



NCSE Research Framework

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FOREWORD

The Irish Primary Principals' Network is delighted to have been afforded the opportunity to contribute to continuing NCSE research into the area of Special Needs provision in our schools. This short submission identifies areas in provision where we believe deficiencies exist across the four priority research themes. These gaps in provision have been consistently highlighted by our membership through regular consultation surveys over recent years. We believe further research and perhaps significant additional resourcing may be required to address the deficiencies identified.

THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF SEN CHILDREN, PARENTS, ACCESS AND OUTCOMES

Access to inclusive education must begin at Early Years level. Many principals report children presenting at junior infant level with significant needs which have neither been identified nor addressed.

Early years settings must firstly be given the tools/checklists to enable preliminary identification of children with possible needs. Secondly, these settings must have easier access to supports when concerns exist or needs are identified.

Research is required to ascertain if all Early Years settings have access to local early intervention services and if vital services are being provided in a uniform manner thus ensuring an assessment of need and preliminary supports accompany every SEN pupil on transition to primary school.

Principals also note that there is still no best practice manual available in relation to the integration of children with SEN into mainstream classes.

Many schools still operate on a trial an error basis that may not necessarily meet the needs of some of the children in question.

THEME 2: BEST PRACTICE IN PLANNING, ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM AND SCHOOL CAPACITY

IPPN considers that there is an urgent need to ascertain if the number of NEPS psychologists working at school level is sufficient to meet need. Consideration must also be given to what is considered a realistic caseload for these psychologists. As needs vary from school to school and complex behaviours increase, perhaps NEPS provision should centre on the number of individual children rather than the number of schools under the remit of an individual psychologist.

Another particular area of research worth exploring is an examination of how effective pedagogy and classroom management for the SEN pupil is impacting on the rest of the children in the mainstream class, particularly in relation to disruption to class teaching time and curriculum access. This research could also focus on the amount of time on average a mainstream class teacher invests in a child with complex needs as opposed to classmates without needs.

Workload issues also require up-to-date research particularly the workload of the principal in mainstream schools with special classes. Typically, such classes add considerably to administrative workload as well as to the management and support of school personnel. There has been no cognisance taken of this reality to date.

THEME 3: STAFF AND SUPPORT ISSUES

Principals consistently report that the training and development needs of teachers and support staff is not available locally. In some instances, necessary training has to be sourced from overseas. Research into priority areas for CPD is necessary if we are to ensure best practice into the future. Consultation with practitioners in identifying these areas is necessary to ensure there is a targeted response to identified gaps in training.

An overview of SEN supports is now timely to ensure these supports meet the complex needs of today's child. Successive IPPN surveys since 2008 provide clear indication that there is a noticeable increase in the numbers of children exhibiting symptoms of depression, neglect, anxiety and emotional disturbance attending our primary schools.

This review could assess if children with more challenging behaviours are receiving adequate supports and interventions. The research could also explore best practice in dealing with crisis situations in schools and examine if current class ratios and SNA supports are set at appropriate levels particularly in cases where there is are significant levels of challenging behaviours in a class eg: children with emotional and behavioural disability. Research is urgently needed in the area of Physical Restraint and the lack of clear guidelines in dealing with children who exhibit severe EBD.

Depending on what part of the country a school is located in, supports from outside professionals covering areas such as Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy vary greatly. In some cases, they don't exist at all. It would be extremely useful if a census of regional services was available to pinpoint where gaps exist and to agree on the best ways to deliver supports. It would also be useful if deficits, gaps and lack of cohesion at National level between DES and Department of Health could be addressed.

THEME 4: DATA COLLECTION, PREVALENCE

IPPN believes that current data collection methodologies are adequately addressing trends in the prevalence and incidence of particular conditions. The next step is to ensure that once identification and diagnosis is completed, supports are put in place **before** the child transitions to primary school.