



**SPECIAL SCHOOLS  
&  
SPECIAL CLASSES - FUTURE ROLES.**

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## 1. RESPONSES

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The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) wishes to make the following observations in relation to the future of Special Schools and Special Classes in meeting the needs of pupils with special education needs.

### **The Future Role of Special Schools in meeting the needs of children with SEN**

- There is a continuing need for Special Schools in the system, particularly in meeting the needs of the physically impaired and children with moderate, severe and profound disabilities
- These schools can continue to provide an important service while operating a dual enrolment system with partner Primary and Secondary schools in their area.
- There is an urgent need for Liaison Teachers to be provided to strengthen links between mainstream and Special Schools.
- Principals of Special Schools need to be supported more particularly in relation to human resource management, who must deal on a daily basis with multi-disciplinary and other non DES appointed personnel, without proper administrative backup.
- In-service support must be provided to support Revised Curriculum Guidelines as happens when such guidelines are being introduced into mainstream schools.
- Special Schools must be facilitated in working more closely with Mainstream schools so as to share the expertise of the Special Schools with colleagues in the mainstream sector. As well as the provision of a Liaison Teacher, time must be allocated for meeting and planning, sharing resources and supports and developing collaborative IEPs.

### **Future role of Special Classes in Mainstream Schools**

- The setting up of Special Classes in mainstream schools has been a success particularly in relation to positive integration practices.
- This policy has placed considerable additional administrative pressures on the Principal and also has had significant implications for the finances of the mainstream school.
- A recent IPPN survey of Autism provision in Special Classes indicates that funding for these classes need to be increased by 300% to reduce financial pressures on the mainstream school and ensure that no mainstream funds have to be diverted to support the activities of the Special Class. (Main survey findings attached)
- The future role of such Special Classes must be to facilitate children in acquiring and utilising the skills necessary for independent living. A pupil-teacher ratio of 4:1 for Profound/Moderate/ Severe/Autistic would improve a schools ability to deliver in this area.
- Clear policies on integration practices must be developed as a matter of priority by the DES to support the work of these classes.
- Uniformity of services to all Special Classes must become a priority for the DES.
- Children in Special Classes for Specific Speech and Language Disorder and Special Reading Classes benefit from the knowledge that other children share their disability and feel less isolated as a result.
- Special Language Classes must be provided with adequate Speech Therapy, provided by the DES. Having the services of Speech Therapists from the HSE is problematic as they have different conditions of employment. Many are currently giving only a partial service th these classes
- Provision must be made for children who attend both Special Language Classes and Special Reading Classes to receive extra support when they return to their own schools

- Special Classes for children with General Learning Disabilities must not be restricted to having merely one SNA. Such classes now frequently have children with a wide range of disabilities and with multiple disabilities requiring enormous support.

### **Mainstream and Special Classes working together**

- There is considerable scope for these classes working together provided certain infrastructures are in place such as – clearly defined pupil-teacher ratios for mainstream classes with special needs children, integration policies, curriculum policies, training schedules to meet the curricular and non-curricular needs of teachers and SNAs and whole school training on Health and Safety requirements. This is vital if all mainstream staff are to buy into the concept of integrating a special class in a mainstream school.
- The EPSEN Act places particular emphasis on the role of the Principal Teacher particularly in relation to IEPs, Assessments of Need, Appeals procedures and management of outside agencies. The DES must recognise that special concessions such as administrative backup and increased funding must be made available to enable mainstream and Special Classes work more effectively together.
- Class teachers must be facilitated to have an input at Case Conferences if required.
- Schools offering Fetac programmes at Second level must be resourced to plan and deliver these programmes with in-built substitute cover for class teachers.