

NCSE Research Conference



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

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Introduction

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



The Pilot

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



In-school activities included:

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



Project Coordinator seconded to:

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

Evaluation aims

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

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

Students



Schools & staff



Post-school settings

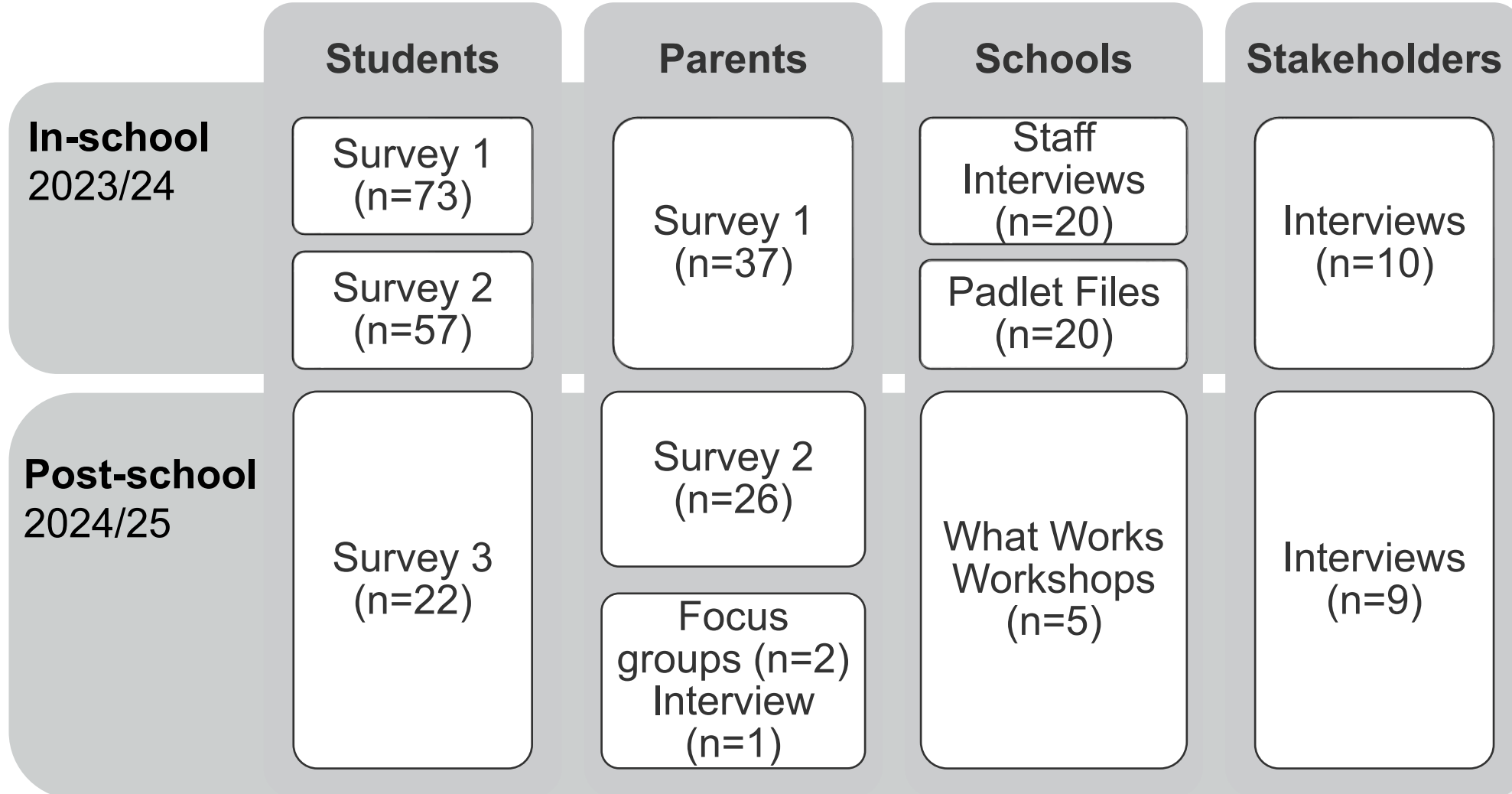


Stakeholders


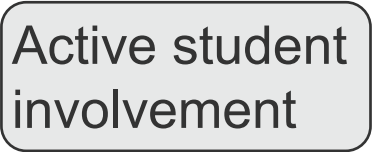
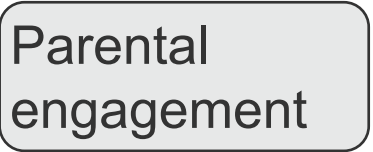
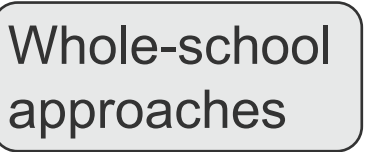


- Identifying successful elements to inform any future scale-up

Mixed methods approach



Literature review

- **National and international evidence** on transition planning
- Reinforced **rationale** and potential to improve outcomes:
 - Effective transition support improves educational, employment and social outcomes
 - Success factors:    
 - Without structured support, students face disrupted transitions and reduced life chances
 - Gaps in current practice – lack of statutory planning requirements and inconsistent delivery

Overarching findings

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

Implementation

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

Embeddedness

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

Impact on students

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

89% of surveyed students transitioned to training or employment



86% reported being happy with their post-school destination



81% of surveyed parents saw gains in independent living skills



Impact on schools

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

Impact on post-school settings & other stakeholders

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

Scalability



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

Successes observed in participating schools

Need for continued support beyond post-primary education



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

Workforce capacity and admin constraints

Lack of funding for transport and trip-related costs

Central coordination and learning activities

Standardised time allocation models

Variation in school commitment

Inter-agency coordination

Implications for future phases and scale-up



Protected staff time
and designated roles



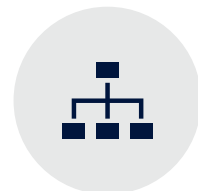
Earlier engagement and
comprehensive planning



Robust infrastructure
and resources



Enhanced inter-agency
collaboration



System-level
changes



Addressing
workforce and
funding gaps



Localised
support
networks

Implications for future phases and scale-up

Protected staff time and designated roles:



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

Earlier engagement and comprehensive planning:



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

Implications for future phases and scale-up

Robust infrastructure and resources:



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

Enhanced inter-agency collaboration:




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

Implications for future phases and scale-up

System-level changes:

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

Addressing workforce and funding gaps:

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

Localised support networks:

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

Concluding remarks

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

Thank you

Any questions?



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