people, interacting, all that sort of thing, again he can't talk but I know he absolutely loves coming in here. They're happy. (School H, parent 2 pupil with severe/profound GLD)

School staff support the view that there is good social interaction between the children with severe/profound GLD and other pupils in the school, with the class teacher for the special class stating:

Two sixth class children walk two of our children every day and that's at big break and at small break. Now, if it's cold we don't send our children out for small break but the sun is always out at big break so we have a, I suppose it's kind of like a buddy club … for five or ten minutes they take them and they love that and it's a rota' (School H, special class teacher H7)

6.1.2 Disliking school and/or specific subjects

In addition to being asked what they liked about school, the children were also asked if there was anything they didn't like. Fourteen of the 31 children interviewed mentioned things they didn't like, in a total of 46 references. This compares with the 97 references from 21 children about things they liked, strongly suggesting that overall these young children like, rather than dislike, school. A number of children didn't like mathematics; for example, one child said she didn't like 'hard sums' (School A, Pupil A1). A similar sentiment is expressed by children G2, H2, and J5. One child said he didn't like writing, '[b]ecause I just don't. I don't know why' (School B, Pupil B2). Another child states that he doesn't like playing because the other children don't play with him.

One child said, 'I wish I could stay at home' (School K, pupil K1). Few of the pupils go into any great detail about why they don't like school or particular subjects, though one child did say that they did not like school because they had previously been in trouble at school (B3).

SNAs provided insights about children's dislikes as well as their likes, for example:

I think if writing goes on a bit he'll get bored, if there's two or three lessons of writing he'll get bored. (School D, SNA D2)

… one of her books is Irish … and the writing's very small in it and she really finds it hard, that. She gets so frustrated and then that's when the problems start every time that book comes out. (School F, SNA F1)

Parents provided insights into things that their children disliked about school as well as about their likes; although as with the children themselves, there were far fewer mentions of dislikes than of likes (seven parents mentioned things their child didn't like, compared with 18 who mentioned things their child did like).

One parent of a child with a physical disability stated that her child doesn't enjoy some of the additional motor activities he has to do:

I think it's because he's been doing it since birth and every day he has different things to be done with him so I suppose if you're doing something for years you're going to dislike it aren't you. (School E, parent E3)

The same parent talked about her child's desire to be included, and not to stand out in any way:

What he didn't like was being taken out of the class for extra help. He doesn't like anything that he has to do on his own. (School E, parent E3)

Another parent provides an interesting insight into her child's ambivalence about school:

> She doesn't not like it but if she had her choice she wouldn't go. But she doesn't moan now that she has to go, and then every day when she comes in, it's straight to the homework in fairness to her. (School J, parent J4)

6.1.3 Children's relationships with people in the school

As is clear from the discussion of children's reasons for liking or not liking school, the social aspect of school is also important. Themes that emerged in relation to the social aspect of school included the child's relationship with their teacher, the SNA, and their classmates, both in the class and in the playground.

6.1.3.1 Relationships with other children

The child's relationship with their peers can be broken down into a number of sub-themes. These include: their relationship in the playground, playing with other children generally, relationships with a specific child or 'best friend', and being generally sociable and integrated into the class.

There were 17 references to children's relationships in the playground. The playground offers an important opportunity for children to socialise:

> … the SNA has said, and the teacher, that on yard time he'll integrate a lot more whereas last year he might just stand back. (School D, resource teacher D2)

Another teacher also gives a picture of a child whose ability to play with others has developed:

> He used to kind of play by himself for a lot of junior infants and it took him a long time to get used to it because he is that bit more mature he didn't want to be playing kind of the silly games with the boys and he needed the game to have a structure, whereas now that's kind of gone out of the window and he relaxes and you'd actually see him playing with children you'd never have thought he'd play with you know. He brings some cards and he'd be playing card games, things like that. (School J, teacher J3)

Other children have difficulties in integrating, as one teacher states:

> … in the playground as well they have to be encouraged to include him because he can be quite boisterous and things and the children tend to leave him out. (School H, teacher H6)

The role of adults (especially SNAs) in mediating relationships with other children, or in standing back to allow the child space to form their own friendships, is particularly important. For example, one SNA explained how she encourages other children to play with the child she supports:

> I get different kids to play with him and he loves it. (School E, SNA E2)

Another child (F2) who was on the autistic spectrum had difficulties with playing:

> It depends. Right now we're trying to get him active in the football with the lads in the class you now, or the girls you know, but that seems to be working some days. Other days he might not want to participate at all. (School F, SNA F2)

This child had his own football to play with, so could play on his own if he did not feel like playing with other children.

Some children require an SNA to be with them at playtime for safety reasons. In relation to one child who has a VI, the SNA stated:

> Some days she would want me with her, other days she doesn't but when we were up here, by the end of the second term she was totally with the other children. It's a smaller group up here, playing her games, and it was brilliant, and she is really getting very independent now, she's great, it's amazing you know. It's just the danger aspect of it. (School G, SNA G1)

In this extract the SNA is referring to the effect of adaptations which have been made in the playground following advice from the mobility specialist, and the greater possibilities these afford for the child with a visual impairment to play with her peers without the SNA in constant attendance (see section 3.7.8, 5.2.2.1 and 8.6.2 for a more detailed discussion of the additional content provided for children with a visual impairment and those with a hearing impairment).

Twenty references from the interviews focus on a child's relationship with a specific child, typically a best friend. Unfortunately, the constraints of the current project meant that we did not have the opportunity to interview these friends. For example, one child who displays elective mutism has a very good friend in her class:

> … the friend's very good to her but she tends to do a lot for her, I mean she runs and gets all her books for her and this and that so , but I mean I think that's a very big factor there you know. (School C, teacher C1)

> There's a lovely little boy in the class and when the bell goes no matter where he is in the yard he comes over and he puts his arm and he says (Pupil) will I help you up to the line, they've probably been with each other since they were in playschool, so they're very watchful of him and they're very kind. (School E, SNA E3)

Staff do not always view relationships with one specific child positively. For example, one SNA (School I, SNA I1) notes that such relationships can be restrictive, as a child's preferences may lead to them playing with only that one friend. A teacher also made an ambivalent comment in relation to the friendship between two of her pupils:

> Well they're actually the best of friends which in some ways is not necessarily the best thing for either of them but they both go to homework club together and I think their parents, because they're both kind of struggling a bit in school

the parents have kind of bonded a bit because they go to each other's houses and both of them need that. (School J, teacher J3 and J6)

This friendship is between two children who have SEN, and the teacher is slightly concerned about this, perhaps because she would like them to have friends who do not also have special needs.

Other comments focus on children helping each other out in class:

She would be an extremely caring child, I mean she would always try to, like a little mother almost. D1 would be at her table and D1 needs quite a bit of support. Now some at the table, it's almost become a culture just at that table, it's amazing how culture just builds up in a month, but there's a culture of care for themselves, it's just the done thing so I suppose a month in their lives is a very long time to them. (School D, teacher D1)

An important part of being in a mainstream classroom is that it allows an opportunity to be sociable with the rest of the class. A number of comments were made in relation to this:

Yeah, I mean there's nothing wrong with her social skills and her ability to go and play with them, you know she's fine. (School C, resource teacher C2)

... in school she's one of the gang, she wants to be doing what everyone else is doing, she's well up there, she's a fantastic child she really is. (School A, teacher A1)

In relation to one child with multiple disabilities, the observer noted:

Her peers accepted her and did not try to exclude her when her behaviour became exuberant. (School D, observation D1)

Several parents also commented on how well their children got on with others in the class:

I would actually say she is a little socialiser, as I was saying earlier on she's got so many friends in this school, like you know, it kind of threw me when she first started school how quickly she interacted and got involved with people. (School E, Parent E1)

No, he seems to get on well, he's kind of a popular child in the classroom so it makes it a bit easier for him. (School J, parent J1)

This indicates that the children experience good levels of social inclusion. There were a small number of negative comments about the child's relationship with their peers; for example one teacher, referring to a child with an EDBP, who does not seem to be liked by his classmates, noted:

… he doesn't get on great with the other children in the class because he messes so much, that really irritates them so especially during group work you have to encourage the other children to let him get involved otherwise they'll just leave him out. (School H, teacher H6)

However, the exceptional nature of these comments illustrates the fact that the great majority of the children we observed were accepted by their peers within the mainstream classroom.

6.1.3.2 Relationships with teachers and SNAs

There were relatively few references to the relationships between adults and children. Only two references were made in relation to the class teacher's relationship with the pupil – one teacher (School G, teacher G3) noted that she needs to 'pick her battles' in relation to the work she gets the child to do. On the other hand, a pupil (J6) stated that he likes his class teacher.

There were more comments from SNAs (19 in total) about their relationship with the child to whom they were assigned; this is perhaps to be expected given the nature of their role. One SNA spoke about a slightly fraught relationship with her pupil with EDBP. When asked if he apologises following his outbursts, she responded:

Oh he does yeah. Well it depends on whether he meant to do it or not because sometimes now he might be flinging his arms about a bit and if he hit me accidentally and he'll say oh I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, I'm sorry, but if he meant to do it, not a hope … for apologising for it you know. But now he wouldn't usually now but sometimes he could, whoever's sitting beside him or at the side. (School B, SNA B2)

In general, however, SNAs are very positive about the children with whom they work. The following are typical comments:

But really I have to say I have no trouble whatsoever, it's a pleasure … it's just to keep encouraging him to finish his work, he's well able but he'll start chatting to you, as much as to say, you know, I mightn't have to do this now, I'll chat, and I'll say you can tell me later when we're on our break you know. (School E, SNA E3)

Yeah, I mean she's very bubbly, outgoing. From the first day I met her, you've seen yourself, you know she makes friends with everyone, socially she's, she's a lovely child to work with. (School E, SNA E1)

These comments indicate that there is sometimes a strong relationship between the SNA and an individual child. There was evidence in at least two of the case study schools that principals moved SNAs around periodically, perhaps to prevent too strong a bond being formed. On the other hand, parents seemed to appreciate a long-term relationship with an SNA.

6.2 Pupil Progress

In this section, we present our findings in relation to learning outcomes for the pupils with SEN we observed. As we visited each school for only one to three days, the data in relation to this issue comes exclusively from interviews with staff and parents. No references in relation to pupil progress were made by the pupils themselves. This is explained by the limited opportunities which we had to interview these young children on this complex concept. Another factor that has to be taken into account is that before the end of first class, there are no formal mandatory assessments which could provide us with data on children's academic progress. Because of the time of year at which this study took place, this meant that only the children already in second class would have undergone any mandatory formal assessment. Findings in relation to IEPs in general will be presented in the next chapter (Section 7.1.7), as little of the discussion in relation to IEPs focused explicitly on pupil progress. However, in several instances the role played by the IEP in pupil progress can be inferred from the discussion. In school D, the resource teacher discusses the process of drawing up an IEP for pupil D2 and then comments that she ticks off targets as they are achieved, replacing them with new ones and that the mother is delighted with the pupil's progress (see section 6.3.3.1). In another instance the class teacher refers to agreeing with the resource teacher regarding which of the IEP targets she will work on with a particular pupil, and to a forthcoming assessment of his progress (See section 7.1.7.1).

One of the major purposes of school is to provide children with an education that allows them to progress and develop, academically, socially/emotionally and physically. Overall, 85 references were made to progress; Table 22 shows how these references were split between academic, social/emotional and physical progress.

Table 22 Number of references to different types of progress

Theme	Number of references
Academic progress	36
Emotional and/or social progress	38
Physical progress	11
Total	85

When we examined the data in relation to progress in more detail, two sub-themes emerged: the assessment of progress and comments about the amount of progress made by individual children.

6.2.1 Assessment of academic progress

Tracking pupils' academic progress, including the progress of those of its pupils who have SEN is an important aspect of the work of the school. We found examples of both formal and informal measurements of progress during our case studies. Three teachers referred to formal assessments, with two of them explicitly stating they do regular formal assessment. One teacher described how she carried out regular formal assessments in order to track children's progress:

I do assessments. Every two weeks I'm now assessing all his work so his phonics, every single week I'm doing his phonics. I work on a one-to-one basis with him every single day so when the children, I would usually get them doing some written work, and I will bring him up and I will do his phonics with him every single day on a one-to-one basis. I will do his number recognition, he has difficulty with number recognition, I do them every single day on a one to one basis with him and his Irish, we've just started Irish reading, we haven't done any English reading but I would do his words from his Irish reading every single day with him so I'm assessing him basically every single day, and then I send home assessments every two weeks. (School B, teacher B3)

Six teachers mentioned taking a more informal approach, for example:

I suppose a lot of it is observation, just you know as they're going along every day you can see how they're improving. Then we'd have, I'd do the odd test you know, I would just record it, but a lot of it would be observation by watching them and how they're improving or watching how they're getting on, that's really how. (School H, teacher H2, H5, H6)

In light of the fact that there is no mandatory assessment or testing of children before the end of first class or the start of second class, the informal approach epitomised in these quotations is not surprising. Rather, the teachers seem to use the range of more informal assessment methods laid out by the NCCA (2007).

Some teachers stated explicitly that they did not use extra or different measures of progress for children with SEN in their classes. Ten references were made to this effect. In these cases children with SEN are given the same tests as the rest of the class; for example:

… he does the tests exactly the same as all the other children in the class, the maths, the English, the spelling, the Irish spellings so I'd keep a record of that, they'd have it in their little notebooks and I'd be watching his progress through that. (School B, teacher B3)

6.2.2 Amount of progress

Teachers, SNAs and parents all commented on how well children were progressing; for example:

He knows all his letters, he can confuse his words but that's a lot better. He's 100 per cent better than last year, he didn't know any of his letters [then]. (School D, SNA D2)

One of the teachers in school K was particularly enthusiastic in describing the type of progress she had seen in the children following the introduction of the team teaching approach to literacy:

> I think it's brilliant, like so far the boys that I had at the start of the year, I was just so worried about their reading and how we were going to go and when we took up the Jolly Phonics and the Power Hour project I just couldn't believe how quickly the boys adapted to it and how responsive they were and excited and stuff and just the way they've taken on reading, even outside of school and stuff, their confidence, they've really blossomed, especially some of the weaker ones, especially a dyslexic boy, well he's not specifically dyslexic but he does show a lot of signs of it, it's just great to see a boy like that who had so little confidence really blossom and come out of himself. I'm a huge advocate of it, I think it's brilliant. (School K, teacher K1)

For some of the children however, it was clear to the staff that they were not making the same progress as their peers:

> I can see her having to repeat the infants because I feel that she's going to be missing out, there's going to be gaps that she's not going to be able to... (School C, teacher C2)

This child had a HI, for which the process of ensuring proper AT and indeed the use of implants to improve her hearing were not yet fully implemented, meaning the child faced a significant barrier to accessing the curriculum. Her teacher provided further details on how difficult it can be to gauge the child's learning and progress in these circumstances:

> It is [difficult] because you're not getting feedback. You know, I can say to the children, you know, if we're doing a letter, tell me something that starts with that letter, but with her I can't and one of the days I said to her homework, I had the sheet in my hand and it was A and you had to pick the picture that matched "apple". Now because she doesn't have sounds she didn't have a clue. (School C, teacher C2)

Another teacher spoke in some depth about the special needs teachers in the school discussing children who are falling behind and the need for a child to be formally reassessed by the educational psychologist:

> We're having her reassessed again this year because, yes she's being reassessed again, we've just filled out all the details and things for another assessment, because the special needs team would talk about those children a lot, the targeted children, and it really would be through the meetings we would have and together say how we're finding that she's getting on, that would be really what we would do. Her progress is very slow and then we'd get somewhere and then we'd go back again anytime there's a break it would go right back again. (School J, teacher J4)

6.2.3 Physical progress

For some children with SEN, there are important aspects of progress which are additional to the curriculum for most of their peers. For example, for children with physical disabilities, progress in relation to physical aspects such as developing gross and fine motor skills is important, in addition to academic progress. One parent of a child with physical disabilities noted:

> It was very bad this time last year but through the implementing of loads of exercises that we've been directed to use by Enable Ireland and by the resource teacher here in the school, it's actually coming on. (School E, parent E1)

For another child with a similar physical condition, a teacher noted:

> He's six and half and he's really come along now in the last two years. He only began walking after his third birthday so since then he's come on leaps and bounds. Mentally he's absolutely flying it, we've had a little bit of trouble now with concentration, dexterity, something along those lines and physically he would have to be watched because he'd be knocked over quite easily. He'd fall very easily. Things like gym class and stuff, now he tries his best and he tends to do stuff his own way. (School E, teacher E3)

6.2.4 Emotional and/or social progress

For a number of children, emotional and/or social progress is just as important as academic progress in order for them to be able to be included in a mainstream classroom. For example, for Pupil C2 with elective mutism, beginning to talk in school is a clear measure of progress:

> Well, when she came to the school … in the first class but she didn't speak, she didn't speak at all when she came to the school first, she didn't speak at all. It was only at the end of last term that she started to talk you know. (School C, teacher C2)

A resource teacher for a child on the autistic spectrum also noted the progress of the child in terms of opening up and socialising with his fellow pupils:

> … last year he didn't actually talk at all, he wouldn't actually openly talk or converse with you, he has come on a lot. It's hard sometimes you know because I'm there chattering away about anything and everything but he has come on a lot now this term. Even the SNA has said and the teacher that on yard time he'll integrate a lot more whereas last year he might just stand back. But of course he only started school in January of last year so it's taken him a while, he has come on. He will talk if you ask him a question but sometimes it is hard because he won't openly chat away. (School D, resource teacher D2)

The SNA complemented this view by stating:

> Last year he wouldn't have told you if there's something wrong; he wouldn't have told you but now he would. (School D, SNA D2)

For another child, the SNA notes that there can be a disparity between academic and social levels:

> I mean it would have taken a year and a half to get her, well over the year, now not her formal work, she was always good at that, she's very clever, but to get her settled in … I suppose she's more mature now too and for her to have that little bit longer. (School G, SNA G1)

The observer noted in relation to the same child who has a VI:

> She previously had not liked going out at break-time, and had mobility issues, as well as quite challenging emotional outbursts/behaviours, but everyone notes that she has really calmed down and matured over the summer. (School G, observation G1)

This highlights the fact that social and emotional development does not occur solely at school, but can also occur at home. However, this child's increased willingness to go out at break-time and social progress may also be related to adaptations made to the playground following the visit of a mobility specialist (see section 6.1.3.1).

An SNA from another school discussed a variety of aspects of progress in relation to a child with an EDBP:

> How she's progressed. When she came in the morning you'd have to help her take off her coat. Going to the toilet now I have to still remind her she needs to go to the toilet where I'd have to go in and hold the door so that has come on great. She never liked the door to be closed so I used to have to stand with the door open looking out to class. She never liked flushing the toilet or washing her hands where she has progressed that bit. She'll actually get sick with food. We've come in with a system now where she gets a stamp every day if she eats all her lunch, a little kind of a badge on her lunchbox. We're working on the playground at the moment socially, playing, interacting with other kids, that I find, even when children come down to the book corner, Pupil H1 is kind of inclined to sit on her own, she doesn't integrate with other kids very well. Now she'll sit at the table, she can have a laugh and a joke and everything else but at the beginning she wouldn't do anything like that. (School H, SNA H1)

These examples provide a clear insight into the type of social and emotional skills that children with SEN also require assistance in developing, in order to be included in a mainstream class and have access to all aspects of the curriculum.

6.3 Parents' Views and Experiences of the Curriculum

Parents' views on curriculum access were ascertained, through interviews with all those parents of the case study children who were able to make themselves available

for an interview. Four key themes emerged: the importance of parental choice, their knowledge and involvement in assessment and the IEP, communication with the school, and their fears.

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the schools their children were attending. Only two negative comments were made by parents in relation to their experience of the school (in contrast to 42 references which were rated as 'positive'). One of these involved a parent commenting on issues she'd had with a previous class teacher. The other related to a school with a new special unit, and is related in some detail here because it highlights an important potential tension between state of the art provision and full inclusion.

Shortly before the research visit, the school had opened a new extension with modern well-equipped provision for pupils with ASD and severe/profound GLD. Previously, these pupils had been located in 'spare' classrooms along the senior corridor of the mainstream building allowing many opportunities for social interaction and integration with the mainstream classes. These adapted mainstream classrooms were acknowledged to be less satisfactory in many ways, but nonetheless, parents expressed concerns that the move to purpose-built accommodation might lead to children with SEN becoming more isolated from their peers. School staff, including the principal and the special class teacher, also discussed the tension raised by these new units, between providing good physical resources and facilitating social inclusion for pupils with SEN.

However, very positive views of the provision for their child, and its benefits to them, are much more representative of the parents we interviewed. The following are typical examples:

> Yeah and the school and the support we've been getting has been second to none and it's brought them on. (School J, parent J4)

> I mean I'm very, very satisfied with the way he's progressing. I mean it is daunting at the start when you have to access the services and you don't know much about how to go about doing that, so that was daunting and that was exhausting but I mean he's very, very happy and I'm very complimentary of the school. (School B, parent B2)

The lack of stigma experienced by their child in the school was touched upon by one parent:

> ... we've been lucky in that he loves going to learning support, it's very positive for him, and I have to say the way the school handles the children going to learning support seems to be really good, even [for] other mums whose children go there ... there doesn't appear to be a stigma attached to it and the other children don't seem to pick up on this at all which I think is huge, absolutely huge for them, so there's no problem in that sense and he doesn't feel stigmatised because he has to get learning support, he actually looks forward to going and enjoys it but he would struggle with the curriculum definitely. (School D, parent D1)

This triangulates with the data in relation to the child's experience, where the emerging theme was one of children being socially accepted in the school.

Parents were also positive about the support they and their child received from various members of school staff:

> … we love the SNA, we'd have been totally lost [without her] because she takes him out for his reading, his ordinary classroom reading, she takes him out and he's no distraction so they're one on one. (School E, parent E1)

> Yeah and the support from the school was great I have to say. And even the resource teacher was fabulous. (School H, parent H5, H9)

6.3.1 Parents' fears

In spite of this generally very positive picture there were also a number of references in relation to concerns for the future. Eight parents made such comments, in relation to children with a variety of types of need (including ASD, mild GLD, hearing impairment, physical disability and severe/profound GLD).

One important concern for parents is what their children will face in the future. They can be concerned about the loss of resources. The following example is of a parent who hopes that resources that have been put into place in the classroom for a child with HI will follow him as he moves through the school:

> My fear is that any of these things can go. You know if we were to lose the resource teacher, that would bother me a lot or if the speakers, hopefully they'll move with him from class to class. (School B, parent B3)

The parent is talking about an amplification system set up in the classroom to help her child to hear the lessons. The parent hopes that when the child moves on to a new classroom the following year, the amplification system will also be moved to the new classroom.

The parent of a child with severe/profound GLD expressed a more general sense of worry over the child's future, albeit in the context of a very positive view of the progress her child has made by being in a mainstream school:

> Yeah because we're not going to be here forever you know, we're going to go sometime and they're going to be left, because … I have to say from my point of view it's very positive in here you know. I wouldn't like to think what he would be like if I hadn't have sent him in here. (School H, parent H7)

Some parents also have fears about their child fitting in:

> I was nervous about it, like really worrying would he fit in, would it be the right move, was it too early, should we wait until he'd caught up with his own age group because he's older than the rest of the class by a year. (School H, parent H5, H9)

6.3.2 Parental choice

Three parents spoke about the importance of having a choice and an input into their child's education. In addition, two teachers mentioned that children were in the school at the parent's request.

One parent for example provides the reasoning behind her choosing a specific school for her children:

> I chose it because it's small and I liked the staff and I thought the school in general, I thought the children were lovely, like we came to the school a couple of times and I thought the way the school, you know, the fact that it was a small school I suppose was probably the biggest contributing factor to me in deciding and I think the units that they have are very good. I think the special needs units that they have, it's a good set up you know. (School H, parent H5, H9)

Another parent (also of a child in school H) noted that she wanted her child to have opportunities to socialise with other children:

> I wanted him placed with his peers. At the time that he was being placed, the HSE only deemed him suitable to go into a day care centre which I thought, looking at him back then, he was able to gain much more. (School H, parent H7)

6.3.3 Parental involvement in assessment and IEPs

The two remaining themes, namely parental involvement in assessment and IEPS, and communication, overlap to some extent. Parental perceptions of a lack of information about the assessment process is a key issue emerging from the data, despite the fact that parents were very positive about communication with the school in general. Formal communication received 29 such mentions and informal communication received 31 comments. Eight of the parents we interviewed made comments about the initial process of assessing the child's SEN and the majority of these were negative. One parent notes her lack of awareness of how to get her child assessed:

> Now at this point I had no understanding that there was the National Education Psychology Service and that it could have been done through the school, we knew nothing about this, and the teacher just said to us afterwards well if you feel there's a need but it will cost you so we presumed we had to go privately then so I rang the educational psychologist and gave her the results and she said if I were you I'd definitely have him assessed, you know he shouldn't be that down, like he was down below the first percentile so she assessed him privately within two weeks and at the same time, a couple of days later when we were waiting for the assessment, the school offered us learning support which naturally we took straightaway so he kind of started the learning support before the actual psychology assessment but I think to be honest it was just his class teacher, I think it was her first year teaching here and I don't think she was fully in tune whereas probably if I'd gone to the Principal and asked I may have been

told well it could be done you know through the school but we didn't know that. (School D, parent D1)

Another parent stated:

Well I actually instigated a lot of it myself because I just found there wasn't a lot of information there and it took, initially when I sent the letters off and got the referral letter and got letters from paediatricians, etc, etc, it probably started, he started in the September and by the following February his assessments would have commenced. (School B, parent B2)

These particular statements provide examples of the parent being actively involved, and in at least one case chasing up on it, to ensure that an assessment was conducted.

6.3.3.1 Parental involvement in IEP meetings

Despite the fact that the parents we interviewed experienced good communications with the school, there was little evidence from our data that parents were directly involved in drawing up an IEP for the child; indeed only one parent spontaneously mentioned the IEP.

One teacher, who was responsible for co-ordinating special needs provision within her school, did describe a planning meeting for the IEP involving the child's parents:

It would be. We usually get together, myself, the SNA, class teacher and D2's parents, the mam came into us. We sat down and I suppose had a chat about what she feels are his main needs and his progress and whatever and then I put the IEP together, showed it to the class teacher and if she felt there was anything she had on it because there is a review date on it, the review date is Christmas, so I'd be always looking at it and adding on bits or if things have been ticked then I take them out and pick a new thing but we would get together on that and we would meet up even at the door some days, there'll always be some kind of chat about him but that's basically it. And the IEP, the mam came in recently just to sit down and she felt he was doing great and she's delighted with his progress so it's good. (School D, resource teacher D2)

The iterative process for drawing up and reviewing the IEP described by this teacher is laid out in Figure 3.

Figure 3 IEP Process in School D

Meeting of parents, class teacher, SNA and SEN coordinator/resource teacher focusing on parents' view of child's main needs

↓

Draft IEP written by resource teacher

↓

Draft discussed with class teacher and amended if necessary

↓

Ongoing review and updating

↓

Formal review of progress and targets with parents
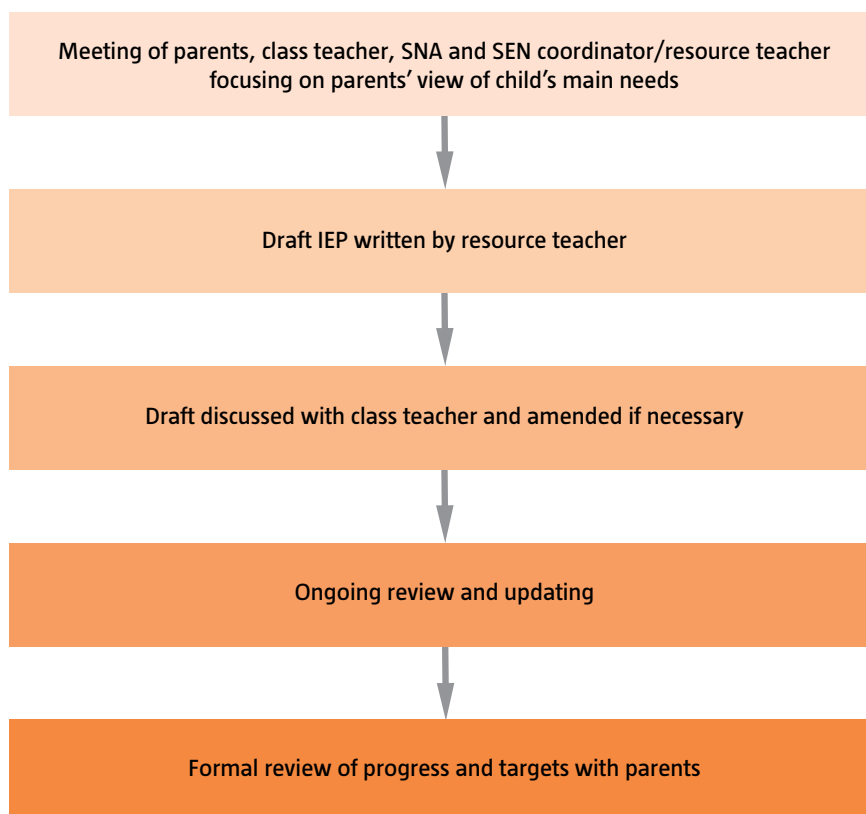
Only one clear example emerged of a parent talking at any length about their own involvement in the IEP:

> They have plans, yes. I wouldn't call them individual education plans but they have a plan which covers the vast majority of things and there is a meeting once a year with the whole team so it's not fully documented because the school haven't been trained in how to do it but they have explained it and what the teacher does is far more, I think, beneficial than the individual, I sometimes think the individual education plan can be on paper but if they're not doing the work behind it – it's not worth it. (School H, parent H5, H9)

A number of other parents spoke about communication in relation to the child's programme, which could have been references to the IEP process; for example:

> We discussed that. I met with the resource teacher and his teacher, with the principal and I mean the first year was just all meetings with the school. (School B, parent B2)

> The occupational therapist came to the school as well and the speech therapist came, met the Principal, her class teacher, the resource teacher and myself and we had a meeting and they put a programme in place to be done during her learning support in school, and also I had stuff to do at home with her. (School D, parent D1)

6.3.4 Other aspects of formal home-communication

One parent spoke positively about the support received from the visiting teacher:

> So with the visiting teacher it's just brilliant. He kind of liaises between what a teacher needs to know and what a parent needs to know. He's visited me at home and he visits them at the school and that I think works brilliantly. (School B, parent B3)

Other parents commented on regular formal parent–teacher meetings:

> The school do a programme which is fantastic. Every term I meet with the class teacher or the resource teacher but mostly I meet with the resource teacher every term but I would meet with the class teacher as well and the resource teacher gives me a list of the work she's going to do for the term with him so I have a copy for home and she sends homework every night to be done with him and then the class teacher does the same. (School H, parent H5, H9)

> We had parent/teacher night on Thursday, so the parent was in for that. It was great. It was good to tell her the progress she was making and to find out what Pupil I5 is like at home. (School I, teacher I4)

It is interesting to note that formal communication was mentioned most frequently in relation to School J, where four of the parents mentioned regular meetings with teachers. It is also interesting to note that these references were made most frequently in relation to children with physical disabilities, with parents meeting with teachers either to inform them of potential difficulties due to the child's physical limitations, or giving them 'tips' (School I, teacher I3).

6.3.4.1 Informal communication

A large part of home–school communication can occur informally, through ad hoc processes, such as chatting to the teacher before or after school. One parent notes:

> I have to say the school are very, very accommodating and they always have been. They've an open door policy, all the staff, you just ring, any concerns you know they're willing to sit down and discuss it with you and you don't feel, "oh gosh I can't phone or I can't", you know, if you've any concern I have to say we're very, we've always been like that with the school. (School D, parent D1)

An SNA talks in a bit more detail about getting to know the parents of the child she works with, and the work they do with the child at home:

> Yeah, like the mum, the dad, they're very good. They're very, very good. There was a while ago, I only started two months ago, and they asked me to go to the house to see her in her own environment and how they deal with things, so it's easier, do you know what I mean ...' (School F, SNA F1)

As with formal communication, informal communication was mentioned most frequently in relation to School J, and, again, informal communication occurred most frequently in relation to physical disabilities.

6.3.4.2 Diaries and/or journals

Somewhere between formal and informal communication are home–school diaries. A number of teachers and/or SNAs have diaries for their children to allow for regular written communication between the home and the school. These were the most frequently cited forms of home-school communication, with participants from School H mentioning them most frequently (four parents). One example concerns a child with emotional concerns for whom not only does the SNA write in the diary, but the parent also writes in any issues that the child may have before going in the morning – if she has had any disturbances or displaying specific anxieties the night before.

A parent of a different child (also in School H) states:

> Yeah, there's a book that comes home every day and there's always a comment written in it about how H5 got on that day and I've also, I asked about his sessions in the classroom, the mainstream class, and she's started to copy me on the comments that are coming back from the SNAs and the teachers, which is great because it kind of gives you more of an idea how he's doing, I mean it's not just how H5's behaviour was today, it was about what he did. (School H, parent H5, H9)

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, we have presented data relevant to research questions 2 and 3. Overall, a very positive picture emerges of the school experience of these young children with SEN and their parents. The children like school, and are generally included by their peers; and their parents are generally very positive about the provision which the school is making and have good relationships with the school. One or two children with EDBP are less well accepted. Parents are also generally very satisfied with their children's progress.

Teachers, however, do raise some concerns in relation to some children who they fear are falling behind their peers. This was a particular issue for children with a hearing impairment (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion). For these young children, most teachers assess progress informally rather than formally; but there are notable exceptions; for example the school which was running 'power hour for literacy' used regular formal assessment of the children's progress, and altered teaching accordingly. A less positive picture emerges of the initial assessment process, about which those parents who commented generally felt they lacked information. In addition, in many schools, parents do not seem to be involved in the process of setting up and implementing IEPs, although there were exceptions, such as School D.

7 Factors that Facilitate and Impede Curriculum Access

In this chapter we report data in relation to the factors which facilitated or impeded access to the curriculum (part of research question 3 and questions 4 and 5), including both the challenges faced by teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum, and those faced by their pupils with SEN in accessing it.

7.1 Factors Facilitating Access to the Curriculum

We identified a number of factors which potentially contributed to a positive experience of the curriculum. In the first part of this chapter we present data relating to these factors. This section explores these factors which include:

- various forms of support

- leadership within the school

- school policy

- staff training and experience

- collaborative planning

- the IEP

- additional provision.

7.1.1 Support

We observed a variety of supports that helped to ensure the child's positive experience of the curriculum in the school. Support relates to the ways in which children with SEN are directly or indirectly given assistance to actively engage with the formal or informal curriculum. Examples of direct support include members of staff (such as resource teachers) working one-to-one with a child to achieve specific learning objectives. Examples of indirect support include the ways in which a classroom teacher is given assistance by somebody (e.g. a visiting teacher).

We identified seven different forms of support:

- classroom teachers supporting other classroom teachers

- multi-disciplinary support

- support from the parents

- a resource teacher supporting the class teacher

- a resource teacher supporting the pupil

- whole-staff support

- the SNA as a support.

As Table 23 shows, by far the most frequently mentioned form of support is the SNA. As will be clear from the literature review (section 3.7.5.1) and the discussion of the SNA as

an agent of differentiation in Chapter 5 (section 5.2.7), the role of the SNA and hence the type of support they give is a much-discussed issue. Therefore, the data in relation to SNA support is explored at some length in a separate section, after other forms of support have been discussed. The next most frequently cited form of support is the resource teacher directly supporting the pupil, with the majority of children with low incidence SEN we observed receiving some support outside the classroom from the resource teacher.

Table 23 How frequently different forms of support were mentioned

Type of support	Number of references
The SNA	220
Resource teacher supporting the pupil	75
Support from parents	40
Resource teacher supporting the class teacher	30
Multi-disciplinary support	5
Whole-staff support	3
Classroom teachers supporting each other	2

7.1.1.1 Classroom teachers supporting classroom teachers

Our data contained very few examples of classroom teachers supporting one another. Those that did arise demonstrate that when such support was in place it was of an informal nature:

> [T]he teacher next door would be my partner, she's senior infants as well and she's lots of experience so I'd turn to her and then I have a mentor as well which would be [teacher] but I'm blessed with this school. You can turn to anybody in this school, you really can, it's not everywhere you'd be that lucky. (School D, teacher D1)

The extent to which teachers received this type of informal support varied from school to school. The teacher quoted above felt that he was fortunate to be part of a supportive community of teachers. In contrast, the teacher quoted below explained how communication from the child's previous teacher was minimal:

> … there wouldn't have been that much input. I spoke to his class teacher previously and she just mentioned a couple of areas. (School H, teacher H9)

7.1.1.2 Multi-disciplinary support

There were only five statements relating to multi-disciplinary support in our data. However the comment below from the parent of a child with complex needs highlights the important role that a well-co-ordinated multi-disciplinary team can play in facilitating curriculum access:

> [P]lus with Pupil D1 she is under this one umbrella group in that the occupational therapist, this educational psychologist and the speech therapist

are all in the same unit, they meet together, you know they have the one umbrella whereas with [Pupil D1's sibling] he sees an occupational therapist actually from the same unit that Pupil D1 does but his speech therapy is from a totally different service so I feel, I think Pupil D1 is co-ordinated better whereas (Pupil D1's sibling) is a bit more separated. (School D, parent D1)

In another instance, the advice of a particular specialist (a mobility trainer) was highlighted as being critical to providing independent access to the informal curriculum for a child with VI.

7.1.1.3 Support from parents

Parents play an important and direct role in their children's education. Through semi-structured interviews and lesson observations, a catalogue of data emerged related to the ways in which some parents extend school learning to the home environment and collaborated with school staff in order to share the responsibility when dealing with specific problems.

One teacher praised a parent's 'strict' efforts to improve her child's behaviour:

He has huge support from his mother, from his family, and that has paid off 100 per cent … with Pupil G4 she probably would be, I know she would say to me that people would feel she's being very strict with him but children like Pupil G4, they need to understand that there's a time for work and there's a time for play and I think we probably have got that balance that he understands, that when he comes in here there's a certain amount expected from him. (School G, resource teacher G1/G4)

Another teacher explained how she was pushing the parents of a child to encourage the child to be more independent:

I have to tell parents when I see them, his task today, he doesn't have to do homework as such but he has to put on his slippers on his own and they say oh but he won't and I say well that's the next step, you know slippers on your own and then go and set the table, that's their homework because it's so important. I tell them try to imagine them when they're 14 or 15 still thinking that they're young and they need help you know. (School H, ASD class teacher H8)

This shows how parents and teachers can co-operate to ensure that the child progresses.

The role of the parent during homework activities is seen as crucial by some teachers, and is a potentially important facilitator of curriculum access. Seven parents describe how they support their children with homework. For example, one parent discusses how she monitors her daughter's homework effort/commitment:

Well, we do homework with her, yes, she's getting that okay yes, sometimes with that I'll go over it in the morning and I'd notice how she knew that last night, she's unsure of it, but you know you ask her that evening and she might know it. (School A, parent A1)

Some children receive more homework than their peers, to help them 'keep up' and sometimes this homework is given to the child by a member of school staff other than the class teacher:

> The other kids aren't actually getting a lot of homework at this stage but he has got work, it's kind of a workbook that I've been given by the resource teacher. (School B, parent B3)

A number of school staff regard extra homework (and parental support with it) as essential, in order to enable some children with SEN to make sufficient progress. Learning is seen as very much contingent upon the extent to which out-of-school support is available:

> … we're trying to get Pupil C2 to match, will you use the word match at home and as a teacher said to me, unless they are trying to reinforce at home what we're doing here, we're really not going to get anywhere so I'm sure he will do it like the father's very interested. (School C, teacher C2)

The interview data also captured one instance of a parent being frustrated at the child's homework not being differentiated to take account of her SEN:

> … one of the days I said to her homework, I had the sheet in my hand and it was A and you had to pick the picture that matched 'apple'. Now because she doesn't have sounds she didn't have a clue. So the father was kind of quite annoyed about it and I said "Listen, don't worry about it. All you have to do is get her to colour in the apple and say apple starts with A" or whatever, you know. (School C, teacher C2)

Parents can also play an important role in supporting growth and development in other areas which impact on school life, such as improving a child's attention span:

> … we're just working on strategies and techniques for just keeping her attention and her focus. (School D, parent D1)

Another parent reported that she will let the teacher know if the child is struggling with the homework and the teacher will make adjustments to the weekly test accordingly. This was one of several reported instances where discussion of what should be expected in terms of homework was a matter of negotiation between teacher and parent.

A final way in which parents can support the child is in assisting with their care needs in school. In one instance we observed, access to the curriculum was facilitated by his mother assisting at swimming:

> The parent does provide some extra help, and lifts him out of the pool for example, and gives encouragement (speaks of a Michael Jackson dance move in relation to the strokes he must do when swimming). (School E, observation E3)

The same parent makes it clear that she regards herself as fortunate to have her son in a school where collaboration between home and school is well-developed:

> Now I know that's not the case in other schools because they cannot have contact with parents … It depends on the back up from the Principal and the teachers on the care they get and I have to say as well you have to be, in this day and age, quite a pushy person to get what you need, so we're fine here and E3 is fine here but with other children they're not so fortunate. (School E, parent E3)

The examples described above give clear evidence that a mutually supportive relationship between parents and the school can play a very important role in facilitating the child's access to the curriculum, and a positive experience of school more generally.

7.1.1.4 The resource teacher as a source of support

Resource teachers provided support both indirectly to the class teacher and directly to the pupil with SEN. Interviews revealed the important ways that resource teachers in some schools provided input to the classroom teacher. For example, the resource teacher was seen as playing a pivotal role in assessing and giving advice about particular children in class:

> You know they might notice things on a one-to-one basis that you mightn't have picked up on in class because you can't give them the same attention … they're very good, you know, any questions or concerns I have they regularly talk to us about whatever children. (School B, teacher B1)

This can often occur on an informal basis, as the quote below indicates:

> That helped me a lot and then … our vice principal next door and she's the Learning Support Teacher and anything I wasn't sure of I'd run past her so she helped and I got access to, you know, they told us all the different computer programmes that I would have bought when I was in Resource … and I had great ones for the computer and that sort of helped me you know. (School C, teacher C2)

There were seven references from five schools (schools C, D, E, H and I) to attempts to integrate the activities of the resource teacher with the class teacher. This has led to the resource teacher providing in-class support (as opposed to withdrawal) and working alongside the classroom teacher:

> Traditionally it was all coming out, withdrawal was the way, but we're changing that an awful lot. We've looked that the resource teacher, the learning support teacher, they go into the room, it seems to be better, it works better, I think it's a better approach and we definitely have much more of that now than we had in the past. (School C, principal)

The quote below from a resource teacher in school D shows that she perceives a tension between providing in-class support and adequately supporting children who get resource hours:

> Well at the minute it's not a lot. Last year, at the minute I have one session a day and another girl has one session a day, that's with senior infants, I suppose that's really for early intervention with their reading, to support their reading, but I've a feeling now we're looking at the timetable again and that could be cut because we want the resource children to get more, whereas last year there was one class that were in severe need so they had maths and English in class support for about a year and a half and their scores have come way up. (School D, resource teacher D1)

Classroom teachers also felt that the resource teacher provided important one-to-one time with the pupil, which would differ from the type of support that they could achieve in a co-teaching situation:

> And [the resource teacher] is very good, if I say to [the resource teacher] like today we were doing extra … or whatever, say we were doing the number one, he would then spend time, show her the number one or whatever on a one-to one. (School C, teacher C2)

One classroom teacher explained how the resource teacher gave the pupil and classroom teacher a much needed break from one another:

> I have the resource teacher which if I didn't have the break from him during the day I'd find it tough going. I find that when he goes out … I think he's ready to get out of the classroom and I think I'm ready for that break as well because there can be some days that constant, when he's working, even when he's working he can hum to himself and that can go on all day. (School G, teacher G3)

It is clear that the variety of ways in which resource teachers work, including in-class support, providing advice and ideas and working one-to-one with individual pupils, are all seen as supportive by classroom teachers.

Support from the resource teacher for individual pupils on a one-to-one basis was a theme that emerged strongly from the data. We identified several different types of support within this one-to-one teaching. First, the resource teacher is seen as having a role in targeting specific aspects of a child's SEN, which might otherwise prove to a barrier to curriculum access. Examples include, social skills and communication for pupils with ASD; self-help skills; and motor skills. The resource teacher also teaches necessary additional curriculum access skills to some children.

> Well, she goes to [the resource teacher] now, it would be mainly conversational, trying to get her to improve her social skills you know, and she takes another child from first class as well and tries to make conversation with the two of them you know. And if she would be behind in any of the work, you

know, it'd be mostly comprehension you know, where I'd read a passage and she would find difficulty in answering the questions and that you know, so that would be the main things. (School C, teacher C1)

One child with a visual impairment is taught Braille skills that are vital to enable her to access the curriculum by a resource teacher:

Since I've started working with [the child] I've been teaching her Braille and obviously for her it is very important that she is reading up to her level because obviously that's where she's going, so it's a lot of reading. Braille is, she has completed Grade 1 Braille, now that she's getting into Grade 2 Braille there's a lot of contractions, there's a lot of abbreviations and a lot of short forms so that it's now for her to actually, she's learnt them in isolation, so it's trying to get her to learn them within her reading. She has begun recently to answer questions about what she is reading so it's not just a reading exercise as it's a comprehension as well and memory in her case. Spellings, dictation, that's what I'm focusing on with her this year so we're trying to keep her up with her class group so that when she goes back to class she's able to efficiently write on her Brailler what needs to be written and read what needs to be read within the classroom situation. (School G, resource teacher G1, G4)

Another child with a physical disability was taught computer skills by the resource teacher so that he could record his work:

I'm using the computer with him because obviously his writing skills wouldn't be as developed … His powers of communication are terrific and you'll be able to see that and he has lots to say so we felt that for him to record it was very important which is why the computer has been a big thing. We use a special keyboard, one with less diversions shall we say, it's one of those, you're probably familiar with those keyboards, big keys, and he can use it quite usefully, he's beginning to use the two hands now so that's all very positive. (School G, resource teacher G1, G4)

Second, resource teachers also gave help with specific aspects of the curriculum which individual children found difficult:

So she finds it difficult to get that jagged "v" or "w", so I'd be working with the "v" or the "w" because they're actually studying them in class for the past couple of weeks, so she finds doing a jagged really hard because you know it's more precise than doing a curve as her hands are very weak, I think that's the most important thing with her. (School E, resource teacher E1)

A common theme was the notion of fun. Resource teachers attempted to create enjoyable learning environments, often through game-based activities:

He kind of does work with [the resource teacher] in the morning and then he might go down and do a game, obviously he'd be learning something as well,

but it would be done in the form of a game or whatever and it gives him a chance to talk about his interests. (School B, SNA B2)

I think D1's always excited to go so she must have a great time so – obviously the lessons outside are very stimulating but she wouldn't have a problem with it. It is always a treat I suppose when children go and it's great reward systems when they're out there if they do well in the reading or whatever they might get a sticker or anything that might excite them, bribery's a great thing you know. (School D, teacher D1)

The resource teacher can also provide 'quiet time' for a child:

Yes and also I think he likes some quiet time during the day as well. I've spoken to his mum and she says he likes that quiet time as well, he'll say this is my time, and she said that's what he likes. (School E, resource teacher E3)

It is clear that the support provided by the resource teacher is multi-faceted. The direction of the support can be towards the pupil or the teacher, and can take a number of forms, and take place both inside and outside of the classroom.

7.1.1.5 Support generally available within the school

There were very few mentions in the interviews of whole-school approaches to the inclusion of pupils with SEN. However, one class teacher in school H which had special units for children with ASD and for children with severe/profound GLDs spoke very positively of the way in which mainstream staff receive support when including pupils with ASD:

... the special unit and all the teachers and SNAs who work over there are fantastic and the resource teacher is fantastic and having an SNA in the classroom is brilliant as well, and the principal, you can go to him with any problem and you know he'll do his best to accommodate it and as I said the psychologist, and there would be doctors and things like that ringing me that the children would go to, and they would give me updates and have queries and different things like that. There's lots of communication between all the people that work with these children but I have to say the principal and having the special unit there is fantastic because if ever you have a problem, they're more used to it than I would be used to it you know, I'm a mainstream teacher whereas they deal specifically in it, so you could always go to them and they'd really help you out, they're brilliant. (School H, teacher H6)

7.1.2 Support provided by the SNA

The role of the SNA in providing support for children with SEN which emerged from the case studies was complex and multi-faceted. The contents of the SNA node in Nvivo were clustered according to emergent themes that arose during data analysis. These themes

are set out in Table 24 below, together with the number of references coded to each theme.

As already noted in Chapter 5 (section 5.2.7), a number of the duties carried out by the SNAs included in this study go well beyond the duties laid out in Circular 07/02. However, as is clear from the data presented, both teachers and SNAs themselves saw these roles as important to facilitating curriculum access for pupils with SEN. Each of the themes listed in Table 24 is discussed in turn, with the exception of the SNA as an agent of differentiation which has already been explored in depth in section 5.2.1, and relationships with pupils, which has been covered in section 6.1.3.2.

Table 24 Themes arising in relation to the support that an SNA can provide

Theme	Number of references
Administrative duties	10
Emotional support	7
Giving the child space	11
Health and safety	49
Over-reliance	9
Relationships with pupils	9
Relationships with teachers	4
Staying with the child all the time	2
Working with more than one child	16
Acting as an agent of differentiation	103

7.1.2.1 Administrative duties

School staff gave various examples of SNAs participating in daily general administrative duties:

> In the morning time she is doing some admin jobs like their daily journal copies and laminating, photocopying, those kind of jobs. (School H, teacher H1)

This is confirmed in the linked observation:

> The SNA in the class does not remain attached to one child. During the first part of the lesson, she is doing admin work, and then looks around at the children while they are doing writing. She is not present during the speech and drama lesson. (School H, observation H1)

The SNA performing work of this type can reduce the administrative load on the teacher, giving them more time to plan lessons and to teach. Some SNAs monitored and organised homework folders. The example below suggests that this is not always a purely administrative role:

> I test them on their words and I do all their homework folders. (School E, SNA E1)

7.1.2.2 Emotional support

SNAs play an important part in providing emotional support for some children. For example:

> I suppose just to help the children who have needs and to kind of keep them on board, to keep them along with the other children. Sometimes they have not just academic needs but I suppose emotional or other sorts of needs as well and to kind of keep them as well as possible along with the other kids. (School B, SNA B2)

> If he's anxious about something yes, he'll come straight to me, be it if we're out in the yard playtime or any situation in the class room or if he's particularly worried if he gets hurt, he's distressed or whatever like that, if he became quite stressed he would come and find me. I'm a 60/40 split. If I'm not in the room and he's distressed he would come and find me. He'd come with another child or another adult. (School J, SNA J5)

Building a child's trust and being sensitive to their needs was said to be important by one SNA:

> That's the way I see it, to give them care and independence is a huge thing for them, to give them that little bit of independence you know. In the beginning as I say, with other children it's hard to know for a week or two what, they need to build a trust with you as well, and if they have that then of course they're going to have good days and bad days, but you'll know they've had a bad day, if something happened, you can be aware of it and a little bit more sensitive. (School E, SNA E3)

7.1.2.3 Giving the child space/observing

School staff often talked about proximity between SNAs and children. Some SNAs made a conscious effort to physically distance themselves from the children they supported. Such distancing was seen to support children's independence:

> Not all the time, not all the time, just when she needs support, because I don't want to be, she's very independent, but you're not seeing her when her hearing aid is not working, but she's a very independent little lady and you don't want to be taking away her [independence]. (School C, SNA C2)

> It's not that the constant adult's there to take away her independence, it's kind of a safety mechanism too. I mean she is left out to roam around the yard, she's not shadowed all the time. (School E, parent E1)

In contrast to statements about SNAs giving children with SEN personal space, one case study illuminated how an SNA spent the whole day with a child whose behaviour was extremely challenging:

> Then eventually when he started his play therapy and his other sessions I suppose he settled in and the SNA at the start was literally with him full time, a lot of the time out of the classroom. (School B, parent B2)

The SNA concurred with the parent that she is now beginning to try and wean the child away from her constant presence:

> … he's just kind of, he's become reliant on me, so what I'll just do is sometimes when he gets started, like today he didn't want to do anything so there was no point in me leaving him, he didn't want to know and it's his first day back as well, he wanted to be chatting about what was happening and what he did and what he will be doing and that was all that came into his head, other than do the work, you know. (School B, SNA B2)

Distancing between SNAs and children was said to maintain and/or foster new relationships between children with SEN and their peers:

> Well for J5, sometimes he doesn't like for anybody to be with him all the time kind of over with him and in those group situations I think he benefits from going to do them, once he's set his task, I think he benefits from doing the activity on his own. (School J, teacher J5)

Giving children personal space does not equate with SNAs being passive. SNAs still observed and monitored children with SEN and intervened where opportunities to be independent led to distraction or poor behaviour.

7.1.2.4 Health and safety

One important role for SNAs is in providing support for a child's health and safety needs, a role which falls clearly within the duties described in Circular 07/02.

Not surprisingly, a very common responsibility for the interviewed SNAs was that of supporting children with toileting:

> So really it's just I go in and help her with her toileting needs and making sure she's okay and like when she needs, well she doesn't actually need a stool, she refuses to use a stool when she's washing her hands, but just to make sure she's okay and that she doesn't fall because she's also quite near the sink and it's that ceramic, that hard type of sink so if she bangs or she was to slip if the floor was wet. (School A, SNA A1)

In this instance toileting needs were linked to hazards/prevention of injury to the child. This was also a key role for many SNAs, who explicitly discussed the need to prevent falls, particularly – though not exclusively – in the playground. Falls can be associated with a child's mobility difficulties:

> We have to be very careful with A1 in the yard because she's only got the sight in the right eye, so she can't see anything that's coming from this side and she just might run through something or walk into something, yeah so, that's what

you have to be very careful, like I'll let go of her hand but I'm not far behind her. (School A, SNA A1)

Another child, E1, is aware that making sure she doesn't fall is part of the SNA's role:

She sometimes makes sure I don't fall in the yard and all that and makes sure no-one hurts me because I fell one day in my wheelchair, I fell on my elbow and hurt my elbow. (School E, pupil E1)

Another role that SNAs play regarding child safety is the prevention of "runaways" – children escaping classrooms/school grounds. In the following example, the teacher states why the SNA stays with the child at lunchtime:

At lunchtime yes she does because as I've said outside he has a tendency to run and again you'd be scared as to where he could go to. (School E, teacher E2)

Other health and safety duties carried out by SNAs included making sure that children sat correctly, and ate and drank enough.

Finally, SNAs provide medical care for some children, such as documenting any signs of injuries to a boy with a serious medical condition:

Now his SNA's very good, she keeps such a close eye on him. I have to give her credit for that. If there's anything at all, like say he comes in with a bruise that he didn't maybe have the previous day, they'd always ring home or ask me to come over to check it, see if it's okay. (School J, parent J2)

7.1.2.5 Over-reliance

One potential negative aspect of SNA support is the risk that a child will become over-reliant on the SNA, rather than achieving the level of independence of which they are capable. Some schools were explicit in stating that they were keen to avoid children becoming over-reliant on SNAs:

Well I suppose things that I'd see him stumble on would be, it's maybe when his SNA isn't beside him you know giving him one to one help, just even transcribing something when we have the blackboard or the white board, you know he will just sit back and say I don't know what to do. (School B, teacher B2)

This teacher went on to say:

.... on a day when [the SNA's] not with him, you know I do have to go down a lot more. And you have to work ahead so I'm not sure if that's because of an over reliance on his SNA or if he really needs that help. (School B, teacher B2)

One teacher discussed the benefits of separating a child with SEN from her SNA once in a while:

Absolutely, she needs to because I suppose the idea is that [the child] has to be somewhat independent, she mustn't become too dependent on her SNA, so while the SNA is always there and there if she needs her, when she doesn't need her it's good for both the SNA and for E1 to be involved in other things you know and I suppose it means that [the child] doesn't stand out either, because she's not different to the others like. The SNA helps others, she goes around to others, she does extra reading with others or bit and pieces you know and I think it's a better way of doing it. (School E, teacher E1)

7.1.2.6   Relationship with teacher

The relationship between the teacher and the SNA is critical both for the smooth running of the classroom and for gaining maximum advantage from the SNA's presence in terms of facilitating access. Many class teachers and SNAs had very positive relationships, as in the examples below:

We've developed a great working relationship now. The SNA is absolutely brilliant, a miracle, a godsend, but it was very daunting as well having somebody else in the classroom. (School D, teacher D1)

One SNA discussed how she and the teacher would plan together:

We plan together and at this stage as you saw it's when they've done colouring they get up and move, and I move back from him then and let him do his own thing. It's only really when he's doing the work, I wouldn't interfere with him when he's socialising unless there's something dangerous going on. (School B, SNA B4)

7.1.2.7   Working with more than one child

Some SNAs work with more than one child. In some cases their hours appear to be made up from those allocated to several children, for example:

Well I work as an SNA primarily to D2. I spend from 9.20am to 2.00pm with D2 and then of course the junior infants go home at 2.00pm but I'm here until 3.00pm so at 2.00pm I go upstairs to another boy who's got Asperger's and spend the last hour with him. (School D, SNA D2)

Others might make a conscious effort to help others in the vicinity so as not to single out one particular child:

… it's good for the SNA to be involved in other things you know and I suppose it means that E1 doesn't stand out either, because she's not different to the others. (School E, teacher E1)

SNAs may also work with other children while their child is away, e.g. in a resource base:

> Well basically as you know my work is with E4 but there's always another child and indeed there are two other children that I work with that would have different learning problems so I work with them when E4 goes to resource in the morning time. (School E, SNA E4)

When children are difficult to manage, it can be difficult for an SNA to manage his/her time and share his/her attention equally between other children:

> He has an SNA but he shares his SNA with another child. His SNA is really just for his physical care needs and the other child, he was out this morning, he's away horse riding, he would be quite challenging, it's part of his social skills programme, he would be quite challenging, so the SNA wouldn't have as much time as she would like but whenever the learning support teacher isn't there I have to give G2 my time where possible but I think he's quite a bright child, he doesn't always need me you know by his side and I think it's better for him not to be dependent on me if he doesn't necessarily need me. (School G, teacher G2)

One SNA appeared to share her time between children/classes in an informal manner:

> I'm kind of floating in mainstream and if principal needed me in another class, I don't have a problem. (School H, SNA H1)

While it is clear from the data presented that all the functions that SNAs fulfil by no means fit easily within the duties laid out in Circular 07/02, both teachers and SNAs themselves saw these roles as important to facilitating curriculum access for pupils with SEN. However, tension can arise between the SNA facilitating access to the curriculum for the child and allowing the child to become over-dependent on support, or inhibiting his/her social relationships with other children.

7.1.3 Leadership

The current study was focused very much on classroom-level issues which facilitate or impede access to the curriculum for children with SEN, and resource issues meant that it was not possible to examine whole-school factors in depth. However, this is not to suggest that leadership is unimportant. The leadership provided by the principal and other staff can be pivotal in creating an atmosphere of inclusion, and providing support for teachers to enable them to include children with a range of needs in their classroom. Formal interviews were conducted with principals where time allowed, and field notes recorded of informal conversations with others.

Despite these limitations, the role of leadership emerged quite strongly from the data. A teacher from school D noted:

> ... our principal is very much into special ed, she herself, she's fantastic that way and she makes sure that everyone has what they, you know, I'm trying to think now because the school has a good name for special ed teachers apparently, it was as regards to kids, a lot of kids have moved from other schools to here

because we've got a good name for it now but I'm actually not that sure.
(School D, teacher D2)

Another teacher, from school H, expressed similar sentiments about the support from the principal:

> I suppose I should say that I have worked in another school and I feel that the input from the principal is really important and you know, I would have seen maybe both sides and I would say that the support you get really makes your job so much easier if you're getting the support that you need. I would definitely say that's what makes the difference in making it work for children with special needs. (School H, resource teacher H5, H9)

Parents in school H also spoke highly of the leadership of the principal in making the school inclusive. The principal, in turn, spoke of the support given by the chair of the board of management.

In school C, the principal clearly took a leading role in reorganising the support in the school (See section 7.1.1.4).

On a more informal basis, the importance of leadership was observed in a number of schools, with clear evidence seen as part of organising the school visits that the principal was engaged and aware of the needs of the children in the school, and provided encouragement to the teachers and SNAs. For example, the principal in School E had arranged for SNAs to undertake a variety of courses to enable them to support children with SEN more effectively. Another key example of this was the team teaching programme that was observed in school K. It is worth noting that the principal played a role in organising this programme, and indeed was one of the teachers who took part in it.

7.1.4 School policies

We asked about school policies in all of the case study schools, and also looked at school websites, where these were available, for further information. However, not all schools had websites.

The interviews with principals give some more in-depth insight into their views on school policies, and how they guide the school:

> Okay. I suppose the first big thing that we feel very strongly about is the value of integration. Integration is a huge thing and we do a lot of work here between the special classes and the mainstream classes – both integration and reverse integration – we do a lot of that. (School C, principal, this school's website states explicitly that the school aims to be inclusive)

> "… [W]e would have also had a tradition of including children in mainstream, children with physical disability initially and then children with a whole range. We're happy to do that because the ethos of the school is such that we are an inclusive school and our mission statement you know is to provide an education for all the children in our area. (School G, principal)

Another example of school policy occurred in school H where a conscious choice was made to have a work rota for SNAs, whereby the SNAs did not just work with one child, but rotated between the different children who had SNAs assigned to them. This helped to ensure that children would not become over-reliant on one specific SNA. School H also has an explicitly inclusive ethos, as was clear from their website.

7.1.5 Training and previous experience

Teachers' training and previous experience can act as either a facilitator or a barrier to children's access to the curriculum. Key areas include initial teacher training; the overall expertise of staff in the school and available for consultation (such as SESS personnel, and the visiting teacher service); SNA training and CPD. As is clear from section 7.2 below, many of the teachers we interviewed regarded their own perceived lack of expertise and relevant training as a significant barrier to the successful inclusion of young children with SEN in their classrooms.

7.1.5.1 Initial training

Thirty-three of the 47 teachers we interviewed provided some details about their initial training. As can be seen from Table 25, the majority had studied at one or other of the main primary teacher training colleges in Ireland, with a smaller number having trained in the UK (see Table 25). The majority, 22 teachers in total, had studied at an undergraduate level, receiving a Bachelor of Education Degree, with eleven teachers stating that their main qualification to teach was a post-graduate one.

Table 25 Institution where initial training was completed

College or university	Number of teachers
Froebel College of Education	2
Marino College of Education	2
Mary Immaculate College of Education	5
Hibernia	3
St Patrick's College	13
University of Ulster	1
St Mary's College Belfast	3
Queen's University Belfast	2
UK universities	4

A majority of teachers interviewed felt they received little training in special needs during their initial teacher training, with eleven describing it as minimal and a further eleven describing it as non-existent. The following statement was typical of these teachers:

> It doesn't spring to mind. If it was it was very minimal. (School E, resource teacher E3)

Only seven teachers made statements to the effect that they felt they had a good level of input in the area of special education in their initial training. One teacher spoke about a placement in a special school as part of her (UK) PGCE:

> Yeah but the last placement was in a special needs school and it was a long one but there was an awful lot on special needs in that course because of that. (School D, teacher D2)

Another recently trained teacher stated:

> There were two semesters on special educational needs all in the form of lectures, examinations, they were all kind of projects and the lectures involved visual aids like DVDs and things like that or they brought people in to talk to us who worked at special educational needs schools. (School E, resource teacher E1)

The extent to which the teachers had had training in relation to special education in their initial teacher training seems from the data to be dependent to some extent on when they did their initial teacher training, with those who had trained more recently being more likely to have had substantial input. The interviewed teachers had completed their initial training between six months and more than 30 years previously.

7.1.5.2 Availability of in-school expertise and consultancy

In addition to their own training and experience, teachers can call upon the expertise of other teachers in the school, and on consultancy available through the support services. One teacher spoke about the support she gets from the special education teachers in the school:

> … they're very good, you know any questions or concerns I have they regularly talk to us about whatever children are. (School B, teacher B2)

A resource teacher gave an example of the support she received from a visiting teacher for visually impaired children:

> The training I've had has kind of been on the hoof if you know what I mean. We have a visiting teacher who comes in on a weekly basis. She's provided lots of materials and lots of help so I'm keeping just ahead of Pupil G1 all the time simply because I need to be. (School G, resource teacher G1)

7.1.5.3 Continuous professional development

We asked all the teachers we interviewed about any CPD they had undertaken, including any in-school support they had had from the SESS. However, it was difficult to obtain precise figures in relation to non-award bearing SEN-specific CPD. Interviewees often did not remember who had provided the CPD they had undertaken or, in some cases, the exact topic. This was, of course, particularly the case for in-service taken many years previously. Only five teachers had taken award-bearing courses related to SEN; these were:

- a resource teacher in School K who had a Diploma and a Master's degree in SEN
- the principals in Schools D and G who had Diplomas in SEN
- a teacher in School I who had a Diploma in language and remedial education
- a learning support teacher in School C who had a Diploma in learning support.

At least three teachers had completed induction courses; two for resource teaching and one for severe/profound GLDs.

Three teachers mentioned that they had taken online courses (resource teacher D1, resource teacher D2, teacher J3, J6). For example resource teacher D1 had taken courses in applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and dyslexia with ICEPE. Additionally a number of teachers had done summer courses in specific areas of SEN. Seven interviewees, from five of the schools referred to in-school training from the SESS. Participants from Schools G, H, and I spoke positively about the support provided by the SESS:

> [T]raining is very important and I think definitely since the setting up of the SESS we have benefited greatly from that and our teachers engage and continue as professional development so it's good that they have the opportunity to do that. (School G, Principal)

Teachers in the other case study schools had either not received such support, or did not remember it, when asked in the interview, despite explicit prompting.

The general lack of response from participants in relation to questions on SEN-specific training is surprising. It suggests that not all the schools were availing of the available support and professional development in relation to SEN. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The most striking aspect of the interviews in relation to CPD was that teachers wanted to be able to access training in relation to the needs of the children they had or were about to have in their class. They often conceptualised this in terms of being trained to teach children with a particular category of SEN. The following are typical examples:

> It would be fantastic if you could go to a course every year depending on which children were in your class. I also find as well since I started teaching I'd really love to [go] back to college with this experience under your belt, you know when they're talking now about autism you could be listening with a child in mind you know and I think you'd be more in tune with what they're saying. (School H, teacher H1)

> I mean I've done summer courses, my summer courses would have been, I did one on ADHD because I knew I had a child coming in who had it, I did a course on dyslexia because I had a child who had it, I didn't have a child but I knew there would be a child in my class who would have it and I've got a child who we kind of have issues about. We'd highlight certain traits of dyslexia and without the course I probably wouldn't have had, you know, wouldn't have spotted it as readily …. (School J, teacher J3, J6)

7.1.5.4 SNA training

The SNAs interviewed were also asked about what training they had received. A number of SNAs made reference to FETAC Level 5 courses, while others mentioned specific courses such as manual handling (SNA E1); phonics (SNA F1); training in using Dynavox

(SNA J1); courses in childcare (SNA J5); and courses from the local adult education centre (SNA E3).

A wide variation was found among SNAs, in terms of their training credentials, with some having only the basic qualifications required, while others had accessed a range of courses. Most notable were the SNAs in School E who had been given the opportunity to attend a variety of SEN-relevant courses.

7.1.6 Whole-staff planning

Key themes that emerged in relation to whole-staff planning were formal collaborative planning, informal collaborative planning and school policies. In general, collaborative planning involved planning between classroom and resource teachers. These practices were seen as broadly beneficial for allowing the school to be inclusive and giving the children good access to the curriculum.

7.1.6.1 Formal collaborative planning

Formal collaborative planning is very important to the introduction of innovations such as the team teaching observed in school K. Considerable planning was involved, including initial assessment in order to place children into their relevant groups, decisions about the books to be used, then ongoing discussion as the scheme develops:

> … we've had two meetings so far where we discuss moving children from different groups. Some children are failing, it's too difficult for them, some children are excelling and also there's a bit of personality problems so we have to keep some children apart socially. Some children are not listening or that you find are very good in each group, we discuss what's happening with them and how to focus them. (School K, resource teacher K1)

These meetings occur on a fortnightly basis. Further discussion of the organisation is given by a class teacher:

> Well I mean every week, every few weeks we each take a different station so I mean I've been on every station so far now, you've got your dictation, the new book, the old book, yesterday's book and the Jolly phonics station so basically it's an intensive hour and ten minutes at each station, intensive in each of those areas. (School K, teacher K1)

Other examples of collaborative planning are given by resource teachers:

> … we do have meetings, the special education teachers will all sit down with the principal once a month and you know we'd chat, that's a formal one but I don't think we have a collaboration one. I must check it out. (School D, resource teacher D2)

The next quote gives further details on collaboration occurring between the classroom teacher and the resource or learning support teacher:

So then myself and the learning support teacher we decided to kind of put a plan into action so what happens is on a Monday afternoon, J2 will go out for support with another child from the class, just on a Monday, but then everyday [SNA] will take him, now you actually didn't see that happen this morning but normally [SNA] will take him for 20 minutes down the back at her table and she'll do work with him on phonics or reading or anything else that I think that he needs. (School J, resource teacher J2)

7.1.6.2 Informal collaborative planning

Much collaborative planning, however, is informal. Time is an important issue, with planning having to occur in snatched moments, as there may be no time set aside for collaboration. Meetings can be as informal as meeting in the staff room or the corridors.

I would meet the SNA regularly because she drops D2 up to me so if I had any information I'd probably relate to her and she'd pass it on to (teacher) and vice versa but as I said meetings now are quite tricky getting the time for them. So it's definitely in school hours anyway. (School D, teacher D2)

One teacher specifically stated that no time is allocated for meetings:

We don't get a huge amount of time in fact there's no time allocated so it's a case of I have to meet the resource teacher usually after school time and we sit down. (School E, teacher E1)

If they cannot find time during the day, one teacher states the need to have meetings or conversations in the evening after school hours.

7.1.7 IEPs

IEPs are explicitly designed to facilitate access to the curriculum for children with SEN, and to ensure that the specific needs of the child are being addressed. We asked to see the IEP for every case study child and to take a copy wherever possible. In total, we saw the IEPs for ten children, from five schools. A number of interesting and contrasting themes arose in relation to the IEP. For example, a number of comments were made around collaboration for the IEP, and there were some contradictory references, in which class teachers or SNAs stated that they were not familiar with or aware of the IEP, or that the resource teacher was the one who dealt with it. It was not clear whether every child we observed had an IEP. Of course, as 16 of the case study children were being catered for under the GAM, it might be expected that these children would not have IEPs, but we expected that each of the 30 children with low incidence SEN would have an IEP. Additionally, not every classroom teacher was necessarily aware of, or engaged with, the IEP(s) for children with SEN in her or his class.

7.1.7.1 Collaboration around the IEP

There were 29 references to the importance of collaboration for the IEP. The greatest number of these were in relation to children with ASD, nine in total. Collaboration

around the IEP was more likely to be mentioned by classroom teachers (eleven times), than by resource teachers (six times) or SNAs (three times).

An example of collaboration in the preparation of the IEP between home, school, and other relevant agencies has already been given in Chapter 6 (section 6.3.3.1). Another example of collaboration around the IEP is given below. In this instance, the collaboration involves not only the class teacher and the resource teacher, but also the visiting teacher (for pupils with a hearing impairment):

> Myself and the class teacher we did that together but we actually spoke as well to the visiting teacher about where to go with that so what we're doing at the moment is we're working on basic things, learning instructions or recognising instructions within the class. The coat, putting on the coat, taking off the coat, lunchtime for lunch stuff, her prayers at night but we haven't got to that at all yet, you know talking about the word prayers and knowing when it's prayers and stuff like that. Those four different things we're trying to work on but I haven't got near those yet you know. (School C, resource teacher C2)

As mentioned above, in addition to involving parents, class teachers and resource teachers, collaboration around the IEP can include a range of outside agencies. In the examples below, the resource teacher and two class teachers from school H describe the IEP process in their school:

> … in conjunction with the class teacher, and then the parents as well would be brought in, you know, to discuss, you know, but probably I'd say myself mostly. Then with regards to maybe if there's an outside agency involved definitely their recommendations, I would include them in the plan you know. (School H, resource teacher H5, H9)

> H5 is exempt from Irish, yeah, and he would do work on his computer as well, he's learning how to type properly so that would be in his individual plan and then with H5, social skills are very important in his individual plan as well, because he can get very tense and anxious and then H6, we have a behavioural plan as well as an educational plan in place for him so we meet a lot and decide what's working, what's not working, and we have a lot of help from the psychologist and he would have met me in conjunction with H6 and then we would have a lot of help in this school where the people would come in and meet with me and we would decide on the things we need to do for the children. But I would have individual plans for those three in particular. (School H, teacher H3, H5, H6)

In this final instance, collaboration involves the different members of staff working on different goals from the IEP, and doing complementary work to facilitate the pupil's progress:

> The resource teacher would work with me; I think I have his targets, let's see. There it is. So she would give me a copy of this, we'd work together, the reading.

> We'd have a set of words, a certain number of words that the children would have to read by senior infants so it's just breaking them down and listing his targets. His reading is very good now. He would be in the top third of the class for that and then just working through phonics, what we would be expecting from him. She would test him at Christmas and then she would let me know what areas she feels need to be going over and I would let her know what areas I feel [need addressing]. (School H, teacher H9)

7.1.7.2 The IEP as the responsibility of the resource teacher

The impression from School H is of active collaboration in relation to the IEP. However, it was not clear that this was the case in a majority of the other schools. While there are examples of staff and parents collaborating on the IEP from some schools, there are also a number of comments that at least implied that meeting the goals of the IEP was the remit of the learning support or resource teachers. Eleven references were coded to the theme of the classroom teacher or SNA not being familiar with the IEP. These eleven references came from six of the eleven schools. Seven of them were made by class teachers, three by SNAs, and one by a resource teacher. This reinforces an impression that there was not necessarily much consistency to be seen across schools, and possibly within schools, as to how IEPs were implemented, and indeed who should implement them. In addition to this, the IEP was only mentioned spontaneously (as opposed to the interviewee talking about the IEP in direct response to questions from the interviewer) 12 times, in five of the eleven schools. Four of these instances came from one school (School D). There were six instances of explicit statements that children did not have IEPs. These were from four of the eleven schools and covered a range of categories of need including dyspraxia, physical disabilities, EDBP and ADHD. The following responses are typical of a number of teachers in answer to questions about whether the child has an IEP:

> He does, I'm not 100 per cent sure, I think he does yeah. (School B, teacher B2)

> It's usually resource teachers that make up the IEPs, it's not really the class teacher. (School I, teacher I3)

In some cases the resource teacher was working on specific goals which addressed particular areas of need for the child:

> Now the resource teacher would have her plan for that and her report and that and IEPs as well, she would've done that for her, yeah. At the moment she's trying to be on the social and conversational skills, that she'd be trying to deal with. (School C, teacher C1)

It is clear that not all classroom teachers are fully aware of or involved with the IEP, and that it is seen by a significant number of them as the remit of the resource teacher. One further interpretation to be drawn from this would be that the classroom teacher sees the limits of their responsibility being teaching the primary curriculum to the child as well as they can within the confines of the classroom, and the group of children in that class.

7.1.7.3 Examples of IEPs

This section concludes with some examples of IEPs from the case study schools, which provide evidence on the types of goals included, and the way in which they were intended to be implemented.

One detailed example viewed by the research team was an IEP for a child (G2) with a rare genetic condition. The areas of concern in the IEP were literacy and numeracy. Staff members mentioned in the education plan were the class teacher and two resource teachers, with the targeting occurring both in the class and in withdrawal. The educational plan included *specific targets* (e.g. recognising letter sounds, copying and adding two numbers up to ten); *achievement criteria* (e.g. the need for accurate task performance on three consecutive tests to ensure complete mastery); *possible resources and techniques* (e.g. use of specific games, guidelines, etc); *possible class strategies* (e.g. set handwriting practice, practical activities); and *ideas for the learning support or assistant* (e.g. teaching correct letter formation, checking on specific aspects of the student's work). The IEP also included ideas for the parent to work on at home.

A second example involves a child (E1) with a physical disability. The IEP details deficits in her fine motor abilities, as well as a series of goals in increasing visual motor skills, increase of co-ordination of both hands together, and the development of fine motor skills. They provide a number of tasks which can be used to improve these functions, for example cutting skills for hand co-ordination, and increasing finger strength using play dough and putty. The IEP in this case only contains details on the tasks, rather than detailing who was responsible for working on these tasks.

7.1.8 Additional provision

Beyond the lessons and curriculum access provided by the school staff, a number of children had additional provision, mainly comprising different forms of therapy, or support from a visiting teacher. These include speech therapy (C2, D1, E2, J1, J6), occupational therapy (D1, E3, I3) and play therapy (B2). Whether provision was made during school hours or outside in the community was dependent on the category of need with which the child had been assessed. Thus only in some cases was there collaboration between therapists and school staff. For example, C2 received speech therapy from the same therapist who worked with children in the speech and language class in school C, but as C2 was not in the special class, she had to see the therapist outside school hours. This impacted on her ability to access this therapy, and also the opportunity for the speech and language therapist to provide input to C2's class teacher.

It is also interesting to note that pupil D1, as a foster child, received additional provision from social services.

7.2 Challenges for Teachers in Implementing and Differentiating the Curriculum

This study identifies a number of barriers which teachers experienced in implementing and differentiating the curriculum, through both observations and interviews. The most

frequently mentioned of these barriers are listed in Table 26 below. It is clear that the teachers in this study felt that time for collaboration was a critical issue in facilitating curriculum access. The other barriers which were most frequently mentioned by teachers were: the nature of the child's special educational need, issues in relation to training and CPD, lack of support for the teacher, and subjects omitted from the curriculum. This blend of concern about 'within child' factors and the need for enhanced support (resources and training) is one which occurs frequently in the literature. It highlights the need to reduce the knowledge/confidence gap so that 'child deficit' concerns are reduced and replaced by positive approaches to intervention.

Table 26 Participants' perceptions of the barriers in relation to implementing and differentiating the curriculum

Barrier	No. of Participants mentioning this barrier			
	Teachers	SNAs	Principals	Parents
Child's need of support	6	0	0	1
Lack of support for the teacher	9	0	0	3
Lack of SEN content in initial training	11	0	0	0
Lack of CPD in SEN	9	2	0	0
Assessments	3	0	1	2
Struggling to reach the level of the curriculum	3	1	0	2
Omitted subjects	9	0	1	2
The nature of the child's SEN	10	2	0	4
Lack of time	13	5	0	3

Other barriers, each mentioned by fewer than five participants, included difficulties in obtaining a school place, the number of pupils in a mainstream class, the child having frequent or prolonged illness, and the child being shy. Not surprisingly, as can be seen from Table 26, the majority of references to barriers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum came from teachers. However, some barriers were also commented on by a number of other participants and observed by the researchers.

7.2.1 The child's need for support

A frequently cited barrier is the child's need for support, with some children either not having access to an SNA (which the teacher feels is needed) or not having sufficient learning support or resource teaching hours. One observation schedule noted:

> Where work is individually based H3 appears to cope well, though he needs occasional additional support, when the whole class is addressed, he does not appear to participate. (School H, Observation H3)

This child, who was catered for under the GAM, needed regular attention to help him remain fully active and engaged in the curriculum.

The eleven references to this theme were in relation to a wide variety of categories of need, including HI; VI; ASD; physical disability; multiple disabilities; EDBP; and children

catered for under the GAM, indicating that the perceived need for support is not specific to one group of children.

In addition, one teacher mentioned a combination of class size and the children's need for support as a barrier:

> No, I've twenty-eight. At the very beginning I'd six children and I find that they really need one-on-one help and there's not always the resources for them to go out anywhere and there isn't the time here because if I dedicate my time to one child then the rest of the children would suffer so striking this balance is very difficult. (School D, teacher D1)

7.2.2 Lack of support for the teacher

One salient theme emerging from the data is the lack of support which a number of the interviewed teachers felt. The 22 references to this theme came from nine teachers in seven schools. What is most striking about these data is the relationship between the perceived lack of support for the teacher from visiting professionals (typically advisory teachers or educational psychologists), teachers' perceptions that they lack knowledge about a particular category of SEN, and a lack of teacher self-confidence regarding their abilities to provide appropriate learning environments for some children with SEN. For example, one teacher describes her sense of 'failure' and belief that she could do better with outside help:

> I think somebody would need to come into the classroom, like you did this morning, and see what B3's difficulties are. I mean at the start of the year if somebody had come into the class and sat in and said to me this is what you need to do it would have been a lot more helpful. I feel that I am learning on the hoof. In some ways you feel like you're failing B3 because it's what, two months on now, and it's only dawning on me what's working for him at this stage so that seems to me to be two months lost, so you do feel like you're failing him in some ways. (School B, teacher B3)

In this particular case, the teacher had no in-class support from an SNA, and had not been given advice by other school staff:

> We weren't even really given guidelines as to how to differentiate for him … you're just thrown in there and told to get on with it really you know. (School B, teacher B3)

Another example of a lack of teacher confidence stemming from a lack of external validation of the appropriateness of her lessons is provided below. Like the teacher cited above, this teacher had received no 'concrete' guidance and had no SNA to turn to for support:

> … there's nothing like concrete that has been given to me, you know, when you're doing this use this, and I would love some ideas on how to because I just don't think that I'm presenting some of the things in the right way. I'm still

coming from a visual perspective and I find it very hard, you know, to imagine the other side of it you know, and how to kind of present things to her in a different way. (School G, teacher G1)

Even in a supportive school, there was a perceived need for input from external experts to give advice in particular cases (for example extreme problem behaviour):

… I can't complain about the team we have but my big thing, you might think I'm harping on about psychologists but you do need help from a psychologist, you know, we're not always able to cope with the changes in behaviour of the child. (School H, teacher H7)

In addition to supporting and advising classroom teachers, one teacher added that she felt having access to educational psychologists could also lend weight to the teacher's opinion of a child's level of ability/disability. This teacher felt that this could be helpful in enabling parents to accept realistic goals for their child.

In circumstances where teachers are lacking in support there is a clear division between those teachers who take the initiative and actively track down the support they need, and those teachers who do not know what services are available or how to engage with them. The following passage documents a resource teacher's efforts to find the support she needs from an outside professional:

Now I have spoken to the woman who specialises in the hearing impaired down in Dublin as well last week and she actually showed up last week for a session, she had a session with her, and she had given me a couple of ideas as well, basically it's repetition and auditory work and sounds and environment and things like that to focus on.' [Interviewer: But a lot of the time you have to seek out the help yourself]. 'Yeah, I've had to do all of that yeah. (School C, resource teacher C2)

7.2.3 Lack of SEN training at initial and CPD level

An important part of being able to implement and differentiate the curriculum for children with SEN is having appropriate training as part of initial teacher training. When talking about the special needs component in their initial teacher training, two-thirds of the teachers said it was non-existent or minimal (see section 7.1.5.1). Only a minority of the teachers felt prepared to work with children with SEN in a mainstream classroom, as a result of their initial training:

… we really don't get enough training in this area sure we don't really. Well I even found, I had a child with autism a couple of years ago and he was on the autistic spectrum, and it was so difficult for him and at the end of the year I felt in many ways I'd failed him just due to, I just didn't know how to help him more you know. (School B, teacher B3)

However, another teacher spoke of the process of learning for teachers which extend beyond the initial degree, with a lot of learning taking place on the job:

> I think leaving college we were still unsure, I mean until you're actually in the setting with the child then you know, so I think we were still unsure leaving college but then I think once you're with a child in the setting you adapt to what you have to do. I would have checked up a lot of information via research and checking up books and checking out different websites and things like that so I would have checked up a good bit of information beforehand which you need really. (School E, teacher E2)

Another issue for teachers was having access to information on the specific type of disability that a child presented in their classroom. This topic has already been discussed in section 7.1.5.3; the further examples given here show that this was a commonly held view among the teachers we interviewed.

> Well I certainly believe that the conditions that come up on a regular basis, or the very common conditions …there should be training on that definitely, and there should be programmes of work laid out for those children and I find it hard to understand why there hasn't been, you know, I mean autistic children, Asperger's children constantly come up, children with Down's syndrome, that one comes up constantly you know. I mean the physical disabilities then, like you have the spina bifida, cerebral palsy, again there should be a programme of motor skills and stuff that I could do or the resource teacher could do with them because otherwise each year you're trying to access professionals, occupational therapists and stuff and get it from them. I feel they should be standard, like the curriculum, there should be a standard resource on all those regular conditions and then obviously the more unusual conditions then would need more research done into them you know. (School E, teacher E1)

> Well I suppose as a class teacher what I would ideally like would be, it would be very helpful to have some sort of tuition on dealing with special needs or something that I come across all the time is the dyslexia problem and diagnosis early on of what the real problems are because sometimes I feel as class teacher is that there's labels and terminology talked about but when I ask for a specific clue as to what to do they seem to dissipate. (School F, teacher F2)

A number of teachers stated that they had had no further training (in any area) following their initial degree. This included ten classroom teachers and one resource teacher. Furthermore, not all those who had accessed CPD had done so in SEN which is only one of the areas in which it is relevant for a mainstream class teacher to undertake CPD. It is clear that only a minority of teachers have accessed CPD in SEN. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

7.2.4 Lack of time for collaboration

Lack of time for collaboration could be seen as an overarching barrier for implementing and differentiating the curriculum for children with SEN. It is mentioned as a barrier by both more teachers and more participants overall than any other issue. For example in

response to a question from the interviewer about whether she has time to liaise with the resource teacher, Teacher C2 says:

> Well sometimes, after three o'clock he would come up or after two o'clock even but when the kids are there I haven't the time. You take your eyes off them for a few minutes and you've lost them. (School C, Teacher C2)

Similarly, in response to the same question, one of the class teachers in school E says:

> We don't get a huge amount of time, in fact there's no time allocated so it's a case of I have to meet the resource teacher usually after school time and we sit down. So at the start of this term we would have sat down and discussed the needs. (School E, Teacher E2)

A resource teacher in School D highlights the lack of scheduled time for meetings about the IEP and the tensions that this can cause:

> Well I find myself, I don't know, I seemed to have missed a lot of groups this year, I find I have so many different meetings, like regarding the resource kids I would miss a lot of groups of my learning support but I suppose at the start of the year it's always like that, you're kind of busy up to I don't know Christmas maybe and after the interruptions are less frequent but sometimes now it is hard even for the IEP meetings I have to get the mam in. (School D, Resource Teacher D2)

Asked about opportunities to talk to the class teacher about the child to whom she is assigned, one SNA said:

> Well we don't really have a time as such but if there is something, depending on what they're doing, I will go up to her or whatever, or after school or in the morning or at break-time or whatever. Only once now, we had a meeting a few weeks after they started back with the teacher he had last year and the SNA he had last year, so the four of us got together and we had a chat about him. (School B, SNA B2)

Clearly, much communication between teachers and SNAs, and indeed between classroom teachers and resource teachers, takes place informally in snatched moments. This leads us to the conclusion that there is little time for the type of planning which can be necessary for ensuring that teaching is differentiated to ensure that children are successfully included in the classroom.

7.2.5 Difficulties in getting a place at a school, or in a class

One school mentioned issues about children not being able to access the speech and language classes, even though they had language issues (School C). The school held the opinion that the needs of the children were such that a placement in the speech and language class would be most suitable for them, even though they did not fit the criteria laid out for entry into the class. There were several instances of a child repeating a school

year due to the teachers and principals taking the view that it would be better for the child to stay back a year, as they had struggled in the previous year (four of the case study children were repeating the current year, one additional child with SEN in first class, who was not one of the case study children, was referred to as repeating a year, in addition it was suggested that a further child would need to repeat the following year).

Three of these instances were in relation to pupils with a hearing impairment who had had cochlear implants, and it seemed possible that in these cases the need to repeat a year might have been due at least in part to delays in the provision of appropriate support for the child within the school setting (see Chapter 8 for further discussion of this issue). However, all six instances seem to be in line with Circular 32/03 with regards to repeating a year in primary school. There were also instances observed of children who were older than their classmates due to the circumstances arising from their needs (a child with dyspraxia in School J, and a child with multiple disabilities in School D). The child in School J was notably older than the rest of the class, though this was not observed to lead to any problems.

7.2.6 Difficulties in getting assessments

Another difficulty for a child with SEN is that without a formal assessment of needs, their access to support is limited to resources available under the GAM, which may not always be sufficient to facilitate full access to the curriculum for the child. For example, one child in School E (E4) was being provided with SNA support by the school for the majority of the day, even though he had not been formally assessed and the school therefore had not been allocated SNA resources in respect of his needs. The observers judged that this support greatly facilitated access to the curriculum for this child. This issue has already been touched on when talking about the parent's experience and problems in getting their child assessed (section 6.3.3). Some schools were also concerned about access to assessments. One teacher notes of a child who had a moderate hearing impairment:

> Her greatest challenge was the fact that it wasn't diagnosed basically you know. (School E, teacher E2)

The principal of another school stated:

> I would like it if we could have more assessments done, the number we can have done is limited, but over the past number of years we haven't done badly, you know we've managed quite well. I'll tell you one of the difficulties we have – we have the special classes, we have children coming in from other areas, the children in the special classes tend to use up more of the assessments. I believe a school that has special classes should get extra. (School C, principal)

This example makes it clear that schools may have limited access to assessments, which means that some children may have to wait for an assessment even when the school believes that the child has needs which are not being met.

7.2.7 Issues in curriculum access for individual children

As explored in Chapter 5, the issue of the extent to which children were accessing the curriculum is a complex one. However the majority of these young children (with the exception of those with sensory impairments and those with moderate GLD) were engaged in, and accomplishing, the same tasks as their peers for much of the time (albeit with support for half the time). Issues in relation to children with sensory impairments will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. However some teachers and parents mentioned other access issues which they saw as related to individual children's needs. These are outlined in this section.

7.2.7.1 Missing school due to Illness

A number of children were said to have missed out on a part of their education due to long periods of sickness. One teacher said of a child:

> ... she missed a lot last year, she was out for physio and other health issues, she's missed an awful lot, she's catching up with her lower infants as well as her higher infants and in that way there's a lot of extra help needed to help her come through, come along to the level that she needed. (School F, teacher F1)

Missing a lot of time from school can lead to the child having additional difficulties in accessing the curriculum.

7.2.7.2 Shyness and unwillingness to engage

Shyness can be another barrier for children. Pupil C1, who presents with elective mutism provides a good example of what may be called shyness, in her unwillingness to make it known to the teacher when she is struggling or having a problem with her work. In the observation schedule, it was noted:

> She then returns to her workbook – she is stuck, but does not ask for help, rather waiting until the teacher seeks her out to give help. (School C, observation C1)

Pupil G3, mentioned already in this section, also shows signs of his mood acting as a potential barrier to him being able to access the curriculum. The teacher stated:

> My problems with him would be, I'm still learning to judge where he's at when he comes in the morning, what triggers him, what will upset him, what won't upset him and if I get that wrong there's a mood like there is now. (School G, teacher G3)

7.2.7.3 Struggling to reach the level of learning set out in the curriculum

One parent noted that her child can take longer to do tasks than the other children:

> ... he has fallen slightly behind maybe in the reading, or just sort of pronouncing the words you know, sounding out the words. It takes him a good few minutes maybe to get the whole sentence read. (School J, parent J2)

For another pupil, the difficulty is in relation to perfectionism, with the child being upset if he fails to do the task perfectly:

> If he can't do it he'll kind of panic a bit, you'd have tears and it could be something simple like maths and academic things are fine but if we're doing a cutting out activity he's not very good at the cutting, and he can't cope with his picture not looking how it should. (School J, teacher J3, J6)

7.2.8 Omitted subjects

Another barrier to access for children to the whole curriculum is that they may not be accessing specific areas. A number of references are made to children not doing Irish. For example, one principal states that children in the speech and language classes don't do Irish (School C, principal). There were eight pupils exempt from Irish, or for whom there was an expectation that they would be exempted from the subject (D2, H6, H9, I4, J1 and the three pupils in the group H7). In addition to the three pupils with severe/profound GLD, three of these pupils are on the autistic spectrum; one has a HI; and one has been assessed as having a form of dyspraxia that impinges on the child's ability to speak.

Another issue raised is that children miss out on mainstream teaching when they are withdrawn for learning support or resource teaching:

> Yeah those two girls they go to learning support so they go out but it varies so what I do in my timetable every day they don't always miss Irish. (School J, teacher J2)

7.2.9 The nature of a child's need acting as a barrier

Following time for collaboration, the second most commonly cited barrier regarding a child's engagement in the curriculum is the nature of the child's SEN. Ten teachers, from ten of the eleven case study schools, specify the nature of the child's SEN as a factor preventing them from engaging with a part of the curriculum. This is sometimes due to health and safety issues and sometimes to it not being possible (in the teacher's judgement) to adapt the curriculum in such a way that the child has full access. A variety of different categories of SEN are cited as barriers, mainly by teachers, but also by parents and SNAs, for example barriers to engaging in physical activities for children with a physical disability, hearing impairment or visual impairment. For example, the parent quoted below spoke about her child with a rare physical condition having to miss out on one aspect of the PE curriculum:

> Of course and it will be for Pupil A1 in some areas because she won't be able to do anything where it'll be jumping, any sudden jumping, like a bouncy trampoline would be absolutely out for her, gymnastics would be absolutely out because you would have this jumping. (School A, parent A1)

The need to use a walking frame can also be a major impediment to engaging in these types of activities. For one pupil with cerebral palsy, the SNA described the worries that she had in taking account of the barriers that the child has to engaging in PE but letting the child also enjoy the experience that he was keen to join in with:

> … for PE he goes with the frame, literally if he runs I run, if he walks I walk, I go beside him and sometimes you feel bad for him that you're kind of in his space but I don't see any other way around it, now he has no fear, he would swing from the lights if he was left, and if he falls he just bounces and gets back up again. In hip hop last week, we do hip hop on a Friday, he was inclined, it was the saddest I'd ever seen him, because he's good, he'll just sit and watch I'd stand and he wouldn't join in and the teacher was very encouraging and sometimes I'd try it without the frame and sometimes I'd try it with the frame. It's very nervous without the frame but just to let him join in and last Friday now that was the best day, he really enjoyed it. (School I, SNA I3)

One teacher spoke about the difficulties in working with a child with a hearing impairment who is behind in terms of language comprehension:

> Because she doesn't hear everything that's being said and then she doesn't understand everything that's being said in the room, because I mean words like "match" and you know things like that she's never heard of them before, you know. She's only had her cochlear implant a few months so she's hearing like a new baby. So I mean with lessons for her, it's all like reading a story, I mean the rest all understand the story. (School C, teacher C2)

Similarly the teacher of a child with a visual impairment said:

> … you know you don't realise how much of each subject really depends on visual aids and like obviously because Pupil G1 has a visual impairment she can't see those, so it's finding ways to work around that to still make these things mean the same thing to her. (School G, teacher G1)

Children on the autistic spectrum may be motivated primarily by things that they are interested in, and it may be difficult to engage them in lessons they do not have an active interest in. One teacher stated:

> So it normally stems from whether he's interested or not. Science he tends to have a flair for that, he would think outside the box. English, I find him hard to motivate. Maths, he likes the concrete but not so much the abstract stuff, he finds that a bit hard. (School H, teacher H9)

7.3 Summary

In this chapter we have presented data in relation to the factors which facilitated or impeded access to the curriculum. In a number of instances the barriers were the converse of the facilitating factors.

Support from the SNA was seen as a major facilitator. The SNA as an agent of differentiation was by far the most frequently mentioned theme under this heading, but this has already been dealt with in Chapter 5 (section 5.2.7). Apart from this, attending to children's care needs was the most frequently mentioned role fulfilled by SNAs. SNAs also fulfilled a number of other roles, both supporting individual children and supporting the teacher more generally. Support from staff with expertise, both within the school and external to it, was seen as a facilitator, as was access to appropriate training. However, the majority of classroom teachers considered that they lacked sufficient expertise and appropriate training to be confident in their ability to provide curriculum access for the pupils with SEN in their classes. They saw a need for focused CPD addressing issues of immediate concern to them, most often concerned with specific categories of SEN.

Collaboration, including with parents, and around the IEP, was also seen as a facilitator, although in a significant number of schools class teachers seemed to have little to do with the IEP. Lack of time for collaboration acted as a barrier to access. The Principal and school policy were both seen to play important roles in facilitating or impeding curriculum access.

Individual children's access to the full curriculum was seen to be impeded by specific individual needs, and by their exclusion from particular curriculum subjects or aspects of them (most notably, though not exclusively Irish).

A few children were repeating a year, and thus were not being educated with their chronological peers. It is a matter of debate whether this should be regarded as a facilitator or a barrier to access.

8 Discussion and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter relates the main findings of the study to the international literature. It makes recommendations based on our interpretation of the findings in the light of that literature. It discusses the implications of our findings for the way in which access is provided to the curriculum for young children with SEN in mainstream classrooms; highlighting factors which emerge as facilitators and barriers to access.

This chapter is divided into 12 sections, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of the findings which we consider need in-depth discussion. These are followed by a brief summary section. As this was a small-scale exploratory study, the findings need to be treated with caution and we suggest that further research is needed in a number of areas.

8.2 Implementation and Differentiation of the Curriculum

The Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999) emphasises flexibility and the use of differentiation as a means of providing for children's diverse learning needs. Both official guidance for teachers in Ireland (NCCA 2002, 2007; NEPS, 2007) and the international literature reviewed in Chapter 3 (e.g. Perner, 2002; Dockerell and Lindsay, 2007) offer a range of examples of how the curriculum can be differentiated.

Overall, the children we observed were engaging with the curriculum and accomplishing 84 per cent of the tasks set for them. In over half (57 per cent) of the tasks they accomplished, they did so with the support of an adult (almost always an SNA). There are several different ways in which this finding can be interpreted. We might see it as underlining the vital role played by SNAs in enabling access to the curriculum for young children within mainstream classrooms. This was a view which was strongly expressed by the teachers we interviewed. Alternatively we might interpret this finding combined with the fact that other differentiation strategies were used in only eleven per cent of tasks, to suggest an over reliance on the SNA as an agent of differentiation. This latter interpretation is supported by the fact that in the majority of classrooms where we observed, we saw only a very narrow range of differentiation strategies. The main form of differentiation was through the use of an SNA to support the pupil. This was true across different curriculum subjects and for children with different types of SEN. It was also true for pupils of different ages, with the exception of junior infants. This extensive use of SNAs as the main means of support for pupils with SEN is of concern in the light of studies suggesting that there are disadvantages as well as advantages to the use of teaching assistant support. We discuss this issue later in this chapter (see section 8.4).

In the next section we explore the possible reasons behind this heavy reliance on SNA support rather than a wider range of differentiation strategies. Our findings suggested two possible reasons. These were: lack of time and a perceived lack of expertise and access to relevant professional development. To some extent these reflect the barriers

to differentiation identified in the literature review (e.g. Stradling and Saunders, 1993). These barriers include:

- lack of SEN staff in the school to support classroom teachers in differentiation
- potential difficulties in collaboration between the classroom teachers and SEN staff
- the tension between mixed-ability teaching as opposed to focused intervention
- the scale of change between withdrawal and in class support.

8.2.1 Lack of time

In our findings we identified lack of time as an over-arching barrier in differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. Teachers had little or no time during the school day in which to meet with the SNA or with the resource teacher in order to plan differentiation strategies. Important aspects of co-ordination and collaboration in relation to provision for pupils with SEN generally took place in snatched moments, in the corridor, at break times or at the end of the school day, rather than there being a particular time set aside for dealing with these issues. Difficulties with collaboration due to lack of time as a barrier to differentiation were also identified in the literature review both in Ireland (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009); and elsewhere (Smith and Leonard, 2005; Anderson, 2007).

Teachers in the current study also appeared to feel under pressure to cover the curriculum content. In this regard our findings were similar to those of the *Primary curriculum review* (NCCA, 2005) which reports that teachers found time to deliver the curriculum and differentiated teaching challenging.

Time needs to be set aside for planning and co-ordination within the school week, particularly in the light of the fact that arrangements such as co-teaching and collaborating on the child's IEP need a greater level of co-ordination than simply supporting access through the provision of an SNA.

Recommendation 1

Time should be built into the school week to enable teachers to plan collaboratively in relation to provision for pupils with SEN.

8.2.2 Lack of access to expertise and relevant professional development

A significant number of teachers in our sample said that their pre-service training had involved no or minimal input on SEN. This reflects the findings of another recent Irish study by Shevlin *et al* (2009). This is also a recurring theme in the international literature (e.g. Farrell *et al*, 2007; Forlin *et al*, 2008). Of course, some of the teachers in our sample trained a number of years ago, and it should be noted that the BEd courses at all five institutions in Ireland now include the teaching of pupils with SEN, including strategies for differentiation, as part of the course. Teachers who had trained more recently in our sample were more likely to feel that the SEN input in their initial training had prepared them adequately.

It is clear from our findings that those teachers who received support from a visiting teacher greatly appreciated this, and felt it increased their confidence and competence in differentiating effectively for pupils with sensory impairments. Those teachers who received support from more experienced colleagues within the school also found this helpful. Lack of time to consult more experienced colleagues may exacerbate the feeling of a lack of access to appropriate expertise. However, the majority of our case study schools had no teachers who had taken accredited CPD in the area of SEN. Consequently teachers with SEN responsibilities may not have felt confident in giving advice to colleagues. This situation contrasts with that in England, where training for SENCOs in mainstream schools has recently been made mandatory.

Only one teacher who we interviewed mentioned the NCCA *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* – the teacher of a special class for pupils with severe/profound GLD. Teachers in our study also spoke of a lack of access to relevant CPD. This is an issue which requires further investigation (see section 8.3 below) since it is clear that both published guidance and short CPD courses in differentiation are offered within Ireland.

Interestingly, in three of the four schools in our study in which some level of overall school co-ordination for SEN was taking place, the principal or a resource teacher did have a CPD qualification in SEN. Our study is too small to base any firm conclusions on this finding; however this tentative link suggests one way in which CPD courses might be used effectively.

8.2.3 The types of differentiation being used

In the literature review, we described differentiation as adaptations to:

- classroom organisation and management

- lesson content

- learning outcomes

- resources

- pedagogy

- assessment methods.

(For example, Renzuilli and Reis, 1997; Perner, 2002; Griffin, 2010).

Despite the heavy reliance on SNA support to provide curriculum access, we did observe teachers using the range of differentiation strategies mentioned in the literature with the exception of differentiated assessment methods. Most of these strategies were being used infrequently, and by only a minority of teachers; where they were in use, it was often in combination rather than separately.

We saw some creative examples of teachers adapting their classroom organisation in order to meet the needs of all the pupils in the class effectively. On at least two occasions these involved the SNA working with small groups of children which might be seen as outside the role described for SNAs in Circular 07/02. In most of the classes we observed, however, teaching alternated between direct teaching from the front of the classroom

and children working individually on worksheets or books. Differentiation by outcome (amount or standard of work completed) was more common than providing children with alternative worksheets or tasks. There was little evidence of teachers adapting assessment methods to take account of children's SEN, except through reducing the amount expected (for example in a weekly spelling test).

Teachers differentiated content and/or provided additional or alternative resources just over 10% of the tasks they gave to the case study pupils. The use of additional or different resources was most common in maths. Some pupils with physical or sensory difficulties had specialist equipment to help with curriculum access. However, there was little evidence in any of these instances of the use of AT being explicitly linked to an IEP. Similarly, we did not see evidence of AT specialists recommended by Lahm (2003) in order to ensure that AT was appropriate, and helped the child to achieve.

Probably the most striking example of a barrier to implementing AT (Lee and Templeton, 2008) was in relation to the Dynavox used by a child with dyspraxia. According to the SNA who supported this pupil, although a number of people had training in how to use this device, she was the only member of staff who had the knowledge and experience to use it effectively with the child concerned.

Examples of differentiated pedagogy were even less common than differentiated materials. Of course this might reflect the fact that these young children were able to access the curriculum without such differentiation. However, it is more likely to reflect the high level of SNA support that all except those in junior infants received. Indeed there is some tentative evidence from our data that more differentiation and support occurs with increasing age (see Table 21), but we do not have sufficient data from this exploratory study to draw any conclusions on this. There is evidence in our data that for some children, the SNA re-explained or simplified concepts, or broke down the task for the child, in addition to assisting those with sensory or physical impairments with those aspects of the task that they found difficult, for example helping a child with a physical disability with writing. This type of support might be regarded as differentiating pedagogy or, occasionally, content. There is tentative evidence in our data that this was a strategy used particularly with children supported under GAM (see Table 19). In some instances it seemed that the strategy for supporting a particular child had been carefully worked out between the teacher and the SNA and that in others the SNA was acting more on her own initiative.

It is clear that this form of support was highly successful in enabling access to the curriculum. However, it is not possible from our data to comment on the relative success of this strategy compared with other forms of differentiation. This form of support also raises important questions in relation to the role of the SNA (see section 8.4 below).

We saw no evidence of teachers applying the principle of universal design (Blamires; 1999; Wehmeyer *et al* (2007) to their planning or teaching. Several teachers sourced materials in different modalities for pupils with sensory impairments in order to provide curriculum access, but in no instance were these materials used to supplement the teaching for all the pupils. Indeed, these teachers often talked about the difficulties they faced in trying to work in these different modalities, implying that it was a struggle,

and that they would therefore potentially not have the confidence to differentiate continuously in this manner.

8.3 Initial Teacher Training and CPD

As is clear from section 8.2.2, the majority of the teachers we interviewed felt that their pre-service training did not prepare them sufficiently to work with pupils with SEN. However, this finding needs to be interpreted cautiously in view of the range of dates at which teachers had trained. Of more interest is the fact that a few teachers did talk very positively about the SEN component of their training. One common factor in these cases seemed to be a placement in a special educational setting such as a special school which was regarded as very helpful. This may indicate that the opportunity to acquire practical experience of working with children with SEN during training is particularly important. Interestingly, this appears to be the view taken by the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) in England which recently commissioned the development of a task for Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students in England to undertake with a pupil with SEN (Nash and Norwich 2010).

Some teachers (though not all) also reported that they found it difficult to access relevant information when a child with a particular type of SEN was placed in their class. Some teachers felt strongly that it would be particularly useful to have easy access to relevant information and professional development in this situation (see below). Being able to access information as and when required is, to some extent, a skill which can be taught.

Recommendation 2

Consideration should be given to ensuring that initial teacher education courses include both theoretical input on teaching pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms and practical classroom experience of working with one or more pupils with SEN. Topics covered should include recent research on ways in which pupils with SEN can be supported, such as co-teaching and the principles of universal design and of differentiation and should demonstrate how these can be applied to facilitate the inclusion of the diversity of pupils. Consideration might also be given to teaching skills for accessing information as required.

The international literature suggests that the majority of children with SEN require teaching approaches that are based on careful assessment and additional opportunities for practice and transfer (Daniels and Porter, 2007). Thus, for pupils with SEN, teachers may need to provide much more extensive and varied practice to enable mastery of a concept than for children without such needs. Provision to ensure that skills, knowledge and concepts learned in one situation can be more generally applied may also need to be explicit and carefully structured. The use of carefully targeted interventions is also important, and these are likely to be most effective when teachers have appropriate specialist knowledge and skills and the ability to use these flexibly, taking account of individual needs (Ofsted 2006; Alexander, 2009; Rose; 2009). Teachers also need to be able to share their knowledge with other adults who might be providing additional

support to children. These findings imply that, in addition to appropriate content in initial training, teachers also need access to SEN-related CPD, appropriate to their role.

As mentioned earlier, there is a range of accredited and non-accredited SEN-related CPD available in Ireland, funded by the teacher education section of the DES. These range from whole-school seminars run by the SESS and a ten-hour introductory course in SEN contact open to all teachers (run on an outreach basis by St Angela's College Sligo), to year-long accredited and combined post-graduate diploma courses, for which only teachers in specific SEN posts can apply. There are also SEN/inclusive education courses run by a number of colleges and commercial providers for which teachers are responsible for their own fees. These include both traditional part-time masters courses and online provision.

Staff from five of the eleven case study schools had attended seminars run by the SESS, but although teachers reported accessing CPD (such as summer courses or online courses) in a range of areas, a number of them had not participated in any SEN-related CPD. Four teachers who discussed the sort of CPD they would find useful were clear that they wanted access to CPD which was directly relevant to their current teaching situation, i.e. focused on particular categories of SEN at a time when they were teaching, or about to teach such a pupil. Such CPD would offer both teachers and schools the opportunity to build the specialist knowledge and skills which the international literature suggests children with SEN need in order to make good progress.

Some CPD of this type is available within Ireland, both in the form of short courses, for example in relation to children with ASD and those with severe/profound GLD, and through online and summer courses. It is not clear why so few of the teachers in our sample had taken such courses, and there may be issues with the way in which courses are publicised to teachers as well as with availability. It is also likely that the timing, location and funding of some courses influence the extent to which teachers see them as accessible. The literature suggests that the factors which influence teachers' participation in CPD courses are complex (e.g. Day, 1997; Hustler *et al*, 2003). However, our findings are similar to those of a recent OECD (2009) survey of post-primary teachers, which found that Irish post-primary teachers had averaged fewer days of CPD than teachers in any other OECD country, and that the majority would have liked more. The same survey also found that there was an unmet need for CPD in SEN in Ireland. It should also be noted that for mainstream classroom teachers, SEN has to compete with other topics when they are selecting a summer course.

- Research is needed into how relevant SEN-related CPD can be made accessible to mainstream classroom teachers. Such research should cover issues such as the format, timing, cost and publicising of courses, and other factors likely to make them more or less attractive to teachers.

Recommendation 3

All teachers, including class teachers in mainstream schools, should have access to CPD on SEN, including ready access to information about the availability of such CPD. Online and modular courses enabling teachers to access CPD when relevant to their

own teaching should be widely available. As finances allow, such CPD should be funded by the state.

This recommendation echoes that made by Marschark (2009) who, reporting on the needs of deaf and hearing impaired children suggests that training needs to be made available for classroom teachers to equip them to meet these children's needs. He further suggests that teachers may need incentives to participate in such training.

8.4 The Role of the SNA

The support of an SNA emerged as the main way in which curriculum access is afforded to the young pupils with SEN in this study. This raises some concerns in the light of recent research on teaching assistants in England reported in Chapter 3 (Blatchford *et al*, 2009; Alborz *et al*, 2009); in the final report of their longitudinal study of the role of support staff, including teaching assistants, in schools in England and Wales, Blatchford *et al* (2009) raise major concerns about the effectiveness of teaching assistant support provided to children. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Children, particularly low attaining children and those with SEN have more contact with teaching assistants than they do with their teachers, and often this is provided in small groups.

2. Teacher assistant support, although it has a positive impact on attention, has a negative impact on children's progress (in English, mathematics and science).

Nasen (formerly National Association for Special Education) has also expressed concern about vulnerable children being supported by unqualified staff (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006).

The research evidence is also clear that children with SEN do best when they have access to expert teachers (Ofsted 2006; Alexander, 2009; Rose; 2009). One role of such expert teachers is to direct the work of teaching assistants appropriately.

The role of the SNA in Ireland does not equate with that of the teaching assistant in the UK, and we rarely saw SNAs working with groups of pupils. However, given the high percentage of the time that children were being supported by an SNA in our study it seems possible that in Ireland, as in England, some children have more contact with an SNA than with their teacher. Although there is some research on the role of the SNA in mainstream primary classrooms in Ireland (Shine, 2005; Logan, 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008; Rose and O'Neill, 2009), none of these studies looks in detail at the amount of time which individual pupils with SEN spent with an SNA rather than a teacher.

- Further research is needed to establish the extent to which children with SEN in mainstream classes interact with SNAs rather than with teachers.

The findings of the current study in relation to the variety of tasks undertaken by SNAs in mainstream classrooms are in accordance with other recent Irish studies (e.g. Logan, 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008). While dealing with the care needs of the child was one key task for SNAs, particularly for children with physical disabilities or for those on the

autistic spectrum (who for example required supervision at break times), they also played a key role in helping the child access the formal curriculum within the classroom.

Two aspects of the role played by SNAs are of particular note. First, in many instances SNAs redirected the child's attention to the lesson, ensuring that they were focused on learning. Second, we frequently observed SNAs repeating and simplifying the content of the lesson for the children they were supporting. This was also a finding from the interviews, both with the SNAs themselves and with teachers. In addition, SNAs used alternative pedagogy and resources with the pupils they supported in a number of instances. These practices were both reported as being successful in enabling curriculum access, and appeared to be so from our observations. It is not clear, however, that such activities fall easily within the role of the SNA, as currently defined.

The research literature referred to above supports the use of SNAs to maintain on-task behaviour. We know of no research which explicitly examines the effectiveness of teaching assistants simplifying or re-explaining lesson content. However the review conducted by Alborz *et al* (2009) suggests that this practice may not always be beneficial, as they found some evidence that intensive one-to-one relationships may lead to the dilution of teaching goals, 'due to an emphasis on task completion at the expense of skill development' (2009, p3). On the other hand, these authors report strong evidence that the use of well-trained and supported teaching assistants to provide focussed interventions (especially in literacy) can enhance pupil progress. The same authors emphasise the importance of appropriate training for teachers in collaborative working if assistants are to be deployed as effectively as possible.

In view of these recent research findings, we suggest that it is important that teachers are made aware of the evidence on effective ways of deploying teaching assistant support. We also suggest that the activities undertaken by SNAs are reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with research findings on effective deployment of teaching assistants.

Recommendation 4

All activities undertaken by SNAs in support of children with SEN should be clearly under the direction of a teacher, and should be consistent with the research evidence on the effective deployment of teaching assistants. The role of SNAs should be extended to include maintaining on-task behaviour for children with SEN under the direction of a teacher. The minimum educational standards required for SNAs should be reviewed and SNAs should receive appropriate training for the roles they undertake.

Another issue in relation to SNAs is the extent to which they should be attached to specific children. This is an issue in which some tensions emerge in the research evidence. For example, some studies suggest that individual allocation can interfere with social contact with peers (Alborz *et al*, 2009), while others suggest that well-directed assistant support can enhance this (Fox *et al*, 2004).

- Given the roles we saw SNAs fulfilling, we suggest that further consideration should be given to the most effective way to allocate SNAs.

8.5 Other Forms of In-class Support

Although we have no substantive evidence on the academic progress of the children in our study, interviewees who were most enthusiastic about the progress of the case study children were reporting on arrangements in which several *teachers* worked in the classroom with small groups of pupils in a carefully planned and focused manner. These arrangements involved flexible use of staffing available through the GAM and allocated resource hours, as suggested in Circular 24/03, and *The Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000) in order to implement forms of collaboration, such as co-teaching, as suggested in the international literature (e.g. Bauwens and Hourcade, 1995; Vaughn, Schumm and Anguelles, 1997; Trent *et al* 2003). However it should be noted that much of the evidence in relation to co-teaching is somewhat anecdotal in nature (Welch *et al*, 1999).

• Further research is needed on the role and effectiveness of SNAs and other forms of classroom support in Ireland.

8.6 Breadth and Level of Curriculum Access

In the introductory chapter we referred to the achievement of curriculum access for pupils with SEN in terms of accessing the full breadth of the curriculum at a level appropriate to their needs.

In general, our findings show that the children in our study were accessing the range of curriculum subjects, indicating the success of inclusive policy in terms of achieving curriculum access for children with SEN in their first years of primary school. Overall, the children were engaging with the curriculum and accomplishing 84 per cent of the tasks set for them. In over half (57 per cent) of the tasks they accomplished, they did so with the support of an adult (almost always an SNA). Most of the time, the tasks these children were set were identical to those given to their peers. Where the tasks set for the children with SEN were identical to those set for their peers without SEN, the children with SEN successfully accomplished them 73 per cent of the time (33 per cent of the time without additional support and additional 40 per cent of the time when supported by an SNA). For two small groups of children, however, those with a hearing impairment and those with moderate GLD, a very different pattern emerged.

Three children with a hearing impairment were the focus of case studies. As is clear from Table 20 in Chapter 5, these children were not accomplishing on the same tasks as their peers despite receiving SNA support. In addition, there was a child with a hearing impairment in one of the classes where another child was being observed. This child's needs in relation to curriculum access were discussed in some detail by the class teacher during her interview, so information in relation to this child as well as the three case study children is included in this section. No other data was gathered in relation to this child.

In two of the four cases, interviewees said that the child had not been recognised as having a hearing impairment before starting school. In all four cases, the children were reported not to have had appropriate provision in place for some months after starting

school. One child was repeating a year, due to not having been able to hear during the previous year, and repeating a year was being considered for another child. Two children had received cochlear implants during the previous year.

It is an issue of great concern that provision that is essential to enable a child with a hearing impairment to access the curriculum was reported not to have been in place for a significant proportion of the child's first year in school. Recommendations in regard to early identification and early intervention for children with a hearing impairment in Ireland have recently been made (Marschark, 2009), and, although only a tiny number of children with disability hearing impairment were included in the present study, our findings add to the urgency of those recommendations.

The picture with regard to the two children with moderate GLD is rather different. Although neither of these two children accomplished on any tasks which were the same as their peers, they did accomplish on tasks in the same curriculum area which had been differentiated to meet their needs.

- Research should be carried out into how curriculum access can best be facilitated for children with sensory impairment, and those with moderate and severe/profound GLD.

8.6.1 Access to the range of curriculum subjects

The young pupils we observed (junior infants to second class) were being taught the Irish primary curriculum, and teachers were attempting to differentiate that curriculum to facilitate access for all pupils. The great majority of pupils were being taught all subjects. However, pupils did miss lessons or parts of lessons in the mainstream classroom when they were withdrawn for support or resource teaching. This may not be a cause for concern, especially if being withdrawn gives the pupil access to a specialist teacher, since at least one study has found that pupils with SEN made best progress where schools used a judicious mix of mainstream support and withdrawal (Ofsted, 2006).

A small number of pupils were exempt from Irish. This exemption did enable some pupils to receive targeted teaching in specific areas (such as motor skills) which they needed, without missing parts of other lessons. However, in the Irish lessons we observed, teachers used a range of motivating materials, and pupils with SEN were enabled to access this aspect of the curriculum. Additionally, in the Gaeltacht school and the Gaelscoileanna, pupils with SEN were being taught through the medium of Irish. Internationally there is little evidence in relation to either bilingualism or teaching a second language to pupils with SEN. However, it is clear that pupils who are exempt from Irish do not have access to the breadth of the primary curriculum.

Recommendation 5

A review of the evidence base for the current policy on exemptions from Irish for pupils with SEN and a comparative study with practice in other countries should be conducted.

8.6.2 The additional curriculum

There is general agreement in the literature that children with sensory impairments and those with physical disabilities may need additional curriculum content to facilitate curriculum access (e.g. Douglas *et al*, 2009). We have already noted in section 8.6.1 that because of the constraints on time within the school day, this may conflict with pupils' access to the breadth of the primary curriculum. The data we collected in this study show that visiting teachers were supporting class teachers and resource teachers in providing this additional content, and that this support was appreciated. However, we were unable to judge whether the additional curriculum content which pupils received was sufficient to enable them the fullest possible curriculum access. This is potentially an issue of some concern, especially in the light of the recent reports on best practice for pupils with sensory impairments (Douglas *et al*, 2009; Marschark, 2009).

8.7 Pupils' and Parents' Experiences of School

The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 suggested that we might find it difficult to gain information from these young children about their experiences (e.g. Kelly, 2007). We also expected that parents would be involved in their children's education (Fox *et al*, 2004) and would talk about this, and how the school supports their child. In the event we successfully interviewed 31 of the 46 children involved in the case studies. Parents and pupils were generally very positive about their experience of school, although a very small minority of pupils did not like their school. Although these results are consistent with the literature, it should be borne in mind that ethical and time constraints meant that the children and parents who took part in case studies were in all cases recruited via the school.

The possibility that the children's answers might have been affected by the presence of adults (either a teacher or an SNA) in a number of the interviews is offset by the fact that the children's statements about school and subjects are on a number of occasions complemented by teachers, SNAs and parents who commented on them liking the school and/or subjects. Such statements are also supported by the literature that suggests that young children are generally very positive about school. One of the key benefits of inclusion, the chance to engage in social situations with their peers (Bishton, 2007), was highlighted by the prominence of the theme of relationships for children – both with their peers in class, and with the teaching staff. Parents in particular were positive about the opportunities their children had to mix and socialise with others without SEN. Parents of pupils with severe/profound GLDs felt particularly strongly on this issue, and school staff concurred with their views. An issue which arose in relation to these pupils was the tension between the provision of state of the art new classrooms, which had all the physical facilities to meet the children's needs, and the greater opportunities for socialising with other pupils presented by their inclusion in the main school building. We know of no research that examines this issue in relation to units for pupils with the range of SEN within mainstream schools.

- Further investigation should be conducted of the ways in which the tension between suitable physical facilities for children with severe SEN and opportunities for inclusion can be resolved or minimised.

A number of other issues were also important for parents, namely their fears for their children's future, and communication with the school. It is clear that a number of parents, though happy with their child's current provision, were wary of what would happen to their children in the future. This suggests that parents were not confident that good inclusive provision in the early years would be continued into the later years of schooling. Work by the NCCA on an alternative framework for junior cycle suggests these parental concerns may be more widely shared (NCCA, 2009).

- Further research is required into the extent to which teachers in mainstream classrooms continue to be successful in facilitating access to the curriculum for children with SEN during the later primary and post-primary years.

It is important to note however that IEPs, in which parental participation is intended to play a key role (NCSE, 2006), were rarely mentioned by parents (see below).

8.8 Assessment

8.8.1 Initial assessment and diagnosis

The EPSEN Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005), when fully implemented, are together designed to provide a structured legislative framework for the adequate assessment, support and monitoring of the needs of children with SEN at all levels of education. However, one area which was an exception to parents' generally very positive views of provision was in relation to the initial diagnosis/assessment of their child's disability or SEN. This underlines the need for the implementation of the above acts, which should bring about improvements to this process.

8.8.2 Assessment of children's progress in school

Both the school staff and the parents interviewed for our study clearly perceived progress as something that is broader than mere academic attainment. Physical, social and emotional progress were all mentioned in addition to academic progress as positive aspects of children's inclusion within a mainstream school, and for some children these took priority over academic progress. This is noteworthy, as, although many anecdotal reports exist, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining these types of progress in relation to inclusive education. An exception is the study by Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004) which suggests that keeping track of progress in these areas and co-ordination of provision across the school are both important for ensuring progress in these areas, as well as for academic progress.

In relation to academic progress the literature suggests that children with SEN make best progress where there are clearly defined targets which are shared by the children themselves, where teaching methods are adapted to meet individual needs and where progress is regularly reviewed. For the young children in our study, as discussed in section 6.2, much of the assessment of progress was informal, with teachers using a range of

the strategies suggested by in NCCA documentation (NCCA, 2007). The brevity of our case study visits to schools and the young age of the children involved meant that we saw little documentary evidence of the children's progress in some of the schools. In some schools however (schools D, E, G, H and K), there were clear systems in place for recording and reviewing progress, especially in particular areas of the curriculum where the children's needs were greatest. In these schools, teachers and parents often showed real excitement about the progress of children with SEN and were also aware when progress was less satisfactory.

8.9 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Some, but not all, of the pupils in our study had IEPs. This is not surprising, given that it is not yet mandatory for all children with SEN to have an IEP, as the relevant sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Ireland, 2004), have not yet been commenced.

However, we found that where IEPs did exist, these were often seen as being the province of the resource teacher, and had been prepared by her/him. In some cases the class teacher was unaware of their content. Some parents were also unaware of whether or not their child had an IEP. School staff seemed unaware of the continuum of support guidance (NEPS, 2007) or the NCSE guidance on individual plans (NCSE, 2006). Our findings in this regard are in accord with the international literature e.g. Fisher and Frey, (2001), who note that in their study, IEPs were not generally used as a basis for planning classroom content.

As suggested in Chapter 3, international experience of IEPs has been mixed, with some studies giving a generally negative evaluation of their impact (e.g. Cooper, 1996; Goddard, 1997). Some writers suggest that the IEP may just be a piece of paperwork, with little relevance to practice in the classroom. It is therefore worth asking the question of whether the IEP is necessarily the best way forward especially in the light of developments such as provision mapping (Gross, 2008).

However, in some of the case study schools we found that the IEP was prepared in collaboration between all those involved, including members of the multidisciplinary team. The completed IEP included agreements between resource and classroom teachers as to how targets would be worked on in the classroom as well as by the resource teacher. Research has suggested that IEPS which meet these criteria can be useful (Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker, 2000). Unsurprisingly, such IEPs were found in schools where there was some overall co-ordination of SEN provision. It was also a feature of these schools that parents were most likely to be aware that their child had an individual programme and have been involved in discussions around it.

Recommendation 6

In order for IEPs to be as effective as possible for children with SEN, further training is required for all relevant staff and co-ordination needs to be in place in all schools.

8.10 Collaboration

Collaboration is a necessary and important part of effective provision for children with SEN. This is true, not only in regard to the IEP, but more generally. Collaboration may be between classroom teachers and resource teachers, or between the classroom teacher and the SNA. The current study provides evidence that the resource teacher can provide support to the classroom teacher through providing advice, and by working on learning targets for a child with SEN which otherwise might not be met. We also observed a number of good models of collaboration between the classroom teacher and the SNA. Some SNAs prepared materials for the teacher. Others clearly contributed to classroom control, reinforcing classroom rules when necessary. Others gave out homework books, or supported children in taking homework down correctly. A few SNAs worked with individual children or a small group while the teacher worked with other pupils.

Some of the schools where we carried out case studies had a relatively developed system of co-ordination for SEN, while others had no such system. It was noticeable that the existence of a member of staff, who either formally or informally took responsibility for co-ordination, was a factor that contributed to a positive experience of school for the case study children.

Recommendation 7

Primary schools should have a post of responsibility for the co-ordination of SEN provision within the school. This teacher should receive relevant CPD to enable them to co-ordinate provision and support colleagues. In larger schools this might be the responsibility of an assistant or deputy principal.

8.11 The Resource or Learning Support Teacher

Although in some schools, the resource or learning support teacher acted as a co-ordinator of the SEN provision in the school, in others she/he operated mainly by withdrawing children for individual or small group teaching, and providing advice to classroom teachers.

Although withdrawal teaching is discouraged by Circular 24/03, it occurred far more frequently than in-class support in the case study schools. Some resource/learning support teachers experienced a tension between what they perceived as children's need for individual tuition and providing in-class support. In the literature review, both positive and negative findings in relation to withdrawal were noted (Anderson 2009; Norwich and Kelly, 2004). No negative comments were made about withdrawal in our study although some adults did say that their children did not like anything which made them stand out from their peers. This is an issue, not just for withdrawal, but for the use of AT within the classroom, a point which is also highlighted in the research literature (e.g. Douglas *et al*, 2011).

8.12 School Leadership and Policy

As our study was focussed on classroom level factors which facilitated or impeded curriculum access, we did not conduct an in-depth examination of the role of school leadership. However, one factor which did emerge was the importance of the principal and/or the teacher who was responsible for SEN co-ordination, both in supporting teachers and pupils and in creating an environment where inclusion was seen as the norm.

8.13 Summary

In this report we have discussed the policy and research context of curriculum access for young children with SEN in mainstream primary classrooms, and reported on a research study conducted in Ireland on this issue. This study used multiple case studies to investigate:

- how mainstream primary teachers implemented and differentiated the curriculum to facilitate curriculum access for these children

- the experience of school from the perspective of the children and their parents

- the factors which contributed to a positive experience for these children

- the barriers which teachers and children experienced to curriculum access.

In Chapters 5 to 7, we reported on our findings in relation to these questions. This chapter links our findings with the context provided by policy and previous international research studies, and draws out implications for 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 to the NCSE for consideration and action.

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Appendices

1. Consent letters and plain language statements
2. Interview schedules
3. Observation schedule
4. Questionnaire from phase 1
5. Members of the advisory committee

Appendix 1: Consent Letters

1(a) Information letter for principals

1(b) Information letter sent to parents whose children are in the class, but who are not involved in the research

1(c) Consent letter for parents

1(d) Consent letter for SNAs

1(e) Consent letter for teachers

Access to the curriculum for pupils with a variety of special educational needs in mainstream classes

Appendix 1(a): Information letter for principals

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

A Joint Research Project carried out by Bangor University, Wales, St Patrick's College, Dublin and Birmingham University, England. Study funded by the National Council for Special Education.

September, 2009

Dear [Principal],

I am writing to thank you for your interest in taking part in the second part of this study. As I'm sure you will understand, we are very keen to proceed with the study as soon as possible, and are hoping to visit some schools before the mid-term break, and so I'm writing to you now, although I appreciate that you will be extremely busy at the start of a new school year. During the next few days, one of the research team will be telephoning you to discuss in more detail what participation in the second phase entails, but we thought it would be helpful for you to have some further information at this stage.

As you may recall the overall aims of the study are to:

1. Describe the ways in which mainstream primary teachers differentiate the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs

2. Explore how pupils with SEN access and experience the curriculum

In the second part of the study we will be looking in depth at the experience of young pupils with special educational needs in up to 15 mainstream primary schools, using a combination of observation and interviews. Participating in this part of the study will involve members of the research team visiting your school for one to two days to carry out interviews with staff, parents and where appropriate young pupils with SEN, and structured observations of how these pupils access the curriculum. During the visit we hope that we will be able to observe up to six pupils with SEN (depending on the size of your school and how many pupils you have with SEN in the relevant classes) in two lessons each, talk to the child immediately after each of the lessons, interview the child's parents, the class teacher, and any relevant SNAs and support teachers. Where appropriate we would also like to look at the pupils' IEPs and other relevant documentation.

Because we want to ensure that the study is applicable to the range of young children with SEN in mainstream classrooms, the researcher who contacts you will have a tentative 'short list' of pupils in your school to discuss with you (identified from your questionnaire responses, by year group and type of SEN). Lessons to be observed will

be selected by the class teacher in consultation with the researchers prior to the visit. In order for a pupil to be observed, in addition to your signed consent to the study as a whole, we need signed informed consent from that pupil's parents, assent from the pupil themselves, willingness on the part of the class teacher to participate, and preferably willingness on the part of the pupil's parents, any relevant support teachers and SNAs to participate in a short interview. 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.

We will also be asking you if any new young children with identified SEN have entered junior infants this year.

I enclose a letter addressed to the class teachers who would be involved in the study which is intended to form the basis for a telephone discussion in relation to the observations.

Should you wish to contact us, please telephone or email Dr Cathal Butler (tel. 018842350 email: cathal.butler@spd.dcu.ie

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jean Ware

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Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

Consent Form

I have read about the study on access to the curriculum for young children with SEN in Ireland and I understand what is involved.

I am willing for my school to participate in the study. I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time

Signed: ....

Principal Teacher .... School

Date: ....

Appendix 1(b): Information letter sent to parents whose children are in the class, but who are not involved in the research

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

A Joint Research Project carried out by Bangor University, Wales, St Patrick's College, Dublin and Birmingham University, England. Study funded by the National Council for Special Education.

September, 2009

Dear Parents,

A group of researchers from Bangor University, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, and Birmingham University has received funding from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to carry out a study of how pupils with special educational needs in Junior Infants to Second Class are helped to take part in all the lessons and activities that are going on in school.

The principal of [School Name] has given us permission to work with the school, and we have already asked permission from the parents of the individual pupils we would particularly like to observe.

While your child is not the focus of attention, the study will be taking place in your child's class, so we are writing to let you know about what we will be doing. We can assure you that if your child does talk to any of the researchers, nothing of what they say will be included in the research, as they are not the focus of the study.

We do not believe that your child will be inconvenienced in any way by the fact that the study is taking place in [School Name]. Instead, we hope that not only [School Name], but other schools, will be helped by what we find out we provide quality education for all pupils. However, should you prefer to do so, you can withdraw your child from the class while the researchers are observing. If you wish to discuss this option, please contact the school principal.

On behalf of the research team, I would like to thank you sincerely for your cooperation. If you have any questions about the study, please contact the school principal, or Dr Cathal Butler (tel. 018842350).

Yours sincerely

Dr Jean Ware

Appendix 1(c): Consent letter for parents

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

A Joint Research Project carried out by Bangor University, Wales, St Patrick's College, Dublin and Birmingham University, England. Study funded by the National Council for Special Education.

September, 2009

Dear Parents,

A group of Researchers from Bangor University, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, and Birmingham University. has received money from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to carry out a study of how young children with special needs, being educated in mainstream primary schools, are enabled to access the curriculum.

The Principal has given us permission to work with your child's school. We are writing to ask 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 with you 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. The interview with your child, will be informal and will take only a few minutes, it will also be audio-taped

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 or your child 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 have any questions you wish to ask before deciding whether or not to participate please contact Dr Cathal Butler on 01 8842350. If you are willing to take part in the study, please compete and sign the attached consent form and return it to the principal. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Jean Ware

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

Consent Form (Parents)

I have read about the study on the Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs, 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: ....

Appendix 1(d): Consent letter for SNAs

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

A Joint Research Project carried out by Bangor University, Wales, St Patrick's College, Dublin and Birmingham University, England. Study funded by the National Council for Special Education.

September 2009

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to invite you to take part in the second phase of a study of access to the curriculum for young pupils with Special Educational Needs (junior infants to second class). The study is in two parts. It is being funded by the NCSE and conducted on behalf of the NCSE by researchers from Bangor University, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, and Birmingham University.

The overall aims of the study are to:

1. Describe the ways in which mainstream primary teachers differentiate the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs

2. Explore how pupils with SEN access and experience the curriculum

The first phase, which consisted of a questionnaire, has already been completed, and your principal has expressed an interest in taking part in Phase 2 of the study.

As a result of the information supplied about your school in the questionnaire (in regard to the nature of pupils' SEN and other factors such as the number and gender of pupils and school location) we have short-listed your school for Phase 2 and have asked your principal to pass this letter to you to tell you what taking part in the study would involve for you, and give you the opportunity to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Please read the information below and decide whether you wish to participate or not. You are free to choose whether or not to participate, and need not participate unless you wish to do so even if other members of your school community are taking part. If you do choose to participate you will be free to withdraw your consent at any time.

In this phase of the study we will be looking in depth at the experience of young pupils with special educational needs in up to 15 mainstream primary schools, (including we hope your school) using a combination of observation and interviews.

Participation will involve a one – two day visit to your school by members of the research team. During the visit we will observe some of the young pupils with SEN (from Junior and Senior infants, first and second class, as appropriate) over the course of two

lessons. Pupils to be observed, will be selected in consultation with the principal, you and other relevant school personnel, and will of course, be dependent on both written parental consent, and verbal or written assent from the pupil themselves. Observations will be supported by interviews with you, the classroom teacher, the pupils' parents, the pupils themselves and other relevant professionals involved with these pupils. Where appropriate we would also like to look at the pupils' IEPs and other relevant documentation.

The findings from the research will be submitted in a report to the NCSE and may also later be presented at conferences and published in journal papers. No identifying information with regard to the individuals or schools participating will be included in any report or publication and, within the limitations of the law, anonymity and, confidentiality will be respected at all times.

If, when you have read this statement, you are willing to participate in the project please sign the attached form and return it in the envelope provided.

If you decide to take part, we will arrange to talk with you on the phone about your participation before coming to the school. If you would like to talk to a member of the research team before giving your initial consent, please contact Dr Cathal Butler on 018842350.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jean Ware

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

Consent Form

I have read about the study on access to the curriculum for young children with SEN in Ireland and I understand what is involved.

I am willing to participate in the study. I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time

Signed: ....

SNA .... School

Date: ....

Appendix 1(e): Consent letter for teachers

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

A Joint Research Project carried out by Bangor University, Wales, St Patrick's College, Dublin and Birmingham University, England. Study funded by the National Council for Special Education.

September 2009

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to invite you to take part in the second phase of a study of access to the curriculum for young pupils with Special Educational Needs (junior infants to second class). The study is in two parts. It is being funded by the NCSE and conducted on behalf of the NCSE by researchers from Bangor University, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, and Birmingham University.

The overall aims of the study are to:

1. Describe the ways in which mainstream primary teachers differentiate the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs

2. Explore how pupils with SEN access and experience the curriculum

The first phase, which consisted of a questionnaire, has already been completed, and your principal has expressed an interest in taking part in Phase 2 of the study.

As a result of the information supplied about your school in the questionnaire (in regard to the nature of pupils' SEN and other factors such as the number and gender of pupils and school location) we have short-listed your school for Phase 2 and have asked your principal to pass this letter to you to tell you what taking part in the study would involve for you, and give you the opportunity to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Please read the information below and decide whether you wish to participate or not. You are free to choose whether or not to participate, and need not participate unless you wish to do so even if other members of your school community are taking part. If you do choose to participate you will be free to withdraw your consent at any time.

In this phase of the study we will be looking in depth at the experience of young pupils with special educational needs in up to 15 mainstream primary schools, (including we hope your school) using a combination of observation and interviews.

Participation will involve a one – two day visit to your school by members of the research team. During the visit we will observe some of the young pupils with SEN (from Junior and Senior infants, first and second class, as appropriate) over the course of two lessons. Pupils to be observed, will be selected in consultation with the principal, you and other

relevant school personnel, and will of course, be dependent on both written parental consent, and verbal or written assent from the pupil themselves. It will be up to you, as the class teacher to select the lessons to be observed in consultation with the research team prior to the visit. We will not observe any lessons other than those we have previously agreed with you. Observations will be supported by interviews with you, relevant special needs assistants, the pupils' parents, the pupils themselves and other relevant professionals involved with these pupils. Where appropriate we would also like to look at the pupils' IEPs and other relevant documentation.

The findings from the research will be submitted in a report to the NCSE and may also later be presented at conferences and published in journal papers. No identifying information with regard to the individuals or schools participating will be included in any report or publication and, within the limitations of the law, anonymity and, confidentiality will be respected at all times.

If, when you have read this statement, you are willing to participate in the project please sign the attached form and return it in the envelope provided.

If you decide to take part, we will arrange to talk with you on the phone about your participation before coming to the school. If you would like to talk to a member of the research team before giving your initial consent, please contact Dr Cathal Butler on 018842350.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jean Ware

Access to the Curriculum for Young Children with Special Educational Needs

Consent Form

I have read about the study on access to the curriculum for young children with SEN in Ireland and I understand what is involved.

I am willing to participate in the study. I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time

Signed: ....

Teacher   .... School

Date: ....

Appendix 2: Interview Schedules

2(a)   Interview schedule with the classroom teacher

2(b)   Interview schedule with the resource teacher

2(c)   Interview schedule with the special needs assistant

2(d)   Interview schedule with the pupil

2 (e) Interview schedule with the parent

Appendix 2(a): Interview schedule with the classroom teacher

Introduction

Thanks so much for letting me talk to you today. As you know I/our team have been observing a number of pupils with special needs [low incidence/less common] in school X. We are interested in how those pupils participate in class/lessons [access the curriculum] and I'd like to talk to you about how you see your role in relation to this [helping/supporting].

I'd like to ask you a few questions first about the lesson(s) I have seen and more generally about how you help/support the pupils with SEN in your class/school.

Questions about the Observation

First about the lesson(s) I observed. Perhaps we could talk about Subject 1 first (suggest the lesson the teacher felt was a 'good' example might be discussed first)

1. Did you feel the lesson I was watching turned out to be pretty typical? (probes: Did you vary from your normal practice? Did the child behave in a way that they would not normally do you think me being there affected them?)

2. From your perspective – what is it that makes it harder to enable access to the curriculum for N harder in subject 2 than subject 1?

3. We are looking at children's "access to the curriculum" – could you tell me your understanding of this term? (probe how does it apply for the child being observed?)

4. I noticed that… (example of some differentiation observed) How do you decide what to do to adapt the curriculum to N's needs? (Probes: Does N have some sort of individual plan, who prepared it? I wonder would it be possible for me to take a copy of it? When N first entered the class did you get useful assessment info?)

5. Do you find you need to do any other individualised planning for N? (Would be great to see/ take an example of that)

6. How do you adapt lessons / materials for the child?

7. How do you check on N's progress?

8. Would the way you provide for N be pretty typical of the other pupils with (?low incidence?) SEN in the class.

9. What support is available to you in meeting N's needs? (Probe support teachers, SNA, policies)

10. How does the SNA help you in giving N Access to the curriculum?

11. 9. Are there any subjects N doesn't take? Probe: Why is that?

Questions about Qualifications

Before we finish I'd just like to ask you about your experience and qualifications

1. Where did you train? Was that a BEd, Grad Dip? (If Grad Dip – what subjects did they do for first degree?) Was there anything on SEN in your initial training? (Probe how much, any opportunity to work with pupils with SEN)

2. How long have you been teaching now? (Probes: Have you always worked in this school? Have you always worked in this role in the school? What classes have they taught? Any experience of special education?)

3. Have you had the opportunity to attend any courses/ CPD on special ed? (Probe for all)

4. Have you obtained any further qualifications since getting your BEd/ grad dip? (If yes, probe, especially for special education content)

5. How do you feel this has prepared you to support children with SEN?

6. Has the school had any support in regard to special education from the PCSP, Cigire SESS etc.

7. Is there any additional form of training or support that you feel would help you?

Appendix 2(b): Interview schedule with the resource teacher

Introduction

Thanks so much for letting me talk to you today. As you know I/our team have been observing a number of pupils with special needs [low incidence/less common] in school X. We are interested in how those pupils participate in class/lessons [access the curriculum] and I'd like to talk to you about how you see your role in relation to this [helping/supporting].

General Questions

1. First can I clarify if all the pupils we've been observing get resource hours?

2. List of pupils' names and number of hours per week allocated.

3. Of course there's much more flexibility in how hours are used now than there used to be, so I wonder could you give me an outline of how you use the hours for each of the pupils? (Probes to ascertain if support is given in class, child is withdrawn individually or as a member of a group, or a mix, what subjects are done in what format)

Questions about the child being observed

Moving on specifically to the child we have observed

1. Are there any particular issues with enabling N to have access to the curriculum?

2. What support are you able to give the class teacher in meeting the child's needs? (probe: do you provide support in class or on a withdrawal basis?)

3. How easy is it to find time to collaborate? Does the school have a policy on how collaboration takes place?

4. Does N have some sort of individual plan? How was it prepared? Who was involved? I wonder would it be possible for me to take a copy of it?

Questions about Qualifications

Before we finish I'd just like to ask you about your qualifications and experience

1. Where did you train? Was that a BEd, Grad Dip? (If Grad Dip what subjects did they do for first degree?) Was there anything on SEN in your initial training? (Probe how much, any opportunity to work with pupils with SEN)

2. How long have you been teaching now?

3. Have you obtained any further qualifications since getting your BEd/ grad dip? (If yes, probe, especially for special education content)

4. Have you had the opportunity to attend any courses/ CPD on special education? (Probe for all)

5. How do you feel this has prepared you to support children with SEN?

6. Has the school had any support in regard to special education from the PCSP, Cigire, SESS etc.

7. Is there any form of training or support that you feel would help you?

8. Have you always worked in this school? Have you always worked in this role in the school? What classes have they taught? (Probe: Any experience of special education – this will probably not be needed as should be clear from answers to previous questions).

Appendix 2(c): Interview schedule with the special needs assistant

Introduction

Thanks so much for letting me talk to you today. As you know I/our team have been observing a number of pupils with special needs [low incidence/less common] in school X. We are interested in how those pupils participate in class/lessons [access the curriculum] and I'd like to talk to you about how you see your role in relation to this [helping/supporting].

I'd like to ask you a few questions first about the lesson(s) I have seen and more generally about how you help/support the pupils with SEN in your class/school.

General Questions

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your work in the school? (probes: How do you see your role as an SNA? Do you work in one class, with one child? How is it decided how your time is divided?)

2. How long have you been an SNA here?

3. Have you had access to training? (probes: If yes, what courses have you attended? What were your qualifications when you started as an SNA ? What training, if any, do you think would be of benefit to you?)

Questions relating to the child and working with them

1. Could you tell me a bit about the child I have just observed doing lesson X? (probes: How long have you been working with him/her, what type of support do you provide for him/her?)

2. Does Jenny/Joe have an individual plan of some kind? [Probe: Do you make use of it in your work with Jenny/Joe? Probe: How does the plan – or individualised planning – support you to help Jenny/Joe?]

3. Do you have opportunities to talk about how you help Jenny/Joe with her/his teacher? [Probe: Do you meet with the teacher before/after a lesson or talk at other times during the day/week?]

Questions relating to the observation

1. Is the way that you have been working in the lesson(s) I have seen today typical? [If not in what ways did it differ?]

2. How do you decide what to do with Jenny/Joe? [Probe: Do know what you are going to do with her/him in the lesson(s) I have seen before it begins? How do you help her/him to start/carry out/finish an activity such as ....)

Appendix 2(d): Interview schedule with the pupil

Cover note to go with pupil interview – Background

Due to the range of ages and levels of development amongst the pupils we will be interviewing we anticipate having to tailor the actual wording very much to the individual child so we can only set out a very rough schedule in the attached.

We think that there are some very important principles though. We intend to interview the child as soon as possible after the lesson in which we've observed them to give them and us the maximum chance of having a worthwhile conversation about it. However we achieve it, the child must feel genuinely free to finish the interview at any point.

Every attempt will be made to interview the child in their classroom, to make them as comfortable as possible. The child will already have been asked if they are happy for us to watch their lesson and to talk to us about what they do in school.

Warm up

We will tell the child that we are in their class looking at how their teacher helps them to learn, and we want to talk to them a bit, to see how they feel about, and get their views, and ensure that they're ok with this before commencing

Conversation about the lesson observed

I was in your class watching the last lesson.

I was watching the children, and watching the teacher, and it was hard to take everything in. It'd help me if you could tell me about the last lesson –

What did you do?

Did you like the lesson?

Do you like _____ (that subject)

What did you do well, was there anything you found hard?' and 'did you get help with that?' Who helped? Or 'who do you get help from in_____?'

Would you have liked some help? What sort of help?

General Questions

Can you tell me a bit about your school?

What do you like in school?

Is there anything you don't like?

Can you tell me about the SNA/resource teacher...

Do you ever have lessons with anyone other than (class teacher) might be better here?

Do you think there is anything the school could do to help you?

Finish – thank them for talking to you, and for being so helpful.

Appendix 2 (e): Interview schedule with the parent

Introduction

Interviewer briefly explains the focus of the project, going back over the letter they received if necessary.

Thanks so much for letting me talk to you today. As you know this research is looking at how junior-aged pupils with SEN can be helped to participate as fully as possible in the curriculum [curriculum access for pupils with SEN at junior level] We're particularly interested in talking to you about how you feel things are working for John/ Jenny. The focus is on the challenges faced in including these pupils and how these may be overcome.

Child focused questions

Can you tell me a bit about your son/daughter.

Does he/she like school?

What do they like?

Are there any areas/subjects that are particularly difficult for him/her?

Education focused questions

Can you tell me a bit about how the school helps your child?

Are/Were you involved in talking to the teacher about your child's learning? (Probe: school meetings, parent teacher meetings, education targets)

How often are you in contact with the school/ principal/ class teacher/ resource teacher?

Does he/she get homework? (probe: could you tell me a bit about the homework he/she gets)

Parent focused questions

Are you happy with how your child is getting on at school?

Is there anything you would like to see happen to make things better for X ?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thanks very much

Additional probes may be added based on the responses given by the parents. It is important to note that this interview schedule is not prescriptive, and that parents will not be interrupted or stopped if they go off-topic.

Appendix 3: Observation Schedule

Child:	School:		Teacher:
Teaching details			
Lesson being taught, and specific topic(s) (eg maths: addition)			
Task(s) set for the class (List Tasks) 'Tasks' represent major transition points in the lesson so moving clearly from one topic to another- whole class to individual or group work/ revising last week's lesson to a new topic etc.	A. B. C. D. E.		
Task(s) set for the child (are they given the same task, the same amount of time to complete tasks) (List Task A etc.	A. B. C. D. E.		
Task(s) accomplished by the child	A. B. C. D. E.		
Interaction between the teacher and the class (instructions given)			
Interaction between the teacher and the child (whether the child is given specific			
instructions that are differentiated)			
Interaction between other professional and the class			
Interaction between other professional and the child			
Interaction between child and other children (note who instigates interaction- does child ask for help from others/ and receive it)			
Behaviour of the class generally			
Behaviour of the child generally			

Access Checklist (tick the most appropriate description FOR EACH TASK)	A	B	C	D	E	
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, achieving on the same tasks as the rest of the class without additional support						
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, achieving the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support						
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is achieving on tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support						
The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is achieving on tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support						
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not achieving on the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support						
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not achieving on the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support						
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, and but is not achieving on tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support						
The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, and but is not achieving on tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support						
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/ aims with or without additional support						
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson						
Narrative:						

Appendix 4: Questionnaire from Phase One

Access to the curriculum for young children with special educational needs

SECTION A – General information about the school

Please complete this section in relation to the school as a whole.

School name (mail merge) caters for: (Please tick the relevant box)

Infant pupils only	☐
Both Infant and Junior pupils	☐
Infant, Junior and Senior pupils	☐
Junior and Senior pupils only	☐

School name (mail merge) caters for: (Please tick the relevant box)

Both boys and girls	☐
Boys only	☐
Girls only	☐

Number of pupils at *School name (mail merge)* (Please enter number in each box)

Total number of boys	
Total number of girls	
Total number of pupils	

How many of these pupils are International children?	

Does *School name (mail merge)* receive DEIS funding? (Please tick the relevant box)	Yes ☐	No ☐
Does the school have a Special Class? (Please tick the relevant box)	Yes ☐	No ☐

If Yes, what category of need is the Special Class designated for? ....

How many support teachers does the school have? (Please enter a number in each box)

Special Education Teachers funded under GAM		Language Support Teachers	
Resource Teachers		Teachers for Travellers	

**SECTION B – Please complete this section in relation to
             JUNIOR INFANTS TO SECOND CLASS ONLY**

Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs
(Please enter a number in each box)

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class
Number of pupils				
Number with SEN (total)				
Number with low incidence SEN				

Please complete the following table to indicate the types of disability experienced by
these pupils. (Please tick the appropriate boxes).

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class
Physical Disability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hearing Impairment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visual Impairment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional Disturbance	☐	☐	☐	☐
Severe Emotional Disturbance	☐	☐	☐	☐
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Moderate General Learning Disability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	☐	☐	☐	☐
Specific Learning Disability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assessed Syndrome	☐	☐	☐	☐
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐
Multiple Disabilities	☐	☐	☐	☐

How many support teachers work with children in these classes?
(Please enter a number in each box)

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class
Special Education Teachers funded under GAM				
Resource Teachers				
Language Support Teachers				
Teachers for Travellers				

How many SNAs work with the children in the classes?
(Please enter a number in each box)

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class
No. of SNAs				

THANKS FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix 5: Members of the Advisory Committee

Clare Farrell, Assistant Principal Officer/Research Officer, NCSE, (Chairperson)

Mary Byrne, Special Education Advisor, NCSE

Dr Gerald Craddock, Chief Officer, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, National Disability Authority

Kathryn Crowley, Director, Curriculum and Assessment, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Anna Griffiths, Deputy Principal, Ladyswell National School, Mulhuddart, Dublin

Deirdre Kelleher, Assistant National Co-ordinator, Special Education Support Service (replaced by Madeline Hickey, Deputy Director, Special Education Support Service)

Professor Mary Kellett, Children's Research Centre, the Open University, UK

Tom O'Sullivan, INTO and NCSE Council.