

How principals and teachers in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district support inclusion as they mediate the ‘new model’ of special education teacher allocation.

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### **Declaration**

I declare that this material which I now submit for examination on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged in its text.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Pauline Morley)

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023

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## List of Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AON	Assessment of Need
AP1	Assistant Principal One
AP2	Assistant Principal Two
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CDNT	Children Disability Network Teams
CFA	Child and Family Agency (TUSLA)
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Science
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
DoH	Department of Health
DPRT-R	The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EBD	Emotional Behavioural Difficulties
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EU	European Union
FOI	Freedom of Information
GAM	General Allocation Model
HI	High Incidence (disability)
HSE	Health Service Executive
IEP	Individual Education Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IT	Information Technology
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
JOS	JISC Online Surveys

LI	Low Incidence (disability)
LS/RT	Learning Support/Resource Teacher
MCT	Mainstream Class Teacher
MGLD	Mild General Learning Disability
MICRA-T	Mary Immaculate Reading Attainment
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT	Occupational Therapist
PD	Professional Development
RTH	Resource Teaching Hours
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENCO	Special Education Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SET	Special Education Teacher
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self Evaluation
SSF	Student Support File
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America

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## **Abstract**

The last four decades have been characterised by a movement towards inclusive education globally. While Ireland has been slow to move in that direction significant progress has been made in providing support for students with special educational needs (SEN) in Irish schools. This study examines how the most recent Department of Education (DE) policy initiative to provide additional teaching support to students with SEN under a ‘new model’ introduced in *Circular 0013/2017* (DES, 2017a) is understood and mediated by teachers and principals in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district.

An explanatory sequential design situated within a pragmatic paradigm was employed. In phase one principals, mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers (N=73) completed a survey, and in phase two one-to-one and focus group interviews were conducted in a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Band One Junior primary school in the same postal district. Analysis of the data sets were conducted using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis and the findings of the study are presented under four themes.

The data captured the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of principals and teachers towards the ‘new model’ and its impact on their practice. The findings show that teachers and principals consider themselves advocates for inclusion but believe that all students cannot be included effectively in the mainstream class. They question the lack of clarity and transparency around the ‘complex’ needs’ component of the model. While some teachers and principals welcomed the increased agency provided under the ‘new model’, others suggested that this transferred the responsibility from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the DE to schools without providing the necessary level of support which is a challenge. The findings of this study raise important considerations and have implications for policy, practice and future research if ‘truly inclusive schools’ are to be realised.

# Chapter: One Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Traditionally mainstream and special education provision operated as separate parallel systems of education within Ireland (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). A combination of national and international factors since the early 1990s resulted in Ireland, although a ‘late arrival to the inclusion movement’ (MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007, p. 290), developing a more inclusive approach for students with special educational needs (SEN). Increased numbers of students with SEN are now educated within the mainstream classroom or special classes attached to mainstream schools (McCoy, Banks, and Shevlin, 2016; Rose et al., 2017; Casserly and Padden, 2018; Rose and Shevlin, 2020). This has required a state imperative to ensure the provision of an efficient and effective model of teaching support enabling school staff to include students with SEN within the mainstream school.

In 2005, the Department of Education and Science (DES)<sup>1</sup> introduced a scheme of additional teaching support under Circular 02/05 *Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools* (DES, 2005a), called the general allocation model (GAM). The GAM was premised on building ‘truly inclusive schools’ (DES, 2005a, p.3), and was designed to ensure that schools have sufficient teaching resources to meet the immediate needs of students with high incidence (HI) disabilities<sup>2</sup> and those who require learning support<sup>3</sup>. Following several revisions to that model which are discussed in detail in Chapter Two, a new model to allocate additional special education teacher (SET) support was introduced in 2017.

This new model, which is the focus of this study, was designed to provide a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching to schools, based on that school’s educational profile. The model is generally called the ‘new model’ both in the school context and within policy documents and that title will be used within this study. Following the publication of the policy advice paper *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in*

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Education. The Department of Education has gone through several name changes in the last two centuries. From 1924 until 1997 it was known as the Department of Education. From 1st October 1997, it became known as the Department of Education and Science. On 2nd May 2010, it was renamed the Department of Education and Skills and on the 22nd of October 2020, it was renamed the Department of Education. Throughout this thesis, all documents published before 22nd October 2020 will be cited as DES and those published after that date will be cited as DE.

<sup>2</sup> High incidence disabilities: borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability, and specific learning disability (DES, 2005a).

<sup>3</sup> Learning support: students whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics prioritised for learning-support teaching (DES, 2005a).



*Schools* (NCSE, 2013) the NCSE established a working group at the request of the Minister for Education and Skills to develop a proposal for a new model of support teacher allocation. The NCSE working group adopted four guiding principles to underpin its work:

- All students, are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools without the necessity of a diagnosis or label to access additional teaching support.
- A whole-school approach is adopted by schools in respect of the education of students with SEN.
- Additional teaching supports are allocated to schools based on the school's educational profile, and
- those supports are managed and deployed effectively to meet the needs of students with SEN (NCSE, 2014).

This ensured that the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools was central to the development of a new approach, whilst simultaneously recognising that some students with complex needs may require a special class or special school placement.

In September 2017, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) introduced a new model for allocating additional teaching support to students with SEN under Circular No 0013/2017 *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a). The principle of this approach is to allocate support based on a school profile, and in line with the NCSE's (2014) guiding principles, the removal of the necessity for a medical diagnosis of disability for the allocation of additional teaching resources. These changes are accompanied by increased autonomy and responsibility for schools to allocate support to those students who, in their view, are in most need of support, based on the guidelines (DES, 2017b) issued by the DES to accompany the circular.

The 'new model', at the time of writing, has been in place for six years and the support hours allocated to schools have been adjusted with effect from September 2022 based on a recalculation of the school profile under Circular 0020/2022 *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DE, 2022a) following an earlier reprofiling under Circular 0007/2019 *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2019b). It is therefore timely to explore how schools have engaged with this model and to identify how they exercise their autonomy and responsibility to allocate support teaching hours.

This study sets out to explore how schools in a Dublin postal district mediate this ‘new model’ and provide support to students with SEN in their schools. The researcher’s motivation and the rationale for conducting the study are set out in Section 1.2, and the research aims, and the research questions are set out in Section 1.3. As this study is situated within the context of inclusion, it is necessary to consider and define the terms inclusion, inclusive education, special education, and disability which can be confusing and controversial concepts. The working definition of inclusion used in this study is set out in Section 1.4, and the terms are discussed further in Chapter Three. The structure of the thesis is set out in Section 1.5.

## **1.2 Rationale and purpose for the study**

This researcher as a principal of a DEIS Band 1<sup>4</sup> primary school is highly committed to the principle of inclusion and the right to an appropriate education in an environment best suited to the needs of the child. This commitment and stance are based on my many years as a teacher, engaged in the inclusion of children with SEN from my first teaching position in a two-teacher school on the western seaboard where I taught a child in a multi-grade setting who had a diagnosis of an SEN which was quite unusual at that time. This was also something I had no experience with, despite having completed an elective module on ‘remedial reading’ in my undergraduate teacher education degree. In my next teaching position, I taught a deaf child, and the following year taught a child with moderate general learning difficulties, all within a multi-grade setting. These early experiences of supporting children with a variety of SEN post-qualification were both educational and formative. After the judgement in the O’Donoghue<sup>5</sup> case I secured a teaching position in a special school, having recently taught in a special class in a large urban mainstream school. Following the introduction of resource teaching positions, I secured a position as a resource teacher in a very large urban mainstream primary school, and taught children with a range of SEN

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<sup>4</sup> Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) Band 1. <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/>

The DEIS programme is the Department of Education’s main policy initiative to respond to educational disadvantage. Schools are assigned to DEIS Urban Band 1, DEIS Urban Band 2, or Rural based on the location of the schools and their level of disadvantage, with Band 1 being the greatest level of disadvantage.

<sup>5</sup> O’Donoghue case: In a seminal ruling in the High Court case in 1992 of *Paul O’Donoghue v the Minister for Education, the Minister for Health, Ireland and the Attorney General* Justice Rory O’Hanlon found that the State had failed to provide Paul O’Donoghue with his constitutional right to a ‘free primary education’ under Article 42 of the Constitution and therefore discriminated against him. The State was required to make such provision as necessary to enable each child to reach his/her potential (Meegan and MacPhail, 2006).

<https://www.pila.ie/resources/listing/case-summary-odonoghue-v-minister-for-health-ors-1/>

diagnosis both in withdrawal and in-class settings. I also had the opportunity of being seconded to the Special Education Support Service (SESS) which was later subsumed into the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). These experiences resulted in my being a strong proponent for the inclusion of students with SEN from the outset of my career.

Previous policy changes afforded me with professional opportunities as outlined, and the introduction of the GAM model (DES, 2005a) saw an increase in the number of learning support teacher colleagues. The GAM was welcomed as it enabled the school to provide additional teaching support to more students and removed the necessity of a medical diagnosis to provide support for students with literacy difficulties which could have been attributed to dyslexia, and other HI disabilities such as Mild General Learning difficulties. This 'new model' builds on the GAM, and a medical diagnosis is no longer required to provide additional teaching support to students. However Circular 0013/2017 advises that where other professional assessments are available they should 'be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a child's needs, the nature of difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions' (DES, 2017a, p. 14). Consequently, in the absence of such assessments, students with SEN are dependent on the competence of principals and teachers to administer appropriate school-based assessments to identify their needs and to inform interventions. Not all schools are equally resourced and appropriate assessment tools may not be available. Furthermore, teachers may not be qualified to administer them, and they may not identify needs in areas such as speech and language skills which would be identified by assessment tools available to an appropriately qualified clinician. Even if a student has a medical diagnosis, additional teaching support may not be provided to such students due to the necessity to prioritise, and the student not meeting a school's criteria for learning support as set out in their learning support policy. I acknowledge that there are concerns associated with a diagnostic approach to support allocation, however, there is a risk, that in the absence of a diagnosis, this new system of teaching support allocation may potentially discriminate against students with an undiagnosed disability, and as already stated students with a medical diagnosis may no longer be allocated additional teaching support. It is therefore essential that every school has sufficient teachers who have the required professional expertise, and who have attained recognised qualifications in special education to meet these new expectations. Coupled with my professional experience of the impact of previous policy changes on teachers' practice and students' learning, I am highly motivated to investigate the influence of this new funding model on teachers' practice.

The purpose of this study is to explore how principals and teachers in a Dublin postal district mediate DE policy and facilitate inclusion as they implement Circular 0013/ 2017 (DES, 2017a). I am interested in the ways they engage with this new model and the changes, if any, made to their practice in allocating support to students per their identified needs. The research seeks to gain insights into principals' and teachers' perception of the 'new model' and explore how they allocate support to students requiring additional support in the absence of a formal diagnosis. Anecdotally it has been suggested that this 'new model' is a cost-cutting exercise rather than a way to ensure that those students most in need of support get appropriate support. If this is a widely held view, it may influence teachers' perspective of the model and thus their practice. As this model is relatively new, and there is limited published data on the practical impact of the application of the model in schools, it is timely to examine the implementation of the policy in practice. In line with my epistemological and ontological view, this study is situated within a pragmatic paradigm. An explanatory sequential design was employed utilising a mixed-method approach. An online questionnaire to glean the views of teachers and principals was initially deployed, which informed the development of interview schedules which were used in a case study school to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews to explore in depth how this school mediated the 'new model'. The research approach is detailed in Chapter Four Sections 2 and 3.

### **1.3 Research aims and questions**

This study aims to contribute to the knowledge base on the impact of policy on the implementation of inclusive practices through an exploration of the ways in which mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district mediate DE policy in respect of additional teaching support allocation.

The research aims to:

- uncover the attitudes and understandings of inclusion held by principals and teachers in this Dublin postal district.
- explore their perceptions of the 'new model' and its implications for students, teachers and schools.
- explore whether the 'new model' has influenced changes in practice in the way schools support students with SEN in this Dublin postal district.

In considering the main aims, more nuanced questions were devised. These questions were as follows:

- What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' attitudes towards, and understanding of inclusion?
- What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' understandings and perceptions of the 'new model'?
- How have schools changed their practice in response to the introduction of the 'new model'?

The following section explores the definitions and understandings of the terms inclusion, inclusive education, special needs and disability within the context of this study.

#### **1.4 Inclusion, inclusive education and special education**

At the heart of inclusive education is the human right to education, a concept originally associated with the field of special education having been enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 (United Nations, (UN) 1948). A range of international developments strongly supporting inclusion, still situated within the field of SEN, were articulated in the *UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 1993), the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs* (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) (UNESCO, 1994), the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000), and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) (UNCRPD, 2007). The *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* published in 1978 and commonly known as the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) marked a watershed in the education of children with special education needs (SEN) in the UK, and also influenced the provision of education for children with SEN in Ireland (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). The national policy influences on an inclusive education system in Ireland are presented and discussed in Chapter Two. Definitions of the terms inclusion and special educational needs as used in this study are outlined in the following sections.

#### **Inclusion and inclusive education**

Though the imperative for inclusion has been accepted internationally through the adoption of Article 24 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD)<sup>6</sup> 'States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels'

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<sup>6</sup> In 2018 the Irish Government ratified the UNCRPD, Article 24 (2), which obliges the State to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality, and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.

(UN, 2007, p. 16), its implementation remains fraught. While acknowledging that there was no one agreed definition, the NCSE consultative forum proposed a definition of inclusive education that would reflect the Irish context. It was agreed that it would be based on a combination of the UNESCO (2005) definition and the description included within the DES (2007) *Post-Primary Guidelines for Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs*.

Inclusion is seen as a process of:

- Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities and
- Removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school (Winter and O’Raw, 2010, p. 39)

This concept of inclusion promotes the active participation of the student rather than simple placement and emphasises the need for changes within the education system and the school to meet their needs. This aligns with this researchers view of inclusion and thus it is this definition of inclusion that is used in this study.

In 2018 the Irish Government ratified the UNCRPD, Article 24 (2), which obliges the State to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality, and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. This led the then Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh to request the NCSE to conduct a review of whether special schools and special classes should continue to be offered as a choice on a continuum of educational provision. Reporting in 2019 the NCSE (2019) considered that Ireland’s ratification of the UNCRPD is likely to have a significant influence on policy development concerning special schools and classes, highlighting the UNCRPD Committee’s interpretation of Article 24 (Education) that ‘having a mainstream educational system and a separate special education system is not compatible with its view of inclusion and that parallel systems are not considered inclusive’ (NCSE, 2019, p.9). Although Ireland ratified Article 24 of the UNCRPD, the NCSE (2019) has taken a different view and argued that it is the needs of children and their best interests that are ‘fundamental and first’ (NCSE, 2019, p.9). This view is manifested in the year-on-year increase in special classes and the opening of special schools in the last number of years (NCSE, 2023) and highlights the tension between policy and practice regarding the inclusion of students with SEN. The purpose of this study is to explore how principals and teachers in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district mediate DE policy and facilitate inclusion as they implement Circular

0013/ 2017 (DES, 2017a), and thus does not focus on the tension between this aspect of policy and practice.

### **Special educational needs**

Following their brief to make recommendations on the educational provision for children with special needs, the *Report of the Special Review Committee* ((SERC), Government of Ireland, 1993) firstly set out a description of students with SEN as:

... those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for students of the same age, or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the mainstream classroom is not sufficiently challenging (Government of Ireland, 1993, p. 18).

Thus, a broad conceptualisation of special education was provided encompassing the inclusion of circumstances that might result in a student having special educational needs. Later with the signing into law of *The Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) a statutory basis for policy and practice concerning educational provision was provided. The preamble to the act sets out its intention to make provision for ‘any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs’, (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 5). A comprehensive definition of the term ‘disability’,<sup>8</sup> was presented, and provision was made to include the educational needs of exceptionally able students. It excluded the particular circumstances of a student that may adversely impact their education and was more restrictive in its understanding of SEN than that of the SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993). *The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs* (EPSEN) Act 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) replaces the definition used in the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) with one that is even more restrictive defining the term ‘special educational needs’ as ‘a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring ...disability’ (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 1). In keeping with position adopted in the GAM (DES, 2005a) model provision for the support of exceptionally able students is not included in this ‘new model’, thus, for this study, it is this narrower definition of “special educational needs” that is used. The following

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<sup>8</sup> Disability is defined in the act as the total or partial loss of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the loss of a part of the person’s body or the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness or the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body or a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction or a condition or illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgements or which results in disturbed behaviour (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 6).

section of this chapter provides an overview of the thesis, briefly describing the contents of each of the following chapters.

### **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter One introduced the study, setting out the national and international inclusive educational policies which contextualise the study and which oriented the Irish State towards inclusive education. The research aims and the research questions which guide the study were presented. This chapter also provided a rationale for the study, articulating the significance of the research and outlining the researcher's motivation for the study. The research paradigm directing the research was introduced and a brief outline of the research design and data collection tools was provided. Definitional issues regarding inclusion, inclusive education, special education, and disability were discussed and set within the context of this study.

Chapter Two presents an understanding of the current policy landscape for inclusive education in Ireland through a review of the historical policies towards inclusive education. The evolution of policy advice and how it has translated into national policy in Irish primary schools in the form of the 'new model' is explored and critiqued, providing the backdrop to the study.

Chapter Three provides a comprehensive review of the literature relating to teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and understandings of inclusion and their implications for practice. An in-depth consideration of Hornby's theory of *inclusive special education* (Hornby, 2014, 2015), articulating the theoretical framework and lens through which this study is situated, is presented. Literature regarding teachers' attitudes to inclusion and perceptions of their competence in supporting students with SEN is addressed. In addition, issues relating to the diagnosis of educational need and the implications for teacher practice are explored and critiqued in consideration of the removal of the necessity of a medical diagnosis for the provision of additional teaching support under the 'new model' (DES, 2017a).

Chapter Four sets out the methodological approach adopted to collect the data required to explore how teachers and principals in a Dublin postal district mediate the 'new model'. An explanatory sequential design situated within a pragmatic paradigm was employed utilising a mixed-method approach. An online questionnaire to glean the views of teachers and principals was initially deployed, which informed the development of interview schedules which were used in a case study school to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews to explore in depth how this school mediated the 'new model'. The data analysis process which consisted of quantitative data analysis utilising Microsoft Excel



and thematic analysis conducted on the qualitative data from the questionnaire and interviews utilising the Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) approach was outlined. The ethical procedures which were adhered to during this study are also set out. Finally, the limitations of the study are also presented.

Chapter Five presents the findings and a discussion of those findings linked to Hornby's (2014, 2015) framework of *inclusive special education* and situated within the relevant literature and the policy documents discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Four main themes each with several subthemes identified from the analysis of the data from the questionnaire together with the data from the case study are presented. These include inclusion and inclusive practices, the 'new model', teacher self-efficacy, and challenges for inclusion.

Chapter Six sets out a synthesis of the findings and answers the research questions. It outlines how this research contributes to the existing knowledge about inclusive practices in mainstream primary schools. The implications of the findings for policy and practice are also set out, and relevant recommendations are made. Finally, recommendations for further research in the area of inclusive education for students with SEN.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the definitional complexities of the terms inclusion, inclusive education, special educational needs and disability and the multiplicity of understandings of the concepts (Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou, 2010; Hornby, 2014; Norwich, 2014). As discussed in Section 1.4, whilst acknowledging that there is no one definition of inclusion, it is that based on a combination of the UNESCO (2005) definition and the description included in the DES (2007) *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* that is used for the purposes of this study. The definition of the term "special educational needs" used is that used in the EPSEN Act 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004). The study was situated within the broad policy context which influenced this researcher's career and professional experiences motivating her interest in the DE policy on the provision of additional support teachers which is the focus of the study. The history of this researcher's career journey was briefly outlined and followed by the research aims and the research questions. An overview of the structure of the thesis concluded this chapter. The next chapter traces the evolution of the historical policy and legislative influences up to the current DE policy which is the focus of this study; the provision of additional teaching support to facilitate inclusive education in mainstream primary schools.

# Chapter Two: Development of Inclusive Education Policy in Ireland

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth picture of the new model of support teacher allocation as introduced by the DE in 2017 (DES, 2017a) which is the focus of this study. This model was preceded by a number of different models with the first model introduced in 1999 (DES, 1999) following the announcement by the then Minister for Education and Science Micháel Martin in November 1998 of the concept of an automatic response to need (Carey, 2005; Kerins and McDonagh, 2015). Firstly, the historical backdrop to the development of inclusive education in Ireland is set out. The relevant policy documents, litigation and legislation that influenced inclusive education in Ireland, that are explored throughout this chapter are presented in [Appendix A](#). The impetus for change driven by parental litigation and followed by the introduction of a legislative framework underpinning education policy as it pertains to inclusion in Ireland is presented. The policy changes from the 1990s in respect of the allocation of additional teaching support for students with SEN, commencing with the provision of what was then known as ‘remedial education’<sup>9</sup> are chronicled. Finally, a timeline of the evolution of policy advice as it pertains to the ‘new model’, and the way in which it translated into national policy in Irish primary schools are explored and critiqued.

## 2.2 The development of inclusive education in Ireland

In the period after Independence in 1922, the revival of the Irish language and native traditions was the key education policy objective (Coolahan, 1981; Stevens and O’Moore, 2009). In a country with a poorly resourced primary school system tasked with this gargantuan task, there was little scope to address the education of children with sensory impairments or special needs (McGee, 1990). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century many children with special needs remained in hospitals, asylums and county homes (Stevens and O’Moore, 2009). This era of ‘neglect and denial’ (Swan, 2000) saw some growth in facilities for children with SEN driven by religious orders, with little or no financial support from the state. In 1959 the DE appointed its first inspector responsible for

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<sup>9</sup> Remedial education. Remedial teaching was provided to students in ordinary schools who have clearly observable difficulties in acquiring basic skills in literacy and/or numeracy, or who have some difficulties in learning of a more general nature. These pupils require additional teaching support to supplement that which can normally be provided by the class teacher (SERC, 1993, p. 75). Remedial education was later known as learning support (DES, 2000).

special education indicating that a more enlightened approach was being taken (Swan, 2000; Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). During the 1960s there was an increased awareness and focus on educating children with disabilities, and following the publication of a White Paper *The Problem of the Mentally Handicapped* (Department of Health [DoH], 1960) a commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap was set up. The resultant *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap* (Government of Ireland, 1965) became the basis for state policy on the development of special education for the next thirty years (Stevens and O'Moore, 2009; Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). While the language and terminology used were reflective of societal attitudes of the time (Scanlon and Doyle, 2022), the publication of this report 'reflected a new awareness of the issues pertaining to educating the mentally handicapped and a greater social concern generally that the problems should be grappled with' (Coolahan, 1981, p. 186). This report accepted the prevailing medical model of service provision and validated the creation of a parallel, segregated education system which McGee (1990) and Griffin and Shevlin (2011) suggested was the only acceptable alternative in terms of educational provision at that time. The growth in special schools and special classes in the 'special school phase' (Swan, 2000) illustrated the importance of this report for the development of educational provision for children with SEN. The development of this parallel system contributed at one level, to the perception of a different form of education for a different type of pupil, but at another level it signalled the beginning of the end of the era of 'neglect and denial' (Swan, 2000, p. 2). By the 1980s there were 114 special schools catering for children aged from four to eighteen years with different categories of special needs (Coolahan, 1981; Government of Ireland, 1993). These developments in special education provision took the form of locational integration (McGee, 1990; McDonnell, 2003) and a limited form of social integration as defined by Warnock (1978), beginning a momentum for integrated education (Stevens and O'Moore, 2009).

Until the 1980s the Department of Health (DoH) was primarily responsible for the education and care of people with disabilities. The publication by the DoH of the report of the Review Group on Mental Handicap Services, *Needs and Abilities: A Policy for the Intellectually Disabled* (Government of Ireland, 1990) made a number of recommendations. The Review Group welcomed the fact that 'increasing numbers of pupils with general learning difficulties are now being provided with educational opportunities in their local environments' (Government of Ireland, 1990, p. 15) and recommended that there should be greater co-ordination between the Departments of Education and Health in the provision of services to such pupils. The new direction, signposted in this report, signalled a move

towards transferring responsibility for some key elements of disability service provision away from the DoH to the DE and other mainstream services (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). While this report signalled a shift towards integration, one of the most significant indications of the move towards integration was the decision to establish the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in 1991, whose brief was to examine the existing system for supporting students with SEN and to make recommendations for the future (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). The SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993) and other developments that advanced the provision of special education are discussed in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 The SERC report**

The SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993) set out seven key principles to serve as basic guidelines underpinning the development of special education provision. These affirmed the right of the child with SEN to an appropriate education based on their needs. Whilst favouring placement in a mainstream setting the SERC report recommended that a continuum of special education needs be established, allowing for full time placement in a mainstream class with additional support, to full time placement in a special school. However, for administrative and organisational reasons, the use of categories of disability was retained ‘as a useful first general indicator of what a particular pupil’s requirements are likely to be’ (SERC, 1993, p. 21)<sup>10</sup>. This was the subject of some criticism and diverged from the approach of the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) which had abolished the use of categories of disability and introduced the term ‘special educational need’. The Committee made it clear that adopting this approach did not imply that special educational provision ‘should be determined only by the category to which s/he is considered to belong’ (p. 20). Thirteen different categories were identified, including sensory impairment, general learning difficulties, physical impairments and multiple impairments. A revised pupil teacher ratio for each of the categories was also suggested for special schools and classes. Significant additional resources and enabling legislation were recommended to ensure an appropriate educational provision for children with SEN. The Committee advocated for integration and participation of pupils with disabilities in school activities with other pupils, to the maximum extent which is consistent with the broader overall interests of both the pupils with disabilities and the other pupils in the class/group (Government of Ireland, 1993, pp. 18-19).

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<sup>10</sup> The SERC acknowledged that a pupil’s primary disability may not sufficiently establish their additional educational need, and that the primary consideration should be that pupil’s assessed needs. This assessed need should be as a result of a consideration of all the circumstances, and a diagnostic assessment of abilities, interests, aptitudes, functional skills and needs. However, they reported that a pupil’s primary disability can be a useful starting point as an indicator of what the pupil’s needs are likely to be (Government of Ireland, 1993).

Guidance was not provided as to how this would be determined. Overall, the SERC report favoured ‘as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary’ (p. 22), concluding that a pragmatic rather than ideological position was more helpful. However, in relation to students with severe learning difficulties the SERC report suggested that a network of designated ordinary schools should be developed with specialist facilities, staffing and support services, rather than placement in mainstream classes with the support of a resource teacher (p. 171). The publication of the SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993) has been described as a ‘credible attempt to improve system capacity in relation to special education provision’ (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011, p. 53) and since its publication, DE policy has increasingly been for mainstream provision for children with SEN (Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008).

### **2.2.2 Report on the National Education Convention**

In the same year that SERC reported, The National Education Convention which brought together representatives from forty-two organisations to discuss educational policy in Ireland took place. This ‘was an unprecedented, democratic event in the history of Irish education’ (Coolahan, 1994, p. 1) and was a significant dimension on the consultative process on education in the 1990s. The *Report on the National Education Convention* (Coolahan, 1994) agreed that educational policy should be premised on the basis that every child was educable and had a right to education. This was groundbreaking, as it was only following the ruling in the O’Donoghue case (O’Donoghue v. Minister for Health [1993] IEHC 2; [1996] 2IR 20, P.54), that children with severe/profound general learning difficulties were brought within the education system. An emphasis was also placed on parental choice, informed by appropriate assessment and consultation with teachers (Coolahan, 1994). A strong case for increased integration was favoured alongside a continuum of provision in line with that proposed in the SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993). It was recognised that positive attitudes are essential for the successful implementation of a policy of increased integration, necessitating greater knowledge of different disabilities and requiring both initial and in-service teacher education. However, fears were articulated that unless there was government commitment to increased resourcing, the positive attitude towards integration would result in unsupported integration becoming the norm.

### **2.2.3 Charting our Education Future**

The influence of both the SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993) and the report on *The National Education Convention* (Coolahan, 1994) is observable in the 1995 Government White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (DES, 1995). There was a clear indication in the White Paper that the concept of integration was now superseded by a philosophy of inclusion where all children were entitled to an education alongside their peers. It was accepted that this philosophy would involve a commitment ‘to promote equality of access, participation and benefit for all in accordance with their needs and abilities’ (p. 8), placing an emphasis on adapting the school to meet the varied needs of pupils with SEN (Swan, 2000). It was also agreed that this would include the allocation of resources to those most in need and the provision of appropriate support systems ‘to cater for the diverse educational needs of the population’ (p. 8).

The concept of a continuum of provision for students with SEN as recommended by SERC (1993) and the provision of a flexible system ‘with students being enabled to move as necessary and practicable from one type of provision to another’ was also proposed (DES, 1995, p. 26). Catering for the diversity of needs was also endorsed, and the centrality of the learner in the educational process affirmed (DES, 1995). A partnership approach recognising the rights of parents to be consulted and informed on all aspects of their child’s education was asserted, and increased transparency and accountability were also advocated. This document formed the basis for the consultation process which led to the publication of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998), and later the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act* (Government of Ireland, 2004), which brought legislative effect to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools.

### **2.2.4 Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities**

In 1996 the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, *A Strategy for Equality* (Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996), was published. The report highlighted the many barriers preventing the full participation of people with disabilities within Irish society. It adopted a social model, rejecting the dominant medical model of disability at that time, and advocated responses from a civil rights perspective. The importance of initial teacher education (ITE) and the need for continuing professional development (PD) were also highlighted.

The Commission advocated for an inclusive Education Act which would ‘enshrine and stimulate further progress towards inclusion’ (Commission on the Status of People with

Disabilities, 1996) and facilitate flexibility and formal linkages at local level between mainstream and special schools. The report asserted the right of all children to an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment

except where it is clear that the child involved will not benefit through being placed in a mainstream environment, or that other children would be unduly and unfairly disadvantaged (Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996, p. 174).

This recognition of the necessity to meet the needs of both students with SEN and the needs of students who did not have those needs was in accordance with the SERC recommendation and was later echoed in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004).

A continuum of placement provision was advocated similar to that recommended in the SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993), and the importance of considering the unique needs of the individual in decision making regarding appropriate educational provision was stressed, however the Commission rejected the concept of the designated school as proposed by SERC (Government of Ireland, 1993). In making this recommendation the Commission drew on the definition of ‘appropriate’ contained in the American Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1975) stating that appropriate educational provision must be based on the child’s identified individual needs, and that a written Individual Education programme (IEP) be developed for that child. The report also highlighted the State’s responsibility to ensure sufficient resources for the provision of ‘an education appropriate to their needs in the best possible environment’ (Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996, p. 173), for persons with disabilities and the responsibility of each school to have a plan to facilitate inclusive education. The lack of coordination between the various State departments was highlighted, and the Commission urged greater collaboration between the Departments of Education, Health and Justice with the DE taking the lead in ensuring the provision of high-quality educational services to children with SEN. Lack of support services, including access to speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy and information and advice to psychologists and specialist teachers were also identified as barriers to equality of participation in the education system. Litigation and legislative influences on the development of inclusive education in Ireland are discussed in the next section.

### **2.3 Litigation and legislation influencing change.**

Until the enactment of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) the Irish education system was governed by the *Rules for National Schools under the Department*

of Education (DE, 1965) and Departmental Circulars, and in the absence of enabling legislation the courts played a major role in establishing educational rights for children with disabilities. Two seminal cases which influenced the course of the provision of education for students with severe general learning disabilities are set out in the next section.

### 2.3.1 Litigation

During the 1990s parents initiated a number of court cases against the State seeking improved educational provision for their children who had severe/profound general learning difficulties or autism. Two cases in particular (O'Donoghue 1993; Sinnott 2000) had a profound impact on educational provision in Ireland. In a landmark ruling, Justice Rory O'Hanlon found that under Article 42 of the 1937 Constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937) the State was obliged to provide 'free primary education for this group of children in as full and positive a manner as it has done for all other children in the community' (*O'Donoghue v. Minister for Health [1993] IEHC 2; [1996] 2 IR 20, p. 54*). This judgement signalled a move away from the medical model of disability and established the rights of children with severe/profound general learning disability to a free primary education (Meaney, Kiernan and Monahan, 2005). In a subsequent case, *Sinnott v Minister for Education [2001] 2 IR 545*, Justice Barr in the High Court found that the right to primary education should be provided on a needs basis rather than on the basis of chronological age, and maintained that the State was obliged to provide lifelong education for people with severe/profound general learning disabilities (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). However, on appeal to the Supreme Court, it was found that the State's obligation to provide a primary education for these children ended at eighteen. These high profile cases, and others, paved the way for reform and change in the education of children with SEN (Perry and Clarke, 2015), and demonstrated the potential for public interest litigation to bring about educational reform and influence legislative change which is discussed in the following section.

### 2.3.2 Legislation

A limited legislative framework existed in Ireland up to the passing of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998), which provides a statutory basis for policy and practice in relation to educational provision. Although the judgement in the Sinnott case may have signalled a move away from the predominant medical model, the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) adopted the medical model. This maintained the focus on features of the individual's body or mind and ignored environmental and contextual issues, reinforcing the 'within child' concept of disability (McDonnell, 2003). Despite this, the



*Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) enshrines in legislation the right of a person with a disability or other SEN to ‘support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person’ (Section 7). It also requires school admission policies to respect the principles of equality and parental choice in school selection, and represented the first legislative provision for the education of persons with SEN (Meaney et al., 2005).

The NCSE and the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) service were established by the Minister for Education and Science in accordance with Section 54 of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998). The establishment of the NCSE represented a ‘significant modification of the systemic organisation and delivery of special educational provision’ which heretofore had been administered by the DES (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007, p. 64). The functions of the NCSE are set out in Section 20 of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004), with responsibility for the provision of resources and supports to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available. The Council also has an advisory role to the Minister in matters pertaining to SEN and conducts and disseminates relevant research and information relating to the provision of special education.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was established in September 1999 as a division of the DES and is responsible for all educational psychological services to children. NEPS provides support to schools in relation to special educational provision including the provision of psychological assessments (Carey, 2005; Griffin and Shevlin, 2007; Flood, 2013). However to date the NEPS service is not available to all schools (IMPACT, 2015; O’Brien, 2016) due to insufficient staffing levels, and thus NEPS is unable to provide the range of services necessary to meet the needs of an increasingly complex student population.

Legislation regulating access to schools is provided for under *The Equal Status Act* (Government of Ireland, 2000), in addition to the provisions of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998). *The Equal Status Act* prohibits discrimination on nine different grounds including disabilities. Under this act a school is required to provide reasonable accommodation, supports and facilities to meet the needs of the child with a disability, if not doing so would create a barrier to participation in the school (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). Following on from the publication of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998), the DES committed to ‘an automatic response to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN)’ (DES, 2003, p. 1). This commitment articulated a clear vision for the provision of resources and support based on the individual needs of the child rather than

on the ability of the system to provide for those needs (Carey, 2005), and represented a shift in thinking on the part of the Government.

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) marked a further significant milestone in the legislative provision for children with SEN, stating that school provision should be informed by rights and equality principles with inclusion as a core value. It uses a different definition than that in the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998), which recognises that ‘difficulties in learning are relative rather than all-embracing’ (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011, p. 60), and focuses on the effects of disability rather than the cause. However due to financial constraints EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) whilst heralding significant change within the educational landscape has not yet been fully commenced (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013), and despite the improved economic situation EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) remains to be commenced in its entirety. *Section 2*, which has been commenced, states that:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs’ unless it would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or impact on the provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

While the act refers to the respective rights to an appropriate education of children who do and do not have SEN, it is silent on how the rights of each group might be balanced (Meaney et al., 2005). Parts of *Section 14* requiring the Board of Management of a school to ‘ensure that *Section 2* is complied with’ were also commenced. However, it is notable that this right to be educated alongside their peers, comes with a number of caveats, or safeguards ‘unless it is inconsistent with the best interests of the child’ or ... ‘the effective provision of education for the other children...’ ‘as resources permit’ ‘as far as is practicable.’ The inclusion of these clauses is consistent with the pragmatic approach adopted by SERC (Government of Ireland, 1993) and the Report on the National Education Convention (Coolahan, 1994), although it is not in line with more recent DE policy. This also reflected an emphasis on parental choice, greater flexibility and greater resources. This requirement highlighted the necessity for a continuum of educational provision, which has long been a feature of the Irish education system (Kenny, McCoy and Mihut, 2020), and is advocated for by others such as Hornby in his theory of *inclusive special education* (Hornby, 2014, 2015). The DE has recently commenced a consultation process to review this legislation (DE, 2022b; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (NCCA) 2023).

In a further move towards an inclusive education system, in 2018 the Irish Government ratified the UNCRPD, Article 24 (2), which obliges the State to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. This has far-reaching implications for the Irish education system which has traditionally had two parallel systems of education which is not compatible with the UNCRPD Committee's view of inclusion (NCSE, 2019). This concept of 'full inclusion' is contested and the NCSE has consulted on how best to move forward in the education of students who are currently being educated in special schools and special classes.

Although the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) addressed the issue of admissions to schools the *Education (Admissions to Schools Act)* (Ireland, 2018) enhanced the rights of students with SEN to an inclusive education stating that schools must accept all students who apply to them unless the school is oversubscribed. This ensures that schools cannot refuse to accept a child with SEN on any grounds irrespective of whether this is in the best interests of the child or their peers. Furthermore, under Section 8 of the Act, Part VI of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) is amended whereby the Minister for Education can, following consultation compel a school to make additional provision for a child with special educational needs. The Minister for Education, in response to parental pressures, invoked this section of the Act and compelled schools in Dublin 15 and South County Dublin to open special classes for children with Autism (NCSE, 2020b; Thomas, 2019). Given that the thrust of Irish education policy is for inclusion within the mainstream setting in accordance with Section 24 of the UNCRPD, it is interesting that the Minister has exercised Section 37 A (6) of the Education Act 1998 (as inserted by Section 8 of the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*) (Ireland, 2018) compelling schools to segregate students and open designated classes for student with Autism. This has increased the numbers of special classes and special schools.

To date, no other category of special class has been opened under this legislation, indeed the Minister for Education cannot compel a school to open a class for children with speech and language difficulties as the DoH under the HSE must agree to provide the services of a Speech and Language Therapist to do so. Furthermore, in contrast to the stance taken to open special schools and special classes for children with autism the minister has once again come before the courts, this time for refusing to open a special class for children with specific learning disability in Dublin 15. Mr. Justice Barr queried whether the Minister of State for Special Education has 'set her face against funding' Specific Learning Disability Special Classes and is operating an 'inflexible policy'. He further highlighted that the 'new

model' did not rule out SLD classes, and that the Minister has continued to fund the existing classes (Baker 2022; Killian 2022).

The following section traces the development of the provision of supports to enable students with SEN to realise those rights within their primary school.

## **2.4 Allocation of additional teaching support for students with SEN**

The number of teachers allocated to primary schools is determined on the basis of student enrolment on the 30<sup>th</sup> September of the previous calendar year, with a differential allocation based on school status<sup>11</sup> (DE, 2022a, 2023a). Where schools have students with English as an Additional Language (EAL)<sup>12</sup> provision is made for additional teaching support for those students. An additional teaching allocation is also provided to all schools to enable them to support students with SEN under different allocation mechanisms. It is the allocation of this additional teaching support that is the focus of this study, and the next section sets out the evolution of this provision.

### **2.4.1 Remedial teaching**

Since 1963 the DE has sanctioned remedial posts in individual schools and in clusters of schools on an 'ex-quota' basis (i.e., in addition to the number of teaching posts sanctioned on the basis of the school enrolment). They were appointed to provide specialist help to students in schools where there was a high incidence of students who had serious difficulties in reading (Coolahan, 1981; Shiel, Morgan and Larney, 1998; Swan, 2000). Students were usually withdrawn from their class for sessional support in groups, or on an individual basis for short periods of time. They were provided with intensive instruction, primarily in the area of reading, although some support was provided in mathematics (McGee, 1990; Shiel, Morgan and Larney, 1998; Swan, 2000). The *Guidelines on Remedial Education* (DE, 1987) published by the DE set out the aims of remedial education and provided practical advice for schools on the organisation of a positive school environment for children with learning difficulties. At the time of publication of the Guidelines there were 837 remedial teachers<sup>13</sup> in

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<sup>11</sup> School status. The Department of Education allocates teacher numbers to schools on the basis of pupil teacher ratio and their enrolment on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September of the previous year. Lower thresholds apply for DEIS Band 1 schools. (DE, 2023a)

<sup>12</sup> English as an Additional Language (EAL). Additional teaching support was provided under Circular 53/007 (DES, 2007a) and later under Circular 15/009 (DES, 2009) for students with English as an additional language. Under Circular 0007/2012 (DES, 2012) the GAM was adjusted to combine the general allocation and language support into a single allocation. Provision was made for schools with very high concentrations of students with EAL to apply for additional support.

<sup>13</sup> Remedial teacher. Remedial teaching positions were introduced into Irish schools in 1963. Their role was to 'remediate' the student's specific difficulties in literacy and/or numeracy (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

primary schools with the majority working in large urban schools. The service was gradually extended during the 1990s (Shiel, Morgan and Larney, 1998), and by 1999 close to 1,500 remedial teachers were appointed providing a service in all primary schools, although many of these positions were shared between a number of schools (DES, 2000). The role of the remedial teacher was not entirely clear according to Swan (2000), and unfortunately led to the birth of the ‘unhelpful misnomer of the “remedial pupil” (Swan, 2000, p. 2).

In 1996 the DES commissioned a study to examine the ways in which the *Guidelines on Remedial Education* (DE, 1987) and the recommendations on remedial education in the SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993) were being practised in Irish primary schools. *The Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools* (Shiel et al., 1998) found that there was considerable variation between the work in the classroom and the programme carried out by the remedial teacher. Shiel et al., (1998) concluded that remedial teachers ‘spend about 85 percent of each school week working with individuals or small groups who have been withdrawn for remedial teaching’ (p. xi), resulting in little time for consultation or collaboration with mainstream class teachers or others. As a response to these findings and recommendations, the *Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000) were published to address the shortcomings identified by Shiel et al., (1998). The *Guidelines* placed particular stress on policies which emphasise ‘the enhancement of classroom-based learning’ for all pupils (DES, 2000, p. 15), collaboration between class teacher, support teacher, principal and parents. The change in emphasis signalled in this document was highlighted by noting that ‘the terms ‘learning support’ and ‘learning support teaching’ are used, from this point, instead of ‘remedial education’ and ‘remedial teaching’ (DES, 2000, p. 4). The development of whole-school policies on learning support and targeting the identified learning needs of students achieving at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on nationally standardised tests of literacy and numeracy were also emphasised.

The publication of these guidelines ‘marked a significant stage in the development of government policy towards inclusion’ (MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007, p. 295), and highlighted the necessity to adapt the school to the needs of the pupil (Swan, 2000). A spirit of partnership was deemed essential and the expected roles of the different partners, the Board of Management, the principal teacher, class teacher, learning support teacher and parents and the children themselves were addressed in the guidelines. The principal teacher has overall

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Following the publication of the *Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000) the term ‘learning support’ teacher was used.

responsibility for the school's learning support programme and for the operation of services for children with SEN. However the role of co-ordinating this provision could be assigned to 'another teacher such as a special education teacher, learning support teacher or a post holder' (DES, 2000, p. 39). The guidelines set out the typical duties that would be included in the role such as maintaining a list of pupils in receipt of support, co-ordinating the workloads of the learning-support and resource teachers<sup>14</sup>, monitoring and tracking the progress of the children, and liaising with external agencies. However, consideration was not given as to when these duties would be carried out, and while schools could assign the duties to a post holder it was not considered necessary to have a formal designated role as SEN co-ordinator within the school as was the case in other jurisdictions (Department for Education and Skills, 2001; Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017, 2020).

#### **2.4.2 Resource teaching provision**

In a response to a recommendation in SERC (Government of Ireland, 1993) for the establishment of resource teaching posts to cater for students with significant learning needs in mainstream schools, the DE drew up a briefing sheet on the appointment of resource teachers. The allocation of resource teaching hours to schools was determined by the nature and degree of disability and the pupil-teacher ratio for that particular disability in line with weighting used in the SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993). By 1996, forty six resource teachers had been appointed to cater for students in mainstream primary schools, although in the early years the majority supported children in clusters of schools (Costello, 1999). Circular M08/99 *Applications for the services of a full or part-time resource teacher to assist a school in providing education to meet the needs and abilities of children with disabilities* (DES, 1999) introduced the system of resource teaching positions as an additional post allocated to 'meet the needs and abilities of children assessed as having disabilities' (p.1). The basis on which resource teachers could be appointed was specified, and the flexible manner in which this support could be provided was set out, including direct teaching of the children either in a separate room or within the mainstream classroom, or team-teaching if it was beneficial to the child (DES, 1999). These hours were allocated on the basis of an application in respect of individual children and were separate to a school's learning support teacher allocation (DES, 1999, 2002). This was envisaged as a whole school approach to supporting students with a diagnosed disability and not solely the responsibility of the

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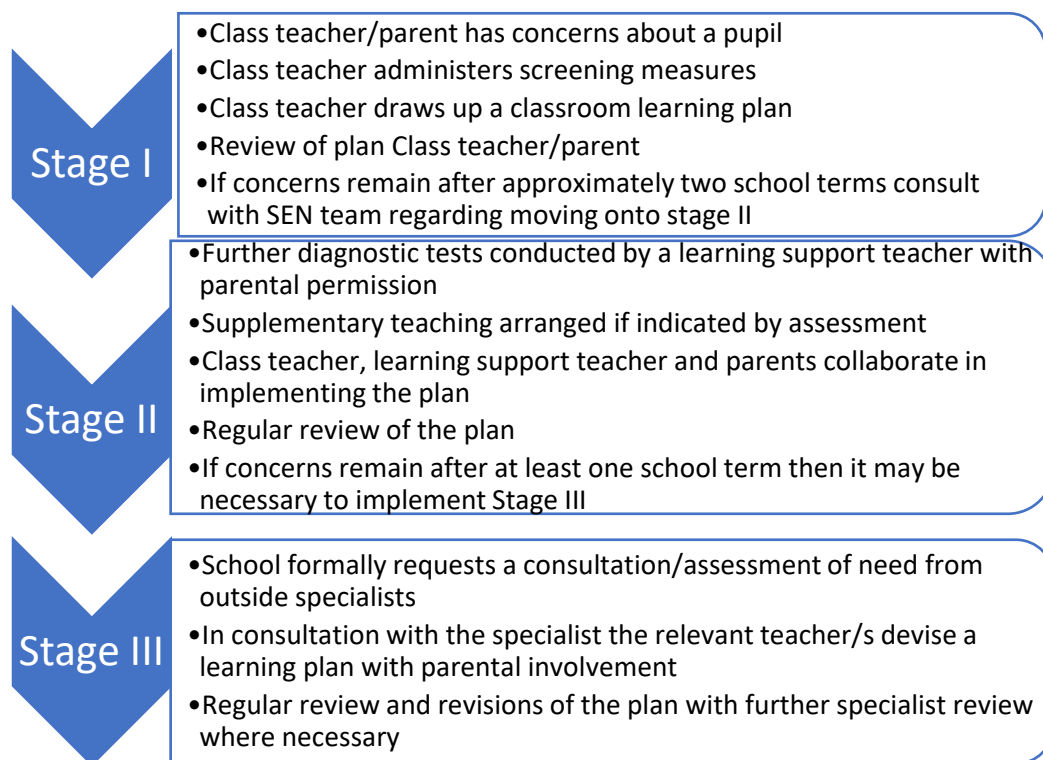
<sup>14</sup> Resource teacher. The role of the resource teacher is to provide additional teaching support for these children who have been fully integrated into mainstream schools and who need such support (DES, 2002)

resource teacher, as the child was ‘fully integrated into a mainstream school and will spend most of his/her time with the mainstream teacher’ (DES, 1999, p. 1, 2002, p. 1).

#### **2.4.3 Review of the resource teaching allocation model**

Amidst concerns that the very significant level of resources allocated to schools under the resource teaching hours model in Circulars M08/99 (DES, 1999) and Circular SP.ED 08/02 (DES, 2002), were being misapplied, the DES commenced a review, with the intention of revising the guidelines in respect of the provision of support (MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007). Within this context, Circular 24/03 *Allocation of Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in National Schools* (DES, 2003) was issued. This circular advocated a collaborative whole school approach reflecting the principles of the *Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000). The DES (2003) criticised the reliance on withdrawing students for individual support, pointing out that ‘the practice has developed in recent years of using resource hours for individual tuition only’ (p. 2/3), stating that it was ‘contrary to the principle of integration in teaching and learning’ (p. 3), and calling on schools to provide support within the mainstream class or ‘if necessary, in small groups’ (DES, 2003, p. 3). A three-stage sequential approach to special education needs as set out in Figure 2.1 was outlined, and an emphasis placed on helping prevent a child from being placed in a special education setting prematurely (Carey, 2005).

**Figure 2.1 Staged approach to special educational needs adapted from Circular 24/03 (DES, 2003)**



According to MacGiolla Phádraig (2007), ‘this circular contained the clearest expression to date of the advantages of inclusion as a means of dealing with special educational needs’ (p. 297). This circular paved the way for subsequent circulars on the provision of additional teaching support for students with SEN.

#### **2.4.4 The General Allocation Model (GAM)**

By 2005 there were 5,000 teachers at primary level dealing directly with children with SEN (DES, 2005b), and the DES issued Circular SP ED 02/05 *The Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05* (DES, 2005a). The purpose of the circular was ‘to provide guidance for mainstream primary schools on the deployment and organisation of the teaching resources that were allocated’ (p. 1), under what the circular termed ‘the general allocation model’ (p. 1). The circular introduced a revised system for the allocation of additional teaching resources for students with SEN. Under this system the category of special education needs was divided into HI disability and low incidence (LI) disability. LI disability referred to students with specified categories of diagnosed disabilities as reproduced here in Table 2.1.



**Table 2.1 Categories of low-incidence special educational needs (DES, 2005a, p. 15).**

<b>Low Incidence Disabilities</b>	<b>Hours of resource teaching support available to school per week</b>
<b>Physical Disability</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Hearing Impairment</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Visual Impairment</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Emotional Disturbance</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Severe Emotional Disturbance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Moderate General Learning Disability</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Severe/Profound General Learning Disability</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Specific Speech and Language Disorder</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Assessed syndrome in conjunction with one of the above low incidence disabilities</b>	<b>3 to 5, taking into account the pupil's special educational needs including level of general learning disability</b>
<b>Multiple Disabilities</b>	<b>5</b>

This model provided a combined allocation that included additional teaching time previously allocated for learning-support provision, together with an allocation of additional teaching time for students with HI disabilities who had previously been allocated resource teaching hours. The inclusion of those students with HI disabilities under GAM immediately cleared the backlog of students waiting assessment and according to Stevens and O'Moore (2009, p. 55) 'effectively halted the ever-accelerating appointment of resource teachers'. Separate provision was made for students with LI disabilities through the retention of the Resource Teaching Hours (RTH) model. This was managed by the NCSE itself, with 22,271 students supported in primary schools in the academic year 2012-13 by 3,230 resource teachers (NCSE, 2014b).

The GAM was premised on the notion that the learning needs of students with HI disabilities could be met promptly without the need for a formal assessment, although students with LI disabilities continued to require a diagnosis. A weighted allocation of additional teaching posts was made based on school size and type in acknowledgement that boys' schools tended to have a higher incidence of disabilities than all-girls' schools. DEIS<sup>15</sup> schools were allocated their first post at 80 pupils, with a different appointment basis for smaller schools to ensure they were not disadvantaged by the introduction of the GAM. The over-riding principle of inclusion as expressed in Circular 24/03 (DES, 2003) was

<sup>15</sup> DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/>

highlighted, and the fundamental basis of the model was that students with the highest level of need should receive the highest level of support from the most experienced and qualified teachers (DES, 2005a). The rationale behind this approach to allocating teaching support was to facilitate the development of ‘truly inclusive schools’ (DES, 2005a, p. 2), and ‘enable schools to deploy additional teaching resources in a flexible manner, leading to more effective and efficient delivery of services’ (p. 3). This circular recommended a whole-school approach to meet the needs of students with SEN and emphasised that the primary responsibility for all pupils rests with the class teacher. The key principles underpinning the model were outlined in the circular and are presented in Figure 2.2 below.

**Figure 2.2 Principles underpinning Circular 02/05 adapted from Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a)**



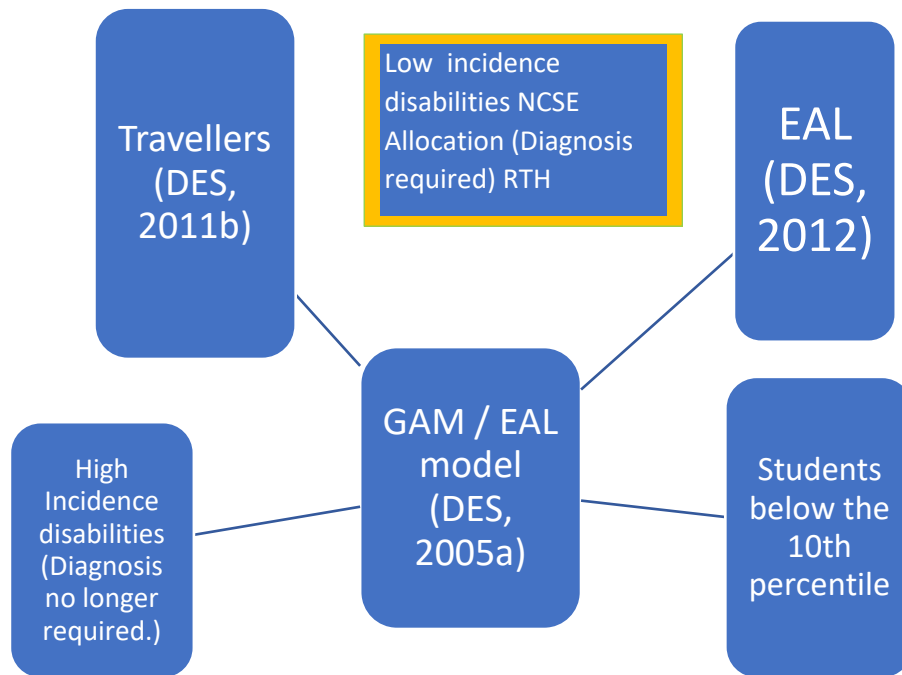
Carey (2005) observes that this was arguably one of the most important circulars issued by the Department as it provided a formula by which schools were automatically entitled to receive an allocation of permanent supplementary teaching posts to support students with SEN. This revised model of support represented a paradigmatic shift from a diagnostic requirement to access resources, to one where resources were provided to the majority of students on the basis of need.

#### 2.4.5 Adjusting the GAM model (DES, 2010)

While there was a broad consensus that the GAM model was achieving its aims, and that it was based on sound principles, the *Review of the Primary Schools' General Allocation Model* (DES, 2010) made a number of recommendations for change and the GAM model was revised from the academic year 2010/2011. Resource Teacher for Traveller posts were withdrawn under the provisions of Circular 0017/2011 (DES, 2011b) to ensure that schools selected pupils for learning support on the basis of individual need, rather than 'Traveller identity' (DES, 2011b). A total of €1.3 billion was spent on special education in 2012, increased from €1.2 billion in 2011 (Campbell et al., 2017), however cuts of 15 percent in the hours allocated to students with LI were also introduced (Phelan, 2012; Carbery, 2013; Murray, 2013; NCSE, 2013b), due in part to the fiscal constraints faced by the Government of the time.

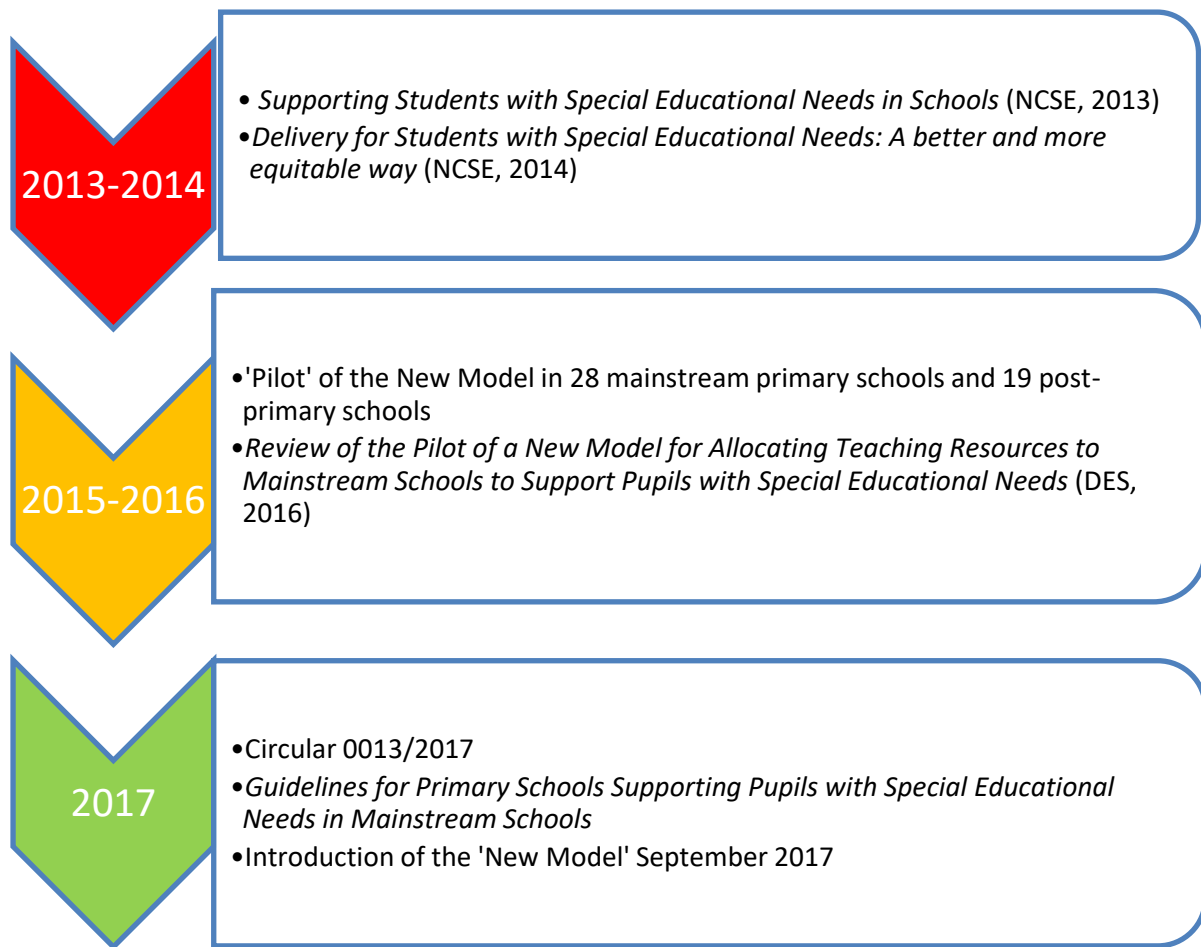
More fundamental revisions to the GAM were introduced in Circular 0007/12 *Staffing arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2012/13 school year* (DES, 2012). Under this circular, the GAM was adjusted to combine the general allocation and language support into a 'single simplified allocation for all primary schools' (DES, 2012, p. 6) superseding the allocation process in previous circulars. The GAM/EAL allocation was now based on the number of mainstream teaching posts in schools in the 2011/2012 school year (DES, 2012) instead of pupil numbers, although the gender differential was maintained. For schools with high concentrations of students requiring EAL support, permanent additional teaching positions were now provided (DES, 2012), replacing the provisions of Circular 0015/2009 *Meeting the needs of pupils learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)* (DES, 2009). However, the number of permanent positions allocated was less than the temporary positions previously provided, and it was highlighted that the allocation of these posts would be reviewed on a regular basis and adjusted downwards in future years in line with reductions announced in Budget 2010 (DES, 2012). Recognition was, however, given to socio-economic status, and an additional differential base allocation was given to DEIS Band 1 schools based on enrolment (DES, 2012). Schools were given the autonomy to flexibly deploy the allocated resources between language support and learning support based on their specified needs (DES, 2012). As set out in Figure 2.3 The GAM / EAL model (DES, 2005a, 2012) had been extended to provide additional teaching support to a wider range of students by 2012, whilst the separate NCSE Resource Teaching Hours continued to be allocated to students with low incidence disabilities.

**Figure 2.3 Students catered for under the GAM /EAL (DES, 2005a, 2011b, 2012) model and RTH hours by 2012.**



With the withdrawal of resource teacher for traveller posts (DES, 2011b) and the single allocation for general allocation and EAL support (DES, 2012) schools now had to stretch the support provided to additional students other than those provided for under the original GAM thus embedding a reduced quantum of teaching support in the system. Therefore, despite schools having flexibility and the autonomy to deploy the resources provided, the criteria for eligibility for those resources assumed ever more importance in practice. Subsequent to these changes, in 2012 the NCSE was requested to provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on how students with SEN should, in the future, be supported in schools (NCSE, 2013b). The NCSE reported in 2013 and their advice is discussed in the following section. The policy timeline and phases involved in moving towards a ‘new model’ are illustrated in Figure 2.4 below and each stage will be explored in turn in Section 2.4.6, Section 2.4.7 and Section 2.5.

**Figure 2.4 Policy timeline and phases in the development of the ‘New Model’**



#### **2.4.6 Moving towards a different model**

The resulting policy advice paper, *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools* (NCSE, 2013b) concluded, that the current system ‘does not provide all children with equitable access to educational supports. It may reinforce advantage and confirm disadvantage’ (p. 5), recommending that a new model should be developed based on the profiled need of each school. This advice echoed an argument put forward by Travers (2010, 2012) that DEIS schools should be taken out of the GAM and the needs of individual DEIS schools be matched with the necessary resources on a school by school basis. The *Review of the Primary Schools General Allocation Model* (DES, 2010) had made the somewhat similar recommendation that one cohesive model of teacher allocation support should be considered for DEIS schools, rather than providing support through a combination of three different schemes, i.e. the DEIS scheme, the GAM/EAL scheme and the RTH scheme. The NCSE working group also argued that the level of additional supports provided should be based on an assessment of the students’ needs rather than linked to a diagnosis of a

particular category of disability (NCSE, 2013b; Rix et al., 2013) as was the case for students with HI disabilities under the GAM (DES, 2005a, 2012). Concern was also expressed that many ‘assessments simply state a child’s disability rather than informing and guiding a child’s development, teaching and learning’ (NCSE, 2013b, p. 5), and that Health Service Executive (HSE) professionals felt pressured to diagnose a child with a disability for such purposes (NCSE, 2013b), however no evidence is presented to support this contention.

The NCSE (2013b) further contended that a diagnosis was not equally available to all students, with some parents being able to pay privately for such assessments and others not. While it is undoubtedly true that individual circumstances should not determine access to state supports, the implication is that schools where parents have the ability to pay for assessments have a higher level of state allocated supports than schools where parents do not have the ability to pay. This contention is at variance with the research (McCoy, Banks and Shevlin, 2012, 2016). Using data from the National Survey of Schools, a nationally representative study of SEN in mainstream schools carried out in 2011 McCoy et al., (2014), and Banks et.al., (2015) found that the numbers of students with diagnosed needs are higher in DEIS schools than in any other school category, reporting an average of 13 percent of students with SEN, in contrast to non-DEIS schools reporting percentages of students with SEN at 10 percent. They argue that these findings indicate that the model of support already in place was broadly effective in supporting those students; although they noted that there was scope for further refinement of the process even within those schools designated as DEIS to ensure that the supports are more targeted.

The NCSE working group also raised several issues regarding the funding of SEN, one of which was the lack of data regarding the numbers of students actually supported by the GAM, acknowledging that ‘[I]t is not possible to identify the total number of students supported through the GAM as schools determine how these hours are used to support eligible students and the DES does not hold details of the number of students supported through this mechanism’ (NCSE, 2013b, p. 116). The lack of accountability for the resources allocated, and the provision of teaching support on the basis of either teacher or pupil numbers were also criticised (NCSE, 2013b). Stemming from these criticisms the NCSE working group argued for an alternative model tailored to respond to the profiled needs of each school. Based on this advice the Minister for Education and Skills tasked the NCSE with the development of a new model for allocating additional special educational teaching resources to mainstream schools which resulted in the publication of the NCSE working

group report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A better and more equitable way* (NCSE, 2014a) which is discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4.7 Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A better and more equitable way (NCSE, 2014a).**

In response to the request from the Minister for Education and Skills, the NCSE proposed a new model of teaching support allocation. The NCSE working group adopted four guiding principles to underpin its work, one of which was that all students ‘irrespective of special educational need are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools’ (NCSE, 2014, p.5) without the necessity of a diagnosis or label to access additional teaching support. This ensured that the inclusion of students with SEN was central to the development of a new approach. According to the NCSE (2014a), this was a new and different model and not simply a revision of the old model. Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a) was premised on building ‘truly inclusive schools’ (DES, 2005a, p.3) and this new model seeks to build on that aspiration.

The NCSE (2014a) favoured a two-staged approach to the delivery of a new funding model, with a first stage identifying the allocation of additional teaching supports, and a second stage the deployment of those resources by schools. The allocation was to comprise two main components, a baseline component to support inclusion, prevent learning difficulties and support early intervention, and a second component based on the school educational profile which was to take into consideration:

- the number of pupils with complex needs enrolled in the school
- the learning support needs of pupils based on the reported standardised test results, and
- the social context of the school including disadvantage and gender (NCSE, 2014a).

Gender was maintained as a component of the model as research has consistently maintained that the ratio of disabilities is higher for boys and there is extensive literature on boys’ underachievement at school (OECD, 2003; McCoy et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2015). The NCSE (2014a) advocated for the inclusion of standardised test results as part of the educational profile of a school, arguing that they link directly to the educational achievement of students in schools, whilst acknowledging their limitations. Under Circular Letter 56/2011 *Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011a) and more recent updating circulars the DES requires all schools to upload aggregated data

from standardised test scores to the national data base. This circular also gave discretion to the principal in determining an exemption from sitting the test.

Students may be excluded from standardised testing if in the view of the school principal they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate (DES, 2011a, p.6).

The same weighting is assigned for students who register a Sten score of 1, or who were exempted from the test (DES, 2017a). As individual principals have autonomy to decide who is and who is not tested within the standardised system, this can result in a lack of uniformity in the interpretation of the inclusion or exclusion of pupils' criteria. This then makes it difficult to include the aggregated test scores in a school profile and to state they provide a 'more equitable' basis on which to provide support.

Questions have been raised amid concerns about the negative consequences of the use of standardised assessment scores as a measure for funding staffing allocations and accountability (Raftery and Brennan, 2021). It was argued that 'their use as funding criteria may act as a disincentive for schools to achieve to retain funding allocations' (Banks, et al., 2015, p. 939), and could result in a reduction in support teacher allocation (Banks, 2021). There is also evidence in the literature that serious difficulties may arise when attempts are made to use the same test for a number of different purposes (William, 2010; Polesel, Rice and Dulfer, 2014; O'Leary et al., 2019; Lysaght and O'Leary, 2020). A further argument against the use of standardised assessment procedures is that they reinforce the deficit model of disability (McDonnell, 2003; Desforges and Lindsay, 2010; Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). Schools also have a choice, albeit limited, regarding the standardised tests that they use. There is a choice of two tests in literacy, the MICRA-T (*Mary Immaculate Reading Attainment Test*) (Wall and Burke, 2004) utilising a cloze type test approach and the DPRT-R (*The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test Revised*) (Educational Research Centre, 2018) using a multiple-choice question type. There are also standardised assessment tests in mathematics from the same publishers, with one test requiring the children to write out and calculate their answers, and the other using multiple choice. This emphasis on standardised testing places undue importance on the test results as they were not designed or validated for informing support teacher allocation, and according to Beechinor (2018) they should not be used for this purpose. While standardised tests were not originally high stakes tests in Ireland, with the



inclusion of these test results as part of a school profile and a key determiner of the additional teaching support, the stakes have increased.

The second stage of the funding model was set out as the effective deployment of the additional teaching supports by schools, supported by NEPS to identify students with SEN and to develop appropriate evidence-based interventions. An NCSE Inclusion Support Service was also to be developed which would build professional capacity in schools and support schools by responding to exceptional circumstances. The NCSE argued for greater accountability from schools in relation to target setting and the support provided. It argued that the ‘new model’ breaks the link between diagnosis and resourcing and places a ‘greater emphasis on monitoring educational outcomes’ (NCSE, 2014a, p. 11). Further requirements were envisaged whereby schools would report annually to the NCSE on the utilisation of the resources and student progress. However, regardless of these additional reporting requirements, the NCSE (2014a) argued that the ‘new model’ would mean a reduction in the administrative burden for schools, with a central online data system to be developed to facilitate the collection and collation of data. This online database has yet to materialise. Despite the criticisms and questions regarding this new approach, in February 2015, the then Minister for Education and Skills commenced the process of putting this new model in place.

## **2.5 Implementation of the ‘New Model’ under Circular 13/2017 (DES, 2017a)**

The stages in this implementation process are set out in the following sections.

### **2.5.1 Piloting the model**

The Minister firstly established a pilot of the new allocation model which took place during the 2015/2016 school year (DES, 2016). However, this was not a pilot in the true sense of the word as those schools which would have had a decrease in their support teaching allocation under the proposed model did not have their teaching support allocation reduced, as it was feared that they would not participate with a reduced allocation. An evaluation of this ‘pilot’ was conducted by the DES Inspectorate who reported that this constraint ‘limited the extent to which full implementation of the model could be tested and evaluated in the pilot project’ (DES, 2016b, p. 8). The findings noted that while participating schools were positively disposed towards the model, this positive disposition was based on the schools being guaranteed not to lose their existing resources for the duration of the ‘pilot.’ The DES Inspectorate also noted as a concern that there was a lack of impact of the new allocation model in some schools where no additional teaching resources were granted (DES, 2016). Irrespective of these concerns, to give effect to this ‘new model’, the DES issued Circular

13/2017 *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools: Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a) and guidance notes *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017b).

### 2.5.2 Circular 13/2017 (DES, 2017a)

The circular begins by setting out its ‘purpose’ which ‘is to advise schools of the revised allocation process for special education teachers to mainstream primary schools from the 2017/18 school year’ (DES, 2017a, p.1). It outlined the rationale for the ‘new model’ as set out in the NCSE policy advice (NCSE, 2013b), and the subsequent Working Group Report (NCSE, 2014a). According to the Circular, the new allocation ‘will provide a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school’s educational profile’ (DES, 2017a, p. 1) enabling schools ‘to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who require such support in their schools’ (DES, 2017a, p. 1). It also guaranteed that all schools would ‘maintain their existing 2016/17 school year allocations and retain these allocations until the next profiling takes place’ from September 2019 (DES, 2017a, p. 3). The number of support teaching positions and the number of students identified as having LI disabilities from 2011 up to the 2016/2017 academic year are set out in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 Number of learning support teachers and resource teachers 2011/2012 to 2016/2017** (NCSE, 2013a, 2014b; Campbell *et al.*, 2017; NCSE, 2018)

	2011/2012	2012/2013	2016/2017	% increase
<b>Students with LI disabilities</b>	29,426	32,480	47,065	60%
<b>LITH posts</b>	5,265	5,265	7,427	41%
<b>GAM posts</b>	4,475	4,863	5,072	13%
<b>Total SET posts</b>	9,740	10,128	12,499	28%

Significant additional special education teaching posts were allocated to schools from September 2017, to support the introduction of this model (DES, 2017a) bringing the total SET posts to approximately 13,300. These additional posts were provided to schools due to receive an increased allocation based on their school profile, and to those schools which would have nominally been due to receive a reduced allocation based on their school profile

enabling them to retain their 2016/17 school year allocation. As the redistribution of teaching resources linked to educational need which underpinned the ‘new model’ (NCSE, 2014a) did not happen, the existing inequities were now to an extent inbuilt into the model (Travers, 2017). The allocation did, however, give certainty to schools as it was to remain in place for two years. Schools were advised that following a recalculation of the school profile in 2019, the quantum of support could change in the academic year 2019/2020 (DES, 2017a).

### **2.5.3 Components of the model**

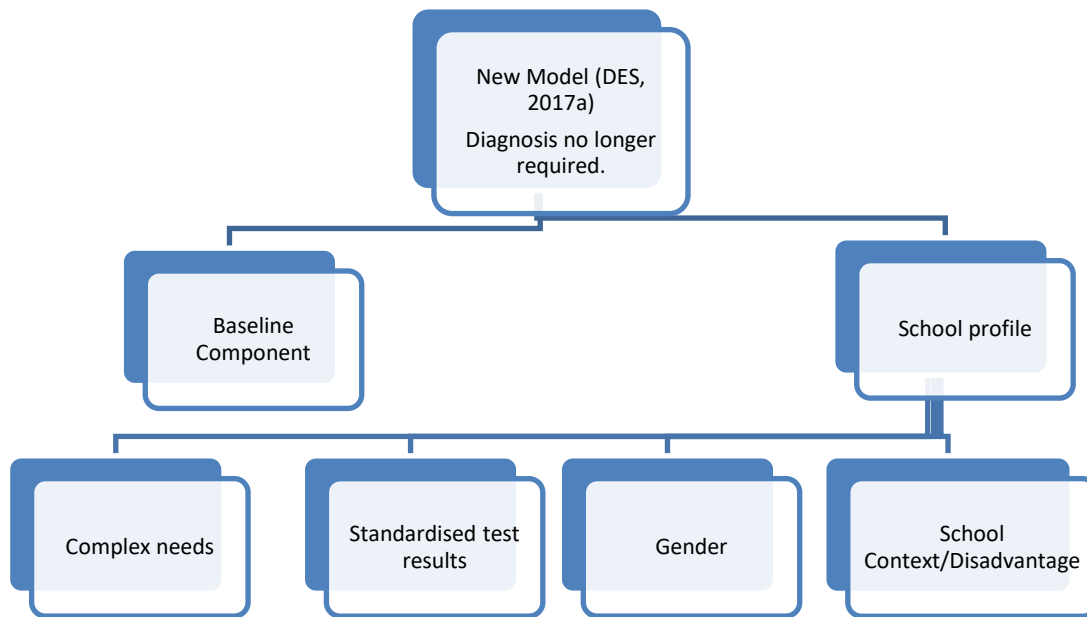
The circular also provided an explanation of the general composition of the allocation to schools (See Figure 2.5) which was broken down as follows:

- A baseline allocation, made up of 20 percent of the Resource/Learning support posts in 2016/2017 based on the school enrolment for 2015/2016.
- The school educational profile,
  - comprised standardised test results from 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 for pupils achieving at or below Sten 4 with the highest weighting assigned for those pupils registered at a Sten score of 1, or who were exempt from the test, with graduated weightings given for those pupils registering a Sten score of 2, 3 and 4.
  - Disadvantage <sup>16</sup>
  - Gender and
  - Complex needs constituting 50 percent of the quantum of Resource/Learning support posts in the system.

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<sup>16</sup> Disadvantage. ‘This has been calculated by conducting a social context survey of primary schools in 2014. Future reviews will take account of updated data and will be guided by the best available information sources at the time of the review’ (DES, 2017a, p. 11).

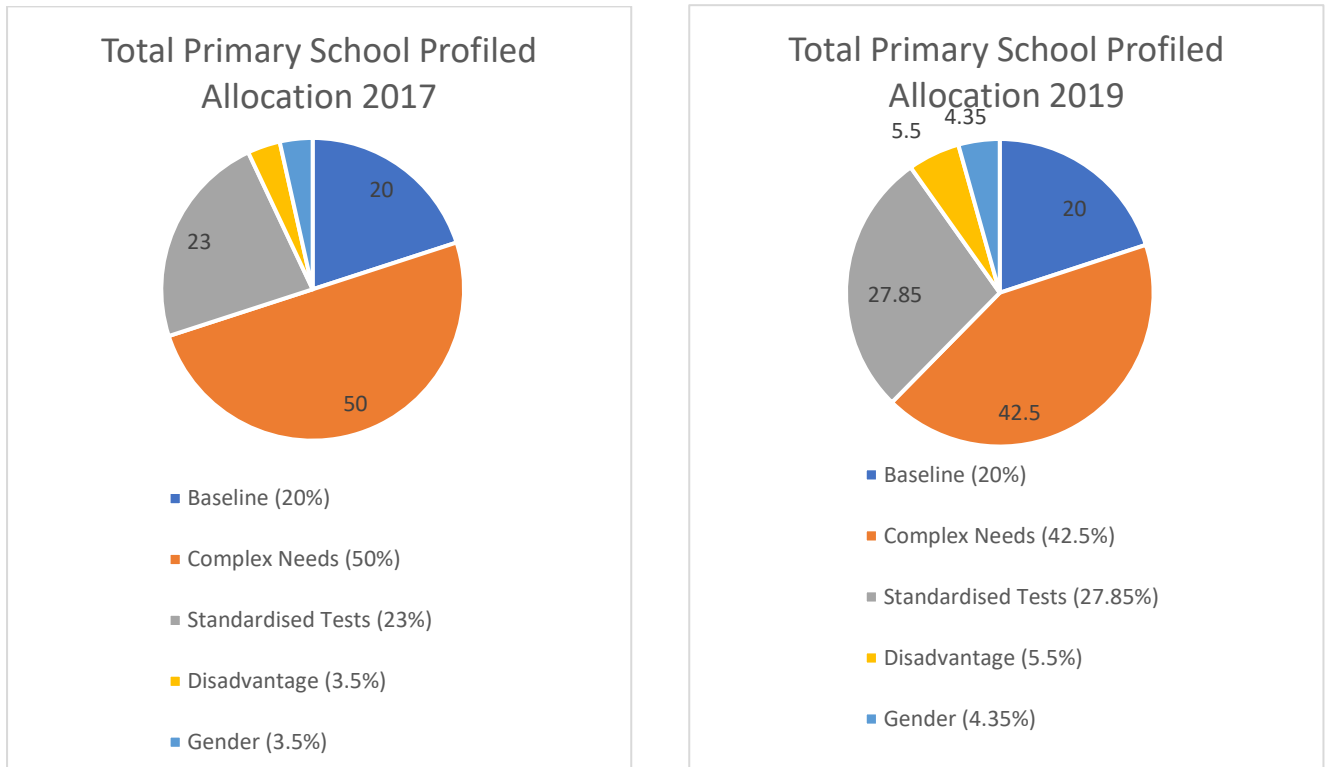
**Figure 2.5 Components of the ‘New Model’ (DES, 2017a)**



The term ‘complex needs’ was not defined, but in order to proceed with the ‘new model’ the LI allocations made in 2016/2017 were used to establish this component. The full breakdown of the different elements of the allocation is set out in Figure 2.6: Total Primary School Profiled Allocation 2017 and 2019.

In February 2019 a reprofiling of schools took place and the allocation of support across the components of the profile was revised. These revisions were set out in circulars *0007/2019 Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools: Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2019b) and *Circular 0019/2019 Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2019/2020 school year* (DES, 2019a). Schools were advised that where an increase was indicated only 20 percent of this increase was applied, with a similar application to any decrease. Once again, the inequities in the previous model which this ‘new model’ was to replace, were continued for a further two years. As illustrated in Figure 2.6, the profiled allocation was changed in 2019 with an increased weighting of 27.85 percent assigned to standardised test in 2019 (DES, 2019b) and increased further in 2022 to 35.88 percent (DE, 2022a) as illustrated in Figure 2.7. These continued increases have elevated the importance of standardised test results in respect of their prominence in determining the support teaching allocation.

**Figure 2.6 Total primary school profiled allocation 2017 (DES, 2017a) and 2019 (DES, 2019b)**



### ‘Complex needs’

As signposted in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a), changes to the ‘complex needs’ component were introduced in Circular 007/2019 (DES, 2019b) as part of the first re-profiling of schools. The circular sets out in detail over pages 7 – 13 (DES, 2019b) the way in which the ‘complex needs’ component of the model will be established. The ‘complex needs’ component will now ‘take account of the decision making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to [Health Service Executive] HSE Children Disability Network Teams’(CDNT) (DES, 2019b, p. 8). The HSE previously had no role in determining the allocation of teaching resources, however as a consequence of this change the HSE now plays a significant role in the allocation of additional teaching supports to schools. This is a change in direction, and reverses to a degree the transfer of responsibility for services for persons with disabilities from the DOH to the DE initially signalled in the report of the Review Group on Mental Handicap Services (Government of Ireland, 1990). The circular directs readers to the *National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay* (HSE, 2016) which sets out the procedures for determining access to the CDNTs. The ‘complex needs’ component now comprises two elements,

- those students who already had resource hours, and remained within the school, and
- those pupils ‘identified by the HSE as accessing or assessed as qualifying for access to HSE disability Services, who enrolled to Junior Infants classes in each school year from 2017/18 onwards’ (DES, 2019b, p. 8).

The circular clarifies that ‘access is based on the child’s functioning capacity across a range of domains, rather than being based on a formal diagnosis of disability’ (DES, 2019b, p. 8). However, a number of challenges remain. The HSE document sets out four levels of difficulty in respect of functional skills, from ‘no difficulty’ to ‘significant difficulty’. It is unclear if the data returned to the NCSE by the HSE are those children experiencing significant difficulties<sup>17</sup>, or highly significant difficulties<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, the definition of ‘complex needs’ provided by the HSE does not provide any clarity on the matter, defining the term ‘complex needs’ as referring ‘to one or more impairments which contribute to a range of significant functional difficulties that require the services and support of an interdisciplinary disability team’ (HSE Community Operations, 2021, p. 13). Schools are therefore unaware of the number of children, and more specifically the particular children who have been identified by the HSE as meeting their criteria. The confusion around the terminology and definitions are at variance with the recommendation from the NCSE (NCSE, 2014a, p. 6) for:

clear and agreed protocols operated with an appropriate level of oversight, by the relevant State agencies (NEPS, HSE and NCSE) and the development of clear descriptors for use by NEPS psychologists and health professionals.

A second challenge for schools in respect of the ‘complex needs’ component is that only those students identified prior to starting school are counted as the new dataset. Students who might otherwise be identified as meeting this criteria after starting school are not counted in the dataset and thus not included in the school profile. Thirdly, provision is not made for the inclusion of students who move school, or come from another country, in the school profile. Circular 007/2019 (DES, 2019b) suggests that sufficient teaching resources are already

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<sup>17</sup> Significant difficulties. ‘This refers to functional difficulties which: result in the child’s ability to perform in this area being delayed or different from peers and result in restrictions in participation in most settings (home, school and community) and negatively impact performance across some other areas of function and participation’ (HSE Community Operations, 2021, p. 12).

<sup>18</sup> Highly significant difficulties. ‘This refers to functional difficulties which: result in the child’s ability to perform in this area being markedly delayed or markedly different from peers and result in restrictions in participation in all settings (home, school and community) and negatively impact performance across multiple other areas of function and participation’ (HSE Community Operations, 2021, p. 12).

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/progressing-disability/pds-programme/documents/national-policy-on-access-to-services-for-disabilities-and-developmental-delay.pdf>

provided by school's baseline allocation and educational profile to meet the needs of these students except in exceptional circumstances whereby a school profile changes significantly<sup>19</sup>. Fourthly, it is the HSE that determines to which school the additional teaching support is allocated based on the child's home address and proximity to a school, irrespective of whether the student attends that school or not. However, Circular 007/2019 (DES, 2019b, p. 10) assures schools that where it is unclear as to which school the child may be attending this was addressed by the disability service provider and the NCSE. As schools do not know which students have been identified by the HSE they have no way of ascertaining if this is indeed the case. A further element of confusion is introduced whereby the new 'complex needs' value allocated to a Senior School<sup>20</sup> is that allocated to the associated Junior School. However, in this researcher's experience this is not the case as the complex needs component allocated to the Junior/Senior schools with which the researcher is familiar differ. This difference in allocation suggests that the data set provided by the HSE to the DE is inaccurate, there are errors in the DE calculations or both. This has implications for the schools as there are now inaccuracies in the quantum of support provided which has implications for the inclusion of students with SEN.

According to Circular 007/2019 (DES, 2019b, p. 19) many pupils previously identified as 'low incidence will now be counted under the standardised test category'. This statement is reflective of the deficit model of thinking and fails to recognise that many students with LI disabilities achieve Sten scores greater than four, and thus will not have their scores on standardised tests included in that category. Some schools can offer support to students achieving in the average or above average range on standardised tests as they have the capacity to do so within their support teaching allocation. However, other schools, particularly in a DEIS context, although not exclusively so, will not be in a position to provide support to all students identified as in need of support (Travers, 2017). In effect this means that students who previously would have received support, due to the allocation of RTH, may no longer do so as the necessity to allocate support to those with the greatest needs may mean that they do not meet the school threshold for support.

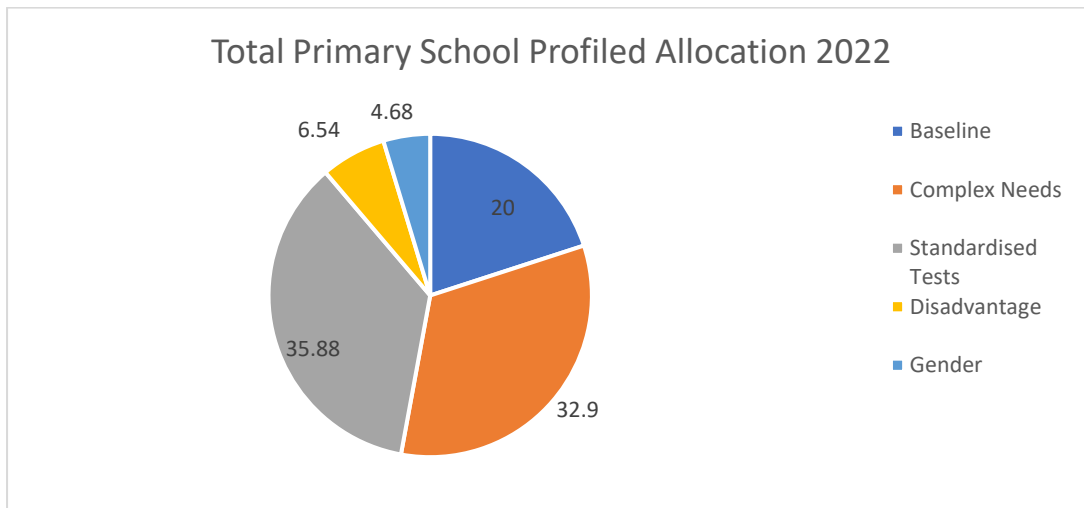
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<sup>19</sup> In such exceptional circumstances a review process is available to consider these changes to the school profile which could not have been anticipated, and to make adjustments to the school's allocation where necessary (DES, 2019b).

<sup>20</sup> In order to reflect pupil movement from a Junior School to an associated Senior School, the values being applied to the Junior School will also be applied to the Senior School for each year in which new complex needs Junior Infants are being counted (DES, 2019b).

A further challenge arises in respect of the quantum of hours provided for those students with complex needs. While it is acknowledged that this model is different than the previous model, students with the most complex needs such as Autism and Severe/Profound General Learning Difficulties were allocated five RTH under the GAM/EAL (DES, 2005a). Under this ‘new model’ an allocation of three and a half hours additional teaching support is included for students with ‘complex needs’. This change introduces a further reduction in the allocation to schools. Combined with the lack of available data from the HSE, the additional teaching allocation in respect of this component, while expected to reduce over time, is reducing at a much greater level than premised as illustrated in Figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7 Total primary school profiled allocation 2022 (DE, 2022a)**



In addition to the issues already identified, the composition of the ‘complex needs’ component may not be correct for individual schools. Following the submission of a Freedom of Information (FOI) request in respect of the ‘complex needs’ component of her school’s allocation, the researcher was informed that ‘the information does not exist’ (HSE FOI response, Jan., 2023). This contradicts the statement in Circular No 0020/2022 (DE, 2022a) which states that:

Data has been received from the HSE Children Disability Network teams on the number of new entrants with complex needs to primary schools and this data has been incorporated into the model (p. 6).

As the HSE has stated that the data do not exist, it cannot have been included in the most recent reprofiling of the school’s allocation, rendering the allocation incorrect. The following section addresses the responsibilities placed on schools to deploy this teaching support allocation to the students with the greatest needs.



#### **2.5.4 Deployment of teaching support: autonomy and flexibility**

Central to this model was the notion of the devolution of autonomy to schools to allocate this additional teaching support in accordance with their identified needs. However, under Circular letter M08/99 (DES, 1999) schools were given the autonomy to deploy resource teaching support in a flexible manner. Later, under Circular letter SP ED 24/03 the over-riding principle was for the deployment of additional teaching support ‘in the manner that best meets the needs of the pupils with special educational needs in that school’ (DES, 2003, p.3). This was reiterated in SP ED Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a), highlighting the advantages of the then new system stating that it ‘gives greater flexibility to school management in the deployment of resources’ (DES, 2005a, p.19). The allocation of EAL support teachers in 2009 was also ‘based on allowing schools flexibility in the deployment of support’ (DES, 2009, p.2). This flexibility was echoed with the combination of the ‘general allocation and language support into a single and simplified allocation,’ (DES, 2012, p. 6) and schools were given the autonomy to deploy the teaching resource between language support and learning support depending on their specific needs (DES, 2012). As students are no longer allocated a specified quantum of hours under the RTH schools have the autonomy to deploy the hours allocated flexibly under the ‘new model’ to those students most in need of support.

The devolution of this increased autonomy brings with it obligations for the school to facilitate planning, consultation, collaboration and decision-making opportunities for all SEN matters. It also requires principals to lead the process of SEN provision within the school and manage the effective deployment of teaching staff and SNAs to support the needs of students with SEN (Walsh, 2021). Given the increased responsibilities placed on school principals for the management of the complexities of SEN provision, and the lack of confidence experienced by principals and SEN teachers in embracing this autonomy (Walsh, 2021) building professional capacity is essential (Kenny, McCoy and Mihut, 2020; Walsh, 2021). Principals and SEN teachers must be confident in making judgements on resource allocation to respond appropriately to students’ needs (Rose, 2017), and Walsh (2021) argues that specific PD opportunities are required to raise teacher confidence. A national programme of continuing PD based on the five themes of good practice as set out in *Better Services, Better Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) was recommended by the Inspectorate in their review of the pilot (DES, 2016), but to date no such programme has been developed.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The original GAM was introduced to develop ‘truly inclusive schools’ (DES, 2005a), and the ‘new model’ is designed to replace it to ‘ensure that all schools can continue to meet the special educational and learning support needs of all children in their school’ (DES, 2017a, p. 2). However, no definition or guidance as to what constitutes a ‘truly inclusive school’ was provided in Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a), nor is it provided in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a), or the accompanying guidelines, leaving schools to develop their own vision of an inclusive school. It is important to emphasise that the concept of inclusion is contested, and while there are many definitions, no single definition has been universally accepted (Florian, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2010; Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Salend, 2011).

This Chapter set out to review the policy journey undertaken by the Irish education system in developing inclusive schools through the provision of additional teaching support, and highlighted the advances made in the previous three decades. The current model of support teacher allocation signifies a further move away from a diagnostic model of support teacher allocation, and increased autonomy for schools in the deployment of this teaching resource. Questions regarding the calculation of the quantum of support provided were raised centred on the use of standardised test results and the enhanced role for the HSE in respect of the allocation of this resource. The aim of this new model is to build on the aspirations of the GAM (DES, 2005a) model to build ‘truly inclusive schools’ (p.2). The purpose of this study is to examine teachers attitudes towards this model, and the impact of this model on their practice. Teachers’ perceived self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion are crucial for the implementation of inclusive classroom practices. Literature considering inclusion, teacher self-efficacy and teacher attitudes towards inclusion and the influencing factors will be discussed in Chapter Three.

# Chapter Three: Literature Review

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out a review of the literature to gain an understanding of the broad area of inclusion and the provision of support for students with SEN which is the focus of this study. The theoretical framework within which this study is situated is also set out. The research questions consider teachers' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion and their implications for practice, therefore the initial investigation of the literature concentrated on these areas whilst also considering the challenges inclusion presents for the teacher in the classroom, and the factors influencing teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The search process for the literature review began by using the online databases EBSCO, ERIC, Education Source, and Academic Search Complete using the words 'inclusion' 'special education' 'inclusive education' 'funding models', 'teachers' attitudes' and 'teachers' beliefs'. As the study was focused on the provision of additional teaching support words such as 'pedagogy' 'intervention'. 'strategies to support students with SEN' were not included in the search process. The initial search was followed by a more focused search of journals specific to the field of inclusion and special education such as the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* (JORSEN), and the *British Journal of Special Education* (BJSE) spanning the years from 2010 to 2023. As the context for the study was Irish based searches in Irish journals such as *Irish Educational Studies*, *REACH*, *Journal of Special needs Education in Ireland*, and *Irish Teachers' Journal* were also conducted. In addition recent handbooks relating to inclusion and SEN such as *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education* (Florian, 2013), and collections of articles on inclusive education such as *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* were explored for suitable chapters pertaining to inclusion and inclusive education. This enabled the researcher to read current research around the broad area under investigation and revealed a number of different aspects of inclusion and inclusive education that had not been considered initially, for example, teacher self-efficacy as a factor influencing teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. These were then included in further searches for consideration in the literature review.

Section 3.2 examines the literature on inclusion, inclusive education and special education. Section 3.3 sets out an in-depth consideration of Hornby's (2014) theory of *inclusive special education* articulating the theoretical framework and lens through which this study is situated. While there are a host of factors influencing teacher attitudes, teacher self-

efficacy is a strong predictor of teacher attitudes to inclusion (Forlin, Sharma and Loreman, 2014; Sharma and Nuttal, 2016) impacting on teacher practice and perceptions of their own competence in effectively supporting students with SEN. The literature regarding teacher self-efficacy and teachers' attitudes and the impact on inclusive practice is explored and critiqued in Section 3.4. Section 3.5 considers influencing factors such as teacher related variables, child related variables and environmental variables upon which the successful inclusion of children with SEN depends (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Ewing, Monsen and Kielblock, 2018). As teacher willingness to include students varies according to SEN type (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2010, 2011; de Boer et al., 2012; Armstrong, 2014) the literature on issue of labels and categories and their relevance to inclusive education will also be addressed.

### **3.2 Inclusion, inclusive education and special education**

As set out in Chapter One the definition of the term inclusion as used in this study is that proposed by the NCSE consultative forum whereby inclusion is seen as a process of:

- Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities and
- Removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school (Winter and O'Raw, 2010, p. 39).

The definition of the term special education as used in this study is 'a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring ... disability' (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 1). This section presents the origins and understandings of the terms inclusion, inclusive education and special education as discussed in the literature. Inclusion or inclusive education is widely acknowledged as one of the most controversial issues regarding the education of children with SEN (Kauffman and Hallahan, 2005; Slee, 2011; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b). The concept of inclusion has been influenced by social, political, and economic perspectives (Thomas and Vaughan, 2004; Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). The adoption of the term inclusion is relatively recent, coming into use after the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), but it is based on old and established values. According to Norwich (2013), it can be seen to 'represent a contemporary mixture of the values of equal opportunity, social respect and solidarity' (p. 2), and has undertones relating to self-worth, and educational and social values (Meegan and MacPhail, 2006). Ameson, Allan, and Simonson (2009) identify the values of access and quality, equity and social justice, democratic values and participation, and the balance between

unity/diversity of equal opportunity as being associated with inclusion. This mix of values contributes to the ambiguities in the interpretation and meaning of the term inclusion (Barton, 2003).

The term inclusion evolved from and superseded the term ‘integration’. The goal of integration was to ensure that children with disabilities had the right to be educated in mainstream schools alongside their peers. However, the onus was on the student to fit in (Meegan and MacPhail, 2006; MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007), and thus focused on those students with disabilities which deemed them least difficult to include, and mainstream schools remained largely unchanged. Integration, in essence, failed to achieve its aim and thus a new approach was required (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

## **Inclusion**

In contrast to integration, inclusion is a more philosophical approach responding to the diverse needs of all students (Mac Ruairc, 2013), involving a process of reform and a whole school approach (Mittler, 2000). Internationally it was first associated with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States of America (USA), later becoming associated with developments within the field of special education, referring to ‘the process of educating children with disabilities in the regular education classrooms of their neighbourhood schools – the schools they would attend if they did not have a disability – and providing them with the necessary services and supports’ (Rafferty, Boettcher and Griffin, 2001, p. 266). Inclusion has a strong intuitive, ethical appeal; it was argued that it was the right thing to do, and the term has been widely adopted, due to it being viewed as a ‘good thing’ despite the ambiguities and various definitions (Norwich, 2013a).

Some inclusion theorists argue that inclusion is not a monolithic concept; that there is a ‘multiplicity of inclusions’ so that it makes sense to talk about ‘inclusions’, in the plural’ (Dyson, 1999). The potential for the ‘multiple and conflicting perspectives on inclusion’ (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 32) to act as barriers to inclusion in national policy, and to the development of inclusive schools has also been recognised. Despite the multiplicity of ‘inclusions’ identified by the participants in their study, Graham and Spandagou (2011) found ‘that “inclusion” and “integration” mean the same thing in New South Wales government schools’ (p. 233), and argue that a policy of inclusion should not be open to interpretation or the resolve of individual principals. The complex nature of inclusion which is highly contested and the challenges presented by the lack of a universally accepted definition have

been recognised by many (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou, 2010; Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Salend, 2011; Hornby, 2014; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b; Singal and Muthukrishna, 2014; Rose et al., 2015). Furthermore, different words can have different meanings across countries, cultures, and individuals, making a precise definition difficult (Meegan and MacPhail, 2006). Even within schools where colleagues use the same terminology their understandings may be different (Ekins, 2013), influencing the way the student is included in their classrooms and in the school itself. Norwich ( 2013, p. 16) points out that ‘Inclusion as a concept and value is now recognized as complex with multiple meanings’, and ‘its definition and use are seriously problematic’ (Warnock, Norwich and Terzi, 2010. p. 10).

Of concern to many writers in the field of special education has been that of placement, with many advocating a particular view of inclusion, often termed ‘full inclusion’ which calls for all students irrespective of their needs, or abilities to be educated in the mainstream classroom alongside their peers (Westwood, 2018). Advocates of full inclusion suggest that ‘place’ is of foremost importance with other dimensions of special education such as the child’s instructional need deemed less important. However, this view of inclusion is contested, with Warnock (2005) concluding that the concept of inclusive education should be reconsidered and reimagined to allow children with SEN to be included in the ‘...common educational enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof’ (Warnock, Norwich and Terzi, 2010, p. 32). Kauffman et al., (2020, p. 80) also argue that place is only one dimension of special education and that while the location of instruction is important, ‘addressing the instructional and support needs of all children with disabilities is very complex regardless of where it occurs’. Similar views regarding the ideology of full inclusion are put forward by other writers who argue that a diversity of placements is required to provide an appropriate education for students with SEN (Kauffman, 1995, 1995; Hornby, 2014; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b). This vision of full inclusion has according to Kauffman and Hornby (2020) been promoted by some senior academics in the field of special education despite the:

widely reported concerns of teachers and parents, and the lack of research evidence for the advantages of inclusive education for some children over traditional special education provision and placements (p. 258).

Although full inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools was identified as a goal of the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000), it has been described as ‘impossible to achieve in practice’ (Hornby, 2015, p. 236). It is argued that this conception of inclusive education or ‘full inclusion’ is ideological (Bailey and du Plessis, 1998), and results in the

sacrifice of children for ideology (Kauffman and Hallahan, 2005; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b; Hornby, 2015). Indeed, Cooper and Jacobs (2011, p.6) go so far as to suggest that promoting ‘the delusion that being present in a school equates with being socially and educationally included, is one of the most dishonest and insidious forms of exclusion’.

Salend (2011, p. 39) distinguishes between inclusion and special education, defining inclusion as:

a philosophy that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging and community.

According to this definition, inclusion is characterised by: a philosophy of acceptance and belonging, valuing the education of students in high-quality schools alongside their peers, in mainstream classrooms in their local schools, underpinned by a collaborative framework of student, family, education, and community collaboration (Hornby, 2014).

### **Special education needs**

A precise definition of SEN is also difficult and like the term ‘inclusion’ the term “special educational needs” has been discussed extensively in the literature and many definitions proposed (DES, 2007b) . From a sociological perspective, the concept of special education has been criticised for many decades (Tomlinson, 1982, 1985; Booth and Ainscow, 2011). Tomlinson (1985) argues that the term serves little educational purposes and that it has ‘become an ideological rationalisation for those who have the power to shape and define the expanding special education system and have vested interests in this expansion’ (p.163).

In distinguishing between inclusion and special education Salend (2011, p. 39) defines special education as follows:

Special education involves delivering and monitoring a specially designed and coordinated set of comprehensive, research-based instructional and assessment practices and related services to students with learning, behavioral, emotional, physical, health, or sensory disabilities.

In contrast to inclusive education, special education Hornby (2014) argues, is characterised by several different factors including individual assessment, planning, and target setting underpinned by collaborative partnerships. This is followed by intensive intervention from specialist teachers using evidence-based instructional practices which are then monitored and evaluated. A similar characterisation of special education is posited by Desforges and Lindsay (2010) who suggest that a greater emphasis be placed on curriculum-based methods with assessment focused on skill levels, interventions planned to move the child forward, and

progress monitored after a period of teaching. They also advise that a system where there is ‘an obligation on professionals to coordinate their assessment and professional opinions’ (Desforges and Lindsay, 2010, p. 13) is required, and they recommend collaboration between mainstream and special educators, and outside professionals such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, and parents. As already indicated, the philosophies underpinning inclusion and special education are fundamentally different (Kauffman and Hornby, 2020), and Hornby (2014, 2015) argues that a different vision is called for to ensure the effective education of children with SEN.

### **3.3 Theoretical framework: Inclusive special education**

This section explores the theoretical framework and lens through which this study is contextualised. Theoretical frameworks can be used to guide the researcher by suggesting concepts and relationships to explore, helping them to ‘see’ and understand aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Anfara Jr. and Mertz, 2015). While the theoretical framework may provide a map for qualitative exploration the researcher must still use their own skills and judgement to analyse the data, and not be constrained by the framework. In this way the framework provides an initial guide to the researcher and will assist the researcher in answering the research questions. However, the researcher must maintain a reflexive stance when analysing the data, to maximise the utility of the framework without fitting the data to the framework (Garvey and Jones, 2021). Given the complexities of the concept of inclusion, inclusive education and special education it was necessary to identify an appropriate theoretical framework as a lens through which to view this study. Initially Lani Florian’s concept of inclusive pedagogy (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian and Beaton, 2017) was considered. Inclusive pedagogy is a pedagogical response to individual differences between students. It rejects the notion that it is helpful to base teaching approaches on categories of learners and rejects the limitations on learning that ‘are often inadvertently placed on children when they are judged ‘less able’ (Florian, 2010 p. 69). As this study was focused on teacher’s attitudes towards inclusion it was a suitable framework, however, this approach did not consider the policy dimension, which was also relevant to this study, and was thus rejected as the theoretical lens for this study.

As the researcher was interested in examining the ways in which DE policy is mediated in mainstream primary schools consideration was next given to the theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Ball, 1994). This too was rejected as an appropriate framework as it did not encapsulate the complexities of the research topic and thus a broader



search for an appropriate theoretical lens was undertaken. Given that this study was focused on the way in which DE policy is mediated and applied practically in context encompassing inclusion and special education Gary Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education* was then considered as it addressed inclusion at both a systems level and local school level.

The two differing philosophies associated with inclusion and special education have led Hornby to call for a reconceptualization of inclusive education. He argues that the policy of 'full inclusion', 'with its vision of all children being educated in mainstream classrooms for all of their time at school is theoretically unsound and practically impossible to achieve' (Hornby, 2014, p. 2). He suggests that this is because it is likely that there will always be children with SEN who cannot be effectively educated in mainstream classrooms. This view, which is not in accord with Article 24 of the UNCRPD, is aligned with the approach adopted by the DE in Ireland where a continuum of provision is available from full time placement in a mainstream class with support to fulltime placement in a special school. Indeed, Hornby and Hyatt (2017) suggest that Article 24 may not be in the best interest of all children with SEN. The limits to the successful education of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms are also articulated by others (Evans and Lunt, 2002; Thomas and Loxley, 2007; Hansen, 2012; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b; Kauffman and Hornby, 2020). Based on the differing positions, Hornby (2014) argues that it is necessary to have a 'new more realistic vision for the education of children with SEND'<sup>21</sup> (p. 2).

He proposes that this is best achieved through the development of a new theoretical approach, *inclusive special education*, synthesising the ideology, philosophy and values of inclusive education and special education in order to ensure effective education for all children with SEN. This new model, Hornby insists:

is about providing the best possible instruction for all children with SEND, in the most appropriate setting, throughout all stages of a child's education, with the aim of achieving the highest possible level of inclusion in the community post-school. Its focus is on effectively including as many children as possible in mainstream schools, along with the availability of a continuum of placement options (Hornby, 2015, p. 247).

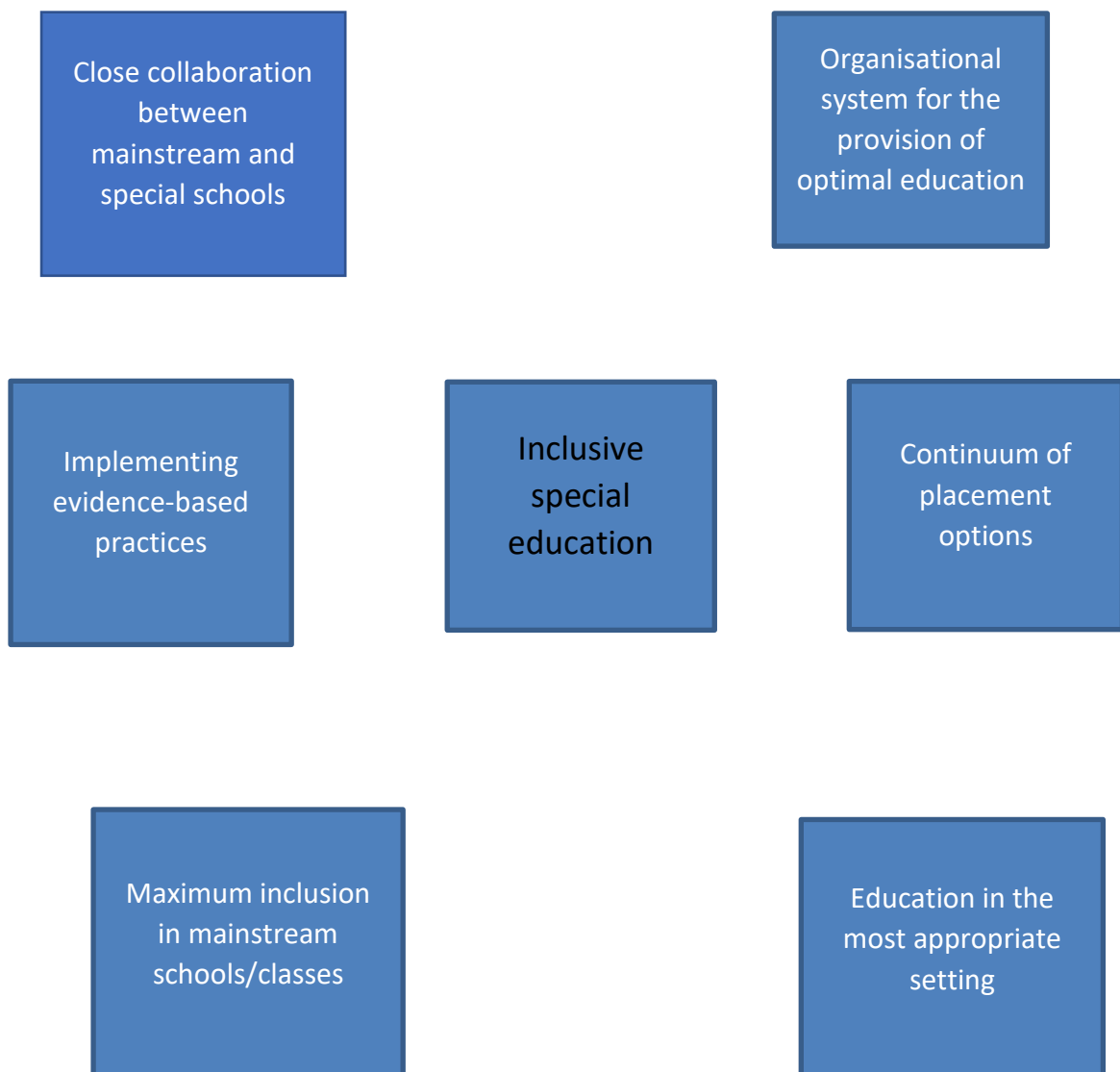
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<sup>21</sup> Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Central to Hornby’s (2014) vision is an emphasis on the ‘best possible education... in the most appropriate setting’ (p.13), maximising the potential for inclusion in their community for the adult who as a child has experienced an appropriate education.

There are six guiding principles informing Hornby’s (2014) model of *inclusive special education* which are illustrated in Figure 3.1 and fully outlined in [Appendix B](#). The term *inclusive special education* has, according to Hornby (2014), been used previously to describe the special education system in Finland, but contends that while his theory includes some of the elements of that system, ‘it is more comprehensive in addressing the education of all children with SEND in mainstream schools, special schools and special classes within mainstream schools’ (Hornby, 2015, p. 236). Each of these principles will be considered in turn below commencing with the ‘organisational system for the provision of optimal education’.

**Fig. 3. 1 Components of inclusive special education (Hornby, 2014, p. 14)**



### 3.3.1 Organisational system for the provision of optimal education

Hornby (2014) highlights the importance of organisational systems and procedures at all levels of the education system, underpinned by legislation and an inspection system to ensure the implementation of policy. This, Hornby (2014) argues, is essential in order to ensure the best possible education for all children with SEN, and he sets out five aspects to this at system level.

- National policies
- Teacher education policy
- Whole school policies
- Effective organisational procedures at school level
- Whole school strategies to support children with SEN.

Firstly, it is important that there is a clear policy underpinned by legislation specifying the rights of children with SEN. Secondly, initial teacher education should provide a thorough grounding in teaching children with SEN and ongoing relevant PD should be available to all teachers throughout their careers. Thirdly, Hornby (2014) highlights the importance of whole-school policies and procedures to respond to the needs of students with SEN. This, he argues, is key to the implementation of *inclusive special education*, with specialist support teachers providing evidence-based interventions informed by strengths-based approaches to optimise learning for all students. These whole school policies should also provide for collaboration with parents in order to facilitate the holistic development of students with SEN (Hornby, 2011b; Hornby, Gable and Evans, 2013). Fourthly, Hornby (2014) places an emphasis on the implementation of organisational procedures by school staff educated in the area of *inclusive special education*. The identification and assessment of children with SEN must be in place, with systems for monitoring and reviewing student progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. Finally, whole school strategies, and appropriately educated staff who are competent to deliver evidence based interventions through individualised educational programmes to support the holistic development of children with SEN, are integral to *inclusive special education* (Hornby, 2014). The importance of effective teachers skilled in the use of appropriate assessment approaches to more accurately assess and support student learning is also highlighted in the literature (Salend and Whittaker, 2012). This coupled with the support of outside specialists such as psychologists and specialist teachers to assist the school in the development and implementation of whole

school practices to enable the holistic development of children with SEN is integral to *inclusive special education* (Hornby, 2014, 2015).

### **3.3.2 Continuum of placement options**

Whilst a key principle of *inclusive special education* is the effective education of as many children as possible in mainstream schools, it is recognised that this is not possible for all children, particularly for those children with more significant and complex needs. Indeed it is argued by some that there is a minority of students who benefit from being educated in learning support rooms<sup>22</sup> or special classes for some or all of the time, or from being educated in special schools (Warnock, 2005; Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b; NCSE, 2014a; Kauffman and Hornby, 2020). In order to provide the best possible education for all students with SEN, Hornby (2014) argues that there should be a continuum of provision to meet their needs, ranging from full time education in a ‘mainstream class with differentiation of work by the class teacher’ (p. 15) to full time education in a special school. In tandem with a continuum of placement options, the importance of flexibility to move between placement options to ensure education in the most appropriate setting at all stages in the child’s education is advocated (Hornby, 2014, 2015).

### **3.3.3 Education in the most appropriate setting**

The central premise of this theory is the provision of high-quality instruction in the most appropriate setting for the child, and as already stated, focused on the effective inclusion of as many children as possible in mainstream schools. Hornby (2014) emphasises that children must be able to move flexibly between different placement options as the need arises, in order to ensure that the child has access to an appropriate education throughout their educational journey. The opportunity for the provision of education in the most appropriate setting is premised on the availability of a continuum of placement options within the school system so that this need can be realised (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020). This is critical to ensure that children are, at all times, being educated in a setting that best meets their learning needs (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020).

### **3.3.4 Maximum inclusion in mainstream schools/classes**

In order to effectively educate as many children as possible in mainstream schools it is essential that teachers have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN.

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<sup>22</sup> Learning support rooms: Room where supplementary teaching in literacy or numeracy is provided by a learning support teacher (DES, 2000)

Hornby (2014) argues that this is only possible if teachers have a sound knowledge of the different types of SEN and the practical strategies to teach students with SEN effectively in mainstream classrooms. The provision of high quality, school-centred, teacher PD is also vital to ensure the most effective and flexible use of resources, and to support teachers to monitor student progress (Hornby, 2014, 2015). Collaboration and differentiation are also central to the provision of high-quality teaching for children with SEN in mainstream schools, supporting shared decision making and distributed leadership (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020).

### **3.3.5 Implementing evidence-based practices**

The use of evidence-based practices to optimise learning for all students is emphasised in the literature (Mitchell and Sutherland, 2020) and underpins this *inclusive special education* theory. Hornby (2014) emphasises that teachers must be able to identify children with SEN, and ensure they are using sound teaching practices and strategies to facilitate optimal learning for all students. He also insists that teachers must be able to distinguish between those interventions that are effective in supporting students with SEN, such as peer tutoring, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and co-operative learning (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020) and those strategies that have been found to be ineffective, such as facilitated communication (Hornby and Witte, 2014; Kauffman and Badar, 2014a). Teachers should also be skilled in the use of appropriate assessment approaches (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020) to monitor progress and inform instructional practices to ensure children's educational needs are met.

### **3.3.6 Close collaboration between mainstream and special schools**

A fundamental element of Hornby's model is collaboration; with collaboration between parents, school staff and outside agencies considered essential. Enabling the close collaboration between mainstream schools and special schools is also key. Hornby (2014, 2015) proposes that the development of these collaborative relationships will support the education of children with SEN in mainstream provision. Hornby (2020) argues that special schools are well placed to provide this support due to the expertise and experience of teachers in special schools in dealing with more complex levels of SEN. Hornby (2014) also places a strong emphasis on the development of inter-personal skills, a necessary prerequisite for effective consultation and collaboration, in addition to the skills needed for empowering and facilitating the development of colleagues and parents of children with SEN (Hornby, 2014, 2015, 2020).

### 3.3.7 The implications of *Inclusive Special Education* for this study

Hornby (2014, 2015) sets out his vision for inclusive special education and the benefits it may bring to children with SEN and the advancement of inclusive practices. In consideration of the six principles proposed in Hornby's (2014) *inclusive special education system*, Ireland appears to have the foundation stones in place, with a continuum of placement provision available and facilitating the placement of students with SEN in mainstream schools.

The importance of legislative provision specifying the rights of children with SEN as advocated by Hornby (2014, 2015) is addressed firstly in the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) and further legislative provision as discussed in Chapter Two. The importance of whole-school policies and procedures to respond to the needs of students with SEN as highlighted by Hornby (2014, 2015) is directed principally by the DE through circulars and guidance documents. The most recent guidance document, *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs* (DES, 2017b) was issued in tandem with *Circular No. 0013/2017 Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching* (DES, 2017a) which gave effect to the 'new model' which is the subject of this study. Guidance on inclusion has also been provided for schools in the *Inclusive Education Framework* (NCSE, 2011) in order 'to provide clear signposts on their journey towards inclusion' (p. 11). This document proposes to facilitate reflection on inclusive practices, promote a collaborative approach to the implementation of inclusion, and sets out a co-ordinated response to the educational challenges that the inclusion of students with SEN may bring. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which was established under the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) is available to schools to provide support and guidance, however, NEPS has been consistently understaffed and not all schools can avail of their services (Desforges and Lindsay, 2010; O'Brien, 2016; Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI), 2020). Support from specialist teachers is also provided to schools by the NCSE which has recently been reorganised on a regional basis in order to deliver support more effectively (NCSE, 2022). These supports enable schools to provide a more inclusive education as posited by Hornby (2014) in his theory of *inclusive special education*.

(Hornby, 2014, 2015) argues for a continuum of provision to support students with SEN, from education in a mainstream class with support, to full time education in a special school. This proposal is similar to that advocated by the *Report of the Special Education*

*Review Committee* (Government of Ireland, 1993) which also favoured education in the mainstream setting for as many children as possible. In tandem with a continuum of placement options, the importance of flexibility to move between placement options to ensure education in the most appropriate setting at all stages in the child's education is advocated (Hornby, 2014, 2015). Although this type of provision was endorsed in the White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* (DES, 1995), and a continuum of placement options is available in Ireland, this flexibility is not currently widely available. Whilst most recently the policy advice provided to the Minister for Education by the NCSE in the progress report *Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes: An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society?* (NCSE, 2019) stated that they

cannot draw definitive conclusions, from the literature, that one type of educational placement is better than another for children and young people with special educational needs. We can tentatively suggest that some of the more methodologically robust studies appear to indicate that students with special educational needs who are educated in mainstream settings have better short and long term outcomes than those who were in a special educational placements (NCSE, 2019, p. 5).

This is hardly a ringing endorsement for the education of all children in mainstream classrooms and is at variance with the research cited by Hornby (2014, 2015) 'which suggests that children with SEND who experience inclusive education can often be disadvantaged in the long term' (Hornby, 2014 p. 29). With the opening of a number of special schools (NCSE, 2019) and the growth in the numbers of special classes attached to mainstream schools, particularly classes for children with autism (NCSE, 2020, 2021, 2022), the DE appears to be in favour of maintaining the current continuum of placement provision. Indeed, the NCSE (2019) goes on to state that 'notwithstanding Ireland's commitments under the UNCRPD, the NCSE is of the view that the best interests of children and their needs should be fundamental and first' which aligns with a key principle of Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*.

The increase in the number of special classes in mainstream schools affords greater opportunities for moving between placement options, albeit in a limited fashion. There is currently no option to flexibly move between mainstream schools and special schools, which can be an impediment to parental choice in choosing a school for their child with SEN. Although Ware et al., (2009), found that there was considerable dissatisfaction with the current policy which prohibits dual enrolment, and whilst there was a recognition that such a

policy presented many challenges not least resource issues, the majority of the participants in that study were in favour of some form of dual placement. The implementation of a clear policy of dual enrolment would address some of the limitations regarding students ability to move flexibly between different placement options and facilitate greater collaboration between mainstream schools and special schools.

A key principle advocated by Hornby (2014, 2015) in his vision for *inclusive special education* is collaboration between schools and parents, and between mainstream schools and special schools. Collaboration between schools and parents is consistently highlighted in the Irish context and the importance of parent/school partnership in the education of their children valued (DES, 1995; Ireland, 1998; Shiel, Morgan and Larney, 1998; DES, 2000; NCSE, 2011; DE, 2020). In schools with special classes collaboration between mainstream and special class staff is integral to inclusion but there is little or no formal collaboration between mainstream schools and special schools. While much has been achieved in the development of special education in Ireland, the path to inclusion has been taken with caution, and Ireland has been slow to develop a more inclusive school system (MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007). The foundation stones of Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education* already exists within the Irish education system, with a continuum of placement provision available that encompasses facilitating the placement of students with SEN in mainstream schools (NCSE, 2019). Consequently, this theory has been chosen as the appropriate lens through which to conduct this study, supporting the design of the study and facilitating the analysis of the data. Irrespective of the time taken to develop inclusive schools, a key theme emerging from the literature relates to teachers' perceived self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion which are crucial for the implementation of inclusive classroom practices. Literature considering teacher self-efficacy and the factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are discussed in the following section.

### **3.4 Teacher perceived self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive education**

While nationally and internationally there is a political commitment to inclusive education, the vision of policymakers can sometimes be discrepant with the views of teachers who are required to implement it (Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab, 2020). Inclusive education is more than simply the geographical placement of children in mainstream classes, and it presents many challenges for teachers (Florian and Becirevic, 2011; McKay, 2016; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019). Research has demonstrated that teachers are central to the process, and



their self-efficacy and attitudes are crucial (Wilson et al., 2016; Hellmich, Löper and Görel, 2019; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019; Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab, 2020). It is therefore vital to understand the factors associated with teachers' perceived self-efficacy and attitudes as they pertain to inclusive education. A number of studies have concluded that teacher self-efficacy is linked to teacher attitudes, and is a significant predictive variable in explaining teachers' intentions to include students with SEN in mainstream classrooms (Weisel and Dror, 2006; Savolainen et al., 2012; Sharma and Sokal, 2016; Hellmich, Löper and Görel, 2019; Miesera et al., 2019; Savolainen, Malinen, and Schwab, 2020; Saloviita, 2020b). In a recent study on teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes conducted over a period of three years Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab (2020) found that teachers' attitudes are stable, and that teachers' self-efficacy affects teachers' attitudes, rather than the reverse. A total of 1,326 teachers from Finnish schools participated in the study. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were surveyed five times over the timescale of the study and their attitudes were surveyed three times over the same period using an electronic survey. The findings suggest that increasing teacher self-efficacy for inclusive practices is likely to affect their attitudes towards inclusion positively. Firstly, literature on teachers' perceived self-efficacy will be explored, followed by a critique of the literature on teachers' attitudes and the influencing factors as they relate to inclusive education.

#### **3.4.1 Teachers' perceived self-efficacy in relation to inclusion and inclusive education**

The concept of efficacy is derived from Bandura's social-cognitive theory who identified self-efficacy in his seminal study '*Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change*' (Bandura, 1977). Within this theory, self-efficacy is defined as an individual's 'belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (p. 3). According to this theory, self-efficacy is influenced by the dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural and environmental factors (Lee et al., 2018). It is one of the most powerful motivational predictors of how well a person will perform any task (Heslin and Klehe, 2006), influencing peoples' choice of activity and the time and effort they will expend in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1977). Within the context of this theory 'a teacher's belief in his or her own capability to prompt student engagement and learning, even when students are difficult or unmotivated, has been labelled "teacher self-efficacy" (Lazarides and Warner, p. 1, 2020). Bandura (1993, 1997) argued that teachers' perceived teaching self-efficacy influences their judgements about the teaching tasks they engage in, the level of academic progress their students achieve, as well as the kind

of learning environment they create for their students. In relation to inclusion it refers to teachers' beliefs in their abilities to use differentiated instruction, and effective and innovative teaching strategies (Wilson et al., 2016; Kiel, Braun, Muckenthaler, Heimlich and Weiss, 2020).

Overall, national and international research indicates low levels of teacher self-efficacy in relation to inclusive practices (Winter, 2006; Travers et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2015). Many teachers believe they do not have the necessary knowledge to support students with SEN effectively, and further they lack the confidence to do so (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011). Teachers with higher levels of teaching self-efficacy in respect of inclusive practices have been found to be more willing to include children with SEN than teachers with lower teaching self-efficacy levels (Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2014; Kiel, et al., 2020). The research also suggests that teachers with high teaching self-efficacy attribute students' difficulties to external factors, in contrast to teachers with lower teaching self-efficacy who tend to see learning difficulties as attributable to within-child factors (Vaz et al., 2015). Differences in teachers' beliefs influence their practice. Where teachers perceive children with disabilities as 'problem children,' or focus on the pathological nature of their disabilities, they do not utilise inclusive pedagogical practices and those students received less encouragement and support than other students (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2014). This contrasts with teachers who consider the external factors which influence learning, and consequently design appropriate instructional interventions for their students (Jordan and Stanovich, 2003; Gibbs and Elliott, 2015). Prior teaching experience of working with students with SEN was also found to be a negative predictor of teaching self-efficacy in respect of inclusive practices for teachers in Finland, South-Africa and Hong Kong (Savolainen et al., 2012; Chao, Forlin and Ho, 2016). It appears perhaps that increased knowledge and experience of working with students with SEN results in teachers being more rather than less concerned about their ability to do so (Chao, Forlin and Ho, 2016). A further contributing factor to low levels of teacher self-efficacy in relation to inclusive practices is the belief that special education is somewhat 'different' to that provided in the mainstream classroom. The following section will discuss teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

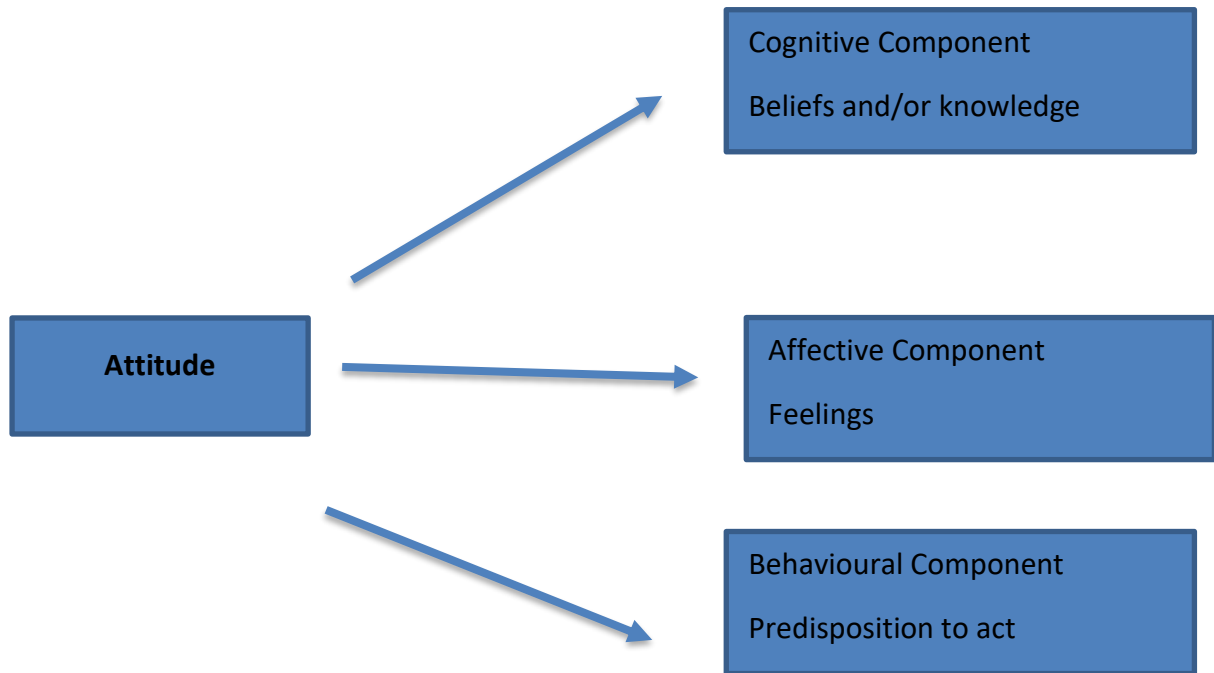
### **3.4.2 Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive education**

As with teachers' self-efficacy, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education has been studied extensively (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011; Hellmich, Löper and Görel, 2019; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019;

Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab, 2020). The assumption that attitudes can explain or even predict behaviour is well accepted, and the concept of attitudes is often discussed within the context of the theory of planned behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen, 1991, 2001). In examining teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, the term should firstly be defined. However, this is not easy, as there are many inconsistent definitions (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011), and other terms such as beliefs, expectations or intentions are sometimes used synonymously with the term attitudes (Schwab, 2018). From a sociopsychological perspective, a broad definition of an attitude is provided by Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) as 'a measure of an individual's viewpoint or disposition towards a particular person, thing, or idea' (p. 633), or as a psychological tendency that 'can be regarded as a type of bias that predisposes the individual toward evaluative responses that are positive or negative' (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p. 2). This conception of attitude according to Eagly and Chaiken (2007) 'distinguishes between the inner tendency that is attitude and the evaluative responses that express attitudes' (p. 582). An alternative definition of attitudes is proffered by Triandis (1971, p. 266) who defines attitudes as 'learned predispositions reflecting how favorable or unfavorable people are towards other people, objects or events'.

However, the most cited model according to Van den Berg et al., (2006) is the three component model of Eagly and Chaiken (1993, 1998) as illustrated in Figure 3.2. This model encompasses cognitive, affective and behavioural elements. The cognitive component consists of the beliefs and/or knowledge an individual holds about the object, such as educating children with SEN in inclusive classrooms, and knowledge about disabilities. The affective component is reflected in feelings around confidence, competence, and frustration, while the behavioural component indicates an individual's behavioural intentions towards the attitude object, such as the teachers willingness to change the way they teach when they have students with SEN in their classrooms (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011; de Boer et al., 2012). The three components are interactive, influencing the way in which a person perceives the world, thus teachers' attitudes are influenced by their own experiences, pupil variables and environmental variables (Leatherman and Niemeyer, 2005).

**Figure 3. 2 Eagly and Chaiken Three component model of attitude** (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993)



However, Eagly and Chaiken's (1993, 1998) three-component model is not universally accepted, with researchers such as Ajzen (2005) preferring a two-component, or one-component model arguing that a single factor can explain most of the variance present in the data.

Whilst acknowledging that the number of attitude components is a matter of debate, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) used the Eagly and Chaiken (1993) three-component framework in their review of the literature on teacher attitudes to inclusion. Although they conclude that it was a useful framework to review the results of the studies, many of the selected studies lacked a theoretical basis which made their interpretation of the scales challenging (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011; de Boer et al., 2012). Attitudes are multi-faceted, and teachers' and principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN (Ewing, Monsen and Kielblock, 2018) vary, with some studies stating that teachers are positive towards inclusive education, whereas other research determines that teachers are not so positive. The mixed findings on teachers' attitudes may possibly be attributed to the inclusion of different elements of cognition, affect and behaviour in the questionnaires used by the researchers, in addition to socially desirable responses from participants. In their review of the literature, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) found that overall teachers demonstrate neutral or indeed negative attitudes towards inclusion. These findings deviate

from the earlier findings of Avramidis and Norwich (2002) who following a review of a large body of United Kingdom (UK) and international literature on integration/inclusion, reported that while teachers were positive towards the general philosophy of inclusive education they found no evidence of acceptance of ‘full inclusion’ for all pupils. Despite the mixed findings from studies, the research evidence is that teachers’ attitudes have an impact on teaching and learning for students with SEN, and understanding these attitudes is key to improving them and thus enabling the development of more inclusive classrooms (Monsen and Frederickson, 2004; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Schwab, 2018; Avramidis et al., Strogilos, 2019). A number of factors such as teacher related variables, child-related variables, and environmental variables were identified as influencing teachers’ attitudes. The literature relating to this is explored in the following section.

### **3.5 Factors influencing teachers’ and principals’ attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive education**

The second theme that emerged from the literature was the factors that influence teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. The first key factor relates to teacher related variables which include demographic variables such as gender, age, and contact with people with disabilities. This is followed by an exploration of the literature on teacher education and experience, and the belief that specialist pedagogy, strategies and approaches are required to teach students with SEN.

#### **3.5.1 Teacher-related variables**

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) identify a host of teacher-related variables, such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, grade level and contact with people with disabilities which may impact on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. The focus of their literature review was on attitudes towards the inclusion of students with significant and complex needs rather than those students with learning difficulties in the mild to moderate range who are usually placed in mainstream classrooms. In addition, some studies reviewed investigated attitudes to integration, and other studies to inclusion, The different understandings of these terms may have influenced the findings of the various studies, and they may not be directly comparable.

#### **Demographic teacher-related variables**

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) report that for gender, age, teaching experience and grade level taught the findings were inconsistent. Likewise, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2012) conclude that none of the variables they explored (i.e. gender, years of teaching

experience, and experience with inclusive education) affected teacher attitudes towards students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Syndrome or a cognitive disability in a regular primary classroom. Weak associations between age and teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were reported by Saloviita (2020a, 2020b), although Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008), Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) and Vaz et al., (2015) found that the attitude of younger teachers was more positive than that of older teachers. A number of possible reasons could account for this, with younger teachers having experienced the presence of students with SEN during their own schooling, or a greater emphasis on inclusion in their initial teacher education programmes. In Ireland, Butler and Shevlin (2001) conclude that gender, age and professional experience were not significant factors influencing post-primary teacher attitudes to inclusion with similar findings reported by de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011), Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) and Leonard and Smyth (2020).

The research findings in relation to contact were also mixed. Studies suggest that principals or teachers acquainted with disabled persons, or working with disabled persons, are more favourably disposed towards integration or inclusion than those who had not (Parasuram, 2006; Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011). Researchers such as Forlin (1995) suggest that social contact might not promote a more favourable disposition towards inclusion, and other studies conclude that no significant correlation exists between contact with people with SEN and attitudes towards inclusion (Butler and Shevlin, 2001). The literature on teacher education and teacher experience and the impact on inclusive practices is discussed in the next section.

### **Teacher education and experience**

While the importance of teacher education in the area of inclusion cannot be understated, the research has shown that many teachers do not believe that their ITE prepared them to effectively include students with SEN in their classrooms (Allen, 2009; Goos et al., 2009; Bullock and Russell, 2010; O'Donnell, 2012). Teacher preparation and regular PD in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN are consistently highlighted as factors influencing teacher attitudes, and the impact of additional teacher education programmes on both student teachers and serving teachers' attitudes has been the focus of much research ( de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011; McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd, 2014; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Vaz et al., 2015; Cate et al., 2018; Avramidis et al., 2019).

Research findings predominantly indicate that student teachers who participate in courses and modules on inclusive education had more positive attitudes towards inclusion than student teachers who did not complete such courses (Kim, 2011; Varcoe and Boyle, 2014; Sharma and Nuttal, 2016; Tournaki and Samuels, 2016; Goldan and Schwab, 2020). Some studies conclude that following a course on inclusion there was an improvement in teachers' level of confidence and knowledge of legislation and policy resulting in an increase in levels of efficacy among participants, irrespective of demographic background variables, or attitudes (Forlin, Sharma and Loreman, 2014). Other studies also suggest that teachers who had received long-term specialised PD in the area of inclusion were significantly more positive about the general philosophy of inclusion in comparison to teachers who had no such PD (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007). Immersing teachers in high-quality professional development has also been found to lead to improved classroom practices, facilitating collaborative practices and shared learning, benefiting all students (McLeskey et al., 2014).

However some studies have concluded that PD did not influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, with Wilkins and Nietfeld (2004) finding no differences between teachers participating in an experimental group and a control group. Leonard and Smyth (2020), in their study on Irish primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion found that professional development in SEN, and/or inclusion or type of professional development in SEN and inclusion did not influence attitudes. This is an interesting finding as in an earlier Irish study teachers reported that the 'basic requirements for inclusive practice are missing' (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013, p. 1130) and emphasised the need for initial teacher education and ongoing PD in the area of SEN.

Differences between teacher categories was found by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Saloviita (2020a, 2020b) with special education teachers more positively disposed towards inclusion than their mainstream counterparts. There are a number of possible reasons for this, with special education teachers more positively disposed to students with SEN, and consequently more positively disposed towards the concept of inclusion, or they may have had additional specialist education and experience in the area of SEN. Praisner (2003) also concludes that PD for principals in inclusion related to a more positive attitude, and that principals who had taken more topics in SEN as part of their formal teacher education were more positive towards inclusion.

Based on their findings which indicated that both teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs are stable traits which can take a long time to change, Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab (2020) recommend the development of teacher education programmes commencing with the initial teacher education phase to support changes in attitudes and efficacy. A similar recommendation was made by Avramidis et al., (2019) who suggested that ensuring teachers received PD in areas related to changing their attitudes towards the education of students with SEN and developing collaborative practices, has the potential to raise confidence in their skills in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms

The literature in relation to the belief that children with SEN require specialist pedagogy will be explored in the following section.

### **Specialist pedagogy, strategies and approaches**

The belief that children with SEN are different than their peers and require specialist pedagogical approaches (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011) perpetuates the special education divide, whereby a different form of education is required for a different type of pupil (Swan, 2000). This view has been challenged with Norwich and Lewis (2001) failing to find evidence for distinctive SEN teaching strategies and concluding that it was more useful to consider the adaptation of teaching approaches that were successful for all learners. In a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in the UK to assess the effectiveness of strategies and approaches used to teach students with SEN, it was demonstrated that;

teaching strategies and approaches are associated with, but not necessarily related directly to specific categories of special educational need (E.g. autism, learning difficulty etc) (Davis and Florian, 2004, p. 6)

Strategies and teaching approaches such as the use of technology for learners with sensory impairment, and visual reinforcement to aid verbal instructions for learners with speech and language and communication needs and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were highlighted in the literature reviewed. The authors of the report conclude that while knowledge of SEN is important, there are no distinctive teaching strategies required to teach students with SEN, although this is qualified by the recognition of the need for more focused teaching for students with SEN (Davis and Florian, 2004b).

In their review of the evidence for distinct pedagogies, Norwich and Lewis (2005, 2007) considered the interconnections between knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy in



respect of teaching learners with a range of SEN from dyslexia to severe learning difficulties, and ASD, amongst others. They contend that an understanding of effective pedagogy based on the needs of the individual child, rather than an in-depth knowledge of medical diagnostic categories, is central to effective practice for students with SEN. Mintz and Wyse (2015) broadly accept this contention; however, they argue that this is not sufficient, and argue instead, that;

such a pedagogy is likely to be more effective if it includes an openness to investigating what psychology may have to tell us about those individual needs, which will include particular pedagogic strategies specific to particular diagnostic groups (p. 1168).

In support of this view PD on such topics as the characteristics of students with disabilities and academic programming for students with disabilities was recommended by Boyle and Hernandez (2016, p. 209) ‘in order to provide on-going supports for teachers in this area’. In a similar vein Jordan (2005) maintains that while learners with ASD have common needs their individual needs can only be addressed through an understanding of ASD. Other authors such as Lindsay et al., (2013), Anglim, Prendeville and Kinsella (2018), Garrad, Rayner and Pedersen (2019) and Majoko (2019) have also posited the view that particular strategies are required for the effective teaching of students with ASD. In Ireland this perspective has been supported by the NCSE (2015) with the publication of their policy advice *Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder* which lists 34 interventions for autistic students and more recently by the DE with the publication of the *Autism Good Practice Guide for Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2022).

While Norwich and Lewis (2005, 2007) point out that there are no distinctive SEN teaching strategies or techniques that are uniquely effective for certain categories of children in terms of planning, teaching and monitoring learning with the exception of children with sensory impairments and severe learning needs, they recognise the complexity of the issue and that ‘there is much more to be done’ (p. 149). In the same vein, Davis and Florian (2004, p. 31) conclude that most authors acknowledge that teaching strategies may be ‘associated with but not necessarily related to categories of SEN’, and that teaching approaches for children with SEN could not be sufficiently differentiated from those used with all children. However, they acknowledge that there may be ‘high density’ approaches based on learners’ needs. Teaching approaches such as error-free learning, and high levels of practice to mastery are appropriate for students with SEN, although they do not differ qualitatively from teaching which does not emphasise these approaches (Norwich and Lewis, 2007). Florian

(2008) also argues that ‘teachers need to be disabused of the notion that they are not qualified to teach disabled children or others with ‘additional needs’ ... that indeed they have much of the knowledge and many of the skills required to teach all children’ (p. 206) whilst acknowledging that they may not have the confidence to put this into practice.

Another influential variable impacting teachers’ attitudes and self-efficacy identified in the literature is that of child-related variables. Central to this factor is a medical diagnosis with teachers’ attitudes differing based on the type of disability. Child-related variables are discussed in the following section.

### **3.5.2 Child-related variables**

In contrast to the mixed findings in relation to teacher related variables and their effect on teachers’ attitudes, the research consistently shows that teachers’ attitudes differ according to the type of disability. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) argue that teachers hold differing attitudes about school placement, based primarily on the nature of the students’ disabilities. There is a greater level of acceptance amongst teachers in relation to the inclusion of students with mild physical or sensory impairments, but more negative attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with complex needs, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Similarly Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) found that teachers are more inclined to accept children with physical disabilities or visual impairment than they were to accept children with hearing impairment or children who were ‘mentally disabled’ (p. 386). A review of the literature into teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education by de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) suggests that teachers are more positive towards students with physical disabilities, specific learning difficulties and visual impairment. Research also demonstrates that principals have more positive attitudes to students with sensory, physical or intellectual disabilities than students with disruptive behaviour (Wood, Evans and Spandagou, 2014). Krischler and Pit-Ten Cate (2019) reveal that teachers hold negative implicit attitudes toward students with SEN and these negative attitudes are mirrored by teachers’ concerns at the impact that challenging behaviour has on other students and the negative consequences for their well-being and education. In Ireland Day and Prunty (2015) found that the behavioural difficulties of some students was a major challenge to inclusion and Butler and Shevlin (2001) found that many teachers associate learning disabilities with behavioural problems, and they do not consider that these could be due to social or environmental factors. The next section explores the literature on the environmental variables that influence teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and the impact on teaching and learning.

### 3.5.3 Environment-related variables

A number of studies have considered the educational environmental variables that influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, with the availability of resources and supports at both classroom and school levels consistently adjudged to be associated with positive attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Goodman and Burton, 2010; Ainscow et al., 2012; Chiner and Cardona, 2013). Adequate levels of support and the provision of appropriate classroom environments are important to foster positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN (Monsen et al., 2014). A number of studies suggest that teachers' attitude towards inclusion improved when they perceived that they had enough internal and external support (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Leonard and Smyth, 2020). These supports encompassed both physical resources such as teaching materials, Information Technology (IT) equipment and an appropriate physical environment together with human resources such as special teachers, learning support assistants, and speech therapists (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Ahmmed, 2013; Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Goldan and Schwab, 2020; Leonard and Smyth, 2020).

Support and advice from specialist resource teachers were also identified in the literature as an important factor in developing positive teacher attitudes to inclusion (Kauffman, Lloyd and McGee, 1989; Hodkinson, 2009; Chiner and Cardona, 2013), enabling them to work effectively in inclusive classrooms. Positive attitudes towards inclusion were reported by teachers who benefited from the support of specialist teachers co-teaching in the classroom (Minke et al., 1996; Saloviita and Schaffus, 2016). Support from outside agencies such as psychologists was also identified as assisting schools in creating more inclusive learning environments (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013). Concerns about the lack of sufficient resources and supports have been found in other Irish studies (O'Toole and Burke, 2013; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Leonard and Smyth, 2020), with over sixty six percent of participants in Leonard and Smyth's (2020) study stating that they did not believe they had adequate resources to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASD in their classrooms. Principals expressed concern and dissatisfaction with the overall level of funding and resources they received to support students with SEN within their schools (Graham and Spandagou, 2011). Lengthy waiting times for assessment and difficulties in accessing assessments in addition to poor liaison and communication between clinicians and

school staff have implications for effective inclusion (Ní Bhroin and King, 2020; Walsh, 2021; Travers, 2023).

### **Nature of the support provided**

However, increasing the resources and providing additional PD does not necessarily change teachers' attitudes (Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Leonard and Smyth, 2020; Saloviita, 2020b). It is more complicated than that, and the type of additional resources provided is crucial. Collaboration between teachers and the provision of additional administrative support to teachers has been demonstrated to foster more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2014; Mulholland and O'Connor, 2016; Leonard and Smyth, 2020). In addition teacher collaboration is now widely accepted as key to implementing inclusive education (Friend et al., 2010; Ainscow, 2016b; Mulholland and O'Connor, 2016; Kokko, Takala and Pihlaja, 2021), although it is recognised that this is not without its challenges. School culture impacts on collaboration, and developing a collaborative culture is a difficult task requiring effective school leadership (King, 2011). Professional dialogue is fundamental to the development of a collaborative culture, and building knowledge about SEN (Kershner, 2013).

Teacher collaboration can take a number of forms, including working with other teachers in a team teaching approach, professional conversations with colleagues, (Mac Ruairc, 2016), collaboration with outside agencies and trying new approaches to include students with SEN in the classroom (Florian, 2013). Team teaching, or co-teaching has been promoted as policy in Ireland to support students with SEN within the mainstream classroom (DES, 2005a, 2017a, 2019b). It has been defined variously as 'two or more trained educators, or certified staff in one educational setting such as in a classroom for a single group of students' (Huggins, Huyghe and Iljoski, 2010), or 'the sharing of instruction by a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist in a general education class that includes students with disabilities' (Friend et al., 2010, p. 9). However, it remains a challenge for many teachers in Ireland (Murphy, 2011; Gleeson, 2012), and it is not yet fully accepted (Travers et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2015). Indeed it appears that teachers in Ireland lack a clear understanding of the different in-class approaches available (Casserly and Padden, 2018), with an overreliance on one approach, station teaching (Walsh, 2021). This indicates a need for PD regarding alternative approaches, and the lack of PD is cited as one of the reasons behind the reluctance to implement team teaching. Other factors such as personal reluctance to participate, incompatibility with another teacher (Casserly and Padden, 2018)

and finding the time to collaborate with colleagues (Travers et al., 2010; Mulholland and O'Connor, 2016; Ní Bhroin and King, 2020), have also been cited as barriers to the implementation of more in-class support or team teaching.

### **Time**

Teachers believe that the lack of time is a considerable constraint in facilitating effective inclusion, impacting on several areas of teachers' practice. Having sufficient time for lesson planning, collaborative planning and for liaising with parents and other professionals has been highlighted as a barrier to effective inclusive practice (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009; Travers et al., 2010; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; O'Riordan, 2017; Ní Bhroin and King, 2020). Teachers also believe they do not have enough time to cater appropriately for the needs of their students with SEN, amidst concerns regarding preparation and collaboration in the development of IEPs, and gaps in their learning (Gibb et al., 2007; Travers et al., 2010; Day and Prunty, 2015). Furthermore teachers also report feeling guilty and stressed due to concerns about giving sufficient time to their students with and without SEN (Talmor, Reiter and Feigin, 2005). Time to collaborate with professionals from outside agencies was also cited as a concern (Travers et al., 2010; O'Riordan, 2017). While time is a concern for teachers increased funding is required to provide for extra staffing in order for teachers to have additional time for planning and collaboration. It has long been recognised that more students with SEN are attending mainstream schools (NCSE, 2019), will the removal of the necessity for an assessment have a consequential impact on the prevalence rate of such disabilities? The theme of diagnostic labels and SEN categories is discussed in the next section.

### **3.6 Diagnostic labels and categories**

The use of labels in special education has been considered the norm, however, it is fraught with difficulties and ambiguities in relation to the provision of education to students with SEN (Anderson and Boyle, 2015; Artiles, 2015; Arishi, Boyle and Lauchlan, 2017). While the research has identified teachers' concerns regarding the inclusion of children who exhibit challenging behaviour, research has also focused on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and diagnostic labels (Foroni and Rothbart, 2011, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2020). Further issues arise with the allied concept of categorisation with the research divided as to the necessity to have labels, and the usefulness of labels and categories in identifying a student's learning needs. Categories and labels have been used for many different reasons; for sorting individuals into groups for research, to allocate resources, to monitor and plan for

additional educational provision, for setting up specific voluntary organisations to promote the interests of groups of children (Norwich, 2013b), for funding for research and also by interest groups defining themselves in terms of medical categories (Norwich, 2013a). Despite their use, Norwich (2013b) argues that it is ‘very difficult to find a systematic, coherent and evidence-based position about classification that commands wide support’ (p.55). Categories are also used to support decision making in relation to educational placement, and while this historic use has declined in relation to some categories it has increased for others (Norwich, 2013b). This use of a label is questioned by Lauchlan et al., (2017) who argue that:

the persistence of labelling and diagnosis and the belief that the only method to gain access to school support and/or funding is through the attachment of a label is disappointing and may not be helpful (p. 5).

However it has been argued that this administrative function is justified, as a type of affirmative action (Norwich, 2013b).

The use of labels has its roots in psychology where stereotypes stem from a basic cognitive need to categorise, simplify and help humans make sense of their world (Zhang et al., 2023). It can provide a linguistic ‘shorthand’ for communicating social and cultural constructs about others (Rhodes, Leslie and Tworek, 2012; Cuttler and Ryckman, 2019). This essentialist thinking has been shown to support prejudicial stereotypes (Bastian and Haslam, 2006; Link, Phelan and Hatzenbuehler, 2014), and these generalisations may obscure the individual’s actual needs, compromise the willingness of professionals to fully explore the child’s capabilities (Boyle, 2014), and limit consideration of alternative interventions (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). This use of labels is situated within the medical deficit model of disability and places the focus on ‘within child’ factors and may result in a failure to consider environmental factors which may be contributing to the difficulties experienced by the child. This could also lead to parents and professionals believing there is nothing that can be done to support the child, resulting in lowered expectations for the child from all concerned (Boyle, 2014; Arishi, Boyle and Lauchlan, 2017). This can prejudicially affect teachers’ beliefs and behaviours, and encourage medicalised conceptions of children’s difficulties (Ohan et al., 2011; Gibbs and Elliott, 2015; Cuttler and Ryckman, 2019). Moreover medical classifications do not provide guidance about the specific educational need of the student (Norwich, 2013b), and the use of the label may not in fact lead to appropriate interventions (Arishi, Boyle and Lauchlan, 2017).

While individual labels may be clearly defined, this is a simplistic view as many children may meet the diagnostic criteria for several different diagnoses, due to co-morbidity, or indeed the label may obscure the diversity of need (Foroni and Rothbart, 2011, 2013). A diagnostic label can be sought by parents and individuals to provide an explanation for what is perceived as a ‘problem’, and an official diagnosis can reduce anxiety for parents and the child, as it provides an explanation for the problem. Having a label may increase awareness and understanding, and support a positive identity but may also be stigmatising (Gillman, Heyman and Swain, 2000; Riddick, 2000; Garrick Duhane and Salend, 2010; Baines, 2012; Chambers et al., 2020). These differing perspectives on the use of a label are not viewed as mutually exclusive, and participants in Chambers et al., (2020) study on the removal of the Asperger’s syndrome diagnosis from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) fifth edition* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) articulated conflicting thoughts around the use of a label. Participants identified strongly with their Asperger syndrome diagnosis and were grateful for it as it provided access to services, allowed them to understand their differences and provided an explanation for others so that allowances could be made. However, some participants acknowledged Asperger Syndrome as a stigmatised identity (Chambers et al., 2020). As such, labels and their definitions can change, resulting in confusion and lack of clarity for individuals, professionals and parents.

Criticisms regarding use of categories and labels and the validity and reliability of a disability diagnosis related to placement or additional resource allocation have also been raised in the literature. Practical issues around securing a diagnosis, and disability categories viewed as heterogeneous regarding educational support have also been raised in the literature (Norwich and Lewis, 2005, 2007; Banks, Frawley and McCoy, 2015). In the UK, Lewis and Norwich (2004) and Norwich and Lewis (2005, 2007) conclude that while the traditional medical SEN categories can serve to guide and inform decision making around teaching as part of a repertoire of information, they have limited use in planning and monitoring teaching and learning. Similarly, despite the fact that a diagnosis may be useful as part of the analysis of the child’s needs, Desforges and Lindsay (2010, p. 7) also argue that ‘such diagnosis have limited implications for educational placement and provision’.

Where a diagnosis is required in order to access resources, Norwich (2013b) contends that this can lead to what has been called ‘perverse incentives’ with schools pressurised to increase the rate of identification of students with SEN in order to access increased additional resources. He suggests that this can be countered by an external review of assessments, or

not using categories at all. However, he points out that this would undermine the basis of the system of additional support allocation and suggests that an alternative funding mechanism using baseline assessment levels and social disadvantage could be implemented. In Ireland the ‘new model’ introduced in 2017 (DES, 2017a) has adopted this approach, with support provided to schools on the basis of a baseline allocation and a school profile, comprising aggregate assessment results, social disadvantage, gender and complex needs. However, like Dyson (2002) who has suggested something similar, Norwich (2013b) points out that while no one is advocating for the full replacement of individual resourcing and planning, a reduction in the number of students with supports is required. He also points out that if this approach is used, and decision making regarding the allocation of resources is devolved to school level, some classification system would still be required, and the numbers of children supported will be reduced. This echoes the argument put forward by Florian et al. (2006, p. 37) ‘that there can be no public policy or research without classification’. Norwich goes on to point out that hard decisions are required regarding difference and differentiation, ‘to identify or not identify differences such as difficulties in learning’ (p. 63). These ‘dilemmas of difference’ stem from societal conceptions about human difference, ‘as either option has some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection, or denial of opportunities (Norwich, 2008, 2013b). In the field of education, the ‘dilemmas of difference’ in relation to students with SEN centre on three main issues:

- Placement (maintain a continuum of provision)
- Curriculum (to what extent is the curriculum relevant to them)
- Identification (whether to identify, or not, and how) (Norwich, 2008).

This tension between values of inclusion and individuality may result in the use of a label or category acting as a barrier to inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2006; Norwich, 2013b), with Ballard (2003, p. 8) stating that ‘naming children as “special” identifies them as different from others and different in ways that are not valued in present mainstream schools and society’. In contrast, it is argued by others that if they are not identified it could prevent them from accessing an education appropriate to their needs (Norwich, 2008, 2013b; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b). Classification systems for children with SEN can also have significant implications in respect of educational placement and life outcomes (Florian et al., 2006). The tensions evident in the ‘*dilemmas of difference*’ arising from positive and negative conceptions of difference in society generally, and in the case of this study, around SEN in



education challenge educators and policy makers to ensure the needs of the individual child are addressed.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Though the imperative for inclusion has been accepted internationally its implementation remains fraught, and the concept of inclusive education is one of the most controversial issues regarding the education of students with SEN. A number of perceptions of inclusion were discussed in this chapter illustrating the complexities of the term and as Norwich (2013a, p. 16) points out ‘its definition and use are seriously problematic’. This Chapter presented the theoretical framework underpinning the research study based on the work of Hornby (2014, 2015) who makes a robust case for a new theory which he calls *inclusive special education* synthesising the ideology, philosophy and values of inclusive education and special education. Teachers are central to the provision of inclusive education, and the literature in respect of teacher self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusive education illustrated the factors that influence their attitudes towards inclusion. The impact that ITE programmes and teacher PD have on their attitudes towards inclusive education in addition to the belief that specialist pedagogy is required to teach students with SEN were highlighted. Teachers attitudes vary, based on the nature of their students disabilities, raising questions in respect to the effective inclusion of students with complex needs and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The ambiguities and difficulties in relation to the use of a label or category in relation to the provision of education require hard decisions to be made ‘to identify or not identify differences such as difficulties in learning’ (Norwich, 2013c. p. 63). The importance of collaboration with colleagues and outside professionals is highlighted in the literature, but the ability to collaborate is constrained by the limited time to do so negatively impacting teachers inclusive practices.

The following chapter sets out the methodological design employed in this study.

# Chapter Four: Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapters Two and Three, the ongoing debate around inclusion and the way in which the ‘new model’ is mediated by mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district provides the central rationale for this study. The purpose of the study is to explore in detail principals’ and teachers’ attitudes towards, and perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion, and to examine the ways in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support is mediated in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district. An explanatory sequential design was employed to examine the way mainstream primary schools in this postal district mediate the ‘new model’ as set out in *Circular 0013/2017 Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a), the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017b) and the updating *Circular 007/2019 Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2019b), and *Circular 20/2022* (DE, 2022d).

The epistemological and ontological beliefs brought to this study by the researcher are outlined in Section 4.2 and the philosophical beliefs and perspectives underpinning research paradigms are discussed in Section 4.3. Section 4.4 sets out the design framework, and section 4.5 presents the sampling strategy and the research participants. Section 4.6 describes the data collection tools utilised during the study and the associated rationale. The data analysis process is described in Section 4.7 and the chapter concludes with consideration of the ethical obligations and the overall reliability and validity of the study, and the methodological limitations.

## 4.2 Researcher positionality

The researcher brings his/her own set of theories and perspectives to the enquiry, and it is this ‘basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.105) when undertaking their study. My interest in this study developed from my lived experiences as a teacher and educator which have influenced my ontological and epistemological view of the world. My ontological position recognises that there is no one ‘real world’, but that the world is understood and interpreted by each individual, resulting in multiple constructions and understandings, some of which may be conflicting. This ontological perspective leads me to recognise that reality is subject to change, and is interpreted and understood in light of its utility in a particular situation or time (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). My epistemological stance is aligned with a qualitative perspective

whereby the researcher seeks to understand the experiences of others. It recognises that this research takes place in communities and thus the researcher needs to interact with the members of the community both to understand and address the problem being studied (Mertens, 2019). The way students with SEN are supported in schools and the decision-making process involved in providing that support is complex and challenging. As a principal and educator, I am keenly aware of my responsibilities in respect of allocating this resource equitably and the associated challenges in deploying limited resources to support students with SEN in mainstream primary schools. However, the manner in which this support is provided, and staff deployed within schools may differ due to the ontological and epistemological perspectives held by a principal and teachers within a particular school, and their understanding of inclusion. Within the context of my role as a researcher I am also conscious of my beliefs and understanding of inclusion, and inclusive education. I firmly believe in the right of every child to an appropriate education, and to live a full life as a child within their own communities. My teaching experiences have led me to believe that a pragmatic rather than ideological position is a more helpful approach to ensure every child has their right to an appropriate education vindicated. The deployment of additional teaching support is the locus of the study, and my focus is on establishing a practical understanding of this real-world issue (Patton, 2015) through an examination of the practical consequences of this 'new model' (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Consequently, careful consideration was given to the research question which focused on principals' and teachers' understanding of inclusion and the way they mediate DE policy in relation to the provision of support to students with SEN.

#### **4.3 Philosophical perspective and research paradigm**

It was essential to choose an appropriate paradigm to guide the research and address the research questions (Creswell, 2015; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). Paradigms can be described as belief systems or ways of looking at the world (Creswell, 2013). There is a clear link between formulating research questions, the adoption of a paradigm position and the evolution of appropriate methodologies to address those questions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A paradigm reflects ontological and epistemological assumptions about the production, interpretation, and reporting of data held by the researcher. Ontological assumptions are those beliefs that concern the nature of reality, and epistemology concerns knowledge, and how it is constituted (Crotty, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Different paradigms represent different views of reality and how knowledge is constructed. These include positivism, which is associated with a scientific approach, and interpretivism which is associated with a qualitative approach (Mertens, 2015; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

Historically, the dominant paradigm guiding studies within education and the sciences was a positivist approach, or the 'received view' and its successor post-positivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015). Positivism is rooted in quantitative, scientific methods, with positivists claiming that 'only scientific knowledge is valid, certain and accurate' (Crotty, 1998, p. 29). Ontologically positivists hold the view that there is one reality (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018), and positivism is underpinned by an epistemological assumption of objectivity. However, by failing to recognise the role of the researcher, and limiting knowledge to numbers, it is dehumanising and does not capture the full complexities of human social life (Hammersley, 1997). Thus, this approach was rejected, as the study did not lend itself solely to quantitative, scientific, and observable methods (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018), and a qualitative approach was considered.

A different epistemological perspective is presented by (Kuhn, 1970) that emphasises the phenomenological view of human behaviour. Ontologically this interpretivist approach recognises that people's interpretations of their social world influence their actions, creating the possibility that individual responses to the same or similar situations may differ, resulting in multiple meanings being constructed (Gage, 1989; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). This requires the researcher to suspend his/her own cultural beliefs and assumptions and be open to learning about the cultural beliefs and values of the people and context being studied (Hammersley, 2012). The findings from a qualitative approach are judged based on authenticity, trustworthiness, and dependability, in addition to reflexivity, rapport, and reciprocity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, 2009; Mertens, 2015). A qualitative approach is not without criticism, and it is argued that an approach that focuses on a small number of context-specific cases limits the opportunity for generalising the results of the study to a broader population (Hammersley, 2012; Mertens, 2015; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). A qualitative approach was also rejected as it did not enable the complexities of the research questions to be addressed.

Further reflection on the research questions and a consideration of the methods best suited to answer those questions led to the view that 'what works', rather than focusing on whether the question was wholly quantitative or qualitative in nature was required. Ercikan and Roth (2006) contend that different forms of research could be positioned on a continuum

with qualitative and quantitative research distinguished by degree. Philosophers such as Biesta (2010) and Patton (2015) argue that a worldview providing methods of research that are most appropriate to study the phenomenon at hand is required. These theorists sought a more practical approach, advocating the use of several methods, that in combination could throw light on the actual behaviour of participants, the beliefs that underpinned those behaviours, and the likely consequences following them. This paradigm arose due to arguments from philosophers that it was not possible to access the 'truth' through the positivist or the interpretivist view of reality, and thus a pragmatic paradigm provided an underlying philosophical framework for mixed methods research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). This paradigm also provided the opportunity for this researcher to choose the methods which were best suited to answer the research questions posed in this study (Mertens, 2019). This paradigm advocates a relational epistemology, and reflects an ontology where there is both a single 'real world' and individuals can have their unique view of the world (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Within the pragmatic paradigm, it is the researcher who makes a choice and decision about what is appropriate and what is important (Mertens, 2019). This approach provides for diverse understandings of multiple truths through an interpretive framework (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). As this study focuses on inclusion which as 'a concept and value is now recognized as complex with multiple meanings' (Norwich, 2013a, p. 16) a pragmatic paradigm using an explanatory sequential design framework was considered an appropriate fit for this study. The rationale for the choice of this design is set out in the following section.

#### **4.4 Research design framework**

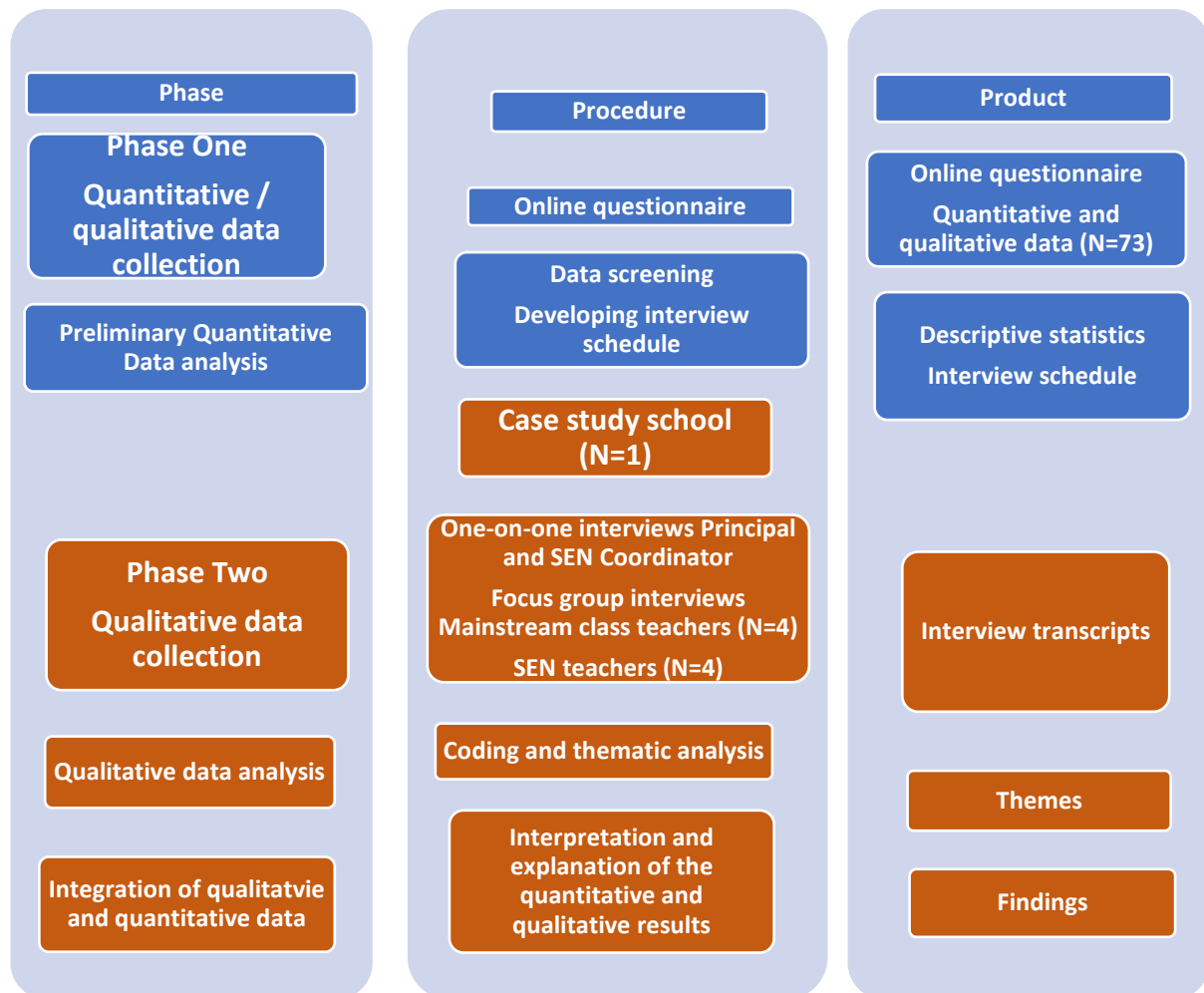
An explanatory sequential mixed methods design approach incorporating a two-phase model (Creswell, 2015) was adopted for the research to gain deep, rich insights into the lived experiences of principals, SEN teachers and co-ordinators, and mainstream class teachers as they mediate DE policy on inclusion. This approach consisted of firstly the concurrent collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in phase one through an online questionnaire, one designed for principals and a second questionnaire designed for mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers and co-ordinators ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)). Phase two served to illustrate contextually the ways schools understand and implement the 'new model' as delineated in *Circular 13/2017* (DES, 2017a) through focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews in a case study school to elaborate and explain in more detail the data collected in the first phase (Creswell, 2015; Mertens, 2015; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019).

The rationale for choosing this approach and utilising mixed methods within one study is based on the fact that on their own, neither quantitative nor qualitative data are sufficient to capture the deep nuances of principals' and teachers' beliefs about inclusion and the details of the implementation of the 'new model' (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This design approach has the advantage of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data from a broad population initially, and then allows for the collection and more in-depth exploration of qualitative data in the second phase. Both data sets complement each other, take advantage of the strengths of each methodology, and enable a more robust analysis (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

In choosing this design several methodological issues had to be addressed; firstly, the priority or weighting given to the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis had to be thought through. Further, consideration had to be given to the sequence of the data collection and analysis and the stage at which the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study were connected, and the findings or results integrated (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006; Creswell, 2015; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Careful consideration of these issues was undertaken to ensure the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the data. The decision-making process was guided by the research questions, the purpose of the study and methodological discussions in the literature (Creswell, 2015; Mertens, 2015; Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and thus I decided to give equal priority to both, from the very beginning.

However, this approach is not without its limitations as the researcher needs to have knowledge of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and the time to collect both (Creswell, 2015; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As this researcher had experience in both methods during the course of her studies, this limitation was ameliorated, and the timeline of the study facilitated the analysis of both data sets (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006), and thus it was decided that an explanatory sequential design was the appropriate design for this study.

**Figure 4.1 Visual model for the sequential explanatory design procedure**



#### 4.5. Sampling strategy and research participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants in order to discern how schools understand and mediate inclusion (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Denscombe, 2021). This involves the strategic selection of ‘information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated’ (Patton, 2015, p. 265). Mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district were chosen as all patron bodies and most school types are represented; they are also culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse. Consequently this researcher believed that both statistical and rich qualitative data could be obtained from principals and teachers in these schools which would inform an understanding of the research questions being investigated (Creswell, 2015). The schools were also convenient from a geographical perspective for the researcher, facilitating access to the case study school to conduct interviews in phase two of the study; however, due to the closure of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic interviews were conducted online.

Principals and teachers in all mainstream primary schools in the postal district area were invited to participate in the study. There are currently over 30 mainstream primary schools in this area. Initial contact was made with the school principals through the principals' network in respect of this two-phase study. This was followed by an email ([Appendix G](#)) asking them to complete an online questionnaire ([Appendix C](#)) and to share the link to a separate questionnaire with the teachers on their staff for completion on an individual basis ([Appendix D](#)). Teachers were free to take the questionnaire if they wished. Expressions of interest were sought from the principals to participate in the second phase of the study. The questionnaire was distributed in January 2020, and a reminder email sent in February 2020. At a later meeting of the principals' network the researcher reminded those attending of her research and followed up with a reminder email to the entire group. Due to the low numbers of teachers taking the questionnaire the researcher also asked teachers in the postal district attending an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the local Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) to complete a questionnaire, by providing them with the link, and asking them to recommend it to other colleagues in their school.

Following these reminders, a total of 12 principals and 61 teachers completed the questionnaire. This resulted in a broad representation of the mainstream primary schools in this Dublin postal district taking the questionnaire. Access to the questionnaire was closed in June 2020. Question 8 in the teachers' questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their current role in the school. Nineteen teachers identified as mainstream class teachers, however, ten teachers selected 'other'. Of these four were also mainstream class teachers. These teachers did not complete the section specific to mainstream class teachers but identified as 'mainstream teacher' in the completion of other sections. Deputy principals who worked in a support teaching role or who identified as SEN coordinators are included in the figures for SEN teachers. A breakdown of the questionnaire respondents' school profile is set out in [Appendix E](#) illustrating the diversity of school type in this Dublin postal district. Demographic information regarding the questionnaire respondents' role and gender is set out in Table 4.1, and further demographic information detailing age, years teaching, and qualifications is provided in [Appendix F](#).



**Table 4.1 Questionnaire respondents by role and gender**

Teacher Role	N=			%
Principal (administrative)	12			16
Deputy principal administrative/teaching	4			6
HSCL <sup>23</sup> teacher	3			4
Mainstream Class teacher	19			26
SEN teacher/SEN Coordinator/Special class teacher/EAL teacher	35			48
Gender	Teacher	Principal		
Male	3	4	10	
Female	57	8	89	
Prefer not to say	1	0	1	

#### 4.5.1 Case study school

The principal of the case study school expressed interest in participating in the second phase of the study and was the only school to do so. This type of case study is an instrumental case study because ‘it serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue’ (Creswell, 2015, p. 465). Both the principal and SEN coordinator were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews and to identify mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers to participate in focus group interviews. Using an objective selection tool ([Appendix H](#)) the principal or nominated teacher was asked to list the names of the teachers at every class level, or in a support role, in alphabetical order. This tool was used in order to provide them with an objective tool by which the participating teachers could be identified, and to minimise the possibility of bias in the selection of teachers for the study. Teachers had the option not to participate, and then an alternative teacher was identified.

Bell and Waters (2014) suggest that a case study approach is particularly appropriate for individual researchers enabling one aspect of a problem to be studied in depth within a limited timeframe. According to Robson (2002), a case ‘is the situation, individual, group, organisation or whatever it is that we are interested in’ (p. 177), while Creswell (2015) defines a case study as an ‘in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection’ (p 465). Case studies report on

<sup>23</sup> Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL) The HSCL teacher (a teacher based in a school) is released from his/her teaching duties to work in partnership with parents, teachers and local community organisations to support positive educational outcomes for pupils/students (TUSLA, 2023).

the unique and dynamic contexts within which the real-life interactions of events and human relationships, together with other factors, occur (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). They also strive to portray the rich detail and ‘thick descriptions’ of the lived experiences of participants, and their thoughts and feelings about a particular situation. This provides detailed descriptions with a narrow focus, enabling them to ‘speak for themselves’ rather than to be heavily interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 377).

While case studies provide an insight and illuminate a particular case within a specific context, they are not without disadvantages. A criticism of the case study approach lies in the fact that generalisations from the specific instance under study is uncertain, and the extent to which findings from a case study can be generalised to other examples is dependent on the degree to which the case study example is similar to others of its type (Denscombe, 2014). However, Yin (2018) argues that the goal of case study research is to generalise theories, what he terms ‘analytic generalizations’ and ‘not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalizations’ (p. 21). The aim of this study was not so much to generalise from the case study school to all other similar schools, but to explore in depth the way this school mediates DE policy on inclusion and implements the ‘new model.’

It cannot be said that this school is representative of all mainstream primary schools in this Dublin postal district. However, it is a typical DEIS Band 1 co-educational junior primary school situated in a densely populated urban area with a number of other similar schools within a two-kilometre radius. It has a pupil population of between 250 – 300 pupils who come from diverse social, religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It has an administrative principal, one Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator, 15 mainstream class teachers, English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers and five support teachers. When the reprofiling of the ‘new model’ occurred in 2019 (DES, 2019b) the school received an increase of less than one hour in the total number of hours allocated. The school utilises their additional teaching allocation to provide support to approximately 150 students including approximately 60 children requiring EAL support. Ten staff members from the case study school took part in the study. In order to maintain their anonymity pseudonyms are used as presented in Table 4.2.

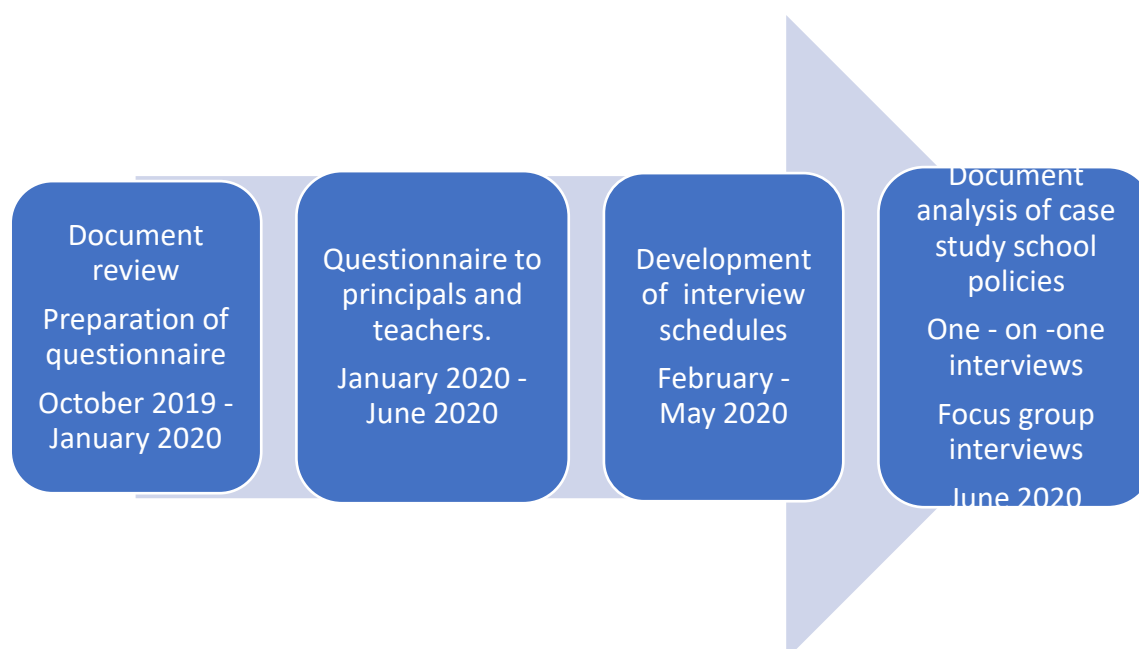
**Table 4.2 Case study school participants’ pseudonym and demographic information**

Teacher pseudonym	Role in case study school	No. of Years Teaching
<b>Ailbhe</b>	Administrative Principal	16
<b>Bronagh</b>	SEN Coordinator	16
<b>Meabh</b>	Mainstream class teacher	10
<b>Saoirse</b>	Mainstream class teacher	8
<b>Sadhbh</b>	Mainstream class teacher	7
<b>Aoibhinn</b>	Mainstream class teacher	13
<b>Orlaith</b>	SEN teacher	15
<b>Dearbhla</b>	SEN teacher	18
<b>Sorcha</b>	SEN teacher	19
<b>Muireann</b>	SEN teacher	11

#### 4.6 Data collection methods

To elicit the voice of principals and teachers who are tasked with mediating DE policy and implementing the ‘new model’, a range of data collection tools were employed including document analysis, questionnaires, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the principal and SEN coordinator, and two focus group interviews with the mainstream class teachers and the SEN team in one case study school. The data were collected over a six-month period from January 2020 to June 2020 as shown in Figure 4.2 which sets out the data collection chronology. The data collection instruments are explored in the following sections.

**Figure 4.2 Data collection chronology**



##### 4.6.1 Data collection chronology

The study commenced in October 2019 with the preparation of the questionnaire. The re-profiling of the schools had taken place commencing in the academic year 2019-2020 with

the revised allocations to remain in place for two years. However, the next scheduled re-profiling did not take place in September 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the allocations remained in place for a further year ‘to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations’ (DE, 2021, p. 10). As the next re-profiling is due to take place for the 24/25 academic year and the ‘new model’ is currently being reviewed by the DE (letter to the researcher’s school May 2023), it is desirable that the study is completed to allow for the findings of this study to inform that review and contribute to the revisions that may occur. Identifying the advantages, challenges, and areas for improvement as perceived by the participants in this study will enable the voices of teachers in this Dublin postal district to be articulated and to inform future policy development in the area of inclusive education.

#### **4.6.2 Document analysis**

Document analysis is particularly relevant in enriching mixed methods studies and can provide a vehicle for understanding organisational practices (Coffey, 2013). Documents are textual devices enabling information to be shared and ‘stories’ presented, a literary exposition of reality, constructing particular kinds of representations according to a purpose (Coffey, 2013). On the other hand, documents may also be incomplete, or inaccurate, and on their own cannot tell us how a particular organisation conducts its business, nor should they be seen as replacements for other kinds of data (Coffey, 2013). As this study was based on the implementation of a DES (DES, 2017a) policy introducing a new way of providing additional teaching support to schools, it was necessary to analyse the relevant documentary data. The information from these documents and peer reviewed literature helped inform the design of the subsequent data collection instruments (Yanow, 2007; Bowen, 2009).

Document analysis was conducted on national legislation, including for example the *Education Act* (Government of Ireland, 1998b), DES circulars such as *Circular 0013/2017 Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a), and policy advice and research documents from the NCSE such as *Supporting Students with Special Education needs in Schools* (NCSE, 2013b) which provided background information and historical insights into the development of the ‘new model’. These documents, framing and shaping the national position on inclusion, were discussed in Chapter Two.

Document analysis is often used together with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation, where the researcher draws on two or more sources of evidence to corroborate the data from different data sets (Bowen, 2009). In phase two, the case study school’s SEN policy was read and analysed. This provided a context, and background

information about the school and its policy and practice on inclusion. It also provided information, in the language and words of the case study school, on the ways in which the school selected students for support and provided that support (Creswell, 2015). In this way the school's SEN policy was used to triangulate the data from individual interviews with the principal and SEN coordinator and focus group interviews with the class teachers and the SEN team as discussed in Section 4.8 Authenticity, trustworthiness and credibility.

#### **4.6.3 Phase one: questionnaire**

In phase one of the study, teachers and principals in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. The key objective of questionnaires is to reveal large-scale patterns and trends (Creswell, 2015). Thus, they are an appropriate tool to use with many participants as the same questions can be asked of all participants and they are enabled to respond quickly to the questions posed in a straightforward manner (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Questionnaires may also be designed to facilitate respondents in answering the questions anonymously and in their own time (Shawer, 2010). However, the absence of the researcher means that they have no control over the environment in which the questionnaire is completed, or even if it is completed by the intended person. This may also result in misinterpretation, and questions being answered incorrectly, and consequently a false picture being presented (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). This reinforces the importance of the use of clear and consistent language to tease out the information sought; therefore, considerable time must be given to ensuring that the advantages of using a questionnaire accrue to the researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). As questionnaires are a self-reporting measure, respondents may answer the questions in a way that they perceive the researcher wants them to answer, and thus may result in bias (Mertens, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Response rates to questionnaires may also be low and require a follow up in order to secure a higher response rate (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The physical appearance of the questionnaire is also important and Mertens (2015) advises making it visually attractive for respondents.

Technological advances in recent years mean that the use of the internet to conduct research has become commonplace (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014; Roberts and Allen, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Denscombe, 2021), and online questionnaires have all but replaced paper-based questionnaires, due to their cost effectiveness, flexibility and convenience. Spatial and temporal constraints are also overcome through the use of

online questionnaires, they are environmentally friendly, and can incorporate design options to ease navigation through the questionnaire by respondents (Roberts and Allen, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Clark et al., 2021). Online questionnaires are also highly efficient in that participants can be prompted to correct errors and ensure the necessary items are completed (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). They also provide the option to export the responses into other software such as Excel for analysis, reducing the potential for error in transferring the data from one format to another.

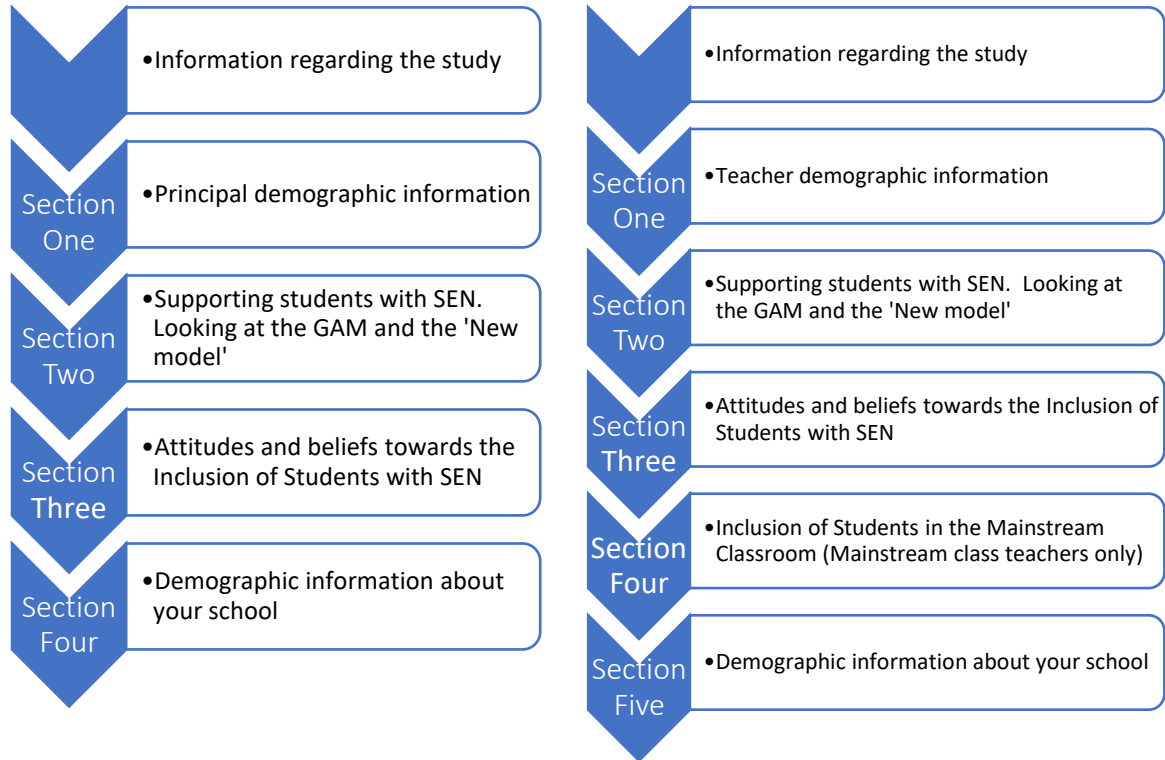
However, online questionnaires are not without their disadvantages either, with computer skills required on the part of the researcher to design an attractive data collection tool, and on the part of the respondent to navigate the questionnaire. Issues may also arise with internet access causing the respondent to lose their response and perhaps abandon the questionnaire (Roberts and Allen, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Denscombe, 2021). Having considered both the advantages and disadvantages of online questionnaires, the researcher determined that the advantages of an online questionnaire outweighed those of paper-based questionnaires and was a better fit for this study. The appropriateness of this decision was reinforced with the commencement of the COVID -19 pandemic resulting in the closure of schools in March 2020, and the dissemination and collection of paper-based questionnaires would not have been possible. The process of development of the questionnaire is set out in the following section.

### **Development of the questionnaire**

The development of a questionnaire can be challenging, requiring considerable discipline in the design, selection and writing of questions. Consideration must also be given to the analysis of the questionnaire at the outset (Bell and Waters, 2014). Careful thought was given to the exact purpose of the questionnaire, the respondents, and the resources available to the researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Two separate questionnaires were designed using JISC Online Surveys (JOS); one questionnaire was targeted at principal teachers and a second questionnaire was designed in such a way as to identify different target participants; SEN teachers and coordinators, mainstream class teachers, and other teachers, enabling them to respond to questions relevant to their role within the school ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)). A range of question types were used including closed questions, Likert scale questions and open-ended questions to collect demographic data regarding the respondents and their school, attitudes towards inclusion and SEN practices within the school illustrating the engagement with the ‘new model.’

The principal questionnaire consisted of four sections, and the teacher questionnaire consisted of five sections as shown in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.3 Map of principals' questionnaire** **Figure 4.4 Map of teachers' questionnaire**



The first and final sections in both questionnaires sought demographic information about the respondent and their school respectively. Section two focused on how students with SEN were supported in the schools under the GAM /EAL model (DES, 2005a), and the 'new model' (DES, 2017a). Questions in this section were carefully designed to create an exploratory instrument which would examine the experiences of teachers in this postal district in mediating inclusion and probe their views of the 'new model'.

Section three focused on principals' and teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards the inclusion of students with SEN. This section drew on aspects of *The Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale* (TAIS) (Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014), *School principals' attitudes toward inclusion* (Bailey, 2004) and the *Differentiated Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale* (DATIS) (Lübke, Piquart and Schwinger, 2019) that were relevant to this study. Questions not selected for this questionnaire included for example 'Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported' (Bailey, 2004), and 'Parents of an SEN child present no greater problem for a teacher than those of a non SEN-child' (Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014) as the focus of the study was not on parental

attitudes or parent/teacher relationships. A number of changes or modifications were made to the selected questions including using English spellings and wording. Examples include replacing the terms *regular* and *normal* with the term *mainstream* as this is more appropriate to the Irish context. Response bias was controlled for by arranging questions so that a positive attitude towards inclusion was reflected by an ‘agree’ response for 10 items in the principals’ questionnaire (Q. 42, items 1, 2, 4, Q. 43, items 2, 7, Q. 44, items 3, 5, and Q. 45 items 2, 5, 8), and 14 items in the teacher questionnaire (Q. 69, items 1, 2, 4, Q. 70, items 2, 7, Q. 71, items 3, 5, Q. 72, items 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, 16). An ‘agree’ response for the remaining items reflected a negative attitude towards inclusion. Teachers were also asked to rate their beliefs on ease of inclusion of students with different categories of SEN across a 5-point Likert type scale based on the categories used in Circular 02/05 *Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05* (DES, 2005a) with the addition of Dual Exceptionality and Gifted/Exceptionally Able.

Section four in the teacher questionnaire sought information from mainstream class teachers only, regarding their current class, SEN students within the class and the types of support provided to students with SEN in their class.

### **Piloting the questionnaire**

Prior to the pilot stage, early iterations of the instrument were completed by two post-primary teachers and a retired primary school principal from another jurisdiction. Both post-primary teachers had many years teaching experience and one was an expert in the field of SEN. The retired principal also had many years working in the field of SEN. Their contributions and constructive feedback informed the development of the questionnaire and the terminology used. A pilot has a number of functions, firstly it helps determine whether the typical participants can understand the questions and are capable of completing the questionnaire (Creswell, 2015). Piloting can be helpful in eliminating ambiguity in questions, and helping refine the questions to ensure the data collection instrument will collect the data the research is seeking (Bell and Waters, 2014). It can also help to ensure the quality of the instrument through fine-tuning the design and content following feedback from the pilot participants (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Pilot testing of the questionnaire was subsequently undertaken with a number of individuals who were similar to the target population, two principals, a class teacher with many years’ experience in an SEN teacher role, and an NQT in her first-year teaching, who acted as critical friends and provided



feedback. The pilot participants indicated that the questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete. Following their input, amendments were made to a number of questions. The question regarding the inclusion of different disability types was changed from 'willing to include' to ease of inclusion. Teachers and principals were asked to indicate how difficult or easy they think it is to include a child with a particular disability in their classroom as teachers do not have a choice as to whether they will accept a child with SEN in their class or not. Additionally, this question originally comprised three parts, seeking the views of principals and teachers in respect of the severity of the disability (mild, moderate, severe), however the pilot respondents believed that it was sufficient to pose the question in relation to the nature of the disability, and consequently this additional element was removed. Several questions were removed as they were repetitive; and some further questions were deleted from the principal questionnaire as the principal teachers did not believe they were relevant to principals. This included for example questions in Section Two, 'I know when to initiate classroom support plans', 'I know when to initiate school support plans', and 'I feel competent in developing classroom support plans'. The principals in this area were all administrative principals and thus the pilot participants deemed that they were not directly related to their practice and thus they were removed.

The structure of the questionnaire was also changed with Section two moving to the final section to support participants in completing the sections of the questionnaire which required more thought. Following these amendments and editing of the questions, the questionnaires were sent by email to the principals of the mainstream primary schools in the Dublin postal district ([Appendix G](#)).

#### **4.6.4 Phase Two Interviews and Focus groups**

The principals of all mainstream primary schools in the postal district were invited to participate in both phases of the study, however only one school expressed interest in participating in the second phase as a case study school. In this phase interviews were employed as the primary data collection tool to complement the survey data collected in phase one, with one-on-one interviews conducted with the principal and SEN coordinator and focus group interviews conducted with mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers.

#### **Types of Interviews**

Having decided that interviews were an appropriate data collection tool it was necessary to consider what form of interviewing would best answer the research questions.

Interviews are not just an information gathering device, but rather allow the participants, both the researcher and the person being interviewed, to construct a reality to which they are both contributing. The researcher is therefore an active participant in the interview and the researcher talk is as integral to the analysis as the talk of the participants (Creswell, 2015). When conducting interviews, a challenge for the researcher is choosing questions which will encourage participants to talk openly (Kvale and Brikmann, 2015). Careful planning was therefore undertaken in order to ensure that the interview questions linked directly to the research questions (Clark et al., 2021).

Interviews can be carried out in person with individuals or groups or using technology via email, telephone, or an online platform. Having considered and rejected both e-mail and telephone interviews, consideration was then given to in person interviews. There are several different approaches to interviews ranging from the formal structured interview to the more flexible unstructured interview (Kvale and Brikmann, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The structured interview uses standardised predetermined questions and enables the researcher to compare answers from different respondents, with little opportunity for the interviewer to modify the questions or the sequence in which questions are posed. In contrast the unstructured interview is more flexible, although still carefully planned (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). It is most useful when the interviewer is reliant on the respondents to provide new knowledge, in contrast to the structured interview where the researcher seeks to find the answers to specific questions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to facilitate the in-depth exploration of the predetermined questions or themes, whilst at the same time providing flexibility to the interviewee to expand and develop their responses. A key benefit in the flexibility offered by this approach is that the researcher can modify the sequence of the questions posed, probe the interviewees' responses to clarify and extend meaning thus giving voice to the participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Kvale and Brikmann, 2015; Denscombe, 2021). The use of semi-structured interviews also facilitated a more relaxed, conversational engagement between the interviewees and the researcher, particularly considering the necessity to use an online platform to conduct the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews, despite having many advantages, also have limitations which must be acknowledged. Interview responses may be unclear, or inarticulate, and the co-constructed nature of the interview may affect how the interviewee responds. They may also respond in ways they think the interviewer wants to hear (Creswell, 2015); therefore the

researcher cannot be certain that they are answering truthfully. As this study was exploring a relatively new system of providing additional teaching support in Irish schools, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate interview approach for collecting data related to inclusion and the implementation of the ‘new model’ in the case study school.

However, as it was also important to gather the shared understanding of mainstream class teachers and support teachers, focus group interviews were considered a more appropriate data collection tool than one-on-one interviews. Focus groups are beneficial when the interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other as within a school context, and their interactions are likely to yield richer data than one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2015). Having more than one interviewee can also provide a number of versions of events, complementing the other with additional points, resulting in a more comprehensive and reliable record (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The group context involves discussion between the participants and generates a wider range of responses than individual interviews and is a more beneficial use of time (Creswell, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In this study there were four interviewees in each of the two focus group interviews from the same staff, and thus familiar with each other.

However, Arksey and Knight (1999) suggest that one interviewee may dominate the focus group, and individuals who hold a different point of view may be reluctant to speak out in front of others. Several issues in conducting the interviews also need to be addressed. Cohen et al., (2018) advise considering whether each member of the group should be asked the question, how to arrange turn-taking, being vigilant in picking up on people who are trying to speak and offering them the opportunity to do so. As the interviews were conducted online all the participants muted their mics when they were not speaking to minimise interference; this facilitated turn taking more readily and reduced the potential for people to talk at the same time (Creswell, 2015).

### **Interviewing Using an Online Platform**

This Dublin postal district was chosen as a suitable area for the focus of this study for several reasons, one of which was that it was geographically convenient for the researcher to conduct interviews. With the onset of COVID-19, this was less of a concern as in-person interviews were not possible due to the COVID-19 restrictions; consequently, all interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. While this was unexpected, there are several practical benefits to conducting interviews online such as the flexibility of scheduling the

interview (Holt, 2010). Further benefits of using internet technologies are identified by Hanna (2012) such as low cost, ease of access and health and safety issues whereby both the researcher and the participants can engage in the interview process from the safety of their preferred environment. This also enabled the research participants to experience a level of control and power as they were able to participate in the interview from the comfort of their chosen location (Busher and James, 2006) thus facilitating a more relaxed interview (Hanna, 2012).

However, conducting interviews online does have some limitations in that social conventions such as shaking hands, and having a coffee prior to starting the interview are not possible (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). In this study the researcher knew both the principal and the SEN Co-ordinator and already had a professional relationship with them which was helpful given that the usual social conventions were not possible. However, the teaching staff were not known to her. Communication via email, providing the information sheet and consent form, and scheduling the interview facilitated the building of rapport with both teacher groups prior to the focus group interviews. Issues with faulty webcam or a drop-in internet signal may also be issues which beset the online interview process; however, this was not the case during any of the interviews conducted, although one teacher in the SEN teacher focus group lost connectivity towards the end of the focus group due to her phone battery becoming depleted.

### **Developing the Interview Schedules**

Key themes derived from the literature review and the document analysis had informed the construction of the questionnaire in phase one. The second phase of this study was informed and influenced by the findings from the initial phase of the research, which together with relevant SEN documents from the case study school guided the design of the interview schedules. Separate interview schedules, although similar, were developed for the principal and the SEN Co-ordinator, ([Appendix I](#) and [Appendix J](#)) and for the focus groups of mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers ([Appendix K](#) and [Appendix L](#)). The interview schedules were sent to the participants prior to the interview so that they could reflect on their responses prior to the actual interview.

### **Piloting the Interviews**

Piloting of the interview schedule and procedures was also conducted. This was worthwhile as it provided an opportunity to both practise the skill of conducting interviews and pilot the interview schedules. Two principals participated in this pilot phase of the study.

Both were principals of DEIS Band 1 schools, but not from the Dublin postal district area, and one was the SEN Co-ordinator in her school. Both principals were asked to pilot the interview schedule because of the personal relationships I had with them (Yin, 2018). The nature of the personal relationship meant that mutual trust was already established which facilitated constructive and honest feedback related to the research process, both in relation to the interview schedule and conducting the interview (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The pilot interviews were conducted online, and video recorded; this was particularly helpful as it enabled the researcher to familiarise herself with the software and evaluate her own interview performance (Robson and McCartan, 2016). While the pilot participants found most of the questions unambiguous and relevant to the research topic, some questions required rewording to clarify the information sought. A few questions were omitted from the final schedule as they had been already addressed. In addition, the sequence of the questions was adjusted in order to facilitate the flow of the interview and enable the interviewee to respond to questions that led naturally from the previous question. Obtaining this feedback from trusted professionals was helpful in revising the interview schedules. Piloting also indicated the potential length of the interview, around one hour, which informed appointment arrangements.

### **Administering the interviews**

Individual one-on-one interviews were conducted with the principal and SEN Co-ordinator and focus group interviews were conducted with the mainstream class teachers and separately with the SEN teachers in order to get a broad understanding of the way their school facilitated inclusion and mediated the ‘new model.’ Conscious of ensuring that participants were relaxed whilst being interviewed in an unfamiliar online environment, I first outlined the purpose and structure of the interview and made explicit my expectations. Prior to conducting the interviews, I confirmed that the staff were aware that their decision to participate was voluntary and sought their consent to record the interviews. I reminded them that they could withdraw their consent or not answer any questions they did not wish during the interview and that if they did participate, they could withdraw their data at any point up to when the data was anonymized ([Appendix M](#) and [Appendix N](#)). I also offered participants the opportunity to ask any questions or queries they had regarding the study.

I began with broad general questions designed to put the participants at ease. Using an interview schedule enabled the interviewees to respond to the questions in their own way, facilitating the analysis of the language constructions and meanings generated by the

participants during the interview (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). This approach enabled the principal, SEN Co-ordinator and the two teacher groups to articulate their views about inclusion and their engagement with the 'new model' in their school. Care was taken to achieve a balance between ensuring that the questions posed addressed the research question and followed up on issues raised in greater depth (Creswell, 2015). This also ensured greater variability in the responses without the influence of participants other than the researcher in the one-on-one interviews and facilitated the co-construction of meaning in the focus groups.

### **Recording the Interviews**

The one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams in accordance with the ethical guidance from Maynooth University (MU). This platform had the benefit of using video as well as audio to conduct the interview, mirroring the face-to-face experience whilst preserving the benefits of a personal, safe place (Hanna, 2012). Further benefits accrued to the use of this online platform in that the interview could be recorded, and it was also possible for the audio to be transcribed. These interview transcriptions and audio recordings were reviewed by the researcher and edited as soon as possible after the interviews had taken place to ensure their accuracy. This was necessary to correct errors due to some instances of poor voice quality and limitations of the voice recognition software.

## **4.7 Data analysis**

Data analysis comprised two different phases. The data collected from the questionnaire were imported into Excel for analysis. An initial analysis was conducted on the questionnaire which included data from all principals and teachers participating in the first phase of the study. These data, as already discussed, informed the development of the interview schedules in Phase Two.

### **4.7.1 Quantitative data analysis**

Quantitative data analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel software. All 73 responses had an ID associated with them which protected the anonymity of the respondents. Microsoft Excel was chosen as the analytical tool to support the management and analysis of quantitative data as it is relatively easy to use, and the researcher had a good working knowledge of the software. Using JOS, the data from the two questionnaires ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)) were downloaded as an Excel file to enable sorting and collation of the data. Several steps were taken to sort and prepare the data for analysis. Firstly, the qualitative

question responses were removed from the Excel files in respect of both questionnaire types and the quantitative data were merged resulting in one spreadsheet with the quantitative data from both questionnaires.

Once the quantitative data had been prepared the researcher commenced the analysis process. As the questionnaire constituted phase one of the explanatory sequential design within a pragmatic paradigm it was appropriate to use descriptive statistics to summarise and describe the characteristics of the data set. Excel was used to calculate the standard deviation, measures of central tendency (means) and the frequencies and percentages of the responses from the respondents. Demographic information regarding the questionnaire respondents was presented in Section 4.5, and [Appendix E](#) and [Appendix F](#) and a variety of visual presentations in the form of graphs and tables is used to present the quantitative findings in Chapter Five.

#### **4.7.2 Qualitative data analysis**

In addition to the qualitative data responses in the questionnaires, multiple sources of data were collected in respect of the case study site, including documents, individual semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. The transcripts were reviewed and edited by the researcher through listening carefully to the recordings. Transcribing the interviews in this way and revisiting the audio recordings facilitated closer engagement with the data and supported the analysis (Bazeley, 2013). The interview and focus group transcripts recorded who was speaking, which was particularly important in the case of the focus group interviews as there were four interviewees and the researcher participating in the discussion.

Analysing qualitative data is a dynamic process requiring the researcher to remain open to new ways of understanding and interpreting the research topic (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2015; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Clark et al., 2021). Different approaches may be taken to analyse qualitative data, a top-down theoretical thematic analysis driven by the research questions, or a bottom-up inductive approach driven by the data. For this study I was interested in the attitudes of principals and teachers in this Dublin postal district towards inclusion and the ways they mediate DE policy in relation to additional teaching support. Thus the analysis was driven by a bottom up approach focusing on the data collected and reflecting an inductive method (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022). Thematic analysis offers an accessible, flexible approach to qualitative data analysis and was an appropriate method for this study. It also facilitated a rigorous and systematic approach to coding and the identification of themes. A theme is a pattern or element of meaning within the data which

depicts something important about the data relative to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2014, 2019, 2022). Using thematic analysis and following a dynamic, iterative six-step approach as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2022) codes and themes were identified from the data. The six-step approach is set out in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2022)**

	Phase	Description of the Process
1	Organisation and familiarisation with the data	Reading qualitative responses from the questionnaires. Transcribing interviews and focus group interviews. Reading and rereading the data and noting initial ideas
2	Generating initial codes	Using an open coding process by highlighting interesting statements across the entire data set to generate codes.
3	Searching for themes	Collating the codes into potential themes and checking for data relevant to those themes across the data set
4	Reviewing themes	Checking that the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1 analysis) and the data set (Level 2 analysis).Generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the themes, and the overall story. Generating clear names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	Selection of extracts examples of themes, referring to the research questions and literature and production of a scholarly report of the analysis.

Following the initial review of the recording for the purposes of member checking, I revisited the recordings together with the transcripts many times during the analysis process. This first step was necessary to familiarise and immerse myself in the data and to get a sense of what the participants had said (Creswell, 2015; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The transcripts were also reread in conjunction with the recordings to ensure that they were an accurate record of the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). Revisiting the recordings was also important as it enabled me to adopt a more holistic approach to the interpretation of the interviews, interpreting what the participants actually said, and how they said it, and the body language of the participants (Kvale and Brikmann, 2015). Having familiarised myself with the data, the second step of the process commenced. I had begun to form ideas about what was in the data and used different coloured highlighters to highlight interesting phrases and comments made by the interview participants, and statements made by the questionnaire respondents, using an inductive or open coding process. During this phase of the process, I also used MAXQDA, computer software to search for terms or phrases that I had highlighted to ascertain if there were further examples within the data set. The responsibility for coding



the data remains with the researcher (Saldana, 2016) but by using a balanced approach I blended manual coding with the use of MAXQDA for the organization and management of the data. Phase two involved the generation of initial codes across all the data sets using the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework of thematic analysis. While the Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013, 2022) model is set out in stages it is not in fact a linear process but rather an iterative process requiring the researcher to move back and forth throughout the stages as required. Qualitative coding is a reflective process and involves interacting and thinking about the data, allowing the researcher to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Memoing enabled the researcher to consider possible themes, or ‘candidate’ themes and provide a document which could be reviewed at a later stage to confirm or discard themes (Saldana, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2022). Stage three of the analysis involved seeking to identify similar concepts and patterns between the different data sets, questionnaire responses, interviews and focus groups. The aim at this stage was to generate a number of working, provisional themes, and consider the story they allowed me to tell about my dataset, and to address my research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Yin (2009) advocates that the data are interrogated by the researcher to identify contradictions or anomalies, and to ensure that all interpretations are accounted for. This comparative analysis ensured that the interpretations and findings are accurate and credible. Following this process the codes were then grouped together forming initial themes. At this stage, 17 potential themes were identified ([Appendix O](#)). Table 4.4 shows three of the initial themes and associated codes.

**Table 4.4 Initial themes and associated codes**

<b>Theme: Challenges for collaborative practices</b>	<b>Theme: Inclusion</b>	<b>Theme: The new model</b>
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Try to meet their needs	Realistically included	More paperwork
Having the right supports	Try to cater for everybody in the mainstream	Too much administration
If you don't have the right supports	For the most part children with SEN should be included in the mainstream	Very time-consuming
Little communication	Compromises the safety of the child	More autonomy
Too few special education teachers	It very much depends	Discretion of individual school
Having enough time	It can be tokenism	Schools have more power

During the fourth stage I reviewed the preliminary themes identified at stage three and made use of the functionality of MAXQDA to search for and select the data relating to each theme. During this phase the themes were refined resulting in themes being discarded, being merged, and being separated. At this stage the entire data set was re-read to consider how accurately the themes reflected the data and how they collectively provided evidence to answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Stage Five involved further refinement of the themes to ensure that I spoke for the data and told the story ‘made from and of the dataset’ (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 91). The final stage of the process involved writing up the findings which are presented under the themes in Chapter Five. The reliability and validity of the data set were ensured by continued re-reading of the entire data set and reflecting on the coding process and refinement process of the themes as discussed in the following section.

#### **4.8 Reliability, dependability, and validity, credibility**

The criteria for judging the quality of research have been detailed by many writers, and standards for judging the quality of quantitative research have emerged: reliability and validity (Mertens, 2019). Parallel criteria in respect of qualitative research are dependability and credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln, 2009; Mertens, 2019). This section outlines the procedures undertaken during the study to ensure these criteria are met (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019).

##### **4.8.1 Reliability and dependability**

Reliability relates to the consistency of the research and the extent to which it can be replicated, although the use of the term within qualitative research is contested. As set out in Section 4.6 pilot testing of the questionnaire and interview schedules took place and changes made were detailed. Guba and Lincoln (1989) have argued that the term reliability should be replaced with the term dependability which in the context of qualitative research is a challenge, as two researchers studying a single setting may come up with different findings, but both sets of findings might be reliable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Through the use of memos, the choice of codes was continually monitored to ensure consistency across the different data sets, this was supported by the use of MAXQDA software to check the phrases and words that constituted the selected codes. Recording my thoughts about the codes providing a rationale for why particular codes were merged, and explaining what particular themes meant provided an audit trail of the decision-

making process. This audit trail provides supporting evidence for the choices and judgements made throughout the study (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

#### **4.8.2 Validity and credibility**

A number of measures were taken to ensure the validity and credibility of the study, commencing with the selection of the participants. As set out in Section 4.5 questionnaires were sent to the principals of all the mainstream primary schools in the Dublin postal district, and the case study school was within this postal district, with participants participating in both phases of the study maximising the importance of one phase explaining the other. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data to minimise the threat to statistical conclusion validity (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Credibility within qualitative research, is a process of using ‘data as evidence to warrant claims within different theoretical frameworks and specific communities of practice’ (Freeman et al., 2007). It is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the researcher’s perspective (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Guba and Lincoln (1989) equate credibility with internal validity. Member checking was a strategy employed to enhance the validity of the research, and the edited transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants. Doing so offered the interviewees the opportunity to correct factual errors, provide further information, and support the validation of the interviews (Bassey, 1999; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). It also offered the opportunity to ask any questions that they had concerning their experience of partaking in the study (Creswell, 2015). All participants acknowledged receipt of the transcript, and none requested any changes. One participant sought clarification as to whether the data would be anonymized, and this was confirmed. The findings of the study were also sent by email to the staff in the case study school to determine whether they believed that they reflected their views.

#### **4.8.3 Triangulation**

To maximise the internal validity of the study multiple data sources such as interviews and questionnaires were used in this study. Data were also sought from different groups; principals, mainstream teachers, and SEN teachers together with document analysis (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019; Mertens, 2019). This allowed for different perspectives and views of the ‘new model’ to be shared by the respondents. It also provided the opportunity for the corroboration of the evidence shared by the respondents from the different teacher groups. Interviewing specific teacher cohorts within the case study school facilitated the triangulation of the findings and contributed to the validity of the study (Mertens, 2015;

Robson and McCartan, 2016; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). This methodological triangulation enabled a rigorous analysis of the data. The findings represented the different realities, together with both the consistencies and contradictions presented by the principals' and teachers' perspectives of the focus of the study which was the 'new model' of additional teaching support.

#### **4.8.4 Reflexivity**

As a teacher with a keen interest in inclusion and supporting children with SEN, I brought my views and experiences to the research. Therefore, I was conscious of bringing these values and beliefs and my own biases to the research. I made these known to the reader in Chapter One by setting out a brief biographical statement. As a researcher, I cannot distance myself from my experiences, but I used memos and a journal as reflective tools to record my engagement with the data throughout the analysis process. As part of this process, efforts to look for alternative explanations or contrary evidence in the data remained a priority. For example, some of the questionnaire respondents were of the view that the 'new model' enhanced the quantum of support that could be provided to schools and that all children could now access support where needed. While this positive viewpoint would be at variance with this researcher's experience, it must be acknowledged that all schools do not incur the same level of student need and thus is reflective of the different realities.

#### **4.9 Ethical Issues**

As any research involving interactions with human participants carries a certain level of risk, it behoves the researcher to adhere carefully to ethical considerations throughout to minimise this risk (Mertens, 2019). This study was completed under the aegis of Maynooth University Ethics Committee and adhered to the guidelines stipulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) which considers that all educational research should be conducted within an ethical framework of respect for those participating in the study. This stance recognises that while the institutional requirements of Maynooth University and the BERA (2018) guidelines direct ethical practice, the execution of such practice is situated in the conduct of the individual researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). With this fore fronted, issues such as negotiating access, the right to privacy, seeking informed consent, and the protection of participants from harm were considered from the outset (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

#### **4.9.1 Informed consent**

All reasonable steps were taken to ensure that participants were fully informed as to the nature of the study and that any anticipated consequences were understood (BERA, 2018). Principals of schools in the area were first informed about the study at a local principals' meeting and allowed to ask any questions they had about the study. The initial section of the questionnaires ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)) furnished information about the study and informed participants that ethical approval had been obtained from Maynooth University Ethics Committee. Participants were advised that as the questionnaire was anonymous they would not be able to withdraw their data once the questionnaire was submitted. Participants provided informed consent to participate in the study when they clicked the link 'NEXT,' to proceed.

A wider range of ethical issues were present in phase two of the study due to the greater level of engagement between the teachers and principal in the case study school with the researcher. When the principal expressed interest in taking part in phase two of the study, permission to proceed was also sought from the school Board of Management. A detailed description of the study was provided to the Board and informed consent for the school to participate in the study was sought ([Appendix P](#)) (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). The Board was advised that the school would not be identified. The benefits and risks to the school arising from its participation were outlined, and any aspects of study about which it enquired would also be explained. The Board was informed of the steps that would be taken to ensure that if permission was given to conduct the study all participants would be fully informed as to why they had been asked to participate, the nature of participation required, and how the outcomes of the study may be used (BERA, 2018). Having obtained the approval of the Board of Management for participation in the study the principal and teachers from the school were invited to participate and an information sheet and consent forms were emailed to the relevant staff ([Appendix K](#) and [Appendix L](#)). Participants freely gave their consent to participate by signing the consent form and reaffirmed their consent at the start of interviews or focus group interviews. I provided my email address for teachers to contact me directly to address any questions they had. In addition, the principal was offered the opportunity to arrange a visit by me, if required, to meet the teachers to address any questions they had. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, this did not prove possible, and while the option of an online meeting was then offered this was not taken up.

#### **4.9.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

The anonymity of the principal and teachers participating in phase two of the study has been considered by using a pseudonym for the participating school and teachers. The data were also anonymised so that no information provided could identify either the teachers or the school. However, it was also explained to participants that anonymity could not be guaranteed, as they could potentially be identifiable to familiar readers, although the postal district and the school within which they work is not identified in the study (Denscombe, 2021). Teachers participating in the interviews were assured that any information shared during the interviews was accessible only to the researcher and would not be shared with the principal or school management.

#### **4.9.3 Storage of data**

Paper copies of the data were kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. The questionnaire responses are held in a password-protected file on the MU server and may be retained for a period of a minimum of ten years after the study is completed in line with the GDPR policy and Ethics policy of MU (Maynooth University, 2018, 2019). Interview and focus group interview participants were advised that their details and data would only be kept for the specified purposes of my research and not retained any longer than necessary in compliance with the GDPR policy of Maynooth University (Maynooth University, 2018), the Maynooth University Research Ethics policy (Maynooth University, 2019) and the Maynooth University Research Integrity policy (Maynooth University, 2021).

#### **4.9.4 Researcher Power**

As the researcher is a principal, there was a risk of the researcher being viewed as being in a position of power over the teacher participants (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). The researcher also has extensive experience in the field of SEN so it could be construed that I was checking to see how other teachers/schools are engaging with the 'new model' and to ascertain if teachers' views are compatible with those of the school management. I explained to all participants at the start of the interviews that in the context of this study my role was that of researcher, and that there is no one way to mediate the 'new model' or to support students with SEN. I also explained to the teachers that what was said during the interviews was not going to be shared with the principal of the school and that any email communication, apart from scheduling the interviews, would be between the researcher and the individual teacher (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Other aspects of power within the case study school were also considered through having one-on-one interviews with the principal and the SEN coordinator and separate focus group interviews with the mainstream class teachers and the SEN teachers. Focus group interviews with the class teachers and with the SEN team members had the potential to be a positive or a negative experience based on their views of inclusion and may present greater risk if the views articulated are different than those of the SEN co-ordinator or the principal or their peers. Neither the principal nor the SEN co-ordinator was present during the group interviews enabling the teachers to articulate their views more freely (Creswell, 2015).

Participants were also facilitated with their choice of time and venue for the interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic participants had even greater control over the choice of venue with some participants choosing to be interviewed in their homes, and others in the school. Providing an opportunity for the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews also gave a level of control back to the participants (Creswell, 2015).

#### **4.10 Limitations**

Whilst every effort was made to conduct a well-designed study nevertheless all research has limitations which must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study was based on a small online questionnaire sample and a single-site case study school in a postal district in Dublin, and thus is not representative of all primary schools in Ireland. While online questionnaires typically have a lower response-rate than other questionnaire modes and response rates can vary from less than one percent in some cases (Vehovar and Lozar Manfreda, 2017; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), the low response rate to this questionnaire is recognised as a limitation of the study. There are several possible reasons for this, one being that the questionnaire did not reach the intended participants, as due to competing pressures principals may not have completed the questionnaire themselves or sent the link to their teacher colleagues which may explain the initial low response rate from mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers. The length of time taken to complete the questionnaire may have been longer than that indicated by those who piloted the questionnaire, and this may have resulted in some potential respondents not completing or submitting the questionnaire. Several different approaches were taken to increase the response rate resulting in 73 respondents in total, and while these measures increased the response rate, overall, it remained low.

The sample of participants may not be representative of the school teaching population as a whole as the study was conducted within a particular Dublin postal district.

However, the questionnaire respondents represented a broad range of principals, mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers from large primary schools under different patronages and as such their responses provided an insight into the way a cross section of schools mediate the 'new model'. The questionnaire responses informed the interview schedules which led to the thick, rich data provided by the interview participants complementing the qualitative and quantitative data from the questionnaires. Thus, although the low questionnaire response rate is recognised as a limitation, it did not significantly impact the overall findings of the study.

The case study was that of the 'new model' and was investigated in depth in one site in a mainstream primary school in Dublin, and thus the generalizability of the findings is limited (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The case study school which was a DEIS Band one junior school is not representative of all primary schools, and thus the experiences of the teachers within that school are not representative of the experiences of teachers in all DEIS Band one schools and less representative of teachers in non-DEIS schools. Nonetheless these limitations are compensated for to some extent by the depth of engagement of the staff in the case study school, and the rich data provided by the survey respondents to the qualitative questions.

The questionnaire responses and the interviews represent a snapshot in time, and while the questionnaire was launched prior to the school closures brought about by COVID-19, the interviews were carried out during the first closure period. The timing of the data collection, and particularly the data collected in phase two of the study occurring as it did during the period of school closure must be acknowledged. School staff were under intense pressure and stress trying to respond to pupils' needs at this time. This was particularly so for DEIS schools where staff were under pressure to ensure pupils had access to digital technology for the continuation of their education in an online environment. Staff also had to ensure that school meals continued to be provided to students although the children were not attending school at that time. These factors must be acknowledged and the impact that they may have had on participant responses recognised.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the methodological approach chosen for this study, and the rationale for the choices made to obtain the data required to answer the research questions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The choice of paradigm together with its ontological, epistemological and methodological implications was presented. The explanatory sequential research design was described, and the data collection instruments selected were detailed, and



the rationale as to their appropriateness was set out. The process of data analysis which was conducted using Microsoft Excel for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data was described. The ethical considerations underpinning the study were set out and the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the study were explained. Finally, the limitations of the study were articulated. Chapter Five sets out the findings which were determined from deep engagement with and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative questionnaire data together with the thick, rich data from the interviews and focus groups interviews.

# Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the study are presented so as to answer the research questions. The findings are discussed in relation to Hornby's (2014, 2015) framework of *inclusive special education*, and the policy and research literature introduced in Chapters Two and Three. The chapter is divided into sections which reflect the themes constructed from a careful analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. The following main themes were identified:

- inclusion and inclusive practices,
- the 'new model',
- teacher self-efficacy in respect of inclusion, and
- challenges for inclusion: Everybody's doing their best

Each theme has a number of subthemes which are presented at the outset of each section. Permeating the themes is the individual child, and the way in which their unique characteristics influence their successful inclusion in the mainstream classroom. The main themes are presented in Figure 5.1. Both the quantitative and qualitative data are presented and discussed simultaneously for each of the main themes and sub themes in Sections 5.2 onwards. The terms 'principal', 'mainstream class teacher', and 'SEN teacher' are used in respect of each group of respondents where appropriate. Where the term 'teacher' is used it refers to mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers.

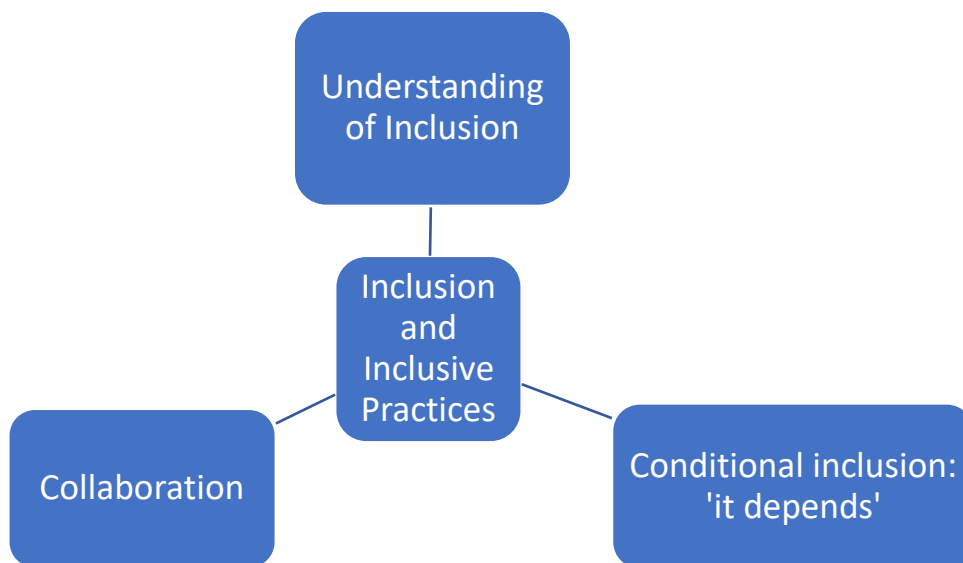
**Figure 5.1 Main Themes**



## 5.2 Theme One. Inclusion and inclusive practices

This section addresses the theme of inclusion and inclusive practices. There are three subthemes as illustrated in Figure 5.2. The first subtheme addresses the findings as they relate to teachers' understanding of inclusion, and the second their willingness to include students under the theme Conditional inclusion 'it depends'. This is followed by the third subtheme collaboration, referring to collaboration both within the school setting and with personnel from outside agencies.

**Figure 5.2 Theme One. Inclusion and inclusive practices, and subthemes**



### 5.2.1 Subtheme One. Understanding of inclusion

Most principals were positively disposed towards inclusion in some respects, with PTR 6<sup>24</sup> explaining that 'it works well for many children but only when adequately resourced, ', and PTR 1 saying 'I feel students with SEN should be properly supported so that they can be realistically included'. Dearbhla and Muireann, SEN teachers in the case study school (Table 4.2) were not focused on resourcing as a criteria for inclusion with Dearbhla commenting that 'it just means no matter what your issue, issues are, including you within the class and within the school', and Muireann saying 'you try and cater for everybody in mainstream'. Likewise, receptiveness to full inclusion was expressed by Ailbhe the principal, who confirmed the openness of the school to students of all abilities when she said

I suppose, no matter what your ability, that's everybody's, you know, included in the class... if you've a learning difficulty or anything like that, um, that the school

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<sup>24</sup> PTR Principal Teacher Respondent

is open to, to working with you and the people aren't pigeonholed according to their ability.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Bronagh the SEN coordinator when she said

I suppose it's the broader term of inclusion to me would be that no matter what your ability that you are accepted into a school'.

The concept of inclusion was expanded upon by Meabh and Aoibhinn with Maebh pointing out that 'it's acceptance as well, you know, of others', and Aoibhinn reflecting that 'if they come from a disadvantaged background that they're given an equal opportunity to other kids'. Sadhbh concurred with the broader perspective on inclusion reflecting that as 'the others were saying is it's about disadvantage as well'.

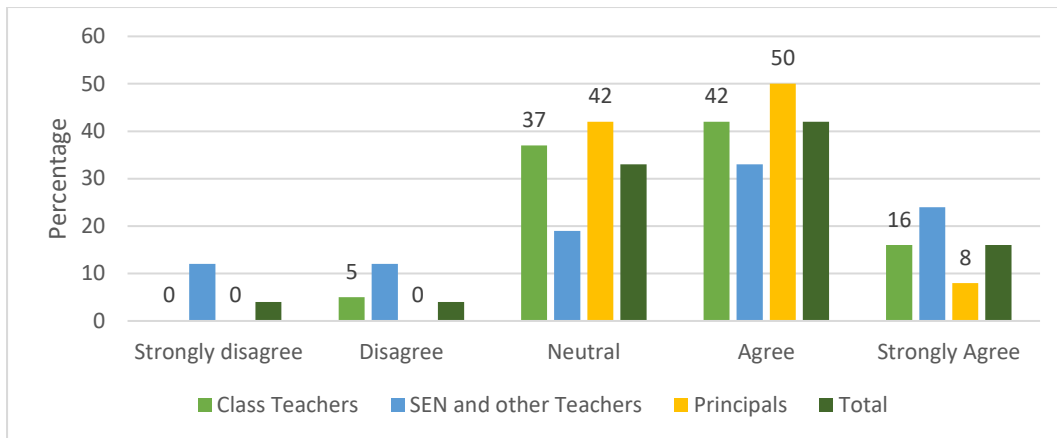
The varied conceptions of inclusion portrayed by the questionnaire respondents and case study school principal and teachers are reflective of the myriad of ways in which the term inclusion is used, resulting in it meaning different things to different people (Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou, 2010).

The openness to include students with SEN in schools and mainstream classrooms irrespective of their needs or issues, is discussed in the next section.

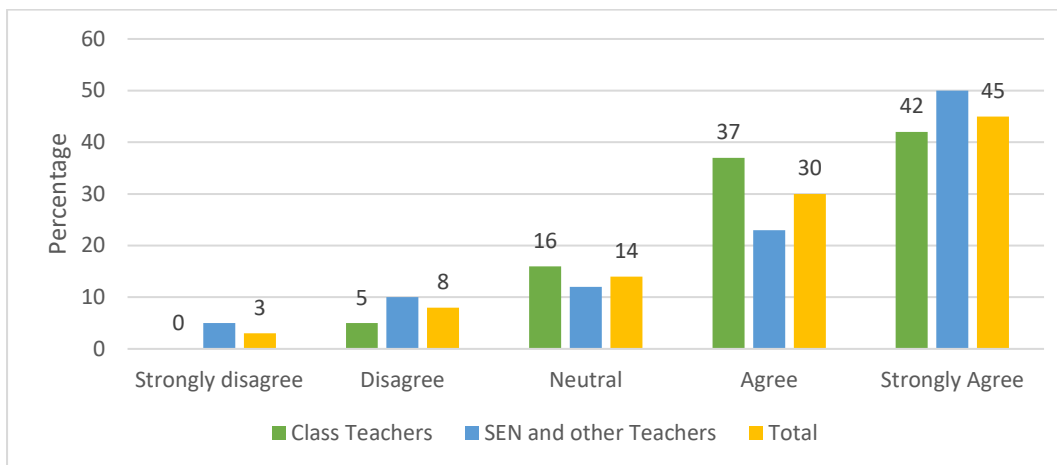
### **5.2.2 Subtheme Two. Conditional inclusion, 'it depends'**

Teachers and principals were asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements focused on the inclusion of students with SEN using a rating scale from one to five, with one being strongly disagree, and five, strongly agree. Some teachers and principals believed that the inclusion of students with SEN in their classrooms requires significant changes in classroom procedures with 58 percent (N=42) of all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement as presented in Figure 5.3. Class teachers and SEN teachers also expressed the view that they needed to change the way they teach when they have students with SEN in their classroom with 75 percent (N=46) of these respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was required as depicted in Figure 5.4.

**Figure 5.3 Inclusion of students with SEN requires significant change in mainstream class procedures**

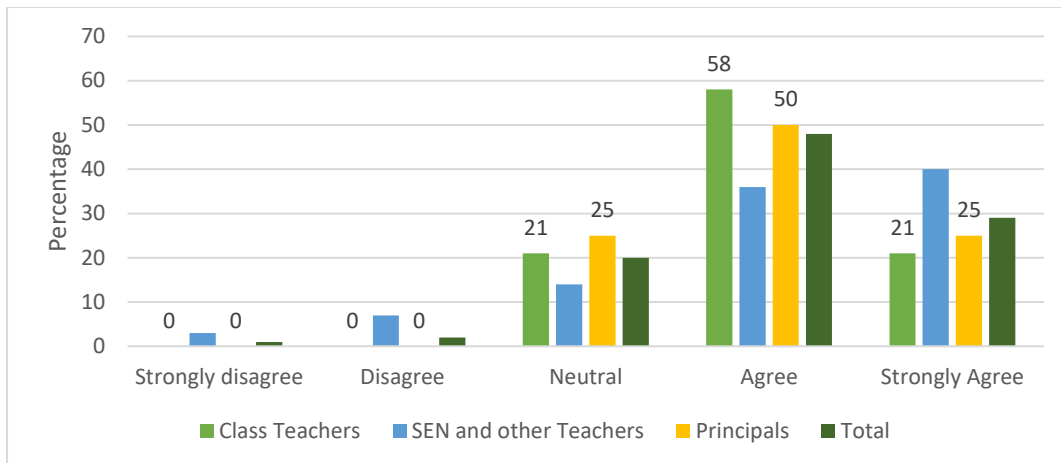


**Figure 5.4 I need to change the way I teach when I have students with SEN in the class**

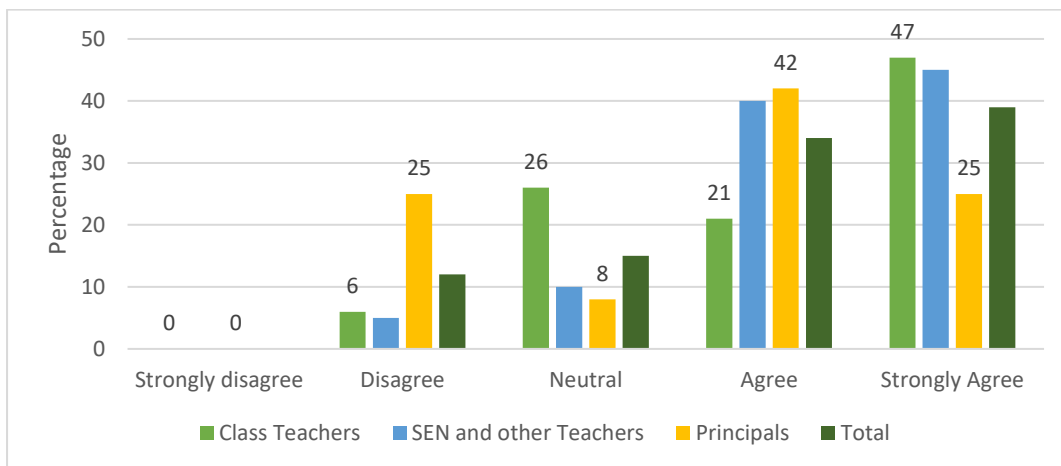


Despite their beliefs of the impact of students with SEN on teachers' practice, principals and teachers were of the view that students with SEN should be given every opportunity to function in the mainstream classroom where possible with 77 percent (N=56) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement as illustrated in Figure 5.5. However, in contrast 73 percent (N=53) agreed or strongly agreed that some disabilities are inappropriate for the mainstream class as depicted in Figure 5.6. Additionally, they were unsure if the needs of students with SEN were best served through special, separate classes as illustrated in Figure 5.7 with 45 percent (N=33) of all respondents holding a neutral position on the matter.

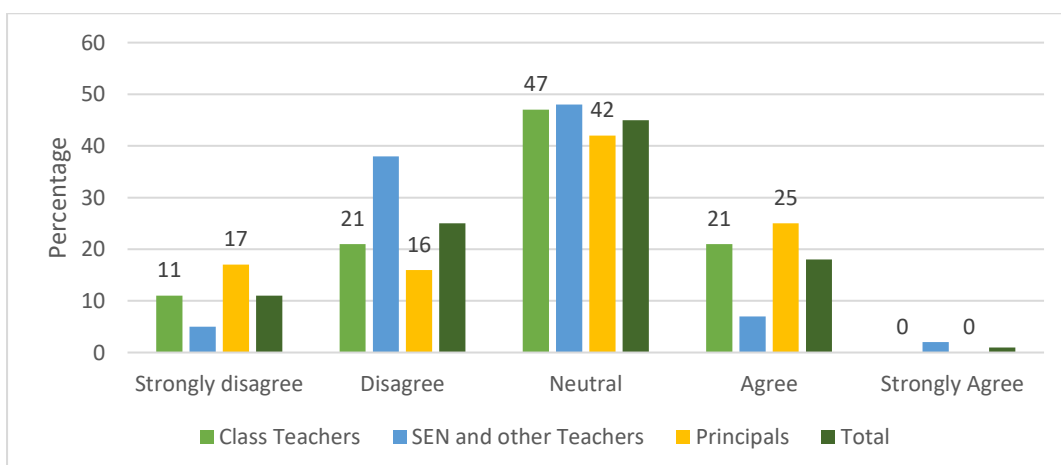
**Figure 5.5 Students with SEN should be given every opportunity to function in the mainstream class setting where possible**



**Figure 5.6 Some disabilities are inappropriate in the mainstream classroom**



**Figure 5.7 The needs of students with SEN can be best served through special, separate classes**



Separately questionnaire respondents were asked to rate how easy or how difficult it is to include students with a range of diagnosed disabilities using a rating scale from one to five, with one being extremely difficult, and five extremely easy. Table 5.1 sets out the mean and standard deviation in relation to how easy the three teacher groups think it is to include students with SEN in mainstream classrooms.

**Table 5.1 Mean scores for teachers easy to include, by SEN category**

Disability category	Principal		Class teacher		SEN teacher	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Hearing difficulties</b>	3.5	0.9	2.89	1.10	2.98	1.09
<b>Behavioural difficulties</b>	1.58	0.51	2.05	0.85	2.10	0.98
<b>Social and emotional difficulties</b>	2.25	1.22	2.37	0.83	2.33	1.05
<b>Physical difficulties</b>	3.42	1.08	3.16	0.96	3.02	1.05
<b>Visual difficulties</b>	3.25	1.14	3.00	1.05	2.69	0.98
<b>Mild general learning difficulties</b>	3.67	0.78	3.53	0.77	3.14	0.90
<b>Moderate general learning difficulties</b>	2.33	0.89	2.47	0.77	2.00	0.96
<b>Severe/profound general learning difficulties</b>	1.58	0.79	1.58	0.84	1.12	0.33
<b>Speech and language difficulties</b>	3.08	0.79	3.68	0.89	3.26	0.89
<b>Autism</b>	2.33	1.15	2.79	0.85	2.64	0.79
<b>Autism (Preverbal/early communication)</b>	1.83	0.94	2.21	1.23	1.64	0.62
<b>Specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia)</b>	3.42	0.90	4.00	0.58	3.55	0.83
<b>Gifted/Exceptionally able</b>	3.33	0.78	3.37	0.96	3.57	1.04
<b>Dual Exceptionality</b>	2.92	0.90	3.05	0.91	3.21	0.87

Overall teachers and principals indicated a willingness to include students with a diagnosed SEN, however, the ease with which they believed this was possible differed based on the SEN category. Principals believed that students with mild general learning difficulties were the easiest to include with a mean of 3.67, while SEN teachers perceived students who were gifted or exceptionally able as the easiest to include with a mean score of 3.57. Class teachers perceived students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or dyscalculia as the easiest to include with a mean score of 4. However, students with severe/profound general learning difficulties were perceived as the most difficult to include, with a mean of 1.58 for principals and class teachers, and a mean of 1.12 for SEN teachers. Likewise, principals' responses indicated a mean score of 1.58 for willingness to include students with behavioural difficulties, although class teachers were slightly more positive in their willingness to include with a mean of 2.05.

Responses to the qualitative questionnaire questions and interviews in the case study school expanded upon and clarified the results from the quantitative questionnaire data. The challenges for the inclusion of students with behavioural difficulties were raised by teachers and principals with one principal pointing out that ‘[S]ome can be catered [for] in class, but behavioural difficulties are a health and safety risk and time-consuming in an overburdened curriculum’ (PTR 12). Similar concerns were articulated by a deputy principal respondent saying:

I like to think I am an advocate for inclusion. However, there are rare incidents when either a pupil with SEN cannot be given the correct resources to develop OR when a pupil with behavioural issues disrupts a class to the extent that other pupils are not being allowed a fair chance to learn (CTR15).

Students with behavioural difficulties were also identified by other class teachers as particularly difficult to include safely in the classroom with one class teacher pointing out that

in some cases where a child has severe behaviour problems, a mainstream classroom may not be a feasible option, especially if it compromises the safety of the child with SEN and the other children of the class (CTR 23).

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou, 2006; de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011; Krischler and Pit-ten Cate, 2019) where teachers felt that students with behavioural difficulties are more difficult to include than students with sensory difficulties. Challenging behaviour was also cited as an issue in previous Irish studies with major concern expressed at the extent to which significantly challenging behaviour infringes upon the rights of all pupils and teachers (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013). The beliefs articulated by a number of principals and teachers in this study that the mainstream class is not an appropriate placement for some students with SEN but that they should be given every opportunity to function in the mainstream classroom where possible is also evident in the literature. Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), Warnock (2005), Hornby (2014, 2015) and Kauffman and Hornby (2020) and others support the effective inclusion of as many children with SEN as possible in mainstream schools, but also posit the view that

for some students with disabilities (certainly not all, but a significant percentage) inclusion in general education is not helpful, denying students with disabilities the very special education that is their moral right if not their legal right (Kauffman and Badar, 2014b, p. 14).



These contrasting positions are indicative of the tensions within special education with teachers and principals clarifying that their responses were really individual to the particular child rather than pertaining to a specific SEN diagnosis. SETR 31<sup>25</sup> observed that ‘a mainstream class could be of great benefit to one child but may hinder the growth and development of another’. Similarly, CTR 4<sup>26</sup> believed that ‘for the most part children with SEN should be included in the mainstream, whether it’s for a portion of the day or longer’ expressing a belief that there are limits to inclusion.

Teachers in the case study school also expressed similar qualifying sentiments with Dearbhla saying ‘It very much depends where on the, you know, mild general or severe, where you said the child lies’ (Dearbhla) and Muireann saying ‘it would all be in an individual case, really, wouldn’t it be? Yeah’. Mainstream class teachers made similar comments, with Saoirse saying ‘you know, one child might settle fine into a classroom, mainstream classroom setting and then maybe another might have behaviour issues’

Sadhbh echoed that, saying

you could have one child with autism who settles in very well and deals very well with the, the mainstream classroom environment and another child who struggles hugely and finds it difficult to learn within that environment.

Whilst some of these comments may be perceived as indicative of a within-child perspective of disability, an alternative interpretation places the focus on the individual child and their unique needs, demonstrating that according to the participants in this study the disability does not define the child. Teachers’ beliefs in respect of the inclusion of children in a mainstream classroom were summed up in the words of SETR 12 when she articulated the view that:

inclusion is only beneficial if it provides the child with the best support to do their best. For many children with SEN this will be the mainstream class. But with children with severe and extremely complex needs a mainstream class may not be the most suitable place for them and would actually hinder them as opposed to help them.

This focus on the individual child and meeting their particular needs aligned with a number of components of Hornby’s (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education* and is indicative of a focus on the provision of education in the most appropriate setting, whilst ensuring the maximum inclusion in mainstream schools or classes. It also recognises that this may not be possible for all children, particularly those with more significant and complex

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<sup>25</sup> SETR Special Education Teacher Respondent

<sup>26</sup> CTR Class Teacher Respondent

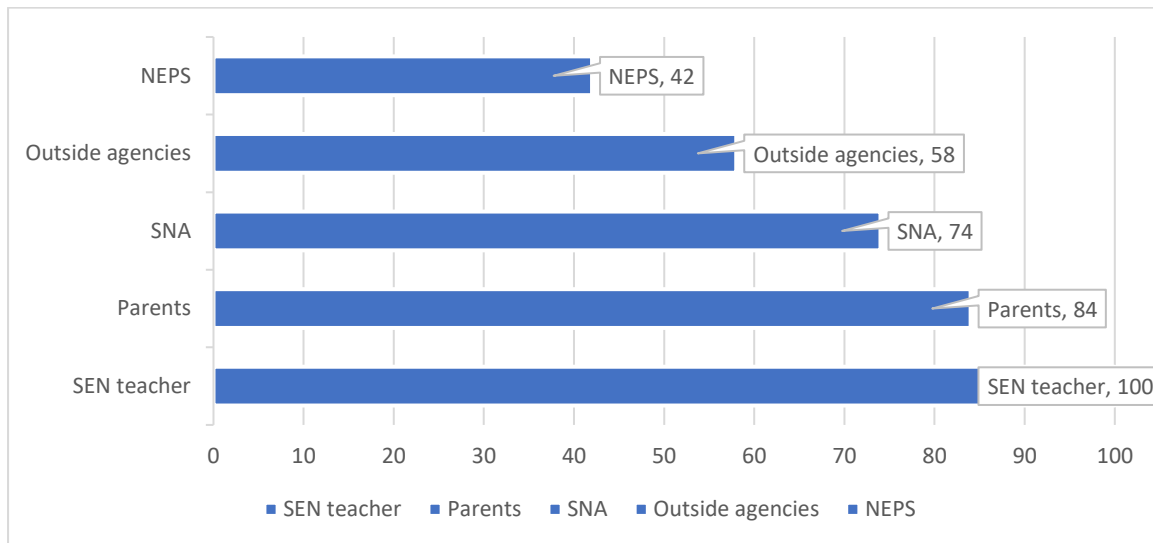
needs. This perspective is premised on the availability of a continuum of placement options within the school system which is currently available in the Irish school system. While the views expressed by the teachers in this study highlight the importance of education in the most appropriate setting they are not in accordance with the UNCRPD Committee's interpretation of Article 24 (Education) of the convention that having a parallel education systems is not considered inclusive (NCSE, 2019). Despite the caveats proffered by teachers in the inclusion of students with SEN in their classrooms, their professional practice demonstrated a generally positive disposition to inclusion. The inclusive practices of teachers and schools in this Dublin postal district are discussed in the following section.

### **5.2.3 Subtheme Three. Collaboration**

The implementation of inclusive practices in mainstream primary schools in this Dublin postal district was underpinned by an SEN policy with 93 percent (N=68) of participants stating that their school had an SEN policy and 73 percent (N=53) of participants stating that they were familiar with that policy. This is consistent with the findings of Rose et al., (2015) who found that 91 percent of primary schools had an SEN policy, and Walsh (2021) who found that all of the schools in her study had an SEN policy. Having coherent education policies based on the principles of inclusion is essential in Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*, and the findings indicate that these policies are implemented through a variety of approaches encompassing collaborative work practices within the school, and engagement with parents and outside agencies. These diverse approaches are now detailed.

Teacher respondents indicated that they collaborate with a multiplicity of education partners, with all mainstream class teachers collaborating with an SEN teacher in their school, and 84 percent (N=16) collaborating with parents. Fewer mainstream class teachers collaborated with SNAs; however, this may have been because all mainstream class teachers were not working with an SNA or did not have a student requiring SNA support at the time of the questionnaire. Teachers collaborate to a lesser extent with outside agencies, with 58 percent (N=11) of mainstream class teachers collaborating with outside agencies, and 42 percent (N= 8) collaborating with NEPS when planning for students with SEN as shown in Figure 5.8.

**Figure 5.8 Mainstream class teachers collaborate with education partners**

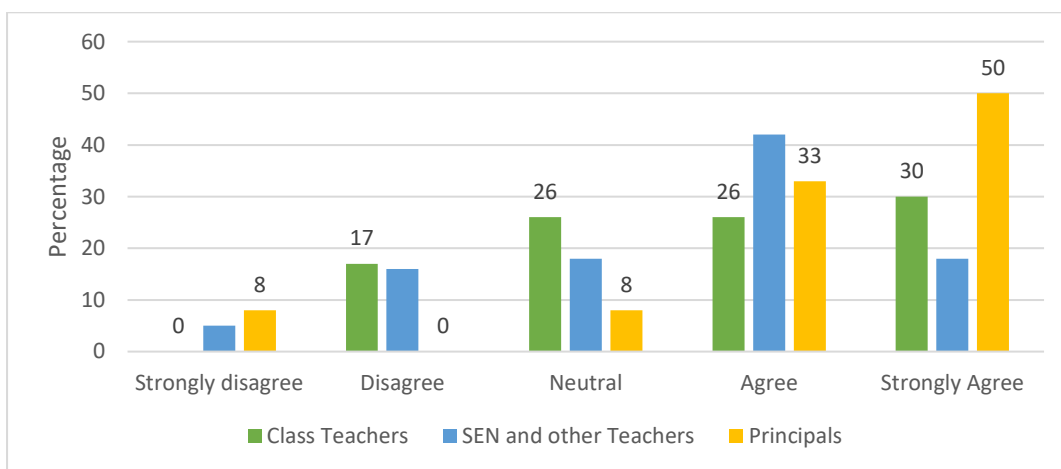


Several different approaches have been developed by schools to facilitate collaborative planning at both a formal and informal level. Local arrangements or context-specific solutions were implemented where ‘supervision was provided to allow SEN teachers and the classroom teachers to meet’ (CTR 3). In other schools, collaborative planning usually occurred ‘after school... lunchtime’ (CTR 12) or ‘in our own time outside of school hours’ (CTR 6). One class teacher taught infants, and collaborative planning was scheduled ‘during the hour when the children have gone home’ (CTR 1). In other schools, team meetings involving class teachers and support teachers are facilitated by making use of ‘Croke Park hours’ (PTR 6, PTR 10). For some teachers, planning is more ad hoc, and ‘most often it is snatched chats as children are working with SNA’ (CTR 18).

The development of collaborative skills and close collaboration with parents, specialist teachers, and other professionals is essential to implement effective inclusive special education. Hornby (2014, 2015) places a strong emphasis on the development of inter-personal skills, which he says are an essential prerequisite for effective consultation and collaboration. Whole school policies which make provision for collaboration with parents to facilitate the holistic development of students with SEN have also been emphasised by Hornby (2011b). The importance of collaboration is also highlighted in the literature by McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014) and Ainscow (2016a). Taking the time to collaborate with colleagues and the other partners in education is necessary to ensure the effective inclusion of students with SEN and recognised by the teachers and principals in this study through the steps they take to facilitate collaboration.

Although all mainstream class teachers collaborate with their SEN teacher colleagues, only 63 percent (N=46) of respondents stated that class teachers and support teachers collaborate well in their school. Principals and teachers differed in their views regarding the success of their collaborative practices. While 83 percent (N=10) of principals agreed or strongly agreed that class teachers and support teachers collaborate well together, this contrasts with the views of both mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers. Only 56 percent (N=13) of mainstream class teachers agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case, and 60 percent (N=23) of SEN teachers held a similar view as illustrated in Figure 5.9.

**Figure 5.9 Class teachers and support teachers collaborate well together in our school**



Further insights into collaborative practices to support inclusion were provided by the staff of the case study school. This school carries out a formal review of its SEN provision regularly, with a review week timetabled into the school calendar every seven or eight weeks. Staff believed that this systematic structure enabled them to track and monitor pupils throughout the year and facilitate formal engagement between mainstream class teachers and the SET team about pupils' progress. Bronagh advised that in order to facilitate this they

withdraw some supports from classrooms, maybe some kind of whole school interventions, you know, like power hour, or, um, maybe literacy support...and we timetable meetings between class teachers and whoever their support teacher is...so, we were like constantly reviewing, and it gives a good whole school, everyone knows what is happening.

She believed that time spent setting up the system in their school over the past few years meant that the practice was embedded and could almost 'just run itself now' (Bronagh).

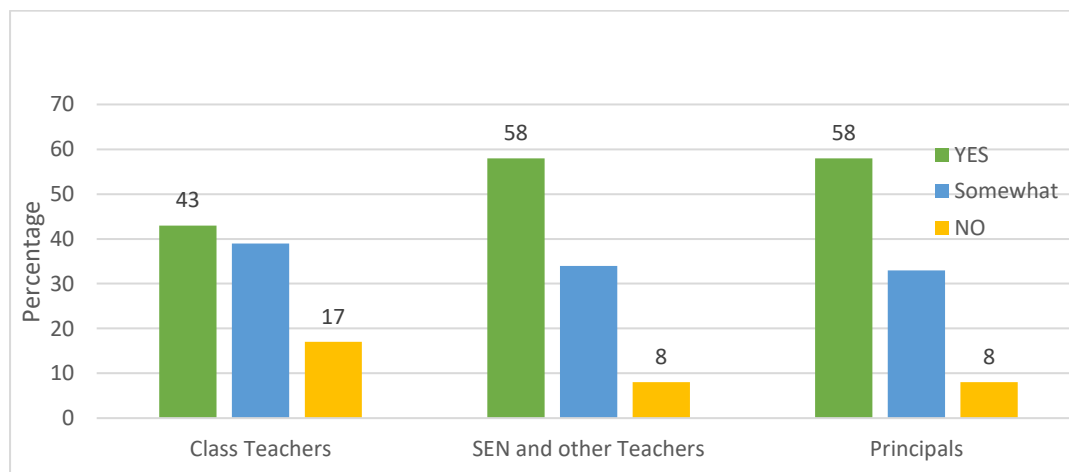
Research has demonstrated that collaboration between teachers fosters more positive attitudes toward inclusion (Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Ahmmed, Sharma, and Deppeler,

2014; Leonard and Smyth, 2020) and that teacher collaboration is widely accepted as a means to achieving improvement and as key to implementing inclusive education (Ainscow, 2016b, 2016a; Kokko, Takala and Pihlaja, 2021). The teachers in the case study school have demonstrated that they have put considerable thought and effort into developing structures within their school to implement collaborative practices to support the inclusion of students with SEN. However, despite the effort put into setting up these collaborative structures, a number of different barriers or challenges were identified. As additional support teaching now appears to be provided to a greater extent within the mainstream classroom increased levels of collaboration between the SET teacher and the mainstream class teacher would be expected. However, there is a risk that the contention that collaborative practices are key to implementing inclusive education can obscure the complexities involved in ensuring that collaboration is effective (Ainscow, 2016a). The findings from this study show that the questionnaire respondents are not wholly in agreement that class teachers and SET teachers collaborate well together, suggesting that presence in the classroom does not automatically result in effective collaboration. Unless teachers collaborate effectively students are not benefiting from the presence of two professionals in the classroom.

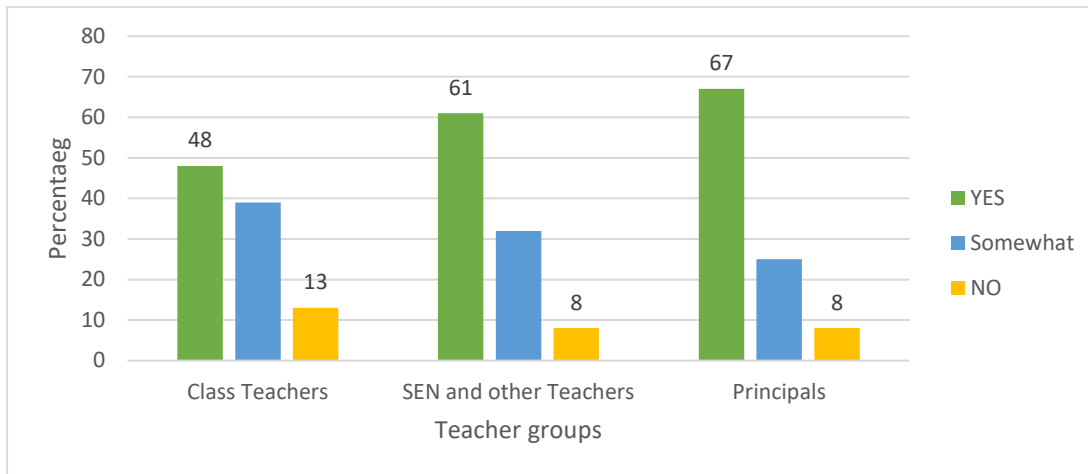
### 5.3 Theme Two. The ‘New Model’

The majority of questionnaire respondents stated that they were familiar or somewhat familiar with Circular No 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) which introduced the ‘new model’, and the updating Circular No 007/2019 (DES, 2019b) as illustrated in Figure 5.10. They were also familiar with the *Guidelines for Schools* (DES, 2017b) published to support the introduction of the ‘new model’ as illustrated in Figure 5.11.

**Figure 5.10 Familiarity with Circular 0013/2017 and Circular 0007/2019 (DES, 2017a, 2019b)**



**Figure 5.11 Familiarity with the guidelines accompanying Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017b)**

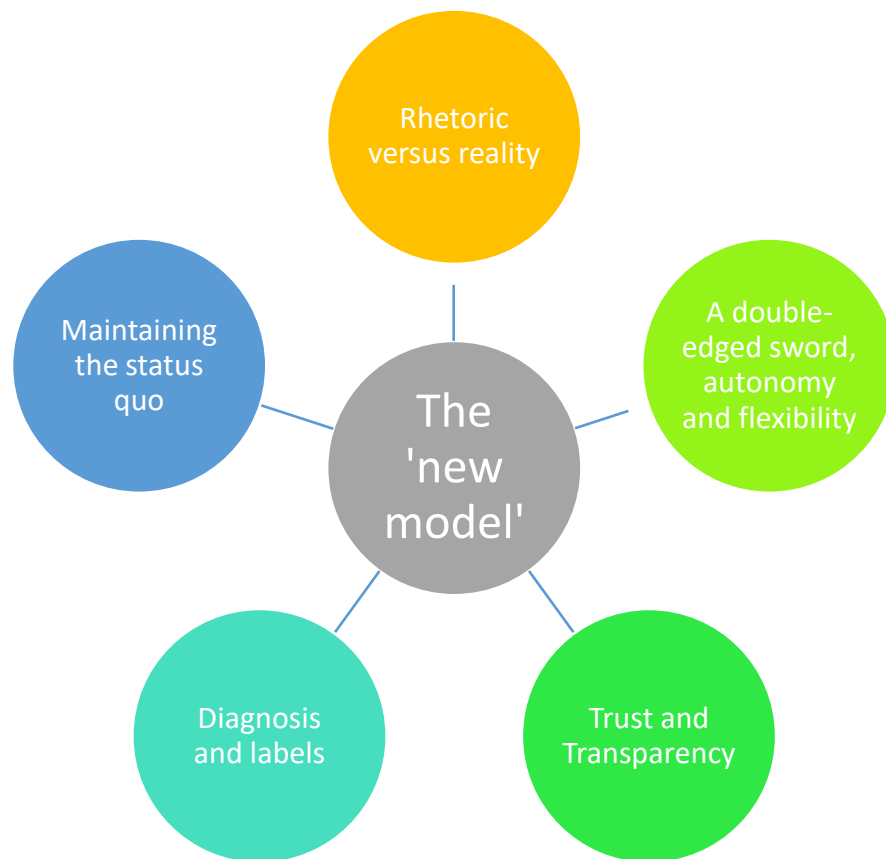


This familiarity meant that principals, SEN teachers and to a lesser extent mainstream class teachers believed they were sufficiently conversant with the changes introduced by the circulars to enable them to express their views about the constituent components of the new policy. The findings relating to the ‘new model’ are discussed in the next section under theme two and the subthemes:

- rhetoric versus reality,
- a double-edged sword, autonomy and flexibility,
  - deployment of resources
- trust and transparency,
  - complex needs
  - standardised tests
  - gender
  - school context
- diagnosis and labels
- maintaining the status quo

The subthemes are illustrated in Figure 5.12

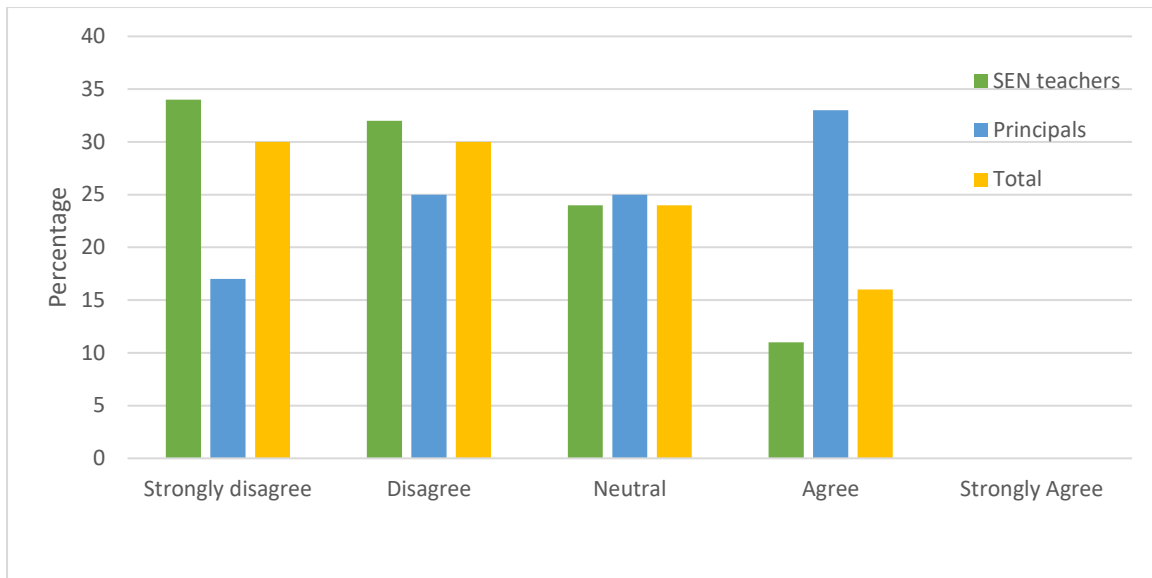
**Figure 5.12 Theme Two. The ‘New Model’ and subthemes**



### **5.3.1 Subtheme One. Rhetoric versus reality**

Principals and SEN teachers disputed the DE contention that the ‘new model’ resulted in a very significant administrative saving for schools (DES, 2017a). Overall 60 percent (N=30) of the principal and SEN teacher questionnaire respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case as illustrated in Figure 5.13. However, SEN teachers were more firmly of the view that the administrative requirements were not reduced, with 66 percent (N=25) of SEN teacher respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that this was the case. In their policy document recommending the introduction of a new model, the NCSE (2014) suggested that the elimination of the necessity to apply for resource hours as required under the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a) would provide some reduction in the administrative work for schools. The DES went further, however, and stated that it would ‘create a very significant administrative saving for schools’ (DES, 2017b, p. 14). Indeed, the reverse could be said to be the case ‘as the DES and NCSE drive for MORE [respondent emphasis] individualised paperwork’ (SETR 27), it results in ‘increased paperwork’ (PTR 8), and ‘too much administration’ (SETR 21).

**Figure 5.13 The ‘New Model’ has resulted in a very significant administrative saving for schools**



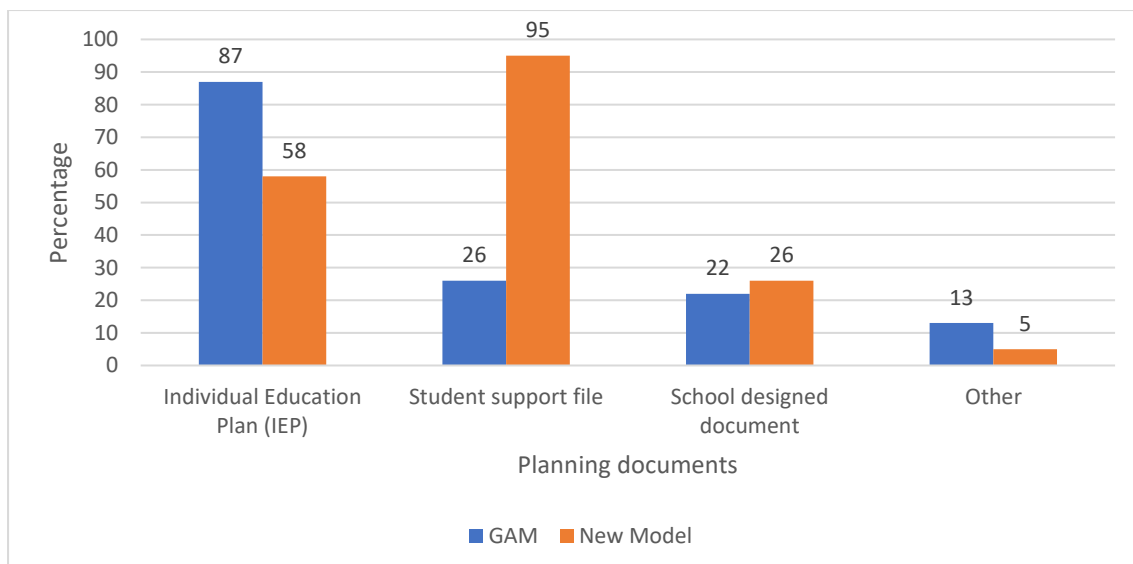
Far from reducing the administrative burden, one principal suggested that the ‘new model’ was introduced to ‘increase the number of planning documents required, to make application for SEN resources even more onerous’ (PTR 1). While mainstream class teachers were not specifically asked this question, they commented on the fact that there was ‘more paperwork’ required (CTR 11), and CTR 8 lamented the ‘added paperwork’. The need for increased paperwork was exemplified by the SEN teachers in the case study school, who commented that ‘sometimes the paperwork that comes with children is very time-consuming outside of school or during school’ (Orlaith) and ‘you can add on hours and hours to your week’ (Sorcha). The change in the level of paperwork required was highlighted by SETR 6 who said that she sees ‘a huge demand for paperwork where conversations used to suffice’ illustrating a disconnect between the DE rhetoric and school reality.

The fact that schools no longer have to apply for resource hours for pupils with LI disabilities (DES, 2017a) was acknowledged by PTR 10 who recognised that there was ‘less paperwork applying for resources’ [Resource hours], and PTR 5 found that ‘it saves time on filling in lengthy paperwork’. Both the NCSE (NCSE, 2014a) and the DES (DES, 2017a) were confident that this model would be more attractive to principals and teachers due to the reduced paperwork that they envisaged with the introduction of the ‘new model’. However, it is evident from the findings that this is not the experience on the ground, indicating that the views of policymakers are at odds with the experience of practitioners.



A number of teachers and principals stated that they had made changes to the planning documents that they used in their school following the introduction of the ‘new model’ (DES, 2005a), from Individual Education Plans (IEP) to Student Support Files (SSF) as illustrated in Figure 5.14. This change to using the SSF may account for some of the increased administration experienced by principals and teachers, and may also suggest that schools are now more aware of the need for greater accountability to ensure that they document and record the organisational procedures for the identification, tracking, and monitoring of students with SEN. Hornby (2014, 2015) emphasises the importance of having whole school policies and procedures to respond to the needs of students with SEN. He also argues that systems for the identification, assessment, and monitoring of student progress must be in place in addition to systems for the evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions. Other research also stresses the importance of teacher skills in the use of appropriate assessments and whole school approaches to inform interventions and to monitor the progress of students with SEN (Desforges and Lindsay, 2010; Salend and Whittaker, 2012; Hornby, 2020; Kauffman and Hornby, 2020). The need for greater accountability appears to have been recognised by the teachers and principals in this study through the changes they have made in their record keeping.

**Figure 5.14 Planning documents used under GAM/EAL (DES, 2005a) and the ‘New Model’ (DES, 2017a)**



While the views of school staff differed from that of the Departmental Circular as it pertained to the administrative workload, principals and teachers were broadly in agreement that the ‘new model’ brought increased autonomy as discussed in the next section.

### 5.3.2 Subtheme Two. A Double-edged sword: autonomy and responsibility

Some teachers and principals opined that the ‘new model’ offered autonomy to schools in allocating the additional support teaching resources, with PTR 3 saying it ‘gives school autonomy in how our resources are used’, and PTR 9 commenting that it is a ‘more fluid system’. Ailbhe the principal of the case study school also acknowledged this flexibility, commenting that in comparison to the GAM/EAL (DES, 2005a) ‘you don’t have that rigidity any more’, and similarly PTR 7 recognised that this model allowed the school ‘more discretion in assigning supports within the school. In the old model, it was very inflexible’. SEN teachers and mainstream class teachers were of the view that the ‘new model’ ‘allows autonomy to schools to provide greater levels of support to those children in most need of it,’ (SETR 15), and that ‘schools are now in a position to use hours to suit needs of school rather than hours following a child for individual support’ (CTR 16). These sentiments align with the aspirations outlined in Circular 0013/2017 that:

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability (DES, 2017a p.2).

Even though the increased autonomy and flexibility were welcomed by many, the aspirations espoused in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) were not viewed by all participants through the same lens as that of the DE. There was a recognition by some teachers and principals that schools were only partly autonomous as decisions taken to allocate support teaching hours must be allocated within a set of pre-determined parameters, which were also constrained by the quantum of support allocated. Teachers and principals expressed several contrary views concerning the increased autonomy and flexibility devolved to schools, with PTR 3 of the opinion that:

my cynical hat would say that it further removes the NCSE and the Department from taking ownership and responsibility for the lack of resources within the schools. They're putting more, or they're pretending to give us more authority but they're giving it to us with the hands tied behind our backs (PTR 3).

Other principals agreed, with PTR 9 saying ‘in theory, the freedom to allocate support where needed most’. SEN teachers too were somewhat cynical with SETR 27 arguing that the devolution of flexibility to schools was ‘to appear to give schools agency in how lsrt [support teaching hours] hrs used’, and SETR 2 saying:

no matter how the powers that be dress it up using language such as granting schools autonomy, in my opinion, this is never backed up by allocating sufficient, if any, additional staff required.

While some negative views were expressed, principals and teachers were also cognisant of the implications of the increased autonomy. PTR 9 believed that the new model ‘encourages more accountability on the part of schools and all staff’, with others viewing it as a double-edged sword, that with autonomy also came responsibility. Ailbhe pointed out that ‘you’re given all the responsibility and it’s kind of more, you know, more kind of things on the school to do and decide’. Concern was also expressed that ‘the model puts too much onus on schools to ensure that children are receiving the correct allocation in terms of support’ (PTR 5). Class teachers also recognised the implications of increased autonomy for schools with one teacher stating that:

schools have been given a greater level of autonomy than in [the] previous model and this may result in some challenges in terms of organisation, deployment and use of SET (CTR 10).

Another teacher professed that ‘it does also mean that the school has more responsibility, accountability, etc., for the allocation of that support than the Department does’ (CTR 12), echoing the views expressed earlier by PTR 3.

Although some of the principals and teachers in this study believed that autonomy and flexibility to deploy the support teaching resources was devolved to schools under this ‘new model’, schools were first granted this autonomy in Circular letter SP ED 24/03 (DES, 2003) which was reiterated in subsequent circulars. Indeed, under Circular letter M08/99 (DES, 1999) guidance to resource teachers outlined a variety of ways that they could assist schools in providing support for children with SEN, such as direct teaching within the classroom or in a separate room or by team-teaching. But despite the many circulars emanating from the DE advising schools and teachers of the autonomy and flexibility afforded to them, many of the teachers participating in this study incorrectly attributed the ‘new model’ with the introduction of autonomy and flexibility. The lack of awareness on the part of some participants in this study of the autonomy and flexibility afforded to them for many years raises the question as to the effectiveness of the communication between the DE and schools. This finding has implications for both ITE programmes and for teacher PD in that increased professional learning is required to ensure that principals and teachers are au fait with DE policy.

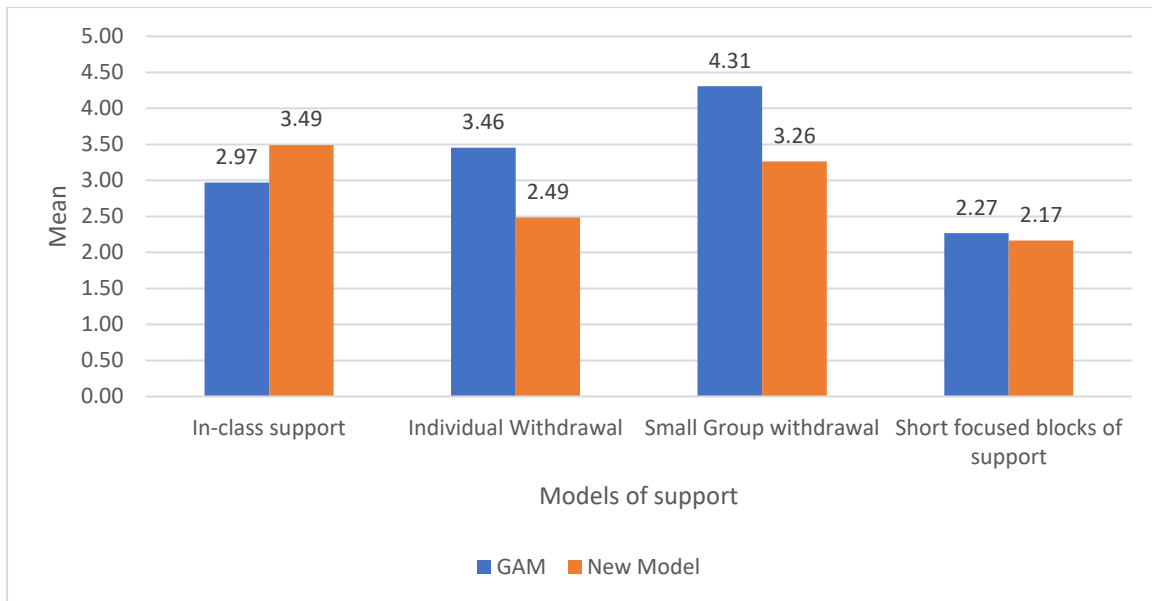
The removal of the necessity for a diagnosis of a disability sees a shift in the locus of responsibility from outside agencies to schools and teachers with the resultant effect that decision-making at school level becomes increasingly important (Kenny, McCoy, and Mihut, 2020; Walsh, 2021). The findings of this study highlight the difficulties experienced by schools, and the weightier responsibility thrust upon teachers and principals to identify and prioritise those students with the greatest needs. This decision-making process is constrained by the allocation provided by the DE in accordance with a school profile, the composition of which is not transparent and the accuracy of which is questioned. The concerns around these increased responsibilities are mirrored in previous studies with Walsh (2021) commenting on ‘the lack of confidence experienced by principals and SETs in embracing the autonomy afforded to them when making meaning of SEN policy and practice’ (p.88). This highlights the importance of increased expertise within schools and the necessity for appropriate PD for teachers, many of whom profess themselves unqualified for the task thrust upon them by this ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a).

In light of the increased autonomy and flexibility afforded to schools by the ‘new model’; principals and teachers have indicated that following the introduction of the ‘new model’ the manner in which support teaching is deployed changed. This is detailed in the following section.

### **Deployment of teaching support**

Survey respondents were asked to rank the approach used to deploy additional teaching support under the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a) and under the ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a), with one being the model of support used most frequently and five the model of support used least frequently. Under the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a), individual and small group withdrawal were the main models of support provided to students with SEN. The findings indicate that 75 percent (N=55) of survey respondents stated that the manner in which support was deployed changed following the introduction of the ‘new model’. There has been a slight increase in the provision of in-class support and a decrease in both individual and small group withdrawal. The mean responses for each model of support type under the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a) and the ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a) are set out in Figure 5.15 below.

**Figure 5.15 Models of support teaching under GAM/EAL (DES, 2005a) and the ‘New Model’ (DES, 2017a)**



The change in the model of support provision as identified in the ranking question illustrated in Figure 5.15 was supported by the questionnaire responses. Respondents indicated that following the introduction of the ‘new model’, they were providing more in-class support than heretofore with SETR 17 saying ‘Lots more in-class support’ and similarly CTR 19 responding ‘more in-class, small groups, less individual withdrawals’ and likewise CTR 6 saying ‘there is more in-class support and less withdrawal’. Principals also indicated that ‘team teaching, and in-class support [is] now the main approach’ (PTR 11).

Although there was an increased emphasis on providing support in the classroom, this was not always viewed positively with CTR 16 saying that while there was:

much more in-class support. Which went well at the beginning of the year but as the year progressed there were more times needed for small group withdrawal.

Likewise, CTR 1 pointed out that ‘We tried much more in-class support but found that the children with the most needs were falling further behind’.

While there was a move towards more in-class teaching, PTR 10 commented that ‘we provide less support because we have more students with SEN’ and in a similar vein PTR 2 commented that:

the new model has left us with far less support than the previous model and therefore we had to take more pupils out of learning support to meet the needs of those that were greater.

Teaching on a withdrawal basis has consistently been the predominant model of support in Ireland (Shevlin, Kenny, and Loxley, 2008; Rose and Shevlin, 2020), although the *Learning Support Guidelines* placed

considerable emphasis on the central importance of appropriate classroom-based intervention (whether or not supplementary teaching is involved) in addressing the needs of children with low achievement and/or learning difficulties (DES, 2000, p.29).

Despite there being general agreement that withdrawing pupils has significant limitations (Slee, 2011; McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd, 2014; and Anderson and Boyle, 2015), and that withdrawal is not advocated as the default option (Mulholland and O'Connor, 2016) withdrawal on an individual or small group basis continues to be a strong feature of learning support provision in the primary schools in this Dublin postal district.

Overall, although there have been some changes in the way support teaching provision is being deployed, this is not necessarily a direct response to the introduction of the 'new model'. SETR 1 clearly articulated that the needs of the students are paramount in determining how support is deployed stating that in her school:

team teaching [is] prioritised and inclusion of a mix of in-class and withdrawal support as best fitting the needs of the children with SEN. Amount of support now determined by greatest need getting greatest level of support.

The attention given to the needs of the students is central to Hornby's, (2014) vision for *inclusive special education* with an emphasis on the 'best possible education ... in the most appropriate setting' (p. 13). This focus also aligns with the provisions of Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a) which highlights that 'interventions with pupils should be delivered in a manner that best meets the needs identified, which may be through group or individual teaching' (p. 7). This provision is rearticulated in Circular 0013/2017 which specifies that:

the special education teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw pupils in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils' needs) for intensive teaching of key skills' (DES, 2017a, p. 18).

However, as argued by Hornby (2014), this is only possible if teachers have a sound knowledge of the different types of SEN and the practical strategies to teach students with SEN effectively in the mainstream classroom. Therefore, the provision of high-quality PD is vital to ensure that personnel resources are flexibly and effectively deployed to meet the needs of students with SEN.

### 5.3.3 Subtheme Three. Trust and transparency

The findings for this subtheme address the constituent components of the school profile for the purposes of allocating additional teaching support under the ‘new model’:

- complex needs,
- standardised test results,
- gender and
- school context.

Principals and teachers believed there was an absence of transparency around the calculation of the additional support teaching hours, and they were sceptical about the data used for DEIS schools and the lack of clarity around the definition of the term ‘complex needs’ resulting in an element of mistrust in the system. Ailbhe had

doubts about the actual allocation, like the figures they’re drawing from, from DEIS, and from complex needs. Like, I, I, for me, that’s a real grey area. I just don’t understand it, how they got those figures, and they say ... anyone with names on the HSE list. And the thing is in a Junior Primary, you’re going to have a lot of undiagnosed children, particularly in the DEIS context. And so, like, that’s not fair to DEIS schools. Um, I don’t think, um, so I’m dubious about where they get those figures from.

Similar doubt was expressed by PTR 9 who doesn’t ‘think the profiling is capturing the ‘complex needs’ of our incoming students at all and don’t see how it can’.

Due to a difference in the hours granted to this researchers school and the associated Junior school a FOI was submitted to the HSE, and this researcher was advised that the information ‘does not exist’ (HSE FOI response, Jan., 2023) highlighting the validity of those concerns.

#### **Complex needs**

SETR 26 also queried the definition of ‘complex needs’ under the re-profiling saying:

nobody knows. We were never told. Presumption is that it is children under HSE care, probably with serious/multiple diagnoses. Although, the lie ‘the child doesn’t need a diagnosis’ is everywhere, so...

Consistent with SETR 26’s conception of the term and the absence of transparency, it was also highlighted that:

the DES haven’t given any definition, so schools are trying to decide themselves – in our school, it’s usually the children with diagnosis of low incidence (SETR 14).

Some principals were of the view that it referred to ‘children who had been previously assessed with SEN’ (PTR 5) and similarly, PTR 10 believed the term referred to ‘any of the needs that were part of the application for resource hours under the old model’. These interpretations are not entirely accurate; however, PTR 2 correctly recognised that it referred to ‘previous low-incidence allocations / engaging with the HSE disability service teams’ and was the only principal to reference the HSE in the context of ‘complex needs’. Class teachers too primarily believed that it referred to students with a diagnosis, with CTR 3 saying ‘[I]n this context, it is my understanding that ‘complex needs’ are children who have had a psychological assessment’. SEN teachers held a similar position, with SETR 18 saying ‘children who would formerly come under the ‘resource’ heading... those with allocated hours from a psy [psychological] assessment’. However, SETR 23 was aware that the term ‘complex needs’ in this context included ‘pupils who have supports outside school from the HSE’ as was SETR 27 ‘those pupils who are accessing support from the disability teams in the HSE’.

While students who were allocated resource hours and remained within a school retained their hours under the ‘new model’, from September 2017 this no longer applied to any students with low incidence disabilities as designated under Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005a) entering the education system or changing schools (DES, 2017a, 2019c). Although some respondents were aware that the term ‘complex needs’ in the context of the ‘new model’ included students on the HSE disability lists, the majority were not aware that the composition of the ‘complex needs’ element of a school’s profile was dependent on the efficiency of the HSE and the accuracy of their data. CTR 2 summed up the difficulties with the term ‘complex needs’ and the lack of clarity for schools when she stated that:

I think real clarity of what constitutes a complex need would need to be given to teachers and timely support services to allow for diagnoses and support input from external professionals.

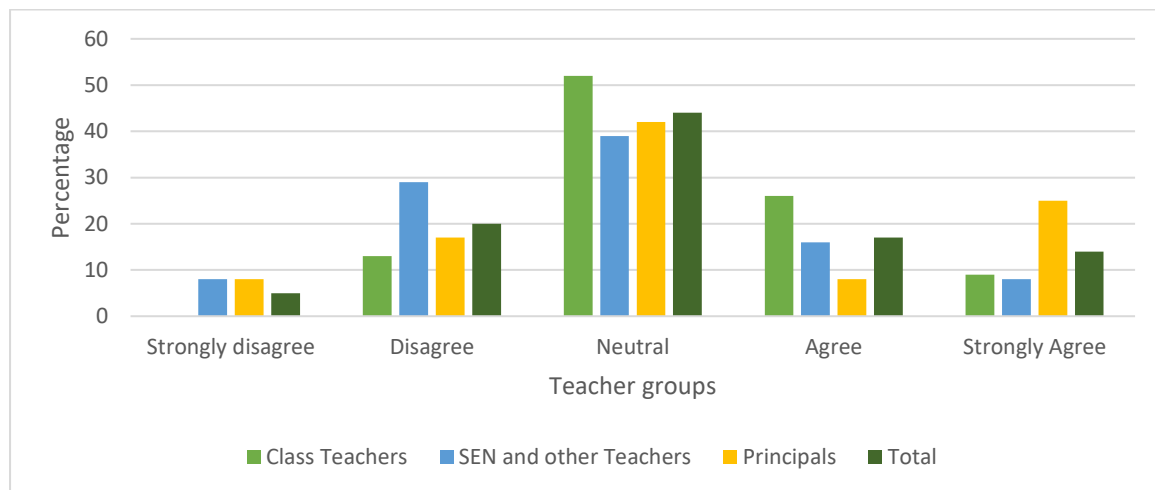
This lacuna demonstrates yet another example of miscommunication or at the very least poor communication on the part of the DE and makes it difficult for schools to identify the pupils included in this category contributing to a lack of trust by teachers in the system. Ailbhe spotlighted the difficulties that the absence of transparency causes for her school:

there’s no transparency of, you know, like even if you got a phone call to say, look you’ve you’ve five children, you know, that are on HSE lists. These are the five, do we have that right? You know, there’s no transparency or I don’t know where they’re pulling those figures from, or who the children are.



In addition to the lack of clarity and transparency around the definition of the term ‘complex needs’, teachers and principals were not persuaded that this was an appropriate approach to the identification of children with ‘complex needs’, with 44 percent (N=32) of all respondents maintaining a neutral position on the matter. However, 33 percent (N=4) of principals and 35 percent (N=8) of mainstream class teachers agreed or strongly agreed that it was appropriate although only 24 percent (N=9) of SEN teachers did so as illustrated in Figure 5.16.

**Figure 5.16 Using the decision-making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE children disability network teams is an appropriate way to establish the complex needs component of the school educational profile**



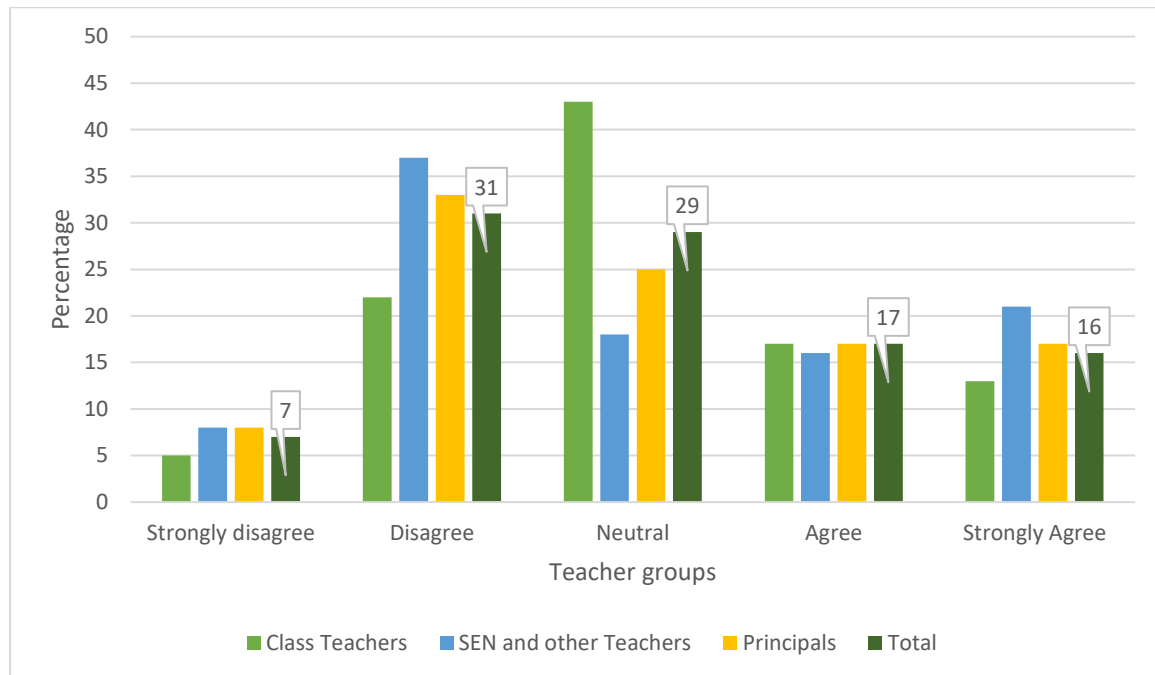
Some concerns were also raised about the use of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy to inform the school profile. These concerns are discussed in the following section.

### Standardised test results

The NCSE (2014) viewed the standardised test results as providing a broad and objective basis to differentiate between schools, and the DES (2017a) argued that the ‘standardised test score component therefore reflects the actual level of learning needs in each school’ (p.10). However, principals and teachers were not convinced as to the rationale for their inclusion in the school profile. They held mixed views as to the appropriateness of their inclusion with only slightly more respondents disagreeing than agreeing and 29 percent (N=21) were unsure as illustrated in Figure 5. 17. Some further clarification as to respondents’ views was provided in the qualitative responses with one teacher arguing that it is ‘wrong to use standardised tests, because we only have a choice of two limited tests. No

spelling test allowed to be included' (SETR 8). Teacher fears regarding this use of standardised test results were highlighted by CTR 12 noting that 'schools feel penalised for good results in standardised testing'. This belief that improvements in the standardised test results would mean a reduction in hours was articulated by Muireann observing that 'then you don't have the extra teacher to go in and help implement the programme'.

**Figure 5.17 The use of standardised test results as a component of the school profile is not an appropriate use of such results**

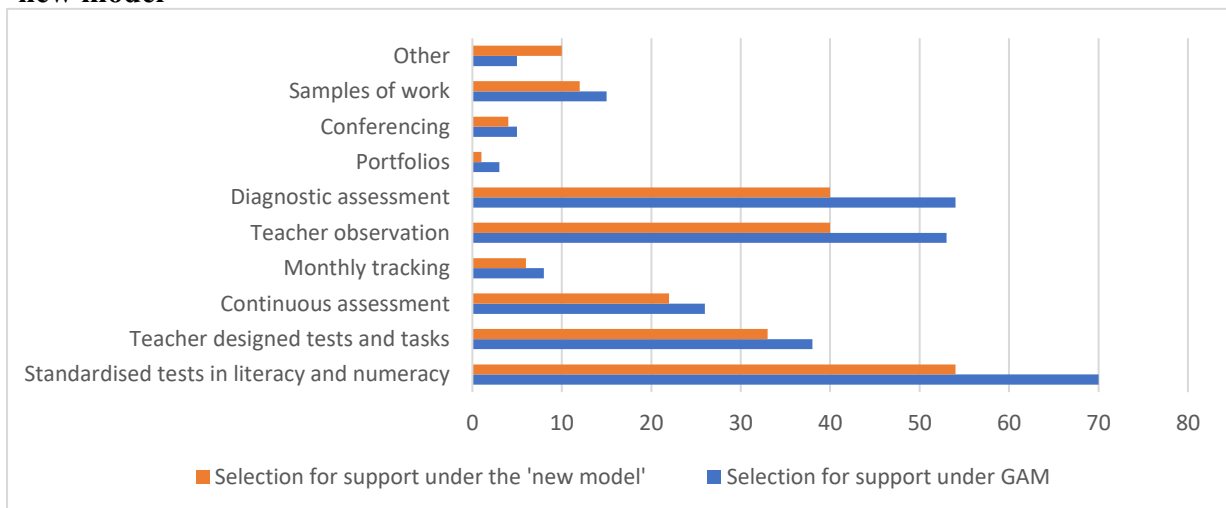


These findings reflect the divided opinions held by the participants in this study where the data could be used to support or dissuade the use of standardised tests as a component of the model. However, the detrimental effects of an imbalanced assessment system that promotes and prioritises standardised testing at the expense of evidence-based alternatives cannot be underestimated (O'Leary et al., 2019; Lysaght and O'Leary, 2020). The difficulties, such as reduced student educational experiences in subjects other than those tested, and an impact on teaching practices that arise when the same test is used for several purposes has also been raised in the literature, (Polesel, Rice, and Dulfer, 2014). Furthermore, the use of standardised tests as a component of a school profile is also debatable as this was not the purpose of such tests, and using the results in this way may have unintended consequences (Beechinor, 2018; O'Leary et al., 2019; Raftery and Brennan, 2021).

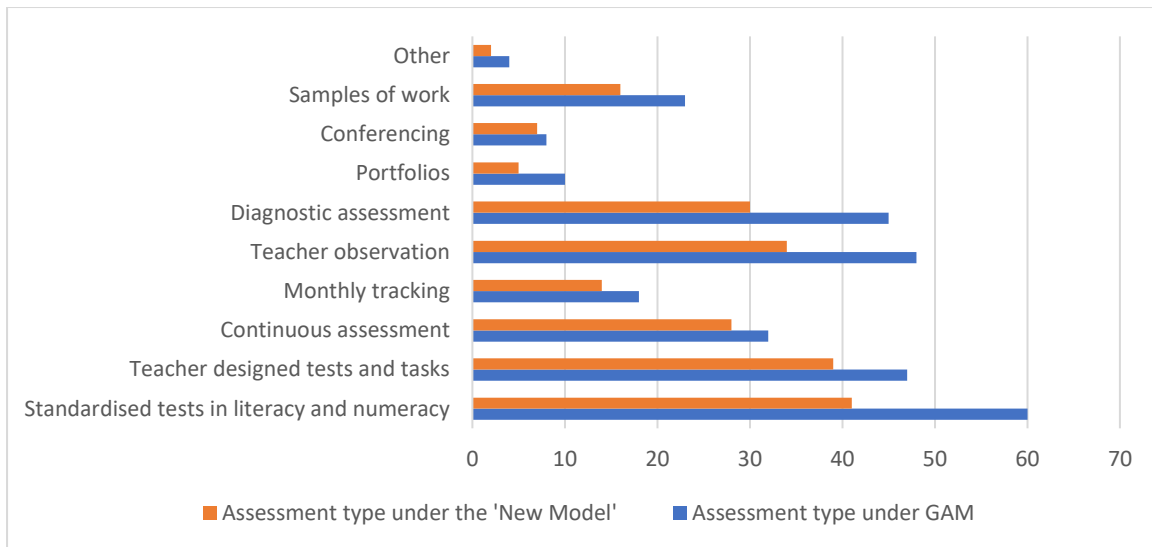
The DE attempted to assuage teachers’ fears in this regard by the use of the aggregate of two years of standardised test results for the introduction of the ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a) and four years for the re-profiling which took place in 2019 (DES, 2019b). A similar approach was adopted for the profiling effective from September 2022 which took an aggregate of the test results over 2018, 2019, and 2021 (DE, 2022a). Standardised testing did not take place in 2020 due to COVID-19. The recent policy changes have increased the focus and stakes attached to the use of standardised test results in the Irish primary education system and created tensions within the education community regarding the weight now afforded to these results. Despite the aggregation of the test results and the attempt by the DE to smooth any fluctuations, it has been argued that these fears have the potential to act as a disincentive for schools to perform well, as to do so may result in a reduction in support teaching hours (Banks, 2021).

Teachers have indicated that they are not as reliant on the use of standardised test results to identify and select students for additional teaching support or for tracking and monitoring student progress. As shown in Figure 5.18 and Figure 5.19 they use a range of assessment tools for these purposes.

**Figure 5.18 How students are selected for support teaching under the GAM and the ‘new model’**



**Figure 5.19 Processes used to track and monitor student progress under the GAM and the ‘new model’**

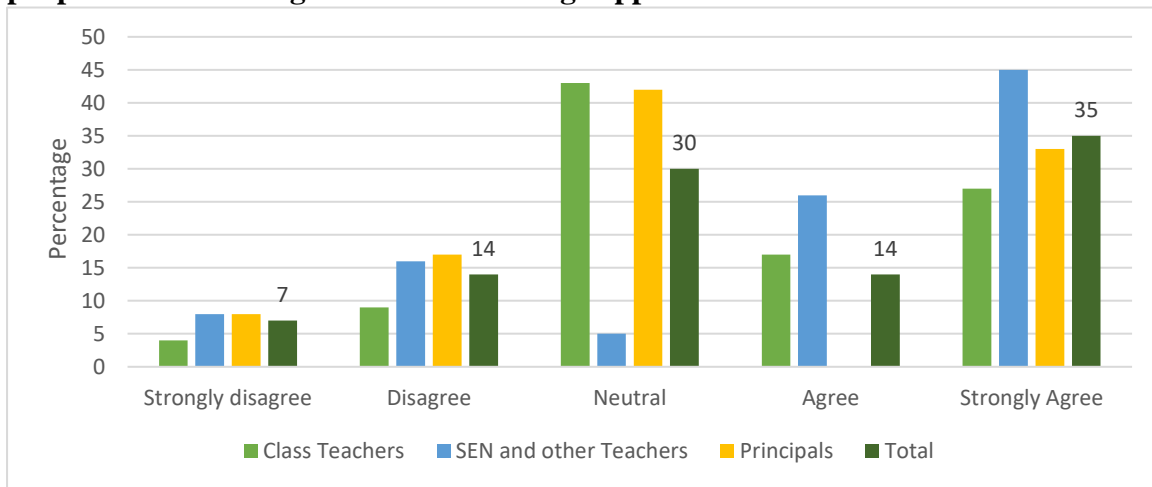


The use of a variety of assessment approaches is indicative of good practice as standardised testing, while important, should not supersede the importance and value of other types of assessment that teachers conduct as an integral part of their practice (O’Leary et al., 2019; Lysaght and O’Leary, 2020). Hornby (2014, 2015) also stresses the importance of teachers being able to identify children with SEN and monitor their progress, and places an emphasis on whole school policies and having systems in place to do so. While the respondents in this study use standardised test results to identify children requiring support they also use other assessment approaches to support them in doing so, recognising the limitations of standardised tests. Other research also emphasises the importance of teacher skills in the use of appropriate assessment approaches to inform interventions and instructional approaches and to monitor progress (Desforges and Lindsay, 2010; Salend and Whittaker, 2012; Hornby, 2020; Kauffman and Hornby, 2020).

### **Gender**

Gender had been included as a dimension of diversity in allocating additional teacher resources under the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a), and is included as an element of the school profile in the ‘new model’. Teachers and principals believe that it should not be included, with 49 percent (N=36) of total questionnaire respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that its inclusion is not appropriate and 30 percent (N=22) maintaining a neutral stance. The views of the different teacher groups are shown in Figure 5.20.

**Figure 5.20 Gender should not be included as an element of the school profile for the purposes of allocating additional teaching support**

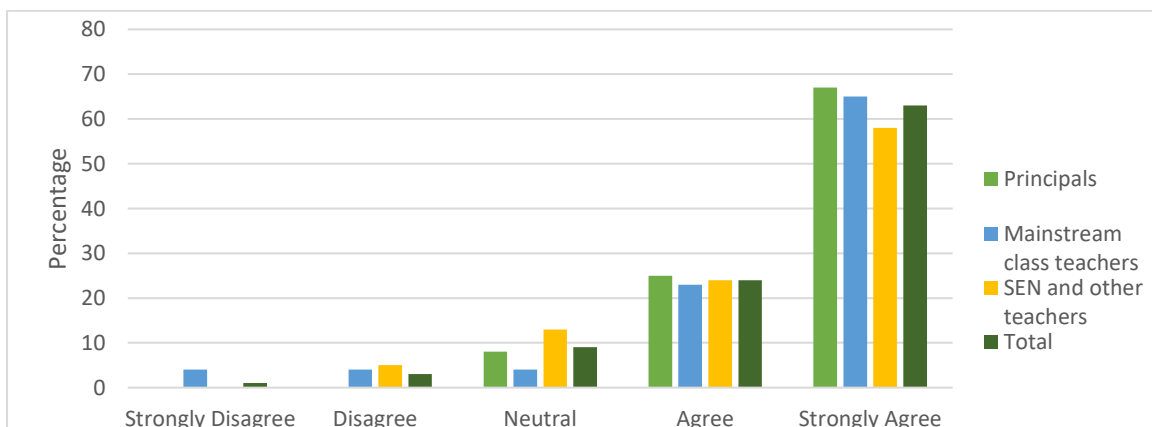


While research indicates that the ratio of disabilities is higher for boys (OECD, 2003; McCoy et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2015), analysis of SEN prevalence among nine-year-olds in Ireland suggests that gender differences among students with MGLD are not as distinct as previously thought (Banks and McCoy, 2011), bringing into question the rationale behind including gender as an element of the school profile. Indeed despite the lack of evidence in support of a gender-based differential, the DE increased the allocation from 3.5 percent in 2017 (DES, 2017a) to 4.35 percent in 2019 (DES, 2019b) and to 4.68 percent under the latest reprofiling in 2022 (DE, 2022e).

### School context

Principals and teachers were overwhelmingly in agreement with the inclusion of school context as a component of the school profile with 87 percent (N=64) of questionnaire respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that it should be included, as illustrated in Figure 5.21.

**Figure 5.21 School context should be included as a component of the school profile**



Despite this, some concerns were raised about the quantum of support given to DEIS schools with SETR 6 arguing that DEIS ‘should be taken into account in the new model and realistically it is not’. Ailbhe too was concerned with the quantum of support provided to DEIS schools arguing that she didn’t

think DEIS schools are getting enough under the DEIS section. Um I’m worried about [the] complex needs section, where it comes from, um, I do think they need to take account of you know, in certain socioeconomic groups that there is a kind of a tendency for, you know, lack of early intervention or, you know, early diagnosis, and there should be more flexibility there in terms of, you know, um allocation provision to, to DEIS schools.

Similarly, SETR 12 suggested that ‘[a]s a DEIS school I would have liked to see a certain amount of support teaching allocated specifically for early interventions and whole school interventions separate to SEN allocation.’ Echoing a similar sentiment, Saoirse thought that

coming from a DEIS school, like it’s so important that that’s taken into account,... Like definitely students have much more needs, like there’s greater needs there than say a non-DEIS school.

However, this opinion was not held by all teachers with SETR 3 saying ‘I find it very unfair and very skewed towards DEIS schools’.

A key imperative for the implementation of the ‘new model’ had been the concerns raised by the NCSE (2013) that the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005a) was inequitable, believing that parents’ ability to pay resulted in schools where parents had an economic advantage having greater numbers of students with a diagnosed disability. However, according to Banks, Frawley, and McCoy (2015), the number of students with diagnosed needs is higher in DEIS schools than in any other category of school. Furthermore the GAM/EAL DES (2005a) model had taken DEIS status into account with a differential allocation of support teaching for such schools. However, that being said it was recognised that a more nuanced approach could be adopted, with Travers (2010, 2012) arguing that DEIS schools should be taken out of the GAM and the needs of individual DEIS schools matched with the necessary resources on a school by school basis. It was also recommended in the *Review of the Primary Schools General Allocation Model* (DES, 2010) that one cohesive model of teacher allocation support should be considered for DEIS schools rather than through the three different schemes that existed at that time. However, the findings of this study illustrate that the nuanced measures called for by Travers (2010, 2012) are not being addressed by the ‘new model’, and Travers (2017) points out that the existing inequities are being perpetuated with the phased introduction of the model. While school

context was retained as an element of a school profile the removal of the necessity for a diagnosis to access additional teaching support was central to the justification for the introduction of the ‘new model’. The issue of diagnosis and labels is discussed in the next section.

#### **5.3.4 Subtheme Four. Diagnosis and labels**

The imperative that under the GAM allocation model (DES, 2005a) a professional diagnosis was required prior to the allocation of supports was debunked and questioned by teachers in the case study school, with a number of teachers stating that they didn’t require a piece of paper to give the child support. It was also disputed that supports were denied to students due to the lack of a diagnosis with Ailbhe stating that ‘we’d always try, and you know help help the other people that didn’t have you know a diagnosis’, and later ‘you did try to help the children that didn’t have, you know, didn’t have a condition on paper’. Similarly, Meabh pointed out that if she went to the support team and said:

I know someone hasn’t got a diagnosis, but I think they need, um, you know, a little bit more help, and um, I found that the SET team have always been very receptive and obliging and will always come to see what they can do to assist you.

Equally, Sadhbh was quite clear that ‘whether it was the GAM model or the new model that kids in the class always were looked after’. Likewise, SETR 21 commented that ‘from our point of view, we always supported those children’ and SETR 15 reflected that ‘if schools were not already taking children with no diagnosis into account, the opportunity is officially here now to do just that,’ illustrating that where students have identified needs, they are supported by schools without the necessity of a diagnosis. This contrasts with the assertion that children, particularly those in DEIS schools were losing out due to their parents’ inability to pay for such assessments and reports (NCSE, 2014a).

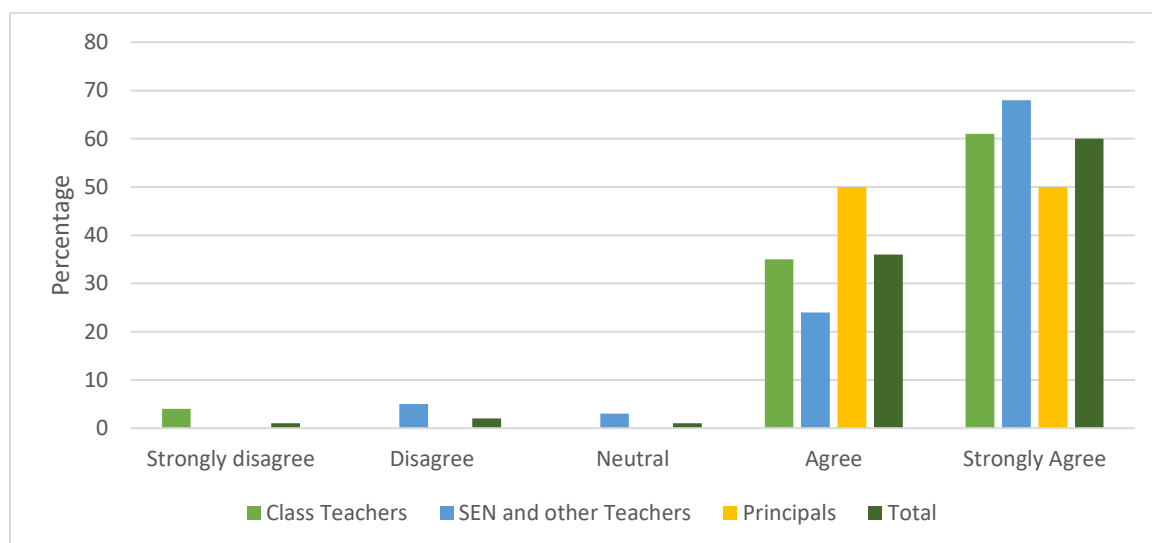
In respect of removing the requirement for a diagnosis to access additional teaching support, respondents proffered the view that this change was introduced to ‘alleviate waiting periods for diagnoses and assessments’ (CTR 10), and ‘to decrease the numbers of children waiting on assessments’ (SETR 5). It was also suggested that doing so had the effect of ‘alleviating outside agencies of the responsibility to the child’ (SETR 21). Previously the lack of capacity to secure psychological assessments was a key factor influencing the review of the funding model prior to the introduction of the GAM/EAL model and according to Stevens and O’Moore (2009)

cynical commentators could suggest that it effectively halted the ever-accelerating appointment of resource teachers, immediately cleared the huge backlog of applications awaiting departmental sanction, wiped out the huge waiting lists for NEPS psychological assessments and that the largest section of the school-going special needs population just ‘dropped off the radar’ overnight (p. 55).

Given the parallels between the situation that pertained prior to the introduction of the GAM/EAL model (DES, 2005) and the current backlog of assessments and lengthy waiting lists (Travers, 2023), could “cynical commentators” make analogous comments in respect of the ‘new model’?

While acknowledging that a medical diagnosis was neither necessary to identify a literacy or numeracy learning need, nor to provide support, teachers and principals expressed a strong sentiment that a diagnosis of disability is useful for educational reasons with 96 percent (N=70) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement as illustrated in Figure 5.22.

**Figure 5.22 A Diagnosis of a disability is useful in informing appropriate teaching strategies or interventions**

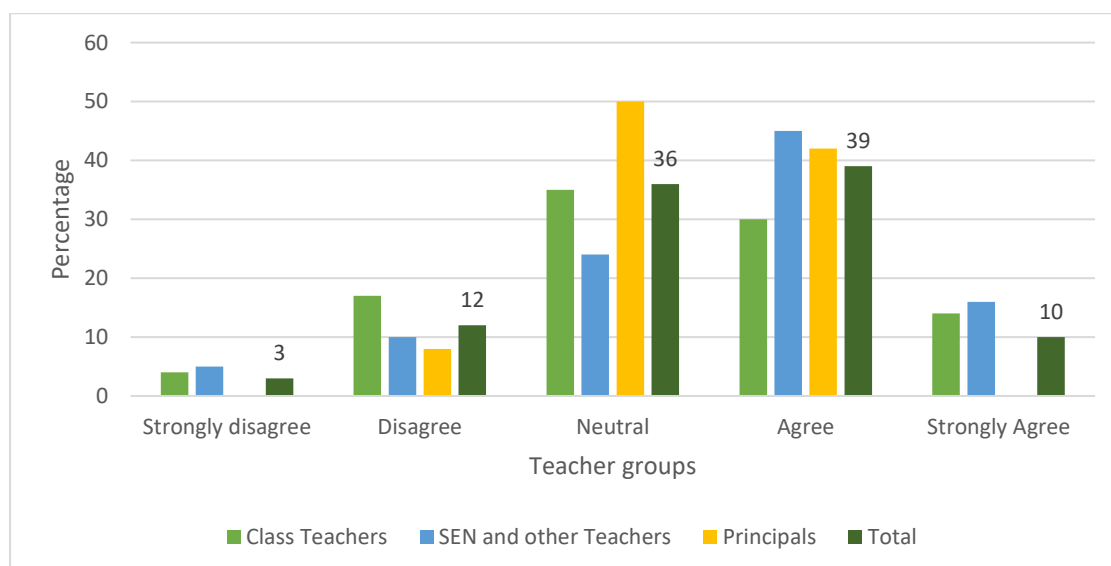


This position was supported by their belief that the report from a relevant clinician ‘helps to kind of focus on where you need to go’ (Fiona). Bronagh also found that reports ‘generally come with good, um, suggestions for teaching or targets to be met. They do help inform the teaching’. Sadhbh suggested that the SEN category or label ‘is the starting point and then after that, um, you have to adapt to the individual child’. Meabh agreed, and argued that ‘while it’s a diagnosis, just children aren’t standard, so you have to adapt with the child’. This view was echoed by a questionnaire respondent who believed that ‘[T]he SEN label does nothing to indicate what level of support each pupil will need’ (SETR 28). However,



the benefit of having a report accords with the direction in Circular No 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) that support and guidance from outside clinical reports should be used to ‘help explain, and provide a better understanding of a child’s needs, the nature of the difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions’ (DES, 2017a, p. 14). This could be viewed as contradictory as the ‘new model’ was premised on the basis that it was no longer necessary to obtain a diagnosis of disability in order to allocate additional teaching support (DES, 2017a), however, schools are now expected to identify students for support and provide appropriate interventions in the absence of such reports. Even though 96 percent (N=70) of respondents were of the view that a diagnosis of a disability is useful in informing appropriate teaching strategies or interventions, only 44 percent (N=10) of mainstream class teachers agreed or strongly agreed that SEN categories or labels are a useful way to allocate additional teaching support. This contrasts with the views of SEN teachers with 61 percent (N=23) in agreement as to their usefulness in this regard. The full breakdown of the views of the three teacher groups is presented in Figure 5.23.

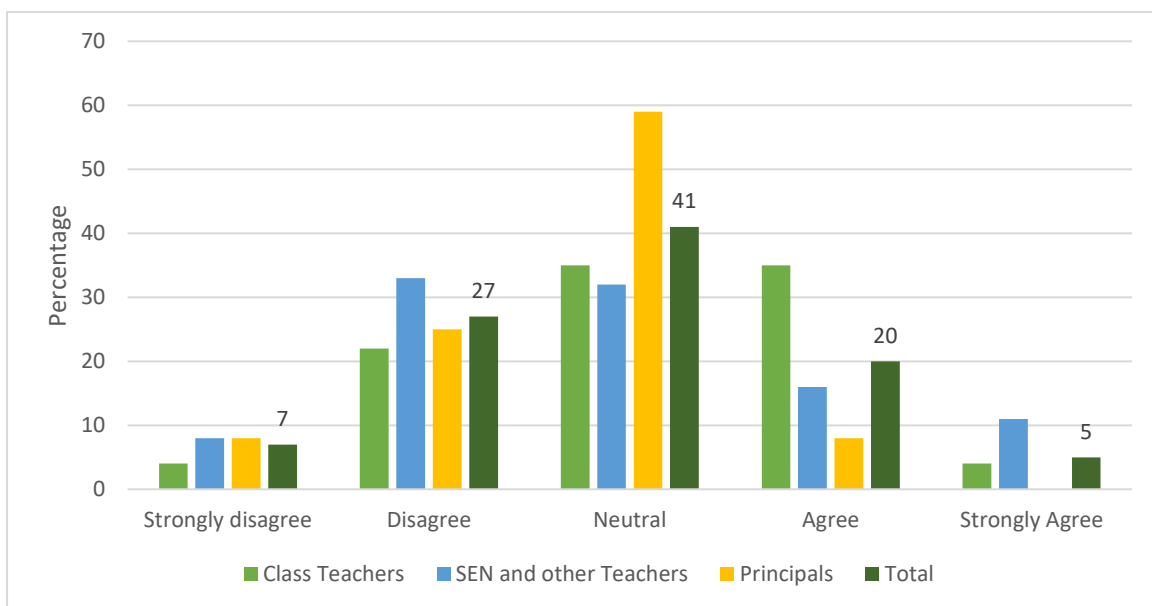
**Figure 5.23 SEN categories or labels are a useful way to allocate additional teaching support**



While the necessity for teachers to be skilled in the use of appropriate assessment approaches is stressed by Hornby (2014, 2015), he also emphasises the importance of support from outside specialists such as psychologists and specialist teachers to assist the school in the development of whole school practices to enable the holistic development of students with SEN. Although teachers assess their students using a variety of approaches they believe that a diagnostic report provides additional information, and the recommendations inform teaching and the provision of interventions. However, overall, 25 percent (N=18) of

respondents believe that using medical categories in special education undermines educational assessment as the basis for the planning of teaching. Class teachers and SEN teachers differed as to their stance on this matter with 39 percent (N=9) of class teachers agreeing or strongly with the statement in contrast to 27 percent (N=10) of SEN teachers and 8 percent (N=1) of principals as illustrated in Figure 5.24. These somewhat contradictory responses are reflective of the complexity of positions around the benefits of labels/categories of disability in schools and indeed perhaps reflective of the importance a diagnosis or a report holds for the work of the teacher in their particular role.

**Figure 5.24 The use of medical categories in special education undermines educational assessment as the basis for the planning of teaching**



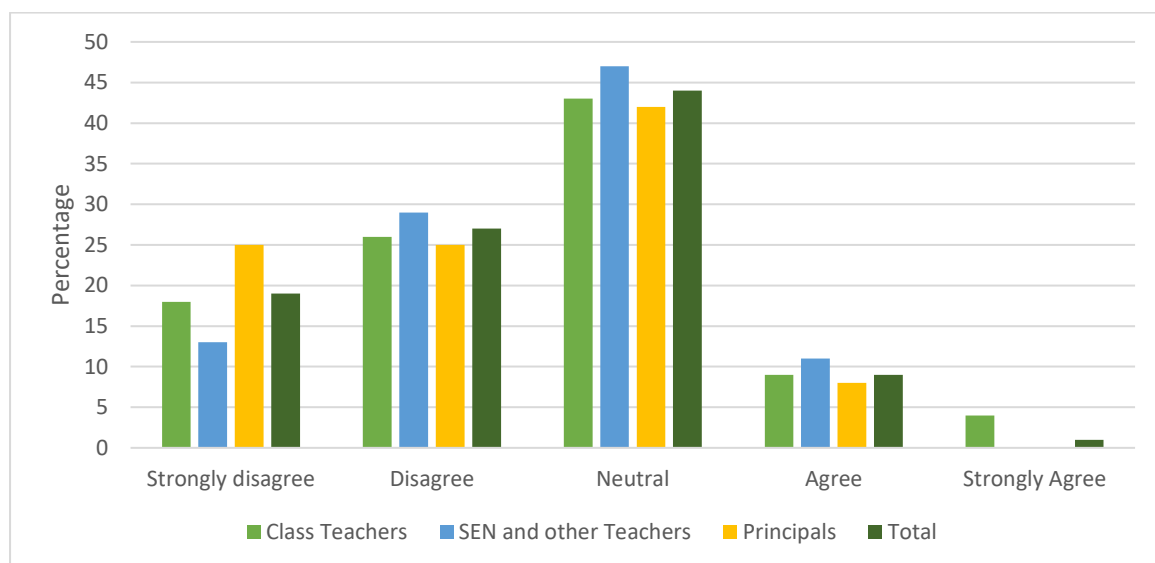
The complexity of the positions concerning the utility of a diagnosis is also reflected in the literature, with participants in Chambers et al's (2020) study articulating conflicting thoughts about the use of a label. The simplistic nature of a label is also evident in the literature as many children may meet the diagnostic criteria for several different diagnoses, due to co-morbidity, (Froni and Rothbart, 2011, 2013). Other issues raised by the participants in this study around co-morbidity and disability categories being viewed as heterogeneous regarding educational support have also been identified in the literature (Norwich and Lewis, 2005, 2007; Banks, Frawley, and McCoy, 2015). Teachers and principals in this study believed that a medical diagnosis was useful in informing appropriate teaching strategies, and 49 percent (N=36) believed that they were a useful way to allocate additional teaching support, however, Desforges and Lindsay (2010) argued that they had limited use for these purposes. Previously the research argued that except for children with

sensory impairments and severe learning needs, there were no distinctive SEN teaching strategies or techniques that were effective for certain categories of children (Norwich and Lewis, 2005, 2007). However, there is a momentum towards more specialised approaches to assessment and teaching interventions for autistic children (Anglim, Prendeville, and Kinsella, 2018; Garrad, Rayner, and Pedersen, 2019; Majoko, 2019). These views may be linked to that momentum, and it is notable that the NCSE policy advice (2015) lists 34 interventions for autistic students, and the more recently published *Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2022) provides information on evidence-based whole-school and individualised approaches to effective instruction for autistic students.

### 5.3.5 Subtheme Five. Maintaining the status quo

Following the re-profiling of schools in 2019, the change in the quantum of hours was phased in by capping the resultant increase or decrease to 20 percent (DES, 2019b) so that those schools due to lose hours would have time to adjust to a reduced allocation. Although this would have benefited some schools, the strategy was viewed negatively with only ten percent (N=7) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was the right thing to do. As shown in Figure 5.25 42 percent (N=16) of SEN teacher respondents and 50 percent (N=6) of principal respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the right thing to do. However, 44 percent (N=32) of all respondents maintained a neutral position. This is further evidence of the divided opinions amongst teaching staff on the matter. It was not possible to determine whether the views expressed were based on whether the respondents' schools benefited from the phased introduction or not.

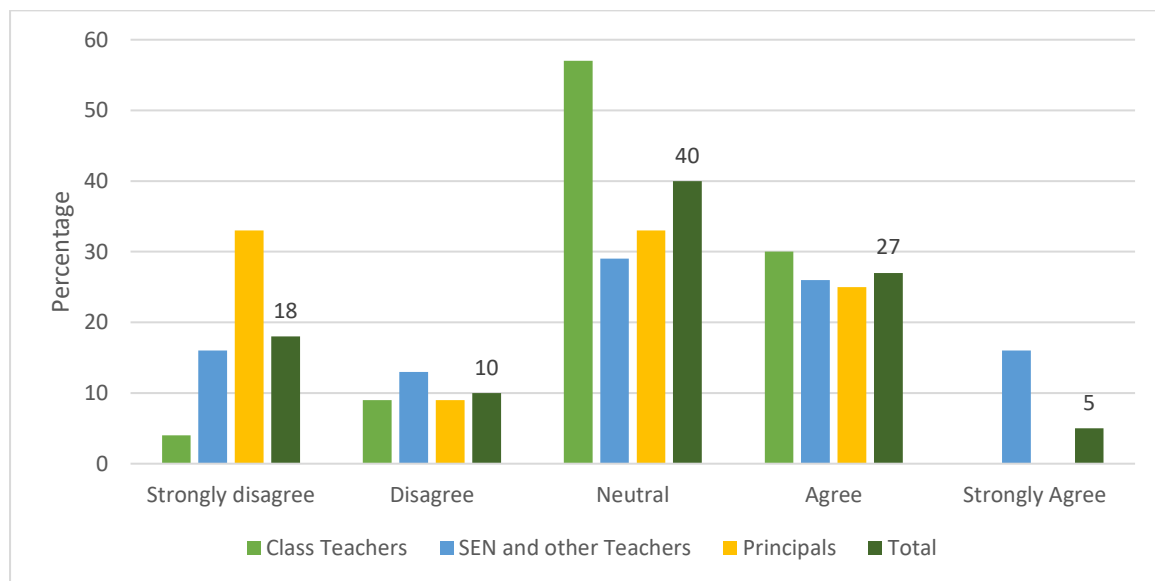
**Figure 5.25 Capping the changes in support teaching allocation was the right thing to do**



Despite the rationale put forward for this approach, the continued failure to implement the full changes to the allocations maintains the status quo, and is contrary to the stated ‘purpose’ of the ‘new allocation model which was to address the inequities in the system (DES, 2019, p. 3). Thus, as highlighted by Travers (2017, p. 101) ‘we are not there yet in terms of equity of allocation according to need.’

While almost half the questionnaire respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the capping of the reprofiled hours, 32 percent (N=23) of respondents agreed that the adjustments made to the support teaching allocation were in line with the principles of equity and fairness. However, 57 percent (N=13) of class teachers maintained a neutral stance on the matter, SEN teachers were the only group strongly agreeing with the statement as illustrated in Figure 5.26. The data highlight a lack of consensus amongst principals and teachers in relation to these questions, and the divided opinions warrant further investigation to determine the basis for principals’ and teachers’ contrasting perspectives.

**Figure 5.26 The adjustments to the support teaching allocation to our school for September 2019 are in line with the principles of equity and fairness**



#### 5.4 Theme Three. Teacher self-efficacy in respect of inclusion

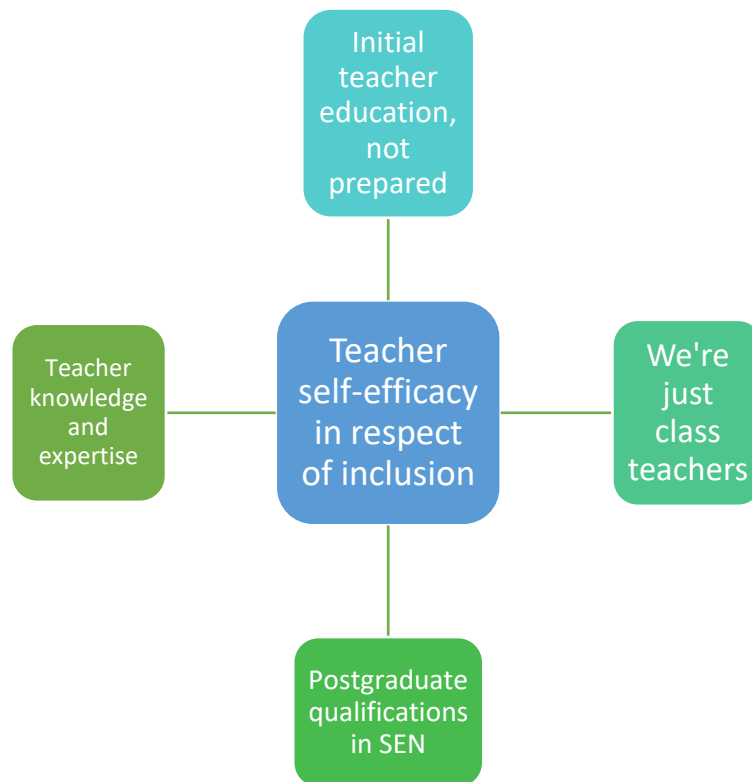
While teachers and principals held diverse views about the ‘New Model’ they were creative in their use of time as they endeavoured to support students with SEN within their schools. However, despite their willingness to support students and the steps they were taking to ensure they did so, some teachers were keenly aware that they lacked an essential prerequisite to support their students effectively.

In this study, a number of questions were posed to explore teachers' and principals' attitudes and sense of self-efficacy as regards the inclusion of students with SEN. Theme three, Teacher Self-efficacy in respect of inclusion and, four subthemes

- initial teacher education, not prepared
- teacher knowledge and expertise
- we're just class teachers
- postgraduate qualifications in SEN

are discussed in the following sections.

**Figure 5. 27 Theme Three. Teacher self-efficacy in respect of inclusion**

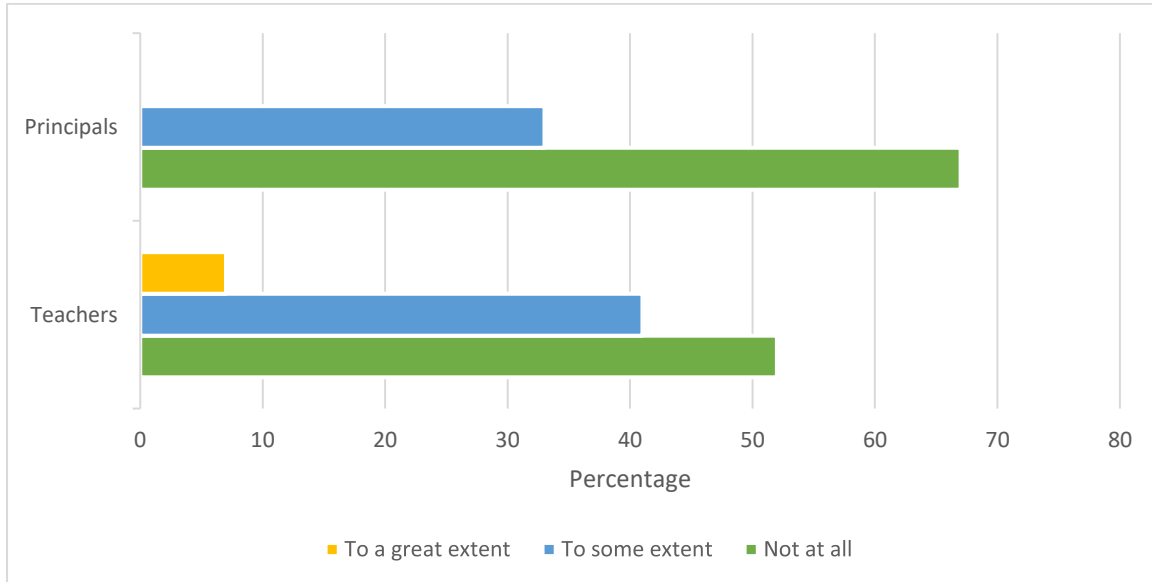


#### **5.4.1 Subtheme One. Initial teacher education, not prepared**

The findings identified several factors concerning teacher education that impacted teacher and principal self-efficacy regarding inclusion. Principals and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their ITE programme with 67 percent (N= 8) of principals and 52 percent (N=32) of teachers indicating that they were not at all prepared to teach students with SEN, as illustrated in Figure 5.28. They stated that their ITE programmes did not cover the

inclusion of students with SEN in a way that they could address their needs effectively within the classroom, impacting their self-efficacy and adversely affecting their classroom practices.

**Figure 5.28 Extent to which initial teacher education prepared teachers to teach students with SEN**



Historical factors relating to course content were identified as a reason for this lack of preparedness to teach students with SEN with PTR 5 stating that ‘when I trained as a primary school teacher in the early 1980s there was no training for working with students with special educational needs’, and PTR 10 stating that SEN was ‘probably not as high a priority at that time’. Teachers and principals highlighted the lack of emphasis in their ITE programmes on supporting students with SEN pointing out that:

Teaching colleges do not focus enough on Special Ed when teachers are training as a mainstream teacher. Needs are changing all of the time and teachers have not been taught how to deal with / teach the needs when presented in their classroom (CTR 21).

SEN teachers recounted similar experiences, with SETR 24 saying ‘no mention of SEN whatsoever’, and SETR 31 saying ‘no training whatsoever for SEN’. Teachers in the case study school commented on their ITE experience with Meabh reflecting that:

we got three years of history of education, and I think we got about eight weeks on special ed, Yeah, that was it, six weeks we did it. We basically didn’t get it and that’s only going by a decade ago.

Teachers who completed their teacher education programmes outside Ireland in the last decade also commented on their level of preparedness for teaching children with SEN with CTR 11 commenting:

I had lots of SEND lectures but not preparing you for the really difficult children, it was always mild diagnoses. I also never was trained in supporting very violent children which I have dealt with a lot.

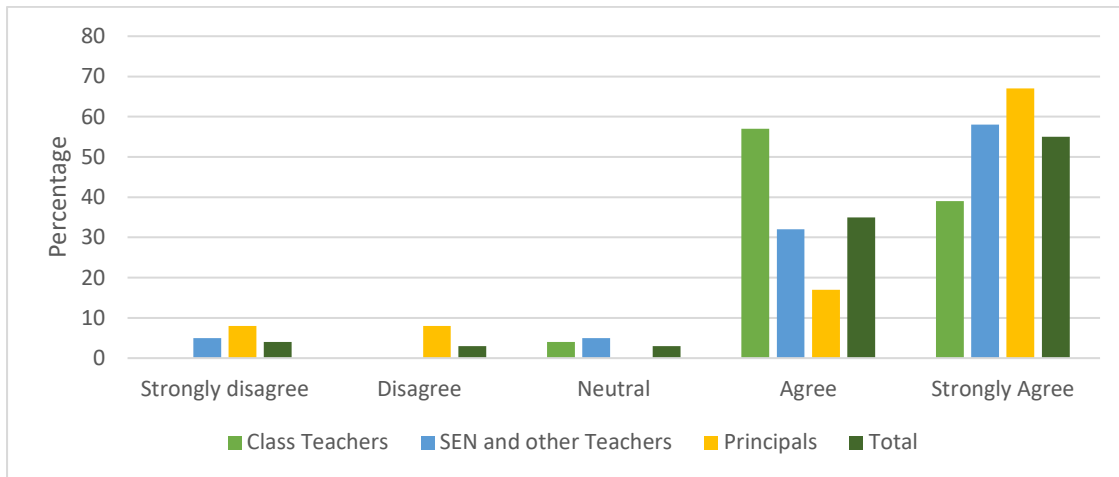
These findings are consistent with previous Irish research where teachers did not believe that their ITE programme sufficiently prepared them to teach students with SEN (O'Donnell, 2012; Rose et al., 2015). However, more recently qualified teachers who had either completed an elective module in SEN or had placements in an SEN setting, stated that their ITE programme had prepared them to a 'great extent', with CTR 5 who was recently qualified saying '[We] received a lot of support from lecturers with this, including dedicated modules on working with children with SEN'. SETR 33 also commented on being 'provided a number of opportunities to complete placements in SEN settings, as well as a number of modules focused on SEN'. This suggests that changes in ITE programmes may be impacting the extent to which teachers are now prepared to teach students with SEN, and it is hoped that this will become more evident in classrooms in the future. As part of its most recent accreditation review, the Teaching Council stipulated that 'Inclusive Education' be a mandatory Core Element of ITE Programmes (The Teaching Council, 2020). This is essential as there is a complete reliance on ITE programmes to prepare teachers to support students with SEN in schools, regardless of their school placement. The importance of teachers having positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN has been emphasised by Hornby (2014, 2015), however, he also points out that this is only possible if teachers have a sound knowledge of the different types of SEN and the practical strategies to teach students with SEN effectively. Despite more recently qualified graduates stating that their ITE programme had prepared them to a 'great extent', overall the findings of this study indicate that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach students with SEN following their ITE.

#### **5.4.2 Subtheme Two. Teacher knowledge and expertise**

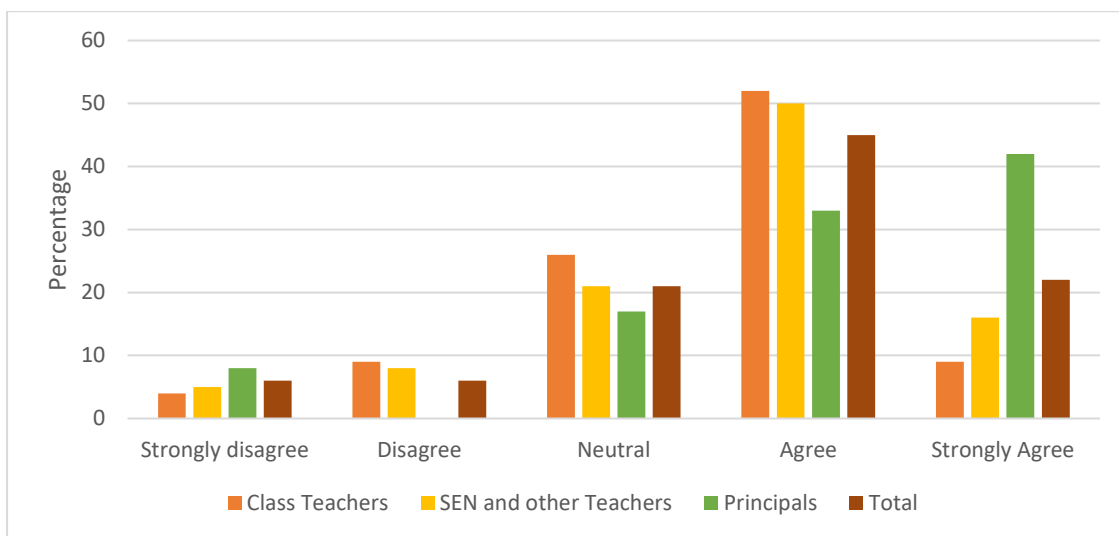
Several statements were presented to principals and teachers regarding their knowledge of the continuum of support, their expertise in supporting students with SEN, and the implications of inclusion for teachers' practice and self-efficacy. Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their familiarity with the continuum of support using a rating

scale from one to five, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. A similar rating scale was used for statements focused on inclusion for teachers' practice and self-efficacy. Overall 90 percent (N=66) of teachers and principals agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the continuum of support and 67 percent (N=49) either agreed or strongly agreed that it is implemented effectively in their schools. See Figure 5.29 and Figure 5.30 for further details.

**Figure 5.29 Principals and teachers are familiar with the continuum of support**



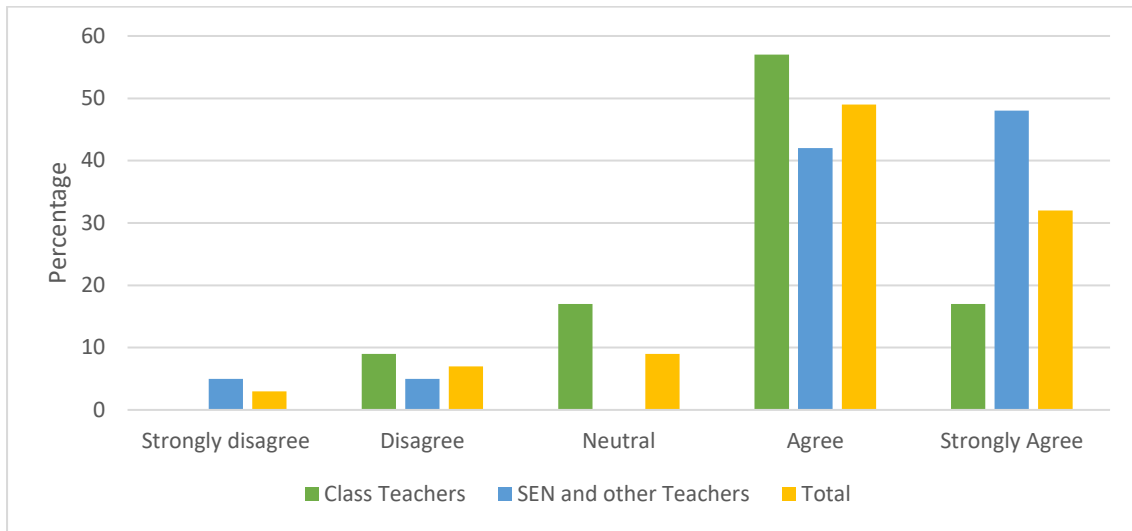
**Figure 5.30 Principals and teachers believe the continuum of support is implemented effectively in their school**



Although teachers stated that they were not adequately prepared to support students with SEN and required further PD, over 80 percent (N=49) of mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in their ability to identify students for educational support as illustrated in Figure 5.31.

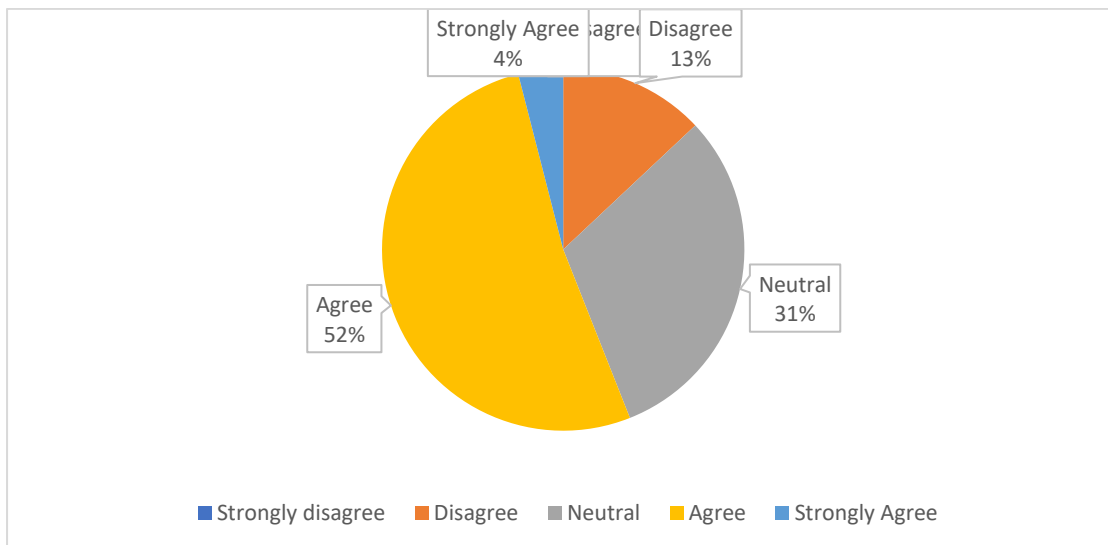


**Figure 5.31 Teacher confidence in identifying students for educational support**



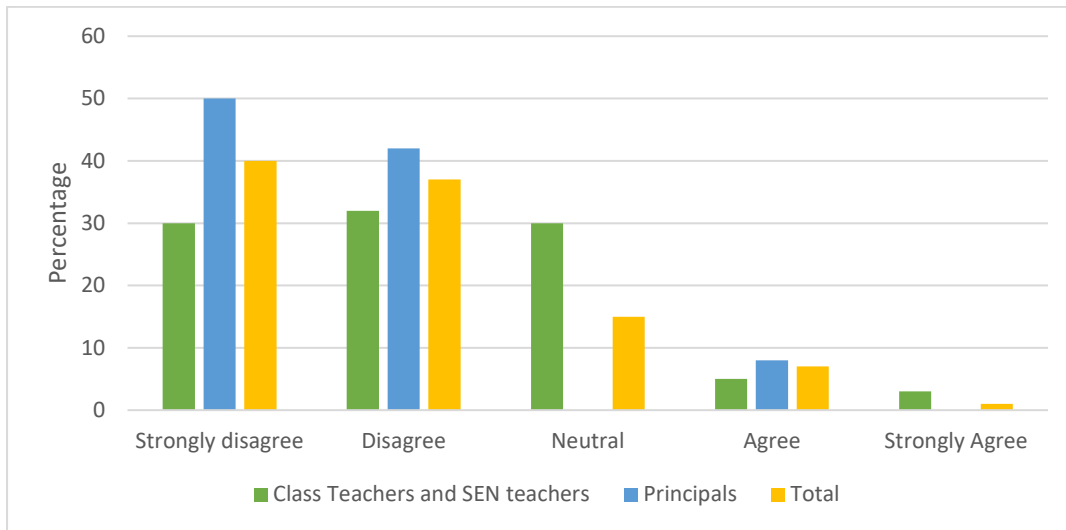
Mainstream class teachers also felt competent to initiate and develop classroom support plans with 56 percent (N=13) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt competent to do so. However, 31 percent (N=7) maintained a neutral position as depicted in Figure 5.32.

**Figure 5.32 Classroom teachers' confidence in their ability to develop classroom support plans**



In line with these findings, 77 percent (N=56) of questionnaire respondents did not believe that mainstream class teachers have sufficient education to teach students with SEN as illustrated in Figure 5.33.

**Figure 5.33 Mainstream class teachers have sufficient training to teach students with SEN**

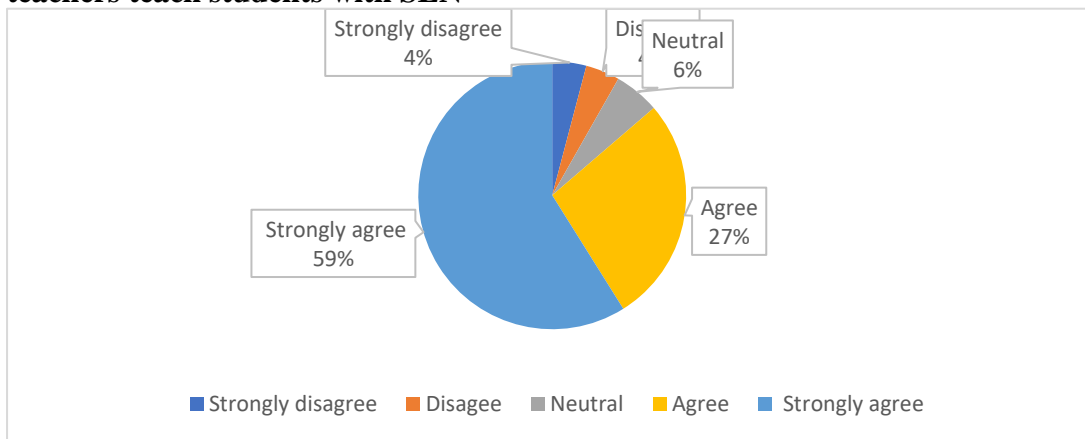


Hornby's (2014, 2015) *inclusive special education* model emphasises the necessity for teachers to feel competent to teach children with SEN, therefore sufficient input on the teaching of students with SEN in ITE programmes is essential so that they feel confident to do so. However, although more recently qualified questionnaire respondents indicated that their initial teacher education programme prepared them to teach students with SEN; teachers and principals participating in this study believed that further professional development is required.

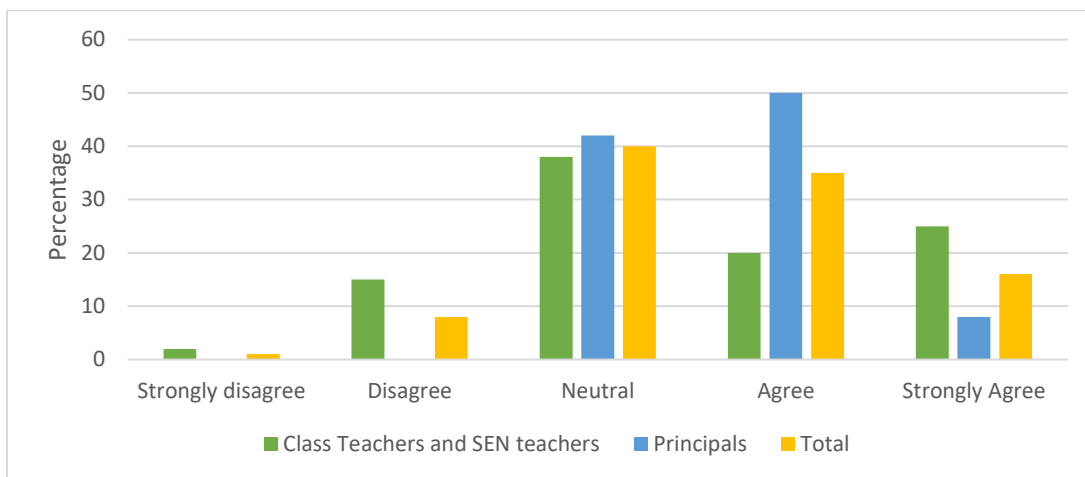
#### 5.4.3 Subtheme Three. 'We're just class teachers'

Consistent with their views that their ITE programmes did not prepare them to teach students with SEN, 86 percent (N=63) of all questionnaire respondents agreed or strongly agreed that more PD is required to help mainstream class teachers working with students with SEN as illustrated in Figure 5.34. Principals and teachers also believed that extensive retraining is required to include students with SEN as shown in Figure 5.35.

**Figure 5.34 More professional development is required to enable mainstream class teachers teach students with SEN**



**Figure 5.35 Extensive retraining is required to include students with SEN**



The argument that all teachers should have thorough education in the teaching of children with SEN as part of their ITE and relevant ongoing PD has been well documented in the literature (Kauffman and Hornby, 2020), and is one of the guiding principles of Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*, however, respondents in this study do not believe that they have achieved that standard. Teachers consistently referenced the lack of education in respect of supporting students with SEN, with Meabh saying, 'I think there's a lack of training which I think, I think is the key thing here'. Teachers were also concerned that they 'are not qualified for the role we have been given of assessing and determining special educational needs' (CTR 10), with Orlaith highlighting the issue when she said '[W]e're just class teachers and we're not specialists' and later when she queried

am I really doing enough for this child? Do I have the specialist knowledge to, to know where to go, or know what to do?

Principals expressed concerns that although they had the autonomy to deploy the additional teaching support, they did not have the expertise to shoulder the associated responsibility. This difficulty was recognised by PTR 1 who was cognisant of the challenge of ‘[s]tanding over decisions that are made without the benefit of expertise’. Teacher and principal respondents and staff in the case study school highlighted the onus put on teachers to take on, in essence, the role of Occupational Therapist (OT), Psychologist, and Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) without the appropriate qualifications to do so. This was emphasised by Sadhbh who pointed out that as a learning support teacher:

well, sometimes I get scared when I feel I don’t have the expertise sometimes in dealing with children who might have specific needs. Like I’m thinking of just say speech and language sometimes. I mean, we’re teachers, we’re not speech and language therapists.

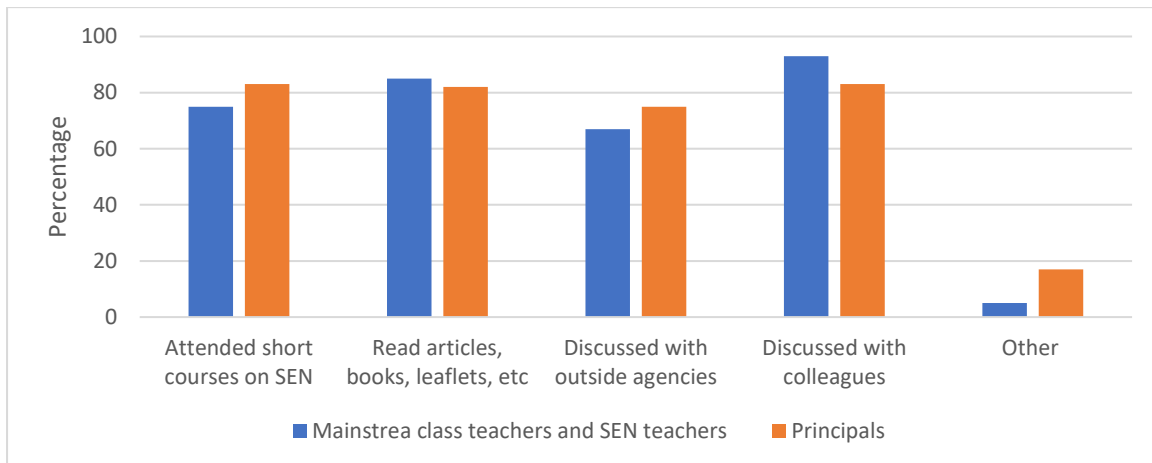
SETR 21 went so far as to suggest that the ‘new model’ was ‘alleviating outside agencies of the responsibility to the child’. SETR 23 also lamented the ‘...expectation that teachers in the school can deal with OT, [Occupational therapist] SLT [Speech and Language therapist] issues, etc. without the requisite training,’ and likewise SETR 8 commented that teachers are ‘expected to support SLT and OT without proper training’. Meabh pointed out that:

it can be very difficult because I don’t have the, I’m not a professional speech and language therapist. You know I just find that very, very frustrating. It’s like, they’ve had their eight or 10 weeks now, even though it took 10 months to get to them, and now they’re back with you.

Teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and self-efficacy in respect of inclusion have a very powerful influence on the classroom learning environment (Forlin, Keen, and Barrett, 2008; Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka, 2014; Monsen, Ewing, and Boyle, 2015), and teachers’ self-efficacy towards inclusion is a significant predictive variable in explaining teachers’ intentions to include students with SEN in mainstream classrooms (Sharma and Sokal, 2016; Hellmich, Löper and Görel, 2019; Saloviita, 2020a). If teachers are not confident that they are well prepared to do this following their ITE programme, then the challenges of effectively including students with SEN remain.

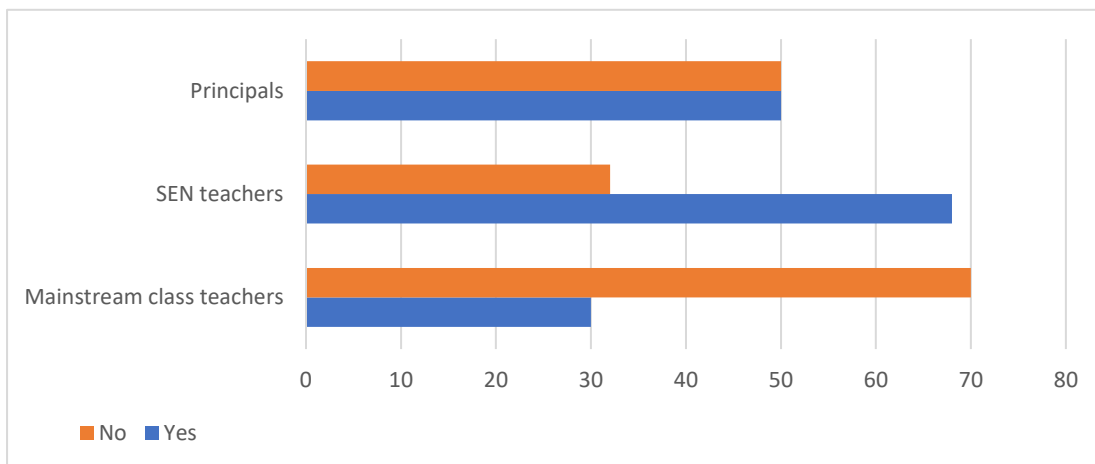
Questionnaire respondents engaged in relevant PD in the field of SEN in a variety of ways in an attempt to obtain the additional skills they believed they required. They attended non-accredited courses, read books and articles, and engaged in professional dialogue with colleagues as indicated in Figure 5.36.

**Figure 5.36 Principal and teacher engagement in SEN PD in the last three years**



Principals and teachers had also taken part in PD in the implementation of the ‘new model’, as illustrated in Figure 5.37. However, there was a marked disparity in teacher participation in this training with 70 percent (N=27) of SEN teachers and 50 percent (N=6) of principals having attended such PD but only 30 percent (N=7) of mainstream class teachers. This discrepancy may be because schools view the ‘new model’ and the attendant responsibilities associated with it as more relevant for principals and SEN teachers rather than a matter for class teachers.

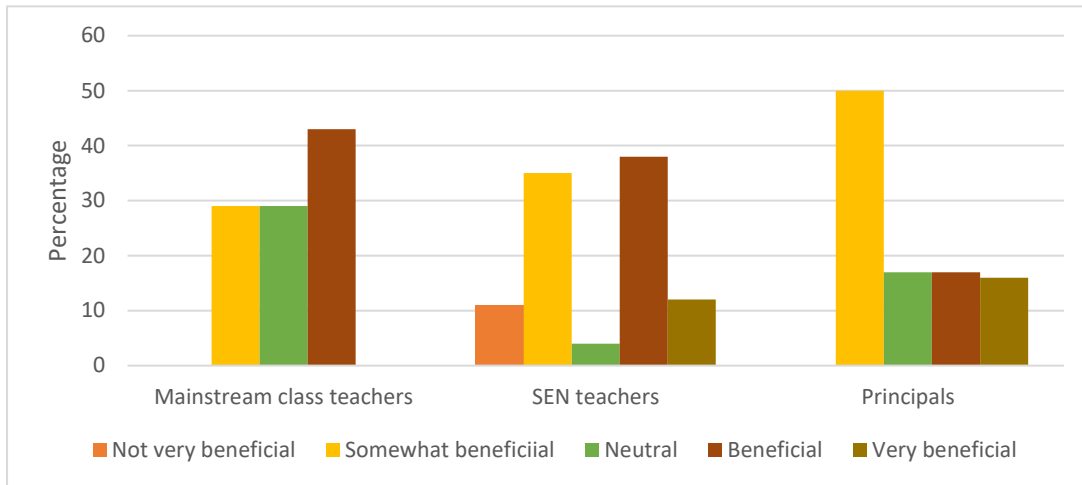
**Figure 5.37 Percentage of teachers who had attended pd in the implementation of the ‘new model’ by role**



Of the respondents who attended the PD, one of the SEN teachers found it was not very beneficial, although 38 percent (N=10) found it beneficial and 12 percent (N=3) very beneficial. While none of the mainstream class teachers found the training ‘very beneficial’ as illustrated in Figure 5.38, 43 percent (N=3) found it beneficial. The diversity of opinions regarding the PD provided on the ‘new model’ may be reflective of the individual teachers

and principals previous working knowledge of the implementation of additional support teaching allocation.

**Figure 5.38 How beneficial was the training in understanding the ‘new model’**

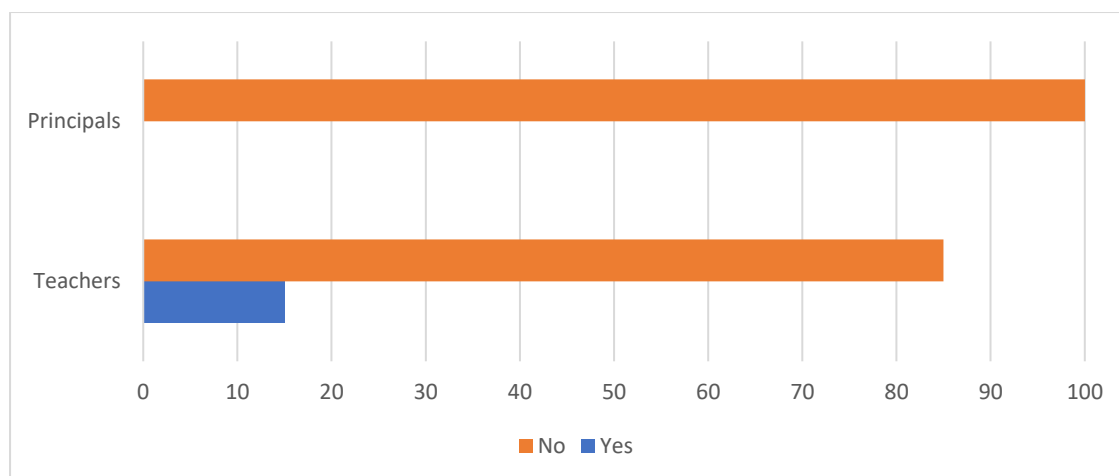


This engagement in professional learning aligns with the Cosán Framework (The Teaching Council, 2016) that argues that teachers’ learning should be linked to their individual professional needs and the needs of their students and school. As discussed in the following section, although the teachers in this study are intrinsically motivated to take responsibility for their professional development, they do not appear to have participated in formal accredited professional learning opportunities.

#### **5.4.4 Subtheme Four. Postgraduate qualifications in SEN**

Although principals and teachers perceived their ITE as inadequate in preparing them to teach students with SEN and that additional PD was required, there was little evidence of them availing of accredited PD programmes in the field. None of the principal respondents and only 15 percent (N=9) of the teacher respondents held academic qualifications in SEN as illustrated in Figure 5.39.

**Figure 5.39 Percentage of principals and teachers with postgraduate qualifications in SEN**



Two teacher respondents were trained in Maths Recovery, but this training is not mapped on to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Of the teachers who held postgraduate qualifications in SEN, seven were working as SEN teachers with two carrying out the role of SEN coordinator in their school. This contrasts with the findings of Travers et al., (2010) where all of the SEN coordinators had specialist qualifications. In that study the six case study schools were chosen for their inclusive outlook, and the fact that all of the SEN coordinators had specialist qualifications is interesting in the context of inclusive schools. The postgraduate qualifications in SEN undertaken by the teachers in this study were at level 9 (master’s degree/postgraduate certificate/diploma). See Table 5.2 for the post graduate qualifications held by teachers.

**Table 5.2 Postgraduate qualifications in SEN held by questionnaire respondents**

Postgraduate qualifications in SEN held by participants	Number of teachers
Post Graduate Diploma in SEN	7
Masters in Special and Additional Learning Needs	1
Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Studies in Special Education and Post Grad Cert in Autism	1

As 38 of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they were either SEN teachers or SEN co-ordinators this is concerning, particularly given the requirement for teachers to identify the learning needs of students in the absence of a diagnosis. These findings, once again highlight the disparity between DE rhetoric which emphasises that classroom teachers ‘will be supported by Special Educational Needs Teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education’ (DES, 2017b., p. 17) and school reality.

Even though it may be argued that teachers have access to additional PD, and they attend short courses in SEN, they are not accessing PD at a postgraduate level. Consideration needs to be given to whether one day occasional courses is sufficient, or whether it is appropriate for schools to have at least one staff member who holds academic qualifications in the field of SEN similar to the schools in Travers et al., (2010) study, particularly given the onerous responsibility now placed on school staff,. The Guidelines (DES, 2017b) recommend that pupils with the greatest levels of need ‘should be supported by teachers with relevant expertise,’ and further that members of the support team ‘should have the necessary experience and access to PD to support the diverse needs of pupils with special educational needs’ (DES, 2017b, p.5). Given that there is a requirement for schools to make decisions around the selection of students for support, the allocation of support and the provision of appropriate interventions, it is incumbent on schools to have staff with the skills to do this.

PD is a key theme in the literature (McGee, 2004; Sharma, Forlin and Loreman, 2008; Drudy and Kinsella, 2009; O’Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Sharma, Loreman and Forlin, 2012; Forlin, Sharma and Loreman, 2014) and the importance of skilled teachers is central to Hornby’s (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*. The DE also points out that principals should take into account the ‘acquired professional development and expertise of teachers, including where teachers have attained recognised qualifications in special education’ (DES, 2017a, p. 20) to ensure that students with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise. However, this study illustrates that while PD is a concern for teachers to some degree, they are not accessing accredited PD at a postgraduate level. The challenges preventing teachers undertaking accredited postgraduate qualifications in SEN need to be identified, in order to address the lacuna between DE rhetoric and school reality as to the availability of teachers with sufficient expertise in the area of SEN. The final theme Challenges for inclusion is discussed in the following section.

#### **5.5 Theme Four. Challenges for inclusion, ‘Everybody’s doing their best’**

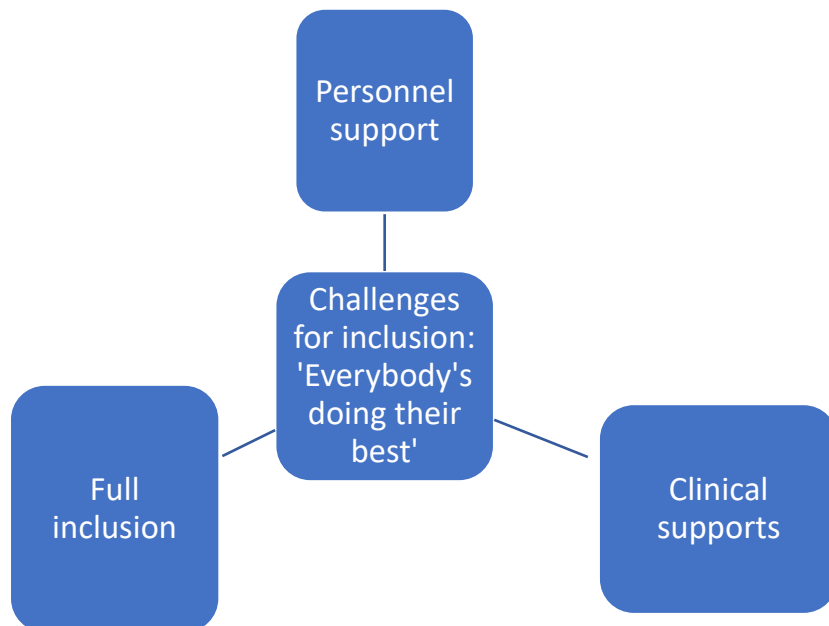
A key issue for principals and teachers was their ability to support students with SEN and address their needs appropriately in their classrooms and schools. Teachers highlighted the fact that they ‘try to meet their needs as best we can’ (Bronagh), and Ailbhe drew attention to the fact that ‘there’s huge needs and you’re constantly trying to deal with them as best you can’. In developing and engaging in inclusive practices several challenges were identified by the questionnaire respondents, one of which was the challenges relating to teacher initial education programmes and teacher PD which were addressed earlier.



Principals and teachers also identified specific challenges relating to time, with teachers and principals stressing the impact of time across different aspects of their work supporting students with SEN. The lack of time to meet the diverse needs of students within the classroom, as well as the lack of time for planning and collaboration has long been documented, with opportunities for professional learning from other teachers and other professionals constrained by the lack of time (Travers et al., 2010; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Ní Bhroin and King, 2020). While there are supports such as assistive technology, specialised furniture, and assistive devices allocated by the DE and the NCSE to help students with SEN, teachers, and principals highlighted personnel supports, rather than these material supports, as impacting directly on their ability to teach students with SEN within the classroom. These subthemes have been identified under Theme Four Challenges for Inclusion.

- Personnel support
  - Classroom supports
  - SEN Coordinator
- Clinical supports, and
- Full inclusion.

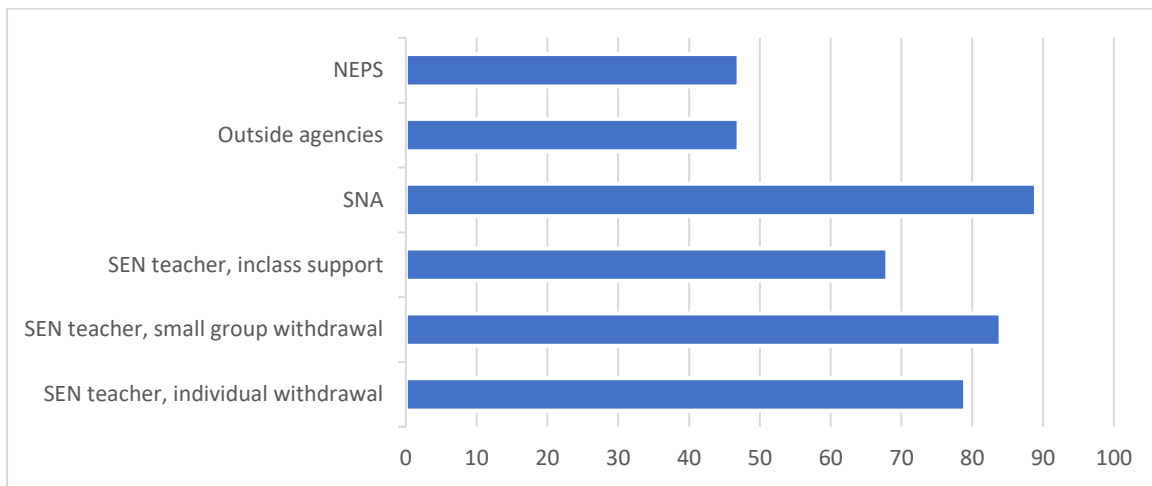
**Figure 5.40 Theme Four. Challenges for inclusion: ‘Everybody’s doing their best’**



### 5.5.1 Subtheme One. Personnel support

Questionnaire respondents indicated that a range of personnel supports and resources were available to them with 89 percent (N=17) of mainstream class teachers having an SNA assigned to students in their classroom. Support was also available from outside agencies with 47 percent (N= 9) of class teachers saying they were in receipt of support from NEPS and 47 percent (N= 9) in receipt of supports from the HSE or other disability services. The range of supports available to support students with SEN is presented in Figure 5.41.

**Figure 5.41 Personnel support available to mainstream class teachers**

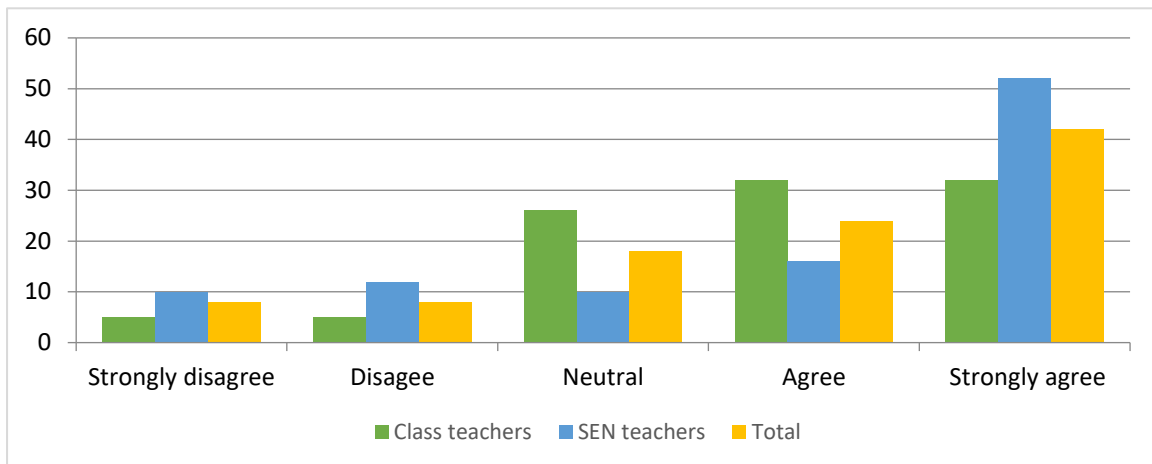


Research has indicated that the level of support that teachers have, or perceive to have available to them, is a factor that influences their attitudes towards inclusive practices (Goodman and Burton, 2010; Ahmmed, 2013; Chiner and Cardona, 2013; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Goldan and Schwab, 2020). The respondents in this study have a range of support available to them both from within the school and from outside agencies. However, the quantum of support available and the ability to access that support in a timely manner is a more pertinent factor and is addressed in the following sections.

### Classroom Support

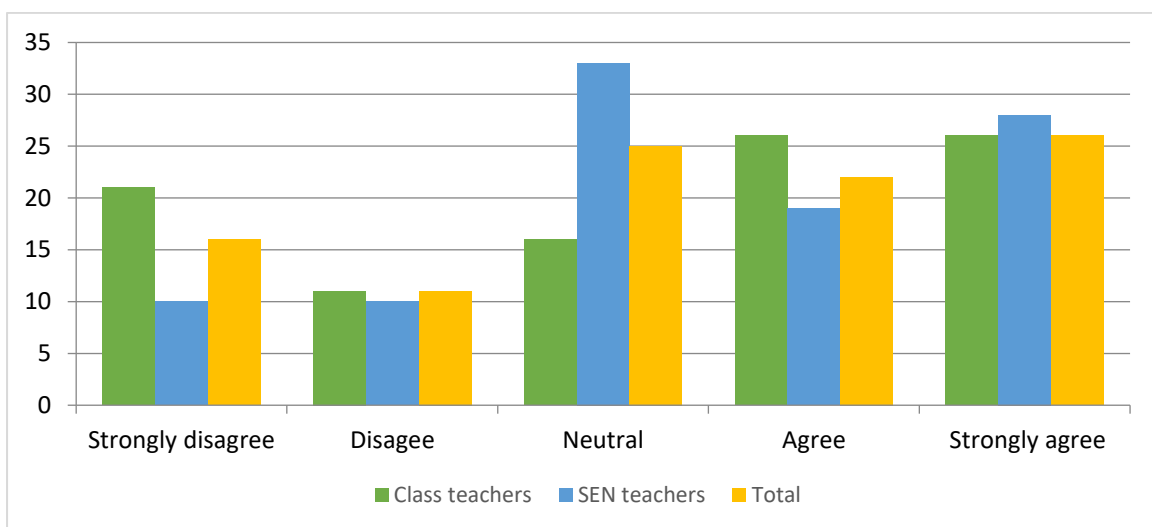
Ranking statements regarding the provision of personnel support where teachers had students with SEN in their classroom, with one being strongly disagree and five strongly agree, were posed to mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers. Teachers were clear that they require more help in their classrooms when students with SEN are included as illustrated in Figure 5.42.

**Figure 5.42 I need more help in my classroom when students with SEN are included**



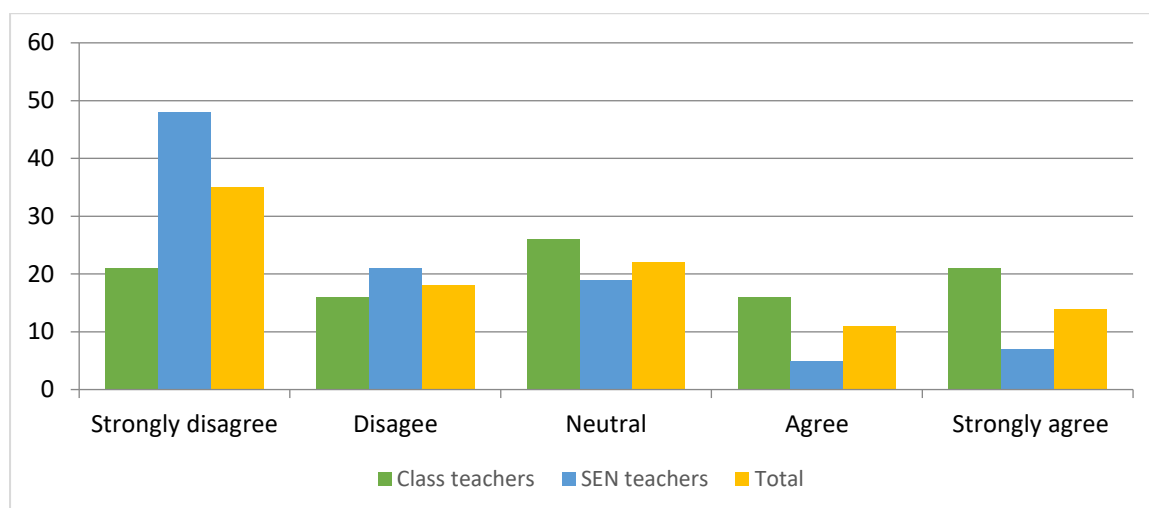
Just over half of the mainstream class teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were receiving sufficient additional teaching support, but 32 percent (N=7) disagreed or strongly disagreed illustrated in Figure 5.43.

**Figure 5.43 I receive enough support from SEN teachers**



Teachers were also clear that they did not receive sufficient SNA support with 53 percent (N=12) of class teachers and SEN teachers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement, as illustrated in Figure 5.44.

**Figure 5.44 I receive enough SNA support in my classroom**



These findings were supported by the qualitative responses provided by the questionnaire respondents. According to CTR 18 there are '[N]ot enough teachers in some schools to carry out [the] 'new model'' effectively' and CTR 7 saying 'there aren't enough support teachers available for the amount of varying needs' and that it is challenging 'if more pupils require support than hours provide' (CTR 18). SEN teachers had a similar perspective, with SETR 16 saying 'too few special education teachers to effectively support individual pupils' and SETR 23 saying 'having enough time for all pupils is the biggest challenge.' However, SETR 11 believes that under the 'new model' 'every child who needs support shall receive it' and SETR 12 believes that it will 'support all children that need it'. While these sentiments accord with the aspirations of the Circular (DES, 2017a), these statements are in the minority, and do not appear to be reflective of the experiences of most respondents.

Principal teachers also expressed concerns on the reality of supporting students with SEN effectively due to the quantum of teaching support provided. One principal was adamant that:

children with significant SEN needs or complex needs need significant support. This is not reflected in the SEN Allocation staffing; the reality is that schools and SEN children are not being adequately supported by the HSE or external supports to enable children with SEN flourish in the mainstream setting' (PTR 9).

The experience of teachers and principals in this Dublin postal area consistently show that there are 'not enough staff to support all the children who need help' (SETR 27). Indeed, PTR 1 states that:

[i]nitially I thought we would have more time for collaboration, but so many pupils with complex needs have joined the school/been diagnosed that we are more stretched than ever.

PTR 3 found that ‘as we were a developing school when the allocation was first given out, we feel that our allocation is not enough to meet the needs of our school’ highlighting the issues that the implementation of the ‘new model’ presents for their school.

Mainstream class teachers in the case study school held similar views on the quantum of support that the pupils in their classes were receiving. When the researcher asked, ‘how beneficial do you find the level of support that you’re getting now in class? there was a brief silence and some laughter. Meabh broke the silence saying, ‘I know that like everybody’s doing their best, you know...we don’t have an awful lot of time with so many needs in the school’, Sadhbh, agreed saying:

I think probably all of us at some stage or another have had one child that we felt needed a bit of support that there just wasn’t the facility or the resource there to give that child.

The SEN team in the case study school was also concerned with their capacity to provide appropriate support to the children on their caseloads, with Dearbhla highlighting that:

if the children with huge, special needs are really draining the learning support team then is there another group of children in the bottom who would have been getting loads of help were it not for those other children.

This necessitated the need to ‘prioritise at times, and it may be decided at times that actually we don’t have any more resources to facilitate this particular child’ (Sadhbh). Sorcha pointed out that ‘we are very stretched even though we have six SET’, and Fiona agreed, ‘which sounds like loads, but we’re so, so stretched, and there is such a huge list of children’. Whilst Saoirse agreed, she was also resigned to the situation and stated that ‘we could always probably all, could do with more and, but I suppose we can only do and deal with what we’ve actually, um, actually got’.

Ailbhe, the Principal of the case study school, expanded on the issue of insufficient teaching supports saying:

the new admissions policy, it’s all saying, you know, you take any child in with any needs, um, but the supports aren’t there to back it up ’

and later, acknowledged that while ‘there’s ways around it, like grouping children, but you know, that’s still compromise as well at times.’ In a similar vein, Bronagh acknowledged the

challenges facing the school in meeting the needs of their students from the limited resources available to them when she said:

[w]e have waiting lists as well. ... we can put that child on the waiting list and then have a look at them in the next review and see where we can fit them in. ... it's nearly like an algorithm sometimes to see like that, like I said, sometimes you have to look at a couple of needs and put them together in a group though. They might not be the most suitable, you try your best to cater for them in some way.

Having 'waiting lists' and catering for the children 'in some way' is at quite a remove from the ideological rhetoric proposed in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) which stated that the support teaching allocation enables schools to meet the needs of all children requiring such support. Interestingly, SETR 28 questions the profiling system, saying 'it depends on the profile of the school, if the child was in another school would they get more access if it was based on individual cases rather than whole school'.

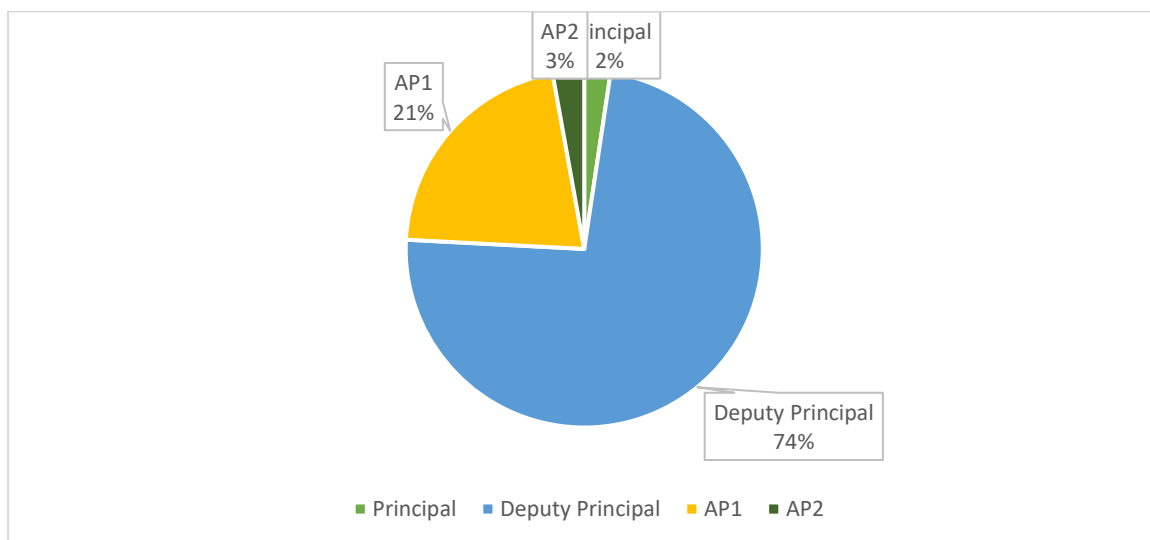
Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a), as discussed in Chapter two, outlines the manner in which the support is quantified, enabling schools 'to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who require such support in their schools', and clarifies that '[S]chools will deploy resources based on each pupil's individual learning needs' (DES, 2017a, p.1). Thus the circular states unequivocally that *all pupils* (my emphasis) who require support will be provided with additional teaching support, and that schools will be supported in identifying and providing for the learning needs of pupils through use of the accompanying *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017b). The statement made by SETR 28 questioning the profiling system highlights the inequity inbuilt into the system whereby schools with a small pupil teacher ratio can offer support to students in the average or above average range on standardised tests (Travers, 2017). This contrasts with the experience of schools in this Dublin postal district that struggle to meet all of the identified needs in their school.

### **SEN co-ordinator**

Bronagh the SEN co-ordinator in the case study school highlighted the complexities in timetabling support for the students with SEN in their school, likening it to an 'algorithm' and illustrating the time it takes to maximise the use of the additional teaching support allocated. While the management and co-ordination of SEN provision in a school is the role of the principal there is legislative provision for the work to be delegated to another member of staff. In this study 78 percent (N=57) of questionnaire respondents indicated that their

school had an SEN co-ordinator, but it was not a promoted post in all schools. In some instances, the responsibility was shared between the SEN teachers, or carried out by one of the SEN team. A few teacher respondents were unsure if it was a promoted position in their school. In 74 percent (N=53) of cases where the SEN co-ordinator was a postholder, it was part of the Deputy Principal's role as depicted in Figure 5.45. Teachers believed that the role of SEN co-ordinator should be a promoted post 'outright on its own as it is such an important role in school' (SETR 28). A similar view was held by SETR 6 who believed that it should be a post at 'AP1 [Assistant Principal 1] level as there is massive responsibility attached to the role, and also incessant bureaucratic demands'. However, not all teachers held this view with SETR 5 of the opinion that 'any teacher who has been working in SEN for a number of years and has some level of knowledge and expertise can do it.'

**Figure 5.45 SEN Co-ordinator and post of responsibility level in school**



Hornby (2014, 2015) highlights the importance of organisational systems and procedures at both the system level and school level to ensure the needs of students with SEN are appropriately addressed. The necessity for the appointment of an SEN co-ordinator to manage this administrative function was highlighted by the participants in this study and for the post to be a senior leadership role within a school. This requirement has also emerged from the literature as key to coordinating and managing the SEN function and ensuring adherence to policies and procedures in respect of supporting the inclusion of students with SEN (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017, 2020; Walsh, 2021). The findings of this study demonstrate the responsibility to do so is delegated in most instances, but not all, to the Deputy principal or a member of the senior leadership team. Hornby (2014, 2015) repeatedly

emphasises the importance of having staff educated in the area of inclusive special education to ensure the effective education of students with SEN. This requirement coupled with the necessity to have organisational systems and procedures in schools emphasises the importance placed by Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education* on the education of students with SEN. Moreover, Walsh (2021) contends that SEN teachers who hold an academic qualification in SEN or hold a management post engage more deeply and have a stronger impact on the school's SEN provision than those who are not part of the school management team. The dissatisfaction expressed by some teachers in respect of their preparedness to teach students with SEN following their initial teacher education programme, and the few respondents holding post-graduate qualifications in SEN raise concerns about the capacity of schools to meet their expanded responsibilities.

### **5.5.2 Subtheme Two. Clinical supports**

While support is available from a number of sources, Ailbhe recognised that 'the biggest challenge is, I suppose, it's just having the right supports you know' in order to include students with SEN. Later Ailbhe expanded on the challenge facing the staff in her school in ensuring inclusive practices:

you know, you take any child in with any needs, but the supports aren't there to back it up. So that's a very tough situation, you know, because if you don't have the right supports, it is going to be, it can be a struggle.

Teachers highlighted that the 'inclusion of students is made easier for everyone once the correct resources are in place i.e., SNA, SLT, OT, parental support' (CTR 11), and SETR (8) was clear that 'it really depends on the individual needs of the child and the supports allocated and the intervention with agencies'. However, this support was not always readily available with teachers and principals reporting poor or limited access to clinical supports from SLTs or OTs, and according to one teacher '[i]t was always difficult to get but now is even more so' (SETR 21). Ailbhe found that 'it's hit and miss how these children have got the resources', and the length of time it can take for students to be seen by clinicians placed pressure on school staff to do what they can for the students in the intervening period. For example, Ailbhe found that 'they can take 18 months or more to be seen. So, um, like I suppose we just do our best as a school'. The frustration and helplessness of teachers in the face of lengthy waiting lists was highlighted by Saoirse when she pointed out that:

you recognise a need, and you need assistance from outside agencies, that you fill in all the forms, say for speech and language, and um, send them away, then



you get back, eh, yeah, we might be able to get to you in 10 months. I mean, that can be just soul destroying.

Collaboration with staff from outside agencies was also highlighted as a challenge. Even when students were assessed teachers found that ‘there’s no kind of checking in to see how they’re getting on’ (Fiona), and ‘the link, the direct link, isn’t always there...It’d be better if there was a stronger link between services and schools’ (Bronagh). Sadhbh spelled it out very explicitly when she explained that ‘there’s very little communication between those other agencies those specific like SLT, OT, physio and the mainstream teacher.’ .

In addition, there was also the expectation that following a block of therapy ‘they’ll give the pack to the school, and you know, say follow up from this’ (Ailbhe). Teachers also found that this was:

difficult to manage... when things like that come in, you’re expected to be able to just, oh just, you know have, you know 10 minutes there every day with that child. So, it’s not that easy, like in a in a whole class setting or, or even to timetable into, you know, uh a SET timetable (Sorcha).

Despite the fact that the lack of supports from clinicians was a concern, Dearbhla pointed out that ‘they’re doing their best. It’s just, they’re very stretched as well. They have way too many children on their lists’. SETR 22 similarly pointed out that ‘outside agencies are also overwhelmed with requests for assessments and supports and schools are trying desperately to help’. The dearth of supports available from clinicians such as SLTs and OTs to provide support for students in schools means that schools find themselves as the ‘only form of help till they are, you know, till they are seen by somebody else’ (Ailbhe). While it is laudable that schools wish to help in the absence of clinical support from the HSE, it is not the role of schools to do so, with PTR 3 arguing that ‘for schools to do this without these clinical supports is at best misguided and at worst, arrogant’. The lack of appropriate clinical supports evidenced in this study and in previous studies (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Ní Bhroin and King, 2020) means that the education system is attempting to compensate for deficiencies in other services in the absence of adequate personnel supports and resources, and where teachers and principals express the belief that they do not have the expertise to do so.

### **5.5.3 Subtheme Three. Full inclusion**

Despite articulating a conception of inclusion as ‘just inclusion is being included in the mainstream class’ (Orlaith), teachers and principals were not in fact supportive of full inclusion with many expressing reservations about the ability of mainstream schools to

support full inclusion, irrespective of the level of supports available. The positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with SEN was qualified in a number of respects. A key issue for five of the 12 principals was the issue of resourcing, with PTR 6 saying that inclusion ‘works well for many children but only when adequately resourced’ and PTR 1 saying, ‘I feel students with SEN should be properly supported so that they can be realistically included’. However, principals were concerned that ‘[a] mainstream teacher with 26 pupils cannot meet the needs of all pupils if they are also faced with a pupil with a profound disability’ (PTR 5), and another stating ‘[m]ainstream Class Teachers (MCT) simply aren’t equipped or supported enough to do this’ (PTR 3). This was reaffirmed by Bronagh, the SEN co-ordinator in the case study school, who commented that ‘we don’t like, we don’t feel like we would have the supports to accept every child and the way the broad sense of inclusion has been put out there at the moment’.

The challenges faced by class teachers in including all students meaningfully was raised by a number of questionnaire respondents. One class teacher was adamant that ‘Mainstream classroom CANNOT and DO NOT (respondent’s emphasis) provide appropriate support or education for all children with SEN’ (CTR 4). Yet another class teacher cautioned that ‘unless class sizes are halved, and every class teacher has adequate support (SNA, SET etc.), neither children with additional need nor mainstream children would benefit from full inclusion’ (CTR 9). SET teachers also had difficulties with the appropriateness of full inclusion and suggested that the ‘inclusion of children with severe difficulties without sufficient support can cause chaos in the classroom’ (SETR 31), with yet another stating ‘mainstream settings are inappropriate for some students’ (SETR 18). These views echo those of Warnock who concluded that the concept of inclusive education should be reconsidered and reimagined to allow children with SEN to be included in the ‘... common educational enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof’ (Warnock, Norwich and Terzi, 2010, p.32). Similar views are articulated by Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), Hornby (2014, 2015), Kauffman and Badar (2014b), Kauffman and Hornby (2020) and others who recognise that the majority of children with SEN can be educated effectively in the mainstream classroom but that for a minority of students with more complex needs, placement in a different setting such as a resource room, special class or special school for some or all of the time might be more appropriate (Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b). These views align with those presented in the SERC report (Government of Ireland, 1993) which recommended that a continuum of placement

options be available ranging from full-time placement in mainstream classes to full-time placement in a special school, and is one of the guiding principles articulated by Hornby (2014, 2015) in his theory of *inclusive special education*. However, these sentiments are at odds with the UNCRPD interpretation of Article 24 (Education) which was ratified by Ireland in 2018, and which calls for schools to implement a fully inclusive education system. The implications of this interpretation, and the tension between Irish education policy and practice, as evidenced by the year on year opening of special classes and more recently special schools are being considered by the NCSE (2019).

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis and discussion of the research findings of this study into the way principals and teachers in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district mediate the ‘new model’ and engage in inclusive practices to support their students with SEN.

Firstly, the key theme of inclusion and inclusive practices was discussed. It was demonstrated that principals and teachers supported the inclusion of students with SEN and that they held various understandings of inclusion. The next theme dealt with the ‘new model’ and the constituent component. Concerns were raised about the lack of clarity, and indeed confusion, on the part of principals and teachers around what constituted ‘complex needs’. The use of standardised assessment results to inform teaching allocations was also questioned. While teachers ascribed the introduction of flexibility and autonomy to the ‘new model’ and indeed welcomed them, schools had both flexibility and autonomy for many years to allocate the support to the students as they thought fit, but most seemed unaware of this. Teachers and principals recognised that with autonomy came responsibility and this double-edged sword was a concern. Some principals and teachers were of the view that this autonomy was the DE distancing itself from the responsibility of allocating support to individual students on the basis of their need and that teachers and principals were not qualified to do so. As students with low incidence disabilities no longer required a diagnosis in order to be allocated support, the findings on the views of teachers and principals on the usefulness of a diagnosis to inform pedagogical matters were presented.

This led to the third theme of teacher self-efficacy where teachers considered the implications of inclusion for their self-efficacy believing that additional PD and supports were required when they had students with SEN in their classrooms. While some teachers

and principals highlighted the need for further education in inclusion, few teachers and no principal in this Dublin postal district had engaged in post-graduate studies in SEN. Given the responsibilities now placed on schools this is a worry, and questions need to be asked as to why this is the case. The final theme of challenges to inclusion indicated that teachers and principals believed they needed more support to effectively include students with SEN, and that supports from clinicians was also required. However, support from outside agencies was difficult to obtain and collaboration with outside agencies proved more challenging, and in many instances it was not possible for schools to engage collaboratively with clinicians. Principals and teachers were not in favour of the concept of full inclusion recognising that the needs of the individual child were paramount. Although the 'new model' had been in place for three years when the data for this study was collected, schools continue to question the model and the impact of the model has yet to be determined. However, the findings have highlighted issues that have implications for practice, policy and future research. The following chapter provides a conclusion to the study.

# Chapter Six: Conclusion

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study derived from the findings set out and discussed in the previous chapter. The aim of this study is to examine how principals and teachers in a Dublin postal district mediate a new funding model to support students with SEN and facilitate inclusion. The ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a) was introduced to build on the GAM/EAL model which was intended to make possible ‘the development of truly inclusive schools’ (DES, 2005a, p. 2). Under this ‘new model’ a diagnosis of a special educational need is no longer required to access educational support, and the allocation of special educational support teaching is provided based on a school’s educational profile. While the previous chapter presented the findings under four themes and subthemes, this chapter highlights the relevance of the findings and conveys how the study contributes to policy and practice within the context of inclusive education. In Section 6.2 the implications and significance of those findings as they address the research questions and viewed through Hornby’s (2014, 201) theory of *inclusive special education* are presented. In Ireland the educational provision for students with SEN is currently under scrutiny with the EPSEN act (Government of Ireland, 2004) being reviewed and the DE conducting an evaluation of the ‘new model’. There is limited published research on the practical application of the ‘new model’ in mainstream primary schools. Therefore, the findings of this study will contribute to the evidence-base and reveal principals’ and teachers’ attitudes, beliefs and understandings of inclusion and towards the ‘new model’ as it is mediated in their schools. This is followed by the contribution that this study makes to knowledge, and recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, the implications of the findings for future research are set out.

## 6.2 Summary of the Key Findings in relation to the Research Questions

This research study set out to explore how principals and teachers in a Dublin postal district understand and mediate the latest funding model whereby additional teaching support is provided to schools to support students with SEN. The following section provides a synopsis of the findings of this study as they address the research questions which are set out in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Research Questions.**

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1. What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' attitudes towards and understanding of inclusion?
  2. What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' understandings and perceptions of the 'new model'?
  3. How have schools changed their practice in response to the introduction of the 'new model'?
- 

### **6.2.1 What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' attitudes towards and understanding of inclusion?**

The findings indicate that principals and teachers participating in this study are highly committed to their students, doing their best to support them in spite of the constraints under which they are working. They are generally positively disposed towards the principle of inclusion, with teachers viewing inclusion as acceptance and trying to 'cater for everybody in mainstream' (Muireann), irrespective of their needs or abilities. Teachers and principals are also clear that students with SEN should be given every opportunity to succeed in the mainstream classroom. Nonetheless, more careful analysis reveals that they are not supportive of 'full inclusion' and argue that there are limits to inclusion and that it 'is not going to work for every child' (SETR 8). They also argue that successful inclusion is dependent on the individual child, rather than on a particular diagnosis. Teachers and principals differed in their views as to which disability category was the easiest to include, but students with severe/profound general learning difficulties are seen as the most difficult to include by principals, class teachers and SEN teachers. Students with behavioural difficulties are also viewed as being particularly difficult to include, with concerns expressed for the education and safety of other children in the classroom. Similar concerns were identified in previous studies regarding 'the extent to which significantly challenging behaviour infringes upon the rights of all pupils and teachers' (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013, p. 1130).

The findings, illustrative of teachers' and principals' beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion are not compatible with the UNCRPD Committee's interpretation of Article 24 (Education) of the convention which is that having a mainstream educational system and a separate special education system is not compatible with its views of inclusion. However,

these findings are aligned with the views articulated by Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), Warnock, Norwich and Terzi (2010), Hornby (2011, 2014, 2015), Kauffman and Badar (2014), Kauffman and Hornby (2020) and others who recognise that while the majority of children with SEN can be educated effectively in the mainstream classroom, for a minority of students placement in a different setting may be more appropriate to their needs. The findings are also aligned with the NCSE's position that 'all children should be educated together, with the appropriate supports in place, unless there is a strong evidential basis to support an alternative approach' (NCSE, 2019, p.9). Thus, the provision of a continuum of placement options recommended in SERC (Government of Ireland, 1993) and advocated in Hornby's (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education* is essential to meet the individual needs of students with SEN, and vindicate their rights to an appropriate education.

### **6.2.2 What are principals', mainstream class teachers' and support teachers' understandings and perceptions of the 'new model'?**

Many teachers and principals were unclear as to how their school's additional teacher allocation was calculated. They did not have an entirely accurate understanding of the definition of the 'complex needs' component of the model, questioning the transparency of the figures and the accuracy of the allocation. Following the submission of a FOI request in respect of the 'complex needs' component of her school's allocation, this researcher was informed that 'the information does not exist' (HSE FOI response, Jan., 2023) lending credence to the fears articulated by the principals and teachers in this study regarding the accuracy of the additional support teaching allocation. Despite DE and NCSE rhetoric that the 'new model' would result in a reduced administrative burden, this is disputed by the participants. While it is acknowledged that it is no longer necessary to apply for support teaching hours for students with SEN the findings indicate that there is an increased administrative requirement as a result of the additional responsibilities under the 'new model.

A number of teachers and principals cited the 'new model' as introducing flexibility and affording them autonomy to meet the needs of their students. However, they did not recognise that this flexibility and autonomy had been devolved to schools more than 20 years ago under Circular letter M08/99 (DES, 1999). This agency/responsibility dichotomy is regarded as a double-edged sword, and a few participants view this as the DE, and the NCSE, shifting their responsibilities to school staff, rather than autonomy to allocate the additional teaching support to those who need it most. Contrary to the DE position principals and teachers do not believe that all students can get the necessary support under this new model,

although this is not a unanimous viewpoint. The need to prioritise students for support, with some students no longer getting the required support as others have a greater need, is highlighted in this study. The lack of time for planning and collaboration, in addition to insufficient time to meet the individual needs of children are identified as a considerable challenge. This issue was highlighted over ten years ago by Travers et al., (2010), and more recently by Ní Bhroin and King (2020) and continues to be a challenge. Collaboration is a key principle advocated by Hornby (2014, 2015) in his vision for *inclusive special education*, and consistently highlighted in the Irish context (DES, 2000; NCSE, 2011; DE 2020). However, the time restrictions identified in this study has implications for supporting inclusion in mainstream primary schools in this Dublin postal district.

The resource constraints under which teachers are operating as they try to share limited resources equitably means that decision-making at the school level is critical (Kenny, McCoy and Mihut, 2020). Teachers and principals argue that they do not have the expertise to meet the demands now made of them, and similar to previous research (O’Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Travers et al., 2010; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013) are adamant that they require further PD. They argue that this is necessary both in ITE programmes and in ongoing PD for them to successfully include students with SEN despite the changes introduced to ITE programmes by the Teaching Council since 2011 (The Teaching Council, 2016, 2020). The need for thorough, ongoing and high-quality PD is an essential component of Hornby’s (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*, and integral to the provision of an appropriate education for students with SEN. It must be acknowledged that both teachers and principals in this study engaged in non-certified PD, this should be encouraged, though the impact of this PD, or lack of impact on changes in practice should also be noted. Only nine of the 73 questionnaire respondents and none of the staff in the case study school held post-graduate qualifications in SEN, and a number of recommendations are made in Section 6.4 in this regard.

### **6.2.3 How have schools changed their practice in response to the introduction of the ‘new model’?**

According to the findings, schools have implemented several changes to their SEN practices since the introduction of the ‘new model’. Questionnaire respondents indicated that they use the continuum of support and the SSF for record keeping purposes. Changes have also been made to the procedures used for identifying students for support, and for tracking



and monitoring progress. Hornby's (2014, 2015) model of *inclusive special education* highlights the importance of whole-school policies and effective organisational procedures at the school level to support students with SEN. With the use of the continuum of support and the SSF, schools appear to be developing more systematic procedures in respect of the management of the SEN function in their schools. The findings also indicate that more support is provided through the use of in-class models or team teaching than heretofore, although these changes were attributed to staffing changes rather than to the introduction of the 'new model' in the case study school. However, despite these changes, the provision of support on a withdrawal basis continues to be the preferred model of support, as evidenced in other Irish studies (Rose and Shevlin, 2020). Indeed, the review of the pilot conducted by the DE Inspectorate raised as a concern 'the reported lack of impact of the new allocation model in some schools where no additional teaching resources were granted' (DES, 2016, p.33).

The 'new model' was introduced to remove the necessity of a medical diagnosis to access support in respect of students with LI disabilities. However, the findings of this study indicate that schools provided support for students identified as having a learning need even in the absence of a diagnosis. Teachers report that where diagnostic reports are available they find the recommendations beneficial to inform their practice, but mainstream class teachers and SEN teachers differed as to their usefulness in allocating additional teaching support. It was also acknowledged that sourcing these reports took time, but teachers do their best to support their students in the absence of recommendations and without the requisite expertise. The lack of access to external professional services and the challenges accessing reports in a timely manner has also been identified previously (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Ní Bhroin and King, 2020; Travers, 2023). Even where such reports are available, the findings indicate that there is limited interaction or collaboration with the outside professionals and school staff, and unrealistic expectations placed on schools by these clinicians. A key principle of Hornby's (2014, 2015) model is that of collaboration; with an emphasis on collaboration between parents, school staff and outside professionals considered essential. It is clear from the findings that there are shortcomings in the extent of collaboration between school staff, but this is even more marked in the lack of collaboration between school staff and outside professionals.

Since the introduction of the 'new model,' the educational landscape has changed in a number of ways, with the ratification of the UNCRPD by Ireland in 2018 and with schools

required to complete the educational component of the Assessment of Need (AON) process (DE, 2022c, 2023b). The additional requirement places further pressure on teaching staff who have already stated that they are not sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of students with SEN, and a further administrative burden on time-poor school staff. The views of teachers and principals in this study who are tasked with the education of students with SEN are at odds with the interpretation of Article 24 (Education) by the UNCRPD committee. Similarly, the NCSE (2019) 'is of the view that the best interests of children and their needs should be fundamental and first' (p. 9). Furthermore, notwithstanding the ratification of the UNCRPD by the Irish Government in 2018 there is a tension between that Committee's interpretation of Article 24 (Education) and the expansion of special schools and special classes in Ireland illustrating the complexities of inclusive education.

### **6.3 Contribution to knowledge and scholarship**

This study sought the views of practitioners on how they mediate DE policy in respect of the 'new model' of additional teaching support. The model has been in place for just over six years, and little is known about it both in terms of teachers' attitudes towards it and the impact on policy and practice in schools. This study attempts to address that lacuna and presents insight into the experiences and perspectives of teachers and principals in a Dublin postal district tasked with implementing DE policy on inclusion in their schools. Using an explanatory sequential design, policy practice dissonance is uncovered, with the experiences of teachers on the ground at variance with the DE position set out in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a). To date there is limited research into attitudes towards and the implementation of this 'new model' to support inclusion. The findings, conclusions and recommendations in this chapter provide feedback regarding teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the 'new model' and the effectiveness of the 'new model' in supporting inclusion. The findings add to the available evidence base to shape and inform policy in respect of funding models to support inclusive education. The necessity for the provision of an enhanced programme of initial teacher education coupled with enhanced PD for teachers to enable the provision of truly inclusive schools is evident, despite the programme changes initiated by the Teaching Council (The Teaching Council, 2016, 2020). This knowledge has the potential to inform future revisions to policy on teacher education and facilitate inclusion in Irish primary schools.

The findings of this study, viewed through the lens of Hornby's (2014,2015) *inclusive special education* provide a framework as a unit of analysis through which inclusive education policy in Ireland can be studied. The model as envisaged in the NCSE working group report (NCSE, 2014) has not as yet been realised, with further changes to school profiles to occur in the future. This study has shed light on the 'new model' as it is currently structured, and how it is mediated in mainstream primary schools in this Dublin postal district. The exploratory questions created for this study focused on the Continuum of Support and on the model itself, can identify areas where teachers' require additional PD and inform future revisions to the requirements for ITE programmes and PD. As the model is changed through future reprofiling, they can also serve as a strong foundation to conduct future research into the implementation of the model. Recommendations for practice, policy and further research are presented in the following section.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for practice, policy, and future research**

The research findings from this study have implications for practice, policy and future research as set out below.

##### **6.4.1 Recommendations for practice**

The development of inclusive practice in schools is essential in order to ensure that all students, including those with SEN, are appropriately supported. The findings of this study recommend timely access to clinical reports and opportunities for school staff to collaborate with clinicians in providing support to students with SEN. The HSE should immediately set about a recruitment drive to recruit the necessary numbers of clinicians to meet the needs of students with SEN to enable them to assess and provide appropriate support so that students with SEN can be included effectively and appropriately in the most suitable environment. However, it is recognised that this requires significant additional resources to fund the recruitment of more staff. Furthermore, the current challenges in recruiting staff to vacant positions may mean that even with additional funding there may not be sufficient personnel available to fill vacant positions.

The enhanced role for the HSE in determining the allocation of teaching supports to schools spotlighted in this study and the deficit in the required information necessitates closer collaboration between the DE and the DoH to address the complexities of the HSE/DE interplay regarding the provision of the necessary information required to calculate the 'complex needs' component of the model.

Effective collaboration is essential to ensure the needs of students with SEN are met. The staff in the case study school were systematic in carving out time for collaboration. Although school staff may be constrained in collaborating with personnel from other agencies they should take advantage of their agency and the increased autonomy afforded in Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) and allocate dedicated time for collaboration between school staff and between school staff and outside professionals where they are available.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for policy**

The research findings have implications for policy development in respect of the provision of additional teaching support and for teacher education. While these recommendations, if implemented would enhance the educational provision for students with SEN and move further towards an inclusive education system, there are associated cost implications. Consequently, it may not be possible to implement them in the short term. Time proved a significant challenge in meeting the needs of students with SEN in a number of respects. The appointment of an administrative Deputy Principal at a new lower threshold is recommended, particularly in DEIS Band 1 schools, and as a matter of urgency in DEIS Band 1 schools with special classes. The administrative requirements to run schools effectively, particularly schools that have special classes, is such that additional time is necessary. Having an administrative Deputy Principal would provide that additional time and enable schools to meet the needs of students with SEN more effectively.

Collaboration between teachers and school staff is essential for the inclusion of students with SEN. Principals and teachers have their role to play in identifying opportunities for collaboration, however there is also a need to ring-fence time for collaboration between school staff and between school staff and clinicians, parents and outside agencies. While some provision has been allowed for this under circular 0013/2017 DES (2017), it is quite vague. Collaboration has been identified as essential for inclusive schools (Travers et al., 2010), but the absence of a firm commitment to this is yet another example of the policy practice dissonance. If the DE and the NCSE are serious about inclusion and the development of inclusive schools, a clearer and stronger commitment to an allocation of time for collaboration between teachers should be provided for in the next reprofiling and allocation of additional teaching support.

Although it is recognised that there are limits to what can be provided in initial teacher education programmes a number of recommendations are made in respect of teacher

education, including enhancements to initial teacher education programmes and enhanced teacher professional development. The Teaching Council has revised the criteria for initial teacher education and inclusive education is now a mandatory core element of ITE programmes (The Teaching Council, 2020). The expansion of the B. Ed programme to a four-year degree and the introduction of a range of optional modules in inclusive education in a number of the Universities providing ITE programmes is a step in the right direction. Despite Ireland's ratification of the UNCRPD Article 20 (education) the year-on-year expansion of special classes and more recently special schools means that NQTs will be appointed to special class settings more regularly. As the induction phase for NQTs can be supported in any teaching setting similar school placement time and requirements must be allocated during ITE across all teaching settings to ensure teachers are fully equipped to teach children with SEN in a mainstream setting or special class setting. This study recommends the inclusion of additional observation placements in SEN settings, an assessed placement in an SEN setting and a special class setting as an integral part of ITE programmes to ensure NQTs are better positioned to teach students with SEN in inclusive schools. The current failing to include an assessed special education placement renders the experience academic rather than practical, and the findings from this study suggest that the absence of a practical assessed placement experience in a special education setting continues to ignore the realities of inclusive special education. It may be possible to achieve some of these recommendations more easily than others, and time constraints may have implications for the inclusion of additional modules in ITE programmes. Some programmes offer elective modules in SEN and it may be necessary to revisit the way in which these elective modules are offered.

While the teachers and principals in this study professed themselves familiar with Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) and the accompanying Guidelines (DES, 2017b) the provision of a module on education policy and legislation as part of the ITE programmes is also recommended by this study to ensure NQTs are better prepared to meet the administrative requirements expected of them in fulfilling their duties in the classroom. Teachers and principals have a professional responsibility to ensure they are familiar with changes to DE policy, opportunities for PD in this area should be provided by the NCSE, and or OIDE to support principals and teachers updating their knowledge of educational policies.

While there are benefits to providing support within the classroom, the teachers in this study did not find that it was always beneficial for their pupils. Previous research found that

teachers in Ireland lack a clear understanding of the different in-class approaches available (Casserly and Padden, 2018), with an overreliance on one approach, station teaching (Walsh, 2021). This lack of understanding could have negatively impacted the effectiveness of the approach as teachers, while willing to adopt in-class approaches were not fully conversant with its effective implementation. Despite the fact that some initial teacher education programmes provide opportunities to develop skills in these areas, and student teachers may experience this approach while on school placement the provision of PD regarding the different in-class approaches is essential to support the implementation of inclusive practices.

Without negating the autonomy schools have in relation to the focus of school improvement, for future cycles of School Self Evaluation (SSE),<sup>27</sup> the DE Inspectorate should advocate the development of inclusive practices as a key component for school improvement. A number of years ago the NCSE published the *Inclusive Education Framework* (NCSE, 2011); this document could form the basis for schools to review their practices in respect of the inclusion of students with SEN. The Cosán Framework (The Teaching Council, 2016) also provides for inclusion as a learning area that could be considered by teachers for their own PD. There are many demands on a teacher's time and the primary school curriculum is currently being revised, so this would require a willingness on the part of principals and teachers to prioritise inclusion as an area for development.

Given the responsibility placed on schools and school principals for the effective deployment of the additional teaching support provided to schools (DES, 2017a, 2019b), it is critical to ensure that teachers and principals are provided with the skills to make appropriate decisions in respect of this work. School leaders would benefit from the opportunity to engage in PD which supports their leadership skills in the area of developing inclusive schools. This PD should be provided for all principals, as an essential component of the MISNEACH<sup>28</sup> programme provided by OIDE<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> School Self Evaluation (SSE) is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. It involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements about practice and about how well pupils and students are doing. The key focus of school self-evaluation is to bring about improvements in pupils' and students' learning.

<sup>28</sup> MISNEACH is a two-year personal and professional development programme for Newly Appointed Principals (NAPs) developed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

<sup>29</sup> OIDE is a new support service for teachers and school leaders, funded by the Department of Education formed from the integration of four existing support services and launched on September 1, 2023. These support services are the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

Modules on SEN should also be mandatory on post-graduate programmes for leadership increasing the opportunities for prospective school leaders to engage in relevant PD in the area of inclusion and SEN.

Increasing the number of places on the special education courses provided by the colleges of education, together with the reinstatement of the qualification allowance, would possibly encourage more teachers to undertake postgraduate studies in the area of SEN, thus facilitating the development of these skills. Places on these courses should also be available to mainstream class teachers in recognition of their primary responsibility for teaching all students in the class including students with SEN.

The DES (DES, 2016) recommended a national programme of PD to support schools implement the ‘new model’ in recognition of teachers’ and principals’ need for such PD. This should be implemented immediately during an exceptional closure day to ensure it is delivered to all schools and all staff as efficiently as possible. It is recognised that there are cost implications in the implementation of all of these recommendations, and while increased funding has already been allocated to support inclusion, if the DE and the NCSE are committed to developing ‘truly inclusive schools’ and honouring Ireland’s commitments under the UNCRPD, the required funding must be put in place.

Consideration could be given by school Boards of Management to require staff assigned to an SEN role to hold a post-graduate qualification in SEN if they are to remain in that role for more than two years. This would ensure that students with SEN have access to teachers who have the relevant expertise and can provide continuity of support and align with the aspirations of Circular 0013/2017 and the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with SEN in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017a, 2017b).

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) is currently being reviewed. Teachers and principals in this study raised concerns about the impact of including children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties on the safety and education of other children in their class. This study recommends that Section 2 of this act be retained to protect the right of all students to an appropriate education. While the act refers to the respective rights to an appropriate education of children who do and do not have SEN, it is silent on how the rights of each group might be balanced (Meaney et al., 2005), this should be addressed in new legislation. This study further recommends that the narrow restrictive

definition of ‘special needs’ set out in EPSEN (Government of Ireland,2004) be expanded to reflect the definition included in the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland 1998).

This study recommends that in line with a reframing of the definition of ‘special needs’ new models of support teaching funding should make provision for additional teaching support for students who are exceptionally able.

The current position adopted by the DE whereby they stratify different disabilities is discriminatory. Classes for children with other disabilities, such as specific learning difficulties should be opened where there is an identified need, this is provided for in the ‘new model’. The NCSE should be proactive in supporting schools open classes for students with Developmental Language Delay (DLD), and the DE should compel the HSE to provide the appropriate levels of clinical support. Although these recommendations are contrary to the UNCRPD interpretation of the term inclusion, they are aligned with the current DE practice of opening special schools and special classes and align with Hornby’s (2014, 2015) theory of *inclusive special education*, and facilitate the provision of an appropriate education to meet the needs of all students..

### **SEN Co-ordinator role**

Given the complexity and demands of the SEN function within schools, particularly in larger schools, it is insufficient to state that this responsibility falls solely to the principal. The ‘new model’ brings increased responsibilities for leadership and management. Allied to the need for increased PD there is also a need to consider formalising the management of the SEN function within schools. In recognition of the increased responsibilities and the time required to address them, the provision of a discrete post of responsibility dedicated to the leadership and management of the SEN function would go some way to ameliorating these challenges. This study recommends that this promoted post be separate from the current schedule of promoted posts (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017, 2020) to support the provision of a truly inclusive education system.

### **6.4.3 Recommendations for further research**

This study has examined the ways in which mainstream primary schools in a Dublin postal district are mediating the implementation of the ‘new model’ (DES, 2017a) which aims to support students with SEN in ‘a better and more equitable way’ (NCSE, 2014a). The findings of this study present opportunities for further enquiry and future research. Six years after the ‘new model’ was introduced and following a further re-profiling of schools, there is



a greater awareness of the implications for resourcing for schools through the changes introduced by the ‘new model’. The DE is currently conducting a review of the model (DE Special Education Section, 2023) ‘to provide assurance or confirmation that the model is delivering SET resources effectively and efficiently’. Having taken part in this review, this researcher is calling for a new, more comprehensive review conducted by an independent body, rather than the NCSE.

The exploratory questions in respect of the ‘new model’ and the continuum of support created for use in this study could serve as a foundation for the development of a validated scale to ascertain principals’ and teachers’ attitudes towards, and perceptions of the model. The ‘new model’ as originally designed, will not be fully implemented for many years to come, thus there are opportunities to conduct further research into the ‘new model’ as it changes to determine if it is indeed ‘a better and more equitable way’ to support the inclusion of students with SEN.

The role of the SEN co-ordinator in second level schools has been studied by Fitzgerald and Radford (2017, 2020) and it is timely that similar research be conducted at the primary school level. These new requirements have implications for the role of SEN co-ordinator which does not exist as a formal role in primary schools despite the extensive responsibilities now encompassed in the management of the SEN function in schools.

Finally, the nature of this study meant that the voice of students and parents was not included. Therefore, future studies could focus on the perspectives of parents and students and their experiences of the implementation of the ‘new model’. These important perspectives could shed further light on the inclusive nature of the model and enhance our understanding of the impact of policy change on the stakeholders who are the beneficiaries or casualties of the ‘new model’.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This study has examined the ways in which principals and teachers in a Dublin postal district mediated the ‘new model’ of support teaching allocation. An explanatory sequential design was used to explore and gain insight to better understand the ways in which this policy was mediated from the perspective of those tasked with its implementation. By exploring the perspectives and experiences of principals, teachers and SEN teachers, this study shed light on the implementation of this government policy in mainstream primary schools in a Dublin

postal district. Research has demonstrated that teachers are central to the inclusion process, and their self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion are crucial (Wilson et al., 2016; Hellmich, Löper and Görel, 2019; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019; Savolainen, Malinen and Schwab, 2020). The findings from this study indicate that principals and teachers in this postal district are broadly supportive of inclusion but believe there are limits to inclusion. They are committed to their students and are creative in their use of time to facilitate collaborative practices to enable the development of inclusive practices.

This study demonstrates the policy practice dissonance and the impact of poor communication and lack of trust between those tasked with the implementation of policy and those charged with its design. A clear statement from one of the survey respondents ‘listen to teachers’ (SETR 21) should not go unheeded as the findings of this study provide important insights to inform and underpin the development of policy to ensure the delivery of an appropriate education for students with SEN in accordance with their individual needs.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Relevant policy and legislative developments

Government reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993)</li><li>• Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996)</li><li>• Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools (1998)</li></ul>
Litigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The O'Donoghue case (1993)</li><li>• The Sinnott case (2000)</li></ul>
Policy documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The National Education Convention (1994)</li><li>• Government White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future (1995)</li></ul>
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Education Act 1998</li><li>• The Education (Welfare) Act 2000</li><li>• The Equal Status Act 2000</li><li>• The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004</li><li>• The Disability Act 2005</li><li>• The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018</li></ul>
NCSE Research reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools (2013)</li><li>• Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A better and more equitable way (2014)</li></ul>

## Appendix B Model of *Inclusive Special Education* (Hornby, 2014, 2015)

Model of Inclusive Special Education
<p><b>Guiding Principle: Organisation for providing optimal education for all children with SEN</b></p>
<p><b>Key Elements:</b></p> <p>‘It is necessary to have coherent education policies and procedures in place in all aspects of the education system in order to provide the best possible education for all children with SEND (EADSNE, 2009)’ (Hornby, 2015, p. 249).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and coherent national policy based on the principles of inclusive special education.</li> <li>• Legislative framework clearly specifying the rights of children with SEN.</li> <li>• Statutory guidelines with mechanisms such as school inspections to ensure the implementation of policy and guidelines.</li> <li>• Parent partnership services providing information and guidance to parents of children with SEN (Hornby, 2014).</li> <li>• School policies to ensure statutory requirements and guidelines are implemented.</li> <li>• Procedures for the identification and assessment of children with SEN, implementation of appropriate evidence based interventions (Hornby, 2014)</li> <li>• Procedures for the evaluation, monitoring and review of student progress</li> <li>• Effective school based organisational procedures to meet SEN needs, implemented by school staff trained in inclusive special education, in addition to specialist staff from outside agencies and outside specialist teachers, (Ekins, 2015)</li> <li>• Schools should ensure that whole-school, effective, evidence based practices including parental involvement are implemented to facilitate the academic and social development of children with SEN, (Hornby, 2011a; Hornby, Gable and Evans, 2013)</li> <li>• All teachers must be able to identify children with SEN and ensure that evidence based teaching strategies and approaches such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring are used to optimise learning for all children (Hornby, 2014)</li> <li>• Teachers must have thorough training in teaching children with SEN as part of their initial teacher education and ongoing relevant professional development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guiding Principle: Continuum of placement options</b></p>
<p><b>Key Elements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises that the majority of children with SEN can be educated effectively in mainstream classes.</li> <li>• Minority of children with complex SEN could benefit more from placement in resource rooms, special classes or special schools for some or all of the time (<b>Warnock, Norwich and Terzi, 2010; Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Kauffman and Badar, 2014b</b>).</li> <li>• Continuum of placement options ranging from full-time placement in mainstream class with differentiation of work by the class teacher, to fulltime placement in a special school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guiding Principle: Education in the most appropriate setting</b></p>
<p><b>Key Elements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement between the various placement options should be available to ensure the most appropriate placement option.</li> </ul> <p>‘The most important issue is to have the flexibility to transfer within a school system that has a continuum of placement options available, in order to ensure that children are at all times being educated in the setting that best facilitates their learning’ (Hornby, 2015, p.249)</p>
<p><b>Guiding Principle: Focus on effectively educating as many children as possible in mainstream schools.</b></p>

**Key Elements:****Schools to have policies and practices in place to support inclusive special education.**

- It is essential that mainstream schoolteachers have a sound knowledge of SEN and relevant practical teaching strategies.
- Have high expectations.
- Focus on meeting the needs of all students in the school.
- Use collaboration and differentiation to provide high quality instruction for all students.
- High quality ongoing school-centred professional development
- Efficient and flexible use of resources
- Distributed leadership and shared decision making
- Use of comprehensive data systems to monitor student progress.
- Development of collaborative skills to facilitate working in partnership with outside agencies, specialist teachers, and parents in order to implement effective inclusive special education (Farrell *et al.*, 2007; McLeskey, Waldron and Redd, 2014).

**Guiding Principle: Implementing evidence-based practices****Key Elements:**

- Implementing evidence based practices (Hornby, Gable and Evans, 2013; Mitchell, 2020)
- Assessment strategies and Individual Education Plans to focus on students' strengths and inform teaching.
- Use of systems such as Response to Intervention (Burns and Gibbons, 2012), **Universal Design for Learning** (King-Sears, 2009) and Positive Behaviour Interventions and supports to manage behaviour and facilitate learning (Savage, Lewis and Colless, 2011)
- Use of assistive technology, peer tutoring, co-operative learning and the teaching of meta-cognitive strategies to optimise the effectiveness of teaching.
- Close collaboration with parents and other professionals (Hornby, 2011b)
- Use of culturally relevant and responsive interventions (Habib, Densmore-James and Macfarlane, 2013)

**Guiding Principle: Collaboration between mainstream and special schools/classes****Key Elements: There are two roles for special schools.**

- Provision of special education for children with more severe levels of SEN that cannot be met effectively in mainstream schools.
- Provide guidance and support to mainstream schools for the effective education of children with moderate levels of SEN (Ekins, 2013)
- Development of inter-personal skills to ensure the required levels of effective consultation and collaboration (Hornby, 2014)

## **Appendix C Principal Questionnaire. Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs: The GAM and Resource Hours Model (Previous Model) and the New Model of Teaching Support Allocation**

### **Information Regarding the Study**

I Pauline Morley, a Doctoral student in the Education Department in Maynooth University am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Walsh as part of the requirements for The Doctorate in Education Programme. I am also a Principal teacher. In the context of this study my role is that of researcher and any data gathered during the study is for research purposes only. I would appreciate if you would read the information regarding the study and if you are happy to participate please complete the questionnaire that follows. If after reading this Information section, you need any further information or clarification regarding the study, you can contact me at xxx

The purpose of this study is to explore Principals' and teachers' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion through the ways in which they engage with state policy on Special Educational Needs (SEN). It also intends to examine the way in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support under Circular 13/2017, *Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017) is mediated in primary schools in Dublin X. This is a two-phase study. In this, the first phase, Principal teachers and teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X are invited to take an anonymous online questionnaire which should take approximately 30 – 35 minutes to complete.

In the second phase of the study, mainstream primary schools in the Dublin X area have been invited to take part in a detailed study about their engagement with the 'new model' of additional teaching support for students with SEN.

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee.

You have been asked to take part in this research because you are a Principal teacher in a mainstream primary school in Dublin X, but you are under no obligation to do so.

However, I would be really grateful if you agree to take part and give some of your time to complete this questionnaire. If you decide to do so, consent will be given on the click of the final submission of the questionnaire. As the questionnaire is anonymous, you will not be able to withdraw your data once submitted.

Information regarding you and your school will be collected together with information regarding your knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion and towards the 'New Model' of additional teaching support allocation. Information regarding the way in which you and/or your school has engaged with the 'New Model' to date, and the ways in which you and your school support students with SEN will also be collected.

No identifying data will be requested, as the questionnaire is anonymous.

All information will be collected using JISC Online Surveys and will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. All hard copy information will be held in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' home. Electronic information will be password protected and all survey data will be retained and hosted on a third party (Online Surveys) server and will be accessed only by Pauline Morley. No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent' (Maynooth University, 2019).



On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by the researcher. Hard copy data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the researcher.

The research findings will be written up and presented as a Doctoral Thesis on the ways primary schools in Dublin X have engaged with the 'New Model'. They will also be used for further publications arising from this study such as conference presentations and academic journal articles.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part, although it will take a few minutes of your time to do so. I hope you feel this is outweighed by the potential to play your part in adding to the body of knowledge of the ways in which teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the 'New Model' of teacher support allocation. You may contact my supervisor, Dr. Thomas Walsh, [thomas.walsh@mu.ie](mailto:thomas.walsh@mu.ie), if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

By clicking 'NEXT' you are consenting to participating in the study.

There are four sections to be completed in this questionnaire.

Section 1. Seeks information about you, the Principal teacher.

Section 2. Focuses on the ways in which students with SEN were supported under the GAM Resource hours model (Previous model) and are currently supported in schools under the 'New Model' of additional teaching support.

Section 3. Probes attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion.

Section 4. Seeks information about your school.

## Section 1. Teacher Demographic Information

1. What gender do you identify as? *Required*

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

2. Please indicate your age. *Required*

21-24

25-29

30-34

35-39

40-44

45-49

50-54

55-59

60 +

3. What teaching qualification do you hold? *Required*

B. Ed Degree

B. Ed Degree International (e.g., UK, Europe, USA, Australia)

Professional Masters in Education

Post Graduate Diploma in Education

Post Graduate Diploma/Masters in Education International (e.g., UK, Europe, USA, Australia)

Other

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4. To what extent did your initial teacher training prepare you for working with students with SEN? *Required*

Not at all

To a great extent

To some extent

Other

4.a. Please expand on your answer if you so wish. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you hold any academic qualifications in SEN? *Required*

Yes

No

5.a. Please state your SEN academic qualifications. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please list any other academic qualifications in addition to those already provided.

---

7. Please indicate the total number of years teaching including this year.

0-40 *Required.*

Total years teaching

## Section 2. Supporting Students with SEN. Looking at the GAM and Resource hours model (The Previous Model) and the 'New Model' of Support Teacher Allocation

*This section asks you a number of questions regarding the way in which students with SEN in your school were supported under the GAM and Resource hours model and the way they are currently supported under the 'New Model'.*

Following advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) the Department of Education and Skills (DES) changed the way in which additional teaching support was provided to schools to facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN (NCSE, 2014). Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) and the accompanying *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017b) introduced this new model of allocating additional teaching support to schools with effect from September 2017. This changed the method of allocation from one based on the number of classroom teachers and resource hours for individual students under the General Allocation Model (GAM) to one based on the school profile. The allocation to schools was reviewed and revised with effect from September 2019 under Circular 07/2019 (DES, 2019).

This is a link to Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation*

[http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013\\_2017.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013_2017.pdf)

This is a link to Circular 07/2019 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which updated the Special Education Teacher allocation.

[http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0007\\_2019.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0007_2019.pdf)

This is a link to the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.

<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf>

8. Is there an SEN policy in your school ? *Required*

Yes

No

Unsure

8.a. Are you familiar with your school's SEN policy?

Yes

No

Somewhat

9. In your school who has responsibility for selecting students for support? Please tick all that apply . *Required.*

- Principal
- SEN Co-ordinator
- SEN teacher
- Mainstream class teacher
- Other

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

10. As Principal, do you take an active role in prioritising students for support?  
*Required*

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

10.a. What form does this involvement take? \_\_\_\_\_

11. As Principal, do you take an active role in prioritising students for a NEPS psychological assessment? *Required*

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

11.a. What form does this involvement take? \_\_\_\_\_

12. As Principal, and the leader of teaching and learning, what in your opinion, is your role in respect of the management of the additional resources provided to the school to support students with SEN? \_\_\_\_\_

13. In making decisions about managing the additional teaching support allocation, with whom do you liaise? Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- SEN co-ordinator
- SEN teachers
- Mainstream class teacher
- Other

13.a. If you selected Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Describe how your school organises the planning and collaboration time for students with SEN?  *Required*

**Comparing Practice under the GAM and Resource Hours Model (The Previous Model) and the 'New Model'**

**15. Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model) how were the students with SEN in your school *primarily supported*?**

Only rank those models of support offered, with 1 being the model of support offered most frequently and 5 the model of support offered least frequently.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
In-class support					
Individual withdrawal					
Small group withdrawal					
Short focused blocks of support					
Other					
Don't know					

**15.a.** If you selected 'other' can you explain please? *Optional*

---

**16. Since the introduction of the 'New Model' has your school changed the way in which it provides support to students with SEN? *Required***

Yes

No

Unsure

**16.a. If yes, in what ways has your school changed its practice?** For example introduced team teaching/in-class support, support delivered in blocks of time to individual/small groups/class level?

**16.b.** How are the students with SEN in your school *primarily supported now*?

Only rank those models of support offered, with 1 being the model of support offered most frequently and 5 the model of support offered least frequently.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
In-class support					
Individual withdrawal					
Small group withdrawal					
Short focused blocks of support					
Other					
Don't know					

16.b.i. If you selected "other" can you explain please? *Optional*

17. ***Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)*** how were students in your school ***selected for support?*** Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher designed tests and tasks                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Continuous assessment  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monthly tracking   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher observation  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Portfolios   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Samples of work  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

17.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

18. ***Since the introduction of the 'New Model'*** has your school ***changed the way in which students are selected for support?*** *Required*

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Yes    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unsure | <input type="checkbox"/> |

18.a. How are students in your school ***selected for support now?*** Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher designed tests and tasks                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Continuous assessment  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monthly tracking   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher observation  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Portfolios   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Samples of work  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

18.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

19. Under the **GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)** which of the following **assessment methods were used in your school to monitor and report** on the progress of students with SEN? Please tick all that apply. *Required*  
Please select at least 1 answer(s).

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher designed tests and tasks                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Continuous assessment  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monthly tracking   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher observation  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Portfolios   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Samples of work  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unsure   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

19.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

20. Since the introduction of the 'New Model' has your school **changed the assessment methods** used to **monitor and report on the progress of students with SEN**? *Required*

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Yes    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unsure | <input type="checkbox"/> |

20.a. Which of the following assessment methods are **used in your school to monitor and report** on the progress of students with SEN now? Please tick all that apply.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher designed tests and tasks                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Continuous assessment  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monthly tracking   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher observation  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Portfolios   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Samples of work  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

20.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

---



21. ***Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)*** which of the following ***planning documents*** were used in your school for students with SEN?  
*Required*

- Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Student support file
- School designed document
- Other
- Unsure

21.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

22. Since ***the introduction of the 'New Model'*** has your school changed the ***planning documents used for students with SEN?***

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

22.a. Which of the following ***planning documents are used in your school for students with SEN now?*** *Required*

- Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Student support file
- School designed document
- Other

22.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

### Knowledge about the Continuum of Support

23. These statements relate to your current knowledge and application of the continuum of support model to facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN. Please tick the button under the column that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 7 answer(s).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I am familiar with the continuum of support model.						
Since the introduction of the 'New Model' our school uses the continuum of support to identify and respond to students' needs.						
The continuum of support model is implemented effectively in our school.						
My awareness of the continuum of support approach has developed since the introduction of the 'New Model'.						
In our school class teachers and support teachers collaborate well together to support students with SEN.						
Our school used the continuum of support under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model) to identify and respond to students' needs.						
I am familiar with the range of Diagnostic assessments used in our school to identify students' needs.						

24. In the context of the Continuum of Support what is your understanding of the term Classroom support? \_\_\_\_\_

25. In the context of the Continuum of Support what is your understanding of the term School support? \_\_\_\_\_

26. In the context of the Continuum of Support what is your understanding of the term School Support Plus? \_\_\_\_\_

### Knowledge and Beliefs about The New Model

27. Are you familiar with Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which introduced the 'New Model' of support teacher allocation, and Circular 007/2019 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which updated the earlier circular. *Required*

- Yes   
No   
Somewhat

28. Are you familiar with the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* that accompanied Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation*? *Required*

- Yes   
No   
Somewhat

29. In your opinion what was the reason for changing the model of teaching support allocation from the General Allocation Model (GAM) and resource hours for assessed needs to the current model based on school profile? *Required*

---

30. Have you received training in the implementation of the 'New Model'? *Required*

- Yes   
No

30.a. How beneficial was this training in helping you understand the 'New Model'?

- Not very beneficial   
Somewhat beneficial   
Neutral   
Beneficial   
Very beneficial

30.b. If you were offered the opportunity to attend training on the 'New Model' would you do so?

- Yes   
No

31. What in your opinion are the benefits of the 'New Model'?

---

32. In your opinion what are the challenges of the 'New Model' of teaching support allocation?

---

33. In your opinion what are the opportunities of the 'New Model' of teaching support allocation?

---

34. Under Circular 13/2017 the additional teaching supports provided are based on the schools educational profile which takes into account, among other components; 'The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.' In this context, what is your understanding of '**complex needs**'?

---

35. These statements relate to your knowledge and beliefs about the *'New Model'* of additional support teaching and the GAM *resource hours model (Previous model)*. Please tick the button under the column that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views. Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row. Please select exactly 15 answer(s). Please don't select more than 15 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
The 'New Model' has resulted in a very significant administrative saving for schools.						
School context should be included as a component of the school profile.						
A diagnosis of a specific disability is useful in informing appropriate teaching strategies/interventions.						
Capping any changes in the allocation of teaching support for 2019/2020 to schools at 20% was the right thing to do.						
The use of standardised test results as a component of the school profile is NOT an appropriate use of such results.						
Under the 'New Model' students no longer experience delays in accessing learning support.						
Using the decision-making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams is an appropriate way to establish the complex needs component of the school educational profile.						
The adjustments made to the support teaching allocation to our school for September 2019 are in line with the principles of equity and fairness.						
The flexibility afforded by the 'New Model' has enabled our						

school to provide support to more students than the previous model.						
The GAM and resource hours model (Previous model) was inequitable and potentially confirmed social advantage for some children and reinforced social disadvantage for others. SEN categories or labels is a useful way to allocate additional teaching support.						
Gender should NOT be included as an element of the school profile for the purposes of allocating additional teaching support.						
The GAM and resource hours model (Previous model) was inequitable, and encouraged unnecessary labelling of children with SEN.						
SEN categories or labels is a useful way to allocate additional teaching support						
The 'New Model' is designed to be responsive to identified needs.						
The use of medical categories in special education undermines educational assessment as the basis for the planning of teaching.						

36. Is there any other comment you would like to make about the 'New Model' of support teaching allocation, or the GAM resource hours model (Previous model) of support?

---

## Section 3. Attitudes and Beliefs towards the inclusion of students with SEN

This section asks you a number of questions about inclusion as it relates to students with SEN.

37. What are your thoughts about inclusion as it pertains to students with SEN?

---

38. In what ways, if any, have you upskilled in the area of SEN in the last three years. Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- |                                      |                          |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Attended courses on SEN              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Read articles, books, leaflets, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Discussed with outside agencies      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Discussed with colleagues            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| None of the above                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

38.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

39. Thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, please indicate how difficult or how easy you think it is to include students with the following categories of SEN in the mainstream classroom. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.  
Please select exactly 14 answer(s).

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy	Don't know
Hearing difficulties						
Behavioural difficulties						
Social and emotional difficulties						
Physical difficulties						
Visual difficulties						
Mild General Learning difficulties						
Moderate General Learning difficulties						
Severe/Profound General Learning difficulties						
Speech and language difficulties						
Autism						
Autism (Preverbal/early						

communication)						
Specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia)						
Gifted/Exceptionally Able						
Dual Exceptionality						

39.a. If you wish to make any further comment in relation to this, please do so.

---

40. Still thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, but focused this time on ***other students in the classroom***, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 5 answer(s).

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Inclusion offers mixed group interaction which Fosters understanding and acceptance of differences.					
The inclusion of students with SEN can be beneficial for students without SEN.					
The contact students without SEN have with students with SEN may be harmful.					
The presence of students with SEN promotes acceptance of difference on the part of students without SEN.					
The extra attention students with SEN require is to the detriment of the other students.					



41. Continuing to think about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, but focused this time on the **behaviour of students with SEN**, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5..There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.  *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 8 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 8 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Students with SEN and behaviour issues disrupt other students learning.					
Most students with SEN are well behaved in the classroom.					
The behaviour of a student with SEN generally requires more patience from the teacher than does the behaviour of a child without SEN.					
The student with SEN probably develops academic skills more rapidly in a special classroom than in a mainstream class.					
It is likely that a student with SEN will exhibit behaviour problems in a mainstream class setting.					
The behaviour of students with SEN sets a bad example for the other students.					
Students with SEN should be given every opportunity to function in the mainstream class setting where possible.					
Students with behaviour problems should be in a special class.					

42. Still thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN but thinking now about the *social and emotional effects of inclusion for students with SEN in the mainstream classroom*, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views. Please select exactly 5 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 5 answer(s) in any single column.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
The student with SEN is socially isolated by students without SEN.					
Inclusion is likely to have a negative effect on the emotional development of the student with SEN.					
Including the student with SEN in the mainstream class promotes his or her social independence.					
The needs of students with SEN can be best served through special, separate classes.					
The challenge of being in a mainstream classroom will promote the academic growth of the student with SEN.					

43. Continuing to think about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, but ***focusing on the implications of inclusion for teachers' practice and efficacy***, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 9 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 9 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Inclusion of students with SEN necessitates extensive retraining of mainstream class teachers.					
Mainstream classroom teachers possess a great deal of the expertise necessary to work with students with SEN.					
Students with SEN monopolise the teacher's time.					
Diagnostic prescriptive teaching is better done by SEN teachers than by mainstream class teachers.					
Many of the things teachers do with students without SEN are appropriate for students with SEN.					
Inclusion of students with SEN requires significant change in mainstream class procedures.					
Some disabilities are inappropriate for the mainstream class.					
Mainstream class teachers have sufficient training to teach students with SEN.					
More professional development should be provided to help mainstream class teachers working with SEN teachers.					

44. All students with SEN should be included in the mainstream class, irrespective of their level of need. What are your views on this statement?

---

45. Is there any other comment you would like to make about inclusion?

---

## Section 4. Demographic Information about your School

This is the final section of the questionnaire and will not take long to complete.

46. School type, tick all that apply *Required*

- Junior
- Senior
- Vertical
- Male
- Female
- Co-educational
- Gaelscoil
- Other

47. Disadvantage Status *Required*

- DEIS Band 1
- DEIS Band 2
- Non DEIS

48. School Category *Required*

- Denominational, e.g., Catholic, Muslim, Church of Ireland.
- Non-Denominational
- Multi-Denominational
- Other

48.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

49. Please indicate the number of students in your school. *Required*

- 101 – 200
- 201 – 300
- 301 – 400
- 401 – 500
- 501 +

50. Is there an SEN co-ordinator post in your school? *Required*

- Yes
- No

50.a. Who co-ordinates SEN provision in your school?

---

50.b. Should this be a post of responsibility and if so at what level?

---

50.c. Is this a post of responsibility and if so at what level?

---

51. Are there any special classes in your school? *Required*

Yes

No

51.a. Please state the type of special classes in your school.

---

54. Please complete the table below regarding the number of staff in your school 0 - 60

*Required*

Total number of teachers including Principal

Total number of Special Needs Assistants

55. Is there anything else you wish to add about the topics in this questionnaire?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, it is very much appreciated. Your views will contribute to an understanding of the ways in which teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation.

## **Appendix D Teacher Questionnaire. Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs: The GAM and Resource Hours Model (Previous Model) and the New Model of Teaching Support Allocation**

### **Information regarding the study**

I Pauline Morley, a Doctoral student in the Education Department in Maynooth University am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Walsh as part of the requirements for The Doctorate in Education Programme. I am also a principal. In the context of this study my role is that of researcher and any data gathered during the study is for research purposes only. I would appreciate if you would read the information regarding the study and if you are happy to participate please complete the questionnaire that follows. If after reading this Information section, you need any further information or clarification regarding the study, you can contact me at xxx

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion through the ways in which they engage with state policy on Special Educational Needs (SEN). It also intends to examine the way in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support under Circular 13/2017, *Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a) is mediated in primary schools in Dublin X.

This is a two-phase study. In this, the first phase, teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X are invited to take an anonymous online questionnaire which should take approximately 30 – 35 minutes to complete.

In the second phase of the study, mainstream primary schools in the Dublin X area have been invited to take part in a detailed study about their engagement with the 'new model' of additional teaching support for students with SEN.

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee.

You have been asked to take part in this research because you are a teacher in a mainstream primary school in Dublin X but you are under no obligation to do so.

However, I would be really grateful if you agree to take part and give some of your time to complete this questionnaire. If you decide to do so, consent will be given on the click of the final submission of the questionnaire. As the questionnaire is anonymous, you will not be able to withdraw your data once submitted.

Information regarding you and your school will be collected (No identifying data will be requested, as the questionnaire is anonymous.) together with information regarding your knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion and towards the 'New Model' of additional teaching support allocation. Information regarding the way in which you and/or your school has engaged with the 'New Model' to date, and the ways in which you and your school support students with SEN will also be collected.

All information will be collected using JISC Online Surveys and will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. All hard copy information will be held in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' home. Electronic information will be password protected and all survey data will be retained and hosted on a third party (Online Surveys) server and will be accessed only by Pauline Morley. No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.' (Maynooth University, 2019)

On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by the researcher. Hard copy data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the researcher.

The research findings will be written up and presented as a Doctoral Thesis on the ways primary schools in Dublin X have engaged with the 'New Model'. They will also be used for further publications arising from this study such as conference presentations and academic journal articles.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part, although it will take a few minutes of your time to do so. I hope you feel this is outweighed by the potential to play your part in adding to the body of knowledge of the ways in which teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation. You may contact my supervisor, Dr. Thomas Walsh, [thomas.walsh@mu.ie](mailto:thomas.walsh@mu.ie), if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

By clicking 'NEXT' you are consenting to participating in the study.



## Section 1. Teacher demographic information

There are five sections to be completed in this questionnaire.

Section 1. Seeks information about you, the teacher.

Section 2. Focuses on the ways in which students with SEN were supported under the GAM Resource hours model (Previous model) and are currently supported in schools under the 'New Model' of additional teaching support.

Section 3. Probes attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion.

Section 4. Inclusion of students in the Mainstream Classroom.

Section 5. Seeks information about your school.

1. What gender do you identify as? *Required*

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

2. Please indicate your age. *Required*

21-24

25-29

30-34

35-39

40-44

45-49

50-54

55-59

60 +

3. What teaching qualification do you hold? *Required*

B. Ed Degree

B. Ed Degree International (e.g., UK, Europe, USA, Australia)

Professional Masters in Education

Post Graduate Diploma in Education

Post Graduate Diploma/Masters in Education International (e.g., UK, Europe, USA, Australia)

Other

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4. To what extent did your initial teacher training prepare you for working with students with SEN? *Required*

Not at all

To a great extent

To some extent

Other

4.a. Please expand on your answer if you so wish. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you hold any academic qualifications in SEN? *Required*

Yes

No

5.a. Please state your SEN academic qualifications. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please list any other academic qualifications in addition to those already provided.

---

7. Please indicate the total number of years teaching including this year. *Required.*

Total years teaching

8. Please indicate your current role in school. *Required*

Mainstream class teacher

SEN teacher

EAL teacher

SEN coordinator

Special Class teacher

Teaching Deputy mainstream class

Teaching Deputy other

Administrative Deputy

Home School Community Liaison teacher

Other

8.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

## Section 2. Supporting Students with SEN and the New Model of Support teacher allocation

*This section asks you a number of questions regarding the way in which students with SEN in your school were supported under the GAM and Resource hours model and the way they are currently supported under the 'New Model'.*

Following advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) the Department of Education and Skills (DES) changed the way in which additional teaching support was provided to schools to facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN (NCSE, 2014). Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) and the accompanying *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES, 2017b) introduced this new model of allocating additional teaching support to schools with effect from September 2017. This changed the method of allocation from one based on the number of classroom teachers and resource hours for individual students under the General Allocation Model (GAM) to one based on the school profile. The allocation to schools was reviewed and revised with effect from September 2019 under Circular 07/2019 (DES, 2019).

This is a link to Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation*

[http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013\\_2017.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013_2017.pdf)

This is a link to Circular 07/2019 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which updated the Special Education Teacher allocation.

[http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0007\\_2019.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0007_2019.pdf)

This is a link to the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.

<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf>

9. Is there an SEN policy in your school *Required*

- Yes   
No   
Unsure

9.a. Are you familiar with your school's SEN policy?

- Yes   
No   
Somewhat

10. Are you familiar with Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which introduced the 'New Model' of support teacher allocation, and Circular 007/2019 *Special Education Teaching Allocation* which updated the earlier circular. *Required*

- Yes   
No   
Somewhat

11. Are you familiar with the *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* that accompanied Circular 13/2017 *Special Education Teaching Allocation*? *Required*

- Yes   
 No   
 Somewhat

12. Have you received training in the implementation of the 'New Model'? *Required*

- Yes   
 No

12.a. How beneficial was this training in helping you understand the 'New Model'?

- Not very beneficial   
 Somewhat beneficial   
 Neutral   
 Beneficial   
 Very beneficial

12.b. If you were offered the opportunity to attend training on the 'New Model' would you do so?

- Yes   
 No

13. In your opinion what was the reason for changing the model of teaching support allocation from the General Allocation Model (GAM) and resource hours for assessed needs to the current model based on school profile? *Required*

**Comparing Practice under the GAM and Resource Hours Model (The Previous Model) and the 'New Model'**

14. *Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)* how were the students with SEN in your school *primarily supported*?

Only rank those models of support offered, with 1 being the model of support offered most frequently and 5 the model of support offered least frequently.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
In-class support					
Individual withdrawal					
Small group withdrawal					
Short focused blocks of support					
Other					
Don't know					

14.a. If you selected 'other' can you explain please? *Optional*

---

15. **Since the introduction of the 'New Model'** has your school changed the way in which it provides support to students with SEN? *Required*

- Yes   
 No   
 Unsure

15.a. **If yes, in what ways has your school changed its practice?** For example introduced team teaching/in-class support, support delivered in blocks of time to individual/small groups/class level?

15.b. How are the students with SEN in your school **primarily supported now?** Only rank those models of support offered, with 1 being the model of support offered most frequently and 5 the model of support offered least frequently. Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row. Please select at least 1 answer(s). Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) in any single column.

	1	2	3	4	5
In-class support					
Individual withdrawal					
Small group withdrawal					
Short focused blocks of support					
Other					
Don't know					

15.b.i. If you selected "other" can you explain please? *Optional*

16. **Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)** how were students in your school **selected for support?** Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy   
 Teacher designed tests and tasks   
 Continuous assessment   
 Monthly tracking   
 Teacher observation   
 Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher)   
 Portfolios   
 Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)   
 Samples of work   
 Other   
 Don't know

16.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

**17. Since the introduction of the 'New Model' has your school *changed the way in which students are selected for support*? Required**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**17.a. How are students in your school *selected for support now*? Please tick all that apply. Required**

- Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy
- Teacher designed tests and tasks
- Continuous assessment
- Monthly tracking
- Teacher observation
- Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher)
- Portfolios
- Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)
- Samples of work
- Other

**17.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:**

**18. Under the *GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)* which of the following *assessment methods were used in your school to monitor and report* on the progress of students with SEN? Please tick all that apply. Required**  
Please select at least 1 answer(s).

- Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy
- Teacher designed tests and tasks
- Continuous assessment
- Monthly tracking
- Teacher observation
- Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher)
- Portfolios
- Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)
- Samples of work
- Other
- Unsure

**18a. If you selected Other, please specify:**

---

19. Since the introduction of the 'New Model' has your school ***changed the assessment methods*** used to ***monitor and report on the progress of students with SEN?*** *Required*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

20.a. Which of the following assessment methods are ***used in your school to monitor and report*** on the progress of students with SEN now? Please tick all that apply.

- Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy
- Teacher designed tests and tasks
- Continuous assessment
- Monthly tracking
- Teacher observation
- Diagnostic assessment (may be administered by a support teacher)
- Portfolios
- Conferencing (discussing progress with the student)
- Samples of work
- Other

20.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

21. ***Under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model)*** which of the following ***planning documents*** were used in your school for students with SEN? *Required*

- Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Student support file
- School designed document
- Other
- Unsure

21.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

22. Since ***the introduction of the 'New Model'*** has your school ***changed the planning documents used for students with SEN?***

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

22.a. Which of the following *planning documents are used in your school for students with SEN now?* *Required*

- Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Student support file
- School designed document
- Other

22.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:



## Knowledge about the Continuum of Support

23. Under Circular 13/2017 the additional teaching supports provided are based on the schools educational profile which takes into account, among other components; 'The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.' In this context what is your understanding of '**complex needs**'? *Required*

24. These statements relate to your current knowledge and application of the continuum of support model to facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN in your class. Please tick the button under the column that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views. *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 11 answer(s).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I am familiar with the continuum of support model.						
I feel confident in identifying students for educational support						
I feel competent in developing classroom support plans						
Since the introduction of the 'New Model' our school uses the continuum of support to identify and respond to students' needs.						
The continuum of support model is implemented effectively in our school.						
My awareness of the continuum of support approach has developed since the introduction of the 'New Model'.						
As a class teacher I know when to initiate classroom support plans						
As a class teacher I know when to initiate school support plans						
In our school class teachers and support teachers collaborate well together to support students with SEN.						

Our school used the continuum of support under the GAM and resource hours model (The Previous Model) to identify and respond to students' needs.						
I am familiar with the range of diagnostic assessments used in our school to identify students' needs.						

## Knowledge and Beliefs about The New Model

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 15 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 15 answer(s) in any single column.

25. These statements relate to your current knowledge about the 'New Model' of additional support teaching. Please tick the button under the column that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.  *Required*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
The 'New Model' has resulted in a very significant administrative saving for schools.						
School context should be included as a component of the school profile.						
A diagnosis of a specific disability is useful in informing appropriate teaching strategies/interventions.						
Capping any changes in the allocation of teaching support for 2019/2020 to schools at 20% was the right thing to do.						
The use of standardised test results as a component of the school profile is NOT an appropriate use of such results.						
Under the 'New Model' students no longer experience delays in accessing learning support.						
Using the decision-making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams is an appropriate way to establish the complex needs component of the school educational profile.						
The adjustments made to the support teaching allocation to our school for September 2019						

are in line with the principles of equity and fairness.						
The flexibility afforded by the 'New Model' has enabled our school to provide support to more students than the previous model.						
SEN categories or labels is a useful way to allocate additional teaching support.						
The GAM and resource hours model (Previous model) was inequitable and potentially confirmed social advantage for some children and reinforced social disadvantage for others.						
Gender should NOT be included as an element of the school profile for the purposes of allocating additional teaching support.						
The GAM and resource hours model (Previous model) was inequitable, and encouraged unnecessary labelling of children with SEN.						
The 'New Model' is designed to be responsive to identified needs.						
The use of medical categories in special education undermines educational assessment as the basis for the planning of teaching.						

26. Is there any other comment you would like to make about the 'New Model' of support teaching allocation, or the previous model of support?

## Section 3. Attitudes and beliefs towards the inclusion of students with SEN

This section asks you a number of questions about inclusion. It also asks you to outline your understanding of or the meaning of inclusion and for your thoughts about inclusion as it relates to students with SEN.

27. In what ways, if any, have you upskilled in the area of SEN in the last three years.

Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- Attended courses on SEN
- Read articles, books, leaflets, etc.
- Discussed with outside agencies
- Discussed with colleagues
- Other
- None of the above

27.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

28. Thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom please indicate how difficult or how easy you think it is to include students with the following categories of SEN in the mainstream classroom. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy	Don't know
Hearing difficulties						
Behavioural difficulties						
Social and emotional difficulties						
Physical difficulties						
Visual difficulties						
Mild General Learning difficulties						
Moderate General Learning difficulties						
Severe/Profound General Learning difficulties						
Speech and language difficulties						
Autism						
Autism (Preverbal/early communication)						
Specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia)						
Gifted/Exceptionally Able						
Dual Exceptionality						

29. Still thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, but focused this time on *other students in the classroom*, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5 Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 5 answer(s).

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Inclusion offers mixed group interaction which Fosters understanding and acceptance of differences.					
The inclusion of students with SEN can be beneficial for students without SEN.					
The contact students without SEN have with students with SEN may be harmful.					
The presence of students with SEN promotes acceptance of difference on the part of students without SEN.					
The extra attention students with SEN require is to the detriment of the other students.					

30. Continuing to think about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom, but focused this time *on the behaviour of students with SEN*, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.  *Required*

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 8 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 8 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Students with SEN and behaviour issues disrupt other students learning.					
Most students with SEN are well behaved in the classroom.					
The behaviour of a student with SEN generally requires more patience from the teacher than does the behaviour of a child without SEN.					
The student with SEN probably develops academic skills more rapidly in a special classroom than in a mainstream class.					
It is likely that a student with SEN will exhibit behaviour problems in a mainstream class setting.					
The behaviour of students with SEN sets a bad example for the other students.					
Students with SEN should be given every opportunity to function in the mainstream class setting where possible.					
Students with behaviour problems should be in a special class.					

31. Still thinking about the effective inclusion of students with SEN but thinking now about the *social and emotional effects of inclusion for students with SEN in the mainstream classroom*, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views. Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row. Please select exactly 6 answer(s). Please don't select more than 6 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
The student with SEN is socially isolated by students without SEN.					
Inclusion is likely to have a negative effect on the emotional development of the student with SEN.					
Including the student with SEN in the mainstream class promotes his or her social independence.					
The needs of students with SEN can be best served through special, separate classes.					
The challenge of being in a mainstream classroom will promote the academic growth of the student with SEN.					



32. Continuing to think about the effective inclusion of students with SEN in the classroom but ***focusing on the implications of inclusion for teachers' practice and efficacy***, please indicate the strength of your agreement with the following statements. With Strongly disagree at 1 to Strongly agree at 5. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answers are those that honestly reflect your views.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 17 answer(s).

Please don't select more than 17 answer(s) in any single column.

	Strongly Disagree 1.	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5.
Inclusion of students with SEN necessitates extensive retraining of mainstream class teachers.					
Mainstream classroom teachers possess a great deal of the expertise necessary to work with students with SEN.					
Students with SEN monopolise the teacher's time.					
Diagnostic prescriptive teaching is better done by SEN teachers than by mainstream class teachers.					
Many of the things teachers do with students without SEN are appropriate for students with SEN.					
Inclusion of students with SEN requires significant change in mainstream class procedures.					
Some disabilities are inappropriate for the mainstream class.					
Mainstream class teachers have sufficient training to teach students with SEN.					
More professional development should be provided to help mainstream class teachers working with SEN teachers.					

33. Is there any other comment you would like to make about inclusion?

## Section 4. Inclusion of students in the mainstream classroom

Please enter a whole number (integer).

34. What class level do you currently teach? *Required*

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Junior Infants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Senior Infants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| First Class    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Second Class   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Third Class    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fourth Class   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fifth Class    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sixth Class    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please state the number of students in your class. *Required*

---

Please enter a whole number (integer).

35. Number of students with SEN in your class. *Required*

---

In the context of this study Special Education Need (SEN) is defined as: 'a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition' (Education for persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN), 2004).

36. Please indicate the SEN categories of the students in your class. Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Physical Disability   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hearing Impairment  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual Impairment   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Behavioural difficulties, e.g., ADHD                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Emotional Disturbance   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Borderline Mild General Learning disability                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mild General Learning disability                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Moderate General Learning Disability                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Severe/Profound General Learning Disability                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Specific Speech and Language Disorder                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Down Syndrome   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Multiple disabilities   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Specific Learning disability, e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

36.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

37. What teaching strategies do you use to facilitate the inclusion and achievement of all students in your class including those with SEN? Please tick all that apply *Required*

- Differentiation
- Mixed ability grouping
- Ability grouping
- Station teaching
- Multi-sensory approaches
- Interventions to promote social and emotional competence
- Embedding Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment
- Co-operative teaching and learning
- Collaborative problem-solving activities
- Active learning
- Small group tuition
- Individual teaching
- Scaffolded instruction
- Other

37.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

38. What types of support are available to you to facilitate the inclusion of the students with SEN in your classroom? Please tick all that apply. *Required*

- SNA access
- In-class support
- Small group withdrawal
- Individual withdrawal
- NEPS
- Support from other agencies, HSE, Disability services,
- Support from outside agencies, School Completion Project (SCP), Neighbour Youth Project (NYP),
- Other

38.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

38.b. If students in your class are receiving support from outside agencies during the school day please elaborate on that support.

---

In planning for students with SEN please select the professionals with whom you collaborate. Please tick all that apply. *Required.*

- SEN teacher
- SNA
- Parents
- Outside agencies, e.g., speech and language therapists, occupational therapists
- NEPS
- Other
- None of the above

39. In respect of planning and collaboration for students with SEN how is planning/collaboration time provided for in your school? *Required.*

## Section 5. Demographic Information about your School

This is the final section of the questionnaire and will not take long to complete.

40. School type, tick all that apply *Required*

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Junior         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Senior         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vertical       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Male           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Female         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Co-educational | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gaelscoil      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

41. Disadvantage Status *Required*

- |             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| DEIS Band 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| DEIS Band 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Non DEIS    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

42. School Category *Required*

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Denominational, e.g., Catholic, Muslim, Church of Ireland. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Non-Denominational   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Multi-Denominational                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

42.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

---

43. Please indicate the number of students in your school. *Required*

- |           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| 101 – 200 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 201 – 300 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 301 – 400 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 401 – 500 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 501 +     | <input type="checkbox"/> |

44. Is there an SEN co-ordinator post in your school? *Required*

- |     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

45.a. Who co-ordinates SEN provision in your school?

---

45.b. Should this be a post of responsibility and if so at what level?

---

45.c. Is this a post of responsibility and if so at what level?

---

46. Are there any special classes in your school? *Required*

Yes

No

46.a. Please state the type of special classes in your school.

---

45. Please complete the table below regarding the number of staff in your school 0 - 60

*Required*

Total number of teachers including Principal

Total number of Special Needs Assistants

47. Is there anything else you wish to add about the topics in this questionnaire?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, it is very much appreciated. Your views will contribute to an understanding of the ways in which teachers in mainstream primary schools in Dublin X facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation.

## Appendix E Questionnaire Respondents' School Profile

	Profile	N =	% =
<b>Patronage</b>	Denominational	64	88
	Non-Denominational	2	3
	Multi-Denominational	6	8
	Inter-Denominational	1	1
<b>School type</b>	Mainstream with special classes	22	30
	Vertical	30	41
	Junior	28	38
	Senior	15	21
	All Boys	5	7
	All Girls	2	3
<b>Language of Instruction</b>	English	69	95
	Gaeilge	4	5
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>	DEIS Band 1	32	44
	DEIS Band 2	6	8
	Non-DEIS	35	48
<b>School size by student number</b>	101 - 200	10	14
	201 -- 300	30	41
	301 - 400	12	16
	401 - 500	10	14
	501 +	11	15
<b>Number of teachers</b>	10-14	12	16
	15-19	5	7
	20-24	31	43
	25-29	12	16
	30-39	10	14
	40-49	2	3
	50+	1	1

## Appendix F Questionnaire Respondents' Demographic Information

### Questionnaire Teaching Qualification by Role

Teaching qualification	Teacher N=	Principal N=	%
<b>B. Ed Degree</b>	36	3	53
<b>B. Ed Degree International</b>	3		4
<b>Professional Masters in Education</b>	6	3	12
<b>Post Graduate Diploma in Education</b>	14	6	27
<b>Postgraduate Diploma/Masters in Education International</b>	1	0	1
<b>Other, Montessori qualification</b>	1	0	1

### Questionnaire Respondents' Age range by Role

Age range of questionnaire respondents	Teacher N=	Principal N=	%
<b>21-24</b>	4	0	5
<b>25-29</b>	6	0	8
<b>30-34</b>	7	0	10
<b>35-39</b>	11	3	19
<b>40-44</b>	15	2	23
<b>45-49</b>	5	3	11
<b>50-54</b>	6	1	10
<b>55-59</b>	7	3	14
<b>60+</b>	0	0	0

### Questionnaire Respondents' Years Teaching by Role

Years teaching	Teacher N=	Principal N=	%
<b>0-4</b>	8	0	11
<b>5-9</b>	6	1	10
<b>10--14</b>	14	1	21
<b>15-19</b>	12	5	23
<b>20-24</b>	7	1	11
<b>24-29</b>	4	1	6
<b>30--34</b>	8	0	11
<b>35-40</b>	2	1	4
<b>Total</b>	61	12	100

## **Appendix G Initial Email to Principals Requesting Completion of the Principal Questionnaire and Circulation of the Teacher Questionnaire to Teachers in Their School**

Dear colleagues,

At our previous meetings I informed you that I was carrying out studies in the area of inclusion and the 'New Model' of additional support teacher allocation. My questionnaire is now ready for distribution.

My study is a two-phase study, and this first phase comprises a questionnaire for mainstream primary school principals and a separate questionnaire for teachers in Dublin XX. The second phase is a case study phase requiring more in-depth involvement and engagement from the principal and school staff. If you are interested in participating in the second phase of the study please let me know and I can provide you with some further information.

I know all too well just how busy everyone is but would appreciate if you would take my questionnaire for Principals,

<https://maynoothuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/supporting-students-with-special-educational-needs-the-ga>

and distribute this questionnaire to the teachers in your school.

<https://maynoothuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/the-new-model-of-teaching-support-allocation-draft-8-copy>

Given the current climate and the debates about inclusion I believe it is important to gather as much data as possible about inclusion and garner the voice of the professional on the ground, teacher voice.

Thank you all for taking the time to read this email and thanking you in anticipation for your participation.

Kind regards

Pauline



## Appendix H Selection Tool for Selecting the Focus Group Participants

January 2020

Dear Principal,

Thank you for participating in this study, which investigates the way in which mainstream primary schools in Dublin XX facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the 'new model' of support teacher allocation.

As outlined, the directions which will enable you or a nominated teacher to randomly select class teachers from Infants to Second class to participate in a focus group interview can be found in Table 1. The directions which will enable you or a nominated teacher to randomly select support teachers to participate in a separate focus group interview can be found in Table 2.

Please list the teachers' names at each class level from Infants to Second and list all the support teachers in the school, in alphabetical order, and follow the directions given in the relevant table to select the teachers.

My role, with your agreement, will be to invite the randomly-selected class teachers and separately, the support teachers to participate in a focus group interview to discuss the ways in which XXX National school facilitates inclusion through engagement with state policy and the 'new model'.

I very much appreciate your support. If you have any queries in relation to this project, you can contact me by email. I would also be happy to discuss this research with you in further detail. Please see contact details below.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Morley

Researcher	Supervisor
Pauline Morley	Dr. Thomas Walsh

**Information for the principal or the nominated teacher to assist in randomly selecting teachers.**

**Junior Infants**

List the names of the Junior Infant class teachers in your school in alphabetical order	Please follow the key below in Table 1 to assist you in randomly selecting a teacher from your list. Write the selected teacher's name here.
1.	
2	
3	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

**Senior Infants**

List the names of the Senior Infant class teachers in your school in alphabetical order	Please follow the key below in Table 1 to assist you in randomly selecting a teacher from your list. Write the selected teacher's name here.
1.	
2	
3	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

**First class**

List the names of the First-Class teachers in your school in alphabetical order	Please follow the key below in Table 1 to assist you in randomly selecting a teacher from your list. Write the selected teacher's name here.
1.	
2	
3	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

## Second Class

List the names of the second-class teachers in your school in alphabetical order	Please follow the key below in Table 1 to assist you in randomly selecting a teacher from your list. Write the selected teacher's name here.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have <b>one teacher</b> at a class level, <b>this teacher is automatically selected.</b></li> <li>• If you have <b>two teachers</b> at a class level, select <b>the second teacher</b> in the list.</li> <li>• If you have <b>three teachers</b> at a class level, select <b>the second teacher</b> in the list.</li> <li>• If you have <b>four teachers</b> at a class level, select <b>the third teacher</b> in the list.</li> <li>• If you have <b>five or more teachers</b> at a class level, select <b>the fifth teacher</b> in the list.</li> <li>• In the event of job-sharing teachers, the first named teacher alphabetically is the selected teacher.</li> <li>• If a selected teacher does not want to participate in the focus group interview, please select the next teacher on the list.</li> </ul>
--

**Table 1. Key used to select mainstream teachers.**

## Support teachers

List the names of the support teachers in your school in alphabetical order. Do not include the SEN coordinator, if your school has one, as he/she will be interviewed separately	Please follow the key below in Table 2 to assist you in randomly selecting a support teacher from your list. Write the selected teachers' names here.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
XX.	
16.	

**Table 2. Key used to select support teachers.**

- If you have **one support teacher, this teacher is automatically selected.**
- If you have **two support teachers**, select **the second teacher** in the list.
- If you have **three support teachers**, select **the second teacher** in the list.
- If you have **four support teachers**, select **the second and third teacher** in the list.
- If you have **five to ten support teachers**, select **the second, third, fifth and the final teacher** on the list.

If you have more than 10 support teachers the following selection criteria applies in addition to those support teachers already selected

- If you have **11 support teachers the 11<sup>th</sup> teacher is automatically selected,**
- if you have **12 support teachers** select the **12<sup>th</sup> teacher** in the list
- if you have **13 support teachers** select the **12<sup>th</sup> teacher** in the list
- if you have **14 support teachers** select the **12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> teacher** in the list
- if you have **XX or more support teachers** select the **12<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>** and the **final teacher** on the list.

If the selected teacher in the list does not wish to participate select the next teacher in the list.

## Appendix I Principal Interview Schedule

Thank you very much for taking the time from your busy schedule to take part in this interview. I wish to reiterate that the identity of your school, and the identity of yourself and any teacher in the school will be anonymous. The video/audio recordings and transcripts of the interview will be maintained in accordance with the data protection policy of Maynooth University. Please note that despite every measure taken to protect your identity, you may still be identifiable to certain readers of the study who may know you.

You may withdraw from the interview at any stage, or if there are any questions which you do not wish to answer you do not have to do so.

If you have any questions about the study which you require further clarification, I am happy to answer them. . If you are happy to go ahead with the interview please sign the consent sheet.

<b>Topic Guide</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Probe</b>
<b>Opener Demographic questions</b>	Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, years teaching experience, number of years in your current position and your qualifications.	Have you any academic qualifications in SEN, or any other area
<b>School demographic questions</b>	Can you provide some background information about the school, number of teachers/pupils, school context.	Number of students with SEN/EAL Number of support teachers Teachers with academic qualifications in SEN SEN teacher allocation
<b>Inclusion</b>	What does the term inclusion mean to you? What does inclusion look like in your school? What do you see as the challenges for class teachers and or schools in including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)? What do you see as the benefits? Responses from the questionnaire suggested that it is easier to include children with some categories of SEN than others. What are your thoughts on this?	

<p><b>Continuum of Support</b></p>	<p>Do you use the continuum of support in your school?</p> <p>Did you use this approach prior to the introduction of the ‘new model’?</p> <p>What planning and recording documentation does the school use for individual students?</p> <p>Do the teachers plan collaboratively to support students with SEN and how is this facilitated?</p>	<p>Do you find it useful in facilitating the deployment of additional teaching support to children with SEN in this school, and facilitating inclusion?</p> <p>Student Support File model for recordkeeping?</p> <p>How does this work? (Collaboration with parents/outside agencies)</p>
<p><b>Role of principal</b></p>	<p>As principal what role do you play in the selection of students for SEN support?</p>	
<p><b>Management of SEN</b></p>	<p>Can you take me through the process of the way in which this school deploys additional teaching support to students with SEN.</p>	<p>Identifying the children for support, timetabling, planning documents, allocating the quantum of support, type of support? How do you decide who gets what? How does the school prioritise students for support?</p> <p>Is this different to the way the school deployed this support previously? (Under GAM)</p>
<p><b>New model</b></p>	<p>Now that the ‘new model’ of SET allocation has been in place for almost three years how do you feel about it?</p> <p>In relation to the school profile used to allocate additional teaching support what are your views on this approach?</p> <p>According to the circular and the NCSE documents the new model reduces the administrative burden for schools what is your view of this?</p> <p>Given that schools now have the autonomy to allocate the additional</p>	<p>Renaming of the Learning Support Teacher/Resource teacher to Special Educational Needs Teacher?</p> <p>What in your view was the reason for changing the allocation model?</p> <p>What are your views on the approach taken to the definition of ‘complex needs’ under this reprofiling?</p>

	teaching support to students without the need for a report/diagnosis, do you feel qualified to identify the needs of these children and to allocate the appropriate level of support?	
<b>Outside agencies/clinical supports</b>	What role do outside agencies play in supporting you/the school include children with SEN?	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>If you could make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to inclusion, what would you say?</p> <p>Is there anything else about inclusion or the 'new model' that you have not had the opportunity to address?</p>	

## Appendix J SEN Co-ordinator Interview Schedule

Thank you very much for taking the time to take part in this interview. I wish to reiterate that the identity of your school, and your identity will be anonymous. The audio recordings and transcripts of the interview will be maintained in accordance with the data protection policy of Maynooth University. Please note that despite every measure taken to protect your identity, you may still be identifiable to certain readers of the study who may know you.

You may withdraw from the interview at any stage, or if there are any questions which you do not wish to answer you do not have to do so.

If you have any questions about the study which you require further clarification, I am happy to answer them. If you are happy to go ahead with the interview please sign the consent sheet.

<b>Topic Guide</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Probe</b>
<b>Opener Demographic questions</b>	Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, years teaching experience, number of years in your current position and your qualifications.	Have you any academic qualifications in SEN, or any other area
<b>School demographic questions</b>  <i><u>If not addressed by the Principal</u></i>	Can you provide some background information about the school, number of teachers/pupils, school context.	Number of students with SEN/EAL/in receipt of support Number of support teachers Teachers with academic qualifications in SEN Support teaching hours 2017  Support teaching hours 2019 (Was this an increase on the previous hours? Is this enough?)  Composition of support teaching hours 2017/2019
<b>Inclusion</b>	What does the term inclusion mean to you? What does inclusion look like in your school? What do you see as the benefits/challenges for class teachers and or schools in including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)?	Are the needs of students with SEN well served in this school?



	Responses from the questionnaire suggested that it is easier to include children with some categories of SEN than others. What are your thoughts on this?	
<b>Professional development</b>	Can staff avail of in-service education in the area of SEN?	How is this prioritised? PD for you?
<b>Continuum of Support</b>	Do you use the continuum of support in your school?  What planning and recording documentation does the school use for individual students?  Do the teachers plan collaboratively to support students with SEN and how is this facilitated?	How useful do you find it in facilitating the deployment of additional teaching support to children with SEN, and facilitating inclusion? Did you use this approach prior to the introduction of the 'new model'?  Student Support File model for recordkeeping?  How does this work? (Collaboration with parents/outside agencies)
<b>SEN Coordinator</b>	As SEN coordinator what role do you play in supporting students with SEN/ management of SEN?  What are your main priorities/responsibilities?  Who supports you in carrying out your duties?  Do you experience any challenges in trying to co-ordinate SEN provision?  How supportive are staff in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN in the school?	Administration responsibilities Teaching Management responsibilities – SNAs / SEN team Liaising with external agencies Supporting staff  How do you deal with these challenges?
<b>Whole School Approach</b>	What whole school approaches are there to support students with SEN?	ISM / Staff meetings

<p><b>Management of SEN</b></p>	<p>What approaches are used to communicate information about students with SEN?</p> <p>Can you take me through the process of the way in which this school deploys additional teaching support to students with SEN.</p> <p>Do the teachers plan collaboratively to support students with SEN and how is this facilitated?</p>	<p>SEN team meetings Allocation of resources/DEIS grant</p> <p>Identifying the children for support, timetabling, planning documents, allocating the quantum of support, type of support?</p> <p>How do you monitor and track student progress/prioritise students for support? Is this different to the way the school deployed this support previously? (Under GAM)</p>
<p><b>New model</b></p>	<p>The ‘New Model’ provides teaching support using a front-loading model, how beneficial do you find this in contrast to the previous model where support was provided based on the number of mainstream class teachers and specific support for students with a SEN diagnosis?</p> <p>Now that the ‘new model’ of SET allocation has been in place for almost three years how do you feel about it?</p> <p>What are your views on the use of a school profile to allocate additional teaching support to schools?</p> <p>According to the circular and the NCSE documents the new model reduces the administrative burden for schools what is your view of this?</p> <p>Given the increased autonomy to allocate the additional teaching support to students without the need for a report/diagnosis, do you feel qualified to identify the needs of these children and to allocate the appropriate level of support?</p> <p>Responses to the questionnaire indicated that teachers and principals had different</p>	<p>What are your thoughts on the use of the school profile allocate renaming of the Learning Support Teacher/Resource teacher to Special Educational Needs Teacher? What in your view was the reason for changing the allocation model?</p> <p>What are your views on the approach taken to the definition of ‘complex needs’ under this reprofiling?</p>

	views as to the reasons for the change in the model of allocating additional teaching support for schools. What are your views?	
<b>Outside agencies/clinical supports</b>	What role do outside agencies play in supporting you/the school include children with SEN?	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>If you could make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to inclusion, what would you say?</p> <p>Is there anything else about inclusion or the 'new model' that you have not had the opportunity to address?</p>	

## Appendix K Class Teachers' Focus Group Interview Schedule

### Interview schedule for Class teachers

Thank you very much for taking the time from your busy schedule to take part in this interview. I wish to reiterate that the identity of your school, and the identity of yourself and any teacher in the school will be anonymous. The video/audio recordings and transcripts of the interview will be maintained in accordance with the data protection policy of Maynooth University.

You may withdraw from the interview at any stage, or if there are any questions which you do not wish to answer you do not have to do so.

If you have any questions about the study which you require further clarification, I am happy to answer them. If you are happy to go ahead, please sign the consent form.

<b>Topic Guide</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Probe</b>
<b>Opener/ Demographic questions</b>	These can be emailed to me after the interview. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, years teaching experience, number of years in your current position and your qualifications.	Have you any academic qualifications in SEN, or any other area
<b>Inclusion</b>	What does the term inclusion mean to you?  What does inclusion look like in your school?  What do you see as the benefits/challenges of inclusion?  What is your view on the usefulness or otherwise of SEN categories to support educational planning? Can you tell me about the school wide approaches that are used to share information about students with SEN? What opportunities do you have to avail of PD in SEN? How is this managed?  Responses from the questionnaire suggested that it is easier to include children with some categories of SEN than others. What are your thoughts on this?	Is this an inclusive school?  Are the needs of students with SEN well served in this school?  For children, class teachers and or schools

<p><b>Continuum of Support</b></p>	<p>Can you tell me about the continuum of support and how does it work in your classroom?</p> <p>How do you find using the Student Support File model for recordkeeping? How does this work?</p> <p>Do the teachers plan collaboratively to support students with SEN and how is this facilitated?</p>	<p>What is your understanding of the different levels of support under the continuum? Classroom support, School support and School support plus?</p> <p>How does this work? (Collaboration with parents/outside agencies)</p>
<p><b>Management of SEN provision</b></p>	<p>How do you monitor and track student progress/prioritise students for support?</p> <p>How is collaborative planning for students with SEN facilitated?</p>	<p>Identifying the children for support, timetabling, planning documents, allocating the quantum of support, type of support?</p> <p>Is this different to the way the school deployed this support previously? (Under GAM)</p>
<p><b>New model</b></p>	<p>What are your thoughts on the use of a school profile as the basis of allocating additional teaching support?</p> <p>Now that we are three years into implementing the new model of SET allocation do you think a change in the model of support was required?</p>	
<p><b>Outside agencies/clinical supports</b></p>	<p>What role do outside agencies play in supporting you/the school include children with SEN?</p>	
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p>If you could make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to inclusion, what would you say?</p> <p>Is there anything else about inclusion or the 'new model' that you have not had the opportunity to address?</p>	

## Appendix L SEN team Focus Group Interview Schedule

Thank you very much for taking the time from your busy schedule to take part in this interview. I wish to reiterate that the identity of your school, and the identity of yourself and any teacher in the school will be anonymous. The video/audio recordings and transcripts of the interview will be maintained in accordance with the data protection policy of Maynooth University.

You may withdraw from the interview at any stage, or if there are any questions which you do not wish to answer you do not have to do so.

If you have any questions about the study which you require further clarification, I am happy to answer them. If you are happy to go ahead, please sign the consent form.

<b>Topic Guide</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Probe</b>
<b>Opener/ Demographic questions</b>	These can be emailed to me after the interview. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, years teaching experience, number of years in your current position and your qualifications.	Have you any academic qualifications in SEN, or any other area
<b>Inclusion</b>	What does the term inclusion mean to you?  What does inclusion look like in your school?  What do you see as the benefits/challenges of inclusion?  What is your view on the usefulness or otherwise of SEN categories to support educational planning?  Responses from the questionnaire suggested that it is easier to include children with some categories of SEN than others. What are your thoughts on this?	Is this an inclusive school?  Are the needs of students with SEN well served in this school?  For children, class teachers and or schools
<b>Continuum of Support</b>	How useful do you find the continuum of support in facilitating the deployment of additional teaching support to children with SEN? How do you find using the Student Support File model for recordkeeping? How does this work?	What is your understanding of the different levels of support under the continuum? Classroom support, School support and School support plus?

	Can you share with me the way in which the review week works in relation to students with SEN? Do the teachers plan collaboratively to support students with SEN and how is this facilitated?	How does this work? (Collaboration with parents/outside agencies)
<b>Management of SEN provision</b>	How do you monitor and track student progress/prioritise students for support?  What opportunities do you have to avail of PD in SEN? How is this managed?	Identifying the children for support, timetabling, planning documents, allocating the quantum of support, type of support?  Is this different to the way the school deployed this support previously? (Under GAM)
<b>New model</b>	What are your thoughts on the use of a school profile as the basis of allocating additional teaching support?  Now that we are three years into implementing the new model of SET allocation do you think a change in the model of support was required?	What are your thoughts on the old model?
<b>Outside agencies/clinical supports</b>	How beneficial do you feel outside agencies (HSE, NEPS, CAMHs, other) are in relation to supporting the child with SEN in your school/on your caseload?	
<b>Conclusion</b>	If you could make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to inclusion, what would you say?  Is there anything else about inclusion or the 'new model' that you have not had the opportunity to address?	

## Appendix M Information Sheet and Consent form for Principal / SEN Co-ordinator



### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPAL Teacher/SEN Co-ordinator

#### **Purpose of the Study.**

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' and principals' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion through the ways in which they engage with state policy on special needs. It also intends to examine the way in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support, which came into effect in September 2017 under *Circular 13/2017; Special Education Teaching Allocation* is mediated in primary schools in Dublin XX.

#### **What will the study involve?**

This study will comprise of two phases. In the first phase principals and teachers have been invited to complete an online questionnaire which will take 30 – 35 minutes to complete. If you have not already taken this survey, I would appreciate if you would.

Please see the link to the survey below.

<https://maynoothuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/supporting-students-with-special-educational-needs-the-ga>

In the second phase of the study mainstream primary schools in the Dublin XX area were invited to take part in a more detailed study about their engagement with the 'new model' of additional teaching support for students with Special Education Needs (SEN). This will include individual interviews with the Principal, SEN coordinator (where there is one) and focus group interviews with class teachers and the SEN team.

Teachers will also be invited to complete the questionnaire if they have not already done so.

Permission has been given by the Board of Management of your school for participation in this phase of the study.

#### **Who has approved this study?**

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee and the Board of Management of this school has given permission for the staff in this school to participate in the study.

#### **Why have you been asked to take part?**

You have been asked because you are the principal/SEN co-ordinator in this primary school, in Dublin XX.



### **What does participation entail for me?**

If you wish to take part in this phase of the study it will involve the completion of a one-on-one interview to explore your perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion, and how the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support is mediated in your school. A copy of the interview schedule will be given to you beforehand.

This interview will take place in your school or another convenient location and take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed. A copy of the transcription of the recording will be given to you to enable you to clarify any points made.

### **Do you have to take part?**

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. While you have been asked to participate because you are in this role, participation in this study is voluntary and you can decide whether you would like to take part in this phase of the study.

However, I hope that you will agree to take part and give some of your time to take part in the interview.

If you decide to do so, you will be given the information sheet, asked to sign a consent form and given a copy for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with either the school or the University.

You may take the survey without taking part in the interview should you so wish.

### **What information will be collected?**

In the interview, information regarding the schools/your engagement with the 'new model' will be collected together with your knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about and towards inclusion and the 'new model' of support allocation.

### **Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' home, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on Maynooth University servers and will be accessed only by Pauline Morley.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.

*'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'* (Maynooth University, 2019)

**What will happen to the information which you give?**

Any information provided by the principal will be kept on the Maynooth University server in such a way that it will not be possible to identify the school. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by me, Pauline Morley. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by me.

**What will happen to the results?**

The research will be written up and presented as a Doctoral Thesis, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part in this interview.

**Any further queries?**

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Pauline Morley, at

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this.**

**Consent Form**

I ..... agree to participate in Pauline Morley’s research study titled.

**An investigation into the ways mainstream primary schools in Dublin XX facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation.**

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Pauline Morley to be audio recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to anonymization.

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals .....

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*I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.*

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher Name in block capitals **PAULINE MORLEY**

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at [research.ethics@mu.ie](mailto:research.ethics@mu.ie) or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

*For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at [ann.mckeon@mu.ie](mailto:ann.mckeon@mu.ie). Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.*

## **Appendix N Information Sheet and consent form for mainstream classroom teachers/SEN teachers**



### **INFORMATION SHEET and consent form for Mainstream Class Teacher / SEN Teachers FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Purpose of the Study.**

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' and principals' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion through the ways in which they engage with state policy on special needs. It also intends to examine the way in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support, which came into effect in September 2017 under *Circular 13/2017; Special Education Teaching Allocation* is mediated in primary schools in Dublin XX.

#### **What will the study involve?**

This study will comprise two phases. In the first phase principals and teachers have been invited to complete an online questionnaire which will take 30 – 35 minutes to complete. If you have not already taken this survey, I would appreciate if you would.

This is the link to the survey.

<https://maynoothuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/the-new-model-of-teaching-support-allocation-draft-8-copy>

In the second phase of the study mainstream primary schools in the Dublin XX area were invited to take part in a more detailed study about their engagement with the 'new model' of additional teaching support for students with Special Education Needs (SEN). This will include individual interviews with the Principal, SEN co-ordinator (where there is one) and focus group interviews with mainstream class teachers and the SEN team.

Permission has been given by the Board of Management of your school for participation in this phase of the study.

#### **Who has approved this study?**

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee and the Board of Management of XX School have given permission for the staff in this school to participate in the study.

#### **Why have you been asked to take part?**

You have been asked because you are teaching a mainstream class or an SEN teacher in XX School in Dublin XX and have been randomly selected to participate in a focus group interview.

### **What does participation entail for me?**

If you wish to take part in this phase of the study it will involve the completion of a focus group interview with mainstream class teachers /SEN Teachers in your school to explore your perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion, and how the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support is mediated in your school. This interview will take place in your school or another convenient location and take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone/mobile phone, and transcribed. A copy of the transcription of the recording will be given to you to enable you to clarify any points made.

A copy of the interview schedule will be given to you beforehand.

### **Do you have to take part?**

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. While you have been asked because you are in this role, participation in this study is voluntary and you can decide whether you would like to take part in this phase of the study.

However, I hope that you will agree to take part and give some of your time to take part in the interview.

If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with either the school or the University.

You may take the survey without taking part in the interview should you so wish.

### **What information will be collected?**

In the interview, information regarding the schools/your engagement with the 'new model' will be collected together with your knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about and towards inclusion and the 'new model' of support allocation.

### **Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on Maynooth University servers and will be accessed only by Pauline Morley.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.

*'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'* (Maynooth University, 2019)

**What will happen to the information which you give?**

Any information provided by the focus group participants will be kept on the Maynooth University server in such a way that it will not be possible to identify the school. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by me, Pauline Morley. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by me.

**What will happen to the results?**

The research will be written up and presented as a Doctoral Thesis, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part in this interview.

**Any further queries?**

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Pauline Morley,

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this.**

**Consent Form**

I ..... agree to participate in Pauline Morley’s research study titled.

**An investigation into the ways mainstream primary schools in Dublin XX facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation.**

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Pauline Morley to be audio recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to anonymization.

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals .....



---

*I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.*

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher Name in block capitals **PAULINE MORLEY**

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at [research.ethics@mu.ie](mailto:research.ethics@mu.ie) or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

*For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at [ann.mckeon@mu.ie](mailto:ann.mckeon@mu.ie). Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.*

## Appendix O Code System

1 autonomy and flexibility Responsibility(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	119
2 class as a whole	3
2.1 Assessment diagnosis reports	83
3 collaboration	38
4 context (+)	11
5 inclusion (+)(+)(+)	101
6 level of need (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	33
7 other children (+)(+)(+)	29
8 outside agencies (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	41
9 parents (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	48
10 placement (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	37
11 mainstream classroom (+)(+)	28
12 safety (+)	27
13 Saving the DES money (+)(+)(+)	21
14 Supports resourcing (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	418
14.1 more children (+)(+)(+)	31
14.2 support teachers (+)	7
14.2.1 individual child (+)(+)(+)	40
15 Teaching approaches (+)(+)(+)	14
15.1 in class (+)(+)	93
16 time (+)(+)(+)	227
17 training (+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)(+)	70

## **Appendix P Information for Board of Management of the case study school requesting participation in the study**

**An investigation into the ways mainstream primary schools in Dublin XX facilitate inclusion through their engagement with the new model of teacher support allocation.**



### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Who is conducting this study?**

I am, Pauline Morley, a Doctoral student in the Education Department in Maynooth University. I am also a principal in Dublin XX. In the context of this study my role is that of researcher and any data gathered during the study is for research purposes only.

As part of the requirements for The Doctorate in Education Programme, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Walsh.

#### **Purpose of the Study.**

The purpose of this proposed study is to explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion through the ways in which they engage with state policy on special needs. It also intends to examine the way in which the current approach to the allocation of additional teaching support which came into effect in September 2017 under *Circular 13/2017; Special Education Teaching Allocation* (DES, 2017a) is mediated in primary schools in Dublin XX.

#### **What will the study involve?**

This is a two-phase study. In the first phase, teachers in mainstream primary schools Dublin XX have been invited to take an anonymous online questionnaire. In the second phase of the study, mainstream primary schools in the Dublin XX area have been invited to take part in a detailed study about their engagement with the 'new model' of additional teaching support for students with Special Education Needs (SEN).

Permission is being sought from you, the Board of Management of XX School for your school to participate in this phase of the study. This phase (Second phase) will include individual interviews with the Principal, SEN co-ordinator, and focus group interviews with class teachers and the SEN team.

The Principal and SEN co-ordinator will also be asked to provide copies of templates of documents

used in your school to manage the provision of support to students with SEN.

Individual interviews and focus group interviews will take place in the school and take approximately 1 hour.

**Who has approved this study?** This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval upon request.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you are the Board of Management of a Primary School in Dublin XX, and permission is being sought for the principal and teachers in your school to participate in the second phase of the study.

**Do you have to take part?**

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, I hope that you will agree that the principal and teachers in the school can participate in the study.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether you give permission for them to take part.

**What information will be collected?** In the interviews, information regarding the school's engagement with the 'new model' will be collected together with teachers' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and understanding of inclusion and towards the 'new model' of support allocation. Information regarding the way in which the school has engaged with the 'new model' to date will also be gathered. The principal or SEN co-ordinator will be asked to provide copies of the template documents used by the SEN team to record the work with students with SEN.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** Yes, all information that is collected about the school during the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' home. Electronic information will be password protected and held securely on Maynooth University servers and will be accessed only by Pauline Morley.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.

*'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or during investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'* (Maynooth University, 2019)

**What will happen to the information which you give?** Any information provided by teachers will be kept on the Maynooth University server in such a way that it will not be possible to identify the school. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by me, Pauline Morley. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by me.

**What will happen to the results?** The research will be written up and presented as a Doctoral Thesis, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

I don't envisage any negative consequences for the Board of Management of the school, or for the principal or teachers in taking part in this study.

**What if there is a problem?** You may contact my supervisor, Dr. Thomas Walsh, [xxx](#), if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

**Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me: Pauline Morley, [xxx](#)