

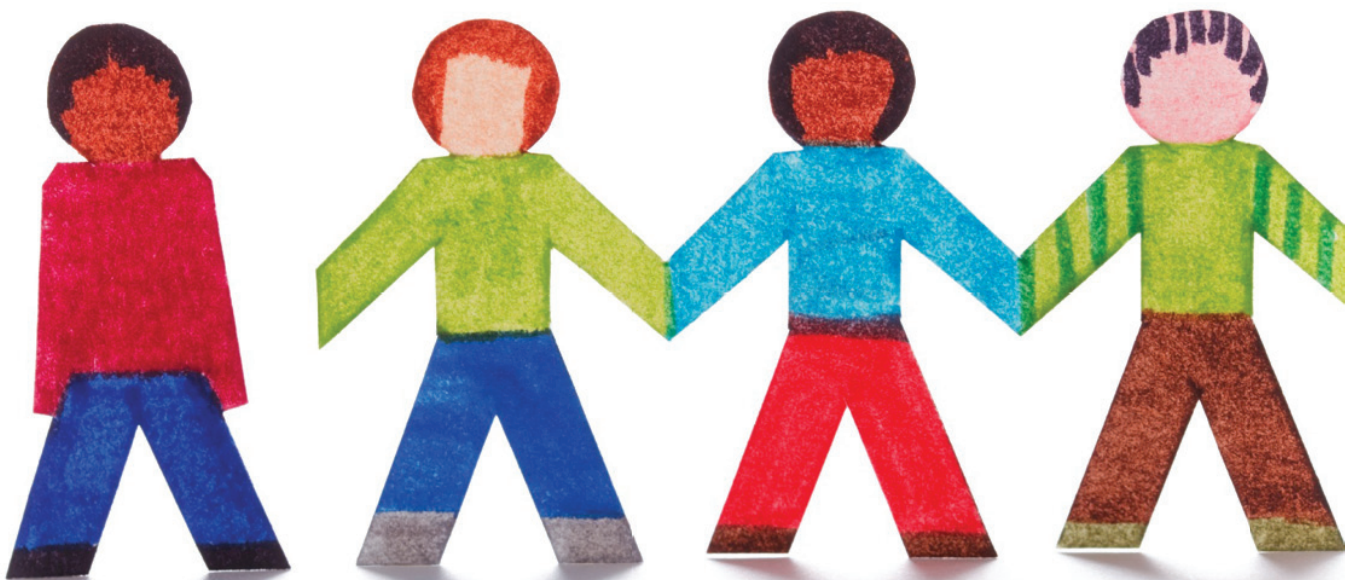


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Addressing the Challenges and Barriers to Inclusion in Irish Schools



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to add to our knowledge of how Irish schools address the many challenges and barriers to inclusive education. In the introduction the context, rationale and definitions used are outlined. The context is the legislative, political, social, educational and moral forces at national and international level urging systemic change in terms of meeting the needs of all learners in mainstream schools.

Inclusion is interpreted in a broad sense, as a process of increasing the access, participation and benefits of all learners in the education system. For the purpose of the study, the focus is on three groups of diverse learners who have been the centre of policy initiatives in relation to inclusion: students with special educational needs (SEN), minority ethnic and minority language students and students experiencing educational disadvantage.

The study addresses the question of how Irish schools seek to overcome the challenges and barriers to inclusion. This necessitated sub questions in relation to identifying the challenges and barriers for the three groups of learners who are the focus of the study and then identifying how schools seek to overcome or mitigate their effects. To address these questions a case study research design was used incorporating multiple methods of data collection across six schools (three primary and three post-primary). Key informants in the Irish education system were relied upon in the selection of schools for the case studies to ensure that the selected schools were endeavouring to operate as inclusively as possible.

Chapters two and three review the literature in terms of the challenges and barriers to inclusion and how schools seek to overcome them. These are presented at the levels of the school, class /teacher, and child/family/community, and are mediated by system level issues, where appropriate. Due to its traditional neglect, the voice of children in the literature and in the findings is presented separately.

Chapter four outlines the methodology of the study in terms of research design, selection of schools, research methods used, development of data collection

instruments, reliability, validity and trustworthiness, data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Accessing the voice of students was a key concern. Six case studies were completed with three primary and three post-primary schools. This resulted in a data set of 312 completed questionnaires, transcripts from 72 interviews and ten student day-long observations, documents and student drawings.

Chapter five presents the findings and discussion in relation to identifying the challenges and barriers to inclusive education across the six schools. A key finding was that while there were specific concerns for each for each of the three areas of research focus, there were far more similarities. This also held for the factors identified as supporting inclusive practices and policies in the schools. Findings are presented at school, teacher /class, and child, family and community levels. The concerns expressed by children are highlighted separately. The key themes and sub-themes (in italics) which emerged are outlined at the various levels.

School Level

The challenges and barriers identified at school level, point to considerable challenges in relation to the expertise of schools and teachers with regard to assessment and the provision of support services. Issues concerning discipline and student behaviour were identified as posing serious challenges for schools. The following areas were reported:

Assessment

Assessment-related issues were identified for all three groups of students with some specific challenges in relation to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds. These included: *the difficulty of making a distinction between a learning and a language difficulty; access to psychological assessment and CPD in relation to assessment; the link between assessment and the allocation of resources; and inadequate formative assessment practices in schools.*

Resources

Even with the willingness of staff, schools reported difficulties in carrying out plans without, what they considered to be, the necessary resources and supports in place.

Particular reference was made to: *lack of support services including lack of coordination between services; lack of support for the transition of students between the different stages of education; inadequate home-school liaison; shortage of dual-language resources; financial constraints, including the lack of sports facilities in schools and local communities.*

Withdrawing Students for Additional Support as a Model of Educational Provision Teachers, principals and special needs assistants (SNAs) said that withdrawal, as a model of additional support, acted as a barrier to inclusion, because it led to students feeling stigmatised, which had implications for self-esteem. Issues which emerged included: *a fear that students were missing out on certain subjects or elements of whole-class work and life; the impact of the withdrawal model on the integrity and cohesion of the class.*

School Discipline and Students' Behaviour Difficulties

Students' behavioural difficulties were identified as a major barrier and challenge to inclusion. Issues such as absenteeism, discipline problems, non-completion of homework, being ill-prepared for school and lack of motivation were cited as serious challenges to including students. Other issues included: *poor school attendance; disruptive behaviour and disciplinary issues; perceived family difficulties and perceived lack of appropriate support for learning.*

Prejudice, Racism and Bullying

Although it did not emerge as strongly, or as often, as the other challenges and barriers, a small number of references were made to teachers' and students' awareness of the potential for bullying. Bullying emerged strongly as a barrier to inclusion from the students' perspective.

Level Two: The Teacher /Class

The challenges and barriers identified at the level of the teacher /class, centred around teachers' concerns in meeting the individual needs of their students. The lack of time and the need for more expertise in the area of differentiation to meet students' individual needs were highlighted as major issues. The following areas were reported:

Lack of Time

The lack of time to accommodate the diverse needs of all students in the classroom was identified as a key challenge to inclusion by teachers. Particular challenges included: *lack of time for teachers to plan together for teaching and the need for individual attention.*

Differentiation

A major challenge which emerged was the difficulty teachers appeared to have in differentiating planning and teaching to take account of the diversity of their students. This challenge was particularly evident in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN and to a lesser extent, students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds. Challenges included: *differentiation of curriculum content; differentiation of instructional strategies and pace for teaching; differentiation of material and resources; differentiation of student output; and differentiation at post-primary level.*

Readiness for Grade Level

Teachers reported difficulties they faced in including students who lack the knowledge and skills that are expected at particular grade levels. Students' difficulties with language, comprehension, vocabulary, reading, writing and mathematics were mentioned as challenges to teachers' ability to include students.

Lack of Teacher Training and Teacher Expertise

Participants pointed to the need for more training and CPD to develop their expertise to support all groups of students in the study. Teacher expertise for students with SEN and for those from minority ethnic and/or minority language groups, was repeatedly emphasised. Issues included: *lack of guidance and support in relation to teaching English as an additional language (EAL) at both primary and post-primary level; and teacher competence in relation to IEPs.*

Teacher Unwillingness

There was a perception among a small group of the study teachers in specialist roles (resource teachers, school completion officers) that teacher unwillingness was a barrier to inclusion.

Level Three: The Child/Family/Community

‘Within-child’ aspects such as students’ ability, characteristics and personality, including areas such as motivation, confidence and self-esteem posed challenges for teachers and schools. Issues which were specific to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds were also highlighted. The following areas were reported:

Within-Child Issues

Within-child issues included: *barriers related to students’ particular disability / characteristics; and students’ lack of confidence.*

Different Cultural Values /Expectations and Language Barriers

Challenges were reported as a result of different cultural values and expectations. Students’ and parents’ difficulties with language were identified as posing barriers and challenges to inclusion. Issues included: *different cultural values and expectations and language barriers for parents and their children.*

Chapter six presents the findings and discussions which are at the core of the study: how schools address the identified challenges and barriers. The themes and sub themes which emerged from the data were the following.

Level One: The School

Leading and Supporting Inclusive Practices: The Principal and Coordinators

A key finding of the study was the force for inclusion created in the schools by the combined power of the principal and leadership-oriented coordinators working together. The effect of this duo working together galvanised support for change in the direction of inclusive policies and practices. There was clear evidence across the case study schools of the importance of the relationship between the principal and the coordinator of special educational needs and language support. Teachers spoke of

the shared vision and leadership of the personnel in these key roles. They set the tone, expectations, attitude and gave status to special educational needs or minority ethnic issues in the school. They formed a hub of interest, energy, passion and expectation that spread out and gave coherence, direction, vision and structure to policies and practices in the school. The relationships were characterised by close communication, active interest of the principal in inclusion issues, mutual support of inclusive policies and by a spirit of inquiry which encouraged experimentation, innovation and evaluation as the school community learned new ways of addressing the challenges.

The coordinators in all the schools were highly confident and had high levels of specialist knowledge and skills. As well as holding post graduate qualifications in the area, they were engaged in continual new learning. Principals were extremely supportive of coordinators, facilitated through distributed leadership and had a positive influence of their staff. The coordinators, for their part, were willing to lead and mentor staff, support new practices and lead reflections on initiatives. The coordinators in the schools assumed key roles in articulating a vision of inclusion in the school and supporting staff to try new practices.

Prioritising Support through Flexibility in Models of Provision

A key feature of all the case study schools was innovation and flexibility in models of support and organisation. The following sub themes emerged: *Early intervention; Flexibility in timetabling; Team teaching; Flexible use of the special class as a facilitator of inclusion; Moving towards collaborative cultures.*

Early Intervention

In two of the primary schools early intervention was interpreted as occurring in Junior Infants with intensive in-class support was provided in literacy and numeracy.

Flexibility in Timetabling

In one of the primary schools the barrier of coordinating timetabling and reducing disruptions to the mainstream classes was overcome to a great extent by providing support for the junior, middle and senior sections of the school at different times of the day. This ensured greater certainty for the class teacher around the timing of

support, less disruption to the mainstream class timetable, more concentrated time for support work and a maximising of the time the whole class was together which aids planning, curriculum coverage and monitoring of progress and tracking of pupil attendance. The concentration of support was aided by the pooling of all of the support teachers together as a team.

One of the post-primary schools solved the dilemma of providing intensive tuition to a small group in the key subject areas without withdrawing pupils from another subject area by offering learning support as a subject option. This has many advantages in terms of the status of the option and the fact that what the students are getting is supplementary and not replacing subject work in English and Mathematics.

Team Teaching

All of the schools had embraced team teaching as part of a flexible model of support. There was evidence of the coordinators and special education team assuming a leadership role on the issue and being very successful in selling it to the wider school in the interests of the students. In one of the post-primary schools the coordinator was very clear that teachers had a professional obligation to collaborate in team teaching when it was in the best interests of the students.

There was some contradictory evidence in comparison to the literature in relation to streaming. In one of the post-primary schools the interaction of a lowest streamed class with virtually full time in-class support led to the class academically surpassing the next stream up. The level of in-class support seemed to be facilitated by the concentration of allocated resource hours in that single class. However, some of the teachers alluded to the social disadvantages for the students in the streamed class.

Flexible use of the Special Class as a Facilitator of Inclusion

In one of the primary schools there was evidence of a very well developed example of how a special class can facilitate inclusion. In this case it was a special class for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. In the school the pupils in the special class were assigned to mainstream classes where they went first thing in the morning. The school perceived huge benefits for the pupils working across the mainstream and special class in terms of being able to provide the intensity of

support when required and yet feeling part of the mainstream. The flexibility of the special class setting allowed the prioritisation of social skills education and behavioural programmes to be made when required. The role of the special class, as part of a continuum of provision that facilitates inclusion, was stressed in the school. It is seen as part of the flexibility of support that allows the school to meet the needs of a wider diversity of children with special educational needs, who otherwise may unnecessarily have to attend a special school.

Moving Towards Collaborative Cultures

There was very strong commitment across all of the schools to building a team approach to inclusion. In one of the schools the importance attached to planning was very evident particularly between teachers working at the same grade and between teachers and support teachers engaged in team teaching. The barrier of doing this formally and adequately without eroding teaching and learning time was overcome by doing it outside of pupil-contact time and school hours. In this school there was also a culture of teachers of all levels of experience mutually observing each other teaching and sharing resources on the school server. The practices in the school of formally planning as a team outside school hours at grade level and with support teachers, providing structured opportunities for colleagues to observe each other teaching and sharing and allowing access to each other's resources on the school server, amount to the beginnings of new cultural practices that have not been the norm in Irish schools. Another of the primary schools was involved in an inter-school collaborative support project enabled by using the virtual learning environment, Moodle.

Providing Social and Emotional Support to Students: Buddy Systems, Pastoral Support

There was a deep appreciation of the role of social and emotional supports to students across all six schools. There was evidence from one of the pupil observations of the benefits of the buddy system in the classroom. There was a very strong emphasis on pastoral support across all six schools. These focused on a number of aspects: the impact of the school philosophy and environment, the potential impact that teachers can have on students, and the work of specific staff

such as counsellors and chaplains. The absolute importance of building a relationship with the children was stressed by many.

Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness is an important aspect when including minority ethnic and minority language students. Some references were also made to awareness of Traveller culture. Eighty references are made to intercultural awareness in relation to themes of cultural weeks/days, celebrating and appreciating diversity, and issues relating to Travellers.

Curricular Relevance

Certain curricular areas were highlighted as facilitating inclusion. These included Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), including different religions in Religious Education, and Environmental and Social Studies (ESS) – in giving students the opportunity for project-based rather than exam-oriented work. The wider role of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied was also stressed.

Continuing Professional Development

Another important aspect for teachers was the need for continuous professional development, which was most frequently mentioned in relation to SEN by class and subject teachers. All of the SEN coordinators in the six schools had specialist qualifications and in some cases led professional development initiatives in the school. In addition they helped staff to prioritise areas of need and arranged on-site professional development to address these needs.

Inclusive Policies

Several policies were mentioned that facilitate inclusion. Particular attention was paid to enrolment policies to ensure they are inclusive. To overcome the barrier of discriminating in favour of members of their own faith one of the Catholic primary schools does not prioritise Catholic children. They include all the children in the area in age order.

Level Two: The Teacher/Class

Varied and Differentiated Teaching Methodologies

A number of the issues arising from the findings can be organised under the overarching theme of teaching methodologies which captures the practices that teachers use in the classroom to allow for the successful inclusion of students in the school and the class. These include behaviour management, differentiation and anchored instruction.

Support from Special Needs Assistants

An important factor reported in facilitating inclusion for children was the deployment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).

Time and Emphasis on Preparation and Planning

Planning and preparation was seen as a means of facilitating inclusion. While all the schools had formal planning procedures in place, the most striking system of planning described was the one used in primary school C. Teachers at each class level collaborate to plan fortnightly and termly. They use a planning template and stay back after school to plan. Language support and learning support/resource teachers and class teachers also meet after school to plan for team teaching.

Teaching Resources

References were made to the teaching materials that teachers avail of, with the majority of these references being specific to children from a minority background, which highlights the strengths that the six schools have in using materials to target and help this specific group of students. Having access to libraries, books and interactive whiteboards were also mentioned as important resources.

Level Three: Child/Family/Community

A number of issues arose at the level of parents/family in terms of practices to include all students. These issues were further broken down into the following themes: engaging parents, collaboration with other schools and agencies and extra-curricular engagement.

Engaging Parents

Within the theme of engaging parents a number of sub themes emerged: *communication with parents, helping in the classroom, support of the HSCL officer and the support of parents' associations.*

Collaboration with other Schools and Agencies

These included links with primary schools particularly around transition, links with local businesses, community agencies and social services.

Extra-Curricular Engagement

All of the schools offered extra-curricular activities to students to enhance their school life and provide them with extra opportunities. Activities included *breakfast / lunch clubs, a bedtime reading club, homework clubs, vocational opportunities, and sporting and musical clubs.*

Children's Voices

The perspectives of students on what makes them feel included or not included in their schools, based on the findings from questionnaire responses and individual interviews, indicated the importance of the social aspects of inclusion for students across all ages and educational settings in the study. In response to questions about feeling not included, the most common theme to emerge in the questionnaire responses, but not in the individual interviews, related to the issue of "bullying." There were explicit references to physical and verbal aggression. However, exclusion and isolation in terms of being left out of a game, left alone, having no one to play with or not being invited to join in games, were viewed by students as contributing to making children feel that they are not included or do not belong in school. Other themes that emerged as barriers to inclusion included not having friends, negative teacher-pupil relations, negative impact of support from the special needs assistants and difficulty with schoolwork. Minor themes included the presence of rubbish affecting the physical environment of the school and inequality of reward systems for students.

The most common theme to emerge when students were asked what makes them feel included in their schools was the theme of "playing games together." The positive

atmosphere in the school and the social aspect of having friends for playing, talking, and listening also contributed to making all children feel included. Art and PE were the only school subjects specifically mentioned with any frequency by the students in addition to practical tasks and activity learning in the classroom. In general, students portrayed their teachers in a positive light but suggested that teachers could help to make all children feel included in school by engaging in more group activities and by responding to individual needs. Students view the principal as a caring benefactor who has an influence on discipline issues. One theme that occurred across all the schools to make students feel that they are included was the need for the principal to communicate with the students and listen to their voices.

Recommendations

Chapter seven discusses the implications for policy and practice and the following recommendations are made:

System Level

1. The remaining sections of the EPSEN Act should be implemented to strengthen the right of children with special educational needs to an appropriate assessment and meeting of their educational needs.
2. There is a need for further mechanisms, following adequate support, to strengthen school adherence to policy and practice guidelines involving expectations for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review. The regular completion of an internal audit of inclusion in schools may contribute to this process.
3. Prospective principals should be required to demonstrate evidence of their positive attitude and commitment to inclusive education.
4. Schools should appoint coordinators of special educational needs and minority ethnic/minority language students within the existing posts of responsibility structure and they should be part of the leadership team in the school and be required to avail of mandatory professional development.
5. As an interim measure the capacity of some post-primary schools to meet the needs of some students with SEN could be enhanced by the appointment of a specialist SEN primary teacher, given the overall generic nature of their professional education.
6. There is a need for coordinated plans for education at local level to include issues of provision for inclusion of students with SEN and minority ethnic

students in particular. This should include issues of transition between primary and post-primary settings, for example, from special classes.

7. In the context of reform of the Junior Certificate the development of curricula, assessment and certification systems should begin by recognising the full diversity of the student population and be developed to address all levels, needs and interests.
8. Schools should be enabled to offer a full range of programmes to meet the diverse needs of the student body.
9. There is a need for dedicated time outside existing teaching hours for shared planning and collaboration to develop high quality inclusive classroom practices.
10. The use of technology, shared web space and virtual learning environments should be used to facilitate collaboration and planning.
11. The requirement to team teach when in the best interests of students should be part of the professional obligation of all teachers.
12. There is a need to evaluate the capacity of the general allocation model to meet the needs of students with high incidence SEN and consideration given to expanding the model to second level.
13. There is need for a formalised system of support for parents of children with special educational needs in choosing placement options for their children.
14. Access to the benefits of the HSCL service should be extended.
15. Access to multi-disciplinary support services should to be equitable, based on need regardless of location of school or placement type and integrated with school supports.

School Level

16. At post-primary the facilitation of team teaching in mixed ability classes needs to be strengthened.
17. Within the school as the unit of inclusion there should be a flexible interacting continuum of placement options to meet the needs of all students.
18. While acknowledging the key support of special needs assistants, it is important that they do not become a substitute for student access to specialist teaching.
19. The provision of social and emotional support systems for students in schools needs be further strengthened as a means of increasing attendance, reducing behavioural difficulties and providing alternatives to suspension.

20. The concerns of teachers dealing with students with behavioural difficulties need to be further addressed.

Minority Ethnic/Minority Language

21. There is a need to convey the message clearly that first language maintenance and development is of benefit to the minority language learners in the Irish education system.
22. The feasibility of providing interpretation and translation services to schools on a national basis should be examined.
23. There is a need to examine methods of provision of cultural mediation services in schools.

Teacher Education

24. Professional development for principals, as provided by LDS, should cover issues relating to leading and supporting change for inclusion.
25. Professional development for coordinators should include an emphasis on leading and supporting change for inclusion.
26. There is a need for a comprehensive system of professional development for teachers in inclusive education that allows for differentiated levels of specialist expertise across the system.
27. Programmes of professional development should address inter alia, pedagogy for active learning, differentiation, collaborative planning, use of resources, assessment and the use of digital and elearning technologies.
28. Given the integral role that class and subject teachers play in English language development in addition to the support provided by language support teachers, all should have an opportunity to attend professional development courses on teaching minority ethnic and minority language students.
29. Measures to develop the use of formative assessment such as assessment for learning need to be promoted at all levels of teacher education.
30. There is a need for further guidance in the area of early intervention in primary schools.
31. There is a need for specific modules on teaching and learning in multi-ethnic and multilingual classrooms in teacher education programmes at all levels.

Student Voice

32. There is a need to develop flexible and creative approaches to facilitate the participation of all students in the development of policy and practice that impact on their lives at all levels of the system.
33. At school and class level there is a need for both formal and informal approaches to accessing, listening to and giving due weight to the voice of children in the life of the school.
34. Clear and effective anti-bullying policies need to be in place in all schools and related educational programmes on social relations in school should be based on a respect for all forms of diversity. The monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy should be informed by regular student feedback.

Further Research

35. Further research is required to assess the advantages and disadvantages of a streamed class combined with team-teaching, for students with lower academic abilities.
36. The role of buddy systems, pastoral care systems and other social interventions need further research to ascertain if they can overcome the negative social consequences of inclusion for some students reported in some of the literature.

GLOSSARY

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CE	Council of Europe
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DCFS	Department for Children, Families and Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science (now Department of Education and Skills)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EC	European Commission
ELSTA	English Language Support Teachers' Association
EOTAS/AEP	Education other Than at School/Alternative Education Provision
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Center
ESAI	Educational Studies Association of Ireland
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FSCEP	The Family School Community Partnership
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLD	General Learning Disabilities
IATSE	Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IILT	Integrate Ireland Language and Training
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPP	Individual Pupil Profile
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LSA	Learning Support Assistants
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools Programme
LANDS	Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools

LEA	Local Education Authority
MGLD	Mild General Learning Disability
NAPS	National Anti Poverty Strategy
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PE	Physical Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PRU	Pupil Referral Units
RTT	Resource Teacher for Travellers
SCMP	School Cultural Mediation Project
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SNA	Special Needs Assistants
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SSP	School Support Programme
SDPI	School Development Planning Initiative
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages
TFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to identify from a sample of six Irish schools (three primary and three post-primary) how they are addressing the challenges and barriers of inclusive education. The focus is on three groups of diverse learners who have been at the centre of policy initiatives in relation to inclusion: students with special educational needs, minority ethnic and minority language students and students experiencing educational disadvantage. The introduction will set the context and rationale for the study and outline key definitions of terms used.

In the past decade schools and classrooms across the country have undergone exponential change in terms of pupil diversity (Conway & Sloane, 2005; INTO, 2004a; NCCA, 1999a). There has been a large increase of the number of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools and a decline in the population of special schools (Ware et al., 2009; Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). The changing population of Ireland has also meant a growth in students from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background, who would not traditionally have settled in Ireland. There is also the challenge of including students who experience educational disadvantage.

Students with Special Educational Needs

National policies in relation to special education have been influenced by international policy documents such as the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education UNESCO (1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN) (1990) and the UN International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Within a European context, the Council of Europe (CE) Political Declaration (2003) and Action Plan (2006) have been of high relevance in Ireland.

Irish policy documents relating to special education have adopted the philosophy of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Government of Ireland, 1993, p. 22) report in favouring “as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary.” Since the Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998a) established the right to an appropriate education for all children there has been a large body of legislation which has influenced thinking, policies and practices around inclusive

education. These include the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 (Government of Ireland, 1998b), the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2000), the Education Welfare Act 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) and the Disability Act 2005 (Government of Ireland, 2005).

These have been complemented by circulars, research and task force reports and curricular, planning, policy and practice guidelines. There has also been a radical change in the level of resources in the system in terms of learning support, resource, language support teachers, special educational needs organisers and special needs assistants. In addition there has been the creation and expansion of bodies such as the National Council for Special Education, National Educational Psychological Service, the National Education Welfare Board, the National Council for Technology in Education, the Special Education Support Service and the Primary Professional Development Service.

Minority Ethnic and Minority Language Students

Ireland has become home to a significantly large number of very diverse populations of immigrants since the early 1990s. This is predominantly as a result of increased economic prosperity, European Union expansion and freedom to travel.

Within this context minority language children, or their families, have arrived in a number of different ways to Ireland. They have entered the country as refugees or asylum seekers, immigrant workers or the children of immigrant workers, unaccompanied minors or as children who have been trafficked. This change is revealed most clearly in the quantitative data contained within the 2006 Census (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2008). Figures from the Census (2006) reveal that there were 420,000 “non-Irish nationals” living in Ireland in April 2006. These immigrants identified 188 different countries of origin. Analysis of these figures highlighted that 82 per cent of these migrants came from 10 countries. This inward migration has led to an increase in linguistic diversity, though here are no definitive data on the number of languages being spoken in Ireland at present. The Valeur Report identified 158 languages placing Ireland third behind the United Kingdom (288) and Spain (198) in the number of additional language spoken in their survey of 21 European states (McPake & Tinsley, 2007). Research carried out by the Language Centre

in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, which found that there were 167 languages being spoken in Ireland, confirms this increase (O'Brien, 2006).

There are emerging national data on the number of minority ethnic and minority language children in Irish schools (ESRI, 2009a) though there are no exact statistics from Census data (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006; McDaid, 2007; Quinn et al., 2007; Nowlan, 2008). Other studies have also included more focused examination to the particular geographical area concerned in their work (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007; McDaid, 2008). The ESRI (2009a) estimate that there are 18,000 “newcomer students” at second level and 45,700 at primary school level. Wallen and Kelly-Holmes (2006, p.143) estimate that 15,600 non-English speaking children between the ages of 0 and 14 immigrated to Ireland between 1996 and 2003.

These figures do not take children born in Ireland into account, and given that in 2004, 8,016 babies were born in the Coombe maternity hospital to women from 92 different countries (Donnellan, 2005), such children potentially account for a high proportion of minority language speakers in Irish schools. According to the ESRI (2009a), it is estimated that “newcomer students made up approximately 10 per cent of the primary school-going population and 6 per cent of the second-level population in 2007”. These children are distributed quite differently across the two levels as most second-level schools have

at least one newcomer student but newcomers make up a relatively modest proportion of students, typically 2 to 9 per cent, within each school. In contrast, the pattern among primary schools is quite different: there is a significant number of schools – four in ten – with no newcomer children, while newcomers are highly represented – making up more than a fifth of the student body – in a tenth of primary schools (p. xiv).

McGorman and Sugrue (2007, p. 50) put these numbers at 20,000 and 8,000 respectively. Significant challenges remain in meeting the needs of these students.

Educational Disadvantage in Ireland

In the last decade, issues of educational disadvantage and educational achievement have moved to the centre of policy-makers agenda and academic debate. Underachievement is particularly recognised as a major problem with some of the lowest levels of achievement found in schools serving a disadvantaged urban community (Kelly, 1995; 1996; Demie, 1998; Mortimore & Whitty, 1997). In Ireland, educational disadvantage has been the

subject of much debate and action over the past 15 years and this has resulted in legislative change, curricular reform and various intervention measures including Education (Welfare) Act, (2000) which established the National Educational Welfare Board, and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999). Following much consultation a detailed outline of how services, supports and resources were to be deployed to target educational disadvantage was published in 2005. *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools- An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DEIS) (DES, 2005a) aims to integrate eight existing programmes under a new programme called the *School Support Programme* (SSP). Many of the measures of the past 15 years have focused on providing additional human and financial resources to address such issues as early education, literacy and numeracy supports, the role of the family and the community in education and early school leaving. A recent review of implementation of the literacy part of the plan by the National Economic and Social Forum (2009) raises many issues of concern.

Definitions used in the Study

The EPSEN Act (2004, p.6) provides a legislative framework for inclusive education, while also providing for the supporting rights of children to an assessment, to an individual education plan, and to an independent appeals process. It offers the following definition of special education needs which informed the study:

“special educational needs” means, in relation to a person, 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 and cognate words shall be construed accordingly (p. 6).

The Act does not define inclusive education but states that:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with—

(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (p. 7).

For the purpose of the study educational disadvantage is defined as in the Education Act (1998a) (S. 32, 9) as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic

disadvantage that prevent pupils from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”.

Essentially, educational disadvantage is multi-dimensional, rooted in the complex interaction of factors at home, in school and in the community. While there is no single contributory factor, it is generally accepted that the factors which can contribute to a pupil underachieving at school are complex, involving a myriad of causes: family situations; parental education; economic poverty; poor housing; ethnic or cultural difference; rural isolation; poor attendance; pupil-teacher ratios; under-resourcing of certain schools; the suitability of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices and policies in the education system.

This study uses the terms “minority ethnic” and “minority language” student following the problems identified by the English Language Support Teachers’ Association (ELSTA) with words previously used, including non-nationals, foreign nationals, new Irish and non-Irish nationals (McDaid, 2009). The term “minority language” is used in reference to a student who does not speak either English or Irish as a first language in the Irish education system. The term “minority ethnic” is similarly used to refer to a student from an ethnic group other than the dominant white ethnic group in Irish schools. The term “minority” is used in advance of “language” or “ethnicity” to denote the status position of the language or ethnicity within Irish society, as opposed to the dominant position of the “majority language”, English or the majority ethnicity.

While the present study focuses on these diverse groups it is recognised that there is much overlap between them. Some students’ identities could be shaped by all of the areas under focus, while it is also recognised that there is an over representation of students experiencing educational disadvantage in some categories of special educational needs and likewise for minority ethnic students (Baker, 2003).

Inclusive Education

A review of the international literature reveals extensive debate on the justification of inclusion from a human rights, social, educational and moral perspective (Florian, 2007; Slee, 2003; Ainscow, 1999). However, there are many definitions of inclusion and it is important to note that there are no explicit definitions of it in either the Education Act

(Ireland, 1998a) or EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). Bailey (1998, p.173) refers to inclusion as “being in an ordinary school with other students, following the same curriculum at the same time, in the same classrooms, with the full acceptance of all, and in a way which makes the student feel no different from other students.” Others see it as a continuing process of “of increasing the participation of students in the cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and communities” (Booth, 1996, p. 96). Some see it as moving away from benevolent humanitarianism to a discourse of rights - the right to participate in the mainstream school, the right to respect, and the right to what Norwich (2000, p. 10) calls “individually relevant learning.”

A key conception of inclusion underpinning this study is that inclusion is a broad concept that encompasses all learners. It is wider than special education and some authors interpret it as a moral vision and conviction that everyone is invaluable and that the community is diminished by the exclusion of anyone (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Hamre (2007, p. 51) sees inclusion as “welcoming all students, recognizing their multifaceted identities, and reconfiguring an educational space that capitalizes on everyone’s unique qualities, experiences, and strengths.”

Slee (2001, p. 116-117) also argues for a wider conception of the concept of inclusion:

For the record I would argue that inclusive education is not about special educational needs, it is about all students. It asks direct questions: Who’s in? and Who’s out? The answers find their sharpest definition along lines of class, ‘race’, ethnicity and language, disability, gender and sexuality and geographic location. Inclusive schooling becomes a greater challenge than is implied through the renditions of Rawlsian (1972) justice presented in the technical attempts to mobilize sufficient resources to contain disabled children in incrementally modified classrooms. Of course, many children require additional resources to enable them to gain access to and mastery of the classroom tasks. These may be resources to assist mobility or to provide access to the dominant language or different forms of information and instruction. However, the calculus of equity is far more complex than this simple addition. It is a cultural calculus wherein we evaluate and question the relative values afforded to different people and groups of people through the culture of schools and classrooms. Most complex of all is the tension between the rejection of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to schooling (i.e. differentiation) and a potential drift into new segregations.

Slee (2001) further articulates that, research into poverty, class and education (Connell, 1993; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995), anti-racist education (Troyna, 1993; Gillborn, 1995),

gender and education (Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999), sexuality and education (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Wright, Weekes, & McLaughlin, 2000) and the intersection of such factors (Sewell, 1997; Corson, 1998) is central to the compilation of a theory of inclusive schooling.

Likewise, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue that schools should “concern themselves with increasing the participation and broad educational achievements of *all* groups of learners who have historically been marginalized” (p. 295). They define inclusion “in three overlapping ways: as reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students; as increasing the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of students in their local communities in ways that treat them all as of equal value; and the putting of inclusive values into action in education and society” (p. 297). This broader conception is used in the study. Participants were informed that for the purposes of the study the aim of inclusive education is “*to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education*” (1998 Education Act, section 6). On this basis, it was important to take into account the views of children and parents as well as principals, teachers, and other school staff, in order to gain a fuller understanding of how schools are responding to the challenges of inclusion.

Dyson (2005, p.88) interprets inclusion as a complex phenomenon because “it enters an arena that is characterised by the complexities and ambiguities that inevitable arise from deep-seated dilemmas.” He describes two key dilemmas as, the dilemma of difference which is intersected by the dilemma of “the extent to which the purposes of education are seen as being located at the level of the individual or of the state.” These dilemmas are then underpinned by wider fundamental social and economic processes. Norwich (2008) identifies three dilemmas around the inclusion of students with special educational needs: the identification dilemma – whether to identify children with SEN/disabilities or not; the curriculum dilemma – whether children with SEN should learn the same common curriculum or not and the location dilemma – whether children with severe disabilities should learn in ordinary classrooms or not.

There is also much commentary on what constitutes effective inclusion, with lists of factors associated with schools moving towards inclusion (Hewitt, 1999; Villa &

Thousand, 2003; Voltz, Brazil & Ford, 2001). However, as Norwich and Kelly (2005, p. 66) point out, this sort of research “tend(s) to overlook the ambiguity, tensions and complexity of schooling.” Irish teachers, school personnel and parents need to be convinced that inclusion is not just an aspiration but that it can be a new reality. There is a need to produce empirical evidence on effective inclusive school policies and classroom practices in Ireland. Undoubtedly there is a dearth of such research, not just nationally but also internationally (Rose, 2002; Kavale, 2001). Furthermore, the difficulties involved in trying to engage in such research have been highlighted (Norwich & Kelly, 2005; Pijl & Hamstra, 2005; Hegarty, 1993) with Norwich and Lunt (2000) listing some of the reasons why most reviews of research evidence on inclusion fail to reach any general conclusions from the studies that have been conducted.

The challenges for schools of becoming more inclusive are very well laid out in the DES (2007a) guidelines on the inclusion of students with SEN in post-primary schools:

An inclusive school is characterised by a continuous process of development and self-evaluation with a view to eliminating barriers to the participation of all students in the catchment area. The school’s mission statement and the policies and procedures set out in the school plan are pivotal in establishing a positive agenda for inclusion. Schools are advised, therefore, to examine and, as appropriate, revise their culture or ethos, values, mission statement, policies, procedures, management style, organisational arrangements, curriculum content, and approaches to learning and teaching with a view to establishing a school climate, curriculum and instructional approach that are fully inclusive (DES, 2007a, p. 9).

By conducting case studies in a range of Irish schools, this study seeks to develop an understanding of educational policies and practices which are conducive to the provision of an inclusive education for children and young people in Ireland. It will build on existing international research, such as that from the US (Manset & Semmel, 1997) and the UK (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 1998; Buckley, 2000), that focuses on positive academic and social outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and on the curricular changes or adaptations needed to effectively include all pupils in mainstream schools.

In this context, it is important to look at challenges and barriers that schools face endeavouring to include these diverse groups of students. Specifically, this study is concerned with the barriers schools experience including a diversity of learners and the

ways in which they seek to overcome these barriers or mitigate their effects. In mapping the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools this research focuses on how schools address the diverse needs of students with special educational needs, minority ethnic/minority language students and students who experience educational disadvantage. Examples of creative solutions and innovative thinking in addressing these challenges and barriers are presented. This relates directly to the policy goals of the DES to support, through education, a socially inclusive society and to seek to improve the standard and quality of education for all learners.

Following this introduction chapter two outlines the key findings from the literature in relation to challenges and barriers to inclusion. This is organised around the school, teacher/class and child/family/community levels. It is recognised that these levels are mediated by system level issues, which are covered where appropriate. In addition the views of children in the study are treated separately. Chapter three has a similar structure but focuses on practices and policies that overcome, reduce or mitigate the challenges and barriers. Chapter four outlines the methodology of the study. Chapters five and six present the findings and discussion for challenges and barriers and for addressing them across the levels referred to above. Finally chapter seven presents the implications and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Literature Review

The literature review on inclusion consists of two chapters: the challenges and barriers to inclusion and practices and policies schools use to overcome, or mitigate, the effects of these challenges and barriers. This chapter consists of a summary of the search procedures used to identify and analyse relevant literature and a brief description of the nature of the research in the area. This is followed by a review of the literature in relation to the challenges and barriers to inclusion. The next chapter, chapter three, reviews the literature on addressing, with a view to overcoming, the challenges and barriers to inclusion.

The study focuses on three diverse groups of learners: students with special educational needs (SEN), students experiencing educational disadvantage and students from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background. However, this literature review does not deal with these three groups separately, as there is a large degree of overlap between them in terms of general barriers and challenges to inclusion and the practices employed by schools to address these challenges and barriers. Consequently, the review is structured around the challenges and barriers to inclusion at three different levels of the education system: those at school level, at teacher /class level and at child/family/community level. Because issues at the overall level of the educational system pervade each of the three levels, these system-level issues are incorporated into the previous levels. Furthermore, because of its traditional neglect, the voice of the child is afforded separate treatment, thereby constituting a fourth and final section of this review of the literature on the challenges and barriers to inclusion.

Literature Search Procedure

Two types of literature searches were used. Firstly, a systematic search of relevant databases (ERIC, EBSCO and Google Scholar) was conducted, using the search terms outlined in Table 1 below. Due to the wide-ranging nature of research carried out in the area of inclusion, a specific set of search terms was used in conjunction with the term inclusion. Secondly, the websites of relevant government and non-governmental agencies were searched, with a view to procuring reports and information on relevant initiatives or schemes in relation to inclusion in Ireland.

Table 1. Search Terms used in the Literature Review

Search Terms
Inclusion and Barriers
Inclusion and Challenges
Inclusion and Practices
Inclusion and Policies
Inclusion and Overcoming barriers
Inclusion and Special Education / Special Needs / Special Educational Needs
Inclusion and Educational disadvantage
Inclusion and Minority Ethnic / Minority Language
Inclusion and Ireland

Beyond these searches, practitioner expertise was also used to source information. Relevant authorities on research in SEN, educational disadvantage, minority ethnic and/or minority language students and inclusion, also provided recommendations to supplement literature already sourced.

The Nature of the Research carried out in Relation to Inclusion

Much of the literature on the challenges, barriers and practices to overcome these challenges to inclusion, is based on accessing and reporting the relevant stakeholders' views and perspectives. Consequently, there is a large body of research which investigates and documents participants' attitudes to the inclusion of students with SEN for example. Most of the research uses a survey approach involving questionnaires, (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007; Avramides & Kalyva, 2007; Forlin, 2008; Tangen, 2005) often augmented by interviews (Idol, 2006; Runswick-Cole, 2008). Some studies are enhanced further by observation (Angelides, 2008; Scheepstra, Nakken & Pijl, 1999; Smith & Leonard, 2005). A number of research studies adopt a case study approach which utilises multiple methods to investigate participants' perspectives (Ellins & Porter, 2005; Farrell et al., 2007; Fox, Farrell & Davis, 2004; Powell, 2006; Wakefield, 2004). In addition, a small number of studies use biographical and autobiographical-type approaches where participants keep research or reflective diaries, or write their life stories (Boling, 2007; Curtin & Clarke, 2005). Because it is concerned with ascertaining people's perspectives, it is not surprising that most of the research is of a qualitative and interpretive nature. There is little or no focus on empirical outcomes for inclusive practice, with the exception of the work of Farrell et al. (2007) who look at educational outcomes. Similarly, looking specifically at practices to overcome barriers and challenges to inclusion, there are very

few reports on initiatives to promote inclusion which have a rigorous, empirical research-base to back up the claims made. This is not to say that the perspectives offered by relevant participants are not relevant but that in the absence of larger-scale, quantifiable, empirical findings, the generalisation of findings can prove difficult.

School Level

The literature on the challenges and barriers to inclusion are reviewed at school level under the following headings: cultural barriers in policies and practices; barriers to achievement in literacy and numeracy; achievement levels for students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds; transition from primary to post-primary school; school discipline and students' behaviour difficulties.

Cultural Barriers in Policies and Practices

The experience of inclusion at the level of the school is linked to the wider educational policy context in which the school resides. This section highlights the interaction of system-wide weaknesses and their implications at school level. Challenges related to lack of leadership, skills and knowledge capacity, curricular, assessment and certification gaps, failure to meet needs and restrictive practices and policies are outlined.

Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008) in a study of the views of key stakeholders in Ireland in relation to inclusion, outline many pertinent barriers. In particular, they found that “the conceptual understanding of special educational needs was seriously deficient and this affected the coherence of policy and service delivery” (p. 141). According to the study participants, the system lacked strategic leadership and there was a “serious shortfall in the range and level of skills required” to deliver quality education for students with special educational needs. Also, within the wider context, and drawing on the work of Clancy (1995), Drudy and Kinsella (2009, p. 650) in a critique of inclusion in Ireland, suggest that the “institutionalisation of invidious status hierarchies between different post-primary schools has served to reproduce existing status hierarchies.” They go on to argue that

these status hierarchies between different types of schools also serve to make it difficult for schools to become more inclusive. The PISA report argues that the more inclusive schooling systems have both higher levels of performance and fewer disparities among students from differing socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2004, p. 197).

However, with pressure on schools to deliver in the ‘points race’ there may be a perception that moves towards greater inclusion of marginalised learners may not be in the best interests of the school (Daly, 2008). Levacic and Woods (2002) for example, found a strong link between social disadvantage in schools and poor performance in terms of GCSE results.

Meijer (2003) notes that there are a number of ways in which countries can approach special education in relation to general education with special education as part of mainstream education, or as a separate system. This historical or traditional separation provides an obstacle to trying to include students with special needs in mainstream schools. The inadequate conceptualisation of the implications of inclusion results in the treatment of diverse learners as an ‘add-on’ in the system, rather than embedding planning for the diversity of learners in all aspects of school life as an integral part of a single educational system (Wedell, 2008). Carrington (1999, p. 258) notes that “the role of schools still appears to be induction in the dominant culture through the imparting of set curricula rather than the meeting of students’ needs as learners.” Many schools may not adapt to allow for inclusion, but rather expect students to fit into the school’s expectations. Kinsella and Senior (2008) conducted an analysis of inclusive education in Ireland based on 14 interviews with key informants in the system:

The findings from the current study to date would suggest that there is still a separateness, a specialness and a dualism (Norwich, 1996) inherent in the organizational culture underpinning provision for pupils with additional needs in Irish schools, which is contrary to the inclusive processes which should operate in schools, in the wider education system and in the interactions between the two systems (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, p. 657).

This lack of planning for diversity is also evident in relation to curriculum reform. In a recent consultative document, the NCCA (2009) outline proposals to design a new curricular framework for some students with learning disabilities at post-primary level. This document was based on feedback from the education partners on *The Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2007):

This feedback informed the final publication of the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* (2007). However, that feedback

also flagged a gap in curriculum, assessment and certification provision at junior cycle for students within the mild to moderate range of general learning disabilities. The view emerged during the consultations that there existed a group of students who, even with the support of teachers using the most sophisticated approaches to differentiation – including the JCSP - would never access the mainstream junior cycle curriculum. A further and more significant point was also made – the mainstream curriculum was not appropriate for this group of students who needed concerted support in personal, social and vocational development (NCCA, 2009, p. 6).

This raises serious issues in relation to the capacity of post-primary schools to meet the needs of these students. By creating a new framework, the NCCA acknowledges that this will create a different qualification system for these students, which is also problematic in a so-called inclusive environment:

However, the introduction of a framework would represent a movement away from the idea of a single junior cycle school qualification. Concerns related to the emergence of a two-tier junior cycle would be raised. These could be addressed somewhat by establishing a close relationship between the learning outcomes of the framework and those of the Junior Certificate but, nonetheless, in the current thinking, there would be two different qualifications involved (NCCA, 2009, p. 13).

The challenge of providing students with appropriate learning opportunities through relevant curricula is one with which education systems struggle. Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2002), in a small-scale qualitative study of students with physical disabilities, note that these students were not accessing the curriculum in many cases.

In a study looking at curriculum access for students with speech and language difficulties, Dockrell and Lindsay (1998) note that for this group of students, there were key barriers to curriculum access in reading, the content of writing, spelling, and mathematics. In other words, the building blocks for further access to education were not within their grasp. Shevlin et al. (2008) in the Irish context, identify lack of access to education through Irish Sign Language for deaf children, as a barrier to inclusion. They also report that there were major concerns expressed about social isolation and low levels of literacy and educational attainment for deaf children in mainstream schools (Shevlin et al., 2008).

The failure to implement fully the provisions of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) has implications for the rights of children with SEN to access appropriate

assessment and an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Getting access to assessment remains a crucial issue for students with SEN (INTO, 2006) and getting access to therapy services following this, is equally problematic for many. O’Sullivan (2002) notes a range of difficulties in relation to the implementation of IEPs in interviews with Irish teachers. Key findings from O’Sullivan’s study were: lack of training in how to compile and use IEPs; schools not complying with whole-school planning guidelines in relation to SEN; as well as more specific barriers in terms of the logistics of preparing and using an IEP.

Restrictive Policies and Practices

Daly (2008) in a study of school culture and inclusion, in seven post-primary schools in Ireland, argues that even with positive, distributed leadership, within-school “systemic forces of inertia were much too weighty” for a major whole-school shift in practices to occur (p. 14). These included inter alia, a didactic pedagogy, curriculum and assessment practices, the points system, subject interests and the rigidities of space and time (Daly, 2008, p. 14). The Department of Education and Science (2007a, p. 9) guidelines on inclusion in post-primary schools also recognise these difficulties and acknowledge that:

Significant challenges in relation to the inclusion of students with special educational needs arise for schools, for example from the requirement to provide a subject-centred curriculum, the preparation of students for state examinations, and the “points race.” Students meet many different teachers during the school day and school week, while teachers similarly may teach a wide range of class groups.

In addition, the guidelines recognise a number of restrictive practices in the system that are barriers to inclusion, as the following three quotations illustrate:

There is evidence that some post-primary schools continue to have restrictive enrolment policies that lead to the effectual exclusion of children with special educational needs and those with other learning differences. Policies and practices may also be in operation within a school that hinder the full participation of children with special educational needs, and there may be a failure to make reasonable accommodations for these students. Some parents of children with special educational needs have experienced difficulty in relation to the enrolment of their child in the school of their choice. In this regard, appeals have been taken successfully by parents under section 29 of the Education Act (1998a) (DES, 2007a, p. 44).

The Department of Education and Science considers that the practice of selecting certain students for enrolment and refusing others so as to ensure that only a certain cohort of students is enrolled - for example those who are more able academically - is unacceptable and that where such practices exist they should be discontinued.

It is also inappropriate for a school to include a clause in its admissions policy to the effect that the enrolment of a student with special educational needs is dependent on the allocation of appropriate resources (DES, 2007a, pp. 44-45).

Shevlin et al. (2008) report that children with autistic spectrum disorders encountered multiple refusals and sometimes ended up in schools, far away from, and outside their local community. They found there was a

widespread belief that the school's perception of the particular disability and the extent of the resulting difficulties for the child were major determining factors in the decision to enrol the child. Such perceptual difficulties were not seen as peculiar to schools but as pervading the system (Shevlin et al., 2008, p. 146).

They also outline how many parents of children with SEN must lobby to secure resources for schools and that schools can act defensively to empowered parents. They also report a lack of leadership from schools in identifying and responding to the educational and social needs of students.

Shevlin et al. argue that

Indepth knowledge in schools about special educational needs appears to be extremely variable. This lack of knowledge has serious implications for the enrolment process and subsequent curricular inclusion. Inadequate knowledge about the educational implications of particular special educational needs had a negative impact on a school's willingness to include the child (Shevlin et al., 2008, p. 149).

In compiling the report on the implementation of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) highlighted the following gaps and deficits in the current provision for SEN in Ireland: inadequate early identification, intervention and pre-school provision; lack of access to the curriculum for many pupils with SEN; no structured emphasis on outcomes; delays in assessment; poor educational planning; under-resourced schools; inadequate institutional and systemic supports for inclusive education; insufficient training; and inappropriate, inefficient and inequitable

allocation of resources (NCSE, 2006). In summarising the challenges and barriers to inclusion at school level in relation to school culture, it is worth noting Carrington's (1999), conclusion that school cultures will need to adapt to be more inclusive, but that this change will not be easy.

Barriers to Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy

The literature highlights significant barriers in relation to raising the achievement levels of students in schools. The following section focuses on literacy and numeracy difficulties for students experiencing educational disadvantage and the achievement levels of students from minority ethnic and minority language backgrounds. Challenges and barriers to the achievement levels of students with SEN are reviewed at the level of the teacher /class, and at the level of the child /family /community, because challenges such as teacher competence, lack of time, lack of coordination and within-child issues appear to have a particular bearing on the achievement levels of students with SEN.

Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties

According to McGough (2007), low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, for pupils experiencing educational disadvantage, are an ongoing concern and challenge to policy and practice, which greatly limits students' capacity to participate and benefit from education. Eivers, Sheil and Shortt (2004) report low levels of literacy for such students with 27% of first and sixth class students and 30% of third class students performing at, or below, the tenth percentile on standardised English reading tests. *The Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantage Schools* (LANDS) (DES, 2005b) study involved an in-depth study of literacy and numeracy in twelve schools of designated disadvantaged status. This study confirmed the findings of Eivers et al. (2004) and in addition, found that achievement scores actually declined as students progressed through the school. With regard to the quality of teaching, the report highlighted significant gaps and weaknesses in relation to the integration of assessment, planning and the teaching of literacy. While several assessment measures were used in the schools, there was limited analysis of the data to inform planning and to differentiate for the range of pupils' needs. In addition, there was evidence of poor planning and collaboration between learning support and class teachers. Overall, the study found that the quality of classroom planning was poor with little or no evidence of systematic planning for literacy in place (Kennedy, 2007).

More recently, an evaluation report *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues*, conducted by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2009), discusses a number of weaknesses in relation to the implementation of literacy policy in schools. These weaknesses relate mainly to lack of clarity in relation to policy target dates, outcomes and distribution of resources. Furthermore, the report points out, that while the initial DEIS publication included an early childhood education element, this was subsequently dropped and replaced with free universal pre-school provision of one year, for 3-4 year olds. The report claims that it is unclear how this scheme will connect with the DEIS programme. In addition, the researchers claim that there is a wide variation in the timing and quality of training and supports available for schools, with urban and rural schools receiving different supports, and some larger urban schools sharing a DEIS Advisor with 26 other schools.

While much is written in the literature on educational disadvantage concerning the importance of setting targets and objectives for achieving outcomes, which are clearly understood by all parties, at school, community and national level, the NESF report (2009) states that DEIS policy has been slow to capture community strengths and resources and to link them to national strategies in any systematic way. In addition, while a stated objective of DEIS is to meet the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) high level goal of reducing the literacy problem in disadvantaged areas from (30%) to (15%), the report points to the fact that there is no direct link between targets that schools set themselves and this national target. Furthermore, there is a clear lack of accountability with no system for rewarding success, or no apparent penalty for failing to achieve the NAPS literacy targets. Some schools report lack of certainty as to how their disadvantaged status will be reassessed if they show evidence of improvement.

This lack of accountability, coupled with the fact that schools have been given the responsibility of defining what constitutes successful literacy outcomes for their pupils, is described as a major policy weakness by the authors of the report. According to the NESF report, this has resulted in a fragmented approach with some schools setting very high standards to raise literacy levels for all their pupils and other schools experiencing less success in this regard (NESF, 2009).

Numeracy

In relation to performance in mathematics, studies conducted in Ireland show that social class is a key factor in tests of mathematical achievement. Pupils attending schools designated as disadvantaged underperform when compared with pupils in schools that are not so designated (Dooley & Corcoran, 2007). Likewise, as with literacy, the pupils' mathematical level declines as they progress through school. US and Canadian research reveals the disconcerting finding that there can be a three year differential in basic mathematical achievement levels between children when they start school (Griffin, Case & Siegler, 1996). However, a review of *Early Start*, the very limited state involvement in pre-school education, found that it did not emphasise early numeracy (Lewis & Archer, 2003), while another evaluation found that number work was being inappropriately dealt with in pre-schools for Travellers (DES, 2003).

Lyons et al. (2003), in a revealing video-analysis study of the teaching of mathematics at junior cycle level, in Irish post-primary schools, demonstrated an almost total reliance on didactic and transmission models of mathematics teaching. In addition, they found a tendency for a small number of boys to dominate classes resulting in the disengagement and "practised subordination" of other pupils (p. 184). In line with other international studies, Lyons et al. (2003, p. 222) found that "one's experience of learning mathematics is mediated by the track, stream, set or band to which one is allocated." They conclude:

There were important qualitative differences in the type and quality of pedagogical practices deployed by teachers in different tracks. The most striking differences were found between the bottom and the top streams. In the bottom stream, the teacher's pedagogical approach was characterised by slow pace, constant repetition and an emphasis on practising of very basic, procedural skills. The teacher's approach appeared to reflect the generally low expectations of the bottom stream. The pedagogical approach of the teachers of the top streams was characterised by a fast pace and an air of urgency. The teachers had higher expectations of the higher streams or tracks (p. 222).

Similar findings have arisen from studies in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia (Boaler et al., 2000; Zevenbergen, 2001). In addition, the Lyons et al. study found that

teachers tended to adopt a cultural deficit interpretation of the lower rates of attainment of working class students; low achievement among working class

students was primarily interpreted in terms of the perceived ‘inadequacies’ of their cultural background (Lyons et al., p. 380).

This resonates with Zevenbergen (2003) who found that teachers generally blamed student and family attributes as being responsible for their low achievement in mathematics.

Lynch’s view is sobering when she argues that there is a sense in which schools fail the very pupils who need the institution most (Lynch, 2005).

Achievement Levels of Students from Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language Backgrounds

This section of the review focuses on issues pertaining to academic success for students from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background. Data from other jurisdictions illustrate that many students from minority language backgrounds have much less successful experiences of education than do majority language students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Watt & Roessingh, 2001; Isquierdo, 2003; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2005; Genesee et al., 2005; OECD, 2006; European Commission (EC), 2008; Cummins, 2008). According to the EC (2008, p. 4) there is clear and consistent evidence that many children of migrants have lower levels of educational attainment than their peers. This is further substantiated by the OECD (2006) examination of results from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2003), which reveals that immigrant students often perform at significantly lower levels than their native peers in key school subjects, such as mathematics, reading and science, as well as in general problem-solving skills.

Watt and Roessingh (2001) noted an overall dropout rate of 74 per cent for English as a Second Language (ESL) students, approximately 2.5 times that of the general high-school population in their longitudinal study in Calgary, Canada. Isquierdo (2003) highlights that while Hispanics represent 11 per cent of the total population of the United States between the ages of 16 and 19, they account for 34 per cent of those students of that age cohort who have dropped out of school (Isquierdo, 2003, p. 1). This occurs despite evidence that immigrant students are motivated learners, and possess positive attitudes towards school (OECD, 2006). The OECD report also illustrates that country of destination significantly impacts on experience, with key differences in performance between countries such as France, Denmark, Germany and Austria, while immigrant students in Australia, New

Zealand and Canada illustrate little difference between their performance and that of non-immigrant students.

Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) illustrate the heterogeneity of immigrant populations in general and the further complexity within what might be understood as more homogenous immigrant groups. They go on to identify the complexity of generation position. They argue that dropout rates vary substantially for all generations across national origin groups in the United States of America. Children of Mexican origin have dropout rates twice the national average for first, second and third generation students. This is contrasted with children of Asian origin, who are more likely to complete school than any other immigrant group, or indeed native children. Further examination, however, reveals that dropout rates for Asian students increases significantly for third and subsequent generations (see also Ngo & Lee, 2007 for a further discussion of complicating the model minority image of Asian students). This runs contrary to the OECD (2006, p. 30) findings that first generation students are more likely to experience difficulty with school performance and associate this with experiencing challenges of immigration, such as adjusting to a new culture and social situation, acclimatising to an unfamiliar school system, or learning a new language.

This heterogeneity was further exposed in the Irish education setting when Ward (2004) identified that unaccompanied minors experienced lack of motivation as a significant barrier to education. While this must be understood in the context of a particular set of circumstances, such as relocation and uncertainty about their future, it does provide some contradiction with the findings of McGorman and Sugrue (2007).

Minority language status and minority ethnic status are, in many cases, intricately intertwined. Recent data from the UK illustrate striking differences in levels of attendance, expulsion and attainment in the formal education system between ethnic minorities and non-ethnic minorities (DfES, 2005). Travellers of Irish heritage, Gypsy/Roma pupils, Black Caribbean, Black Other, White/Black Caribbean and White/Black African pupils had higher rates of permanent exclusion. Black pupils received fixed term exclusions at twice the rate of other pupils (DfES, 2005, pp. 19-21). Traveller groups are more likely to have identified SEN, followed by Black Caribbean, Black Other, White/Black Caribbean (DfES, 2005, p. 21). Black Caribbean boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed

with severe learning difficulty at primary school, while they are twice as likely to be represented on school action plans aimed at tackling behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (DfES, 2005, p. 24). These data also illustrate that while some minority language and/or minority ethnic students were performing at higher than average levels, for instance Indian and Chinese pupils, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils were all below the national average (DfES, 2005, p.9).

Dimensions of Language Proficiency

Not only do minority language students have to develop a proficiency in English in order to properly access the Irish school curriculum, it is a proficiency in a particular type of English language register. Cummins (2001) refers to this as the three dimensions of language proficiency, namely: Conversational Fluency, Discrete Language Skills and Academic Language Proficiency. This builds on earlier work, which established the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1981). Conversational Fluency is the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations and is characteristic of the level of proficiency attained by an English speaking child when they enter school aged five. In contrast to this, Academic Language Proficiency includes knowledge of the less frequent vocabulary of English, as well as the ability to interpret and produce increasingly complex written and oral language in decontextualised settings. Discrete Language Skills embody specific phonological, literacy and grammatical knowledge that students acquire as a result of both formal and informal practice and direct instruction. These skills are learned continually through schooling. Cummins argues that the relationship between these dimensions is still confused and highlights that “many ELL ... students who have acquired fluent conversational skills are still a long way from grade-level performance in academic language proficiency” (Cummins, 2001, p. 66). Cummins asserts that it takes on average five to seven years for a minority language child to develop Academic Language Proficiency to the level of their majority language speaking peers. It must be further recognised that not only do minority language children have to learn the type of academic English necessary for successfully negotiating the education system, but they must also negotiate their own language acquisition with regard to what Mac Ruairc (2004) describes as the prestige varieties of language. His study exposed how middle class linguistic capital is prized in Irish schools and highlighted the problems experienced by children from working class backgrounds who did not share this linguistic code. Despite

attempts to amend their language use through correction, working class children demonstrate a commitment to their own language and continue to use it in school. The issue with learning a standardised version of English emerged as a major issue in a study by Ward (2004) for African-born English language speaking separated minors.

The Distinction between a Language and a Learning Difficulty

Academic failure among minority language students is often cast as being rooted in a learning problem rather than a language problem. Baker (2003) points out that there is evidence of overrepresentation of minority language children within SEN categories. The teachers in McGorman and Sugrue's study (2007) argue that children who performed badly on standardised tests after two years of English language support in Irish schools were becoming candidates for learning support. Furthermore, as both Nowlan (2008) and Devine (2005) highlight, teachers seemed confused about the difference between English language support and learning support. Ortiz (2001) reacts to this overrepresentation in special education by offering a strategy for identifying SEN within minority language students. This is based on ruling out issues such as negative school climate and teaching methods which fail to use pedagogical principles known to be effective for teaching English to minority language students, thus highlighting that these factors can contribute to overrepresentation. There is evidence that this misplacement puts further stresses on the special education system in Irish primary schools (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007).

Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School

Difficulties with transition through different stages of schooling can present challenges for students. Transitions are a normal part of school life for all students and occur at various times, such as starting school; moving to a new class and changing schools. However, there is increasing interest in educational transitions, because the level of success, both socially and academically, experienced in transition, can be a critical factor in determining pupils' future progress and development (Ghaye & Pascal, 1989).

Research has identified various features of school transitions that are potentially problematic for all pupils. These range from a different way of getting to school, changes in building size, teaching styles, the complexity and organisation of the school day, to concerns about friendships with a new group, new teachers, and new codes of practice at lunchtime and playtime. All of these have the potential to create anxiety, tiredness,

discomfort and bewilderment (Barrett, 1986; Cleave, Jowett & Bate, 1982). Schumacher (1998) identified the main worries for students during transition as: getting to class on time; finding their locker; keeping up with work; finding the lunchroom and toilets; getting on the right bus home; getting through the crowded halls; remembering which class to go to next; and aggressive or violent behaviour from older pupils. This is particularly pertinent for students from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background, if the school culture is new to them, or to students who had previously been in a special education environment (special class or special school), where the culture would have been very different.

Drawing on essays written by students describing their experiences of transition from primary to secondary school, Pietarinen (1998) found that changes in the organisation of teaching groups, (e.g. changes from a class teacher to a subject teacher, different patterns of discipline, authority, classroom management and teaching style), the increased size and complexity of building layout and the prospect of bullying or losing friends, all impacted significantly on pupils' ability to adjust to a new situation.

While school size was an important feature, changes in the nature of the teaching style was identified as an even more significant transitional factor affecting pupils' overall academic performance and self-perceptions. Hertzog et al., (1996) report a decline in both grades and attendance, with pupils viewing themselves more negatively after starting post-primary school. The level of success, both socially and academically experienced in transition, can be a critical factor in determining pupils' future progress and development.

School Discipline and Students' Behavioural Difficulties

According to Mand (2007) "the rejection of pupils with behaviour problems is a serious problem for inclusive education schools" (p. 7). The review of the literature revealed that most teachers profess to being open and welcoming to including students with SEN. However, this positive attitude is generally qualified by their reservations about including students with behavioural difficulties. An Ofsted survey (DfES, 2006) reported that students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) were the least likely group of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) to access suitable provision or effective support in either mainstream or special schools. This survey was carried out in 2005 and 2006 to determine the factors that contribute most to the best

outcomes for children with LDD, including high achievement and enjoyment. Two-day visits were conducted in 74 schools across 17 local authorities representing a range of larger rural, urban and metropolitan areas in England. Mainstream schools, resourced mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units (PRU) were visited and detailed case studies were made in 70 of the sites. The case studies revealed that students with BESD were the most disadvantaged group of students regarding access and support. These students “often had no choice of placement due to the reluctance of mainstream schools to work with pupils with this type of difficulty, especially if it was undefined by any form of assessment” (DfES, 2006, p. 7). Although the report found that many mainstream schools were supporting these students successfully, mainstream schools found these students to be the most challenging to teach and include because they said they disrupted the learning of the other pupils.

Teachers repeatedly cited students’ behavioural difficulties as a barrier to their inclusion (Anderson et al., 2007; Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008; Idol, 2006; Wakefield, 2004). As part of an evaluation to determine the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classes, Idol (2006) interviewed a large number of classroom teachers, special education teachers, instructional assistants and principals in four elementary and four secondary schools in the US. While these educators were generally positive towards including students with SEN in their mainstream classes and had “favourable impressions of the impact of students with disabilities on other students in their classes” (p. 91), they reported that “everything changed when a student had serious behavior problems and was disruptive to the class” (pp. 91-92) and this was the case whether or not the students with the behavioural difficulties had SEN.

An investigation by Forlin et al. (2008) of mainstream teachers’ concerns in relation to coping with inclusion is typical of much of the research which reports teachers’ views on the barriers to inclusion. Using questionnaires, Forlin et al. analysed concerns regarding inclusion identified by 228 teachers from 11 schools within 16 districts across Western Australia. These teachers all taught in mainstream primary and post-primary classrooms that included students with identified intellectual disabilities for most of the school day. The two areas of most concern to these teachers were their own perceived professional competency and classroom issues. The behaviour of the child was the major concern cited under the category of classroom issues. However, this category also included concerns

such as students' "short attention span, inappropriate social skills, poor communication skills and limited speech" (p. 256).

A major report carried out by Farrell et al. (2007) and funded by the DfES, researched the relationship between inclusion and achievement for the total cohort of pupils in mainstream schools across all England at each of the key stages. Using the National Pupil Database, the researchers were able to collate data from students' attainments in national assessments with other educationally relevant data such as entitlement to free school meals and whether or not students were placed on the SEN Code of Practice's graduated approach. Farrell et al. concluded that mainstream schools had nothing to fear regarding the overall academic achievements of their students by including students with SEN in their schools. They found that attainment was independent of levels of inclusivity and was instead influenced by factors "at the population level - such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and mother tongue" (p. 177). However, what is of interest to this review of the barriers and challenges to inclusion is the fact that teachers cited behavioural problems as potential threats to the relationship between inclusion and achievement. As Farrell et al. reported, "The issues of problems relating to behaviours which disrupted lessons surfaced regularly as the most difficult aspect of dealing with children with SEN in the context of raising attainments" (p. 177).

The literature revealed that approaches to school discipline, and in particular, how it relates to maintaining good behaviour and retaining students in school, can be a barrier to inclusion for some students. Skiba and Peterson (2000) note that a zero-tolerance type of discipline in schools is entirely at odds with a policy of including students with behavioural problems in mainstream schools. Likewise, Townsend (2000) notes the need for teachers to be culturally responsive in terms of their expectations for behaviour and discipline. Students from lower socio-economic groups, including those at risk of educational disadvantage, were more likely to report having been suspended than students from other social grouping.

Smyth, McCoy and Darmody (2004) report that students raised the issue of unequal treatment by teachers. Students in streamed schools perceived that teachers favoured hardworking and clever students. Boys are more likely to report being "given out to" by teachers than girls. So also are those with lower literacy and numeracy scores and those

who rate themselves as below average in ability. The NCCA provide the following summary of the research of Smyth et al.:

What emerges in the research is evidence of a widening gap in student experiences on the basis of gender, ability grouping and social class background—with those on ‘the wrong side’ of this gap likely to underachieve, become detached and disaffected with school life, and ultimately to want to leave school before they attain their Leaving Certificate, and possibly even before their Junior Certificate (NCCA, 2006, p. 13).

Downes, Maunsell and Ivers (2006) show that teacher-student relations was the dominant theme emerging from accounts of early school leavers with evidence from student reports that there are a small number of teachers who contribute to an extremely negative experience of school for them. Across a range of focus groups there was consensus among the groups praising almost all teachers in their schools and consensus regarding a small minority of individual teachers being overly authoritarian.

There is a body of literature which relates issues of discipline to school completion or early school leaving. Downes and Maunsell (2007) aimed to identify the individual and environmental factors, which militate against school completion, for young people in south west inner city Dublin. Key findings showed significant differences between schools in the same area with 100 per cent of pupils in one school stating that they wanted to remain in school until Leaving Certificate while in another school 25 per cent of the 5th, 6th class expressed a desire to leave before completion of the Leaving Certificate. Hunger was an issue for secondary school students with a reported conservative estimate of 17 per cent of 1st year students saying that were they too hungry to do their work in school. Anxiety-related problems resulted in lack of sleep, affecting academic performance for 15 per cent of all pupils in four primary schools. Drug abuse figured prominently, with 50 per cent of fifth year pupils stating that they had used illegal drugs. There was a direct link between suicide rate and owing money for drugs. Students’ perceptions of being treated fairly by their teachers declined sharply by 75 per cent in 5th and 6th class, with a significant difference in post-primary schools in the same area on this issue. While suspension from school was a strategy used in some settings, the findings point to the need to resource alternative strategies for young people with disruptive behaviour. The report highlights the need for a strategic vision to replace the fragmented delivery of services. According to the researchers, what is needed is an integrated health and education service for the

community. These findings support the call from Fallon (2005) for the urgent need to coordinate all efforts across both statutory and non-statutory provision, in order to offer real opportunities to children experiencing, or at risk of, educational disadvantage.

O'Brien, cited in Mulholland and Keogh (1990) points out that in the area of educational disadvantage, the ongoing lives of students experiencing social disadvantage, can create a lifestyle and world-view which may be at odds with the predominantly middle class world-view upheld and maintained by the school. She suggests that teachers need to be aware of the cultural and value differences that pupils bring to school. In addition, they need to understand the importance of the community in pupils' lives and be attentive to the conflicts that can arise between school and the community.

Wehlage et al. (1989) identify four core values that constitute a positive school culture: teachers accepting personal responsibility for student outcomes; teachers practising an extended teachers' role; teachers accepting the need to be persistent with pupils who are not ideal pupils and teachers holding a belief that all pupils can learn if one builds on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Creating and maintaining a positive school culture to ensure all students are included, places a big responsibility on teachers. The review of the literature now turns to examining the challenges and barriers to inclusion at teacher /class level.

Teacher/Class Level

There is agreement in the literature that successful inclusion is dependent on the positive attitudes of school personnel, particularly teachers and school leaders, towards including students with SEN and those with any other additional learning needs (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Forlin, 2005; Sharma et al., 2006). Therefore much of the research consists of surveying teachers' attitudes to inclusion and investigating their experiences of including students with additional learning needs. While there is a smaller body of research documenting parents' perspectives, there has been a growth in recent years in the research on students' views of their experiences of inclusion. This section of the review of literature documents the challenges and barriers to inclusion at the level of the teacher /class under the following headings: lack of time; lack of coordination and collaboration; role confusion regarding the SNA; teacher allocation;

teacher attitude and expectations; and teacher education, continuing professional development and teacher competence.

Lack of Time

The issue of time constraints on teachers recurs in the research literature on inclusion (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Smith & Leonard, 2005; Talmor, Reiter & Feigin, 2005). Teachers cite lack of time to carry out administrative duties including planning, differentiating their teaching and meeting with colleagues, as a barrier to inclusion (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Smith & Leonard, 2005). Teachers talk of not having enough time to cater sufficiently for the needs of their pupils with additional learning needs, and cite concerns over IEPs, gaps in students' learning, and lack of readiness for grade level as additional pressures (Gibb et al., 2007; Hart, 1998; Tod & Blamires, 1999). Teachers also report being stressed, guilty and feeling torn in their efforts to give enough time to their students with and without additional learning needs (Talmor et al., 2005).

A study by Anderson et al. (2007) highlights teachers' time-related concerns that are reiterated in much of the research. Anderson et al. surveyed 162 Australian primary teachers regarding their beliefs and perceived needs in relation to inclusion. Forced-choice and open-ended questions provided quantitative and qualitative data about these teachers' attitudes and practices. While the majority of the teachers (85%), listed benefits, 95% reported drawbacks to teaching in inclusive classrooms. Of the four main types of disadvantages listed, two related to the issue of time. These time-related disadvantages were "a) time constraints imposed on teachers and b) time constraints imposed on non-disabled children" (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 138). As well as reporting lack of time for preparation and meetings, the teachers in Anderson et al.'s study spoke of time constraints in class for "disabled and well as non-disabled students" (p. 138), constant interruptions and disruptions, and the teacher having to "spread herself or himself too thin" (p. 138).

The issue of non-pupil contact time for teachers is of particular relevance to Irish teachers and is cited as a barrier to including students with SEN by teachers in the Irish literature on inclusion (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009). In a study by Travers (2007) 117 learning support/resource teachers at primary level detailed how much non-pupil contact time, if any, they had each week. There was wide diversity in the amount of non-pupil contact time

given to the teachers, ranging from none to two and a half hours per week. Of the 117 respondents 24% said they had no non-pupil contact time each week. However, 21% had one hour per week, 13% had an hour and a half, 9% had two hours and a further 10% were given two and a half hours per week for duties of a non-teaching nature. Overall, the mean non-pupil contact time was just over one hour per week. Given the roughly similar jobs of all these support teachers, such diversity is puzzling but not surprising given the lack of official guidance on the issue.

Lack of Coordination and Collaboration

Linked to the barrier of lack of time, but worthy of consideration in its own right, is the key issue of collaboration and coordination between those involved in providing for the needs of students with additional learning needs in mainstream schools. Concerns were raised by key informants, including teachers and school principals, in Drudy and Kinsella's (2009) examination of Ireland's progress towards an inclusive education system. Their analysis of Irish policy and legislation regarding the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools, was augmented by empirical data from interviews with key informants in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Italy and the US. Issues raised by participants included difficulties for educators in coordinating and working collaboratively with the different sectors of the education process. Coordination between the areas of health, welfare and education were perceived as being particularly difficult, especially at post-primary level. Hanco (2004) also identified the difficulty of liaison between professionals as a barrier to inclusion, citing such specific issues as, the time it takes to improve such liaison, difficulties in fostering the attitude and relationships within schools and across the services boundaries, in order to promote collaboration. She claims that "territorialism, is rife within education, health care and social work" (p. 62). As in similar studies, Drudy and Kinsella's (2009, p. 657) participants also cited as barriers, the "the lack of opportunities for, or an unwillingness on the part of school personnel, to engage in collaborative problem-solving relating to the effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs."

However, many study participants have cited the lack of designated non-teaching time in the teachers' day as a major barrier to collaborative practice (Harty, 2001) as mentioned above. There is far less known about how schools actually respond to the pressure to collaborate within the context of such a systemic barrier. A telling finding in Travers

(2007) is the range of practices used by schools to eke out time to collaborate. Over 44% of the schools use learning support/resource teachers to release class teachers, and in a new development nearly 10% of schools reported buying substitute cover to release teachers (Travers, 2007).

There are no official guidelines in the Irish system on non-contact time for support teachers and class teachers are under no official obligation to remain in school once the pupils have gone home. The buying of substitute cover illustrates the degree to which some schools will go to facilitate best practice, while also being a salutary reminder of how new inequalities can emerge, as many schools are in a position financially to contemplate such action. The use of learning support/resource teachers to release other teachers to meet and collaborate raises questions about the best use of their time, while covering for colleagues raises questions about the possible erosion of teaching time. In the Irish context there is no obligation on a resource teacher to provide any in-class support, on a class teacher to look for it or on both to engage in joint planning. There is no formal time in the day for such planning and any collaboration is voluntary, ad hoc and sporadic (Keady, 2003). According to Keady, models of support are generally inflexible and not supportive of collaborative practice.

Role Confusion with regard to the SNA

Another barrier at classroom level, which emerges from the Irish literature, is confusion over the role of the SNA. Logan (2006) found that the SNA's prescribed role can differ from their actual role in the classroom stating "The Department of Education and Science sanctions a care role only for assistants and specifies that their duties must be of a non-teaching nature" (Logan, 2006, p. 93). Shevlin et al. (2008, p. 147) report that SNAs believe their role "has not been properly thought out." Shevlin et al. argue that "there appeared to be an absence of guidance from schools to structure the work of the special needs assistant and define their role and relationship to the classroom teacher and the child who has disabilities and/or SEN" (p. 147). They went on to say that the stipulation that the SNA is only concerned with care needs was perceived "as less than helpful. It was resulting in a variety of practice both among and within schools with little informed knowledge about what constituted best practice" (p. 147). Participants in the study argued that SNAs should also be involved in educational tasks.

However, the literature points out that inappropriate use of support from special needs assistants can also act as a barrier to inclusion, if the student becomes over-reliant on the assistant or where the assistant is also a barrier to social interaction with peers. Idol (2006) notes that a SNA should not be assigned to a single student, as this often ends up being a poor use of resources, and furthermore can lead to over-reliance and a loss of independence for the student. Ofsted (DfES, 2006) in a study of best provision for students with SEN, found examples of teachers delegating teaching responsibilities to assistants to the extent that students were denied specialist support from teachers.

Teacher Allocation

Issues related to teacher allocation are reported in the literature as acting as barriers to the inclusion of students with additional learning needs. The absence of a dedicated coordinator of special educational needs or language support as part of the management structure of Irish schools is cited as a barrier in terms of promoting inclusive practices. According to O’Gorman et al. (2009), the situation varies from school to school, and internationally a dedicated coordinator is seen as a prerequisite for leading change for inclusion (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004).

The temporary nature of English language support posts in schools has been highlighted as problematic (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007; Nowlan, 2008). Nowlan’s research, conducted within second-levels schools, identified a lack of continuity for students, as teachers tended to drift in and out of the post. Devine and Kelly (2006) report that the allocation of an experienced full-time teacher to the position of English language support teacher, within the school, in their study is of huge benefit to the school.

The challenges inherent in teacher allocation are not confined to students from minority ethnic and or minority language backgrounds. Travers (2007) and Stevens and O’Moore (2009) raise issues about the capacity of the general allocation model (DES, 2005c) to adequately meet the support needs of students with mild general learning disabilities in mainstream primary schools. Travers also argues that the disconnect between having the general allocation model at primary and not at post-primary level is not helpful in this regard.

The importance of collaboration between professionals has already been highlighted in this review. Without a team approach in schools, the specialist teacher can feel isolated.

Shevlin et al. argue that

Resource allocation models based on categorisation of disability and informed by an inadequate conceptualisation of disability and/or SEN have exacerbated the situation. There is a real danger that the specialist teacher can become responsible for the whole inclusion process (2008, p. 149).

The barriers at teacher /class level, reviewed so far, such as lack of time and limited opportunities to meet and collaborate, influence teachers' attitudes to inclusion. The review now examines the literature in relation to the crucial element of teachers' attitudes and expectations.

Teacher Attitude and Expectations

Teachers' willingness to accept and provide for students with SEN alongside their peers without SEN is closely related to the challenges of coordination and collaboration outlined above. Negative teacher attitudes are cited as a barrier to including students with SEN throughout the research literature (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Carrington, 1999; Clough & Garner, 2003; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009). Ellins and Porter (2005) studied the attitudes of a group of post-primary, subject teachers towards students with SEN. Analysis of their data, which included documents, records of progress, interviews and questionnaires, revealed that the attitudes of core subject teachers were the least favourable of all teachers studied, towards students with SEN. Ellins and Porter suggest that the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science induced pressure on teachers to achieve high results and ratings in league tables and thus led to a more negative attitude towards students who were perceived to lower the academic standards of the cohort being taught. Students with SEN performed more poorly in Science, where the teachers' attitudes were most negative towards them, than in any other subject. Participants in Drudy and Kinsella's (2009) study also cited as a barrier to inclusion, the overemphasis on academic results, manifested in what one school principal called "the points race" (p. 656).

Gibb et al. (2007) studied a special school-mainstream school partnership where a high level of full-time physical and social inclusion was achieved for fourteen, Key Stage Two students from one special school into 11 mainstream schools. They investigated the factors

that acted as facilitators and barriers to the inclusion process. Negative teacher attitude, which was manifested in “inflexible staff attitudes” was listed as a barrier to inclusion. Descriptions, together with examples of such inflexibility were given by special school and mainstream school personnel, which included SENCOs, classroom teachers, teaching assistants and inclusion team personnel. The following is a sample of the descriptions and examples of “inflexible staff attitudes” given:

“Difficulty changing perception of adequate progress (*“instead of seeing from an autistic point of view, she’s just seeing it as a naughty child...”*.)
Unwillingness to adapt teaching style to fit needs (*“...she wasn’t very proactive in changing her style of teaching...”*.)
unwillingness to adapt behaviour expectations” (Gibb et al., 2007. p. 117).

Conversely, positive teacher attitudes are reported to result in the formulation of inclusive practices. Monsen and Frederickson (2004) found that children with SEN who were taught by teachers who held highly positive attitudes to inclusion, experienced significantly greater levels of classroom satisfaction. Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) studied the influence of teaching experience and professional development on Greek teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. Of the 155 mainstream, primary school, class teachers who were surveyed, those who had been “actively involved in teaching pupils with SEN held significantly more positive attitudes than their counterparts with little or no such experience” (p. 367).

In a similar vein, teacher expectations have been found to have a fundamental influence on the educational attainment of minority ethnic and minority language children (Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998). Ogbu (1992), for instance, highlights how members of the Japanese Buraku outcaste continue to perform poorly in school when compared with the dominant Ippan students, in Japan, yet they achieve to the same level in schools in the United States of America. It is argued that this is because the US educators are unaware of their low social status in their home country, thus they have the same high expectations of them as they do for other Japanese students. Huss-Keeler (1997) provides similar findings in relation to minority ethnic and/or minority language students, with teachers misinterpreting the involvement of Pakistani parents in their children’s education as a sign that the parents are disinterested, in comparison with the way many English parents respond. If teachers are not aware, or culturally responsive to aspects of their behaviour, this can lead to

misinterpretations and the evidence suggests that this then acts as an important barrier for minority ethnic and/or minority language students.

Finally, the research evidence indicates that teachers' own social and economic background may exercise a strong influence on how they react to the status attributes of their students. Research evidence points to the fact that in many cases, teachers have unduly negative expectations of pupils who are experiencing disadvantage (Fleming, 1995). While Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggest that the middle class origins of the majority of the teaching profession may have implications for teachers' interactions with working class pupils, Kennedy (1995) found that teachers had lower expectations of pupils from working class backgrounds despite the fact that they themselves came from a similar working class background. A lack of consciousness of these attitudes on the part of the teacher is also highlighted by Scheerens (1992).

Teacher Education, Continuing Professional Development and Teacher Competence

The issue of whether students with SEN require specialised teaching, or simply “good teaching,” is hotly contested (Lewis & Norwich, 2005). In addition to this debate, much has been written about the need to match teaching to the individual needs of students and to adapt teaching approaches and methodologies for students with SEN in order to ensure progress in learning (Westwood, 2007; Slavin, 2003). This section of the review of the literature shows that teachers have repeatedly cited their lack of confidence and or competence in teaching students with SEN as a barrier to including these students in their mainstream classrooms. This concern spans the full range of teachers' careers from pre-service /initial teacher education, to newly qualified teacher education /induction, along the continuum to in-career /continuing professional development (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Hodkinson, 2007).

Moran (2007) examined the extent to which initial teacher education (ITE) programmes contribute to the development of inclusive attitudes, values and practices. The majority of school principals in his study said that they did not believe that initial teacher education prepared student teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms.

ITE doesn't prepare student teachers to come in and teach children with special needs, or with moderate learning difficulties. There needs to be more in ITE ...on

strategies for ensuring that all children are learning, and also for them to be made aware of how children are learning (Moran, 2007, p. 128).

In a similar vein, research by Gash (2006) confirms that the main difficulties experienced by beginning teachers from a European perspective, are also a feature of beginning teachers in the Irish context.

These difficulties include working with children in difficulty with the curriculum, with children who exhibit difficult behaviour and with children who are different from the average children in the class (Gash, 2006, p. 287).

Teachers' reported lack of competence is not confined to those at the initial or early stages of their teaching career. Many teachers report a lack of confidence and competence in teaching students with SEN, particularly those with behaviour difficulties and those with more complex intellectual disabilities (Farrell et al., 2007; Forlin et al., 2008; Idol, 2006; Tangen, 2005). In the Irish context, O'Donnell (2009) also provides evidence of mainstream teachers stating that they do not have the knowledge and competencies necessary to include children with SEN in the mainstream classroom. What teachers describe as challenges in differentiating their teaching and the curriculum for students with SEN, some parents, as in Runswick-Cole's study (2008), categorise as a lack of flexibility on the part of teachers. Linked to professional competence is the issue of opportunities for continuing professional development. Shevlin et al. (2008, p. 146) report that teachers seek information from parents, other teachers and the internet and they argue that "the short courses and in-service days which teachers and some classroom assistants are currently offered, are inadequate." In addition, there is no requirement for any teacher in special education in Ireland to undertake a mandatory course in professional development or gain specialist qualifications.

The two areas of most concern to teachers in a study by Forlin et al. (2008) included their own perceived professional competency and classroom issues. This study involved an investigation of mainstream teachers' concerns in relation to coping with inclusion and is typical of much of the research which reports teachers' views on the barriers to inclusion. Forlin et al. analysed concerns regarding inclusion identified by 228 teachers from 11 schools within 16 districts across Western Australia. Teachers' perceived professional competency included issues such as:

insufficient pre-service training to cater adequately for a child with an intellectual disability in their classroom,difficulty monitoring other students when attending to the student (with SEN)and reduced ability to teach other students as effectively as they would like when including a student with an intellectual disability in their class (Forlin et al., 2008, pp. 255-256).

A major concern reported by the teachers was their lack of competence in teaching and assessing students' progress. Forlin et al. (2008) also asked the teachers to indicate the type of coping strategies they used and the degree to which they found these strategies useful or not, by answering 37 items related to practical aspects of implementing inclusivity. Eight coping strategies were found to be least useful, even though the teachers employed these strategies. For example, although it was employed by over half of the teachers, the strategy of "keeping others from knowing how bad things really are," was ranked as the least useful coping strategy. Other low ranking coping strategies included "hope the situation will go away or somehow be over with; try to keep feelings to yourself; apply for sick or stress leave; resign from teaching; reduce number of support personnel; leave student to work independently and write down your feelings" (p. 260). These eight coping strategies appear to highlight the teachers' lack of confidence and competence in dealing with students with SEN in that the chosen strategies reduced or abandoned collegial efforts, such as collaboration, discussion and the use of support networks. Interestingly, Forlin et al. found that teachers' concerns regarding their professional competence increased, rather than diminished, with age and experience of and involvement in inclusive educational practices.

Teachers' lack of competence was also reported in Gibb et al's (2007) study of a special school-mainstream school partnership involved in promoting inclusion. In their study of the inclusion process of 14 students from a special school to a number of mainstream schools, reported above in relation to the barrier of teacher attitude, "inappropriate teaching strategies" was identified as one of the barriers to inclusion. "Inappropriate teaching strategies" included teachers' lack of knowledge of the range of teaching strategies and lack of skill in matching teaching strategies to the child. Teachers described their lack of competence thus:

I sort of don't feel I know very much about what I should do to bring out the potential in (the child) ... I try to bring him back but then he's off again ... (Gibb et al., 2007, p. 117).

The literature suggests that teachers' lack of confidence in their professional competence appears to be threatened by particular groups of students. The teachers in Avramidis and Kalyva's (2007) study said they were most challenged when it came to including students with particular SEN and disabilities. While they reported being positive about including students with mild to moderate general learning disabilities, they did not feel as confident or competent about including students with "sensory impairments, autism and brain injury or neurological disorders" (p. 381). They stated that a great deal of classroom adaptation was needed for these students in order to include them in the mainstream class. Teachers' reservations about including students with behavioural difficulties may also be related to their feelings of lack of confidence and competence and this literature was reviewed earlier under the challenges and barriers to inclusion at the level of the school.

Linked to teachers' perception of their professional competence are specific skills involved in the teaching of students with SEN. Much has been written on the importance of mainstream and special education teachers planning jointly for students with SEN and particular emphasis is placed on the integration of the IEP within the mainstream class teachers' programme (Doherty, 2005). However, a lack of awareness of students' IEP targets on the part of mainstream class teachers has been cited as a barrier to inclusion (Hart, 1998; Tod & Blamires, 1999). The literature also stresses the importance of involving students in the IEP process, from the formulation of targets through to the on-going evaluation of progress (Gross, 2000). There is little evidence of this being a common practice in the Irish context.

The role of teachers in implementing empirically validated pedagogical practices has been seen as fundamental to the success of minority language children (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Chisholm (1994) reports that most teachers lack the knowledge and skills to work successfully with minority language children. These skills include developing reflective practitioner skills, cultural competence to interact comfortably with students from diverse cultural backgrounds and an understanding of the interrelationship between language and culture. In relation to minority ethnic and or minority language students, the teachers in McGorman and Sugrue (2007) identified the absence of adequate teacher preparation

courses at either pre-service or in-service level. These findings are mirrored by the work of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (2009a). Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) was given the task of providing training for language support teachers by the Irish government. Ward (2004) indicated mixed responses among teachers to the IILT training but clarified that her sample was not substantial enough to provide any solid conclusions. The provision of English language support training through IILT was criticised by the teachers in McGorman and Sugrue (2007). Wallen and Kelly-Holmes' (2006) data from ten schools in Galway city (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006) indicate a heterogeneous population of English language support teachers in terms of training, with qualifications ranging from fully qualified and recognised primary school teachers, to non-qualified teachers with backgrounds in hotel management and the arts. While some of the teachers in the study did have TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) experience, this was predominantly gained in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) to adults overseas.

Dublin City University (DCU) (2007) caution that being qualified as an English teacher for majority language speakers or having a qualification in English as a Foreign Language, does not automatically ensure that the teacher will possess the skills and competencies necessary to work as an English language support teacher. With regard to mainstream class teachers, Kitching (2006) identifies that over 86 per cent of the teachers in his study had not participated in any form of professional development with regard to teaching reading to minority language pupils. Devine (2005) points out that primary school teachers tended to draw on their experience of teaching Irish, in their work teaching English to minority language children. Further problems emerged with regard to the availability of resource materials with Ward (2004) stating that English language support teachers felt it necessary to draw on materials prepared in the United Kingdom or Canada for supplementary resources.

There is no easy demarcation between the challenges and barriers at teacher /class level, reviewed above, and those reviewed earlier, at school level. Issues such as time, collaboration, definition of roles, teacher competence and teacher attitude, are not the domain of the teacher to the exclusion of the school and vice versa. The same applies to the challenges and barriers to inclusion at the level of the child /family /community, to which the review now turns its attention.

Child/Family and Community Level

Although they are closely related to the challenges and barriers at school and teacher /class level, the research literature reveals a number of concerns and issues which are specific to children, their families and wider communities. The first challenge concerns difficulties for students in relation to social inclusion in mainstream schools, and focuses on how some students experience social barriers. This is followed by a review of two challenges and barriers which relate to parents, namely, lack of information and lack of opportunity or encouragement to be involved in their children's formal education in school.

Social Inclusion in Mainstream Schools

While there is evidence in the literature to suggest that many students with SEN are socially included in mainstream schools (Meyer, 2001; Farrell, 1997), there is a substantial body of research which demonstrates the social isolation and difficulty that some of these students face in forming friendships in mainstream settings. In the context of inclusive education, this is worrying, not least because the notion of social inclusion underpins the philosophy of inclusion, but also because the quality of a person's life is highly dependent on the quality of their social relationships. Exclusion by peers and lack of friendship leads to loneliness, unhappiness and rejection (Chappell, 1994; McVilly et al., 2006). Studies have shown that the loss of a sense of belonging also hinders school performance and decreases motivation for learning and schooling (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Guralnick, Gottman & Hammond, 1996).

Students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds have also been found to experience social isolation. Language and racism can provide barriers to social inclusion. The issue of language difficulties emerged quite strongly in a study by McGorman and Sugrue (2007) with one child reporting:

When you come to school first, you don't have any English, and it's very hard. People come up to you and talk to you and they don't know why you can't understand them. They say to you 'what do you want' and you can't answer them (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007, p. 96).

Similar findings emerge in Vekic (2003), who claims that a lack of English proficiency works as a barrier to preventing interaction with English speaking students. While

McGorman and Sugrue (2007) found only limited experience of racism, this emerged as a clear element in other studies (Devine & Kelly, 2006; Devine, Kenny & MacNeela, 2004; Fanning, Veale & O'Connor, 2001).

A major barrier to inclusion for students with SEN is their difficulty in friendship formation and social interaction with students who do not have SEN. Although inclusion in mainstream can lead to higher academic attainment for some students with SEN, there is research evidence to suggest that many of these students face social exclusion in the mainstream setting (Dyson et al., 2004; Thompson, Whitney & Smith, 1994). Three studies published in the *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, (2007), 22(1) are typical of this type of research. The results from this cross-national research from Germany, Norway and The Netherlands showed that the social position of many students with SEN is a cause for concern. These three studies used sociometric techniques to gather empirical data on the social position of students with SEN in mainstream schools. The students with SEN were found to be at greater risk of being rejected in comparison to their peers who do not have SEN. In the Norwegian study for example, (Frostad & Pijl, 2007), 20% to 25% of students with SEN were not socially included in their peer group. This compares with approximately 8% of their peers, who did not have SEN, who were not included either.

It had been expected that the Norwegian students with SEN, because of Norway's long history of inclusive education, would have held better social positions than their German and Dutch peers. However, this was not the case. A sample of 989 students from 4th (9-10 year olds) and 7th (12-13 year olds) grade, in 15 mainstream schools, participated in the Norwegian study. While Norway has a full inclusion education policy, with very few segregated provisions for students with SEN, and avoids formal labelling of pupils with SEN as much as possible, teachers managed to identify 79 pupils (8% of the sample, 4.2% of which had a formal statement) as having SEN. Analysis of the sociometric mapping of these students was based on three different criteria of social inclusion – peer acceptance, friendships and membership of a cohesive subgroup. The overall results showed that the Norwegian students with SEN were less popular, had fewer friends and participated less often as members of a subgroup or social network. In discussing the three research studies from Germany, Norway and The Netherlands concerning the social position of pupils with

SEN in mainstream schools, Pijl (2007) summarises the main reasons for concern for students with SEN thus:

.... a considerable number of the pupils with special needs face a larger risk of being rejected; decades of experience with inclusive education does not make a difference; social skills training is not an easy way out and teachers and parents underestimate the difficulties pupils with special needs have in this respect (Pijl, 2007, p. 5).

There is some evidence that students with particular SEN and/or disabilities and/or characteristics are more at risk of social isolation than others. For example, children with intellectual disabilities often risk being isolated and rejected by peers (Siperstein & Leffert, 1997; Matheson, Olsen & Weisner, 2007; Mand, 2007; O’Keeffe, 2009). A study by Scheepstra et al. (1999) used a week’s long observation, a sociometric scale for children and teacher questionnaires to study the social position of 23 children with Down Syndrome in 24 primary schools in The Netherlands. The findings show that over half of these students were excluded by their peers in both the class and playground. Examples of the characteristics of a child’s SEN being used as an excuse for bullying and rejection by peers is cited in studies by Nabuzoka (2003) and Thompson et al. (1994). Students with behaviour difficulties are particularly at risk, although it would appear that students without SEN, who also exhibit behaviour difficulties, are equally at risk of social isolation from their peers (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Mand, 2007). The evidence also suggests that the risk of social isolation increases with age and time, making it particularly challenging for the inclusion of students in post-primary schools (Frederickson et al., 2007; O’Reilly, Lancioni & Kierans, 2000). Hall and McGregor (2000) concluded from their study of peer relationships of children with disabilities in an inclusive school, that by the end of primary school many of these children are no longer perceived to be part of the class.

A number of factors act as barriers to social inclusion for students with SEN. Many students with SEN have cognitive, sensory and social difficulties which hinder the processes necessary for social interaction. Such skills as communication, understanding, memory and an ability to differentiate between playfulness and bullying do not usually come naturally to students with SEN. It is not surprising then that they find it difficult to initiate, develop and sustain lasting friendships (Carter & Hughes, 2005; Matheson et al., 2007; Chappell, 1994). According to Kemp and Carter (2002) the successful inclusion of

students with intellectual disabilities depends on the students' ability to demonstrate appropriate social skills. Fox et al. (2004) concluded from their study of 18 students with Down Syndrome in 18 different primary schools, that those students who achieved academically and were able to play appropriately were valued and included on an equal footing with their peers who did not have SEN. They also found that the reverse was true. Those who could not perform or play appropriately tended to be viewed as a burden or a responsibility.

Two further challenges to the social inclusion of students with SEN in the mainstream are discussed in the literature. The first concerns the nature of friendship itself and the second questions the validity and possibility of inclusivity where friendship and social relationships between those with and without SEN are concerned. While "being there" is a necessary condition for social inclusion, it does not necessarily mean that the person "belongs." Much of the research which uses sociometric techniques demonstrates starkly how students with SEN are often accepted, but are rarely chosen as friends to work or play with (Frostdad & Pijl, 2007; Scheepstra et al., 1999). Meyer's (2001) "Frames of Friendship," framework is useful in describing and defining the characteristics of a hierarchy of friendships between children with and without disabilities. This six-point framework ranges from the highest level of friendship, "Best Friend," where friends *talk together three or four times a week on the telephone and visit each other's homes on a regular basis*, to the lowest level of "Ghost or Guest" where *the child is ignored or welcomed or treated as a guest by others in social situations.* There is plenty of evidence to suggest that students with SEN can be socially marginalised even though they are physically present in mainstream settings (Ring & Travers, 2005; Ytterhus & Tossebro, 1999; Farrell, 2000). Even when students are accepted into the mainstream class, they tend not to be involved in the voluntary, mutually reciprocal types of friendships enjoyed by their peers without SEN. Often the relationships are unequal, with the student with SEN taking a passive role. These "friendships" frequently become stereotypical and patronising, with students without SEN taking on the roles of care-giving and "mothering" (Matheson et al., 2007; Meyer, 2001).

The concept of homophily challenges the philosophy of inclusive educational provision from the standpoint of social inclusion for many students with SEN. Homophily refers to the notion that people's "social relationships show their preferences to associate with

similar peers” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001, cited in Frostad & Pijl, 2007, p. 17). This is true of adults as well as children (Chappell, 1994) and students in school tend to associate with students similar to themselves. When they are not assigned to specific groupings by the teacher, the research shows that children with SEN tend to associate with each other during unstructured activities within school (Buysse, Goldman & Skinner, 2002; Guralnick et al., 1996; Siperstein et al., 1997;). Strong and persuasive arguments have been made in favour of the notion of homophily, with Chappell (1994) arguing that “the low value accorded to friendships between disabled people is very damaging to their individual self-esteem” (p. 419). Chappell maintains that relationships between people with learning disabilities deserve far greater recognition and value and that “the debate which surrounds the issue of the social relationships of people with learning difficulties needs to be re-defined” (p. 420), in response to a social theory of disability and the principle of normalisation. Her research shows that, given the choice, many people with learning difficulties would choose a segregated, over an inclusive setting because of the quality of social relationships that can exist between like-minded people. The work of Norwich and Kelly (2004) supports this view.

Challenges and Barriers for Parents

Many of the challenges already cited by teachers in studies reviewed at teacher /class level are also identified by parents as barriers to including their children with SEN in the mainstream school. For example, parents comment on negative attitudes on the part of some mainstream schools, on the lack of resources in mainstream settings and on the lack of flexibility in teaching approaches, all barriers cited by teachers. However, some of the challenges cited by parents are specific to parents and these are mainly concerned with the nature and degree to which parents feel they are involved with and encouraged to participate in the relevant educational and related services provided for their children. Two major themes emerge from the research literature in terms of barriers to inclusion related to parents. These are lack of information for parents and lack of opportunity or encouragement to be involved in their children’s formal education in schools.

Lack of Information for Parents

There is research evidence to show that many parents experience unwillingness on the part of schools and related service providers to share information and involve parents in decision-making about educational provision for their children (Runswick-Cole, 2008).

Cook and Swain (2001) explored the views and experiences of parents of 65 children whose special school for primary and post-primary pupils with physical disabilities was being closed by a LEA in northern England, in accordance with a policy of inclusion. Although almost all these parents declared that they were in favour of inclusion as an ideal for their children and were positive towards a philosophy of including them in mainstream schools, they reported serious dissatisfaction and anger of their treatment by the LEA. The parents said that they were not sufficiently brought into planning for the transition of their children to mainstream schools from the beginning of the process. They described the information they received from the LEA as “infrequent, jumbled, muddled and conflicting” (p. 193). In this case study, the authors traced the parents’ journey from confusion and powerlessness, to scepticism and doubt about the truth of the information given by the LEA, to acrimonious dealings ending up with some parents seeking recourse through the courts to stop the re-organisation of educational provision for their children. Cook and Swain concluded that the notion of partnership and collaboration with parents was seriously compromised from the parent’s point of view. In addition, they argued that:

... the ideas of this knowledgeable group of parents were either unheard or ignored. They became a seriously under-utilised resource (p. 197).

Lack of Opportunity or Encouragement for Parental Involvement

Many parents /families have written about their experiences of having a child with SEN and have, amongst other feelings, expressed concern and anxiety about their children (Ariel & Naseef, 2006; Satterlee Ross & Jolly, 2006). Goody (1992), cited in Cook and Swain (2001) argue that a child with SEN can become a “way of life” for his or her parents and that “if that (way of life) is threatened, then that family’s whole existence is threatened” (p. 195). Runswick-Cole’s (2008) interpretation of her data from interviews with 24 parents and seven professionals, regarding parents’ attitudes to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream and special schools, has resonances with Cook and Swain’s conclusions, cited above. Drawing on the social model of disability, Runswick-Cole suggests that despite the movement in policy towards a much more inclusive education system, her parents’ experiences of inclusion continued “to be fragile” (p. 173). Partnership with parents has long been recognised as a vital component in a child’s education. The importance of this partnership is even more crucial where children with SEN are concerned (Dale, 1996).

The Lack of Integration and Coordination of Services

The lack of integration and coordination of services for children with SEN and their families is cited in the research as a barrier to inclusion (Smith & Rose, 1994). Buysse, Wesley and Keyes (1998) studied the factor structure of perceived barriers and supports associated with early childhood inclusion from the perspective of 201 early education and intervention professionals and 287 parents of young children with disabilities in North Carolina. The researchers used a rating scale with 34 barriers and 26 supports which represented conditions that facilitate or inhibit inclusion. While the purpose of the study was to examine the psychometric properties of the rating scale, a number of barriers and supports perceived by professionals and parents were identified. Barriers associated with the coordination and integration of services for young children with disabilities and their families included:

limited involvement of family members in planning special services, lack of communication with families of children with disabilities...and lack of planning time to coordinate special services (p. 180).

Having identified family involvement as critically important for the implementation of inclusion, Buysse et al. claimed that:

the findings of this study suggest that limited time for family involvement and collaboration among parents and professionals presents a monumental barrier to service coordination and integration in inclusive early childhood settings (p. 181).

Parents' frustration over the lack of coordination and integration of services is a recurrent theme in the research literature (Pinkus, 2005).

Challenges and Barriers for Parents, Families of Students from Minority Ethnic and or Minority Language Backgrounds

When teachers involve minority parents as partners in their children's education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children with positive academic consequences (Cummins, 1986, p. 27). McGorman and Sugrue found some evidence of a commitment to the maintenance of first languages on the part of parents but also revealed evidence of the difficulties associated with this. The teachers in McGorman and Sugrue (2007) highlighted that the inability to communicate with parents who have

little or no proficiency in English seriously hampers their work. This reinforces the findings of Kitching (2006) that almost half of his sample regarded their communication with EAL pupils' homes as being of lesser quality than communication with Irish pupils' homes. Parents who appear to be uninvolved in their children's education are often criticised for not caring about their children. We know, however, from the work of O'Brien (1987, 2004) in Ireland that working class parents, for instance, do care about their children's education, but lack the particular form of dominant cultural capital that would otherwise allow them to act on that care through engaging more fully with schools. Wong Fillmore (1983) found similar issues with regard to parents of minority ethnic and minority language children in the United States and analogous findings emerge from McGorman and Sugrue (2007) in their work with parents. Yet minority language parents are interested in their children's education (Azmitia et al., 1994 (as cited in Nieto, 2004, p. 115); Kenner, 2004; Sohn & Wang, 2006; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007; Archer & Francis, 2007).

Azmitia et al. (1994) explain that even though everyday learning activities in the home and families' aspirations for children's futures were crucial resources that could provide school home linkages, there was a general lack of awareness among school staff concerning these resources. In the context of that study, it also emerged that while the Mexican-American families' aspirations for their children were as high as those of European-American families, the former often had little comprehension of how to help their children attain those aspirations (Azmitia et al., as cited in Nieto, 2004, p. 115). Other problems with regard to the involvement of parents in their children's education include language barriers, work schedules, transportation, childcare, time constraints, discomfort levels with an unfamiliar and maybe intimidating system and even a perception that they are not wanted (Brilliant, 2001).

Language barriers also emerged as an issue in McGorman and Sugrue (2007), with one of the parents, Anna, believing that the single biggest barrier to involvement is the lack of English language among newcomer parents (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007, p. 101). This finding about the linguistic barriers echoes findings in the international literature. Sohn and Wang (2006, p. 128), for example, point out in their study of Korean parents' involvement in schools that, "... irrespective of the participants' length of U.S. residency, the language barrier was the most frequently cited problem related to contacting teachers or

participating in school activities.” Any developments with regard to parental involvement which include an aspect of the home visits by a member of school staff, or school proxy, must also be aware of what Kouritzin (2006, p. 22) alerts us to as “the humiliation of being forced to speak a second language badly in their own home.” A further point for consideration emerges from Valdés work with ten Mexican immigrant families in the Southwest of the United States. Valdés argues that simply bringing parents to schools will not eradicate racist or classist responses that some educators and other members of the school community might have towards migrants (as cited in Nieto, 2004, p. 116). To this end, an awareness of the pernicious presence of racism and the inequality experienced by many minority ethnic and minority language parents within our schools and within wider society must remain to the fore. Instead of problematising parental involvement with first languages, Necochea and Cline (2000, p. 323) advise that parents need to be included as integral members of a primary language support programme, allowing schools to capitalize on the strengths and knowledge base that various community members bring to the educational process.

One method that is used to include and involve parents is to have their children act as translators or language brokers. This method is not without problems however. Identified negative outcomes include hearing information more suitable for more mature members of the family; confusing messages about when it is suitable to act in an adult role and in a child role within the family; developing negative attitudes towards the first language when they identify the majority language as that of power; and if the children cannot interpret properly, then this can challenge positive self-esteem (Baker, 2003). Language brokering can have significant effect on traditional intergenerational authority relationships within families (De Ment, Buriel & Villaneuva, 2005, p. 260). McQuillan and Tse (1995) identify how children often took on parental roles by signing school notes without their parents seeing the note or bypassing parents with small school concerns for their younger siblings. This role reversal has been characterized as children acting as ‘surrogate parents.’ The evidence with regard to the effect of language brokering on child-parent relationships is contradictory. Umaña-Taylor (2003) for instance argues that it can lead to harmful role reversal in that parents can become dependent on their children. According to De Ment et al. (2005), language brokers feel a strong commitment not to let their parents down. Some children can resent having to spend their free time doing translation work for their parents

while others reported feeling ashamed of their parents because of their lack of proficiency in English (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Hall & Sham, 2007).

Challenges and Barriers for Parents /Families of Students Experiencing Educational Disadvantage

Lack of parental involvement has also been mentioned as a barrier in relation to students experiencing educational disadvantage. However, in relation to educational disadvantage, many students' home cultures differ significantly from the culture of their teachers and the school. Lower level expectations of some parents may arise as a result of their own negative experiences of schooling or what Hannon and O' Riain (1993, p. 200) describe as "family culture, fatalism, powerlessness and incapacity to address ones' own problems." Fleming (1995) suggests that parents' lack of involvement can arise from confusion as to what is meant by involvement, in that their involvement is not specifically defined or linked to particular outcomes. Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggest that parents of pupils from disadvantaged contexts are as interested, as any parent, in their children's education, though many teachers may think otherwise. According to Drudy and Lynch, teachers often point to parents' lack of attendance at meetings as an example of their lack of interest. However, Drudy and Lynch argue that this is not an accurate reflection of parents' interest but often relates more to educational experiences during their own schooling. O'Brien cited in Mulholland and Keogh (1990) suggests that schools should be much more aware of, and sensitive to, the parents and students who are at risk of educational disadvantage, and they should strive to understand the positive and negative contributions they make toward their children's education and learning.

This review of the literature has so far reported challenges and barriers to inclusion at three different, but intrinsically related levels, as far as students with additional learning needs in the mainstream school are concerned, namely at school, teacher /class and child /family /community level. However, the concentration has been on the views of adults in the educational process. It is therefore appropriate that the perspective of the key stakeholder, the child, is now given voice.

Children's Voices

Introduction

Taking account of children's views is a "practice which is perceptibly growing and which represents an important and transformative paradigm shift" (Greene, 2006, p. 14). This section of the literature review will critically discuss the importance and significance attributed to children's voice as evidenced by their inclusion in educational and welfare policy and research. The relevant literature on the views of children and young people with regard to the challenges and barriers to inclusion will be explored. In addition, the factors which help in overcoming these challenges and barriers will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Children's Voice

The concept of children's rights evolved during the 1980s giving prominence to the role of children as active participants in the construction of their daily lives. From a theoretical viewpoint, the changed perspective on children is grounded in the "new sociology of childhood." The pioneers of this concept (Prout & James, 1990; Qvortrup et al., 1994) see childhood as socially constructed, not as naturally and biologically given. A linked principle is that children should be seen as social actors and agents in their own lives, rather than passive recipients of adults' protection and care and of research, policy and provision of services.

The importance of taking account of children is also well reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This rights-based concept of childhood challenges adults not only to act in the best interests of children, but also to involve children in decision-making. Article 12 of the UNCRC enshrines children's right to be heard in all matters affecting them and to be represented in all relevant proceedings. The State has a duty "... to assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Lundy (2007) proposes a model for understanding the full extent of Article 12 (1). This model considers the inter-related factors of Space, Voice, Audience and Influence which proposes that all children should be encouraged and invited to express their views without experiencing discrimination and that children's views must be listened to and acted upon as appropriate. Lundy (2007) argues that Article 12 is one of the most commonly misunderstood of all the provisions of the CRC. "As a minimum, those working in the

education sector need to know that Article 12 exists; that it has legal force; and that it applies to all educational decision-making” (Lundy, 2007, p. 4). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) reinforces this right of children with disabilities to express their views freely “on an equal basis with other children.”

Children’s rights are increasingly given formal recognition in Ireland, rhetorically, if not in reality (Greene, 2006). Recent developments include the setting up of the National Children’s Strategy-Our Children Their Lives (Ireland, 2000) and the National Children’s Office to improve all aspects of children’s lives by leading and supporting the implementation of the Strategy. The goals of the National Children’s Strategy reflect human rights principles and include the right of children to a voice “in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity” (p. 30). Children were invited to make submissions to the development of the National Children’s Strategy. The National Children’s Advisory Council was also set up in May, 2001 as an independent advisory body in relation to the implementation of the Children’s Strategy. In December, 2003, an Ombudsman for Children was appointed to promote the rights and welfare of children and investigate complaints against public bodies such as schools. These complaints can be made by a child, or by a parent or person on behalf of the child. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) in its most recent Concluding Observations in relation to Ireland acknowledges the measures taken in Ireland to promote the respect for the views of the child but notes that a high number of complaints received by the Ombudsman for Children relate to a lack of respect for the views of children. The Committee recommends that the State party must ensure that children have “the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight, in particular in families, schools and other educational institutions, the health sector and in communities.” Currently, a seven-year national longitudinal study of children in Ireland, which considers the views of children, is in process. This study has been described as “the most important and substantial research initiative ever undertaken with children in Ireland” (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2009).

The challenge of ensuring that all children enjoy the right to express their views and the complexity of the issue has been acknowledged by Porter and Lewis (2004): “There is a danger that in the rhetoric of rights we oversimplify the complexity of gaining the views of

all children including those with learning disabilities” (p. 157). Engaging children in decision-making in relation to matters which affect them was given careful consideration in the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment No 9 on the Rights of the Child with Disabilities. They concluded that “children should be equipped with whatever mode of communication to facilitate expressing their views.” This accords with Article 13 of the UNCRC which states that children have a right to impart information “either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice”. In Ireland, a joint initiative by statutory and non-government sectors (NCO, CRA & NYCI, 2005) produced guidelines on how to involve children and young people in policy development. While these guidelines are important for promoting the participation of children, models of good practice must be identified and developed in Ireland for engaging children with diverse needs. Accessing the views of children with diverse needs will present enormous challenges to researchers who are seeking their views and considerable skill is required to access their views in an ethical and professional way (Whyte, 2006).

Children’s own views and perspectives have been markedly absent from policy debates and discourse in education (Devine, 2004). Traditional concepts of children’s rights and schooling in Ireland have focused on their rights to education rather than their rights to have a voice within the school system (Devine, 2003). It is interesting to note that while children were not included as one of the partners in the consultation process for either the Education Act (1998a) or the Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999c), there is evidence in these documents of the importance of including children’s voices in matters affecting them. An underlying principle of the revised Primary School Curriculum, for example, is that the child is an active agent in his or her learning. The *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process* (NCSE, 2006) state that “students should be supported and encouraged to participate fully in the IEP process” (p. 55). The UK government’s strategy for SEN (DfES, 2004) includes putting children at the heart of personalized learning and involving young people with SEN in decisions about their education.

There is evidence from the research that children can provide a valuable insight into the life of a school for students with diverse needs. Studies including children and young people with a range of SEN (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; O’Donnell, 2003; Rose & Shevlin, 2004; Thomson & Gunter, 2009) and from minority

ethnic and minority language groups (Devine et al., 2004; McDaid, 2009; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007; Vekic, 2003) demonstrate their capacity to inform policy and practice in matters affecting their lives. The views of a random sample of 114 young people aged 11-14 years from schools, EOTAS/AEP (Education Other than at School/Alternative Education Provision) projects and youth councils throughout Northern Ireland on exclusion in schools “reflected principles of social justice and equality of opportunity” (Knipe, Reynolds & Milner, 2007, p. 422). The findings indicate that students have a very valid role to play in decisions relating to educational issues such as suspension and expulsion. The absence of children’s voice in research and discourse is no longer tenable in light of policy and legislation which emphasises the right of children to express their views in matters that affect them. The inclusion agenda is a matter that affects children in school. Children’s views in relation to the challenges and barriers to inclusion will now be discussed.

Challenges and Barriers to Inclusion

Introduction

From the perspective of children and young people, much of the discourse on the challenges and barriers to inclusion and what can be put in place to overcome these challenges and barriers focuses on the centrality of social inclusion. The importance of researching the social dimension of inclusion has been expressed in a paper by Koster et al. (2009). An analysis of the literature confirmed the assumption of the authors that the social dimension of inclusion is described in numerous ways using terms such as social integration, social inclusion and social participation, which do not differ in practice. Koster et al. have suggested the use of a concept to describe the social dimension of inclusion at primary level, that of social participation which is defined as:

Social participation of pupils with special needs in regular education is the presence of positive social contact/interaction between these children and their classmates; acceptance of them by their classmates; social relationships/friendships between them and their classmates and the pupils’ perception that they are accepted by their classmates (p. 135).

The authors emphasise that the importance of each of the four themes in the definition might differ for individual students and that there may be entirely different themes for secondary students. The following findings from the literature on students’ perspectives on

the challenges and barriers to inclusion, which have been organized under the headings of bullying, friendships, teachers, learning assistants, supports and facilities, access to communication and consultation processes, elucidate some of the themes in the definition.

Bullying

The issues of prejudice and bullying emerge in the research literature as a barrier to inclusion. Bullying has been defined as the intentional and repeated harm of a person who is physically or psychologically weaker than the perpetrator (Olweus, 1991). Bullying behaviour can present as physical aggression (eg. hitting, pushing over), verbal aggression (eg. name-calling, “slagging,” racist remarks) and emotional harassment such as exclusion and spreading damaging rumours. When students themselves were invited to define the term “bullying,” similar behaviours were described (Thomson & Gunter, 2009). In this particular study, students in an innovative secondary school in the north of England worked with student researchers on the topic of bullying. The students as researchers used focus group questions and photographs to stimulate group discussions with random groups of students from each level. A broad definition of what counted as bullying emerged from the findings and included segregation around clothing and shoes, sexist and racist name-calling, isolation, rejection and exclusion of students from peer groups. The definition also included pushing, kicking, happy-slaps and texting. While there were no instances of “very serious bullying” such as “systematic physical and verbal abuse and acute persecution of a student by another or a group” (p. 191), focus groups identified “low-level bullying” such as “name-calling, isolation and minor physical shoving and pushing” (p. 191).

A key finding from the comprehensive longitudinal study, *Growing Up in Ireland – The Lives of 9-Year Olds* (ESRI, 2009b), tracking the lives of 8,500 nine-year-olds, indicates that 40% of this age cohort reported being a victim of bullying in the past year while only 23% of mothers reported this to be the case. Perspectives of students and other stakeholders were sought in another Irish longitudinal study of the first three years of post-primary education (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007). Many students in first year reported bullying and 42.1% of students recommended a reduction in bullying as a way to help them settle in to school (NCCA, 2004). Quieter students, physically immature students and members of minority groups (including Travellers) were perceived by students to be more at risk of being bullied.

Specific links between bullying and inclusion are evident in the research literature. Children with SEN have been identified as being particularly at risk of isolation, victimisation and relationship difficulties (Nabuzoka, 2003; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Dyson et al., 2004; Gibb et al., 2007). Students with mobility problems and their parents were interviewed by Pivik, McComas and LaFlamme (2002) to identify barriers to inclusion. They identified four factors which included physical limitations and issues relating to social inclusion: “physical environment,” “intentional attitudinal barriers” (bullying and isolation), “unintentional attitudinal barriers” (lack of knowledge) and “physical limitation.” These findings were corroborated in a study by Shah (2007) where young people with a physical disability reported feelings of loneliness and isolation because of “attitudinal prejudice” (p. 437) that prevented them from building positive formal and social relationships with non-disabled peers. Several of these students also mentioned being victims of overt and covert bullying by non-disabled peers in mainstream schools. The vulnerability to bullying in children with a history of speech and language difficulties was investigated by Lindsay, Dockrell and Mackie (2008) in a UK sample of 12-year-old children from self-reports and reports from parents and teachers. Comparisons were made with matched groups of typically developing children and children with SEN. High levels of victimisation were found across all three groups with 28% reporting that they had experienced one type of physical bullying more than once in the previous week. However, the data suggest that secondary schools students with a history of speech and language difficulties are not specifically vulnerable to being bullied. The views of students with mild general learning difficulties (MGLD) have also been considered in the challenges to inclusion. Norwich and Kelly (2004) conducted a study of 101 children with MGLD aged 10 to 14 years, 50% of whom were attending special schools and the remainder attending mainstream schools. Findings from analysis of semi-structured interviews of students of their perspectives on schooling indicated that 83% (84) of the sample experienced “bullying” which was classified as physical, verbal or teasing. Students from special schools experienced more bullying from peers outside their school than students in mainstream schools. The authors concluded that “bullying” was pervasive for students with MGLD regardless of placement. In contrast, the analysis of a case study in Ireland of a student with severe learning difficulties (Ring & Travers, 2005) indicated that while the student was not teased or bullied in a mainstream primary rural school, he was not socially included because of the lack of knowledge of learning disability displayed by non-disabled peers.

Bullying also appeared to be “rife” in a study of young people from marginalised communities (Rose & Shevlin, 2004, p. 159). Drawing on two large studies of disaffected and disadvantaged primary and post-primary students, Riley (2004) found a difference in views between staff and students. Staff held more positive views than students on many issues. For example, staff under-estimated the feelings of students about playground safety and bullying. Whereas 42% of Year 6 students said they had “been bullied or had nasty things said to them” (p. 175) during the previous two weeks, the average estimate among primary teachers was just 11%.

Studies have also attempted to hear the voices of minority ethnic and minority language children (Fanning et al., 2001; Vekic, 2003; Devine et al., 2004; Ward, 2004; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007). Though not all of these studies focused exclusively on educational issues, they provide a clear insight into how those children experienced education in Ireland. There is some evidence for example of discrimination and racism of minority ethnic and minority language children in Ireland. While McGorman and Sugrue (2007) found only limited experience of racism, this emerged as a clear element in other studies with reports that “S...’s big brother shouts the n... word after me when I call to her house” (Fanning et al., 2001, p. 57), “... there’s a girl in my class and she keeps saying I’m a black monkey” (Devine et al., 2004, p. 192) and: “... if you were a Palestinian and you came over here you’d get slagged. Nobody here likes them. People here are starting to hate Muslims. Like the Americans. It was on the news it was. I wouldn’t like to be a Muslim. They say they’re bastards” (Devine et al., 2004, p. 192). This discrimination and racism has also been extended into the linguistic sphere with, for instance, one child highlighting that “... one day me and my baby sister were going to Spar together, and they started making fun of our language” and one other child reporting that “Sometimes I heard a boy in our class: “I don’t like these girls because they’ve a different language and a different colour” (Devine & Kelly, 2006, p. 132). Young people from the travelling community have also been the subject of peer prejudice and hostile attitudes (Lodge & Lynch, 2003; Rose & Shevlin, 2004).

Friendships

Friendships and peer relations in the lives of children are a key aspect of social inclusion (Dyson et al., 2004). Studies of the attitudes of non-SEN pupils’ to inclusion revealed

positive attitudes (Shevlin & O'Moore, 2000) and positive relationships (Helmstetter, Peck & Giangreco, 1994; Bunch & Valeo, 2004) when students with disabilities were placed in their classrooms. Reports by students with SEN also support these findings (O'Donnell, 2003; Palikara, Lindsay & Dockrell, 2009). However, there is evidence to support the view that such relationships can be qualitatively different from relationships between typically developing age-mates, with some studies reflecting a caring, helping role (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Meyer et al., 1998) characterised by pity and sympathy (Rose & Shevlin, 2004; Devine, 2003) rather than one of reciprocal friendship. In contrast, a small-scale study by Hodkinson (2007) examined fifty-three non-disabled primary school children's conceptualisation of disability. It is argued from the findings that non-disabled children have a narrow conceptualisation of disability and participants held negative attitudes to disability and to disabled children. These attitudes did not change with greater interaction with children with disabilities. Negative attitudes were also reported when young people with different types of physical disability and from a variety of social class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, were interviewed in a study by Shah (2007). Students in the sample emphasised the importance of friendship and some reported feelings of isolation and loneliness in mainstream schools because of access problems and attitudinal prejudice which prevented them from forming friendships with non-disabled students. Students in this particular study who had experienced both special school and mainstream considered it easier to build friendships and social relationships in special schools and colleges. Research by McDaid (2009) highlights friendship as a significant factor in helping minority language children feel included in Irish primary schools. However, lack of language proficiency can act as a barrier to forming friendships. The issue of language difficulties emerged quite strongly in McGorman and Sugrue (2007) with one child reporting, for instance: "When you come to school first, you don't have any English, and it's very hard. People come up to you and talk to you and they don't know why you can't understand them. They say to you "what do you want" and you can't answer them" (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007, p. 96). Similar findings emerge in Vekic (2003), in addition to a further identification that a lack of English proficiency works as a barrier to preventing interaction with English speaking students.

The research literature, however, cautions against making generalised statements about friendships and young people with disabilities. In a study by Curtin and Clarke (2005) researchers collaborated with nine young people with a physical disability to write their

life stories. Their views, preferences and strategies for developing friendships varied considerably from one individual to another. Meyer (2001) explored this issue further in a study of the nature of friendships for both students with disabilities and non-disabled peers. Meyer devised the concept of “frames of friendship” demonstrating the various levels and types of friendship that everybody experiences including “best friend,” “regular friend,” “just another child,” “I’ll help,” “inclusion child,” “ghost or guest.” Problems may arise where the social experiences of children rest exclusively within certain frames.

Friendship in terms of “homophily” has also been explored in the literature. The importance and value of these “lasting friendships” are evident in a study by O’Keeffe (2009, p. 155) of the inclusion of six students with moderate general learning difficulties in primary and post-primary mainstream schools.

Teachers

Evidence from the research literature highlights the importance students place on relationships with teachers and the craft of teaching as factors in inclusion and their engagement with school. In a study of primary children’s experience of school in terms of citizenship and their participation in decisions relating to the control of their time, space and interactions in school, Devine (2002) found that “Children’s accounts of their interactions with teachers were embedded within a discourse of subordination” (p. 313). Children perceived themselves as having subordinate status within the school. Their levels of dissatisfaction with teacher-pupil interactions were mediated by both age and social class. Older children and those from middle-class backgrounds were more likely to assert their right to express their views and be heard. The paternalistic role of teachers emerged in the study where the focus was on the needs of children rather than on their rights. Devine argues that the dynamics of power between adults and children needs to be addressed in the realisation of children’s rights. Negative pupil-teacher interactions were also reported by Riley (2004) who studied a large sample of primary and post-primary students in schools located in areas of high social deprivation. Many students commented on the kindness and friendliness of teachers. In contrast, many also (especially older Year 10 students) had negative things to say. They resented teachers who talked down to them, blamed them unjustly, shouted at them, or punished the whole class and therefore the innocent as well as the guilty. Students disliked “boring” lessons that involved no practical

activity or discussion. The author concludes that “many pupils find too many lessons arid and demotivating, forcing them into a passive learning role” (p. 178).

In a study of what inclusion means to students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in mainstream secondary schools, Humphrey and Lewis (2008) identified lack of differentiation for the “distinct needs” (Norwich & Lewis, 2005) of students with ASD as a barrier to inclusion. These young people found the school environment to be distressing because of the “pushing and shoving” (p. 137) in the corridors, being placed in noisy and disruptive classrooms and unplanned changes to the school day. Inadequate levels of differentiation of the curriculum were also reported by students with a range of disabilities in a study by Woolfson et al. (2007). Analysis of the findings from a postal questionnaire indicated that a large number of students felt that they do not have adequate access to the shared curriculum of mainstream schools. This finding is supported by O’Keeffe (2009) in a study of the inclusion of students with moderate general learning difficulties in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

Very specific issues pertaining to teacher-student relations are highlighted by students in the first three years of their post-primary education (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007). Poor teachers are perceived as those who don’t explain things in class, whose pace of instruction is too fast, who set too much work, give out to or ignore students, use an uninteresting style, rely heavily on the textbook, and who cannot maintain order in class. Students with physical disabilities who had experienced special and mainstream education in a study by Shah (2007) felt that the slower pace of work and the support available in special school was more tailored to their needs than in mainstream schools.

Some examples of very poor pedagogical practice also emerge from studies of minority ethnic and minority language children in Ireland. One parent interviewed in the Fanning et al. (2001) study noted:

... there were three (asylum seeker) boys in Junior infants. The teacher was sitting with the Irish children reading letters. The three boys were in another corner playing with blocks because they couldn’t understand. How will they come to understand if they don’t do the same as other children? I thought school shouldn’t be like this for my son, he should sit with other children” (p. 57).

In the same report, a 16 year old male student with poor written English disclosed that he doesn't understand his homework and as a result "the teacher doesn't ask me for it, knowing I can't do it" (p. 57).

Learning Assistants

While Learning Support Assistants (LSA) and Special Needs Assistants (SNA) have been a welcome addition to support the diversity in classrooms, particularly for students with SEN, perspectives of students indicate that this support can also act as a barrier to inclusion (Shah, 2007; Woolfson et al., 2007; Humhrey & Lewis, 2008). Students with physical disability at post-primary and college level who were interviewed about their experiences of mainstream and special schools (Shah, 2007) pointed out that the support from teaching assistants was often a barrier to learning and "an invasion of their personal space and relationships with peers of their own age" (p. 435). One young participant in the study, Cheka, aged 15, perceived that the support from teaching assistants restricted her engagement in normal activities with her peers. Shah (2007) argues that this has the potential to hinder the formation of friendships. This finding is shared by Woolfson et al. (2007) in a study where the views of a range of students with disabilities were accessed through postal questionnaires of 290 students and focus groups. Students expressed a desire to work independently and to negotiate with teachers about the amount and type of support they receive. Students with physical disabilities in particular would prefer to ask for help rather than receiving it without being consulted. In a study of four mainstream schools in England, Humphrey and Lewis (2008), found that the presence of the LSA allowed some teachers to avoid their responsibility for differentiating students' work. In some cases, students with ASD, who were supported by a LSA had no actual interaction with teachers. This was also the case in Shah's (2007) study where sometimes teaching assistants were required to teach the students with disabilities, while the qualified teacher taught the rest of the class. Similarly, in a study by Norwich and Kelly (2004), students reported receiving more help with their learning overall from teaching assistants than teachers with mainstream boys reporting much less help from their teachers than boys in special schools. Concerns about quality of teaching were expressed in an Ofsted report (DfES, 2006) where a key finding reported that pupils in mainstream schools where the main type of provision was provided by teaching assistants were less likely to make good academic progress than those students who had access to specialist teaching in the schools that were studied.

Lack of Supports and Facilities

In a study by Shah (2007) of the perceptions of 30 students aged 13-25 years with a physical disability of their experiences of mainstream and special schools, several young people praised the facilities in special schools but felt that mainstream schools lacked such facilities and supports. Facilities included physiotherapy, speech therapy, accessible swimming/hydrotherapy pools which were perceived to be crucial to the future health and independence of young people with a physical disability. Lack of access to transport in mainstream schools also hindered the inclusion of students with a physical disability in activities such as work experience. Similar to other studies (Kenny, McNeela & Shevlin, 2003; O'Donnell, 2000), the physical environment of the school was considered to be a barrier to inclusion, hindering their independence and making them dependent on non-disabled peers. Shah (2007) argues that this reinforces the notion that people with disabilities are dependent on and "passive recipients of other people's charity" (p. 434). Accessibility to education by students with a range of disabilities was explored in a study by Woolfson et al. (2007). Homework that is difficult to complete and lack of support to discuss homework was perceived as a barrier to accessing education for focus-group participants. While physical access to school appeared to be an area of greatest satisfaction for students in this study, those with physical disabilities expressed the problem of negotiating large crowds and they suggested that teachers need to consider the fact that it takes them longer to move around the school than non-disabled peers. Lack of signage in schools was also mentioned as a barrier to physical access. Students with physical disabilities disliked being segregated from their peers during PE because they are unable to participate in the same activities as the rest of the class.

Access to Communication and Consultation Processes

Communication and collaboration between students and staff regarding educational issues are essential (Shah, 2007; Riley, 2004; Knipe et al., 2007; Thomson & Gunter, 2009; Devine & Kelly, 2006). In a study by Woolfson et al. (2007) where a postal questionnaire was used to gather the views of young people with disabilities, only half the responses indicated that they were invited to attend their own review meetings and of these, 23% of students claim that they have not been encouraged to express their views at the meeting. These results support the findings of Shevlin et al. (2002). It is interesting to note that when the views of young people were accessed through focus groups of students with similar disabilities in the study by Woolfson et al. students reported that they are included

in review meetings and they are given an opportunity to express their views during these meetings.

CHAPTER 3: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

This chapter focuses on practices and policies, which seek to overcome, reduce or mitigate the challenges and barriers to inclusion. These are described at a number of levels: the school level, the teacher/class level and the child/family/community level. Again there is overlap between the levels and system level policies interact with each. Issues in relation to the voice of the child are dealt with separately. In reviewing the literature on what works in relation to addressing the challenges and barriers to inclusion there is a remarkable consistency across most studies. However, it is important to appreciate contextual elements when considering factors that work across different school and national situations. In terms of strategies for inclusion Hamre (2007, p. 52) argues that:

Inclusion is not formulaic. Decisions vary from classroom to classroom, school to school, and year to year. Moral dilemmas are often unique to the situation. The “best practices” for creating inclusive classrooms are ones that are personalized for the group of individuals on a given day and time and in any given context.

School Level

At a school level, the key points arising from the literature addressed are: leadership for inclusion, cultural change and distributed leadership, inclusion policies, successful inclusion strategies, inclusion and school achievement levels, targeting educational disadvantage and supporting minority ethnic and minority language students.

Leadership for Inclusion

A key theme in the literature is the critical role of leadership in leading and supporting change for inclusion. Drawing on normative, empirical, and critical literatures, Riehl (2000) in reviewing the role of the principal in creating inclusive schools highlights three key tasks: fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programmes and building relationships between schools and communities. She sees that such practice is rooted in values of equity and social justice.

Opportunities for creating new meanings about diversity include official ceremonies, public relation events and meetings (Strike, 1993 as cited in Riehl, 2000). Principals have a key role in framing these new meanings. However, staff are not simply recipients of new

meanings but co-creators (Riehl, 2000). To achieve this requires a democratic discourse process in the school that can be very elusive (Riehl, 2000).

In relation to promoting inclusive school cultures Riehl identifies two dimensions: promoting forms of inclusive teaching and learning and moulding school cultures that facilitate and support diversity. As regards the role of the principal in promoting inclusive teaching and learning the literature highlights the promotion of professional learning communities through attention to individual teacher development and “by creating and sustaining networks of conversation in their schools around issues of teaching and learning” (p. 63). The literature also points to the development of a culture that sees addressing the challenges of student diversity as posing opportunities instead of problems.

Riehl summarises what she terms “culturally responsive teaching” as when

teachers promote learning among culturally diverse students when they honor different ways of knowing and sources of knowledge, allow students to speak and write in their own vernacular and use culturally compatible communication styles themselves, express cultural solidarity with their students, share power with students, focus in caring for the whole child, and maintain high expectations for all (p. 64).

Crockett (2002, p. 163) emphasizes the key role of leadership in developing inclusive schools and presents a conceptual framework of five core principles drawn from historical themes in special education as areas to develop in the preparation of responsive leaders for inclusive schools:

1. *Ethical Practice: Ensuring universal educational access and accountability.* This first principle develops moral leaders who are capable of analyzing complexities, respecting others, and advocating for child benefit, justice, and full educational opportunity for every learner.
2. *Individual Consideration: Addressing individuality and exceptionality in learning.* This principle develops leaders who are attentive to the relationship between the unique learning and behavioral needs of students with disabilities and the specialized instruction to address their educational progress.
3. *Equity Under Law: Providing an appropriate education through equitable public policies.* This principle develops leaders who are committed to the informed implementation of disability law, financial options, and public policies that support individual educational benefit.
4. *Effective Programming: Providing individualized programming designed to enhance student performance.* This principle develops leaders who are skilled at supervising and evaluating educational programs in general, and

individualized programming in particular, and who foster high expectations, support research-based strategies, and target positive results for learners with exceptionalities.

5. *Establishing Productive Partnerships*. The fifth principle develops leaders who are effective in communicating, negotiating, and collaborating with others on behalf of students with disabilities and their families (Crockett, 2002, p. 163).

In addition to addressing special education law, Crockett (2000, p. 165) argues that the five principles of special education leadership preparation might emphasize the following elements:

- moral leadership, involving the ethical analysis of disability-related issues;
- instructional leadership, addressing student centered learning beyond compliance;
- organizational leadership, supporting effective program development, management, and evaluation related to learners with exceptionalities and their teachers; and
- collaborative leadership, promoting partnerships for instruction, conflict resolution, and integrated service delivery.

In a study of leadership for inclusion across England, Portugal and the United States, Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) identified the following factors as shared among leaders in inclusive schools: Uncompromising commitment to inclusive education; clearly defined roles, responsibilities and boundaries; collaborative interpersonal style; problem solving and conflict resolution skills; understanding and appreciation of expertise of others and supportive relationships with staff. Some features were unique to the principal such as initiating and supporting non-hierarchical organizational systems and structures within the school and others to special educational needs coordinators, such as being responsible for collaborating with and supporting colleagues in instruction and classroom management.

The leaders in their study had a commitment to distributed leadership:

There was a clear understanding that in addition to positional leaders some staff members held more specific leadership roles and responsibilities than others. These individuals shared the inclusive philosophy and belief system of the positional leaders (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004, p. 139).

Distributed leadership was also linked to developing collaborative cultures in the schools:

A second aspect of school culture that emerged across settings was the significance of collaboration. The willingness and ability of staff with different

specializations to work together was seen as essential for ‘blending’ support services available for children with special educational needs. Collaboration was both a form of practice and a manifestation of the inclusive values of these schools as they attempted to create a community in which all individuals – staff and students – were valued. Within this context, leadership became redefined and distributed, reinforcing a sense of community and of mutual trust within which it was embedded (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004, p. 140).

Leadership for Inclusion: The Role of Coordinators

Arising from the above, the literature highlights the key role that special educational needs coordinators can play in facilitating inclusion. Dyson (1993) charts a developmental role for special needs coordinators from remedial teacher to a transforming coordinator concerned with developing capacity building across the whole school to being made redundant as subject department coordinators assume responsibilities for promoting inclusive practices. However, recent developments in England have led to a renewed appreciation of the key role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) with a government regulation that the holder must be in a senior management position in the school or have the full backing of a member of the senior leadership team designated as the ‘champion of SEN and disability issues’ within the school. In addition all new SENCOs who have taken up the role since September 2008 must successfully complete the national award for special educational needs coordination within three years of taking on the role (Optimus Education, 2010).

At post-primary level O’Gorman et al. (2009, p. 90) in a study focusing on the professional development requirements of learning support and resource teachers or to use the authors’ term “inclusion specialists” in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, based on responses to 116 questionnaires and 19 semi-structured interviews conclude that “In the main, the role in both jurisdictions appeared to be somewhat peripheral to the main activity of the school, with a particularly heavy reliance in the Republic of Ireland on withdrawal.” They recommend that

the opportunity for inclusion specialists/SEN teachers to promote critical, reflective dialogue among the whole staff should be considered as a key future development of the role and corresponding professional development offered to hone teachers’ team building and leadership skills in this field (p. 90).

O’Gorman et al. (2009) found that learning support teachers/resource teachers in the Republic in comparison to their colleagues in the North ascribed relatively lower

importance to team teaching and preparing differentiated materials, to implementing and reviewing individualised education programmes and to issues of access and entitlement. They also found “in examining the skills and knowledge that participants feel are needed to carry out the role successfully, both pedagogy and curriculum are conspicuous by their relative lack of emphasis. The main skills mentioned were related to organization and time management” (p. 7).

Cultural Change and Distributed Leadership

The processes through which schools embrace the changes outlined above and how they are mediated by the school culture are not well known and can often be based on naïve assumptions. In this regard the recent work of Daly is supportive of our understanding of the process as it relates to an inclusion initiative in the Irish post-primary context. Daly (2008) in a study of seven post-primary schools from a wider sample of 31 involved in the Laptops Initiative project, offers key insights into the workings of the inclusion process through the micro-cultural politics of the schools as organisations. Daly’s evidence challenges a monocultural conceptualisation of school culture as shared vision and common values which tends to inform whole school approaches and suggests an alternative conception of “school culture as a zone of *polycultural contestation and ideological settlement*” (p. 6).

In terms of the promotion of inclusive practices in the school Daly (2008, p. 10) found that it was enabled when the:

vertical leadership of principalship coincided with an empathetic leadership of at least one practitioner-catalyst. Enabled by principal-patronage, the catalysing influence of such practitioner-catalysts stretched across other teachers with a resultant network of coinciding ideological orientations and mutual tacit understandings.

This process resembles distributed leadership (Spillane, Diamond & Loyiso, 2003) with the naturally selected clusters becoming “a relatively powerful force of inclusion in the schools” (p. 14). These clusters were characterised by high level professional activism, an egalitarian and inclusion orientation, an affective inclination, a trial and error mentality and a desire for professional refreshment (Daly, 2008). In order to further the inclusion process, Daly argues that we need to adopt a critical pragmatic approach and focus on

optimising the influence of these clusters or what he terms “the moral sensibilities habitus of schooling” (p. 17).

Linked to this conceptualisation, Kinsella and Senior (2008, p. 664) argue that schools need to be empowered “to become learning organisations around the issue of inclusion.” They propose that this is facilitated by combining organisational psychology, systems and inclusive educational theories. In relation to inclusion they propose a conceptual model of expertise, resources and structures underpinned by a process of inclusion:

The effectiveness or otherwise of these interrelated factors, that is; the skill, the knowledge, the expertise, the resources and the structures, will depend on the overarching process of inclusion that is, or is not, operating within the school.....

In contrast, the Process of Inclusion is likely to be operating at the deep structure of the system, thus influencing and influenced by the attitudes, ethos and culture of the system. It may therefore be considerably more resistant to change. If the resources, expertise and structures are addressed in a vacuum, without attending to the underlying processes of communication and collaboration, it is likely that the response to pupils with additional needs will be narrow, parochial and separatist (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, pp. 655-656).

Inclusion Policies

For the above to take root a supportive policy context at system and school level is vital in facilitating inclusive practices. Drudy and Kinsella (2009, p. 655) in a critique of inclusion policy in Ireland argue that

the extent to which a school can be inclusive is determined by the inclusiveness of the broader education, social and legislative systems in which it operates. An inclusive education system needs to ensure the timely availability of the resources and funding required to meet the needs of pupils with disabilities/special educational needs in mainstream schools...An inclusive education system requires adequate, timely and coordinated support services from health and other professional for these pupils. With regard to resources and services, the education system needs to be operating within a statutory framework of rights-based inclusive legislation, in order to ensure access to the requisite resources and services for pupils with disabilities/special educational needs (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009, p. 655).

They also suggest that prerequisites for inclusion include adequate pre-service education, the need for continuing professional development, meaningful home school partnerships, effective leadership and reduced ratios.

Wedell (2008) in a critique of inclusion policy stresses the necessity for a flexible approach to educational provision that could recognise diversity while providing for all. He is critical of policies which interpret special educational needs as additional or different from general provision and asks the key question:

Is it possible to envisage the contrary – an education system which starts from the recognition of the diversity of learning needs among all learners, and which offers a corresponding continuum of flexible provision? (Wedell, 2008, p.128).

Wedell (2008) raises queries about the relevance of the curriculum for students with special educational needs. In relation to the issue of poor student behaviour, Wedell (2008, p. 129) suggests “that the curriculum in its present form may itself be a contributory cause of poor behaviour because it does not engage the whole range of pupils.”

He also sees potential progress through the concept of personalised learning but highlights the skill and knowledge demands on teachers to achieve this. It requires deep understanding of the nature of learning difficulties and their implications. In addition it necessitates a different approach to assessment. The role of assessment of learning has great potential in this regard:

This allows the teacher to identify the ‘next step’ for learning, and to choose a likely means of helping the child to achieve this step. It should also involve prompt decisions in cases where progress is not being made, using the outcomes of the targeted teaching in order to conjecture better ways of intervening. This is an ongoing process of hypothesizing about the nature of the difficulty, testing this ‘hunch’ through intervention, and selecting another if the hunch proves to be wrong. In other words, a child’s learning problem becomes a teacher’s teaching problem (Wedell, 2008, p. 131).

He also argues that the potential of ICT to help promote inclusion has not been realized and that there is a danger it is being used to reinforce 19th century models of learning rather than promoting 21st century models. He also highlights the need to be inventive in overcoming the rigidities of timetabling, class grouping and staffing. In this regard Wedell cites examples of alternative practice:

In contrast, there are secondary schools that have started to tackle this problem in innovative ways; for example, by dividing the day mainly into two learning

periods. This allows a much greater flexibility in planning for groupwork among pupils, and also enables pupils to gain much more satisfaction because they are able to complete tasks of interest to themselves. When this kind of timetable arrangement is also linked to team teaching (usually with larger groups of pupils), it allows for a much more flexible allocation of staff time to pupils (Wedell, 2008, p. 131).

At school level a key issue in moving towards more inclusive practices is whether the schools have a policy of mixed ability with support for teachers (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009). Research suggests that “children of the least advantaged social groups” are more highly represented in the bottom groups of streamed classes (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009, p. 651). However, Drudy and Kinsella (2009) cite evidence showing that the proportion of schools which operate on mixed ability lines at the junior cycle level has increased from 40% in the mid-1990s to 70% in the mid-2000s.

In relation to Wedell’s call for a policy of flexible provision, it is interesting to note that a recent review of the role of special classes in Ireland showed support for the model as part of a continuum for addressing special educational needs (Ware et al., 2009). They were seen as being effective and importantly acted as an inclusive option both educationally and socially in meeting the needs of children with SEN in mainstream settings who otherwise could be in a special school. However, concerns were raised about the continuity of special classes from primary to post-primary schools and more generally the status of special classes in post-primary schools. Also there were concerns about the level of interaction between the special classes and mainstream classes.

Successful Inclusion Strategies

Another key theme in the literature is the factors associated with schools moving towards inclusion. This involves the school as an organisation learning new ways of thinking and doing. This new learning can take a long time. Ferguson (2008, p. 113) argues that “what remains troubling is that the rhetoric of inclusive education for students with disabilities is not matched by enough reality. After a decade or longer, the news is not good enough.”

In relation to what we know she highlights the importance of shifting approaches to identifying disability away from diagnoses “toward careful assessment of the interaction between the student and the school environment” (p. 113). Ferguson (2008, p. 113) argues that “one lesson we have learned for the past decade of systemic school improvement

efforts is that there are clearly some beliefs and practices that support the inclusion of more student diversity and others that do not.” Avramidis and Norwich (2002) in a review of the literature on teachers’ attitudes to inclusion refer to a number of studies which link the importance of the school’s ethos and teachers’ beliefs with attitudes towards inclusion and practices in this area. Ferguson (2008) outlines five areas that require a shift in emphases.

The first area is a move from teaching to learning. This involves “making the curriculum more engaging and meaningful, “personalising” learning for each and every student, and creating communities of learners who support and share in each other’s learning” (p. 113). Differentiated instruction, peer support and cooperative learning are required for this move. In relation to peer support arrangements for students with severe disabilities, Carter and Kennedy (2006, p. 290) in a review suggest that while effective and feasible “the potential impact of these interventions (peer support) will always remain constrained unless these strategies are couched within educational programs guided by careful planning, collaborative teaming, relevant curriculum, and sound instruction.” The second area is a move from offering services to providing supports in a flexible manner and not a one size fits all approach.

The third area is a move from the individual to group practice among teachers. This

not only results in better learning outcomes for students as teachers with different skills and expertise help each other respond to student learning needs, but also leads to effective and ongoing professional development. Increasingly, school leadership seeks to facilitate communities of practice or professional learning communities where teachers learn from one another in an ongoing way through working together to teach and improve their practice (Ferguson, 2008, p. 116).

Corbett (2001) argues that to be effective, school based support strategies must enable teachers to address difficulties together so no one feels isolated in their task.

The fourth area is a move from parental involvement to family-school linkages. The literature is clear that when families are involved “students achieve more, stay in school longer and engaged in school more completely” (p. 116).

The fifth is a shift from school reform to ongoing school improvement and renewal. The current challenge is “to reinvent schools with new assumptions and more effective

practices rather than simply making additions or corrections to existing practices” (p. 117). The fundamental changes required are complex and take time. This can only occur within a context of “continuous school improvement efforts, well-grounded and validated practices and data-based decision-making” (p. 117).

Post-Primary Strategies: What Works?

As highlighted in the previous chapter there are particular additional challenges at post-primary level in relation to inclusion. This section outlines what schools have found helpful internationally. Villa et al. (2005) describe seven of the most prominent instructional strategies and four reorganisational strategies used in secondary schools to meet the needs of diverse learners. The seven instructional strategies are (a) differentiated instruction: moving toward a universal design framework, (b) interdisciplinary curriculum, (c) use of technology, (d) student collaboration and peer-mediated instruction, (e) supports and accommodations for curricular inclusion, (f) teaching responsibility, peacemaking, and self-determination, and (g) authentic assessment of student performance.

In terms of reorganisation for collaboration, Villa et al. (2005) describe four approaches used in successful schools. These are firstly (a) extended block scheduling. This involves block scheduling of times to exceed sixty minutes. This reduces the number of transitions and increases the opportunities for more personalisation of instruction when it is combined with team teaching. It also mirrors the work environment in the 21st century- “short-term project work in which people enter, form relationships, and exit” (p. 41).

The second is mixed ability teaching. The key argument in favour of mixed ability teaching is

For adolescents to be prepared to operate within the larger, complex heterogeneous community into which they will enter as adults, they need de-tracked high school experiences that reflect the range of abilities, ethnicities, languages economic levels, ages, and other human dimensions within a community (p. 42).

The third is multiple instructional agents in the classroom. This involves the use of a collaborative support team that jointly plans, teaches and problem solves. It entails utilising in-class support measures first and only as much as is required. Villa et al. (2005) describe five approaches to such support. The first is consultation where advice is given to the class/subject teacher, the second is supportive co-teaching where the class/subject

teacher takes the lead role and the support teacher rotates among students to provide support. The third is parallel co-teaching where both teachers teach different heterogeneous groups of students. The fourth is complementary co-teaching where the support teacher supplements the instruction of the class/subject teacher and the fifth is team teaching where both teachers share responsibility for planning, teaching and assessing all pupils in the class. All five have a place depending on student learning needs. Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2008, p. 124) argue that “students and families have a right to expect educators to collaborate in planning and teaching, and educators have a professional, legal and ethical responsibility to do so.”

The fourth area is administrative leadership. Villa et al. (1996) in a survey of teachers’ attitudes to inclusive education in five U.S states and one Canadian province found that the level of administrative support was the most powerful predictor of a teacher’s attitude towards inclusive education. Villa et al. (2005, p. 43) outline “five essential actions” that school leaders must take to facilitate inclusive practices: (i) build a consensus for a vision of inclusive schooling, (ii) on-going professional development to build teachers’ skills and confidence, (iii) provide incentives such as time to meet and training for teachers to take risks in changing to inclusive practices, (iv) reorganise and expand human and teaching resources, (v) planning and acting “to help the community see and get excited about a new vision” (p. 43). They also list practices associated with schools that have adopted inclusive practices. These include data-based decision making, attention to issues of transition and the “creation of small learning communities that allow for connections and personalization among both staff and students” (p. 43).

Villa et al. (2005) outline a study by Liston (2004) of how secondary teachers facilitated inclusion. Six themes emerged with many overlapping with other studies. These were (i) support of school leaders who modelled acceptance of all students and held high expectations and held teachers accountable, (ii) ongoing professional development including universal lesson plan design, differentiated instruction and visitations to other schools developing inclusive practices, (iii) collaboration among staff was a key to student success. This could involve a redefinition of roles for support teachers, (iv) open communication was essential to building the trust required for teaching partnerships and the realisation of give and take that occurs in co-teaching arrangements, (v) instructional

responsiveness to the individual needs of all students and the benefits of co-teaching and (vi) expanded authentic assessment approaches.

Inclusion and School Achievement Levels

A key question for schools is what effect does an inclusive policy have on student outcomes? In a major study examining the link between inclusion of students with SEN and achievement levels in schools, Farrell et al. (2007, p. 175-177) concluded that in highly inclusive schools, students with SEN did not have a negative impact on achievement levels. Examining the characteristics of the inclusive schools through case studies produced five main findings:

1. Schools which are highly inclusive manage their SEN provision in different ways, although there does seem to be a common underlying model. The principal elements of that model were as follows:
 - Provision for students with SEN tends to be characterised by flexibility. Students are neither rigidly segregated from their peers nor ‘dumped’ in mainstream classes, but are offered careful mixtures of provision in a range of settings. The precise mix is customised to the characteristics of individual students rather than being decided on a whole group basis.
 - Customisation of provision depends on careful assessment, planning and monitoring at an individual level. Commonly, this is part of wider monitoring systems across the whole school population.
 - Flexible provision is typically supported by the careful use of adult support.
 - Flexibility of provision is paralleled by flexibility of pedagogy in mainstream classes and by high-quality teaching in non-mainstream situations.
 - Schools typically have a commitment to the principle of inclusion which is shared by a large proportion of the staff.
 - Alongside strategies directed towards students with SEN, high-performing schools also have strategies directed towards raising achievement more generally.
2. Inclusive schools tend to share an ethos which is positive and welcoming but which may also have a strong achievement orientation.
3. Classroom practice in inclusive schools is recognizably like ‘good’ practice everywhere.
4. Schools used a range of strategies for raising achievement:
 - Some of them were about promoting achievement by raising the overall quality of teaching in the school.
 - Some of the strategies were more instrumental, in the sense that they focused directly on raising measured attainment even though the wider impact on learning might be difficult to see.
 - A third group of strategies focused on perceived weaknesses in the underlying skills and capacities of all or many of the school’s population and sought to remedy these.

5. Inclusive schools tend to accept the task of educating most students with SEN as part of their normal responsibilities. Students whose behaviour disrupts lessons, however, are seen as presenting significant challenges.

However, they also stress the demands inclusive practices place on schools and the critical nature of sufficient support:

... in trying to understand the case study schools, we have found it useful to think in terms of an 'ecology' of inclusion. It is clear that teaching children with higher levels of SEN places considerable demands on schools and teachers. Where schools have relatively high proportions of such pupils, there appears to be a delicate balance between the resources they can bring to bear on the task of teaching and the demands which the presence of these children creates. It would seem that it does not take much to disturb it – a shortfall in classroom support, a weakness in teacher skills or managerial planning, a lack of funding and so on ... those who work in and with schools should be aware of the ecological balances in schools and should seek to strengthen them (Farrell et al., 2007, p. 177).

The following section moves the focus to issues pertaining to the inclusion of students experiencing educational disadvantage.

Targeting Educational Disadvantage

There have been many initiatives targeting educational disadvantage. While these initiatives were welcomed by schools, Walsh (2001) points to the demands on schools to coordinate these various initiatives and to inculcate the necessary changes. A subsequent review of the operation of the various schemes resulted in the launch of a new coordinated strategy (DES, 2005a).

DEIS represents a shift in emphasis from individual initiatives, each addressing a particular aspect of the problem to one which adopts a multi-faceted and more integrated approach. This focused action plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage, and targeting resources in a coherent and effective way. In addition, the plan provides for an integrated School Support Programme, bringing together and building upon a number of existing strategies, as well as introducing new supports in schools where there are high levels of disadvantage. Central to the success of the action plan is the increased emphasis on planning at individual school and school cluster level. This involves target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes to ensure that the increased

investment is matched by an improvement in educational outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

The plan seeks to reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities to less than 15% by 2016 (DES, 2005a). Together with policy objectives, targets and outcomes, DEIS sets out to provide a range of educational and other supports to disadvantaged schools, including literacy action plans, structured programmes, provision for parental involvement, professional development for teachers and school meals. Overall, it places literacy supports at the centre of policy action to counter educational disadvantage.

In an evaluation report *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues* NESF (2009) highlights the importance of schools adopting a whole-school approach to address literacy, through integrating teaching and DEIS supports into the school culture in order to meet the significant literacy challenges they face.

Successful schools were characterised by strong and effective leadership, high staff expectations, and a culture of rewarding success. This echoes many of the sentiments already expressed in the literature review regarding school leadership and school culture. In addition, they showed high levels of collegiality; communication; co-operation and flexibility among staff all working to achieve agreed targets and action plans through structured programmes. In these schools, it was noted that staff morale was high, communication was open and effective and staffs were more focused on facing the challenges (NESF, 2009).

The NESF (2009) report recommends the introduction of a *National Literacy Policy Framework* which would provide a stronger articulation of short-term and long-term targets, coordinated at local and national level; greater clarity with regard to the accountability and responsibility of the various stakeholders; more precise implementation and action plans; built-in process evaluation and feedback procedures and more incentives for success. The report strongly recommends that literacy be approached in a holistic way from early childhood to adulthood – and that a partnership approach between the various education and community stakeholders – including parents, at local and national level, is essential for success.

It could be argued that a similar approach is required for numeracy support where the effects of low achievement are equally damaging. Internationally there has been a focus on developing early intervention in numeracy with empirically validated programmes in operation. These include *Number Worlds* (Griffin et al., 1996) which has been successfully introduced in 11 schools in disadvantaged contexts in Ireland (Mullan & Travers, 2007), *Mathematics Recovery* (Wright, Martland & Stafford, 2000) which is used in schools in the DEIS programme, *Big Math for Little Kids* (Ginsburg, Greenes & Balfanz, 2003), *Numeracy Recovery* (Dowker, 2004) and *Ready, Set, Go-Maths* (Pitt, 2001). These programmes have a heavy emphasis on developing the principles of counting and extensions of these, which doesn't get sufficient emphasis in the Irish primary mathematics curriculum (Mullan & Travers, 2007).

Supporting Minority Ethnic and Minority Language Students

Moving from educational disadvantage to initiatives and support for student from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background, the model of support for minority language children learning English as an additional language has been based on the provision of English language support teachers to schools on the basis of identified need. This model of provision is in keeping with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006) findings that the most widely used approach to supporting minority language students was through immersion education supplemented with systematic language support.

In addition to altering the system of allocation of teaching staff, Circular 53/2007 (DES, 2007b) makes recommendations as to effective teaching strategies, advising that students should receive additional language support teaching in the classroom or in small withdrawal groups, in addition to the support they receive from the class teacher. This echoes recommendations made by the DES Inspectorate in recent Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports (DES, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). It also calls for a defined whole-school policy in relation to the identification of pupils requiring support, assessment of pupils' levels of language proficiency, programme planning, recording and monitoring of pupils' progress and communication with parents as key features of effective language support provision. This Circular also amended the previous two-year limit on English language support teaching subsequent to assessment based on IILT's *English Language*

Proficiency Benchmarks (IILT, 2002). Accordingly, pupils with significant English language deficits can apply for English language support for an additional year. Importantly, the Circular also highlights the central role of the class teacher in the provision of English language support. This Circular has been the most comprehensive articulation of government conceptualisation of the provision of English language support teaching to date.

Teacher/Class Level

Focusing on teachers and inclusion the following areas are highlighted in the literature: teacher expertise and commitment, pedagogy and continuing professional development, universally designed learning and differentiation, collaboration at the classroom level, support from special needs assistants and social and emotional support.

Teacher Expertise and Commitment

McGee (2004, p. 78) in an overview of developments in special education in Ireland argues that “the learning of the pupil with special educational needs depends, to an exceptional degree, on relevant teacher expertise... Skilled and conscientious teaching in this area is highly demanding work but the logic of the situation is that the pupils concerned cannot afford less.” He goes on to advocate effective sharing within schools of specialist knowledge and study groups of teachers having access to specialist literature. Sapon-Shevin criticises those who tell teachers that inclusion won’t take any more work than they are already doing. This can set up false and unreasonable expectations. It is intellectually, emotionally and personally taxing and complex work (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Mittler (2000) highlights the importance of the personal commitment of each teacher to inclusion and an institutional obligation to facilitate, enable and support teachers to meet that commitment. There is general consensus in research both nationally and internationally that the type and quality of teacher-pupil interaction have a strong effect on pupils’ engagement in school (Willms, 2003), supports the development of a sense of belonging – being accepted, respected, included and supported at school (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Pupils appreciate a teacher who consults them, who is fair, who makes them feel important and treats them in an adult way (Demetriou, Goalen & Rudduck, 2000). These authors state that the qualities that “matter most to pupils tend to be as much about how they are treated as how they are taught” (p. 431). In the Irish context, studies show that the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship may influence the pupils’ subject

choice in school thus impacting on further choices in education (Darmody & Smyth, 2005). Positive interactions between teachers and pupils serve to raise pupils' motivation and self-esteem as well as encouraging school engagement (Smyth et al., 2004, Smyth et al., 2009). The importance of teachers being respectful to pupils is highlighted by Lynch and Lodge (2002) who report that pupils deeply resented the use of sarcasm, humiliating sanctions, shouting at them and not being given the right to reply as practised by some teachers. These authors also point to the fact that the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship varies by social class in that pupils from a background of disadvantage or from a Traveller background are more likely to experience negative interactions from teachers. Therefore, there is a need to focus on positive interactions between teachers and students.

As stated earlier, the ongoing experiences of pupils experiencing social disadvantage can create a lifestyle and world view which may be at odds with the predominantly middle class world view upheld and maintained by the school (O'Brien cited in Mulholland & Keogh, 1990). She suggests that teachers need to be aware of the cultural and value differences that pupils bring to school. In addition, they need to understand the importance of the community in pupils' lives and be attentive to the conflicts that can arise between school and the community. Wehlage et al. (1989) identifies four core values that constitute a positive school culture: teachers accepting personal responsibility for student outcomes; teachers practising an extended teachers' role; teachers accepting the need to be persistent with pupils who are not ideal pupils and teachers holding a belief that all pupils can learn if one builds on their strengths rather their weaknesses.

Pedagogy and Continuing Professional Development

Given the diverse range of pedagogies which can or could potentially contribute to meeting the needs of diverse learners, the question arises as to how specialised these approaches are. In a review of pedagogies for inclusion of students with special educational needs, Lewis and Norwich (2005) argue that for meeting the needs of most students there isn't a specialist pedagogy required. Rather they suggest the notion of a continua of common teaching approaches that can be subject to various degrees of intensification depending on pupil need. However, this is not to underestimate the complexity of designing appropriate interventions. Lewis and Norwich (2005, p. 218) also emphasise that: "An underlying theme, meshing with the notion of the *intensification of*

common pedagogic strategies, is the skilfulness required to apply a common strategy differentially.”

In addition, they also state that “in advocating a position that assumes continua of common pedagogic strategies based on unique individual differences, we are not ignoring the possibility that teaching geared to pupils with learning difficulties might be inappropriate for average or high attaining pupils” (p. 6). This possibility may be an argument for building flexibility in organisational approaches utilising the school as a focus of inclusion and not just the classroom.

Quality teaching is often cited as being of central importance for success for diverse student populations (Hyland, 2002). Alton-Lee (2003) offers the following suggestions for quality teaching following a Best Evidence Synopsis:

- Quality teaching is focused on student achievement (including social outcomes) and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for heterogeneous groups of students.
- Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities.
- Effective links are created between school and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised, to facilitate learning.
- Quality teaching is responsive to students’ learning processes.
- Opportunity to learn is effective and sufficient.
- Multiple task contexts support learning cycles.
- Curriculum goals, resources including ICT usage, task design, teaching and school practices are affectively aligned.
- Pedagogy scaffolds and provides appropriate feedback on students’ task engagement.
- Pedagogy promotes learning orientations, student-self regulation, metacognitive strategies and thoughtful discourse.
- Teachers and students engage constructively in goal-oriented assessment.

These elements have strong crossover for ensuring school success for minority ethnic and minority language children and children experiencing socio-economic inequalities. In addition, Day (2009) stresses the role of passion, hope, justice and ethics in quality teaching.

In the Irish context, findings from a longitudinal study of students' experiences of curriculum in the first three years of their post-primary schooling reveal the importance of supporting and easing the transition process through developing integration programmes, fostering a positive climate and ensuring continuity in students' learning experiences between primary and post-primary (Smyth et al., 2004).

Students in the study had very clear opinions about what makes for effective teaching. The most effective teachers, in their view, are those who explain things well, enjoy teaching their subject, view learning as fun, encourage students to ask questions, praise good work and don't give out. Poor teachers are perceived as those who don't explain things in class, whose pace of instruction is too fast, who set too much work, give out to or ignore students, use an uninteresting style, rely heavily on the textbook, and who cannot maintain order in class.

Students feel that they learn best in subjects they like, are good at, and in which there are plenty of practical activities. The approaches and methodologies identified by students as conducive to learning include: activity-based learning, discussions, teachers using different teaching styles rather than from the book, and teachers making the subject interesting. Students express a preference for working in groups as the exchange of ideas made the work easier.

Rieth et al. (2003) argue the need for anchored instruction. Anchored instruction involves providing a clear context, which students find engaging and relevant to draw them in. In the context of their study, anchored instruction involved using a video to provide background information about the topic of discussion. This approach was found to encourage enhanced participation by high school students with high incidence disabilities.

At a more general level, Forlin et al. (2008) identified the concerns of 228 regular class teachers in Western Australia who have all been involved with the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability in their classrooms. In terms of what they found as the most useful coping strategies the following emerged: Maintain a sense of humour, make a plan of action and follow it, set realistic expectations, draw on past experiences, seek professional help for student, concentrate on what has to be done next and discuss the situation with specialist personnel.

The need for continuing professional development to address the pedagogical demands of inclusion and the real concerns highlighted in the previous chapter in relation to teacher competence and confidence is very evident in the literature. Internationally, Forlin et al. (2008), Loreman (2007), Thousand, Villa & Nevin (2007) and many others argue the need for professional development at the different levels of teacher education. In the Irish context, Drudy and Kinsella (2009), O’Gorman et al. (2009) and Shevlin et al. (2008) highlight the needs of Irish teachers in this regard. The literature advocates no one approach but highlights the benefits of teacher learning communities, mutual peer observation, using video feedback, access to specialist literature, visits to schools and on-line and blended learning approaches (Lysaght, 2009; Villa et al., 2005; McGee, 2004).

Universally Designed Learning and Differentiation

Thousand et al. (2007) seek to embed the idea of differentiating instruction by utilizing the concept of universally designed learning which seeks to build in planning for diversity in all stages of the learning process. Their overview of the four steps of the universal design for learning cycle are: gathering facts about the learners, content, product, and process. The authors present the Universal Design for Learning lesson plan template to assist teachers with understanding the described processes for differentiation. They stress the benefit of cooperative learning structures such as jigsaw, say and switch, and group investigation strategies. They also include the differentiation of assessment with an emphasis on assessment for learning and curriculum and criterion-referenced assessments. The aim here is to support students to develop multiple means for demonstrating their learning.

The diversity of needs in each classroom and the challenge to meet the needs of all learners demands a new professional imperative of collaboration as an integral part of planning and instruction for all students (Thousand et al., 2007). There are many examples of successful models of co planning and teaching in the literature which deal with personal and professional role delineation. Thousand et al. deal with relationship development and collaborative team self-assessment.

Tomlinson (1999) notes that differentiation can involve modification of content, process, or product. O’Brien and Guiney (2001) note that differentiation should not be seen as an

“add-on” to the normal teaching of the class, but rather it should be central, with the teacher no longer taking for granted that they can teach the whole class in one way for each lesson. King-Sears (2008) notes several important and positive aspects of differentiation:

- Schools that promote differentiation can potentially achieve higher scores on large-scale assessments than schools that promote ‘one size fits all’ instruction.
- Differentiated techniques are responsive to diverse student needs.
- Differentiated techniques promote active student involvement in learning.

Collaboration at the Classroom Level

Collaboration between teachers is now interpreted as a professional necessity in relation to inclusion (Nevin et al., 2008; Craft, 2000; Dyson & Millward, 2000). Giangreco and Baumgart (1995) notes that the new inclusive climate can diminish teacher isolation and is a necessary requirement to address the considerable challenges of inclusion. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) argue that one of the seven principles of postmodern professionalism is

commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support as a way of using shared expertise to solve the ongoing problems of professional practice, rather than engaging in joint work as a motivational device to implement the external mandates of others (p. 20).

Smith and Leonard (2005) developed a model of what is necessary for collaboration for inclusion to incur. This involves a triad of interaction between the principal, mainstream teachers, and special education teachers. Mutually supportive behaviours need to occur between these three sets. A key finding for collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers is the need to communicate effectively, particularly in relation to clarifying their roles in relation to each other, and how they can foster inclusion.

One particular model of in-class collaboration is team teaching, or co-teaching. Bauwens and her colleagues (1989) have defined the co-teaching process as "an educational approach in which general and special educators or related service providers jointly plan for and teach heterogeneous groups of students in integrated settings" (p. 19).

In order to demonstrate the benefits of co-teaching, Walther-Thomas (1997) studied 23 schools over a 3-year period as new co-teaching models were implemented in eight school

districts. Teachers and administrators reported many student benefits. Students with disabilities developed better attitudes about themselves and others. They became less critical, more motivated, and learned to recognize their own academic and social strengths. Most showed academic improvement and very few were removed from general education placements because of inability to cope with academic and/or social demands. Identified students' social skills improved and positive peer relationships developed. Many other low-achieving students also showed academic and social skills improvement in co-taught classes. Participants attributed improvements to more teacher time and attention.

Support from Special Needs Assistants

Special needs assistants can also play a crucial role in supporting inclusion (Logan, 2006). It is important however to note their role, which can be both educational (e.g. assisting children during a lesson) and care (e.g. supervising the child in the playground, assisting them where they have physical needs, etc.). However, the actual role in Ireland is on paper restricted to care and this contrasts with the role of teaching assistants and learning support assistants elsewhere.

Minondo, Meyer and Xin (2001) suggest five major aspects of the role of teaching assistants in America: instructional, school support, liaison, personal support, and one-to-one in-class support. Moran and Abbot (2006) report similar findings in Northern Ireland for learning support assistants. They also state important personal attributes which learning support assistants should have including empathy, being a good team worker, and being adaptive. Moran and Abbott also discuss the issue of qualifications for these learning support assistants, and state the need for proper qualifications and training for this heterogeneous group of workers.

Ofsted (DfES, 2006) in seeking to address the question of whether it matters where pupils are taught in relation to inclusion found effective provision was distributed equally between mainstream and special schools when certain factors were securely in place. However, better or outstanding provision existed in resourced mainstream schools. They also found that

the provision of additional resources to pupils such as support from teaching assistants did not ensure good quality intervention or adequate progress by pupils.

There was a misconception that provision of additional resources was the key requirement for individual pupils, whereas the survey findings showed that key factors for good progress were: the involvement of a specialist teacher; good assessment; work tailored to challenge pupils sufficiently; and commitment from school leaders to ensure good progress for all pupils (DfES, 2006, p. 2).

Social and Emotional Support

A key theme in the literature on educational disadvantage is the importance of the quality of social and emotional support offered to students in reducing school drop out, poor attendance levels and in raising achievement levels. Research findings from The Centre for Educational Disadvantage in St. Patrick's College have identified this in the following areas: transition, particularly for students with special educational needs in designated disadvantaged schools; alternatives to suspension; bullying prevention and intervention; mental health support and strategies for dealing with behavioural difficulties.

Based on a qualitative study on transition from primary school to post-primary school, Maunsell, Barrett and Candon (2007) highlighted the need to examine the possibility of transferring some primary school practices into post-primary school for a period in first year. They advise increasing communication and preparatory planning between schools, the establishment of a student transition liaison officer to prepare pupils for transition and to provide personnel continuity to pupils' overall school experience. A re-structuring of pedagogical and assessment practices at second-level was recommended by Naughton (1997) in order to lessen the experience of discontinuity for the first year student. With regard to supporting students mental health, research by Downes and Maunsell (2007) highlighted that while the large majority of young people have someone to talk to in order to provide social and emotional support, nevertheless a significant minority state that they have nobody to talk with if they feel sad and this places them at risk for mental health problems. They advise the establishment of a community based psychological support service that involves early intervention, mental health promotion, and system level interventions to create a more supportive school social climate in some schools.

Downes et al. (2006) argue the need for alternative strategies to suspension from school, including a supervised time out area in every school for children and young people with disruptive behaviour in order to improve the climate for teaching and learning in classrooms. In addition, the research shows that teacher-student relations were the

dominant theme emerging from accounts of early school leavers with evidence from student reports that there are isolated teachers who contribute to an extremely negative experience of school for them. Across a range of focus groups there was consensus praising almost all teachers in their schools and a consensus regarding a small minority of individual teachers being overly authoritarian. Downes et al. (2006) suggest that schools need mechanisms to provide support to these isolated teachers who need more support in changing from a highly authoritarian teaching style and to provide an outlet for pupil and student perceptions of being treated unfairly, both for minor complaints and more serious issues.

Another key recommendation emanating from the Downes et al. (2006) research is the establishment of a keyworker for young people most at risk of early school leaving to help develop alternative strategies to suspension in conjunction with the school; to support the implementation of the Individual Education Plan and career strategy for the young person; to discuss student perceptions of being treated unfairly in school; to act as a mediator between student and the school, including challenging the young person's perceptions of being treated unfairly, where necessary; to provide support to the student if (s)he falls behind the class or misses school and then feels it is too difficult to catch up; to facilitate the most at risk young people in accessing the range of local services and facilities; to provide a protective role to prevent young people getting involved in the role of 'being a gilly,' i.e., storing drugs for dealers; to play a key role in minimising substance abuse by the young person and to offer social and emotional support to the young person.

In support of teachers' and parents' mental well-being, Downes (2004) confirms a need for system level work with schools to develop teachers' conflict resolution strategies and to improve the social climate in some schools in particular. In addition, the need for system level work with parents, for example, regarding early intervention strategies for their children's literacy and speech and language development is also identified. These interventions at a systemic level with regard to teachers and parents should be seen as part of a preventative strategy with regard to problems, so that the service adopts a model of *both* intervention and prevention, as well as mental health promotion. Downes and Maunsell (2007) highlight the needs of both teachers and parents with respect to developing cognitive-behavioural strategies for working with pupils with ADHD and advise an approach which would support both.

Downes et al. (2006) examined current interventions and gaps in provision with regard to actual and potential early school leavers from 10-17 years mainly in the RAPID areas of Blanchardstown. Young peoples' direct input into the consultation process was obtained through questionnaires given to all 6th classes and nine core local services. Findings revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction and communication between staff and service users with the identified local services with notable reports of gains in helping with difficulties in school and improvement in quality of life in general from attending the service. The key strengths of local schools were evidenced in their approaches to structured transition programmes, proactive preventive approaches to bullying, the provision of a variety of extracurricular activities and allowing schools to be used as a site and resource for adult education. These factors contributed to notable gains in students' intentions to stay on at school until Leaving Certificate in Blanchardstown since 1998. However, the report highlighted the need for greater co-ordination between the after school projects with wider avenues for referral to prevent those students most at risk from falling through the gaps in service provision.

The nutritional needs of a substantial minority of pupils were not being met. Approximately 18% of the 6th class pupils attending school on a given day across the schools stated that they were either often, very often or every day too hungry to do their work in school; this is a child poverty issue and also highlights the need for more consistent access to breakfast clubs.

With regards to behaviour, Moran and Abbot (2006), in their review of models of best practice in inclusive schools note that in relation to students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, teachers should be aware of de-escalation techniques and measures for conflict resolution and anger management, so that pupils with very poor social skills can become motivated and disposed to learn. How teachers deal with incidents of bullying is very important in terms of promoting inclusion. O'Moore and Hillery (1989) point to the relationship between bullying others on a frequent basis and conduct disorders and poor global self-esteem. Downes (2004) argues that psychology services need to support schools in relation to bullying, self-esteem, teacher-pupil interaction, as well as providing emotional and social support. This would impact in a beneficial way on school

attendance if it is both broad based and targeted to specific individuals and families who are most at-risk.

Downes et al. (2006) examined the relationship between early school leaving and bullying and concluded that there is a need to develop proactive approaches to bullying and to disseminate the successful strategies for prevention and intervention *within* the school. The role of the class teacher is examined in a study in a primary school in Ballyfermot (Downes, 2004) and the findings reveal that where the class teacher employs strategies such as an anonymous problem box, role play and circle time it eliminated a bullying problem that had existed in the class the previous year when there were a number of substitute teachers employed.

Child/Family and Community Level

A number of aspects pertaining to parents and the community are highlighted in the literature to enhance the inclusion of students. These include involving parents, children acting as language brokers, and initiatives such as home school liaison, school completion and extra-curricular activities.

Involving Parents

Education is intrinsically linked to the rights and needs of the individual as they grow and develop in the milieu of their families and communities. It is as the HSCL (2006, p. 5) suggests “not centred in the home or school, but rather is to be seen as an ellipse in which there are two foci, the home and the school. This ellipse itself remains centred in the community.” Effective schools, therefore, take account of the influence of the home on children’s learning and they build on the experience children bring to the school. Much is written emphasising the significant educational, social and behavioural benefits that accrue to children as a result of an effective partnership between parent and teachers. The potential for enhancing achievement through partnership is recognised by the OECD publication *Parents as Partners in Schooling* (OECD, 1997). It outlines that not only will children’s and parents benefit more but that long term and systematic benefits will extend beyond immediate relationships making a strategic difference in the lives and educational opportunities for both children and parents alike.

Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed 66 studies of parental participation and concluded that, “regardless of income, education level or cultural background, all families can –and do contribute to their children’s success” (p. 14). They also found that “the evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning children tend to succeed and not just in school, but throughout life” (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1).

In general, parental involvement is associated with children’s higher achievements in language and mathematics, enrolment in more challenging programmes, greater academic persistence, better behaviour, better social skills and adaptation to school, better attendance and lower drop-out rates (Heymann, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In a review of the literature Cotton and Reed Wikelund (2001) concluded that the research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement. Further, the research shows that the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning; the more beneficial are the achievement effects. This holds true for all types of parent involvement in children's learning and for all types and ages of students. There are strong indications from the research that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities in the home. Programmes which involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, show particularly impressive results.

The research also shows that the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be. Research indicates that parents generally become less involved in their child’s schooling as the child gets older, for many reasons; the more complex curriculum, bigger schools, schools located further from home, the greater independence of the child, the larger number of teachers involved in the child’s education etc. However, the literature shows that parental involvement remains very beneficial in promoting positive achievement and affective outcomes with older students. Schools are encouraged to engage and maintain this involvement throughout the middle schools and secondary years (Cotton & Reed Wikelund, 2001).

While parent involvement is closely related to pupil achievement the effects of parent involvement on student outcomes other than achievement are also of interest. These

include attitude toward school or toward particular subject areas, self-concept, classroom behaviour, time spent on homework, expectations for one's future, absenteeism, motivation, and retention. While not as extensively researched as the parent involvement-student achievement relationship, the relationship between parent involvement and these affective outcomes appears to be both strong and positive. All the research studies, which address these areas found that parent involvement has positive effects on student attitudes and social behaviour.

Desforges and Abouchar (2003) note different ways in which parents can become involved. Six levels of involvement are noted. The first is basic parenting – providing basic support to the child, and a stable background. The next level is communication between the home and the school. The third level involves voluntary involvement in the school, helping for example doing reading in class, or in other activities in the school. The fourth level is by providing academic support at home, by helping with homework, focusing on specific subjects, or developing other talents (athletic or musical for example). The fifth level involves decision making, by being part of a parent's organisation or other school-related group. The final level involves collaborating with the community.

Desforges and Abouchar's (2003) literature review on parental involvement notes that parental involvement has an effect on student outcomes generally, though there is no specific literature on outcomes for children with SEN. Rogers et al. (2006) outline the benefit of parent partnership services in England. These services are designed to ensure that parents and carers of children with SEN have access to information, advice and guidance on SEN matters in order to support them in making informed decisions about their child's education and to reduce the need for formal disagreement resolution. This service was found to be highly valued by parents who had use of it, and supported them in making choices about their children's education.

Frederickson et al. (2007) look at parent's views on inclusion. In this study, parents note that for inclusion to be successful, a number of factors need to be present, including adequate planning and preparation, communication and support, individual attention, and a high standard of teaching. Runswick-Cole (2008) note two distinct types of perspectives in parents. Parents who hold a medical-type view of disability are more likely to favour special schooling, whereas parents who focus on barriers to learning experienced by

children with disabilities will focus more on having their children included in the mainstream.

Parental Involvement and Cooperation

Successful schools reach out to parents, establishing true partnerships and providing opportunities for their involvement in concrete ways so as to attain the goal of higher student achievement (Kennedy, 2007). Research by Johnson (2003) shows that schools used a variety of strategies to involve hard to reach parents and many operated an open door policy encouraging parents to drop in regularly for coffee or for informal snack and chat sessions. McSkeane (1999) cited in Downes (2004) highlights the need for facilitation of parental involvement in treatment and interventions for their children while Ward (1994) and Gibbard (1998), cited in Downes (2004) relate how speech and language therapy services in Britain are now specifically targeting their resources at teaching parents the language facilitation techniques to implement with their children. Kelly (1995) outlines how similar developments have also occurred in the US with a move away from an individualised, isolated service delivery model in the clinic or treatment room to client-based intervention taking place in a wider variety of settings involving not only the clinician and the child but others in the child's environment or system, i.e., family members and other professionals.

Home School Liaison and School Completion Initiatives

Two initiatives in this sphere are the Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. The aims of home school liaison include maximising the participation of the children in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure, promoting active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children and raising awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. The Home School Liaison coordinators have been involved in a number of initiatives to try and develop greater relationships between parents and schools including home visitation, developing parent's rooms in schools, being involved in organising courses and classes for parents, and promoting educational initiatives such as literacy and numeracy initiatives. They also provide a point of contact between different agencies, where relevant. As to the efficacy of

the home school liaison, their own research focuses on how they increase co-operation, and in particular the importance of home visitation (HSCL, 2006).

Mulkerrins (2007) in a review of HSCL in eight schools found that while parents feel more empowered and less fearful in dealing with school issues, transformation towards meaningful partnership is a slow process, often exacerbated by teachers' perception of working class parents as inferior (Mulkerrins, 2007, p. 139). Parents felt that while schools had opened up there still existed a lack of recognition of the parent as a co-educator with schools having a superficial regard for their views or involvement. The active participation of parents in adult classes was seen in a positive light as they served to break down isolation and strengthen community links. The impact of increased parent education and confidence was regarded as significant in the extent to which parents can support their children's education at home.

Looking at the activities provided by the school completion programme (DES, 2005d), they include in-school supports at an academic level, provision of extra-curricular activities, as well as therapeutic interventions where possible. With regard to research on how successful school completion programmes or similar methods for reducing early school leaving are, Christenson et al. (2001) note that it is not easy to predict accurately which students are most likely to drop out, and this leads to difficulties in providing empirical evidence for specific interventions to try and increase school completion.

School completion initiatives are important in light of the fact that it is difficult for students to participate and remain in education when they experience poverty and marginalisation. The nature of the educational experience provided can influence students' decisions about staying in school. It is also clear however, that other conditions (economic, social and cultural) have to be addressed alongside school initiatives, so that vulnerable groups and individuals are genuinely included in the education process.

Reporting on a project with five primary schools over a four year period with the aim of nurturing educational partnership between school, home and community Galvin, Higgins and Mahony (2009) outline findings across enhancement of the school ethos, mission and culture, planning of school policies, processes, procedures, organisational structures and practices and teaching, curriculum development and learning styles.

The Family School Community Partnership (FSCEP) (Galvin et al., 2009) project recognises the importance of connecting the home, school and community in support of the child's education across environments, cultures and structures. The focus of the FSCEP project was to design, develop and implement a variety of programmes, which focused on literacy, numeracy, arts education, and sport across the five participating schools. The aim of the programmes was to provide contexts and innovative ways to support parents and teachers working together. Underpinning the rationale and purpose of the initiative was the recognition of the importance and centrality of the parents in advantaging or disadvantaging children at school.

In a review of the project Galvin et al., (2009) reported that consultation with parents and families around planning and designing of programme activities promoted the development of more culturally aware and responsive programmes. Partnership complemented both child and adult learning and encouraged a more holistic view of both the learning activity as well as extending the site and the method of learning from the school to the home/community with learning experienced through different modes – sport and the arts. Partnership promoted and supported diversity by promoting the participation of minority groups thus serving to increase understanding, exchange of ideas and enhanced the capacity of individuals to connect to each other and other agencies in the community. The research pointed to the importance of the nature, frequency and quality of interactions that are key in the development of effective partnerships. Overall, it highlighted reflective practice as the cornerstone of effective partnership development, thus, necessitating attention to focus not only on the outcomes but also on the process by which effective partnership itself is built and sustained. The findings revealed that the project enhanced the relationships between the schools, homes and communities. Most of all, the findings show that the FSCEP project impacted on the learning environment of the child by supporting and facilitating the key partners in the child's life to work together for a better educational experience for all concerned.

In an external review of the project Hainsworth (2009) cited in Galvin et al. (2009) reported that there was consistent feedback that children who experienced a physical, sensory or learning disability benefited specifically from the project, by being supported

by parents and peers in a wide range of activities in a nurturing context. The varied activities provided stimulated increased participation and engagement.

The provision of extra-curricular activities and services including breakfast and lunch clubs, and after-school supports have been linked to increased student participation in schools. Feldmand and Matjasko (2005) note that students who have extra-curricular activities can achieve better outcomes, in terms of academic achievement and psychological adjustment. Mahoney (2000) also links extra-curricular activities with reduced risks of early dropout, though McNeal (1995) notes that it depends on the type of extra-curricular activities available.

Children's Voices

There are some similarities between the themes that emerged from the literature addressing the practices in place to overcome the challenges and barriers to inclusion and those already discussed in the barriers and challenges section. The themes of friendship and teacher – student relations, for example, are evident in the literature on overcoming the challenges and barriers. In addition, school ethos and models of support in mainstream schools are addressed.

Positive School Ethos and Positive feelings about School

There is some evidence that a positive school ethos and positive feelings about school can support inclusion. A positive school ethos helped students to acclimatise in first year and supported the transition process from primary to post-primary school in a study by the NCCA (2004). In another study, the majority of students with mild general learning difficulties who were attending both special and mainstream schools expressed mainly positive feelings about their current school (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). There was no difference in feelings between primary and secondary students.

Teachers

The relationship between the teachers and students as one of the most significant variables affecting student outcomes was identified in a study of inclusion of students having social and emotional difficulties in mainstream schools (Mowat, 2009). In a study by Sellman (2009) a student research group was formed in a SEBD school to evaluate the school's discipline policy. The conclusion of the students was that the approaches to discipline in

the school were “underpinned by the quality of relationships” (p. 42). Children in general perceive their teachers to be kind and caring and want to have a positive relationship with them. (Devine, 2002; Riley 2004). A key finding from the longitudinal study, *Growing Up in Ireland – The Lives of 9-Year Olds* (ESRI, 2009b), refers to students’ perspectives of school and their teachers. Results of this comprehensive study indicate that a very large majority of nine-year-olds (93%) said they liked school at least “sometimes”, 53% of students said they “always” liked their teachers and 41% said they “sometimes” liked them. Similarly, the majority of students with mild general learning difficulties who were attending both special and mainstream schools in a study by Norwich and Kelly (2004) expressed mainly positive feelings in their evaluations of their current teachers.

The craft of teaching and the characteristics of good teaching as perceived by students have been discussed in the research literature. When the views of students in the first three years of their post-primary education were reported (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007), a trend that emerged across the three phases of the study was the characteristics of good teaching. Students referred to the benefits of clear explanations, group work and practical activities. The most effective teachers, in their view, are those who explain things well, enjoy teaching their subject, view learning as fun, encourage students to ask questions, praise good work and don’t give out. Similarly, Woolfson et al. (2007) reported that a high proportion of students agreed that they received extra help with schoolwork from the class teacher or classroom assistant. When the voices of disaffected students were analysed (Riley, 2004), most students were positive about their teachers’ efforts to set high standards of work and behaviour. Students wrote more favourably about their experiences of school and teachers in the open-ended section of the questionnaire. Many commented warmly on the personal qualities of some teachers and their attempts to make lessons interesting. Students also commented on teachers who demonstrated friendliness and kindness, listened to their problems, sorted out bullying issues, treated them fairly and praised them for good behaviour. Students also appreciated teachers who helped them understand their work and responded to individual requests for help.

Recent years have seen a more concentrated effort to hear the voices of minority ethnic and minority language children with regard to educational experiences. Some of the data from these research projects indicate benign aspects of schooling. The students in Vekic’s (2003) study, for instance, reported that they were happy in school and prioritised the role

that the staff and the teachers played in this. The majority of the students felt extremely positive about their teachers, rooted in what the students perceived as their caring and understanding nature. Vekic does enter the caveat that many of these children have had experience of overcrowded classrooms where the teacher cannot devote much time to individuals. In this context the students really appreciated the time spent by the teachers in helping them with their work. Similarly, McGorman and Sugrue (2007) report that the children in their study, both minority and majority language speakers, are quite positive about changing patterns of migration in Irish schools. They do caution, however, that the linguistic and social capital of the students within their study might not be widely shared within other segments of immigrant communities and advise against unsubstantiated generalisation.

School Subjects

Across three phases of a longitudinal study of their first three years of post-primary education, students indicated a preference for practical subjects such as Art, Woodwork, Home Economics, Computer Studies and PE (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007). This trend is also evident in a study by Riley (2004) where students reported that they liked school because of the opportunities to engage in PE and sport. Students have also reported on subjects that they find difficult. Mathematics/numeracy and English/literacy were hardest subjects to learn for students with mild general learning difficulties while English/literacy was specifically highlighted as a challenge by students in mainstream schools (Norwich & Kelly, 2004).

Friendship

The importance of friendships is a common theme in studies that elicit the views of children (O'Donnell, 2003). Studies of friendships and peer relations highlight the complexity of the social world of children. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in a newly multi-ethnic Irish primary school were explored in a study by Devine and Kelly (2006). Conclusions point to the world of children that is “simultaneously fun and risky, within which they must position themselves as competent social negotiators, building alliances and friendships that are open to fluctuation and change” (p. 136). The coping strategies that children employ are mediated by gender, ability and social class. For minority ethnic boys, being good at sport facilitated their inclusion in distinct male peer groups. Newly arrived minority ethnic girls enjoyed initial high status among their peers.

However, this changed to either inclusion or exclusion depending on their ability to negotiate their way into already existing friendship groups. Friendship as an informal system of support at school was mentioned by students in some studies (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Palikara et al., 2009).

Learning Support in Mainstream Schools

Positive views about learning support were evident in some studies where the views of students were considered. The views of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) were examined as they entered post-16 education (Palikara et al., 2009). These young people were able to offer accurate accounts of their history of their special educational needs. Similar results were found in a large scale study examining the perceptions of students with a range of SEN (Lewis, Parsons & Robertson, 2007). In both of these studies, students had positive or very positive views about the support they received at school from both teachers and teaching assistants and some linked this support to their level of achievement. The issue of learning support for students with mild general learning difficulties in mainstreams schools was addressed in a study by Norwich and Kelly (2004). Views elicited from students indicated that they receive a range of learning support. Over 80% (43) students reported receiving both withdrawal and in-class support. Other models of support included group work, one-to-one work and teaching assistant support at the table. Preference for support was also explored in the study and 40% (20) preferred mainly withdrawal while 33% (17) preferred in-class support and 30% (15) preferred a mixture of the two. Students reported that they preferred withdrawal because of better quality support, less noise and appropriate and better work, more fun, less distraction, more attention, less bullying and being with friends. The negative comments about withdrawal included that it was boring without friends and the work was too hard. Fewer reasons were given for liking in-class support and these included preferring to be with the teacher and friends and not missing out or getting the same as everyone else.

Conclusion

Thomson and Gunter (2009) note that “inclusion is often designated as something that adults do for students – the school systems, pedagogies and curriculum are changed so that more young people can achieve wellbeing and academic success” (p. 196). The views expressed by the diverse range of students as discussed in the literature review, demonstrate their ability to reflect critically on the challenges and barriers to inclusion and

the ways in which these challenges and barriers might be overcome. It is evident that “young people also have agency in the construction of schools relations which include or exclude” (Thomson & Gunter, 2009, p. 196). Their insightful views of issues relating to inclusion have potential to inform and challenge current policy and practice. It is essential that they are provided with an opportunity to express their views and be heard.

Summary

In summarising the policies and practices that are helpful in addressing the challenges and barriers to inclusion, Loreman (2007, p. 22) provides a useful framework for a synopsis. He identifies from the research evidence what he calls seven pillars of inclusion. These are: Developing positive attitudes, supportive policy and leadership, school and classroom processes grounded in research-based practice, meaningful reflection, flexible curriculum and pedagogy, community involvement and necessary training and resources. In conclusion, overcoming the challenges and barriers to inclusion involves a reculturing and restructuring of schooling with provision for diversity in all forms permeating the organisation. It involves changes in attitudes, policies and practices. Ultimately it hinges on quality teaching and learning and how well it addresses the needs of all students.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Table 2 outlines the key research question: How do Irish primary and post-primary schools address the challenges and barriers to inclusive education? It also outlines the sub questions that seek to elicit the barriers and challenges and then how they are overcome across three student populations. To address the research questions a multiple case study research design was utilised across six schools. This design was chosen as “the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (Herriott & Firestone, 1983, cited in Yin, 1993, p. 45). Yin (2003) describes the case study research strategy as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Case studies are most appropriate for addressing how and why questions. The table also outlines the sources of evidence on which the study drew on. A particular concern was to capture the voice of students.

Table 2. Main Research and Subquestions at School and Class Levels

Main research question		
How do Irish primary and post-primary schools address the challenges and barriers to inclusive education?		
Subquestions	Level	Research method
What are the challenges and barriers to including students with SEN in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, SNA, student), interviews (principal, teachers, SNA, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis
What are the challenges and barriers to including students experiencing educational disadvantage in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, SNA, student), interviews (principal, teachers, SNA, HSCL, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis
What are the challenges and barriers to including minority ethnic students in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, student), interviews (principal, teachers, language support teacher, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis
How do schools overcome the challenges and barriers to including students with SEN in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, SNA, student), interviews (principal, teachers, SNA, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis
How do schools overcome the challenges and barriers to including students experiencing educational disadvantage in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, SNA, student), interviews (principal, teachers, SNA, HSCL, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis
How do schools overcome the challenges and barriers to including minority ethnic students in mainstream schools?	School/class	Questionnaire (teacher, student), interviews (principal, teachers, language support teacher, students, parents) pupil observation, document analysis

Sample Selection

In order to address the research questions it was necessary to select schools that had a history of moving towards inclusive practices and overcoming some of the challenges and barriers. In terms of breadth of school type and feasibility of access and time a target of six schools (three primary and three post-primary) was chosen.

Working with six schools of different types (3 primary and 3 post-primary), the study endeavoured to identify challenges and barriers across differing school contexts, which impede schools in fostering inclusive practices. Policies and practices, which schools adopted in mitigating the effects of these challenges and barriers were also explored as were the way in which the schools impacted on pupils' experiences of inclusion/exclusion. A sample of schools from different contexts was chosen in order to provide the greatest capacity to learn about the research issues. At primary level this included a school in an area of socio-economic disadvantage, a suburban school with a large minority ethnic population and a rural school with a mix of pupils with low and high incidence SEN, and minority ethnic students. Similarly at second level the sample of schools included a school in an area of socio-economic disadvantage, a co-ed community college and a single sex boys' school from the voluntary sector with a significant population of students with SEN and minority ethnic students.

To access such schools it was decided to contact key informants in the education system. A number of members of all university and college education departments, the Inspectorate and the National Educational Psychological Service were contacted to suggest possible schools to approach based on their professional knowledge (Appendix A). Some other organisations with access to schools were also contacted but were not in a position to offer suggestions. All had intimate knowledge of schools over many years. Each was sent the rationale for the study and the research questions. Arising from this process a list of thirteen schools was recommended. This list was then divided into categories based on location, status (disadvantaged or not), primary or post-primary, co-ed or single sex, and extent of minority ethnic and special education student population. Schools that had the greatest diversity and number of students according to the research criteria were prioritised for primary and post-primary level while ensuring an urban, suburban, rural mix. This resulted in two lists with all schools included as either top three or reserves.

Contact was made by phone with the principals of the six selected schools, the project was explained and they were invited to participate. One rural primary school declined the offer at this stage. Another primary school in an urban area accepted but later withdrew before the project had begun. At second level, the board of management of one of the schools overturned a decision of the principal and staff to become involved. Pressure from other demands on the schools was the reason given for withdrawal.

However, other schools were very enthusiastic about being involved and gave the team access to teachers, pupils, parents, principal and to key documentation. Eventually the target of six schools was reached, three each from primary and post-primary.

Description of the Six Schools

Primary School A

Primary school A is a large suburban Junior school under Catholic patronage with a diverse population of over 550 students, which includes a large proportion of both minority ethnic and/or minority language pupils, and a significant number of Travellers. It is not currently designated as a DEIS school, though it would have a significant population experiencing educational disadvantage. It has a principal and 24 class teachers, nine learning support/resource teachers, two resource teachers for Travellers, three language support teachers and a HSCL teacher, which they are set to lose. The school also has three SNAs. Completed questionnaires were received from 34 teachers and two SNAs.

Primary School B

This school is in a rural Irish town, with a diverse population of 672 students under Catholic patronage. The school has special classes for students with mild general learning disabilities, specific speech and language disorder, and specific learning disability. It also has a large Traveller and minority ethnic/minority language population. It has 23 mainstream teachers, one developing post, four special class teachers, one post for administration-deputy principal, three resource teachers for Travellers and five language support teachers. It also has the services of ten learning support-resource teachers. Completed questionnaires were received from 27 teachers and 10 SNAs.

Primary School C

The third school is suburban junior school, with a diverse population of 460 students under Catholic patronage. The school includes a large percentage of minority ethnic and/or minority language students. The school has principal, 16 class teachers, four learning support/resource and four language support staff and five SNAs. Completed questionnaires were received from 18 teachers.

Post-Primary School D

The first post-primary school is a large urban community college, with a diverse population of over 650 pupils. It has a teaching staff of 38 full time staff. It is inter-denominational and under the patronage of the VEC. It has a large population of students with special educational needs and Traveller students. The school offers the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. Eighteen questionnaires were received from teachers and eight from SNAs.

Post-Primary School E

This school is an inner city secondary voluntary all-boys school with a population of 270. It is part of the DEIS initiative. It has 31.75 whole time teacher equivalents. This includes a learning support teacher, a resource teacher, two disadvantaged area posts, one guidance teacher, 0.5 allowance for a HSCL Coordinator. It also includes allocations for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school has two special needs assistants (SNAs). The school has a significant number of minority ethnic/minority language students.

Post-Primary School F

This post-primary school is a large suburban school with a diverse school population of 360 students. It has 30 teachers and 14 special needs assistants. The school has a large SEN student population, as well as students experiencing educational disadvantage and minority ethnic and or minority language population. It is also part of the DEIS initiative. It has a room that is made available for students with emotional and or behavioural difficulties, when necessary. The school offers the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. Fifteen questionnaires were received from this school.

Research Procedures and Data Collection Methods

Case studies allow different methods to access data. In this case, multiple methods of collecting data were utilised across two stages. In stage one questionnaires for teachers and special needs assistants were sent out to the six schools prior to school visits. Of 239 questionnaires sent out 131 were returned which is a response rate of 55%. These questionnaires were analysed and influenced the subsequent interview schedules designed for stage two. This stage involved visits to schools. A team of four researchers then spent two days in each school. An interview and observation timetable was drawn up in consultation with the principal or key contact in each school. Relevant documents were also either gathered during the visits or read on site if necessary. Table 3 outlines the range and number of participants and research methods used across the six schools resulting in 312 completed questionnaires, 72 interviews and 10 day long student observations.

Table 3. Range and Number of Participants in Relation to Data Collection Methods

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview	Observation
Principals		6	
Class/subject teachers	89	12	
Learning support/resource teachers	11	6	
Language support teachers	10	6	
HSCL	1	3	
School chaplain		1	
School completion		3	
Special needs assistants	20	7	
Students	181	10	10
Parents		10	
Guidance Counsellor		1	
PLC Coordinator		1	
Deputy principal		4	
Counsellor		1	
Special class teacher		1	
Total	312	72	10

Stage One: Questionnaire

Questionnaires for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants

Questionnaires used for the adults consisted of two parts (Appendix B and C). The first part focused on information about their current situation, the types of students they worked

with, the classes or subjects they taught or supported, and their qualifications and teaching experience. The second part had open-ended questions. Using a questionnaire facilitates open-ended questions that can be answered in a confidential manner and “can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which are the hallmarks of qualitative data” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 255). The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide a rich source of data from a wider range of staff in the school than could be accessed via interview as part of the case study visits.

The second part focused specifically on the research questions, and consisted of three open questions:

1. Please state any barriers or challenges that you experience when including each of the following groups in you daily practice...
2. Thinking about your daily practice at a school and at a class level, how do you attempt to overcome the barriers and challenges in relation to the following...

Teachers/SNAs were asked to respond each of these two questions separately for students with SEN, for minority ethnic and/or minority language students and students experiencing educational disadvantage.

3. Looking to the future
 - a. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a school level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class
 - b. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a class level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class

Students' Views

An important facet of the inclusion debate is the consideration of the perspectives of students on their educational provision (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). The rights movement has had a significant influence on children’s participation in matters that affect their lives. Findings from studies involving students with special educational needs reveal that consideration of their perspectives can inform policy and practice (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Lewis et al., 2007; Palikara et al., 2009; Sellman, 2009). The importance of involving students in research is reiterated by Thomson and Gunter (2009) who emphasise

that young people, as well as adults, “have agency in the construction of school relations which include or exclude” (p. 196). Reasons for involving children and young people in the research process have been discussed by Lewis and Porter (2007). Involvement will yield research that is more meaningful and has greater validity. A situation may not be fully understood by researchers without the views of all stakeholders being represented. It is also a more democratic process as students can contribute to decision-making that affects the quality of their lives. In the UK, one of the fundamental principles of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice is that ‘the views of the child should be sought and taken into account’ (DfES, 2001, p. 7).

The complexity of consulting with children and young people has been illustrated (Norwich, Kelly and Educational Psychologists in Training, 2006) and one of the challenges for researchers is identifying ways in which all children can be included in the research process. Evidence from research and policy highlights the importance of identifying and adopting creative and flexible approaches to provide opportunities for children with disabilities to express their views (Rabiee, Sloper & Beresford, 2005; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Morris (1998) stresses the need to dismantle barriers that have historically prevented young people with severe cognitive or communication problems from active participation in matters that affect them. Lewis and Porter (2007) have outlined appropriate research methods which include observation in different contexts, individual interviews, focus group interviews, creative methods such as cameras, videos or drama, questionnaires, life stories, prompted approaches such as “talking mats” (Cameron & Murphy, 2002). While opinion and practice has moved in recognising the importance of involving children in research, concern has been expressed about elicitation methods used in ascertaining the views of children and young people with severe learning disabilities. Ware (2004) cautions against assuming the validity of children’s views passed on through proxies or facilitators and she suggests that indirect methods, such as observation of the child, may be preferable in gauging the views of children with severe and profound learning difficulties. Regardless of what methods are used in eliciting the views of children and young people, it is necessary to validate the meaning through corroboration with other data (Porter & Lacey, 2005).

Student Questionnaires

The questionnaire is a method, which is suited to exploring the views of children (Lewis & Porter, 2007). Given the limited scope of the case study, which included ten individual interviews of students who were “shadowed” and observed in the school setting, it was decided that the broad sweep of a questionnaire would be an appropriate method of accessing the views of a greater number of students. Children and young people can contribute in larger numbers if questionnaires are adapted to their competence level and if adults are prepared to support them with reading and writing as required (Cline & Frederickson, 2009). Creative and flexible approaches were adopted to provide opportunities for all students to express their views (Rabiee et al. 2005; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). As the study spanned primary and post-primary schools, two different versions of the questionnaire were designed. In both cases, a definition of inclusion was written on the questionnaire and read to the students. The layout of the questionnaire was attractive and colourful and included pictures to engage the students (Appendix D). Clear and simple language was used throughout and a sentence completion technique was utilised to provide students with an opportunity to give open-ended comments (Wade & Moore, 1993). Items in the questionnaire mirrored the research questions and included whether or not students feel they belong in their school and what makes them feel they belong or do not belong. They were then asked how a number of different people (children, teachers, the principal, other people) could make the school a better place where people could feel included or feel that they belong.

Questionnaires were administered to both a junior and a senior class, selected by the school staff in each of five schools. In selecting the classes, consideration was given to including the three areas of education targeted in the study (special educational needs, educational disadvantage and minority ethnic education). The purpose of the study was explained to the students who were then given an opportunity to ask questions. It was also reiterated that participation in the study was voluntary and that students could seek clarification at any stage throughout the process by raising a hand (Lewis, 2004). Primary school students, or children for whom writing was not an option, were given a simpler version of the questionnaire where they had the choice of drawing or writing a comment. The two researchers and at least one staff member who were present during the completion of the questionnaires were prepared to read items aloud for the students or act as scribes.

Students who chose to draw to illustrate their views were invited to write the message that the drawing conveyed or to access the support of a scribe, as drawings can be ambiguous and difficult to interpret (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). A further consideration when researching with children is the increased likelihood of acquiescence (Finlay & Lyons, 2002). To reduce the risk of acquiescence and of influencing or distorting the message when reading or scribing, researchers liaised with school staff about the purpose of the questionnaire and the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the student's voice (Lewis & Porter, 2007). Students were very enthusiastic in responding to the questions and some sought support for spellings, reading and further explanation of the meaning of the questions. The process took approximately 35-45 minutes in each class.

While a thorough and systematic approach was adopted in designing and administering the questionnaire, there is no perfect methodology when researching the views of children (Nind et al., 2004) and new and innovative research methods and tools require careful evaluation and validation.

Students were given consent forms to be signed by their parents/guardians and themselves. In some of the schools not all students got the forms signed but wished to participate in completing the questionnaire. Some said they had verbal agreement from home; others that it was signed but they forgot to bring it in. This presented a problem to the research team as the questionnaires were to be completed as a whole class activity so that the intention and language could be explained and support offered to students where required in responding to the questions. Teachers were also anxious that all students took part. A decision was taken, in consultation with the schools, to allow all students in the classes who said they had consent and wished to complete the questionnaire to do so but only those with full written consent were used in the study. This necessitated putting initials on the questionnaires of those without consent forms in order to match them up with the forms when they came in.

Stage Two: Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) were perceived as providing the best means of addressing those issues raised in the previous stage in greater depth across different contexts. Interviews highlight the role of human interaction and the importance of the social context in generating knowledge (Kvale, 1996). They allow for greater depth,

more nuanced descriptions of participants' lives and opportunities to clarify misunderstandings experienced by the interviewee, than other methods of data collection (Cohen et al., 2000; Kvale, 1996). Interviews can aid understanding of specific school and teacher contexts. To understand an educational practice "requires the careful analysis of the social situation - the underlying social rules, the interpretation of the participants, the values and aims embedded within the practice" (Pring, 2000, p. 258).

However, interviews also have their limitations. The quality of data can be affected by issues of mutual trust, social distance, power, uneasiness of respondents to questions, different meanings attached to words and the subjectivity, bias, control, and the skills and attributes of the interviewer (Cicourel, 1964; Woods, 1986 cited in Cohen et al., 2000).

Interviews were held where applicable with the principal, coordinators of special education, language support, school completion officer, home school liaison coordinator, learning support/resource teachers, language support, guidance counsellor, chaplain and with a sample special needs assistants, class and subject teachers (Appendix E). Separate interview schedules were also constructed for children and parents (Appendix F and G).

For school professionals, two considerations were taken into account. First, there was a need to find information about their own role and experiences in the school, and the type of children they work with. Beyond this, the questions focused on the three main sets of questions in the research – the barriers and challenges to inclusion, practices to overcome these barriers, and looking to the future. For all cases, a number of general probes were generated, to ensure any specific or relevant aspects were covered in relation to their own area.

The parents' interview was more general, with questions focusing on whether they think the school is inclusive, and how it helps to include their child. They were asked to focus on what the school does well and whether there are any areas where they could do more to include children.

Student Interviews and Working with Interpreters

For students, the interview schedule was simplified; they were asked in simple terms about whether they feel included in the school, anything that makes them feel not included, and

anything people in the school could do to make them feel more included. For some of the students interpreters were used. It has been argued that interpretation and translation in research was previously practised almost exclusively by anthropologists (Birbili, 2000). Contemporary social research is now much more concerned with collecting data in one language and presenting findings in another, very often through the inclusion of interpreters in the research process. This is not unproblematic. Indeed Birbili (2000) alerts to three factors which can potentially impact on the quality of translation in this context: the competence, the autobiography and what Temple (1997) calls “the material circumstances” of the translator, that is the position the translator holds in relation to the researcher (Birbili, 2000). Furthermore, the vast majority of research within which interpreters or translators are used fails to identify the role of the interpreters or translators, and are presented as if the research participants were fluent English speakers or that the language used in the research was irrelevant (Temple 1997; Edwards, 1998; Temple & Young, 2004). Within this tradition, it is argued that this treatment of the language issue stems from an epistemological perspective in which the researchers view themselves as objective collectors of data, the validity of which must be guaranteed through the elimination of bias.

According to Temple and Young (2004, p. 163) “... the question is, therefore, whether and how translation within the research process potentially introduces bias and how to ensure agreement on the translation of source data.” They proceed to provide the example of Edwards (1998) who discusses techniques such as back translation used to ensure agreement of a ‘correct’ version of a text. This epistemological stance gives no indication of who the interpreter/translator was, what was their relationship to the researcher or the research participant. In this method of research and research writing, “... both the translator and the act of translation are considered irrelevant to such representation and to the reader’s engagement with that representation” (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 164).

However, both Temple and Edwards (2002) and Temple and Young (2004) argue that research work rooted in social constructionist, interpretive or non-positivist epistemology must recognise the role played by the translator. This is important because “... if there is no one meaning to be gleaned from experiences of the social world, then there can be no one translation” (Temple & Edwards, 2002, p. 4). This is not, however, to be seen as a cover for sloppy translation or interpretation, rather it is a recognition that the

translator/interpreter must convey the entire meaning of the answer provided by the respondent. In some instances, this will necessitate the inclusion of words not directly spoken by the respondent but which will make the meaning clearer and give a more accurate account of what the research participant communicated in response to the questions asked. According to Temple and Edwards (2006, p. 40), “Simon (1996) shows that the translator is involved in discussing concepts rather than just words, and that context is all important in deciding equivalence or difference in meaning.”

It is important that this process must be understood and enunciated through the research. As other human beings involved in the interview process, it is obvious that interpreters, just as with the researchers themselves, bring their own passions and prejudices to the interviews. According to Temple and Edwards (2002, p. 11) the research thus becomes subject to ‘triple subjectivity’ (the interactions between research participant, researcher and interpreter), and this needs to be made explicit. This study followed Edwards (1998) in understanding the interpreters as “key informants” because they provided a “source of introduction to, information and discussion on the social world under investigation” (Temple & Edwards, 2002, p. 6).

Student Observation

Observation was used as a data collection technique in the case studies. Two students from each of five schools were selected by school staff to participate in the research. One school withdrew consent for students to participate in the observation element of the study. The learners from the three areas of education targeted in the study (special educational needs, educational disadvantage and minority ethnic /language minority education) were represented in the total cohort of ten students (Table 4).

Table 4. Profiles of Students Observed

Student	Age	School	Class/level	Inclusion focus
Boy	8	Primary A	2 nd	ADHD
Boy	8	Primary A	2 nd	ASD
Girl	10	Primary B	3 rd	Minority ethnic/minority language
Boy	14	Primary B	6 th and special class	Mild general learning disabilities and ASD
Boy	8	Primary C	2 nd	Minority ethnic/minority language
Boy	8	Primary C	2 nd	Minority ethnic/minority language
Boy	13	Post-primary D	1 st year	Awaiting assessment
Girl	16	Post-primary D	3 rd year	Mild general learning disabilities
Boy	15	Post-primary F	3 rd year	Autistic spectrum disorder
Adult	18	Post-primary F	Transition year	Moderate general learning disabilities

Following a review of the literature, the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) was used as the basic instrument for collecting observational data, alongside a basic narrative summary. The Index for Inclusion was adapted (Appendix H) to incorporate inclusive practices in relation to teaching and learning for students across the three areas of special educational needs, educational disadvantage and minority ethnic education.

Children were “shadowed” by a researcher and observed in the school environment for up to one day across a range of subjects and activities. Researchers familiarised themselves with the adapted observation schedule and used this as a frame of reference when recording the narrative summary during observation. Clarification was sought from staff, parents and students when necessary to validate observations made by researchers. Detail and substance were added to the record following the observations. Field notes which included recall of forgotten material, interpretative notes and personal impressions and feelings (Robson, 2005) were also promptly written to substantiate the narrative account. These notes and records were then “coded” back according to the items in the adapted Index for Inclusion.

In the interests of consistency and accuracy, researchers who engaged in the observational aspect of the case study also conducted the individual interviews of the “shadowed” students, their parents and their class teachers.

Document Analysis

Schools were asked for any policy documents, assessments or planning that would shed light on their approaches. In virtually all of the schools access was given. In some of the schools this included presentations made by coordinators to staff and parents. Some of the schools had sophisticated record keeping, tracking and customised IEP templates.

Data Analysis

Initially all data from the questionnaires were coded and incidences applicable to each category compared (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 148). As themes emerged, these gave rise to hypotheses and lines of questioning which informed the interviews.

In addition, the questionnaire data and all transcribed interviews were imported as word documents into NVivo-8 (QSR 2008). Demographic details (participant type, school type) were also imported. NVivo is a specialist software tool developed as a computer aided qualitative data analysis system, over the past 20 years, and NVivo 8 allows for the direct importation of data in a variety of media. The decision to use NVivo was taken in order to allow efficient and transparent analysis of the very large quantity of data collected. It also facilitates the production of a clear audit trail. All processes and stages of coding are tracked in order to show the stages of the analysis. Following data importation, analysis followed a staged process outlined below:

Broad Coding

The qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. All of the data were coded, first to validate the themes, and secondly to ensure the reliability of coding. The qualitative data were initially read through chronologically to generate broad participant driven categories (free nodes) from the data up with no references to the research question.

Grouping Themes into Categories

The research questions were then introduced and categories created (tree nodes). The data were organised in two ways. First, data were organised according to the specific research questions: there were sets of themes on barriers and challenges to inclusion, on practices to overcome barriers to inclusion, and on looking to the future. Second, each theme was broken down into SEN, educational disadvantage, and children from a minority ethnic and/or minority language subthemes, where data referred specifically to one of these three categories.

Coding by Perspective

Each of the major themes of the study was then split down by the participant and school perspectives. These new nodes contained the data coded under each category and theme exclusive to each participant perspective.

Generating Summary Statements using Memos

All the data were then memo'd, with the memos again validated. Memos are summaries of the data generated by the coders. These memos formed the basis of the findings section, illustrated by data from observations and field notes taken in each school. The children's

interviews and questionnaire data were dealt with separately from the other data, though the same process was used in NVivo for this data. In addition to this, the drawings produced by children in the questionnaires were analysed and used for illustrative purposes.

Student observations were written up as described above and then analysed against the themes of challenges, barriers and overcoming them. This process ensured that the data from the questionnaires, interviews, observations and field notes were triangulated as part of the process of confirming themes, findings and conclusions.

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

Nind et al. (2004) outline the many dilemmas in researching inclusive practices and cultures in schools. These include the selection of schools, the impact of the researcher on what is observed, the detection of exclusionary practices, accessing the experiences of the children and how best to feedback to schools. They remind us that school “cultures, attitudes, policies and practices are interwoven with complex contexts” (p. 268).

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 189) offer the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as appropriate candidates for considering the trustworthiness or validity of qualitative data. Hammersley (1992, pp. 70-71) suggests the criteria of plausibility, credibility, and the amount and kind of evidence relative to the type of claims being made. Features of this study that help establish trustworthiness include the very high response rate of all participants in the schools and the level of access given to the research team. Such a culture helps to minimise bias in terms of respondents being honest. The team had access to all relevant personnel and documents to confirm or deny perceived beliefs and claims where appropriate. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 120) argue that in “qualitative methodologies reliability includes fidelity to real life, context-and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents.” The study attempted to be guided by these.

Validity in interviewing is a persistent problem (Cohen et al., 2000). To counteract this it is suggested that efforts should be made to minimise bias such as the tendency of the interviewer to see the respondent in his own image, to seek answers that support preconceived notions and misunderstandings by both interviewer and respondent (Cohen

et al., 2000). It was hoped that awareness of these difficulties helped to minimise their impact.

Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 29) argue that “type three error,” that is, asking the wrong question is the source of most validity errors. Progressive focusing through the questionnaires, and individual interviews helped to ensure the right questions were asked and the most salient issues identified. The use of the interviews to seek confirmation of the emerging analysis strengthens the reliability and validity of same. Observations have high ecological validity because they lack artificiality. However, this method is not without its disadvantages because the observer may affect the situation being observed (Robson, 2005). The triangulation of data from all sources helped to reduce threats to the validity of the findings.

In relation to the data analysis with NVivo, nodes hold data that were coded from sources. Definitions for all nodes in the study were discussed and agreed by the research team for clarity and to test for coding consistency. As there were multiple coders, inter-rater reliability testing was conducted and benchmarked at 80% agreement.

Ethical Considerations

At stage one, the ethical considerations concerning the questionnaire were informed consent, explanation of the purpose of the study and guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability. These were addressed in the cover letter (Appendix K and L). At a methodological level, every effort was made in the construction of the questionnaire to be rigorous, fair and to avoid offensive, biased and inconsiderate items.

At stage two, the ethical issues in relation to the interviews and observations were informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time (Cohen et al., 2000). This right was exercised by some participants in the study and was acted on immediately. Informed consent was obtained in writing and all participants were assured in writing of the anonymity of their schools and themselves (Appendix I, J, K and L). As with the questionnaire, the interview schedules were filtered for potentially offensive and inconsiderate items.

In collecting the views of students it is imperative that they have a clear understanding of the purpose of the research and that their explicit consent has been sought and given. Consent should be regarded as an ongoing process where students are consulted at each step along the way (Lewis & Porter, 2007). Where children are unable to give informed consent, researchers should provide opportunities for assent or dissent to ensure that their involvement is voluntary and not as a result of coercion. There are examples where researchers have given children control over the video recorder to enable them to terminate an interview if necessary (Parsons et al., 2004; Porter & Lacey, 2005).

A further consideration when researching with children with special needs is the increased likelihood of acquiescence (Finlay & Lyons, 2002). The cognitive demands of the question or task requires careful consideration and Lewis (2004) emphasises the importance of giving children a sense that they can seek clarification or signal “don’t know” and suggests the use of statements rather than questions.

The Research Ethics Committees of St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra gave approval for the study. This involved the submission of the research proposal, all research instruments, letters seeking access and consent, and a plain language statement for participants outlining the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

Limitations of the Study

The use of self-completion instruments carries inherent weaknesses. Data can be affected by a social desirability response bias (Robson, 2005). The views of non-respondents are unknown and may affect how representative the findings are. There is also the risk of respondents misunderstanding the questions. However, despite these limitations, steps were taken to ensure consistency, reliability and validity. On this basis the study has generated plausible and credible findings.

In term of generalising the findings the study while representing a strong cross section of schools is not a representative sample and therefore generalisation in that sense is not applicable. However, that is not to say that useful inferences cannot be drawn at all levels of the system. Hammersley (1992) in fact contends that case studies offer only a “weaker” claim to generalisability than does research based on large representative samples. “This

weaker claim does not, however, mean that results are not therefore generalisable” (p. 212).

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS IN RELATION TO CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Introduction

The six schools investigated in this study were all chosen because of their relative success and effectiveness in including students from the three target groups studied – those with SEN, those experiencing educational disadvantage and those from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds. Nevertheless, considerable challenges and barriers were reported through the questionnaires and/or interviews by the participants from all the schools in the study. These, along with additional challenges and barriers, were also observed by the researchers on their visits to the schools. This chapter reports the challenges and barriers to inclusion which were identified in this study and which are confirmed by the research literature already reviewed in chapter two. Analysis of the data from the current study revealed challenges and barriers to inclusion at three different levels – firstly at the level of the school, secondly at the level of the teacher /class, and thirdly, at the level of the child /family /community. Although there was much overlap between the issues raised at these three different levels, the findings from each level are presented and discussed separately below. As explained in the introduction to this report the views of students are afforded separate treatment. Thus, this chapter concludes by reporting the challenges and barriers to inclusion identified by the student participants.

School Level

There was evidence from all data sources of challenges and barriers to inclusion at the level of the school. Four broad themes, covering a range of related issues emerged as follows: issues associated with assessment, the allocation of resources, models of support, such as withdrawing students from the mainstream class for additional support, and students' behavioural difficulties. A small number of references were made to issues in relation to prejudice, racism and bullying and these are reported as the final set of challenges and barriers to inclusion identified at school level.

Assessment

A number of challenges and barriers relating to the theme of assessment were identified by the schools in the study. While some of these pertained to all three groups of students studied, assessment-related issues concerning students from minority ethnic and /or

minority language backgrounds were the most prominent. These included the difficulty of making a distinction between a learning difficulty /SEN and a language difficulty as a result of using English as an additional language, as well as the challenge of identifying specific needs of students. Other issues, which appeared to affect all three groups of students, although to a lesser extent than those from minority language backgrounds, included access to psychological assessment and continuing professional development in relation to assessment, the link between assessment and the allocation of resources, and formative assessment practices in schools. These assessment-related barriers to inclusion at school level are now reported.

Distinction Between a Language and a Learning Difficulty as a Result of Learning English as an Additional Language

One of the main themes, already cited as a teacher-related challenge, to emerge from the findings in relation to assessment, was the difficulty of distinguishing between a learning difficulty/SEN and a language difficulty where students were learning English as an additional language. Seven specific references emerged from three of the schools visited by the research team. The following teacher's comment was typical:

Yes it is hard to know really. You would be saying to the parents, like you would be wondering is it a language thing or is it because they are like Irish children who are in need of extra time or extra resource hours to bridge the gap (Teacher, primary school B).

Teachers said that this challenge led to concerns about selecting the most appropriate model of support within the DES guidelines as “*technically you go to EAL or SEN and that is the difficulty because how do we determine?*” (EAL teacher primary School C). There is research evidence that students whose first language is not English, are over-represented in the area of SEN (Baker, 2003; Ortiz, 2001; Werning, Löser & Urban, 2008). Dyson et al., (2004) found that students whose mother tongue is not English are a little more likely than their peers to be identified as having a special educational need without a statement but less likely than their peers of having a statement of SEN. The authors raise the question that schools might be confounding lack of language proficiency with SEN or that they might be using the SEN structure as a means of providing for these students' needs. Both these possibilities appeared to be true of the schools in the present study as reported earlier when discussing lack of readiness for grade level as a barrier to inclusion.

Another barrier to the assessment process for students from minority backgrounds, involved teachers' lack of knowledge about educational attainment in these students' home countries. While it was noted by one primary principal that children from a minority language background achieve very highly in school standardised testing, other participants in the study identified gaps in their learning, for example, in their comprehension and communication. An EAL teacher in a primary school commented that "...*they can read but they are not getting the actual text, so is that a comprehension thing?*" The importance of identifying gaps in their learning was also expressed by another participant:

Children from English-speaking African countries actually weren't doing as well as we thought they were doing simply because when it comes to communicating ...they would speak pidgin.... (EAL teacher, primary school C).

This speaks to the need for training with regard to language learning trajectories. It must be understood that, not only do minority language children have to develop a proficiency in English in order to properly access the Irish school curriculum, it is a proficiency in a particular type of English language register. Cummins (2001) refers to these as the three dimensions of language proficiency, namely; Conversational Fluency, Discrete Language Skills and Academic Language Proficiency. Cummins asserts that it takes on average, five to seven years for a minority language child to develop Academic Language Proficiency to the level of their majority language speaking peers.

Access to Psychological Assessments and Continuing Professional Development in Relation to Assessment

Access to psychological assessment was reported by teachers as a barrier to inclusion. Seven references were made by four schools (three primary and one post-primary). Concern was expressed by participants about the length of waiting time to have a student assessed and the difficulty in accessing educational assessment for students in a special class. Assessment and collaboration with relevant parties to support the transition process from primary to post-primary school, specifically for a student with emotional/behavioural difficulties was also viewed as a challenge by a school completion officer at post-primary. Confirming the findings from the current study, challenges relating to early identification and access to psychological assessment have also emerged in other Irish studies (Nugent, 2007; Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). Concerns have also been expressed by the DfES (2004) in the UK Government's Strategy for SEN regarding the lack of availability of specialist

expertise working in multi-disciplinary teams to support the full range of students with SEN.

The shift of emphasis in the Irish service provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), over the past decade recognises the need for intervention, support and on-going continuous professional development for teachers and schools (NEPS, 2007). Although schools report that they still require psychological assessments for their students, some schools are also recognising the need to move beyond the initial stages of the assessment process. One deputy principal of a post-primary school said that their school had shifted the focus from psychological assessment to professional development for staff. He stated that “... *we were getting this piece of paper and there wasn't that many recommendations or realistic ones ... the move away now seems to be ... to talk to staff.*” Examples of professional development for staff in this school from other professionals included, input on memory problems with recommendations and reading materials, as well as support within the school for staff and students from a speech and language therapist. The in-service needs of teachers in relation to having the necessary skills to assess students were also identified by one teacher at primary level as “*their needs can be very hard to pinpoint*” (Teacher, primary school C). It seems reasonable to suggest, that the need for teacher and whole-school development in the area of assessment and intervention has increased since the implementation of the General Allocation Model of support for schools (DES, 2005c). Because they have been allocated extra teaching resources to cater for students, who formerly required a psychological assessment for such extra support, schools need to be very proficient in assessing and allocating additional learning support for these students.

The Link between Assessment and the Allocation of Resources

The assessment and subsequent allocation of resources within the school, in the context of current DES policy and guidelines, was identified as a challenge for schools (five references, from three schools, two primary and one post-primary). One teacher expressed the difficulty whereby some students were not entitled to “*resource time because educationally they are doing all right, but emotionally they are certainly not, and we would hope in some way we could hive off some time that we would be able to give the children ... but it is difficult trying to justify all the timetabling*” (Home school liaison teacher, primary school A). The SENCO in the same school expressed concern about

children who are “*so weak, they are just weak, weak children*” but they are not getting a psychological assessment. One EAL teacher described the demands in fulfilling the administration requirements of the DES in relation to language tests to access resources.

This was viewed as a

phenomenal undertaking and to look at how do you test and timetable 173 and how do we tabulate the results and then how do we get it all together and send it off to the Department... and obviously a lot of that has to be done after 3.00 so we give a lot of our time (Teacher, primary school C).

While this challenge links with the need for continuing professional development for teachers in the area of assessment, it also resonates with the barriers discussed in the review of literature concerning the amount of time and administration teachers need to devote to students from the three groups studied (Anderson et al., 2007; Forlin et al., 2008; Smith & Leonard, 2005).

Formative Assessment Practices in Schools

Although the findings from the study focused on the challenges of assessment in relation to identification of needs and allocation of support, there was no reference to on-going formative assessment as a challenge to inclusion from any of the study schools. The importance of formative assessment and its contribution to the achievements of students, in particular lower-attaining students, is well documented in the research literature (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Wiliam et al., 2004). The effectiveness of the assessment lies in the ability of teachers to make decisions about the nature of the ‘gap’ between what students can and cannot do well. Except for one educational setting in the present study, data from observations indicate a gap in classroom practice in relation to formative assessment. More specifically, there was very little evidence of teachers providing ongoing feedback to students, indicating what they have learned and what they might do next, monitoring and recording of progress of students to identify learning difficulties, and encouraging self-assessment. Wedell (2008) argues for teacher education in assessment for learning approaches to provide practitioners with the understanding and skills to make good decisions about interventions for students with SEN, particularly in cases where progress is not being made. The finding from the current study suggest that teachers and schools need to extend and develop their expertise in the area of assessment if they are to identify the specific needs of their students who have additional learning needs and subsequently, plan for, and implement, programmes of learning to meet those needs.

Resources

Lack of resources was mentioned as a challenge and a barrier to the inclusion of each group of students studied (27 references from five of the schools, four of which were from interviews with principals). Teachers and principals expressed the view that even with the willingness of staff in schools, it was difficult to carry out plans without, what they considered to be, the necessary resources and supports in place. Particular reference was made to the lack of support services from non-teaching auxiliary services, along with a lack of coordination between these services and the schools. This lack of coordination between service providers was also linked to a lack of support for the transition of students between the different stages of education. Regarding students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds, two areas were highlighted as barriers to inclusion in relation to lack of resources. These were, inadequate home-school liaison and a shortage of dual language resources. Financial constraints, including the lack of sports facilities in schools and local communities, in areas designated as disadvantaged, were specifically mentioned in relation to students experiencing educational disadvantage. The ways in which participants from the research schools believed, lack of resources in these areas acted as barriers to inclusion, are now reported.

Lack of Support Services

A number of interviewees talked about the need for improved resources and support from non-teaching professionals such as psychologists and health and /social-related service providers. Lack of speech and language therapists and occupational therapists in particular, emerged as a theme when analysing data from four parent interviews. This finding concurs with research from other Irish studies, where the lack of availability of external support services is identified as a barrier to inclusion (Nugent, 2007; Shevlin et al., 2008). The principal of a post-primary school was critical of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and of their reluctance to get involved with the school. A deputy principal of a primary school said that while the school had “*an excellent NEPS service to the school,*” there was no designated NEPS service for students in special classes. The guidance counsellor of a post-primary school, which had a number of unaccompanied minors from various countries, spoke of the need for post-school provision and a coordination of services and resources for these students.

In terms of the major problem that I have working with the students who come here as unaccompanied minors, their major problem is that as soon as they are finished their leaving cert, all supports are cut. And it is very difficult to continue to encourage them to avail of whatever opportunities are there when there is absolutely no support. I have a young fellow in the leaving cert this year and he'd love to go on and do landscape design and he could do that at PLC level but he has €18 a week disposable money and it wouldn't even cover his transport costs to go to PLC. So I think if we are going to open our doors to people, and I think it is appropriate that we should do because we are still a relatively rich country, we have to face the responsibility of not dropping them as soon as they finish the leaving cert (Guidance counsellor, post-primary school F).

Parents and caregivers spoke forcefully about children in ASD units who lose the services of health professionals when they are included in the mainstream classroom:

What I think happens is they integrate; the parents are delighted they're integrated, and then after six months, they're discharged from (health services) ... (Parent post-primary School F).

Yeah, in about fourth class, there was a definite initiative to remove his access to the health professionals (Aunt of student, post-primary school F).

Parents and students in other studies have also expressed views about the lack of resources and support services as a barrier to inclusion and participation in mainstream schools (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Shah, 2007). The views of students with a physical disability who had experienced both mainstream and special school systems, give insights into the challenges and barriers in relation to the lack of resources to support inclusion (Shah, 2007). Shah's students praised the facilities and resources in special educational settings, but felt that these facilities were not available to the same extent in mainstream settings. Facilities which were perceived by young people to be crucial to their physical development and consequently to their future health and independence, included physiotherapy, speech therapy, adequate school transport and accessible swimming and hydrotherapy pools.

Lack of Coordination between Support Services and Schools

Parents of children with SEN in the present study also expressed discontent about the lack of continuity in support services from primary to post-primary schools to include children with SEN. This was clearly articulated by one mother who had experienced three different systems of educational provision for her child with ASD. These systems included provision in the mainstream class in a mainstream school, provision in an ASD unit in a

mainstream school, and her child's current provision, in a special class for students with mild general learning difficulty in a mainstream school:

Yes. I know myself, while I am happy that he is going where he is going, if I could continue this model... but there is an awful deficit though, I don't know where you are in the Department, but if you could actually say it to somebody, there is an awful deficit for the autistic children coming out of primary schools having got very good care. The autistic children in primary schools with their SNAs and everything else, they seem to be getting on fairly well and there is a lot of resources being put into them, but it doesn't seem to be transferring to the secondary because the parents, like we are left, you are more or less left yourself, more or less thrown out there whatever you can get. And then fighting for an SNA again, why would you be fighting, I mean what is this thing that I have to fight for an SNA. I mean if the psychologist has said you need it and the disability determines that you need it, what is all the fighting about? I mean the parents are worn out by the time they get through, they don't want fights, what are we fighting about? And X is a perfect example of what you can achieve if you front load a system. And I am very conscious of the investment the Department has made into X, it is astronomical, but hopefully he has been worth every cent, but I know if he wasn't and he was still with very little language, frustrated, they would certainly be pouring in a lot more, whereas now I could see, I mean he mightn't get a job, but I think he could live fairly independently with support, which I wouldn't have envisaged that life for him. But I am very conscious of the level of support that he got and please God it will pay dividends. I think they have to look, I mean I don't know why they don't continue this model (integrated special class in a mainstream school) on for secondary, there are parents out there who would love this model but I think parents can get very caught up too and they find it difficult to articulate what they actually need. I don't go researching, I look at the child and say, 'what do you need?' And if people looked at the child and stop talking about ... I had a conversation with an inspector who was at a public meeting, lovely woman, and I was telling her about this model because I was so excited, so fascinated last year when he was doing so well and she said, 'that is a very old model.' And I said, 'sure it is working, that is the thing, look at the children at the end of the day.' We get caught up. It is look at what will give this child the best chance of success where ultimately he will be a much more functioning member and will need less (Parent, primary school B).

Hanko (2004) reiterates the lack of effective collaboration between professionals and the lack of multi-agency sharing of information as a barrier to inclusion. Hanko specifically identifies as a barrier, the time it takes for liaison between professionals and the difficulties in fostering attitudes and relationships to promote collaboration. In the Irish context, Drudy and Kinsella (2009) concluded from their study of Ireland's progress towards an inclusive educational system, that

The participants acknowledged the logistical difficulties of achieving coordination and cohesion within and between the different sectors of the education system; between the education system and other relevant systems, especially the Health and Welfare systems, often manifested in difficulties around diagnosis and assessment; (2009, p. 656)

This lack of coordination is linked to difficulties during important transitions throughout the educational life-span of students, an issue which is further developed below.

Lack of Support for the Transition of Students between the Different Stages of Education

The challenge of transition for students with SEN from early year's settings to primary and from primary to post-primary school was also articulated by parents in the current study. One parent identified lack of collaboration and "difficulty in liaising" between the various health service providers as a challenge and a barrier to effective placement and inclusion of children with SEN in primary school settings. Parents also expressed frustration with the lack of support or planning for the transition process from primary to post-primary school: As one parent said: "*But inclusion is there in theory, but not in practice in so many schools, as the department know*" (Parent, post-primary school F).

Another parent, who was now very happy with the provision her child was receiving in his current school, reported that she and her family had tried one post-primary school but "*they (the prospective school) basically did not want to know*" (Parent, post-primary school F). Speaking of her child's current school, which she felt was "*very inclusive and supportive,*" she said "*...when I walked in the door I knew*" (Parent, post-primary school F). In the Irish context, findings from a longitudinal study (Smyth et al., 2004), of students' experiences of curriculum in the first three years of their post-primary schooling, reveal the importance of supporting and easing the transition process through developing integration programmes, fostering a positive climate and ensuring continuity in students' learning experiences between primary and post-primary. The transition from primary to post-primary school poses challenges to many students who are in need of additional support.

Inadequate Home-School Liaison

Poor links between the school and the home and or/community were highlighted in relation to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds. The lack of home-school liaison support, for example, and the lack of time and resources within the school to develop and manage these links, contributed to the challenge of including these students, as one teacher expressed:

And we don't have home school, we don't have any link with home, the parents are not used to coming into school and so coming in for teacher meetings is good and coming in for shows and plays (EAL teacher, primary school C).

This particular teacher felt that it was difficult to sustain this “*inclusive atmosphere*” in the school “*when you have a class of 30 children and you have limited resources to help.*”

This teacher expressed the need for a designated person to liaise between the school and the home. She went on to explain that for students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds, a particular awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural differences was essential:

I wouldn't say home school as in the traditional home school way of doing things because this is the cultural difference there (EAL teacher, primary school C).

Particular challenges relating to different cultures and language problems are reported in a later section of this chapter when discussing barriers and challenges to inclusion at the level of the child /family /community.

Shortage of Appropriate Resources for Students from Minority Language Backgrounds

A second area relating specifically to students from minority language backgrounds, which was perceived to be a barrier to inclusion, was the lack of appropriate resources for these students. One class teacher expressed the view that “*it was very difficult for teachers to source materials and they had no experience of how to teach children from so many different nationalities*” (Teacher, primary school B). A shortage of dual-language books was also referred to as a challenge (EAL teacher, primary school C). Observation data indicated that while motivating and relevant resources for students from minority ethnic groups in particular, had been built up by EAL teachers to support learning, there was very little evidence, in the majority of cases, of these differentiated materials and resources in the mainstream classrooms visited by the research team.

Financial constraints in schools designated as disadvantaged

Financial constraints in schools designated as disadvantaged were considered to be a barrier to inclusion, according to many of the teachers who taught students experiencing educational disadvantage. One post-primary principal spoke of the impact this can have on programmes such as the transition year programme in post-primary schools:

We had the transition year here in the '70s before it became popular elsewhere, we don't have it anymore because a lot of disadvantaged schools will tell you that the

transition year is a middle class programme because it costs so much for the students and the parents. So a lot of disadvantaged schools don't do transition year (Principal, post-primary school D).

Lack of Sports/Activities Facilities

Lack of access to sports facilities and other activities for young people, both within the school and broader school community, was identified as a barrier to inclusion, particularly in inner city areas. A school counsellor commented on the importance of sport to the social and personal development of students:

... it is such an important thing for young lads, sports facilities. I mean a gym would just be an astounding asset to the school, astounding. And I think lads, especially our lads, should actually be marked and graded and it should be incorporated into the whole curriculum, sports. I mean attendance, hygiene, there are so many social skills they can learn through sport (School counsellor, post-primary school D).

This participant also held the view that “good youth programmes” in the local community which would “occupy” young people during the evenings, would also benefit the daily work of the school and the students, “especially those who have behavioural problems and issues in the school.”

The principal in the same school reiterated the need for sports facilities in the school:

Michael Woods came into the school and told us that we would have a sports hall next year. The drugs task force gave us the money for it and everything else but it never happened and we have been constantly fighting with the department for it since (Principal, post-primary school D).

It is worth noting that analysis of the interview data revealed some contradictory evidence regarding the issue of resources. While a lack of resources was identified as a barrier to the inclusion of all groups of students, some participants acknowledged that the provision of resources did not necessarily lead to enhanced educational provision, or to the removal of barriers to inclusion. One teacher argued that adapting school structures and procedures, rather than securing resources, was more important in facilitating inclusion and that the lack of resources may be used as an “excuse to exclude children” (Year head, post-primary school F). This teacher explained:

I was tutor to the first Down's Syndrome student that came to this school. She had been refused entrance to her secondary school, that was her feeder from her primary school, because they didn't have the resources to deal with her. And I think too often schools have used that excuse to exclude children and to not maybe adapt the structures, the procedures, the interventions and supports that we have adapted, that

are available to every school (Year head/Learning support teacher, post-primary school F).

Similarly, the deputy principal of one of the primary schools studied actually believed that lack of physical resources had facilitated inclusion in their particular school

Because we don't have enough classrooms, that is why we have a teacher working in support because there is no physical room for them to go to and it does reduce the ratio (Deputy principal, primary school A).

With the increase in the numbers of learning support /resource teachers to primary schools since 1998, there were not enough separate classrooms in this particular school, (primary school A), for individual teachers. Therefore, the learning support and resource teachers were obliged to team-teach and work collaboratively together in the same classroom. This, according to the deputy principal, had a positive effect on the inclusive provision for students.

This confirms some of the research evidence on the provision of resources to schools for students with SEN. An Ofsted report (DfES, 2006) on 74 schools in 17 local authorities, including Pupil Referral Units (PRU), mainstream and special in England revealed that the provision of resources did not guarantee the quality of the education or of the educational outcomes for pupils.

... the provision of additional resources to pupils such as support from teaching assistants did not ensure good quality intervention or adequate progress by pupils. There was a misconception that provision of additional resources was the key requirement for individual pupils, whereas the survey findings showed that key factors for good progress were: the involvement of a specialist teacher; good assessment; work tailored to challenge pupils sufficiently; and commitment from school leaders to ensure good progress for all pupils (DfES, 2006, p. 2).

The practices identified in the present study to address and overcome challenges and barriers to inclusion, confirm the “key factors for good progress” outlined in the Ofsted survey. These practices are presented and discussed in the next chapter of this report.

Withdrawing Students for Additional Support as a Model of Educational Provision

There was also evidence in the study of school-related challenges and barriers to inclusion in the way additional support for students was organised and managed. Teachers, principals and SNAs said that withdrawal, as a model of additional support, acted as a barrier to inclusion, because it led to students feeling stigmatised, which had implications for self-esteem. The following quotations from interviews with teachers, SNAs and principals provide a useful summary of participants' views:

... the second level school is where children feel targeted and stigmatised by the fact that they are getting withdrawal and stuff. And you have situations where we had it, I remember one guy in particular who absolutely refused hours. Why? Because if he was withdrawn, there is the whole area of self-esteem to be looked at (Principal, post-primary school E).

Certain kids won't want to come out of class, won't want to be labelled as the kid who needs special help or the special treatment or whatever the case (Teacher, post-primary school E).

There is nothing worse than bringing children into the corridor and sitting in the corridor looking at other kids passing by; it is not fair on the child (SNA, primary school A).

Apart from the fear of social isolation, teachers were also concerned that students were missing out on important classroom learning when they were withdrawn for support. For example, one teacher said:

... other years the kids were withdrawn and then they were missing other things. I found a child that was withdrawn, I didn't like them missing English, even though I knew they were going for reading but they were still missing out on something else, but they are always going to miss something. So I would let them do English and then be withdrawn for their reading, but then they were missing geography or history or science or music or something else, so it is a big balancing act (Teacher, primary school A).

This concern is echoed in the literature. Nugent's study (2007) revealed that parents perceived that their children with dyslexia were missing out on subjects such as Irish and Maths while being withdrawn for support with English. The withdrawal model of support, which is the predominant model of resource teaching provision in Ireland, operates by withdrawing students on a one-to-one or small group basis from the classroom (IATSE, 2000). This model has limitations in terms of building inclusive schools according to Ring and Travers (2005).

The impact of the withdrawal model on the integrity and cohesion of the class was also perceived as a barrier to inclusion by school leaders and concern was expressed that this model might “*decimate the class altogether*” (Deputy principal primary school A). While teachers suggested and described models of in-class support that worked well, and successful examples of team-teaching were observed in one post-primary school, analysis of the data revealed that principals, deputy principals, teachers and SNAs struggled with decisions relating to the organisation of additional support for students. This dilemma is articulated in the following quotation from a special class teacher:

I mean let's look at it this way, you have a child who is getting resource hours and so they get pulled out... Say they get an hour, so they are taken out between 11:15 and 12:15, now generally the teachers try to work around it that they do the subjects that they are not doing, if they are doing Irish or whatever at that time, but say you have a class, which we have had here in the past of 35 of whatever, and that is coming again, we are lucky this year, but still they are up to the 30s, the junior infant classes are 30, 31, I mean that is a huge number. But you are going to have children going out for EAL, going out for resource, they can't all, every single child in that class can't go out at the same time, so no matter what you do, even as the best teacher in the world, you are going to have children missing things that they should be doing in the class. They might miss religion, they might miss history or something like that, now the way we do it, they come out but they come out at the times that they are doing the English, Irish and Maths or the subjects that they don't do with them, then they get called back for the other times. Does that make sense? So if you could do it along those lines, maybe not, but even if you could say at Irish time that people can come out or whatever, you know what I mean. I mean why is the child sitting down the back of the classroom if they aren't doing Irish? But because the resource time doesn't always slot in with the Irish time. You couldn't, I mean I would ask anyone to come down and try and work it out how they would work out a timetable to pull everybody out and yet have them in there for all the subjects that they are able to do. Does that make sense? The special class is the only one that comes close. So that is the only thing I feel about it (Special class teacher, primary school B).

Evidence from inspectorate reports, evaluating the implementation of the principles outlined in the *Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2002), and current practice in schools, suggests that while some schools had made progressive strides in collaboratively planning for inclusion, many areas still need attention. Over-reliance on the system of withdrawal emerged as a factor in restricting students' access to a broad and balanced curriculum “Too much withdrawal appears to negatively impact on pupils receiving a broad and balanced curriculum” (NCCA, 2003, p. 13).

Students' Behavioural Difficulties

In line with the literature, students' behavioural difficulties were identified by the study participants as a major barrier and challenge to inclusion. Issues such as absenteeism, discipline problems, non-completion of homework, being ill-prepared for school and lack of motivation were cited by the study schools as serious challenges to including students. The challenge of including students with behavioural difficulties is a recurring theme in the literature on inclusion (Farrell et al., 2007; Forlin, et al., 2008; Wakefield, 2004; Anderson et al., 2007; Idol, 2006).

Poor School Attendance

Although it did not appear to be an issue for students with SEN, attendance was cited by a large number of teachers and SNAs as a barrier to including students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds and students experiencing educational disadvantage (46 of 71 references from teachers across all six schools). Poor school attendance was reported as posing two separate, but related challenges for teachers in including both groups of students. Firstly, teachers stated that prolonged absenteeism, as well as irregular attendance, resulted in students falling behind and not being able to keep up with the academic work of their peers, who attended school regularly. Secondly, students who arrived late to school, or who missed parts of the school day on a regular basis, were cited as posing challenges to teachers' daily practice and efforts to include them, as the challenges posed by 'lack of readiness for grade level' show later. Teachers identified serious delays and gaps in basic skills and core areas of the curriculum for the first group of 'chronic', poor attenders. Referring to a particular student from a minority ethnic background in second class, one teacher said

His poor attendance at school has resulted in him having a poor knowledge of letter sounds. He is unable to read and his maths activities are at a junior infant level (Teacher, primary school B).

Poor attendance is cited in the research literature as a barrier to including students in school. Analysis of data from official databases in the UK indicate that students with SEN who are most likely to be excluded from school, have statements that relate in some way to challenging behaviour. Pupils in a study by Wakefield (2004) had a poor attendance record and were in danger of being excluded from their school. However, in contrast to this evidence from the research literature, there was no evidence from the study schools that exclusion from school, or early school leaving was an issue for students from any of the

three groups studied. The fact that the three post-primary schools studied were all part of the School Completion Programme, and had what appeared to be effective School Completion officers, may have explained why this was not a problem. In addition, all six schools studied had been chosen as examples of good inclusive practice and the researchers' observations testified to the caring ethos and pastoral attention which pervaded the schools.

The students in the second group of 'late-comers' were identified by teachers as having additional difficulties because of their lack of familiarity with the learning structures and school routines required by the teachers in the school. These included issues such as not doing homework, lacking the essential books and materials necessary for class and an inability to follow school rules. Pupils from the Travelling community and those experiencing educational disadvantage were highlighted specifically. The following comments reflect similar views expressed by teachers in their questionnaires and interviews. Describing a student who regularly missed classes, arrived late or left school early, one teacher said "*he finds it difficult to follow class rules and routines after absence*" (Teacher primary school A). Similar challenges were noted by a post-primary teacher who said

Poor attendance causes problems with regard to sequential lessons, most particularly in core subject areas (Teacher, post-primary school F).

Disruptive Behaviour and Disciplinary Issues

Many teachers in the study cited students' inability to adhere to the basic disciplinary requirements of school as an obstacle to including them in class and to engaging them with the curriculum. A total of 56 references from all six schools were made to discipline, of which 24 were specific to children with SEN, and 16 specific to children experiencing educational disadvantage. Examples of behavioural issues ranged from low level disruption such as "*attention seeking, talking out of turn, shouting out, being demanding and easily upset*" to more serious incidences such as being "*angry, hung-over from the night before, using abusive language, engaging in temper tantrums, violent and aggressive physical behaviour.*" One teacher summed up the views of many when responding to the questionnaire "*dealing with interruptions can be time-consuming*" (Teacher, primary school C). In similar vein, another teacher referred to the time-consuming nature of "*outbursts and mood swings*" (Teacher, primary school A). There seemed to be agreement

amongst the teachers that behavioural difficulties, particularly when linked to emotional and personal problems, created serious challenges for teachers when trying to include all students. This finding is confirmed by Avramadis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), who found that, although respondents held positive attitudes towards the general concept of inclusion, perceived competence was reduced in respect of children with more severe needs, especially those regarded as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Scruggs and Mastropieri's (1996) findings also mirror the study teachers' perceptions of students with behavioural difficulties from the current research.

Consequences such as "*disruption of the entire class; causing problems to their learning and the learning of others and loss of time*" were mentioned in the present study. The following response from a post-primary teacher's questionnaire is illustrative of many of the teachers' comments:

These students present the greatest level of difficulty in the classroom, manifesting itself through anti-social, disengaging, unacceptable behaviour (Teacher, post-primary school F).

The findings from the present study reflect the research studies reported in the literature. Referring to Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) and Croll and Moses (2000), Hodkinson (2007) argues that while most teachers support inclusive education, "they do so with reservations" (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 44). Teachers' reservations apply most often to students with behaviour difficulties (Farrell et al., 2007; Forlin et al., 2008; Idol, 2006). Of the 162 primary teachers surveyed in a study by Anderson et al. (2007), 95% listed drawbacks to teaching in inclusive classrooms. Behavioural disadvantages were one of the four categories of drawbacks noted by teachers, who felt that "negatively affected learning opportunities were associated with the behavioral difficulties" (p. 138).

Perceived Family Difficulties and Lack of Appropriate Support for Learning

Students' inability to adhere to the required discipline structures within the school was viewed by teachers as a barrier to their inclusion in the mainstream class. Teachers and SNAs referred to family and personal difficulties experienced by some students, which they then linked to the students' behavioural and emotional difficulties. Nevertheless, teachers acknowledged personal difficulties faced by parents/families who found it challenging to provide, what teachers considered to be adequate support, and more active involvement in their children's formal education in school. This theme, raised by all six

schools, was particularly pertinent for students experiencing educational disadvantage, with 44 references made in relation to disadvantage, 29 of which came from the teacher questionnaires. There were many references in the teacher questionnaires, to difficulties such as lack of basic equipment – “*pencils, pens, stationery, books, copybooks, no uniform, coming to school hungry or tired from lack of sleep, lack of access to books and other educational opportunities at home,*” (Teacher and SNA questionnaires). Disengagement from formal education and school, on the part of the parents, was also mentioned. The research literature warns that teachers’ perceived notions of ‘parent’s lack of support’ needs to be interrogated (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Fleming, 1995). Cotton and Reed Wikelund, 2001 report that the research offers numerous reasons for this: lack of time or energy (due to long hours of heavy physical labour, for example), embarrassment or shyness about one’s own educational level or linguistic abilities, lack of understanding or information about the structure of the school and accepted communication channels, perceived lack of welcome by teachers and principals and teachers and principals’ assumptions of parents’ disinterest or inability to help with children’s schooling. Fleming (1995) advises that teachers’ own social origins may result in them holding undue negative expectations of pupils who are experiencing disadvantage.

In line with the literature, students’ behaviour difficulties were cited as a major threat to inclusion by participants in all the research schools. However, issues of misbehaviour and discipline cannot be confined to challenges and barriers at the level of the student. The response of teachers and of schools is critical and is often what determines whether or not certain behaviour constitutes serious challenges to inclusion. Idol suggested that “proponents of inclusion should determine if teacher concerns about disruptive students might not be overshadowing these teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion” (Idol, 2006, p. 92). It was clear from the number and nature of the references made by teachers to students’ behavioural difficulties, that schools need to seriously examine their approaches and responses to disciplinary and behavioural issues.

Prejudice, Racism and Bullying

The final finding, identified in the study in relation to challenges and barriers to inclusion at school level, concerned the issues of prejudice, racism and bullying. Although they did not emerge as strongly, or as often, as the other challenges and barriers outlined in the rest of this chapter, prejudice, racism and /or bullying received a total of ten references from all

six schools. These barriers, according to the teachers in the present study, were more prevalent at post-primary level and incidences of prejudice/racism were mostly reported in relation to minority groups. For example, in the past parents requested that their child was not seated next to a child from the Travelling community. In the early days of the school, some parents did not want to enrol their children in the parish school because they did not want them mixing with Travellers and black children.

That was a big issue for us, that wouldn't happen now, today, but it was a big issue then because, there was a smell off them or children were complaining and they'd say it out loud in the class. But we were always able to say to parents if they came in to me and, 'will you change my child?' and we have always said no because everyone has to be treated the same (Principal, primary school A).

This principal was keen to emphasise that this had been the situation in the early days of the schools and that it would not arise in the present day. The researchers did not observe any instances of bullying in any of the study schools, which is not surprising, given the fact that only two days were spent in each school. However, one incident of bullying in relation to students from the Travelling community was referred to in one of the schools.

There were also some examples of students being aware of the potential for prejudice or 'different treatment'. The tension between being able to "*cherish your own culture and language, but also to embrace what is going on here*" was referred to by an EAL teacher who related how a girl chose to leave an intercultural club because she felt she was being treated differently:

... the club is lovely, all the different nationalities get together, but she said there is something about the difference and that is not what any of them want, they want to integrate (EAL teacher primary, school B).

The issue of homophobia in schools was proposed as a potential barrier to inclusion but no example of homophobic behaviour was reported by any of the schools. Instead, some schools described how they were working with outside agencies to develop policy in the area. Bullying was also referred to by both parents and teachers. One parent reported that her child was bullied by a group of children in the neighbourhood, who burned his scooter. A child with ADHD was reported by the SNA as having low self-esteem and being vulnerable to bullying. While there was not a lot of evidence from the adult data on the subject of bullying, some very strong evidence emerged from the perspectives of students

in the study that bullying behaviour presents a barrier to inclusion. This evidence is reported and discussed in the final section of this chapter.

In summarising the challenges and barriers identified from the study at school level, it is clear that some issues posed more of a threat to inclusion than others. Analysis of the data revealed considerable challenges in relation to the expertise of schools and teachers with regard to assessment and the provision of support services. The negative, as well as the potentially positive, side effects of lack of resources were reported. Issues concerning discipline and student behaviour were identified as posing serious challenges for schools. Not surprisingly, the issues identified here at the level of the school raised another set of related challenges and barriers for teachers. The next section reports and discusses the challenges and barriers to inclusion identified at teacher level.

Teacher/Class Level

Findings from all data sources reveal teacher-related challenges and barriers to inclusion of all three groups of students in the study. The lack of time to accommodate diverse needs in the classroom and to provide individual attention, where required, were clearly identified as difficulties by many teachers (76 references were made to lack of time being a barrier). Other challenges and barriers at teacher /class level included the demands of differentiation in relation to planning and teaching (43 references), accommodating the gaps in learning associated with the lack of readiness for grade level (48 references), lack of teacher training and expertise (30 references) and to a lesser extent, teacher unwillingness in relation to inclusion (3 references). Each of these challenges and /or barriers is now outlined.

Time and Need for Individual Attention

Findings from questionnaire and interview data indicated that lack of time was rated very highly as a challenge and barrier to the inclusion of all groups of students (76 references from five of the six schools, of which 45 were from teachers). This was particularly evident in relation to students with SEN (30 specific references) and to students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds (ten specific references). In general, the issues relating to lack of time centred around planning and teaching to cater for the diverse needs of students in schools. The following response from a primary teacher's questionnaire provides insight into this perceived challenge in schools:

Due to diversity of needs of all children, it is impossible to cater for their academic, artistic, spiritual and emotional needs (Teacher, primary school B).

Further development of this difficulty is also articulated by a post-primary teacher:

It is very difficult especially because you might have a Thai student who mightn't have good English, then you might have a student who has behavioural difficulties because of their disadvantaged background and it is very hard. It is like you are expected to but you also feel obliged yourself to do it, to just spread yourself so thinly, it is very difficult to cater for all the students' needs it is impossible if you have a class of 25 students in front of you (Teacher, post-primary school F).

Teachers also identified the slower pace of learning of students from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups and students with SEN as a barrier to inclusion, explaining that the pace of lessons slow down, while more time is required in the classroom to give instructions and explain a task. The time devoted to administration was cited as a further challenge with teachers reporting a lack of time to monitor progress of students from all groups, write reports and generally “*keep on top of the paperwork*” (Teacher, primary school A).

Lack of Time for Teachers to Plan Together for Teaching

Lack of time for teachers to plan together for teaching was perceived as a difficulty and a challenge to inclusion of all groups of students (seven references from five schools). Lack of time for planning and work overload are regarded in the literature as major obstacles in furthering curriculum reform (Murchan et al., 2005) and for developing inclusive practices (Horne & Timmons, 2009).

The lack of a designated time for planning and the *ad hoc* nature of planning meetings were articulated by a SEN Coordinator as follows:

There is a kind of a start-up pack that we have for team teachers but a lot of the planning, we have found, is kind of done on the hoof and that is not necessarily the best (SEN coordinator, post-primary school E).

The challenge of finding time for team planning is also articulated by an EAL teacher who stated that there is insufficient time to meet with class teachers “*to try and support what they are doing*” arguing that the priority is to directly support the children and “*you don't really want anything to interrupt that and it is trying to grab a moment during break time to just see, well what is the teacher doing in the week ahead or the next two weeks*”

(EAL teacher primary school B). There are clear links between these teachers' concerns and the evidence from the research literature, which highlights the importance of collaboration. Smith and Leonard, (2005, p. 269), go so far as to regard collaboration as "a cornerstone of effective school inclusion" However, challenges relating to lack of time for team planning are cited frequently in the research literature as barriers to inclusion (Buysse et al., 1998; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Smith & Leonard, 2005; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009). For example, the challenges inherent in achieving coordination within and between the different systems involved in the educational provision for students with special educational needs were articulated by participants in an Irish study which explored progress in inclusive systems and practices since the mid-1990s (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009). Confirming the findings from the current study, lack of coordination for the participants in Drudy and Kinsella's study, appeared to be particularly difficult in second level schools in Ireland. Additionally, insufficient time to collaborate was also perceived to be a barrier to school inclusion by both special and general educators in a study which identified effective communication and clarification of roles and responsibilities as factors which support inclusion (Smith & Leonard, 2005). Again, this was reflected in the findings from the current study.

The Need for Individual Attention

The issue of the need for individual attention arose in relation to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups and students with SEN. It was felt that such students need a lot of individual attention and supervision to support their learning needs. As one teacher stated:

Therefore I find it quite challenging to keep him on task throughout the day. He seems to need constant supervision to remain on task otherwise he will stop up/tidy books away/disappear to the toilet or bin etc.... (Teacher, primary school A).

Another teacher referred to the "*need for constant monitoring of such students, regular visits to make sure work is completed, recorded etc.*" (Teacher, post-primary school E).

There was overwhelming evidence from across all data sources that teachers and SNAs have insufficient time to give the individual attention, extra help and support needed to reach individual learning targets, that they felt students required (44 references, from six schools, of which 36 were from teachers and three from SNAs). For example, when referring to children with English as a second language, one teacher stated, "*finding time*

to interact with them on a one-to-one basis can be challenging” (Teacher, primary school C). Teachers also expressed regret that *“with large classes it is impossible to give them the individual attention that they may need”* (Teacher, post-primary school E).

In addition to these challenges, evidence from the observation data suggests that students with SEN or from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups in particular, are reluctant to raise their hands to respond to a question, to ask questions or seek clarification from adults or peers in the whole-class situation. The research observer in a primary school noted one student from a minority ethnic background, who looked at, and seemed to rely on, peers for visual cues when instructions were given by the teacher. This particular student appeared to be reluctant and to lack the necessary skills to contribute orally to small-group discussion in class.

As well as expressing concern for certain students’ need for individual attention, the study teachers reported the parallel challenge of trying to give enough time to those students who did not need additional support for learning or behaviour. A primary teacher worried that *“concentrating on children who need support”* (Teacher, primary school C) would disadvantage others in the classroom; while another teacher said that:

The biggest challenge would be the time factor, quite simply there is just not enough time to give to these children without neglecting the rest of the class (Teacher, primary school A).

Teachers appear to be keenly aware of this challenge, as the international literature on inclusion attests (Anderson et al., 2007; Forlin et al., 2008). Lack of time to support inclusion in mainstream classrooms emerged as a theme in an Australian study by Anderson et al. (2007) when the inclusion-related beliefs and perceived needs of 162 primary teachers were investigated using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Teachers identified time constraints imposed on teachers and time constraints imposed on non-disabled peers as disadvantages to teaching in inclusive classrooms. The views of teachers in the present study echo those in Anderson et al.’s study.

While there was overlap between the challenges and barriers identified by participants for the three different student groups in the study, some specific, time-related issues emerged as being of particular relevance to one or other of the groups of students. Two particular time-related challenges arose in relation to inclusion of students with SEN. The first was

the lack of time for effective planning for individual needs. One teacher referred to the lack of time to develop new programmes and to modify each lesson, stating that it is “*extremely time consuming and an added stress to an already demanding curriculum*” (Teacher, primary school A). The second challenge was the time needed to differentiate the curriculum appropriately for students with SEN. Another teacher from the same school argued that even when the teachers possessed the skills and resources needed to differentiate the curriculum appropriately for students with SEN,

there is simply not enough time in the day to ensure these students’ every need is catered for, in every lesson throughout the school day (Teacher, primary school A).

Time-related challenges and barriers to inclusion for students from minority language and /or minority ethnic backgrounds were specifically referred to by teachers in the present study. One EAL teacher stressed the importance of allocating time for teachers to communicate with these students’ parents to

go out with an interpreter or whatever it is and help build a relationship. You basically would need time to be allocated within your school day, Or a specific person allocated to it (EAL teacher, primary school C).

Another EAL teacher expressed frustration at the lack of time to continue supporting children with language needs once the designated two years of support allocated to these children had expired:

... my children are diverse, different groupings, some the early stages of language, that is one kind of programme. And then, the others who, you are there trying to support them to keep up with what is happening in class (EAL teacher, primary school B).

Time-related barriers in relation to students at risk of educational disadvantage were also highlighted by teachers. According to one teacher, unless these students have the necessary support from home, or work harder themselves, “*their progress is impeded or at least very slow while their peers may progress. This gap creates more challenging demands on the teacher while their allotted time stays the same*” (Teacher, primary school B). Some teachers in the study spoke of the lack of time to compensate for the absence of support from home in relation to homework and one teacher felt that much of their time was taken up with settling disputes after time on the yard:

Sometimes because you have so many disadvantaged children you have so many behavioural problems and family problems and tempers that spark off so much more easily than a child who comes from a stable background. Coming in from the yard you could spend 10 minutes sorting out problems, tempers or a child I had last year

who was special needs who was very, very weak and took up a huge amount of time and I had no SNA for him. So it is a time issue I think (Teacher, primary school A).

Undoubtedly, the issue of students with behavioural difficulties is related to the challenge of time constraints, as teachers reported having to spend a lot of time dealing with behaviour and disciplinary matters. However, because of the number of references to it from the study, the issue of students' behaviour difficulties has been reported as a barrier to inclusion earlier in this chapter under the heading of challenges and barriers at the level of the school.

Differentiation

There was evidence from the findings that teachers acknowledge student diversity in their classrooms. However, a major challenge which emerged from the study was the difficulty teachers appeared to have in differentiating planning and teaching to take account of this diversity. This challenge was particularly evident in relation to inclusion of students with SEN and to a lesser extent, students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds (43 references, from five schools, of which, 25 were specific to SEN and 13 were specific to minority ethnic groups). Teachers expressed difficulty with differentiation where there was a variety of learning difficulties in any one class group, with one particular primary class teacher stating that *"it is not a realistic expectation that the teacher would have material for differentiation for all the children"* (Teacher primary, school B). Another class teacher from a different primary school expressed similar concerns, which were typical of the study teachers' responses:

... and give them what they each deserve, the different levels of work that would be suited to each childhave to be extremely organised and know exactly what you are doing so that there would be some work that you do with your kids that some kids with special needs would not be able to do at all. And you have to be prepared to give them something else to do. And then even if they are very bright, you have to give them something to push them on that little bit more. And I suppose with language, making sure that it is fully understood (Teacher, primary school A).

The challenge of differentiation, reported by these teachers is supported by the research literature (DES, 2005e). Ring and Travers (2005) concluded that in general, the teachers in their study expressed a lack of confidence in differentiating the learning goals and outcomes to meet students' individual needs. Reports from newly qualified teachers reinforce this view. They state that their prescribed, initial teacher education course did not equip them to differentiate their teaching approaches and methodologies, did not prepare

them for working in disadvantaged areas and did not provide them with knowledge to work with pupils with SEN (DES, 2005e). However, this view must be balanced against the accepted view that professional development for all teachers takes place across three broad teaching stages: initial teacher education, the induction stage, and career wide continuous professional development (Ireland, 1992, 1995).

The challenges and barriers to inclusion, identified by teachers in the present study, centred on four different aspects or levels of differentiation. These included differentiation of curriculum content (eight specific references from four schools), differentiation of instructional strategies and pace of teaching (six specific references from three schools), differentiation of materials and resources (seven specific references from four schools) and differentiation of students' output including tasks and homework (four specific references from four schools). Although barriers at these four levels were also reported by the post-primary teachers in the study, some additional challenges in relation to differentiation emerged from the post-primary schools. Teachers' reported barriers for all four levels of differentiation are presented below. This is followed by an outline of the challenges which emerged specifically for the post-primary teachers in the study in relation to differentiation.

Differentiation of Curriculum Content

Differentiation “to adapt the curriculum so they can cope with it” and “finding lessons that are at the appropriate level of difficulty for the pupils” (Teacher, primary school A) were challenges reported by teachers in terms of curriculum content. The challenge of organising whole-class lessons, while developing programmes and modifying work to include students with SEN was expressed by teachers:

It is very difficult to include him in classroom work set for 2nd class level or to even differentiate 2nd class work to match his abilities, therefore I feel he can be often excluded from the general class as he does different work to everyone else (Teacher, primary school A).

Making decisions about selecting curriculum content for students with SEN and “pitching work to meet their needs, while meeting the needs of the rest of the class and finding work on the same topic but at a level suitable for them” (Teacher primary school B) were all challenges to inclusion articulated by teachers in the study.

These findings in relation to differentiation of curriculum content as a challenge to inclusion are corroborated by results of a study by Gibb et al. (2007) where facilitators and barriers to inclusion were identified by interviewing staffs of special and mainstream schools in a case study where there was a high level of reintegration of students with SEN from the special school. In a recent study by O'Donnell (2009) the majority of teachers regarded their lack of knowledge and ability to differentiate to meet pupils' needs as their biggest challenge. Following close on the expressed inability to differentiate was the need for more time to plan and collaborate with others.

Differentiation of Instructional Strategies and Pace of Teaching

Teachers also referred to the challenge of differentiating their instructional strategies and pace of teaching and the "*challenge from a methodology point of view*" (Teacher primary school A). One teacher expressed awareness that children with SEN take longer to understand a concept and thus they have to "*spend a bit longer teaching a particular curricular area or take time to give them individual attention*" (Teacher, primary school B).

A serious challenge for teachers is to make spoken and written language accessible to all students in the class. This challenge was reflected in the observation data when the teacher was attempting to differentiate oral Irish instructions regarding homework. Eventually, homework was written in English on the whiteboard. A further example with regard to differentiation which was noted in the observation data was the challenge for teachers of making links between new vocabulary or concepts in the classroom in the different curriculum areas and the student's prior learning and /or cultural experiences.

An additional challenge to teachers is making decisions on the level of individual attention required by students as "*it's hard to know how much to scaffold their learning or to let them work independently*" (Teacher, primary school C). While participants in the study referred to the challenge of differentiating instructional strategies and pace of teaching to accommodate individual needs, in contrast to other studies they did not refer specifically to a lack of knowledge of specialist pedagogies (Ring & Travers, 2005; Boling, 2007; Forlin et al., 2008) or lack of knowledge of the range of teaching strategies (Gibb et al., 2007).

Differentiation of Materials and Resources

The challenge to differentiate teaching materials and resources was also perceived by teachers to be a difficulty:

I suppose it is very difficult to keep them all on task so the challenge for me is to differentiate the material enough that I can keep them all busy because some children are much quicker than others and they are finished and they are distracting other people, so that is a huge challenge, to be prepared with enough material for each class (Teacher, post-primary school E).

Many examples of differentiation of teaching materials were observed during the research visits to the schools. These included: simpler or different word lists, different books, modified worksheets, different written or reading activities across the range of curricular areas, differentiated materials that challenged students and fewer written exercises for some students. It was evident from the observation data that notices and labels in the classrooms and schools were written in some instances in many languages to reflect diversity in the school community. In other situations, there was a missed opportunity to use the variety of languages spoken by the students as a linguistic resource for language work or to integrate such linguistic richness into the curriculum.

Differentiation of Student Output

Differentiation of student output in terms of classroom tasks/activities and homework was also identified by teachers as a challenge to inclusion. One teacher expressed the challenge in terms of “*process and product...the child cannot always complete the same worksheet/task*” (Teacher, primary school A). The challenge for teachers to differentiate the curriculum to accommodate the individual needs of students was also evident in the observation data. The majority of teachers and SNAs used differentiation strategies such as, varying levels of questioning and explanation and adapting the difficulty-level of the language they used. However, there was far less evidence of differentiation of learning objectives, curriculum content, materials and resources or expected level of responses from students across curriculum areas, including Irish. The observation data also revealed that students from minority ethnic and/or minority language groups were not invited or encouraged to speak, write or present learning tasks in their own language. While homework was explained, using concrete materials in one case, there was no evidence in the observation data that homework content or materials were differentiated for any particular student or group of students in this category.

Differentiation at Post-Primary Level

The need for greater differentiation to meet the very specific needs of some students at post-primary level emerged as a challenge to inclusion. Flexibility and differentiation in the post-primary curriculum are addressed in the research literature. In highlighting the concerns of teachers about the behaviour problems in schools in the UK, Wedell (2008) argues “that the curriculum in its present form may itself be a contributory cause of poor behavior because it does not engage the whole range of pupils” (p. 129). He refers to recent developments in curriculum, such as the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) produced within the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) which enables students to find success and provides accreditation opportunities for students with special educational needs. The need for flexibility in the second level curriculum is reiterated in a recent study by Mowat (2009). In this evaluative case study of a group work approach to supporting students experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties within a mainstream secondary school, students themselves identified “their relationship with the teacher, their liking of the subject, the degree to which the teacher adopted a flexible approach and the degree of differentiation as being related most to motivation and learning outcomes” (p. 166). Wakefield (2004, p. 83) also recommends a “flexible, relevant and differentiated curriculum” for secondary school students who are disaffected and frequently disruptive.

Parents who were interviewed for the present study also emphasised the importance differentiation and of reviewing the curriculum at post-primary level, particularly for students with ASD, to include issues relating to “*communication, anger management, frustration...*” with one parent stating that her own child had identified his own needs and requested: “*Teach me how to talk to people.*” The inclusion of social communication and personal development skills in the post-primary curriculum is important so that the “*flourishing in terms of academic stuff would flow.*”

A smaller group of teachers were particularly concerned with the challenge of differentiation for students from minority language groups in addition to differentiating for students with SEN in the classroom:

You are going to have your learning support children in the class and you are going to have to differentiate for all of that and now you have this extra layer where like you could have a child sitting in the class, going through the silent phase, not getting involved at all (Teacher, primary school C).

The lack of fluency with the English language and the different levels of English in the classroom can challenge inclusion in terms of “*going back to basics with the new EAL students and continually reviewing the level of difficulty of the lessons*” (Teacher, Primary School B). In particular, “*including their viewpoints in lessons can be challenging*” (Teacher, primary school C).

The views of teachers in this study reflect an awareness of diversity in the classroom and the challenges to inclusion in relation to differentiation to facilitate that diversity. This contrasts with a recent study of teachers’ perceptions of the inclusion of marginalized groups in Slovenia (Pšek et al., 2008) where a representative sample of primary school teachers perceived children with special educational needs as ‘helpless’ and having the ‘lowest abilities’ (p. 225). However, awareness of the need to differentiate to facilitate students’ learning did not always translate into practice in the study schools, particularly at post-primary level. The research observer of a post-primary student in School D stated that there was no evidence of differentiation or provision for this student’s specific learning needs in most of the classes visited. The only classes where this student appeared to be engaged with the learning task or content were when she was withdrawn with just one other pupil for mathematics by the learning support teacher, and when she was working with a designated student ‘buddy’ on the completion of her Junior Certificate project in one class.

Recognising the need to differentiate in order to meet the needs of students with additional learning needs, the principal of one of the post-primary schools spoke of the need for specialist training and CPD for teachers:

It is very easy to throw out the extra resources, extra teaching hours but I would imagine that if we are really serious people more qualified really in the area of resource teaching really because I did a course, I know what it is like and (unclear name) one of our teachers is on it now. A lot of our teachers don't have the training and what I am fearful of is with the cutbacks, the way things are now, you know you would be forced almost in a way to put people into the resource area who don't really want to be in there. But you are only putting them in there because you are making up their hours to 22. I would be a bit fearful of that. And I was talking to (names three teachers) might have mentioned him to you, like really I think more continuous professional development around areas like methodology and teaching, that would be the kind of supports. You know the way here we are very structured in the sense that we have geography in-service, we have English in-service and that has got to do with the subject material. Like I would just question do we need to go back

and start refreshing people's methodologies and how they teach. Because some people haven't been at one of these things for 20 years since they came out and I am not so sure that is good. So if I were to pinpoint the exact resources, that is certainly what I would look at like, go back and, you know, the continuous professional development (Principal, post-primary school E).

Readiness for Grade Level

Lack of readiness for grade level was identified in the study as a challenge and barrier to inclusion. There was a total of 48 references to this theme, 22 of which were specific to students from minority language and/or minority ethnic backgrounds, and 24 of which were specific to children with SEN. References were made by all schools, (32 references from teacher questionnaires and six from teacher interviews). These data point to difficulties teachers said they faced in including students who lack the knowledge and skills that are expected at particular grade levels. Students' difficulties with language, comprehension, vocabulary, coordination, reading, writing and mathematics were mentioned as challenges to teachers' ability to include students, despite their best efforts to differentiate appropriately for them.

There was further evidence that teachers linked the lack of readiness for grade level to challenges and barriers to inclusion. Teachers and SNAs referred repeatedly to literacy-based barriers (18 specific references from all six schools) such as *"inability to read materials at a level close to or approaching class level"* (Teacher primary school B), poor attendance, reading, writing, language and comprehension and difficulties accessing printed media generally, which lead to *"overload of curriculum"* and *"inability to participate in class-work"* (Teacher primary school B). This teacher also reported that they are *"not able to include children in subjects such as English/History/Geography because of their reading levels/ability to organize their thoughts/speed at which they respond."* These issues were mentioned specifically in relation to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups and students with SEN.

For these two particular groups of students, (those with SEN and those from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups), the teachers explained that although students might cope academically with the early years of school, where the infant curriculum teachers *"are using quite a lot of manipulatives and objects"* (EAL teacher primary school C), they experienced difficulties as *"the gap widened"* when students reached 2nd or 3rd

class at primary level. *“The gap widens in 3rd class. The needs are greater”* (Teacher, primary school B). More specifically, teachers referred to children from minority language backgrounds who receive intensive English language support in the Infants classes *“and they didn’t get it at 1st and 2nd. Because 1st and 2nd is such a big jump academically, they were struggling”* (Teacher, primary school C). The language of mathematics was also reported as presenting difficulties for this group of students as well as for students with SEN, as articulated by a teacher:

And it would often be the case that children who have difficulty with the language, they also have difficulty with the maths because a lot of it is written and reading it and interpreting the written work (Teacher, primary school B).

It is important to recognize the research literature on first and second language regarding students’ ability to work academically, as opposed to socially, in languages other than their first language (Cummins, 1981). The literature points out that these students will most likely be able to organize their thoughts and respond at a normal rate and level in their own, first language. The difficulty they may experience in processing and using language, is concerned with a language, rather than a learning, difficulty and that may explain why many of the study students were identified by some teachers as having difficulties in being ready for grade level. Nevertheless, many of the study teachers did in fact cite as a barrier to inclusion, the difficulty they had in making a distinction between a learning difficulty and /or SEN and a language difficulty as a result of learning English as an additional language. This issue is addressed when reporting barriers associated with assessment under challenges and barriers at school /class level.

To a lesser extent, lack of readiness for grade level was identified as a barrier to inclusion for students at risk of educational disadvantage. Teachers and SNAs referred to poor academic skills but also to poor general knowledge and attendance. A school completion officer expressed the view that while schools can put supports in place for students who have poor attendance records, *“they are hampered by the fact that the outside service into that family is not happening”* (School completion officer, post-primary school D). The issue of poor attendance was reported in greater detail earlier in this chapter under the heading of challenges and barriers at school level.

Researcher observations as well as teachers’ reported views confirmed that the teachers were addressing the issue of readiness for grade level satisfactorily and the practices they

adopted are described in the next chapter of this report. However, an interesting effect of this seemingly effective practice, was highlighted as a barrier to inclusion by one parent in the study. This parent said she that while she was happy that her child's lack of readiness for grade level was being satisfactorily addressed by providing intensive individual or small group support, or by programmes within the school, or indeed in a autism unit in a nearby school, she bemoaned the fact that "*there was no integration, practically none at all*" (Parent, primary school B). This comment has implications for the type of provision offered in mainstream schools. It raises the dilemma schools face in deciding whether to withdraw students from the mainstream class for individual and /or small group support for learning that addresses their individual needs, or whether to offer them access to the full curriculum alongside their peers, but risk not meeting their specific needs. This is what is often referred to in the literature as "the dilemma of difference" (Norwich, 1994; Wedell, 2005). The issue of withdrawing students from the mainstream class for additional learning support arose as a barrier to inclusion in this study and was discussed under the heading of challenges and barriers at school /class level at the beginning of this chapter.

Lack of Teacher Education and Teacher Expertise

Lack of teacher education and expertise are closely linked to the teacher-related barriers reported earlier, such as lack of time to plan and collaborate together professionally, difficulties in differentiating appropriately and lack of readiness for grade level. Lack of teacher education and expertise was mentioned frequently by teachers in the questionnaires and interviews as posing challenges for them in including students (30 references in total, from five of the six schools, of which, 15 were specific to students with SEN). Insufficient pre-service and continuing professional development opportunities for teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN, are cited as barriers to inclusion in the literature (Carrington, 1999; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005; Forlin et al., 2008). While general comments were made about the need for continuous professional development and in-service support for all groups of students in the study, teacher expertise for students with SEN (15 references) and for those from minority ethnic and/or minority language groups, (five specific references) were repeatedly emphasised.

Some teachers were critical of the lack of guidance and support in relation to teaching English as an additional language (EAL) at both primary and post-primary level. One newly qualified teacher spoke of the need for more input at undergraduate level for

teachers of students from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups. While some of these teachers had availed of in-service opportunities, they argued that class teachers needed this support as well. As one of these teachers said,

Yes that is the problem. Basically class teachers haven't, like we have got in-service this year, we had two sessions and class teachers haven't had that but class teachers need to be made aware of what they should do to help (EAL teacher, primary school C).

This view is echoed in the literature where a number of studies point to the fact that many teachers lack the preparation and experience in dealing with students with SEN and those from minority ethnic and /or minority language groups, in inclusive settings (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Winter, 2006). Indeed, in their study, already referred to when reporting lack of time as a barrier to inclusion, Drudy and Kinsella, (2009) also report the “belief that there are insufficient numbers of teachers in the (Irish) system who possess the expertise in special needs education to support mainstream teachers in discharging their responsibilities to all pupils” (p. 695).

Insufficient professional development opportunities can result in lack of teacher expertise, a barrier cited by many of the teachers and SNAs in the present study. This in turn appeared to have implications for teachers’ confidence in their ability to teach students effectively and was therefore cited as a barrier to inclusion in the current study. The literature on inclusion highlights the crucial role of teachers as agents in the implementation of inclusive educational policy. Attention needs to be paid to teachers’ beliefs about their own competency because it is likely that their perceptions will influence their behaviour towards, and their acceptance of, students with SEN and other additional educational needs (Dupoux, Wolman & Estrada, 2005; O’Donnell, 2009; Raymond, 1997).

There was evidence of lack of expertise on the part of some teachers in the study with regard to Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students. One of the barriers to the inclusion of students with SEN, which has been identified in the literature, is the lack of awareness by mainstream classroom teachers of the IEP targets for students with SEN, as well as a failure to link special and general education programmes (Hart, 1998; Tod & Blamires, 1999). The observation data indicate that in the majority of cases mainstream teachers did not make reference to the specific IEP targets for students with SEN nor to the Individual Pupil Profile (IPP) for minority ethnic and /or minority language students, which was

developed by the EAL teacher. This is an important finding from the current study because of the crucial role played by IEPs and IPLPs in providing for individual needs of students in inclusive settings.

More recent concepts of inclusion acknowledge that the involvement of students is a critical component of the IEP process and students with SEN should be at the core of individualized learning (Nugent, 2002; Gross, 2000; DfES, 2004). IEP targets are more likely to be effective if the child knows what they are according to Gross (2000). Clarke (2001) argues that involving pupils by sharing learning goals with them and inviting them to monitor their own progress, is a form of differentiation that shifts the focus of the IEP away from narrow targets to teaching and learning. While there was some evidence in the present study that students, when withdrawn individually or in small groups for support, were aware of their own learning targets, there was no evidence from the observation data that they were working towards these individual targets in the context of the mainstream classroom.

Issues such as the selection of resources, for example, age-appropriate books for students with reading difficulties, or knowing how to use gesture and visual aids for students with EAL difficulties were cited as practical examples of where teachers voiced their concern over their lack of knowledge and competence. The following comment from a primary school teacher sums up many of the teachers' view:

In terms of children with special needs I think targeting their needs is a challenge because sometimes you may not have had adequate training or their needs can be very hard to pinpoint or if there is an issue with assessment, you could be waiting God knows how long for a national assessment to be done (Teacher, primary school C).

It should be noted however, that there were mixed responses to the amount and quality of in-service teachers received in relation to students from minority ethnic and minority language backgrounds. One teacher in a primary school said

I think that is something I would like to suggest, over the years I have had wonderful training and Integrate Ireland over the years were an amazing support and the resources they provided, the training they provided, but that was me. And as the team built up it didn't mean that everyone in the team had that support (Teacher, primary school B).

It may be that the issue of lack of teacher training and expertise needs to be addressed at a whole-school level, where teachers, who have availed of extra training, are utilized more efficiently by schools in sharing that expertise and up-skilling other staff.

Teacher Unwillingness

There was a perception among a small group of the study teachers in specialist roles (resource teachers, school completion officers) that teacher unwillingness was a barrier to inclusion (three specific references from two schools). A comment from one special needs coordinator illustrates this viewpoint:

Getting everybody to buy into the learning support and the resource child is a different story. Now maybe it is just me but I take it personally if I hear teachers saying, 'that child shouldn't be here,' you know, that just does my head in and I take that personally. And sometimes it is just a throw away comment or a teacher has been very frustrated in the class and they don't really mean it at all and I might dive down their throat for saying it because it is not right to say that (Special needs coordinator, post-primary school E).

The inclusive nature of practice in schools, whereby students with learning and /or behavioural difficulties were provided with more opportunities and resources (for example small classes, the JCSP library), than other students in the school, was questioned by a small number of post-primary teachers. One particular teacher felt that this issue needed to be addressed periodically to ensure that schools were doing enough for “*the quieter guys who just work away*” and for those students “*who sit quietly in the A4 class in the top stream and do their little bit of work*” (Learning support teacher, post-primary school D).

Analysis of all data sources show that the majority of the study participants held positive attitudes towards including and providing effectively for all three groups of students studied. However, one teacher showed awareness of the potential for teaching unwillingness to act as a barrier to inclusion by saying:

But I can see sometimes, from speaking to other schools completion people, if there are a certain amount of teachers who think this is not a good thing because it is the bad kids getting rewarded all the time, if that creeps in it can be difficult (School completion officer, post-primary school F)

Negative and inflexible teacher attitudes and teacher unwillingness to change are also evident in the research literature (Gibb et al., 2007; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Runswick-Cole, 2008). In a study of parents' attitudes to the inclusion of children with special

educational needs in the UK, Runswick-Cole (2008) identified a group of parents who had initially wanted their children included in mainstream schools but later changed their minds. Their reasons for choosing a special school was not driven by a change of ideology, but rather hinged on what Runswick-Cole refers to as “hostile school cultures” (p. 178) and their children’s experiences of exclusion in mainstream schools. One mother in this (Runswick-Cole) study cited lack of flexibility of teaching approaches as a barrier to her son’s learning in a mainstream school saying: “*They just wouldn’t change*” (p. 178).

Summarising the challenges and barriers which were identified in the study at the level of the teacher /class, the major issue which emerged was the concern these teachers reported in meeting the individual needs of their students. They cited the following, as barriers and challenges to that concern and consequently, to the inclusion of students from the three groups studied: the lack of time to accommodate the diverse needs of students; the demands of differentiation in relation to planning and teaching for individual needs; accommodating the gaps in learning associated with students’ lack of readiness for grade level; the lack of teacher training and expertise and to a lesser extent, negative attitudes on the part of some teachers in relation to inclusion.

Child/Family/Community Level

All six participating schools identified issues arising from within the children/students and their families/communities, which they reported as creating challenges and barriers to inclusion. While there is much overlap between these child /family level barriers and those cited earlier at the level of the school and the teacher /class, a number of challenges merit presentation and discussion in their own right. Two broad categories of child/student and family/community-related issues were distilled from the data. The first category describes ‘within-child’ aspects such as students’ ability, characteristics and personality, including areas such as motivation, confidence and self-esteem. The second category concerns issues related to language barriers and different cultural values and expectations, which were specific to students from minority ethnic and /or minority language backgrounds.

Within-Child Issues

Participants from the study attributed challenges and barriers to inclusion to within-child difficulties. Analysis of the data showed that this was an issue which was specifically related to students with SEN, but was raised overtly by all the different categories of study

participants, except the students themselves (25 references to SEN from five of the six schools; with references from parents (one reference), teachers (12 references), SNAs (five references), SENCOs (one reference), and deputy principals (one reference). Some of the references related to difficulties associated with students' special needs and /or disability, such as SEBD, ADHD, GLD and ASD. For example, describing concerns about including a student with Asperger's syndrome, a SNA from a post-primary school said

He is very different – Aspergers – he is different to autism. He is not a quiet child. He is a very strong personality and his social skills would be really, really bad. So the social skills would be the main issue and for him to integrate with the others would be the main thing apart from the education (SNA, post-primary school F).

Another teacher expressed concerns about teaching students with specific speech and language difficulties:

I only teach one child with a learning disability. His language is quite poor, but sometimes it is difficult to know whether language or the disability is preventing him from learning at the same rate as the other children in the group. I also teach two children with poor speech, they find it hard to express themselves and I find it difficult to understand them and assess their rate of improvement (Teacher, primary school A).

Teachers' concerns about including particular categories of SEN is documented in the literature (Anderson et al., 2007; Avramides & Kalyva, 2007; Forlin et al., 2008). In a research synthesis of teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion from 1985 to 1995, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that, although two thirds of the approximately 10,000 serving teachers surveyed, agreed with the concept of integrating children with SEN, significant numbers of teachers felt unable or unwilling to meet the needs of children with more significant disabilities. Similarly, the teachers in Avramidis and Kalyva's survey (2007), reported that "the greatest degree of classroom adaptation was needed for children with sensory impairments (visual, hearing), autism and brain injury or neurological disorder" (p. 381). This was borne out in the present study, as quotations cited in the sections on challenges and barriers at teacher and school level illustrate, where teachers' reported difficulties in assessing and teaching appropriately, as well as their lack of confidence in their expertise for particular groups of students, were documented.

There is a large body of research evidence showing that it is students with behavioural difficulties who present the greatest challenge to inclusion for teachers (Farrell et al., 2007; Forlin et al., 2008). This was borne out in the present study with many of the teachers and

SNAs reporting how difficult it was for them to include students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. One SNA gave the following example:

It was hard working with him; it was a nightmare to be honest with you. He took over the whole class; he literally had to be carried out by four of us (SNA, primary school A).

The barriers and challenges posed by students' behavioural difficulties have already been reported for the present study under the heading 'school level' barriers.

Participants from the present study also reported difficulties associated with particular disabilities. These included problems with communication and language and poor concentration. For example, describing a student with speech difficulties, she said:

One child has quite severe speech impediment. This makes it very difficult to understand him and for him to communicate with me and others. He often gets frustrated when he can't express himself clearly (Teacher, primary school A).

The challenge of coping with students who have additional difficulties, which are associated with their disability, is also borne out in the literature regarding teachers' concerns about including these students in their mainstream classes (Forlin et al., 2008). Factors cited as barriers to including students from all three groups studied, included problems with attention, application, remaining on task as well as difficulty in understanding lesson content, concepts and tasks. One post-primary student with Downs Syndrome, who was observed in different classes throughout the course of a day, was described as being heavily reliant on his SNA in all lessons. While he appeared to be actively involved in lessons such as woodwork and PE, much of the content of the more academic and language-based lessons was too difficult for him. Despite the teachers' efforts to plan and differentiate the work for these students, it was a real challenge for them to provide opportunities for all students to work purposefully, on-task at their own level (Observer, post-primary school F). Similar observations were made concerning a boy in 6th class in a primary school who was in a special class for the core subjects but was integrated in the mainstream class for all other lessons. Sitting beside him at all times when he was in the mainstream class, his SNA enabled him to remain on-task most of the time. However, much of the content was too difficult for him in the mainstream class. Although he operated independently, mixed well and was fully integrated during break times, he was often paired with his SNA even in the special class setting, when the other students were paired with each other (Observer, primary school B). Observer fieldnotes

suggest that both these students were highly dependent on their SNAs during all class lessons.

Overall, however, there was very little reference to SNAs in the study data, with only four references to the lack of SNAs as a barrier to inclusion. This contrasts with the literature on inclusion which deals quite extensively with the issue of SNAs, teacher aides, classroom and teacher assistants (Idol, 2006; Logan, 2006; Shah, 2007). Interestingly, the evidence from the research literature warns of the dangers of students becoming too dependent on their SNAs resulting in a barrier to inclusion. On the basis of her evaluation of inclusive practices in eight schools in the US, Idol recommends that “inclusion would be best implemented if extra adults were provided to work with any student needing assistance, not just with the students in need of special education” (Idol, 2006, p. 81).

Students’ Lack of Confidence

Concerns were also raised over students’ lack of confidence and poor self-esteem, which teachers reported as barriers and challenges to inclusion for all the schools in the current study. This issue was particularly pertinent for students experiencing educational disadvantage, for whom, eight specific references were made in four of the six schools, in the teacher questionnaires. Fourteen general references were also made to self-esteem and confidence. The following reasons were listed repeatedly by the teachers and SNAs when asked about the barriers and challenges they experience when including students from the three target groups: “*low self-esteem; lack of confidence in themselves; used to being put down; low expectations from home.*” These examples match the instances of students’ lack of social competence and social disengagement, which are listed in the literature, as barriers to successful inclusion in mainstream schools (Gibb et al., 2007). Teachers talked in their interviews of the need to build students’ confidence, as the following extract from a primary school teacher shows:

I suppose just targeting things that we would feel would be essential to develop throughout the year or just encouraging them to develop relationships and self-esteem because I think that can be something that could be a big issue for children that we would be targeting for inclusion (Teacher, primary school C).

The issue of stigmatisation, with the ensuing loss of self-esteem, as a result of being withdrawn from the mainstream class for additional support, was highlighted in the earlier discussion of barriers at school level. Teachers linked many of their concerns about

students' lack of confidence to similar difficulties experienced by these students' parents. One teacher explained how lack of confidence, together with literacy and numeracy problems, disempowered students from performing some of the most basic, social tasks necessary for living:

I know there is a class and a culture barrier there because I know one of the problems that the kids face here is that they don't know the city. You know where we are here in _____ you know where Grafton Street is, One of our kids recently was sent down for an interview for work experience in _____ in Grafton Street. He couldn't find Grafton Street, and he lives here. And the usual option is, what poor people do, I don't know if you observe in town where taxis are ..., poor people use taxis all the time. I practically never use a taxi. Poor people use taxis because they cannot cope, they don't have the literacy skills, the confidence, the numeracy skills to cope with buses (Resource teacher, post-primary school D).

While there was plenty of evidence in the research literature about teachers' apprehension, and sometimes, reluctance, to teach students with more significant SEN and /or disabilities, and particularly those with behavioural difficulties, no reference to students' lack of confidence or self-esteem as a barrier to inclusion was found in the literature reviewed for this study.

Different Cultural Values /Expectations and Language Barriers

Analysis of the data revealed two areas of concern which were specific to students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds. The first related to challenges which arose as a result of different cultural values and expectations, while the second was concerned with language barriers for parents and their children. There were a total of 54 references to this theme, from all 6 schools, with 26 references coming from the teacher interviews.

Different Cultural Values and Expectations

Teachers and SNAs in their questionnaires and interviews cited a range of difficulties arising from the difference between the cultural values and expectations held by the school and those held by this group of parents and their children. They cited practical issues such as difficulties over not collecting children from school or miscommunication between home and school.

However, some unique, cultural values and practices appeared to cause more serious challenges for teachers as they tried to include students from minority ethnic and/or

minority language backgrounds. For example, gender and potential tribal issues, specific minority groups not engaging with or visiting the school, different religious beliefs and customs, different views on how to discipline children, eye contact and toileting issues. A number of teachers spoke of their concern in reporting to parents, incidences such as non-completion of homework for fear that the children might be harshly physically punished. The following response from a primary teacher's questionnaire typifies this sort of concern:

Many students from minority ethnic backgrounds experience different forms of discipline at home and are expected to behave in different ways than at school, e.g. a lot of African children are expected to be loud at home, if they are quiet it is suspicious or they are guilty of something. Also many are disciplined physically (Teacher primary, school A).

In addition to the difficulties posed for parents and their children, cultural differences appeared to challenge many of the teachers themselves. One EAL teacher from a post-primary school referred to difficulties teachers experienced in adjusting to new cultures

Well as I said English as an additional language, I had a group of girls from Africa and I found that difficult because I hadn't been exposed to African people before so I suppose in a way there were some students I found very abrupt and I thought they were being rude but they weren't, it was just their manner, it certainly wasn't a negative thing. That can be quite difficult (EAL teacher, post-primary school F).

A number of teachers highlighted the challenge of celebrating different cultures on the one hand and helping students and their families integrate into the culture of an Irish school on the other:

There are cultural issues, you know, certain families, and I shouldn't be making generalisations, but there would be more of one nationality than another that would be casual about collecting their children or sending in notes and things like that. And you kind of go, look for the smooth running and to benefit your child you really should buy into this and that can be a challenge. And the whole culture thing as well which is an issue for some teachers, if they correct somebody or if they complain to a parent about a child, the child might say, 'oh my daddy will beat me, or my mammy will beat me.' And that whole cultural area can be difficult and you are sort of going, at what level do you interfere, you can't control what goes on at home and yet you might be experiencing the impact of it (Deputy principal, primary school A).

This same teacher worried about imposing the dominant, Irish school culture on these students when she commented:

And then why should we be forcing our values on others, like often we are very pleased if someone does something that we value highly, like isn't it great that so and so went to college or that so and so is doing this now, but in their own culture and

even in a disadvantaged area, that doesn't rate at all for some (Deputy principal, primary school A).

Language Barriers for Parents and their Children

The second area of concern specific to students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds, consisted of language barriers experienced by both parents (51 references, from all six schools, 25 of which were from teachers) and their children (73 references, from five of the schools, 26 of which were from teachers). Teachers and SNAs reported that parents' own language difficulties posed a number of barriers for parents ranging from the challenge of understanding how the Irish education system works, to more concrete difficulties such as enrolling their children in school. Teachers said they were often unsure whether or not notes sent home were understood. A number of teachers cited concern over parents using their own children as interpreters. There were concerns about whether or not the parents could express themselves fully and frankly, particularly when their children were interpreting a discussion of some problem concerning an aspect of learning or behaviour that was to do with the children themselves. As a SNA in a primary school said:

And if the parent hasn't got the English, trying to communicate with the school is very difficult. If they have a problem they have to bring the child in and they really don't get to express what they want to say (SNA, primary school A).

A number of issues related to language difficulties have already been reported in the section dealing with challenges and barriers at teacher-level. These include, the difficulty teachers reported in identifying the difference between a learning difficulty and a language difficult. However, another language-related issue, which was discussed earlier deserves further mention, as it has a particular bearing on child-related challenges and barriers to inclusion. This relates to teachers' concern over students' reluctance to "speak in class" which meant they, the teachers, could not assume the students had understood. One teacher explained the difficulty as follows:

She could be doing anything. So it is things like that and it is very important, I find, to include them all at all times because it is very hard to gauge otherwise who is picking things up and who is listening and who is following. Even just reading the novel there, you could read away and you could just assume that they understand what is going on, but even the simplest of words, especially for the non-nationals, words that you would expect them to know that they often don't know because they don't have the same vocabulary experiences that the Irish kids would have. So just trying to keep them all included would be important (Teacher, primary school A).

A number of other language related issues were listed as posing challenges to the inclusion of students from minority ethnic and/ or minority language backgrounds. Teachers referred to students' frustration and confusion over their inability to understand or express themselves. They spoke of how these students had to study very hard to "catch up" with other students and how difficult it was to accommodate such a range of needs in the same class. Along with the usual difficulties associated with the acquisition of an additional language, many teachers made the point that once the students were proficient with the functional aspects of language, there were still problems in understanding the more complex use of language necessary for full inclusion in class and in school. The following response from a primary teacher's questionnaire was typical:

Children from these backgrounds not only have problems with basic language but also with the humour and innuendo and general content of stories and with the whole fluency of the language used in readers and text books which are largely based on our more western culture and traditions (Teacher, primary school A).

Post-primary teachers also spoke of how these students could be disadvantaged by their written, as opposed to their oral, language. They spoke of the implications for exams as one Post Leaving Certificate Coordinator said:

Well while their spoken English can be alright, it is the written, when they actually go to write stuff that the problem arises. And even though they can present their work in audio format if they want to, on a tape, it wouldn't be clear because their phraseology and that kind of thing isn't good. So basically from my point of view it is correcting and correcting again and showing them the difference of basic English between there and their and basic things like of (PLC, coordinator, post-primary school F).

This is a clear example of the level of academic language required for successful navigation of the school system in Ireland (Cummins, 2001).

Recognising the need for students to maintain their own language, some teachers reported their concern over students who were not speaking English at home. They said these students were not getting enough practice and therefore their opportunities to use English were limited:

I think myself that a lot of it is because of the culture and the language, they are not being exposed, like when you are young you are picking up so much language from aunts, uncles, grandparents and interaction with other people whereas they are only speaking, even when they come to school they are only speaking with children their own age. And children, where they have a limited amount of language at times and what they are speaking out in the yard, and I think that is an area that would need a bit of research (Teacher, primary school B).

There is a large body of research which highlights the importance of maintaining first languages rather than replacing them with the dominant societal language, in this case English. Cummins' (1982) interdependence hypothesis argues that one language helps, rather than frustrates, another language. What is needed is motivation and adequate access to the language, not sole immersion in English.

The emotional and social issues associated with language loss with regard to family relationships and self-image and identity should not be underestimated. Teachers need to be aware that the child exists not only within the English speaking environment of the school, but also within the minority language, family environment and an increasingly multilingual society.

Children's Voices

The views of children and young people in the study on what makes students feel that they are not included or do not belong in the school were elicited through questionnaires and individual interviews. Analysis of the data points to the importance of social inclusion for students across all ages and educational settings in the study. The most common theme to emerge in the questionnaire responses, but not in the individual interviews, relates to the issue of "bullying". What is striking about this finding is that the issue was referred to by the participants without specific prompts, questions or references to "bullying" in the questionnaire. Other themes that emerged include friendship, teachers, special needs assistants and schoolwork. The findings will now be discussed with reference to the relevant literature.

Bullying

Bullying presents as a problem for many children (ESRI, 2009b; NCCA, 2004; Thomson & Gunter, 2009). In the present study, where students' views were elicited on challenges and barriers to inclusion, there were 21 references to "bully" or "bullying" with no explanation or elaboration of the term. There were also explicit references to physical (21) and verbal (15) aggression. However, exclusion and isolation (64 references) in terms of being left out of a game, left alone, having no one to play with or not being invited to join in games, were viewed by students as contributing to making children feel that they are not included or do not belong in school. Table 5 provides details of results relating to the "bullying" theme with direct quotations from students to illuminate the findings.

Table 5. Quotations Relating to the “Bullying” Theme

Bullying behaviour	Examples (comments from students)
<p>“Bullying” generally (21 references)</p>	<p><i>Because they get bullied and the bully won't leave them alone (5th class, primary school B)</i> <i>Boy is hated and bullied by lots of other children (5th class, primary school B)</i> <i>At the start of the year when you are with your old friends. But somebody new always comes into the school. And the first thing that comes to everybody's mind is lets go bully the new child. And they think of that because they think they don't belong here. But everybody does. It's because at the start they are too shy and they won't stand up for themselves. And people that are new they're shy or afraid they won't make new friends. But it's not that they should it's the people that are already in the school that they should invite the new pupil (5th class, primary school B)</i> <i>I think all children should be free and should not be bullied by bigger kids. We should be playing and running and bigger kids should just deal with it (2nd class, primary school C)</i> <i>Bullying, fighting, slagging, won't listen to them (1st year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>People don't feel happy in school when they are being bullied or slagged (1st year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>Bullying, students making other people unwanted, racism, fighting (1st year, post-primary school F)</i></p>
<p>Physical aggression (21 references)</p>	<p><i>The older children fighting with the younger children (1st class, primary school A)</i> <i>Someone fell because of pushing (1st class, primary school A)</i> <i>2nd class hit me (1st class, primary school A)</i> <i>The boy is pushing somebody down (1st class, primary school A)</i> <i>He hurt her arm (2nd class, primary school C)</i> <i>He is punching him in the head (2nd class, primary school C)</i></p>
<p>Verbal aggression (15 references)</p>	<p><i>...children that call other children bad names (3rd class, primary school B)</i> <i>Because they could be different and other people could mocked them just to show off in front of their friends (1st year, post-primary school E)</i> <i>When people slag them and bully them and make fun of them... (1st year, post-primary school E)</i> <i>...they have no friends and get slagged... (1st year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>Because students are always the victims of small mockeries (5th year, post-primary school F)</i></p>
<p>Exclusion, isolation from peers (64 references)</p>	<p><i>Boy crying because he fell and no one to play with (1st class, primary school A)</i> <i>The children will not let new people play (3rd class, primary school B)</i> <i>Children that exclude other children (3rd class, primary school B)</i> <i>People left sitting alone on the dirty ground (3rd class, primary school B)</i> <i>Some people have to play by themselves and there is a boy in my class I think doesn't belong (3rd class, primary school B)</i> <i>When some children do not let people join in their games (5th class, primary school B)</i> <i>Some people are left out because they are different but that doesn't mean you can't be friends with them. Everyone is different. (5th class, primary school B)</i> <i>Two children have nothing to play and everyone is ignoring them (2nd class, primary school C)</i> <i>Some people do not like sport so they sit on their own and read books (1st year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>People not talking to them slagging them and not including them in games and other thing (1st year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>Unfriendly or hostile people, the truth is, some people have issues and deliberately and purposefully hurt and exclude others for their personal pleasure. Some unintentionally. (5th year, post-primary school F)</i> <i>The simple truth is that we are all teenagers and people at our age can be shallow and people may be excluded from groups because of something as simple as how they look (5th year, post-primary school F)</i></p>

While there is no indication from the findings of “very serious bullying” such as “systematic physical and verbal abuse and acute persecution of a student by another or a group” (Thomson & Gunter, 2009, p. 191), there is ample evidence of incidences of “low-level bullying” behaviour, particularly relating to exclusion of students from play and other activities which can be “damaging and long-lasting” (Thomson & Gunter, 2009, p. 193). In some cases, similar to findings in the Thomson and Gunter study, this evidence was elaborated to provide insights into the nature of the victims of bullying. There are references, for example, to peer power relations at work in schools, where older children are “*fighting with the younger children*” and one student in particular makes a plea that “*all children should be free and should not be bullied by bigger kids.*” Power relations are also evident in comments relating to new children in school who “*are too shy and they won’t stand up for themselves.*” This issue is clearly articulated by one student when giving an account of racism in his school:

Most of the students, especially juniors, want to show off how good they are and how much power they have and start messing with weaker students from other countries. Me for example as a foreigner mostly just hang out with other foreigners in school, because they all have the same problem, that they don’t really feel accepted by Irish students (5th year, post-primary school F).

There is some evidence of discrimination and racism of minority ethnic and minority language children in Ireland (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007; Fanning et al., 2001; Devine et al., 2004). Data from the study by Thomson and Gunter (2009) also suggest “that social and cultural minorities in schools are more likely to be subject to the persistent name-calling, isolation and minor physical scuffling the students regarded as bullying behaviour” (p. 191).

Being “*different*” or “*branded strange or odd*” or “*something as simple as how they look*” were cited by students as reasons for being excluded, supporting the findings of Thomson and Gunter (2009) where student researchers referred to physical difference or imperfection such as being overweight being linked to bullying. Quieter students, physically immature students and members of minority groups (including Travellers) were perceived by students to be more at risk of being bullied in a Irish longitudinal study (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007).

While children with SEN have been identified as being particularly at risk of isolation, victimisation and relationship difficulties (Nabuzoka, 2003; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Dyson et al, 2004; Gibb et al., 2007), there was no specific reference to this group of children in the present study.

Friendship

A second but significantly less common theme which emerged from the analysis of the students' views and which is implicit in the previous theme, is the issue of friendship. Children will not feel that they are included or that they belong in the school if they have no friends. The following quotations illustrate the views of the students and this theme is further illuminated in the students' drawings (Figure 1).

They don't have friends, no one wants to play with them (5th class, primary school B)

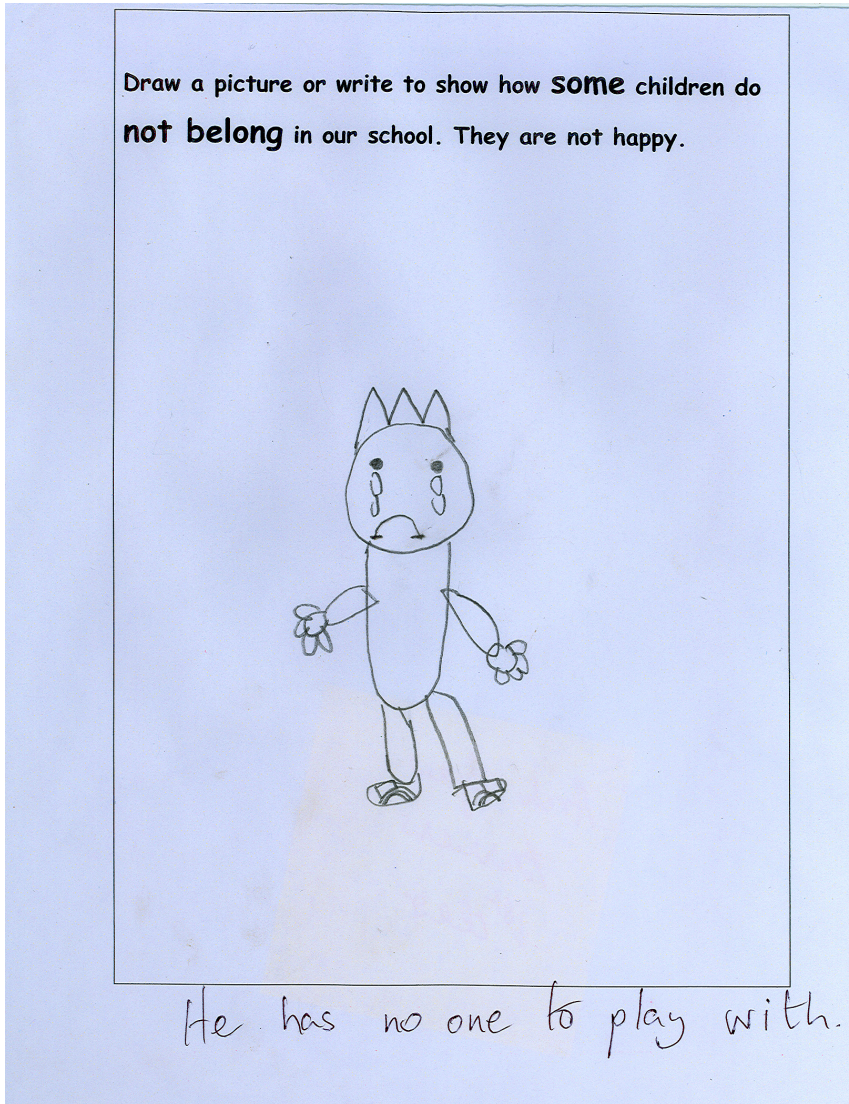
He is lonely and no one will play with him (2nd class, primary school C)

If people say to you "go away you are not my friend" (3rd class, primary school B)

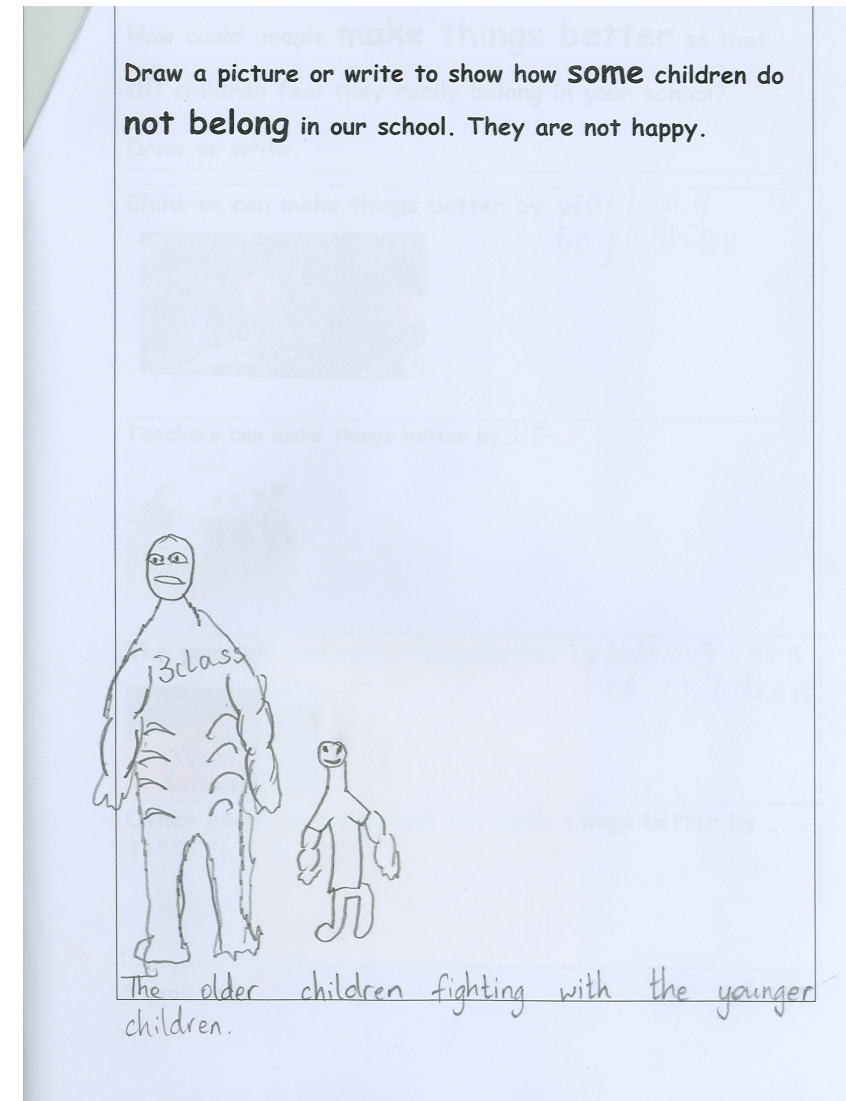
While the research evidence in relation to friendships is varied and contradictory, it is clear that friendships and peer relations in the lives of children with SEN are a key aspect of social inclusion (Dyson et al., 2004). Evidence points to caring, helpful attitudes of non-disabled peers to students with SEN (Norwich & Kelly, 2004), characterised in some cases by pity and sympathy (Rose & Shevlin, 2004). However, some studies indicate that non-disabled children hold negative attitudes to disability and to children with disabilities (Hodkinson, 2007). Friendship has also been highlighted as a significant factor in the inclusion of minority language students in Irish primary schools (McDaid, 2009) while McGorman and Sugrue (2007) and Vekic (2003) found that language proficiency can act as a barrier to inclusion.

Figure 1: Students' Drawings Illustrating what Makes them feel they are not Included

1st Class, primary, school A

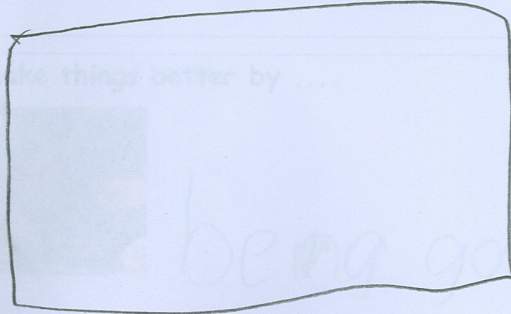


1st Class, primary, school A



1st Class, primary school A

Draw a picture or write to show how **some** children do **not belong** in our school. They are not happy.



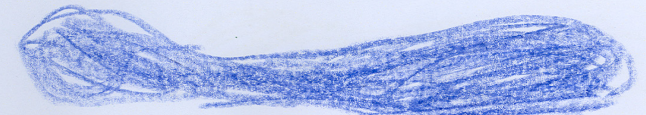
They can't read.

1st Class, primary school C

Draw a picture or write to show how **some** children do **not belong** in our school. They are not happy.



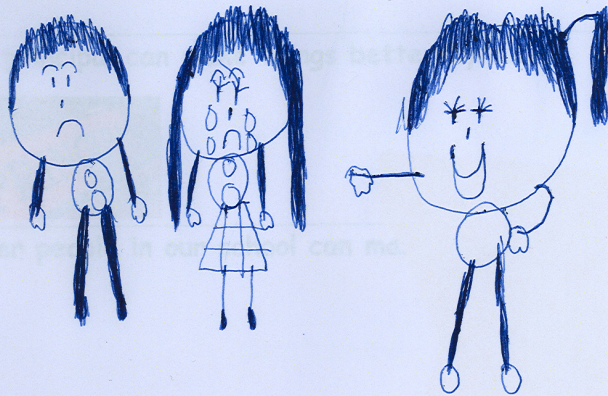
When your
left out!



1st Year, post-primary school F

Draw a picture or write to show how **some** children do **not belong** in our school. They are not happy.

This is a picture about bullying and it doesn't belong in our school



5th Class, primary school B

Draw a picture or write to show how **some** children do **not belong** in our school. They are not happy.



While the nature of friendships and the various levels and types of friendship that students experience (Meyer, 2001) were not explored in the present study, there is evidence in the rich and illustrative views of students that friends are an important aspect of feeling included in their schools.

Teachers

The role of the teacher in making the students feel that they are not included was referred to by eight students who commented on teachers who are not fair, who “*shout at them*” or “*do not listen to their opinions*”, who do not ask them questions or who put them sitting on their own. Negative pupil-teacher relations were also reported by Riley (2004). Students in this study resented teachers who talked down to them, blamed them unjustly, shouted at them, or punished the whole class and therefore the innocent as well as the guilty. While specific references are made in the research literature to poor pedagogical practice and inadequate access to the shared curriculum (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Shah, 2007; Fanning et al., 2001; Woolfson et al., 2007) in addition to lack of modification of the school environment (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008), these barriers to inclusion were not reported by students in the present study. However, students who were interviewed commented about homework issues: “*it’s hard because we have miss X’s homework and miss Y’s homework*” (Primary school C).

Special Needs Assistants

When students were asked what others in the school can do to make them feel that they belong, the organisation and management of the special needs assistant’s support was commented on by post-primary students. One student suggested that “*the special needs assistants could focus more on the people who actually need help and stop focussing on the messers and students who just aren’t bother to do well in school.*” Another post-primary student suggested that “*...special needs helpers could allow the people that they help to be more independent.*” This view is shared in a study by Woolfson et al. (2007) where students expressed a desire to work independently and to negotiate with teachers about the amount and type of support they receive.

Schoolwork

Additional themes which emerged as barriers to inclusion from the students' perspective indicated a concern about not being able to do the work at school, "*when they have too much maths*" (1st class, primary school A), unable to read or write and "*if they are too small they don't know the letters*" (1st class, primary school A). A primary student who was interviewed also referred to not liking school as "*it is kind of too hard*" while a post-primary student spoke about the stress of exams: "*I have to do an Art Project and all that and ...there is a lot of pressure.*" These findings are supported by the results of a study by Norwich and Kelly (2004) which revealed that Mathematics/numeracy and English/literacy were hardest subjects to learn for students with mild general learning difficulties.

Additional Themes

Final comments from a small number of students, which do not appear to be addressed in the research literature, indicate a concern about the physical environment of the school and the issue of reward systems in schools. Comments from a couple of students in two different schools referred to the physical environment of the school, when there is "*a lot of rubbish because it smells*" (1st class, primary school A) and "*no one has manners and they're throwing stuff on the floor*" (3rd class, primary school B).

The issue of inequality in terms of rewards for students, which is well argued in the following quote, was viewed by one student as a barrier to inclusion:

Many students get rewarded for being good for a whole week or being early for a week and they get brought out to breakfast but the students who are always good and on time for school get forgotten about and I think every student should be rewarded (5th year, post-primary school F).

There is a sense in which all the challenges and barriers reported in this chapter, those at the level of the school and those at the level of the teacher /class, are all challenges and barriers at the level of the child, because the child is at the heart of what schooling is about and teachers and schools exist, only because there are children. It is clear from the presentation of the findings in this chapter, that many of the barriers and challenges reported defy neat separation into categories such as teacher-level, school-level and child/family/community-level. However, there is no

doubt that when taken together, the issues reported at all these levels, pose serious challenges to teachers' and schools' attempts to include students from the three groups studied in this research. The next chapter presents and discusses the practices for overcoming these challenges and barriers, which were reported by the study participants.

CHAPTER 6: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

In this chapter the findings are outlined at the school level, class and teacher level and family and community level as well as the children's voice (Table 6). Themes and sub themes where applicable are described.

School Level

At school level the key themes which emerged were: Leading and supporting inclusive practices: the principal and coordinator(s); leadership from coordinators; prioritising support through flexibility in models in provision; intercultural awareness; curricular relevance; continuing professional development and inclusive policies.

Leading and Supporting Inclusive Practices: The Principal and Coordinator(s)

The key role of the principal in leading and supporting inclusive policies, attitudes and practices was very evident from all of the participants. This is in line with the literature (Villa et al., 2005; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Riehl, 2000). Teachers referred to the importance of this leadership in giving direction, in the principal being a member of the coordinating team and in believing in the ideal of education for all.

It has to come from the principal down because if the principal isn't supportive of the team, (Name of principal) is a member of the team, but if the principal isn't supportive of the team you can't do anything, the thing is tight. Like I would have seen things before as confined and you stick to the boundaries, you don't think outside the box. And people who are in the team...would have been part of the old regime if you like, so the only difference has been that the principal is different, the leadership is different (Coordinator of SEN, post-primary D).

One of the principals referred to his realisation of the power of his influence:

So I would say it to any principal, anyone just starting off, just realise how much of an effect, everything, your attitude, the standards that you expect, your personality, all of these things impact and it kind of disseminates out. I hadn't realised it until I got into the job and in the last couple of years certainly would see and they will probably copy your bad sides too, whatever your weakness is it will be there (Principal, post-primary D).

It just comes from the top, if it is not facilitated or encouraged from the top, no matter who you have with ideas working away it will never become inclusive unless the principal believes in it (HSLC, post-primary F).

Table 6. Findings: Themes, Sub Themes and Level for Addressing Challenges and Barriers to Inclusion

Level 1 School Themes	Sub themes	Level 2 Teacher/Class Themes	Level 3 Child/family and community Themes	Sub themes	Level 4 Children's voices – Themes
Leading and supporting inclusive practices: the principal and coordinators		Varied and differentiated teaching methodologies	Engaging parents	Communication with parents Helping in the classroom Support of HSCL officer Support of Parents' Association Providing access for parents to education	Playing games together
Prioritising support through flexibility in models of provision	Early intervention Flexibility in timetabling Team teaching Flexible use of the special class as a facilitator of inclusion Moving towards collaborative cultures Providing social and emotional support to pupils: Buddy systems, pastoral support	Support from special needs assistants	Collaboration with other schools and agencies	Links between primary and post-primary schools Links with community agencies and social services	Being included in all activities
Intercultural Awareness		Time and emphasis on planning and preparation	Extra-curricular engagement	Providing clubs: breakfast, lunch, reading, homework Providing vocational activities Providing sporting and musical activities	Positive atmosphere
Curricular relevance		Teaching Resources			Friends
Continuing professional development					Engaging with specific subjects and group activities
Inclusive Policies					Teachers and Principals

Well I think (name of principal) himself, I mean he is a great believer in education for all, and whatever way we have to deliver we try and deliver within boundaries and within reason. But it stems from there. And I think as teachers come in they buy into it because it is in place, it is the policy so they don't have a problem (School completion coordinator, post-primary F).

Daly (2008) uses the term principal-patronage to describe the enabling leadership which supports the inclusion agenda. Daly (2008, p. 10) also highlights the importance of the interaction of this patronage with at least one “practitioner-catalyst” as contributing to a distributed leadership that stretched across other teachers and facilitated moves towards inclusive practices.

This was very evident in the schools, but a key finding in this study was that movement towards inclusion was particularly so where the “practitioner-catalyst” also had a leadership or coordinating role in the school. The effect of this duo working together galvanised support for change in the direction of inclusive policies and practices. There was clear evidence across the case study schools of the importance of the relationship between the principal and the coordinator of special educational needs and language support. Teachers spoke of the shared vision and leadership of the personnel in these key roles. They set the tone, expectations, attitude and gave status to special educational needs or minority ethnic issues in the school. They formed a hub of interest, energy, passion and expectation that spread out and gave coherence, direction, vision and structure to policies and practices in the school. The relationships were characterised by close communication, active interest of the principal in inclusion issues, mutual support of inclusive policies and by a spirit of inquiry which encouraged experimentation, innovation and evaluation as the school community learned new ways of addressing the challenges. Shevlin et al. (2008) report that parent advocacy groups perceived schools “as unable to provide leadership in identifying and responding appropriately to the educational and social needs of the child” (p. 146). These schools through the principal and coordinator of special education were providing this leadership.

Principals: Building a Vision and Ethos of Care, Responsibility and Achievement

An aspect of the leadership shown by the principals in the case study schools was a willingness to articulate a vision of the school and communicate it to the wider school community. Far from being fearful about the diversity of pupil intake and the challenges it presents, as highlighted by Daly (2008), the principals of these schools see it as a major strength and selling point:

that if you come to (name of school) you know that you are buying into a school that isn't exclusive, that you are going to buy into a place that is a school for everybody and at our open nights and when we are presenting our school that is very much an aspect. And people are voting with their feet. In 2002 we had 420, the next year it was 660. So people know that this is one of the strengths of our school. Another one of the strengths of our school is the special classes. Apart from the education provision provided to the children within those classes, the learning experiences for the rest of the school are immense. Anything that helps a child think outside themselves and if you grow up with a child with special needs, the sense of empathy isn't an abstract concept, it is a very real and living thing day in and day out (Principal, primary school B).

This approach echoes the advice of Riehl (2000) and Villa et al. (2005) about connecting with the wider community and promoting a new vision. The principal of primary B worked to enthuse the students and inspire them to build on their strengths and utilised pictures and letters from famous people to reinforce the message. There was evidence in this school also of an equal attention being paid to strengths in terms of abilities and interests as well as addressing needs in pupils with special educational needs:

And what I have learned in my seven years here is that the level of talent, take any of these children, Traveller children, international pupils, children with special needs, it is so easy to fall into the category of making assumptions about them, so easy to put a label on them, so easy to assume that they are going to be weak across all areas. I could bring you up there and I could show you children who are so talented... take any other aspect of life and what this school offers people is a chance to express that talent, to become enriched, see beyond your weakness, know that you have a talent. And if you look around on the walls here you see notes from, I wrote to anybody I could think of to offer them to tell us... Like Brian O' Driscoll is the latest one, we have a picture of Brian O' Driscoll which we are going to use at the assembly on Wednesday. And basically it says, look everybody has got a talent, everybody has got an ability, go for it. We have things from people like John Hume which is just inside the front door, to the President when she came here, to the head of UCC, the head of UCD, Kofi Annan, Brian Cody is another one and the Taoiseach ... But we wrote to everybody, basically as something to use in assembly so say, look think outside the box (Principal, primary school B).

Principals were clear that there was an expectation of inclusion and a willingness to take responsibility for it:

Now, I suppose our responsibility and our mission, as I see it, is that whoever comes in through our doors and becomes part of our school community, that it's our responsibility to make sure that they achieve the potential that they have, and that's the guarantee that we give to first-year parents or the parents coming in. And as a result, I suppose we've had to be innovative, I think, creative, and particularly responsive to the needs of pupils (Principal, post-primary F).

they're coming into an environment that they believe is safe and that they won't be exposed to bullying and so on and so forth. And my response to them is this: that we have a policy here in the school of absolute blanket supervision so that there is no point of the school day where any child needs to be outside of the sight of an adult. And everybody in the school community has bought into this (Principal, post-primary F).

The teaching staff responded to this challenge and felt pride in the successes they had achieved and laid down to the challenge to other schools to address the structural, curricular, procedural and attitudinal barriers to inclusion:

I think other schools have to take our lead to be perfectly honest with you. I think there should be more of a balance amongst schools to have this open inclusive approach. I mean I am teaching here since 1991, I was tutor to the first student with Down's syndrome that came to this school. She had been refused entrance to her secondary school that was her feeder from her primary school, because they didn't have the resources to deal with her. And I think too often schools have used that excuse to exclude children and to not maybe adapt the structures, the procedures, the interventions and supports that we have adapted, that are available to every school. You just need the vision, the imagination, the commitment and I think you need to have the care for those students. And looking to the future I think really (Name of school) is really a beacon to other schools and is a model to other schools. We are very, very flexible and very open and very visionary I feel in how we do try and include students but also support students. It is one thing to take students into your school and to say they are in a mainstream school, but to make the mainstream curriculum accessible to those students where they can experience success, belonging, achievement and become a real member of the school community and achieve academic success and social success and have access to all the opportunities that every child really should have access to (Learning support teacher, post-primary F).

It is clear here that there is no attempt to minimise the effort involved in meeting the needs of all students in the community. However, the combination of principal and

teacher leadership created a force of movement towards inclusion, which resonates with Daly (2008).

In the schools in this study there was evidence of an equal consideration to the practice of care and concern for achievement levels (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Day, 2009). In line with the research findings on the effect of inclusion on achievement levels in schools there was a strong belief that one did not have to occur at a cost to the other (Farrell et al., 2007). Day (2009) argues that the quality of education is about hope, passion, justice and ethics and many of the teachers in these schools expressed similar sentiments. Riehl (2000) speaks of the importance of the principal articulating hope. Avradmidis and Norwich (2002) stress the role of ethos, culture and attitude and this was underlined by many of the teachers:

The relationship that the staff have with the students. I suppose there would be any number of success stories that we would have, I think it is one of the things that we feel is really lovely about (Post-primary school F) and it is very kind of a public thing that really I suppose reflects what goes on every day (Learning support teacher, post-primary F).

There always has been here since the foundation of the school a very strong ethos of the school being a school for everyone and the concept of a school being one for everyone is under a lot of pressure nowadays (Principal, primary school B).

Well I think really the ethos in the school is key to it all and we do have, and I know it sounds very idealistic, but I really do feel we have a very caring, respectful ethos here, a very pastoral approach to our students. Every teacher in our school would know the name of every student in the school and would be very clear on what those students needs are (Learning support teacher, post-primary F).

The practice of the values of tolerance that underpin inclusion is evident in the following extract. Also the incremental building of a critical mass of teachers committed to moving in the direction of inclusion is clear.

Another strength here of the school is people buy into the philosophy, there is an ownership, if you want to use the word, of philosophy ... I was here a couple of years, not too long, and there was a little lad here with extreme special needs and he had challenging behaviour, he was a tough fellow, a really nice young fellow, anyway I remember when we had the hall out there and it was more open plan than it is now and he sat up on that he yelled and he f'ed and blinded and he cursed at every teacher as we came out of the staffroom. And afterwards I was thinking, ok now somebody is going to come to me... Not one

person came to complain about that child, they knew where he was, it underlined it for me that people get what we are trying to do here, they get it, they see what we are trying to do. And to have that with you is a huge thing, it is a massive thing that there is nobody going to turn around to any of us here and say, 'for God's sake, what is that lad doing going to school here?' And that, with my hand on my heart, is probably the greatest strength of the place (Principal, primary school B).

Participants across all six schools referred to an understanding of inclusion as a means of trying to ensure that all students have equal status and opportunities.

Respect and positive attitudes also formed a part of this:

I suppose we are trying to create equal opportunities for everybody and equal access for everybody and the fact of the matter is that people are coming in from very different backgrounds and very different circumstances and with a very different starting point (Principal, primary school C).

everyone is for them and there is very little stereotyping, which is great, that you have that kind of community spirit in the school (Class teacher, primary school B).

One particular reference focuses on Traveller children, and how they should be included in schools and resistance to other parents seeking to have their child moved:

But we were always able to say to parents if they came in to me and said, 'will you change my child?' and we have always said no because everyone has to be treated the same (Principal, primary school A).

Leadership from Coordinators

The coordinators in all the schools were highly confident and had high levels of specialist knowledge and skills. As well as holding post graduate qualifications in the area, they were engaged in continual new learning. Principals were extremely supportive of coordinators and facilitated through distributed leadership the positive influence of their staff. The coordinators, for their part, were willing to lead and mentor staff, support new practices and lead reflections on initiatives. The coordinators in the schools assumed key roles in articulating a vision of inclusion in the school and supporting staff to try new practices. They understood the evolving nature of our understanding of inclusive practices and policies and had the confidence to engage in what the literature terms practitioner research (Porter & Lacey, 2005). This involved the systematic collection of data, feedback, piloting of assessment and recording instruments and review with the intention of improving

practice. In some of the schools the coordinator led a needs analysis of the school in relation to an aspect of inclusion and arranged tailored professional development for the staff. There was evidence across all of the schools of sustained engagement, inquiry and reflection over many years with resultant refinements to practices and policies, notwithstanding the barrier of time for such activity.

Through this reflection and innovation the schools had developed sophisticated systems and structures that support inclusion. These included personalised record keeping, systems for monitoring progress and documentation for accountability for support time and how it was linked to the curriculum. Daly (2008) describes some of the characteristics of the teachers in his study of Irish post-primary schools who developed inclusive practices as being flexible and not afraid to engage in trial and error approaches to practice. Such traits were also evident in many of the teachers in the case study schools.

A lot of supports, but I have to say these have evolved over a number of years in response to the demands that have been put on the curriculum by including these students. And we have tried out different models and we are still adapting and changing really and I think there has to be that flexibility and we are very lucky in the fact that I suppose the principal would have a great vision and a great commitment to inclusion there that would facilitate those kinds of supports and those kinds of structure (Learning support teacher, post-primary F).

So I suppose one of the great strengths of the school would be the presence of (name of SEN Coordinator) and his expertise in that area (Class teacher, primary school B).

We have a whole staff evaluation of the special needs program at the end of the year every year. That's usually a very soul searching kind of a thing. I used to find it very sort of, challenging in a way, because you know, you're kind of saying did it work or not you know? And we went through years, we were at it about six or seven years now of this kind of trial and error. Different methods and that sort of thing (SEN coordinator, post-primary school F).

But as I say I am lucky with the personnel that are here, they are very open to thinking outside the box and they would do a lot of the thinking themselves, all of the ideas here aren't mine, a lot of them would come from the teachers themselves, they would suggest it. At the end of the year we would have a review of the year, what went well, what could we improve on and it would be done openly. It has a bit of danger in it that if you are doing stuff with the whole room and somebody said this didn't go too well, it might be seen as

criticism of the particular class group or the particular teacher or that, but is isn't viewed that way (Principal, primary school A).

The evidence of critical reflection in these comments illustrates Kinsella and Senior's (2008) argument around the school as a learning organisation facilitating a process of inclusion through the interaction of expertise, resources and structures.

Coordinators: Support for Inclusive Policies and Practices

Coordinators played a key role in policy development, planning and record keeping, and in supporting inclusive practices. A key feature in some of the schools was the attention given to the importance of targeting, tracking and monitoring student progress, keeping detailed records of teaching and being accountable for the additional supports given to students. It was clear in the planning that there was an expectation that support teachers and class or subject teachers were working together. This then feeds back into the assessment process and helps with the tailoring of interventions for students. The process of arriving at this stage is described by the SEN coordinator in one of the post-primary schools:

To keep ongoing records of target students' progress. So this is a thing that is very important I think, to keep records. Because otherwise you don't know where you're going and it's for the professionalism of it. We found in the beginning, five or six years ago, that some were reluctant to keep records, and were inclined to say, 'I'll write down something.' And we had to bite that bullet if you like, because it was perceived then by the main subject teachers that that was a kind of an easy job being the resource teacher so to speak. And the subject teacher was perceived as having to do all the class preparation, all the correction of all the work, the homework... So to professionalise it, it's essential that the resource teachers differentiate the curriculum with the subject teacher... Also, make out detailed records of their progress and also end of term reports. So that's what they're all required to do, which they've been doing ... We have a skills tracking progress sheets that are compiled on all students taught individually or in small groups. So any teacher, resource teacher who takes a group out of a class are required to make some record of the work, the skills they teach them in each class. I will look back and I can see in such a date, how somebody was getting on at that skill that was being taught at that time (SEN Coordinator, post-primary F).

There were also detailed job descriptions in some of the schools for the resource/learning support teacher and for special needs assistants. Post-primary school F felt this was particularly important in the context of co-teaching, where expectations for the resource teacher were clear with an emphasis on differentiation,

ensuring target students are on task, monitoring progress and sharing discipline. For the special needs assistants there was an expectation that they would be in the locker area five minutes before the students arrive in the morning to assist students to have the correct books and materials in class.

There were examples of how resource teachers, particularly coordinators supported colleagues in differentiating the curriculum and how teachers were willing to learn and try new ideas. The key relationship between the principal and coordinator helped establish expectations and a culture of differentiation across many of the schools. In the following excerpt a coordinator in post-primary school F explains some of the adaptations made:

Now (name of teacher) would have been teaching the honours classes, and he was one teacher who would be sort of conservative and maybe conventional. A fantastic teacher. And maybe slightly in the beginning, maybe slightly uncomfortable with special needs. Do you know what I mean? Because he wasn't trained, you know? And now he's delighted to go from an honours class to take a student with Down Syndrome like this (SEN coordinator, post-primary F).

This teacher, with support, used a particular software programme to differentiate work for this student in English and recorded the novel on a tape. This was an example of the use of ICT sought by Wedell (2008). Other examples included simplifying the language of texts and providing supports for understanding technical terms:

(Name of teacher) a few years ago he wrote out the whole history book, adapted it in simpler speak. So subject teachers, I've got subject teachers to do that kind of work to try and modify stuff over the years. And to provide technical terms and meanings. We try to do that in learning support (SEN coordinator, post-primary F).

In one primary school B the special educational needs coordinator gives an annual presentation to parents of pupils with SEN in a local special education preschool of what the school could offer their child. In this initiative parents are presented with the options of a special school, special class or resource support and invited to visit all placement options. The coordinator from the primary school gives parents a comprehensive overview of the school covering the following areas: background to the school, in-school support services, additional supports following assessment, role of special needs assistants, relevant DES circulars, the role of the special classes for

students with mild general learning disability, specific language disorder and dyslexia, the curriculum guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities, the aims of special education, the role of the special education support service, inclusive education and parental choice and individual education plans. When this is combined with a visit to the school parents are in a good position to make an informed choice about placement for their child with special educational needs.

Coordinators when they worked with teams in the school helped to raise the profile of the area and many advantages accrued from a team approach. There was more coordination of support and resources, monitoring of pupils, policy development and better communication. In some schools the principal attended team meetings and this was seen as adding weight to initiatives and facilitating change. The DES (2007a) guidelines for post-primary schools urge a key role for the principal in such teams.

In post-primary school F the principal and coordinator developed a tailored intervention to address behavioural issues. Where incidents occur in class with certain pupils they can avail of a resource room that is staffed and allows space for resolution and continued work (Downes et al., 2006).

It was myself and (names principal) talking about how on earth we would tackle this nettle. We came up with that model ourselves to staff the room and just have one student (SEN coordinator, post-primary F).

When the students come to the room there is an expectation that they will continue their work. The SEN coordinator explained the rationale and practices in the room:

And it's kind of a little buffer zone after the incident and before they get into the more calm thing. And the resource teacher doesn't buy into this punitive in any sense of what happened, or doesn't go into that at all. Write it down, that's over, get down to work. The feedback is very good from teachers, because ... it's a win/win because they know that if ... The safety valve is there and if they're up to high-do with pressure, that the other students in the class are entitled to learn, and remove this student without doing an injustice to anyone. So I must say, now it doesn't go plainly and it doesn't go swimmingly every time they come down and sometimes it's very hard to get them down to task but at least it's constructive and you feel you're giving them a bit of respect and you're giving them some kind of chance. And also encourage them in their file to put in samples of their work. If they've done something very well to do that as well, as well as bringing back to class to the teacher to keep some samples down there. And there's some for effort as well. A reward for effort there. A column for effort. It might happen that their achievement was very

poor, but that their effort was, they made a very good effort. So it's just in recognition of that (SEN coordinator, post-primary F).

A significant barrier identified in the literature is the availability of external support services such as therapies and the coordination of these with the educational services (Shevlin et al., 2008). In two of the case study schools there was evidence of lateral thinking in trying to address this barrier. In one of the schools the coordinator linked up with the occupational therapy department of one of the universities and the final year students provided a service to the school. In one of the primary schools the principal decided to prioritise the area and pay out of school funds:

Another strength of the place, this took a long time, is trying to think laterally to access services. If you are waiting for the HSE to appoint a speech therapist or an occupational therapist to a special class, you will be waiting, and it took me a while to realise that, I might as well be talking to that stick in the corner because it ain't going to happen. But if you actually sit down and look at it and say, ok how much is it going to cost us? Is it €4,000, if we put €4,000 aside, we need OT for 23 children (Principal, primary school B).

As regards occupational therapy, again the community care occupational therapy service run by the HSE, because they don't have enough staff they don't prioritise children with special education needs. We have got around that by, as I said, we have a dedicated OT room in the school which was funded by the Department of Education based on recommendation of the community OT, but what we do with that room is we make that room available to Down's Syndrome Ireland who are subsidising OT services for Down Syndrome children in the county. And we allow that service to use that room two days a week and in return those OTs offer free assessments to the children in the special class. As regards speech and language therapy, there is none, again because of the numbers of speech therapists in the country, again they don't get priority treatment. For next year we hope to use some school funding to actually directly employ a speech and language therapist for that class (SEN coordinator, primary school B).

Overall the findings at school level support the conclusions of the *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues* report (NESF, 2009) which reports that successful schools were characterised by strong and effective leadership, high staff expectations, and a culture of rewarding success. In addition, these schools showed high levels of collegiality; communication; co-operation and flexibility among staff all working to achieve agreed targets and action plans through structured programmes.

While the role of the coordinator has been stressed in the literature there has been little emphasis on the facilitating power of the relationship between the principal and coordinators in building a culture of collaboration for inclusion as evidenced in this study. Dyson (1993) argues that schools need to progress to a situation whereby there is no need for a coordinator of special educational needs as subject and other coordinators assume the role as part of the embedding of inclusion across the whole school. Schools in this study were not at that stage and the coordinators of SEN fulfilled key leadership roles. Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) identified the importance of these roles in facilitating inclusion. The DES guidelines for inclusion at post-primary advise that a member of the special education team “might be assigned the responsibility for coordinating provision” devolved from the principal (DES, 2007a, p. 68). As highlighted in the literature review special educational needs coordinators in England now must be part of the senior management of schools and avail of mandatory professional development (Optimus Education, 2010).

Prioritising Support through Flexibility in Models of Provision

A key feature of all the case study schools was innovation and flexibility in models of support and organisation. This is highlighted in much of the literature (Ferguson, 2008; Farrell et al., 2007). Sub themes here include early intervention, flexibility in timetabling and team teaching.

Early Intervention at Primary Level

In one of the primary schools in a disadvantaged context early intervention was prioritised and targeted and learning support resources were concentrated in this area to give intensive tuition, which the school termed “blitzing”:

And then one day a week they do, blitzing they call it, where all the learning support teachers work together with the class teachers. So basically you'd have four teachers in a classroom working with the children and it is brilliant because it breaks it down to a 6:1 ratio nearly and the activities, you can revisit, like you can do the same concept but revisit it in four different ways. The four teachers might be teaching the same thing, but they might use four different resources. And it is very much planned and it is very much in touch with what is going on in class and that happens every week (Deputy principal, primary school A).

Definitely in junior infants. The highest intervention I suppose with an extra teacher in a class is at junior infant level. There are two teachers in the class a

lot of the day and then one day a week there will be four on a rota, so they have to visit classes in a day so it is hard work for them but they feel it works. So the focus could be phonics or the focus could be a maths activity, they decide as a group, the teachers and the learning support teachers plan this and they are timetabled (Class teacher, primary school A).

Another feature of the early intervention in this school is the use of an early mathematics intervention called Number Worlds. This is a research based intervention programme developed in the U.S. which targets children from disadvantaged contexts at risk of failure in mathematics (Griffin et al., 1996). The intervention consists of in-class support for small group number activities. Research to date on the programme points to positive results from schools using it (Mullan & Travers, 2007). Overall in terms of intervention this school is intervening at Junior Infant level through in class support. This is in contrast to many schools that interpret early intervention as occurring in 1st class (Travers, 2007).

In primary school A also resources were systematically and differentially applied according to assessed need operating a version of the staged approach advocated in circular 02/05. Children assessed as having the greatest needs were assigned substantially more support and the caseloads of the support teachers reflected the level of need of the children. Farrell et al. (2007) found flexible use of adult support in their case study schools.

Flexibility in Timetabling

In primary school B the barrier of coordinating timetabling and reducing disruptions to the mainstream classes was overcome to a great extent by providing support for the junior, middle and senior end of the school at different times of the day. This ensured greater certainty for the class teacher around the timing of support, less disruption to the mainstream class timetable, more concentrated time for support work and a maximising of the time the whole class is together which aids planning, curriculum coverage and monitoring of progress and tracking of pupil attendance. The concentration of support is aided by the pooling of all of the support teachers together as a team. The principal of the school explains how the system operates:

We first of all put together what we call a Forbairt team, our leaning support teams are called Forbairt. And within that we pooled resource, learning support, Traveller education teachers. And we looked at the pool of resources

and we have a senior and a junior Forbairt support team. Now if you are working with the junior support team then we look at a mixture of in-class and withdrawal support there. But it basically works like this, senior infants and 1st class will be dealt with in the morning, so if there are six teachers on the Forbairt junior team, they are all dealing with those classes at that time. So the senior infant children are either going out or somebody is coming in all that time, the rest of the day the mainstream teacher has that class. In the middle class of the day it is 2nd class and the later part of the day it is 3rd class. The senior Forbairt team is 4th, 5th and 6th ... So when there is movement, it is structured movement and because we have that in place I think it is one of the strengths of the school because you don't have people coming and going all the time (Principal, primary school B).

One of the post-primary schools solved the dilemma of providing intensive tuition to a small group in the key subject areas without withdrawing pupils from another subject area by offering learning support as a subject option. This has many advantages in terms of the status of the option and the fact that what the students are getting is supplementary and not replacing subject work in English and Mathematics. However, it does reduce other curriculum options for students (DES, 2007a).

We offer learning support to the junior cycle as an option subject, so what that means is they are not withdrawn from a subject so they are not missing any subject, they drop an option. So instead of doing 9 options or 10 options for junior cert, they do 9, so when other students are going to science or French or whatever, they are coming to LS and LS is a subject in its own right, there is no stigma attached to it. It is their subject, it is taught by trained, qualified learning support teachers in a very calm, quiet, caring environment and it is a very positive thing. I team teach with and we would work with 1st, 2nd and 3rd years. We devise our own programme in literacy, numeracy, self-esteem (Learning support teacher, post-primary F).

In the same post-primary school following criticism from some teachers that the model of co-teaching was not working out in terms of meeting the needs of some of the pupils the school developed a more differentiated support plan with different levels of in-class support and combined it with small group or one to one withdrawal where required.

Because when we started off with the team teaching, we felt that or some felt and told us that it didn't work that great. So I thought why did I let a whole term go you know, how will I safeguard against this? (SEN coordinator post-primary F).

Team Teaching

All of the schools had embraced team teaching as part of a flexible model of support. One of the post-primary schools has a highly developed policy and practice in relation to team teaching. There was huge enthusiasm in the school for the benefits of team teaching (DES, 2007a). This was in contrast to O’Gorman et al. (2009) who report an over reliance on withdrawal as a form of support. The principal, special education needs coordinator and subject teachers outlined these as improved student behaviour, improved student learning performance, less stigma for students, more individual attention for students, mentoring support for newly qualified teachers, less teacher stress, improved teacher morale and the opportunity to observe another teacher using different methodologies. However, across all participants there was widespread support for the benefits of team teaching as a means of facilitating inclusion across all of the areas under study. This reflects the findings of Walther-Thomas (1997) and also reflects the prerequisites for collaboration as laid out by Smith and Leonard (2005).

We are extremely lucky in our school that we have learning support teachers that provide in-class support. As a result all the children benefit from having two teachers in the room so the children with special needs are more easily catered for and it is a lot easier to use differentiation practices (Class teacher, primary school A).

Well the biggest thing really is team teaching. I don't know how many people you have spoken to now but it is absolutely fantastic, it really really is (Subject teacher, post-primary D).

Class X would have been known in 1st year I suppose as having behavioural issues, being a difficult class to manage whereas with two teachers we have had absolutely no problems; we have never had difficulty or loss of control with the two of us. So from that point of view there is a huge benefit. You get the chance to just teach your class when you are the lead teacher and then you can turn around to do something on the board in the full knowledge that nothing is going to go flying across the room or nobody is going to suddenly drift off into a dream world because there is somebody else there keeping them on their toes. Also the fact that they have that extra resource to make use of so they can call you over; they are not sitting there waiting 10 or 15 minutes maybe while the teacher is dealing with somebody else. They get almost instant feedback or instant clarification as well. So they were the huge benefits, the behavioural side of it and the chance to get instant feedback and clarification (Subject teacher, post-primary D).

In post-primary school D there was evidence of monitoring of pupil progress and an evaluation of the team teaching process to assess if the targeted pupils had benefited from the experience.

Like it is grand to say terrific but it does need to be monitored closely because if it is not monitored then you can't show the benefits to the targeted child, you know... 16 periods a week is very costly. So have the children whose hours made up that 16 hours benefited? Yes but some of them still need individual support so they will have to be targeted with individual support as well. So I suppose if I were to say what model we are using - none and all, because it has to be flexible (SEN coordinator, post-primary D).

There was evidence here also of the coordinator and team assuming a leadership role on the issue and being very successful in selling it to the wider school in the interests of the students. In relation to whether teachers should have a choice or not to engage in team teaching the SEN coordinator stressed the professional obligation of teachers to do what is in the best interests of the pupils.

If that is what benefits the children most, that is what the teachers have to fit in with.

There is an element of choice but I know when we were discussing team teaching one of the things that maybe would be a factor in team teaching would be the suitability of who you are working with, I don't hold with that really.

In relation to the teams, the professionalism has to override any individual differences that are there with the teachers. I can see some teams that work, just the energy, and I can see other teams that maybe lack the same dynamic, but are still very effective (SEN Coordinator, post-primary D).

When one considers the extent of a traditional reliance on withdrawal models of support in the Irish system these views are refreshing (IATSE, 2000). While there has been a major push towards more in-class models of support (DES, 2000, 2007) there is evidence here of a further development in stressing the professional obligation of all teachers to engage in co-teaching where it is in the best interests of the students. Currently the code of practice for teachers developed by the teaching council advocates that teachers collaborate but doesn't yet incorporate the above (Teaching Council, 2007).

Internationally, there have been calls for such a commitment to team teaching to be part of the professional obligation of all teachers (Nevin et al., 2008).

In terms of how the school moved to team teaching there was encouragement from the principal and special educational needs coordinator. There was a presentation made to staff and it began in one subject area and spread. There was evidence of a supportive culture of trying it out and reflecting on this.

It is the trying part of it, I suppose, that is important, just try it and see how it works (SEN Coordinator, post-primary D).

... so we had our own staff meeting and (Name of resource teacher) made a presentation to it. So people began to dip their toe into it a bit and like there are huge benefits. But there has been no pressure and it is gradually more and more people want to be involved in it. I suppose the other side of it too that came out is that teaching is quite a lonely profession as well and this probably gives it the other bit of contact... And I am very conscious too, like as I said I am coming from a learning support background and my own experiences and particularly going up to the school, the second level school is where children feel targeted and stigmatised by the fact that they are getting withdrawal (Principal, post-primary D).

We started with English and we would have it in metal work as well, it is working terrific because it means that their results have gone way up because their project work is of a better quality plus their theory would be of a better quality because there are two there (SEN Coordinator, post-primary D).

Yes I think that team teaching has been very supportive and it is great mentoring for very young teachers coming out of college that there is another member of staff connected with them daily, in and out of their rooms supporting them and yet they are still the class teacher, but there is a lot of support there and a lot of mentoring goes on. And for the children it has been very inclusive, definitely (Home School Liaison Teacher, primary school A).

One of the parents interviewed in the post-primary school D could see advantages for her child:

I have seen an awful difference with (Name of daughter), opening up more with (Name of daughter) and I have seen her express more. Especially when she started off with the two teachers in the classroom, she is more confident since that happened in the classroom with the subjects that she has (Parent of student in post-primary D).

...it is not the same negativity from teachers, from the teachers' point of view, you know the way teachers would say, 'oh God we have to go into this, here we go into this crowd again.' That doesn't exist if there is a team (SEN Coordinator, post-primary D).

While extolling the benefits of team teaching there was an understanding that a continuum of support options should be available within the schools including

individual and small group withdrawal, smaller classes, blocking classes at the same time, and in some of the schools the use of integrated special classes. This resonates with the views of Wedell (2008) on the requirement for flexibility in provision. One parent whose child had experienced intensive tuition in a special unit, withdrawal from the mainstream class for support and in-class support spoke about how the various forms of support were appropriate at the various stages of her child's development.

We've struck a balance I think between co-teaching and small group work... Earlier when we started this six years ago, we were inclined to have more teachers co-teaching. But I think that as time went on and we found that okay, we've a balance between smaller classes and blocking classes with all the English classes together in second year, all the maths classes together, so you can actually move children around. And you can have an extra teacher in there in a smaller class (SEN Coordinator, post-primary F).

Lack of space for withdrawal work was also mentioned as a reason for engaging in in-class support in one of the primary schools.

Team Teaching and Streaming

While the issue of streaming remains controversial at second level and while there is abundant evidence of the negative effects on pupils cited (Smyth et al., 2004) there was some contradictory evidence from this study on some possible advantages for some pupils in the lower streams from an academic perspective. One of the second level schools which utilised its learning support resources for in-class support targeted the lowest stream with full in-class support. There was evidence of a high level of collaborative planning between the subject teachers and the learning support/resource teacher for this class. This issue was systematically researched by the team in the school.

The academic results for this class surpassed the results of the next grade up. Kelly (2009) also reports a similar finding from his school. Interestingly the provision of in-class support from an administrative and timetabling perspective seemed to have been facilitated by streaming. This is an issue that requires further examination as the success of mixed ability classes could be enhanced if similar levels of targeted in-class support were possible.

This school actually reverted back to streaming with one of the reasons being that it was becoming such a big area that it was very difficult to try and target kids because they were spread across so many classes... It was becoming very difficult. So you had a child with 1.5 hours in a class with maybe no other student in that class with 1.5 hours and the 1.5 hours did nothing for the child in the week. Now you can have a concentration of 1.5 hours with children who are assessed but who don't meet the criteria for resource hours concentrated in a class, their hours are concentrated so your targeting is concentrated. It is much more focused. So those two things, JCSP plus streaming would be the biggest facilitator I would have seen in the last 5 years in terms of targeting (SEN Coordinator, post-primary D).

... to the extent that if you were in the mixed ability and you had somebody in the group, there is only 1½ hours, can that facilitate team teaching? No it can't. So to that extent the streaming does facilitate it ... (Principal, post-primary D).

The rationale for the move was to raise achievement levels.

I know what the literature says, like are we going backwards, it works, this works for us so this is what we will stick with for now (SEN coordinator, post-primary D).

but I would be very interested to hear what the parents have to say because it works. They can see the improvements, they can see how the child is coming on so... Like whatever negatives they might have about being in a bottom stream class, the results do away with that in time and certainly by the time they get to junior cert (SEN coordinator, post-primary D).

However, some teachers in the school struggled with streaming and highlighted the negative consequences despite the increased academic results:

You see I struggle with streaming so I think that ghettoising 22 children with difficulties in one class is not inclusive. They are included in the school but unfortunately the children are very quick to realise the classes that they are in and they label themselves dummies and we are the weak class and we are the worst or we are the second worst. So in that sense I don't find that it is inclusive. And then when you are teaching 22 children who each are struggling with their own individual needs it is very difficult to include them all in your every class. So it can be very difficult when they are all together in one class. Now the alternative, I am not so sure, if children were spread around in mixed ability classes would they be more ignored in a class, if a teacher felt they were moving on with the work could 2 or 3 children be ignored? So that is a huge educational debate.

The challenge for me in the school is that I feel that the students are isolated by being streamed in the one class so I would notice it around the school in that a lot of them are more vulnerable, they may be slagged and mocked at break

time, that other children, being children, don't understand the needs of some of the students so they do slag them. Now the school works very hard at making sure that doesn't happen, I would have to say that most people are very aware and quick to jump in and nip things in the bud. But we don't know what happens down corridors or in toilets or things like that (Subject teacher, post-primary D).

In addition to in-class support, all of the schools used withdrawal support on an individual and small group basis where appropriate. While some of the inclusion literature is critical of such approaches and views the classroom as the unit of inclusion, others see the school as the unit of inclusion and can see benefits from time related targeted individualised instruction (Heward, 2003). Others stress the need to justify withdrawal from the mainstream class (Norwich, 2000). There was evidence in some of the schools of a more circumspect attitude towards withdrawing students:

At the moment there are a few kids being withdrawn still. We have decided for the last term, a few kids who were just not keeping up and needed some intensive sessions with mental maths. So that is just for the final term, just to boost them we have been trying that (Class teacher, primary school A).

In primary school A, the language teacher referred to the advantages of small group withdrawal in helping some children to talk:

I suppose with the work I do there are huge advantages to it because we are in a small group and it is a very safe space and I think sometimes when you are an EAL child in a class it can be a very daunting experience and I know that some of the children might take, while they are very chatty with me they won't talk when they are in the class (Language support teacher, primary school A).

A key finding across all of the schools was a willingness to try various approaches, evaluate and refine again. This led to flexible models of provision and support:

So it is great, the system that we have, it is kind of trial and error, we are seeing what works and everybody is very flexible. So I think that is the way forward, just to find what works and to go with that and it is good to just try a few different things and I think over the next few years we will perfect it, we will get what we want out of it (Learning support teacher, primary school A).

Flexible Use of the Special Class as a Facilitator of Inclusion

In primary school B there was evidence a very well developed example of how a special class can facilitate inclusion. In this case it was a special class for pupils with

mild general learning disabilities. In the school the pupils in the special class were assigned to mainstream classes and went there first thing in the morning.

I will give you an example, we have set it up that first thing in the morning when they come in, they don't come to my class, they go straight to the mainstream class, they have the prayers at the mainstream class and then they have the 5 minutes of, 'oh sir we won the football match last night, oh we did this, we did that.' And then after that, when the spellings get started or whatever, then they come down to me. But they have already gone in, they have met their friends, they have hung out with them for 20 minutes before class started and they see that as their base class almost, even though it is not. I think that is a very important factor in the way that we do things.

If you ask most of the kids in my class who is their teacher, now I am officially their teacher on the roll, but they will often say their mainstream teacher. And I am totally fine with that because that means it is working, in my view (Special class teacher, primary school B).

Ware et al. (2009) found that the majority of principals of schools with special classes in Ireland reported that the students were in the special class for the whole day. In primary school B there was evidence of collaboration between the special class teachers and the mainstream class teachers and there was an expectation that students would access the mainstream class whenever feasible.

So of course they are able to access music, art, PE, they are your basics, religion as well (Special class teacher, primary school B).

In addition in the senior special class pupils accessed history and geography across the two settings.

The school perceived huge benefits for the pupils working across the mainstream and special class in terms of being able to provide the intensity of support when required and yet feeling part of the mainstream. The flexibility of the special class setting allowed the prioritisation of social skills education and behavioural programmes to be made when required.

Well look at what the children are getting. They are going into mainstream, they feel part of the mainstream, they feel that they are part of the class because if you do ask them they will say that their teacher is whoever it is. But then how many hours are they getting though of the specialised teacher? They are getting an hour and a half in the morning, they are getting another hour and a half between the breaks, so that is 3 hours of a specialised teacher (Special class teacher, primary school B).

We do a huge amount of work on social skills, which you just couldn't do in the mainstream class. We have a behaviour modification programme running, it is running so well that we almost don't need to have it anymore. We have taken children that were not capable of going into mainstream due to their behaviour or whatever, who are now spending a lot of their day in mainstream and mixing very well and there are no problems there and parents are much happier. You couldn't do that in a mainstream setting (Special class teacher, primary school B).

We have a number of students who have come from mainstream settings and it hasn't worked already. One child in particular who came to us this year, whose parents were at such a high stress level because their situation had turned into a nightmare, the child could not sit in a class of 30, could not interact properly, her behaviour was off the charts, it was some of the worst behaviour I have seen and I have worked in a behaviour unit over in America! And just by being able to... I mean I was literally velcroed to her for four months, but by being able to work consistently with her and do an awful lot of one to one work on social skills and things like that and behaviour management programme, she is a model student now. Her parents are so thrilled and happy because their life has suddenly become much easier, they are not dreading a call from the school (Special class teacher, primary school B).

The special class teacher interpreted her role as having a major pastoral dimension and in addition as having a key role to play in aiding the transition to second level:

I do think there is a huge, huge pastoral care aspect to it. You become very involved in families, you become very involved in social workers or whatever, you basically know all that there is going on with them. Mainstream teachers could not possibly provide that kind of cover and care.

I have five students going on to secondary next year... they are going to four different settings. I have visited them all, I have spoken with all the teachers, went with the parents, had the questions that the parents mightn't think of asking, especially in the mainstream setting of what will be set up for them. So we provide a lot more service that you would not get from a resource teacher as easily, or a mainstream teacher couldn't do that with 30 kids in the class. So there is a big service being provided there, I think. And the kids seem very happy in their situation (Special class teacher, primary school B).

The discontinuity of not having a similar structure in the second level feeder schools emerged as an issue in facilitating transfer. This was also a finding in the Ware et al. (2009) study.

Second level is a nightmare, it is really. And they don't have the services and sometimes they don't have the expertise on how to work with a lot of these children, they don't have the time either. So a lot of parents... what we constantly hear is could we get this school in secondary? We hear that time and time again from parents, this is what they are looking for in secondary,

this model of the special class going out into the mainstream (Special class teacher, primary school B).

There was evidence that the special class model and its role as a bridge to inclusion was valued in the school by the principal, SEN coordinator and class teachers. There was a willingness on the part of the class teachers to see the pupils in the special class as an integral part of their own classes and this spread to the other pupils. The following anecdote recounted by the special class teacher captures very well how other pupils viewed the pupils and the culture of respect that permeates the school:

And I think that has to come from the top down, it is the whole ethos of the school, the way they feel about it and it does go over into the children. I think I said a story yesterday... they were playing mini leagues last year and two of my students were on the team and they loved to think they had great football ability, but actually the reality was different. One of the children wanted the ball all the time but he would like the ball kind of handed into his hands or landed at his feet or whatever, and of course in a football match that doesn't happen. This was a semi-final anyway, very important and the ball did actually land quite close to this chap and he went for it and at that moment, not just his own team, but the opposing team stood back, let him pick up the ball and kick it, and they went crazy after it again. And I just kind of thought, they have got that from somewhere, this didn't just happen by accident, this happened because they learned just to give him a chance and then they go off. And I mean there were medals involved here, they had to win, but they were able to give to this child, just this kick and then go on. And that is what I feel happens here, the dog eat dog is dropped for a minute or two and they think about somebody else for a second. And that is great, I think it is wonderful, personally thinking (Special class teacher, primary school B).

The role of the special class as part of a continuum of provision that facilitates inclusion was stressed in the school. It is seen as part of the flexibility of support that allows the school to meet the needs of a wider diversity of children with special educational needs who otherwise may unnecessarily have to attend a special school. In many schools children with mild general learning disabilities are catered for within the general allocation model of support. However, it is important to appreciate the range of difficulties and needs children within this range present with and how many have additional needs as well. The SEN coordinator in the school made the point that it is such children with more complex needs that are best served by the flexible special class model:

... we would feel that the class is, in name, it is a class to do with mild learning difficulty, but I think in effect what happens is that it is only those children within that range with additional difficulties and closer to the moderate that

are in it... I think it is in most cases the children who have additional difficulties like there would be children with significant either physical or medical difficulties or both that would require a lot of support (SEN coordinator, primary school B).

This reference to the changing population of special classes for students with mild general disabilities echoes the findings of Ware et al. (2009) and Stevens and O'Moore (2009). The school has grave doubts if the needs of such students could be met without the special class provision:

From speaking to say some of the mainstream teachers into whose classes those children integrate, like they would have grave doubts as to the ability of any class teacher, with the greatest will in the world, to provide a supportive setting for them as is currently provided (SEN coordinator, primary school B).

Having access in the school to a wide range of flexible support options allowed the school to be confident in its dealings with parents in assessing the best blend of support for their child and in meeting those needs to the greatest extent possible:

I suppose our big concern is that we respond to needs that present themselves to us and that we are open with parents, that we give them as full a picture of our school as we can, that we outline the advantages and disadvantages to our particular setting here; that we encourage them to think carefully and that they visit every other school that would be a possibility for them. And in all cases if a parent, having considered their position carefully, wants to enrol a child here we are open to that and we have never refused admission to a child with special needs. But we feel in the context of the overall debate with regards special needs and integration that it is the wishes of parents which should be paramount and we strongly believe there should be a continuum of support from full integration in a mainstream class to having some special classes which integrate with mainstream classes and again to having special schools, like as I said, we have had a number of pupils who came to us with severe difficulties and have spent some time with us but then have moved over to a special school (SEN coordinator, primary school B).

Moving Towards Collaborative Cultures

There was very strong commitment across all of the schools to building a team approach to inclusion. This is highlighted in the literature as a prerequisite for inclusion (Loreman, 2007; Smith & Leonard, 2005). Most of the schools struggled to devise ways of finding time to facilitate collaboration between teachers for discussion and shared planning (Travers, 2007). Using support teachers to release class teachers to meet another support teacher was one approach used:

But it struck us that we looked a lot at home school links and communicating those, that we didn't have time for teacher to teacher, you to meet me and we

are going to talk about Barry, and so we do have those. They work ok, the way we work it is we work in pairs so we are two resource teachers and we are going to meet the 1st class teacher, so you take their class today and the 1st class teacher comes out and we spend whatever time discussing him and then you go back and this teacher then goes in. So my partner covers for the teachers for the day and tomorrow I cover for you for them coming out as well (Principal, primary school F).

But the big thing is time for that. Because there's nothing more, in a way, more wonderful in a way than a few teachers getting together and maybe a year head, or a tutor to a kid, and just saying, like, 'What's his strengths? What's his needs?' And just focussing on that child for a while. But that takes time. But I mean, I think that's essential to do that. Now a lot of them haven't time. You know some of them have little needs, so some can be expedited very quickly. But there is a need for that sort of time enshrined in the curriculum or in the timetable to do it (SEN Coordinator, post-primary F).

Again, this highlights the work of Smith and Leonard (2005) on collaboration between teachers, with the need for time and planning, as well as the importance of a focus on the needs of the student.

In one of the schools (Primary school C) the importance attached to planning was very evident particularly between teachers working at the same grade and between teachers and support teachers engaged in team teaching. This echoes the findings of Thousand et al. (2007). The barrier of doing this formally and adequately without eroding teaching and learning time was overcome by doing it outside school pupil contact hours:

It is great and people embrace it and it does involve extra planning and it does involve extra commitment on behalf of the teachers, because it doesn't work if you just walk in the room. They have to put in the planning and have the conversations beforehand in place, and people would stay back after school and do that (Principal, Primary school C).

Yes we do it outside school hours, we all stay back anyway, like the four 2nd class teachers plan together so we are all doing the same thing and it is not so stringent that you are stuck doing exactly what everyone else is doing. We do a plan together, the whole collaborative thing is a lot easier (Class teacher a, Primary school C).

Yes and it is so easy then, say one of us has done a worksheet on whatever and it is passed between the four of us, it works that way for all the subjects, or the flip charts for the interactive whiteboard, it is very handy (Class teacher b, primary school C).

Yes, and we plan fortnightly as well. We would also sit down with your link teacher, so I would sit down with Sarah and sort out exactly what we are doing for the next two to three weeks (Class teacher c, primary school C).

The practice of teachers observing each other teach would not be an acknowledged feature of the Irish education system. The recent pilot project for Newly Qualified Teachers encourages teachers to observe more experienced colleagues. In one of the schools where this programme was in place, it acted as a stimulus for other teachers in the school to engage in mutual observation:

... and then at a staff meeting a couple of years ago some of the more experienced teachers said, well can we have a bit of that? Which was amazing, in another staffroom you could be shot if you said something like that. And it just has permeated across the board (Principal, primary school C).

The level of collaborative support was very evident across schools. In one of the primary schools (School C) there seemed to be an added realisation that the challenges presented by diversity are too much for any one teacher to tackle on his or her own and mutual support was a professional necessity (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). This has led to a culture of interdependence in the school where it is the norm to help each other out and share resources:

There is an openness of conversation and a flow, people aren't afraid to ask questions of their colleagues and, is this something of an issue or not, and would you mind popping in for 10 minutes to observe this. So again it is that atmosphere amongst the staff (Deputy principal, primary school C).

And it is like that through the years. Like I have had 1st class a few times and all of my 1st class stuff is all on the server computer and it has all been put into 1st class now this year so everybody just uses everything (Class teacher, primary school C).

The practices in the school of formally planning as a team outside school hours at grade level and with support teachers, providing structured opportunities for colleagues to observe each other teaching and sharing and allowing access to each other's resources on the school server amount to the beginnings of new cultural practices that haven't been the norm in Irish schools. One of the teachers who came from another school describes her surprise in realising how a school could operate differently:

I thought the school I was in was so good and then I actually realised that I wasn't supported at all but this just seems to be all about supporting, how can we make each other's lives easier in the school. And like that, I thought

everybody was so nice to me in the other school, and they were, and I had so many friends in the other school and I thought everything was great, but then I have come here and realised that that is how all schools should be, that everybody is supported. Like I don't know if you have seen but most of the teachers are very new in their career and we do need the support and it means a lot to everybody here (Class teacher, primary school C).

The power of mutual support is very evident in this comment. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) argue that one of the seven principles of postmodern professionalism is “commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support as a way of using shared expertise to solve the ongoing problems of professional practice, rather than engaging in joint work as a motivational device to implement the external mandates of others.” (p. 20). One of the schools (Primary school B) had developed links with other schools through Moodle, an online virtual learning environment that allowed it to share its expertise with other schools:

... we have spent 10 years developing the process of policy development, we have examined it and we have pulled it apart. Developing the product of policy now is a very important aspect of it and making people comfortable with it. In relation to that ... we use Moodle, we have a group of 25 schools and we are involved with them so we share best practice (Principal, Primary school B).

Galvin et al. (2009) report on a project with five primary schools over a four year period with the aim of nurturing educational partnership between school, home and community in relation to overcoming the challenges which included inadequate time, insufficient space, added workloads, poor funding, inadequate school facilities, behavioural issues and poor human resources. They found that the

difficulties relating to these challenges were overcome by schools holding staff workshops, and/or teacher/parent planning days outside of school hours, which acted as a forum for discussing the challenges involved and collectively agreeing on the best action to take (Galvin et al., 2009, p. 109).

The importance of moving towards collaborative cultures is one of the pillars of support for inclusive schooling (Loreman, 2007).

Fullan (1993, p. 49) refers to the difficulties in changing the learning core- “changes in instructional practices and in the culture of teaching toward greater collaborative relationships among students, teachers and other potential partners” as the hardest

core to crack. The importance of collegiality has been highlighted in the literature resulting in increased opportunities to share expertise and receive advice, leaving teachers feeling more confident in dealing with uncertainties that arise (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Consequently, in schools where collaborative relationships are fostered and encouraged, teachers are more likely to trust, value, and legitimize sharing expertise, seeking advice and giving both inside and outside the school. They are more likely to become better teachers (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 104).

Providing Social and Emotional Support to Pupils

Two specific types of personal or social type support offered to children in some of the schools were buddy systems and pastoral support.

Buddy Systems

A system whereby support is provided by fellow students is mentioned in four of the schools, with most specific references being made to minority ethnic and minority language students.

We operate a buddy system here from the youngest up where somebody will remember to go and get the child from the special class, if there is an exceptional thing happening like a puppet show, a visitor coming to the classroom, whatever it might be ... to make sure the child is included in the yard, all of that, and that buddy thing rotates so it is not the same person who is the person's buddy all the way through the school year or the school term (Principal, primary school B).

English et al. (1996) provide evidence of the benefits of such buddy systems for improving the ability to socialise for young children with special needs. Similarly, Nabors, Willoughby and McManamin (2001) focus on the importance this type of support can have outside the classroom, in the playground. With regards to students arriving from a minority background, who may have little or no English, the language support teacher in school B recounts that:

When (names child) came in the class teacher then is going to look for another child who is Polish to be able to be with her and help her in the initial stages. And then the idea within class of the Irish children, almost like the rotating system, that you would have a buddy that a child would be there to help. It works within the class ... if possible if there is another child in the class who has that language, that the two of them would sit together and that child would help the new child. And then that the Irish children would be aware if there is any task at all they can help. And they are all very enthusiastic to help.

This type of support helps to welcome and make the students feel included.

Post-primary school E has a mentoring system in place for all their first year students, which is described:

So we thought what we would do was we established a 1st year buddy programme for the 1st year incoming students and we went about that by selecting the students who had done very well through their first 3 years of junior school. And the criteria we established for the students to be eligible as a mentor were, good behaviour, respect for students and the school community, leadership potential and reasonable motivation. And depending on the 5th year students, for example, we have had 12 this year, we had 20 mentors last year and the incoming 5th years next year are even a larger group. That is a particularly large group to train. So we are building on the mentoring training year on year, we have a lot going on there. So they actually mentor the 1st year students and that is a weekly meeting for the first term (Counsellor, post-primary E).

Post-primary school F also has a similar policy:

The induction policy also when the student first comes into the school we like to use a buddy system where we will have an older student from the same country who will just go around with the student for the first day or just meet up with them at lunch time and bring them to their different classes. I find that is very good and it would be a very daunting thing to have to go into a new country and then go into a new school amongst people of your same age so it is very difficult, so we like to do that (Language support teacher, post-primary F).

There was evidence from one of the pupil observations of the benefits of the buddy system in the classroom. For one of the children being observed, a buddy system had been established by the class teacher. This child, from a minority language and/or minority ethnic background had formed a particular bond with a girl, based on the initial buddy system. As a result of the help provided by this girl, they have a friendly relationship, which helped the child to be able to engage more in the classroom.

Pastoral Support

Pastoral support involved specific staff members helping students deal with what can often be personal more than academic issues. There were 77 references to this theme from all six schools. These focus on a number of aspects: the impact of the school philosophy and environment, the potential impact that teachers can have on students, and the work of specific staff such as counsellors and chaplains. In the UK's SEN

Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), the importance of pastoral support is stressed to ensure that all students are involved in education, and within the wider life of the school.

The absolute importance of building a relationship with the children was stressed by many:

... it is all about building up a relationship with them. Once they are with you it is easier (SEN coordinator, primary school A).

In post-primary school F one teacher focuses on the importance of a generally positive and supportive environment:

Providing a warm positive, learning environment, where care is evident can help with difficult students. Teaching can be more than education – at times a teacher assumes the role of parent, mentor, motivator, friend and advisor. This can help get students “on side” (Teacher, post-primary F).

The chaplain described her role in post-primary school F:

I would deal very much with all of the students, meeting them on a one to one level, seeing how they are, how their families are. I would meet them first thing here every morning from 7:30 onwards, I am on duty at that time and on duty during break times. When the students are free I would make myself free always to be around with them. I would particularly look out for kids who maybe would have family difficulties or personal difficulties. I would be very aware of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds (Chaplain, post-primary F).

My understanding really is a heart for all. And again if you have an open heart you will have an open mind and you will have an acceptance. And that acceptance, which I think it goes through the school, right through the school community here ... It is in trying to include all ... (Chaplain, post-primary F).

The guidance counsellor also has a key role in this regard:

Ok well there are basically I suppose 3 dimensions to my work. The first one is that I am the guidance counsellor and that includes work with students who have personal difficulties. So if there is some sort of crisis in their life or they are upset about something that is going on then I have a counselling role in relation to them (Guidance counsellor, post-primary F).

In post-primary school E the counsellor and the school completion officer talk about their role in relation to pastoral care:

Pastoral care, we see that as a whole school activity and it is intrinsically important to the holistic development and education of the child. And

particularly our children, it takes a while to get to know really where they are coming from.

The school completion officer talks about the potential a teacher has to have an impact on the life of students:

I think that is essential. I think the teacher is really one huge, huge part of a child's life and a good teacher can make a huge difference even given all that I have just talked about. It is one very positive thing that a child can experience and I don't know if we appreciate the impact enough of one positive adult on a child, on a disaffected, if you want to call it that, I mean a child who doesn't feel very happy in school, where it is not a great place for them. So I think a teacher can make a powerful difference. In the early school level I think the incredible years programmes, in the sense that they have three prongs, they are structured, they are evidence based, you can evaluate them, you can actually work with them, could have an impact and make a difference provided that people are prepared to stick with it, use it and not give in to the chop change attitude that government and policy can have. Give it time. And at secondary level, I think having a wide variety of things for children to do, having that positive attitude, valuing them, I think that is really, really important (School completion officer, post-primary E).

In post-primary school F the school completion officer described how she provides pastoral support for students:

Now my job with them would be really a kind of a mentoring role and mentoring ... But what I do is I would be in here in the morning at about 8:30 and they would be coming to school, the children, and I would observe the children ... see are they short anything for school or whatever and I'd have a little chat with them and then if they wanted anything they would come to look for me because I am the designated Traveller person here at present because we have no RTTs or anything at the school. So a lot of my work would be based around Travellers. I do one to ones with other children as well who would be marginalised really and from different backgrounds (School completion officer, post-primary D).

The school completion officer can also look after other aspects such as:

Anybody who we feel needs help they are encouraged. We have a particular group of 5th and 6th years, a lot of African students, and there are complications with where they are staying. Like there are 3 or 4 African girls who are in their 6th year and doing their leaving this year and they were going straight home every day and I was saying to them, 'look hang on and do your few hours study, it will be looked after by schools completion.' And they were saying, 'well if we do that, when we go home we'll have missed dinner,' and for health and safety reasons they are not allowed to use the kitchen themselves. So I said ok what we will do is, we made an arrangement with Brambles so these 4 students, and more if we can get more to do it, they stay here, they do their study, they go down to Brambles, they have their bit of food and then they

go on home. And that is working very well, they are getting the study in. They are lovely students, no trouble, but very disadvantaged because they have no parents here, no support other than what the State gives them and it is minimal money, I think it is €19 a week to live on and buy their bits and pieces. So whatever way we can we will support them (School completion officer, post-primary F).

In the other post-primary school, the school completion officer is involved in working with individual children in the school, and contributing to supplying school uniforms to children. Seven references (from 2 of the schools) were made to resources provided by home school liaison. One teacher noted:

The home school liaison teacher has been invaluable in supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Teacher, primary school A).

Respondents claimed that the supports offered above prevented, reduced and mitigated some of the negative consequences of transition to a new school, absenteeism and early school drop out. This is in line with the literature both nationally and internationally that the type and quality of teacher-pupil interaction have a strong effect on pupils' engagement in school and supports the development of a sense of belonging – being accepted, respected, included and supported at school (Willms, 2003; Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness is an important aspect when including minority language and/or minority language students. Some references were also made to awareness of Traveller culture. Eighty references were made to intercultural awareness in relation to themes of cultural weeks/days, celebrating and appreciating diversity, and issues relating to Travellers.

Large scale cultural events were mentioned in three of the schools:

Like intercultural week now we'd have a lot of parents coming in, they'd come in to their own child's classroom, cook something or Chinese writing or ... So they will come in and even if we have traditional musicians, some of the African parents would like to come in and see them so it is one time of the year where there is loads (Language support teacher, primary school A).

This illustrates that cultural events can give parents an opportunity to become involved in the school. The events can also contribute to the atmosphere of the school:

Yes so there was about a two week period and then that was celebrated, we had one day then, I mean obviously everything was displayed in the hall or in their classrooms and in the corridors and then we had a day where we welcomed parents and children if they wanted to dress in traditional dress, if the Irish children wanted dress in traditional dress either their own or another country, as did the staff. And then the children came to the hall and they either recited poems, songs etc. from what they had learned so that was very exciting (Language support coordinating teacher, primary school B).

In primary school C, the language support teacher stated that these events can be of benefit to the children:

Like we are having a multicultural event next week, we had it last year as well. And one of the halls will be kitted out from door to door with parents from different countries bringing in their ware and their food from different countries. And the children will be brought down into this and they can go around the different stands and they explain to them about this and that. And so if the children, if they are in the group and can, they will actually say, 'well this is what we use this for and this ...' And they feel really big then and we have a multicultural dress day so they can wear their dress. And last year we actually found that the stand that we had the most difficulty with was the Irish stand (Language support teacher, primary school C).

Appreciation /Celebrating Diversity

Appreciation of different cultures and celebrating cultural diversity can also occur on a continual basis. Examples of this can be found in the classroom through:

a reading scheme which includes readers from different countries and stories from around the world, i.e. Ginn 360 and Storyworlds. We use a lot of drama with the stories, to improve fluency and teach ways of asking questions. Children talk about their own traditions, food, music, weather, etc. (Class teacher primary school A).

Teachers can also “talk about other countries regularly and children bring in food/books/resources, this gives them a real sense of belonging within the class”. (Teacher, primary school C).

I suppose valuing their own experience, their own language, like I have a particular group where I have four Polish children and they love speaking about Poland, they love teaching me a bit of Polish, they love if I remember it the next day. So every day they want to teach me a new word, so I am learning a new word every day and I am also going, 'gosh it is very hard to learn this.' And I think that idea of valuing their experience because they are, especially with this group, you come across a lot of children who are really proud of

where they come from and it can get forgotten in a class. So again I have the time where I can look at that, we can take out the map, we can look at the country and find places they are from, places they have been to. Then the other side of that is there are some children where their ethnic background is not at the forefront, they don't want to talk about it, they don't want to tell you how to say hello in their language and you wonder then, would it be wrong to try and highlight to them that they are different. You know, if they don't bring it to the table I don't want to be going, well you are different because you are from Nigeria. Because if they don't see themselves as different, maybe that is a good thing. It means that they are fitting in ... I don't know, I have questions around that myself (Language support teacher, primary school A).

The deputy principal in primary school C also discussed a weekly intercultural group:

Well we have an intercultural group that invites parents in once a week and we have an intercultural exhibition happening next week. So we have had parents coming in bringing food into the school, I mean that ... it is the parents coming in but it passes onto the children. Like for example since Christmas every Wednesday we have an intercultural group and it spreads, it grows ... (Deputy principal, primary school C).

In the classroom observations there was a lot of evidence of appreciation of cultural diversity within the schools. This was often in the form of art or informational posters on the wall, either around the school or in the classrooms. For example, one classroom had a map of the world on it, with pointers for the different countries children from the class came from. This classroom also had posters giving information about the cultures of these countries up in it. Appreciation of cultural diversity was also displayed through the choice of teaching materials, with the children from the same class reading a book set in an African country, and the teacher spoke at length with the children about some of the cultural practices of this country – in terms of food, housing, language, and employment.

Traveller Culture

One school mentioned the importance of being aware of Traveller culture:

And it does keep them on track a bit and they are inclined to stay that bit longer. And of course I am always fighting the Travellers cause for them to be included, even though we are in 2009 there definitely still is discrimination against Travellers, there is. And a lot of it I think too, it should be in teacher training because Traveller culture should definitely be brought into teacher training and that. Like if you heard a teacher of sewing saying, 'bring in a bit of material in the morning, and a needle.' Now as a settled parent myself I'd say, 'why didn't you tell me yesterday, I have to get that.' You can imagine

down in the site in the lashing rain, it is unrealistic to expect them to go home, so there is always that side to it then too (School completion officer, post-primary D).

While all of the above are important events and illustrate a move on the part of the school to recognise and respect the cultural diversity within the schools, it is important to note that full intercultural dialogue extends far deeper than occasional events. Schools must also examine issues such as institutional racism and cultural bias within assessments and psychological tests for instance. Failure to do so can leave schools open to a criticism of practising a more trivial forms of multicultural education rooted in what Troyna (1983) refers to as the ‘Saris, samosas and steel band’ approach to multiculturalism.

Curricular Relevance

Certain curricular areas were highlighted in the study as facilitating inclusion. These included Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), including different religions in Religious Education, and Environmental and Social Studies (ESS) – in giving students the opportunity for project-based rather than exam-oriented work

We have a very good SPHE programme and there is a lot of work on the world of difference and the New Ireland, for example, and making those differences count for very little in fact and seeing the commonality among us all. And this is followed through curricularly in terms of the CSP project and all of those things. And we do a lot of that in the 1st year buddy programme, a lot on bullying, we are huge on the whole issue of bullying in 1st year and all of that comes into it. But that is an ongoing challenge, like maintaining that awareness as the boys go through from junior to senior cycle, it is very important (Counsellor, post-primary E).

One school in particular highlighted the utility of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP).

... we brought in the JCSP programme, which is a fantastic programme and that had huge effects. But it allowed us to target and get as much resources to that class group as we possibly could whereas I felt it was probably being diluted along the way, you know, if the children were scattered all over. So that was primarily the reason, like it allowed us to target as much resources as we possibly could. We have it running since probably 2004-2005 and what we would have seen is when we checked the scores, that consistently the JCSP classes score higher in their examination results than the class immediately above them and if not the one above that as well. So in that sense it is working (Principal, post-primary D).

I think the JCSP team have produced fantastic resources so if I was doing a section on whatever in English, I know that I can go to our JCSP locker and find some stuff to help me out. And I can go and find my statement sheet and that gives me some targets so that I can plan that topic area (Teacher, post-primary D).

Other examples of ways to specifically reach out to children are also mentioned:

We do a video project every year where the kids in 2nd year and again these are the learning support kids, they make a video, no one else in the school does this, so you are talking about inclusion for the disadvantaged kids or the kids that have learning disabilities, this is what happens with them. They do a digital story telling with a digital camera ... where they can go onto a Mac computer and put in dialogues afterwards. So we do trial runs in the zoo and then they do a story board for the actual story they are going to make a video of and they work on that (Learning support teacher, post-primary E).

The ability to address issues of inclusion through the curriculum is crucial. Wedell (2008) stresses the importance of curricular relevance and engagement. However, there was little evidence of personalised learning, the use of assessment for learning or of elearning initiatives.

Continuing Professional Development

Continuing professional development was most frequently mentioned in relation to SEN by class and subject teachers. This is a key theme in the literature (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; O’Gorman et al., 2009; Loreman, 2007; McGee, 2004). All of the SEN coordinators had specialist qualifications and in some cases lead professional development initiatives in the school. In addition they helped staff to prioritise areas of need and arranged on-site professional development to address the needs.

I got that idea from (names outside tutor) when she came here to address us. I’ve got several in-services done over the last few years (SEN coordinator, post-primary F).

There was evidence in the case study schools of the sharing of specialist knowledge and of access to a wide range of literature and resources in the schools. This builds on the advice of McGee (2004) on advocating effective sharing within schools of specialist knowledge and study groups of teachers having access to specialist literature.

Inclusive Policies

Several policies were mentioned that facilitate inclusion. Particular attention was paid to enrolment policies to ensure they are inclusive. Drudy and Kinsella (2009, p. 652) cite exemptions from the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts that “permit religious run institutions to discriminate in favour of members of their own faith in order to preserve the ethos of their institutions. While these provisions are constitutionally compliant, they constitute another potential barrier to fully inclusive schools”. To overcome this barrier, primary school C (though under Catholic patronage) don’t prioritise Catholic children. If there is a shortage of places they include all the children in the area in age order.

In primary school B at the end of senior infants classes may be regrouped to ensure a balance of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, attainments and gender across all classes.

Across the schools there was a strong perception of the “inclusion proofing” of policies. Coordinators played a key role in policy formulation at school level. These related to enrolment, attendance, identification, assessment and programme planning, models of organisation, links with support services, individual education plans, roles and responsibilities and review. These areas are in line with DES (2007a) guidelines.

Teacher/Class Level

This second section on how schools seek to overcome barriers and challenges to inclusion in Irish schools focuses on themes that emerged at the level of the classroom. These themes are: differentiated teaching methodologies; support from special needs assistants; planning; record keeping; collaboration and use of teaching resources.

Varied and Differentiated Teaching Methodologies

A number of the issues arose from the findings that can be organised under the overarching theme of teaching methodologies which captures the practices that teachers use in the classroom. These included behaviour management strategies, differentiation and anchored instruction.

Behaviour Management

Teachers employed various behavioural techniques to help students participate in the learning environment including positive reinforcement, having clear expectations for students, and providing opportunities for success. Weigle (1997) notes a number of levels at which a behavioural support system can operate. These levels include the individual student level, the specific setting levels (e.g. in class), and school-wide support systems. Most references focused on the specific and individual student level. Positive reinforcement was the most cited aspect of behaviour management, with 74 references from all six schools. Though references were made in relation to all three categories of students, they were most commonly mentioned in relation to students experiencing educational disadvantage (41 specific references, as opposed to 11 for minority ethnic students, and 22 for students with SEN).

A number of aspects were specifically mentioned, including token economies, stamps being given out, or merits written in journals. Another key aspect for all students is the use of encouragement and praise, for example “*Positive comments to build up child’s confidence*” (Teacher, primary school A), and “*Constant praise in each task thus building up their self-esteem and confidence*” (Teacher, primary school B). There was a clear indication that for teachers, an important part of their role is to give students encouragement, and a feeling that they are achieving.

Another important aspect referred to was the need to be consistent and clear with regards to their expectations of students. There were 20 specific references to this, with 12 of the references being specific to students experiencing educational disadvantage. For such students, teachers emphasized “*consistency with work so they know exactly what to expect and what is expected of them*” (Teacher, primary school B) and “*clear borders and boundaries regarding behaviour*” (Teacher, post-primary D). For children with SEN the six references made focused on the need to “*keep regular routine and make the child aware of changes if any*” (Teacher, primary school A). Also highlighted were providing opportunities for success. One teacher spoke of “*catching them at being good*” (Teacher, primary school B), and one of setting achievable targets, in relation to their abilities.

Differentiation

Differentiation was a frequently mentioned facet of teaching brought up (84 references in total across all six schools), both within and across the three categories. There is a need for “*differentiated reading and comprehension activities*” (Teacher, primary school A) or “*differentiated questioning – to engage ... children at their level of understanding*” (Teacher, primary school A).

A flavour of the variety of differentiated approaches used by teachers is well captured by the following:

I avail of a dictionary to translate key components of tasks. I differentiate material and on occasion, children from minority backgrounds may complete completely different tasks as set in coordination with the EAL teacher. I oft times avail of gesture, images and pictorial aids to aid explanations. I also operate a buddy system where the child from the minority language background is paired with a suitable peer, a peer with whom they feel comfortable communicating (Teacher, primary school C).

This reflects to some extent the distinction made by Tomlinson (1999) for differentiating between outcome, process and product. One teacher speaks of differentiation being a fairly fundamental aspect of teaching necessary for all students:

Adopting a “one size fits all” approach to teaching is unsuitable for any student. Adjusting your teaching to suit the students’ needs seems best. Differentiated learning /handouts /homework is useful (Teacher, post-primary F).

This reflects the sentiments of O’Brien and Guiney (2001). Teachers referred to the importance of providing individual attention within classroom (45 references across all 6 schools). This is mentioned most in relation to students with SEN (13 specific references).

I try to give them as much individual attention as I can and while working with them, I always ensure that the rest of the class has extra work to do (Teacher, primary school B).

Others refer to the importance of group work. Most references were to students with SEN (19 of 33 references). Some teachers mentioned the importance of

Putting student with special education needs beside more academically strong students sometimes using group work/projects (Teacher, post-primary F) *and using Mixed ability groupings wherever possible* (Teacher, primary school A).

In relation to teaching methodology, support from the language support teachers is mentioned 14 times. One teacher stated:

I differentiate material and on occasion, children from minority backgrounds may complete completely different tasks as set in coordination with the EAL teacher (Teacher, primary school C).

Two students in particular provided good evidence of the positive practices that language support teachers can use to facilitate the successful inclusion of students. For one Asian child, it was noted that there was intensive and direct teaching of language supported by a range of relevant and stimulating resources, which motivated and engaged the student. A second observation involved collaboration between a class teacher and the language support teacher who worked very closely together to plan work for the student.

Two other students with special educational needs observed had work differentiated for them in the classroom, with the SNA working with them on targets for the lesson which differed from the rest of the class. For one child observed from a minority ethnic and/or minority language background, differentiation was also used in terms of the language used; varying levels of questioning and explanation were used, as well as varied levels of expectation. In terms of the observations of the lessons and tracking of pupils many practices facilitated pupil learning. There were examples of differentiated materials including rewritten textbooks, novels on tape and personalised worksheets. There were examples of reinforcement and overlearning and monitoring of student progress. The efficacy of team teaching seemed to be linked to the quality of planning that had occurred before the lessons took place.

Varying Methodologies

Teachers highlighted a variety of ways in which to teach knowledge and skills – using different materials, oral methods, projects, written work, visual aids, handouts, etc. with 29 references made to this theme, of which 16 were specific to SEN.

Teachers aim to use teaching methods that meet the needs of individual students:

With language difficulties I would try to be more pictorial in my teaching methods. I would always try to have concrete materials or pictures to help with my explanations. This means being well prepared and takes a lot of effort (Teacher, primary school A).

Teachers referred to the need to vary their teaching methods to maintain the interest and attention of their students:

Use of varying media – pictures, powerpoints, brainstorming, charts, mind maps (Teacher, post-primary F).

For minority ethnic/minority language students there was an emphasis on using the curriculum to focus on their culture (e.g. doing a project on their country) and on language focused methodologies – lots of oral language work, modelling, drama, concise use of language when instructing, use of visual communication, correcting grammar, and general encouragement.

Varying methodologies were observed in a number of classes, with a focus on utilising a number of different teaching resources, including books, the interactive whiteboards, and physical resources. Another important aspect in this was varying the approach, and explaining important parts of a lesson in a number of different ways. One example of this is of a teacher teaching about percentages – she showed children a number of different types of strategies in order to do tasks – she utilised verbal counting methods, the number board, and the interactive whiteboard to vary what the children were asked to do throughout the lesson, rather than simply relying on the workbook for the maths lesson.

Anchored Instruction

Twelve references were made to anchored instruction, spread evenly across the three categories. As one teacher noted:

When attempting to deal with educational disadvantage and motivation I find it important to use the children's own interests as a starting point for stories or projects (Teacher, primary school A).

This provides one example of how the work of Rieth et al. (2003) can be applied, and how best to actively engage students in their learning. Another teacher stated:

Concentrate on topics which they can relate to – everyday situations – FAMILY, PASTIMES (Teacher, post-primary D).

Teaching Resources

Thirty nine references were made to the teaching materials that teachers avail of, with twenty eight of these references being specific to children from a minority

background, which highlights the strengths that the six schools have in using materials to target and help this specific group of students. In primary school C teacher for example talks about the use of dual language books.

Having access to libraries, books and interactive whiteboards were also mentioned as important resources. The library can provide an opportunity for children to bring books home, while the interactive whiteboard “*is great as the children also get a visual picture of the work being explained*” (Teacher, primary school A).

Interactive whiteboards were observed being used in three schools. In one school the teacher used the interactive whiteboard in an Irish lesson, and in maths, to provide back-up to children’s work in workbooks, as well as having an opportunity to observe and find relevant information on the internet. Based on the observations, it is important that the teacher has training to be able to fully access the capabilities of this piece of equipment, and to be able to find ways to have the children engage with this technology to enhance their learning.

Support from Special Needs Assistants

An important factor in facilitating inclusion for children was the deployment of SNAs. Fifty four positive references were made to SNAs, from all six schools, with 31 of the references, unsurprisingly, being SEN specific.

I suppose the role of the special needs assistants is huge in the school and we have a lot of SNAs that are doing very important work and that is a huge support to teachers and it is a huge support to their individual children as well (Teacher, post-primary F).

The role of the special needs assistant (SNA) in facilitating inclusion has been acknowledged in the literature (Logan, 2006). SNAs can have more of a collaborative role in the class. One issue that can arise here is the distinction between the role of the teacher and the SNA. The negotiation of respective roles in the class was evident across a number of respondents:

Yes there are certain boundaries, even with the teacher and the special needs assistant ... well the teachers here are very supportive, they don’t mind you getting up and saying something but it is a thin line between your role and the teacher’s role but it seems to work very well (SNA, primary school A).

We have got a good bit of freedom, like the SNAs don't take over but we are given freedom, we are given loads of compliments, like your opinion is valued (SNA, primary school A).

The relationship between a teacher and an SNA can be pivotal:

By having a good working relationship with the class teacher. Also by voicing any concerns that may arise, and also by taking any classes or going to talks that would help me to learn more about the child with special needs (SNA, primary school B).

This reflects the findings of Moran and Abbot (2006) and highlights amongst other things the importance of interpersonal skills for assistants. The importance of the SNA being attached to the class as well as catering for the needs of the target child was stressed:

But one of the things we decided at that time was a particular SNA would be attached to him but also attached to the class and establish a relationship with the class and that has worked brilliantly. And that particular SNA worked with that class on particular projects and with that particular kid and also worked with the other kids there (Learning support teacher, post-primary E).

The importance to SNAs for individual children was strongly stated:

Brilliant ... I trust the school because both SNAs have been absolutely excellent, and the one that he had last year who is still an SNA in the school. So I found that was absolutely brilliant. (Parent of child, primary school B).

A number of the children were observed being assisted by SNAs. These SNAs operated in a number of different ways – either by working solely with the child in the class, and giving them individual attention, reinforcement and other help in class, or by working with other members of the class as well as the child being observed. Two of the observations involved children on the autistic spectrum. For one of these children, it was noted that the pupil related to the SNA in a relaxed, open and friendly manner. For the other, it was noted that the SNA had to provide constant support in order for the child to remain on-task and focusing on the lesson.

Planning and Record Keeping

Forty eight references were made to planning and preparation, across the six schools. Planning and preparation was seen as a means of facilitating inclusion (DES, 2007a). The most striking system of planning described was the one used in primary school C. Teachers at each class level collaborate to plan fortnightly and termly. They use a

planning template and stay back after school to plan. Language support and learning support/resource teachers and class teachers also meet after school to plan for team teaching. However, the other schools also had formal planning procedures in place.

... but I would say hugely planning, getting a chance to talk to your team teaching partner in a formal setting like that is a necessary part of the whole thing because if you don't have that, if you are going in there without knowing exactly what you are going to target for the day then you are going have a problem (Teacher, post-primary D).

Post-primary school F has a record keeping system that supports students who miss school/class:

You see I have all my class notes on PowerPoint, everything I do is through IT so even a kid who has missed a class I can just hand them over my class notes. And we are now going to be operating a system through Microsoft where they can go in online and any kid who has missed anything can go in and check and they can see what they missed in class and what I taught month by month and week by week. So that is another venture, as an extra support for children who are missing a little due to unforeseen circumstances (Science teacher, post-primary F).

Beyond this, the need to monitor progress of students with SEN was highlighted.

Child/Family and Community

A number of issues arose at the level of parents/family in terms of practices to include all students. These issues are broken down into the following themes: engaging parents; collaboration with other schools and agencies and extra curricular engagement.

Engaging Parents

Within the theme of engaging parents a number of sub theme emerged: communication with parents, helping in the classroom, support of the HSCL coordinator and the support of parents' associations.

Communication with Parents

In terms of overall communication of school life some of the schools had exceptionally high quality websites, some with video footage of school activities and explaining links to the curriculum. One of the post-primary schools had a very high quality school magazine. Thirty six references were made to providing information

to parents, from five of the six schools. These highlighted the importance of communication with parents about the school, and students' needs and progress.

I suppose our big concern is that we respond to needs that present themselves to us and that we are open with parents, that we give them as full a picture of our school as we can, that we outline the advantages and disadvantages to our particular setting here (Deputy principal, primary school B).

Try and communicate as much as possible with the parents on the importance of homework, uniform, breakfast, etc. I often ask an older brother/sister to help them with homework (Teacher, primary school A).

I keep in contact with parents /guardians informing them of progress and explaining to them on how we/I approach and teach to their child's needs and what I expect from them. I make it very clear that my expectations are consistent small achievable steps. I use an independent home diary for daily comment on progress or revision needs. Parents are always welcome to call (Teacher, primary school B).

This is in line with the work of Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), who note that one important aspect of parental involvement in schools is maintaining regular communication with schools. One reference in relation to a child with special educational needs and his parents highlighted the benefit of parents being able to text the teacher if they have concerns:

... his parents are fantastic, they really are, they will text my mobile in the morning if there are any problems coming in the morning. Like at the moment now he is off his medication ... keep an eye on him, he is inclined to do this, do that, act out whatever (Teacher, primary school A).

Regular parent teacher meetings were highlighted as an important point of contact and schools were conscious of different languages when communicating with parents:

And we are very conscious of the different languages, maybe not all parents understand, so all our notices are multi lingual, as far as we can, so we can let them know if there is going to be a day off or if we have a special event. (Language support teacher, primary school B).

It was noted that for one of the children being observed, from an minority language and/or minority ethnic background, the ability of the school principal to converse in the child and parents own language was of great benefit, both in terms of providing information for parents, being able to interact with them, and being able to interact with the child fluently.

Another aspect of providing information to parents was the need to meet with them on a regular basis. A total of 19 references were made to this aspect, from five of the schools. One school for example described the importance of meeting with the parents of first year students early on in the year:

For example incoming 1st year parents meeting, what we do is we give them an outline of all the programmes that we provide in the school are they are very interested in the mentoring programme, they see it as a very valuable support for their students and they have heard about something similar in other schools (Counsellor, post-primary school E).

Another school also focused on the importance of having meetings early on in the year to reassure parents:

Try to meet parents at the beginning of the year /at parent-teacher meetings and explain, encourage and reassure them that the help their child is receiving is a positive thing and to get them to help out /take an interest in their child at home (Teacher, primary school A).

One parent described a series of meetings she had in relation to her child with special needs:

Well the case conferences were absolutely excellent, which we probably had once every six weeks. We discussed the best way forward for (names child), the behaviour patterns that he had and the best way to deal with them and that was done on a very much group basis, the school, the teachers, the principal, and that was really the start of our way forward (Parent, primary school A).

Helping in the Classroom

Twelve references were made to parents helping in the classroom in three of the schools and the benefits of this (Two primary and one post-primary). Examples included:

And then we do maths for fun and reading for fun and science for fun where we get parents trained to come in and work in the classrooms and we really go out of our way to encourage the most marginalised parents and the parents of special needs kids and the Traveller parents to get involved (HSCL coordinator, primary school A).

Support of the HSCL Coordinator

Two particular avenues were highlighted in facilitating collaboration between schools and parents. These were the home school liaison team and parents'

associations. Three of the schools had home school liaison coordinators working in the school.

So I will start of ... a lot of them would be very marginalised, very easy ways of getting them into the school like coffee mornings first of all, and it is just getting them over the threshold and into the school so they are not afraid of us and showing them how much schools have improved and changed since their own school days because a lot of them would have had very negative images of school. Especially if their child has any type of special need, they would be so worried and very defensive and in many cases they would be trying to hide it really (HSCL, primary school A).

As well as work in the school, home school liaison coordinators stressed the importance of the home visits:

It is patient work and the big thing that I find is good is the home visits, meeting the parents on the doorstep or inside in the kitchen and acknowledging that is the reality and listening to their story and encouraging them to pick up the phone, if it is counselling, will they pick up the phone and go there? If it is the family support, will they engage with the family support agencies? Whatever it is, even while I am there I will give them the phone and say, 'will you talk to so and so there,' and try and get them to seek help rather than saying, 'nothing happens in my life, I can't do anything.' So it is empowering the parents. And the difficulty is that when the family, because of the chaos that is there, that there is nobody that I can make contact with. Sometimes it is an older sister or an older brother and I might have to work on that level (HSCL, post-primary E).

Support from the Parents Council /Association

Two of the schools highlighted the role of the parents' associations as an important way of including parents in the life of the school:

Well as I say, the connection with the parents is very important and we have a very good group now on the parent's association, they are very active and dynamic and interested so I think that might have an effect on other parents and get more of them in. Like the more parents get involved in the school the better and the better the parent's association because it does make a difference. (Principal, post-primary E)

The second school also praised their parents association, as an important association which can reflect the culture of the school:

We have a very active parents association and I recently and there are a lot of intercultural parents who this year have joined the parents association, which is really good (Deputy principal, primary school C).

In addition the principal of primary school C highlighted the importance of minority ethnic parental representation on the Board of Management.

Providing Access for Parents to Education

Interestingly, all six schools mentioned giving parents access to educational opportunities. The types of initiatives mentioned included programmes up to FETAC level, parenting courses, cultural activities and a targeted metal work class for Traveller men:

This year has been phenomenal because we never could get people to go on as far as that, to FETAC level, and we devised this FETAC course ourselves with our facilitator and that has been a huge success this year and the parents have got so much out of it and they are so proud of themselves now. And in fact through this, and this has taken years and years, these are when we first came in with baby steps and organised a coffee morning and have worked their way up and two people are seriously considering going on to further education themselves. (HSCL, primary school A)

Two schools offered parenting and cultural courses:

Well at the moment I am involved in doing parent programmes, and that sounds very simple. But it is much broader than that, you are actually giving some sort of self-belief and self-value and empowerment back to parents. And that alone can trigger a change when a family is at a certain level. And I am talking about families who need intense support, families that have drug issues, addiction, where that has taken over, it is like a poison that has taken over a whole family and has an impact on the children (School completion officer, post-primary E).

We also have, in relation to links with the parents, we have the Polish class for Polish children after school which basically focuses on the Polish language, Polish history. So I suppose links with outside agencies as a strength there (Principal, primary school B).

So that all goes to create the atmosphere ... We have yoga for parents ... It will probably all go with the cuts, but certainly in the last two years we have done yoga, child care, and all of these classes are run by the VEC but they invite a mixed population which is lovely (Deputy principal, primary school C).

The final example provided a unique attempt to involve fathers in education – specifically, it was focused on members of the Travelling community:

I think the important aspect was having the parents on board as well. And you know with the tradition with the Travellers, the dads aren't that involved, so what we did a couple of years ago and a lot of work stemmed from that, we brought the dads in to do a night class. For a lot of them it was the first time ever inside the school, at second level like, so our metal work teacher did a

metal work class. Now the lads wanted to do horse boxes and things and we had to bring down their expectations a little bit. But for some of them, I think there was about 12 started and I think about seven would have followed through to the point where they would have got a certificate. So that kind of legitimised the school and it legitimised it, particularly for the lads to come (Principal, post-primary D).

The literature confirms that successful schools reach out to parents, establishing true partnerships and providing opportunities for their involvement in concrete ways so as to attain the goal of higher student achievement (Kennedy, 2007). Johnson (2003) shows that schools use a variety of strategies to involve hard to reach parents and many operate an open door policy encouraging parents to drop in regularly for coffee or for informal snack and chat sessions. McSkeane, (1999) cited in Downes, (2004) highlights the need for facilitation of parental involvement in treatment and interventions for their children. To maximise the learning of students in disadvantaged settings and to promote the successful outcomes for all students, how a school listens to the community it serves is crucial in defining its role, and building capacity to support both student learning and parental involvement (School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) (2001). Fullan (1993, p. 43) advises that schools to be successful as learning organisations must “be dynamically plugged into their environment if they are to have a chance of survival.”

Collaboration with other Schools and Agencies

There were 23 references to several types of links that facilitated inclusion. These included links with primary schools particularly around transition, links with local businesses, community agencies and social services.

Links between Primary and Post-Primary Schools

I have 5 students going on to secondary next year, every one of them, I visited all the schools they are going to, they are going to four different settings. I have visited them all, I have spoken with all the teachers, went with the parents, had the questions that the parents mightn't think of asking, especially in the mainstream setting of what will be set up for them (Special Class Teacher, primary school B).

I have gone out to primary schools where we have a young fellow in 1st year this year, I would have gone out to the school about three times just in connection with this one young fellow who comes from the autistic spectrum in order that the transfer is easier (Principal, post-primary F).

Links between Schools and Local Businesses who work as Mentors

At the moment we work with (names company) so adults over there would work with them and they go across to (names company) on a regular basis and meet up and chat and talk about CVs and interview skills, whatever. So a lot of the lads in here wouldn't have fathers that are available because they have just moved on so it is more common than not to have mothers bringing up kids on their own so a good male role model would be unusual. Thus this works in that sense. Some of the mentors are women but the majority of them would be male (Principal, post-primary E).

Links with Community Agencies and Social Services

Links with inner city networks, the Gardaí and other local voluntary and statutory agencies through local education committees were referred to.

Links with Social Services

And we have links with St ... Training Centre, we have put together a working group, our next meeting is next week where we sit down with St ... Training Centre, the local primary schools here and the local secondary schools and we sit down and we look at the issues that are being raised by the parents that are enrolled in St ... and we try to help address them. We have the attendance issue that we were looking at, we also have the visits to the school here by groups from St ... we have people on work experience today from St ... Training Centre. We try to be a positive link there ... through that we have a general course, the parents plus programme and it was through our links with the ... Education Service and St ... Training Centre that we managed to secure that because it is a very expensive course to get and normally there is a charge for participants to take part in it. But we offer them the building here to do the training and then they, in return, rather than take money, they gave us their skills and facilitated a course and one of the facilitators on that course was a Traveller lady who was providing the course, which was very positive (Principal, primary school B).

Extra-Curricular Activities

All of the schools offered extra-curricular activities to students, to enhance their school life and provide them with extra opportunities. A total of 88 references were made to such activities across all six schools. Activities included breakfast / lunch clubs, a bedtime reading club, homework clubs, vocational opportunities, and sporting and musical clubs.

Breakfast and Lunch Clubs

One type of club mentioned most frequently in relation to disadvantaged (5 references) and minority (6 references) students are food-based clubs, to provide for students who may not for whatever reason have a proper breakfast at home, or a lunch. As one teacher said:

I think the breakfast club is really important, and some of the children coming to me and they are so tired and then they say to me, 'I didn't have breakfast this morning, or I had a cup of tea for breakfast or I had pizza for breakfast.' And your breakfast is so important (Language support teacher, primary school A).

Another school principal emphasised the importance of this service being open to all students at lunchtime

... we have a lunch programme, so there is a lunch available here every day for every child who needs it. But that is open to everybody. Normally we would have up to 25 or 30 lunches a day and we have sandwiches, drink, some fruit, stuff like that. People call down to Mrs. X's room, any child who forgets their lunch is welcome to do it, it isn't just a certain group of children. We also have a breakfast club so that kids can pop down and get something to eat if they are hungry in the morning at any stage. Those are two very practical supports (Principal, primary school B).

Bedtime Reading Club

A unique programme is described one school which involves parents and children reading together – it is called a bedtime reading club and described as follows:

So we would run, for example, the bedtime reading group in junior infants where the parents come in, it is a library lending scheme, and they come in and they train as librarians as it is called, and they come in on a Monday for half an hour first thing in the morning, sit at the end of the room and call down each child to select a book to take home until Friday. And then the parents come back in on Friday to collect back the book and put it away safely. But by being in the classroom for the half an hour each morning, they are watching what is going on, they are seeing the teacher in action, they are seeing the play, because usually first thing in the morning would be free play, they are seeing how the children react together, they are seeing how important play is whereas they mightn't have understood how important it is (HSCL, primary school A).

Homework Clubs

There were eleven references to the role of Homework Clubs in providing students with an environment and motivation to do their homework that they may not have at home:

The importance of this initiative was highlighted as one that can help to prevent early school leaving:

Well it would be definitely the homework clubs in the evening. The study club now that we have for 5th years because a lot of these kids would be from disadvantaged backgrounds and would be the first in their family to get this far even in school so they wouldn't have a tradition of going to school really, falling out after primary. And the homework, especially 5th year homework club to try and keep them on board, to try and keep them to their leaving cert ... again very much a personal interest from the staff (Chaplain, post-primary F).

The principal described the system in a bit more detail:

OK for our 5th years one of the things that a number of staff put forward was that they weren't doing homework and basically we could clearly see from talking to a number of staff that they are not, if you like, independent learners, that they needed to be supported. And any teacher as part of their normal classroom management would evoke the usual disciplinary sanctions or measures with dealing with the students but even that wasn't proving adequate. So we call it a homework support and from Monday to Thursday we have insisted that a number of them attend for one hour. And this is a programme which is extra to the evening study which is in place for two hours, and also extra to the programme for the 1st and 2nd years, their homework club (Principal, post-primary F).

Providing Vocational Activities

Two schools make mention of important vocational opportunities for students, which they offer. One school completion officer described an Access programme with a local University targeting Travellers. Similar linkages with universities and other local businesses are described by post-primary school E, which provided important training and prospective employment opportunities for students and which can also act as an incentive.

Providing Sporting and Musical Activities

Schools also highlighted the importance of sporting activities, which can act as an important incentive or influence on students. One principal described the wide range of sporting activities his school engages in:

And I guess that is another strength of the place, that children are offered the opportunity to express their talents whether it be through sport, through art, through music, through whatever. I mean the choir has 75 kids in it here, we have nine basketball teams, so this is the pyramid of our sports, it was great we won the division 1 boys and girls, that is great, we are all delighted with that. But we have nine basketball teams, we have hurling, we have table tennis, in

terms of extra curricular activities we are open until 8:00pm in the evening because there are so many things happening (Principal, primary school B).

The importance of having sporting facilities and engaging with the local community in relation to sport was also emphasised.

Children's Voices

What makes Students feel Included/that they Belong?

The analysis of the perspectives of students on what makes them feel included in their schools, based on the findings from questionnaire responses and individual interviews, yields similar themes to those that emerged in addressing the barriers to inclusion. The most common responses for this question related to playing games together, being included in all activities, having friends and generally having a positive school atmosphere. A number of other themes that emerged related to engaging with specific subjects (Art and PE), group activities and relating to teachers.

The questionnaire also invited students to respond to the question of what could be done to improve the school or make things better so that all children feel included. Students were given written and visual prompts to structure their responses. Prompts included what the students, principal, teacher and other people could do to make students feel included. When responses were analysed, it became apparent that there was overlap with themes from the previous section of the questionnaire that asked students what makes them feel included in their school. However, an additional theme relating to the role of the principal emerged and this will be considered separately.

These themes paint a picture of the school as an important social venue for the child, where social inclusion is paramount – children should be able to enjoy activities, play games, and experience a positive environment.

Playing Games Together

The most common theme to emerge when students were asked what makes them feel included in their schools was the theme of “playing games together” (63 references) and the social aspect of play, before school, after school and at break times. A similar theme emerged when students were asked how they might make each other feel included in the school. Responses referred to doing things together (54 references) such as “*playing together*” or “*working together*” and “*not leaving people out.*” A variety of games are mentioned – basketball, football, skipping, dodgeball, hopscotch and GAA. Many of the statements are descriptions of drawings of children playing games with everyone included.

My class are playing outside together (1st class, primary school A).

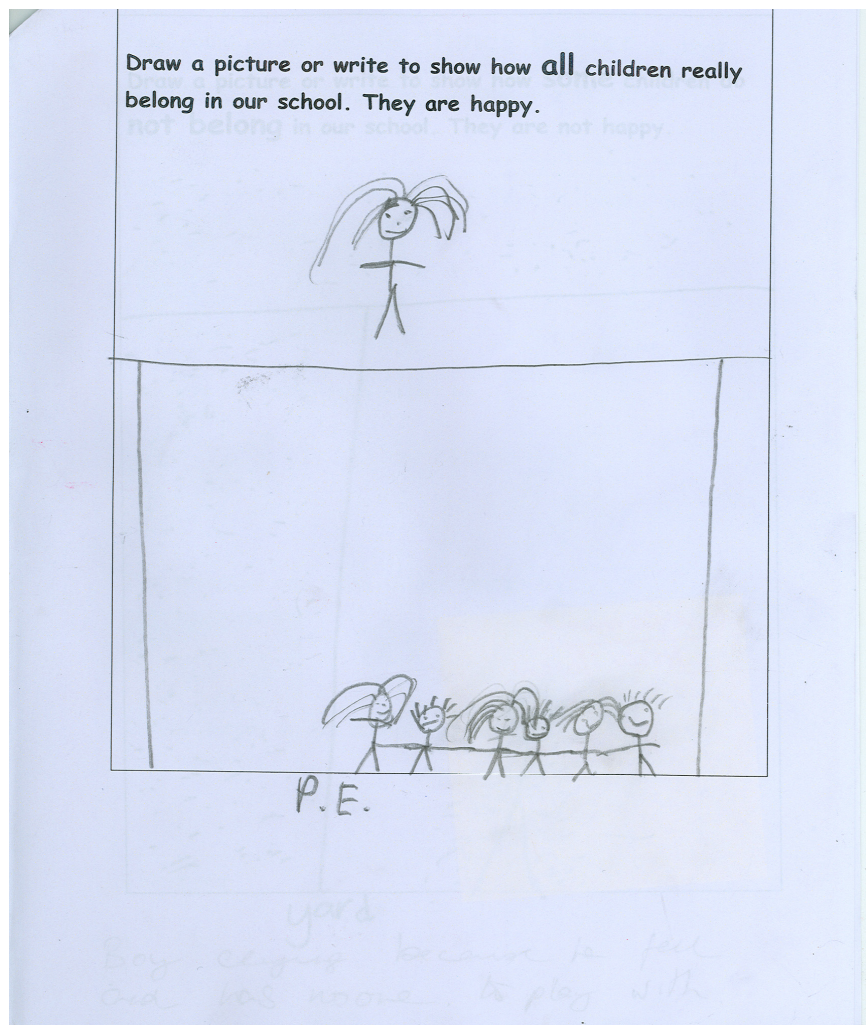
I think everybody belongs in our school because we have so many activities like soccer, and basketball, and table tennis, and hurling (3rd class, primary school B).

If someone wants to come into your game, letting them join in (3rd class, primary school B).

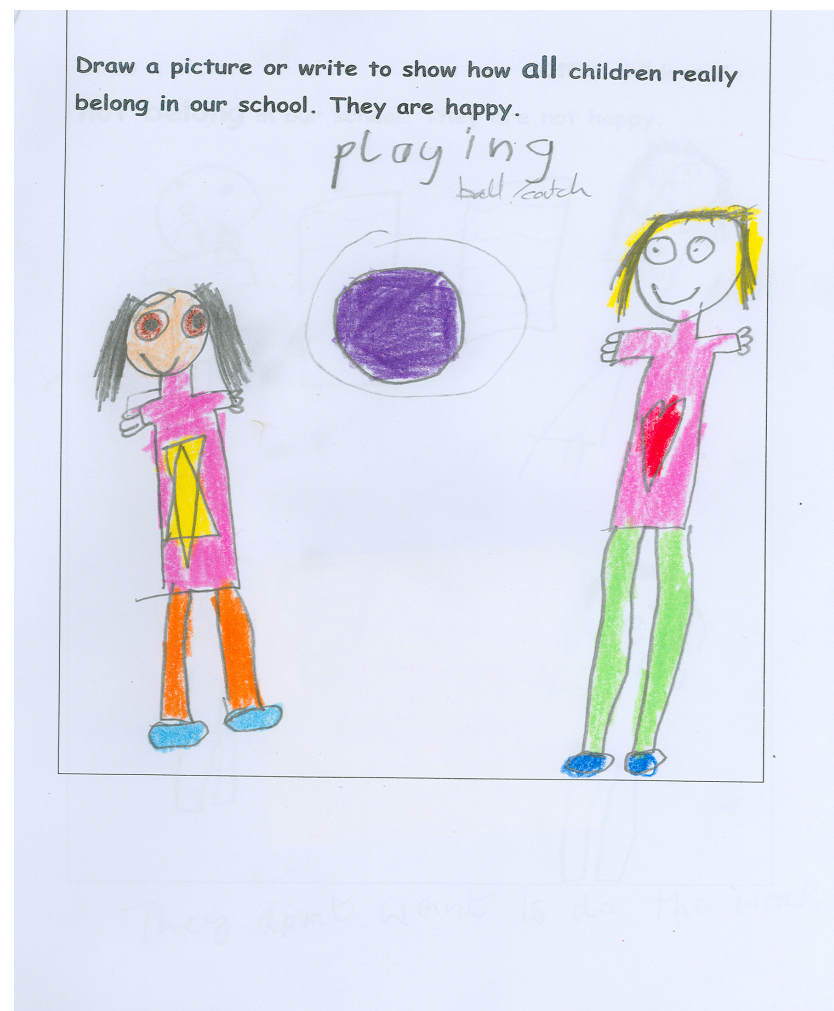
“Playing games together” appears to be a theme that is afforded very high status by the students in making them feel included in their schools. While there is a link with the theme of friendship, which is discussed later, the concept of playing games together is unique and warrants consideration in its own right. As illustrated in the drawings (Figure 2), it appears to epitomise for students what inclusion is about. There is some evidence from the literature which indicates that for minority ethnic boys, being good at sport facilitated their inclusion in distinct male peer groups (Devine & Kelly, 2006). However, the high status of the theme “playing games together” as perceived by the students in the present study raises concerns about the

Figure 2: Students' Drawings Illustrating what makes them feel Included in their School

1st class, primary school A



1st class, primary school A



Draw a picture or write to show how **all** children really belong in our school. They are happy.



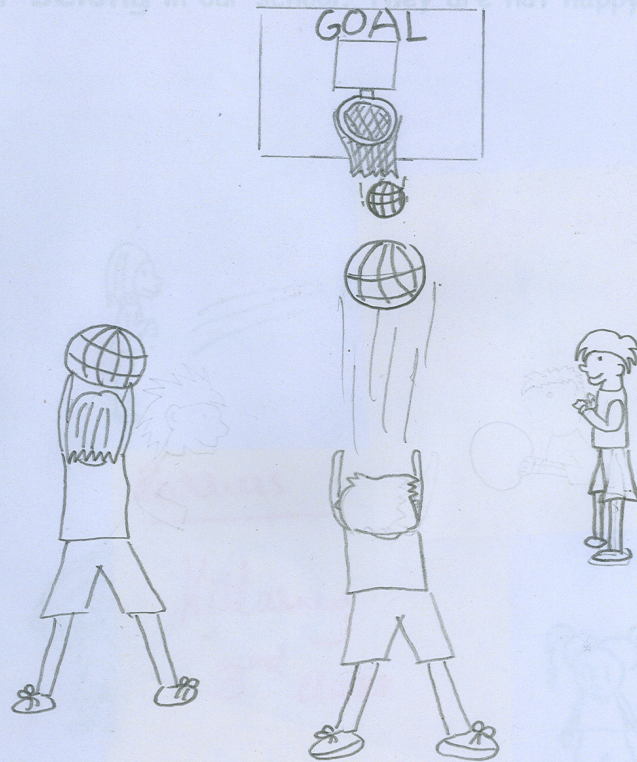
Draw a picture or write to show how **all** children really belong in our school. They are happy.



Children are playing football together. They are happy! The sun is even happy!

3rd Class, primary school B

Draw a picture or write to show how **all** children really belong in our school. They are happy.



People are playing together .

2nd Class, primary school C

Draw a picture or write to show how **all** children really belong in our school. They are happy.



We belong together because we love to learn!

inclusion of students who may have difficulties or a lack of interest in playing games and in social interaction for a variety of reasons.

Being Included in all Activities

This theme is very closely linked to the previous theme of playing games together” and relates to being given the same opportunities as all other children in the school. The following quotes illustrate yet again the views of students on what makes them feel included in their schools and the importance of playing together, and not leaving anybody out.

They’re playing soccer. All the children are included (3rd class, primary school B).

I think children do fit in their schools because they are never left out (2nd class, primary school C).

The children in (name of school) like to share and help each other and no one is left out. They are caring and loving. If someone doesn’t want to play the game we’re playing they would play a different game (5th class, primary school B).

The children are happy because they are including everybody in the game (3rd class, primary school B).

Like going to school cause they know that their not left out (1st year, post-primary school E).

There is no major bullying in the school. People from all over the world attend this school and are quickly accepted in various groups. Every student has the opportunity to get involved in any special activity as sports (5th year, post-primary school F).

When asked in the questionnaire how students can make other students feel included, the same theme of “not leaving people out” and “including everyone no matter who they are or where they come from” emerged from the primary school students. One senior post-primary student suggested “asking a student that is sitting on their own during break to sit with you or involve quiet students into a game of football” while another suggested “to arrange a few sessions once or twice a week with groups from every year and ask them about how they would like to feel more included.”

Being “kind,” “nice” and “friendly” to other students were also terms used by students (28 references). While primary school students did not elaborate beyond

these terms, many (16) post-primary students were direct but eloquent in their suggestions for a more tolerant and inclusive school environment:

Be kind, participate, help others feel included, be friendly.

Be nicer! Some students take a while before they're even comfortable raising their hand.

Encouragement (not jeering) would help, and everyone with a sense of decency should cast out an olive branch to their fellow students, whether they get on well immediately or not.

Be nicer to each other and treat everybody equal, whether Irish or not, black or white doesn't matter.

Positive Atmosphere

The next most common theme to emerge was related to the positive atmosphere in the school, which contributes to making all children feel included. The following quotes illustrate the students' perceptions of a positive school atmosphere that contributes to making them feel included in their school.

All the children sharing their paint in Art (1st class, primary school A).

Everyone feels happy and friendly in our school. It is great to help others (3rd class, primary school B).

All children belong in our school because we all make each other welcome, we play together, we share, we help each other, we welcome each other in our community and be nice to each other (2nd class, Primary School C).

We have assembly every Wednesday and we also hold regular class discussions in classes such as religion, SPHE etc. (5th year, post-primary school, F).

Friendly atmosphere: In this school I think that students get along well with each other and their teachers. If there is a case of bullying between students, the school can deal with it effectively because of their anti-bullying attitudes (5th year, post-primary school F).

Themes of “sharing” and “helping each other” were also evident in the findings when students were asked how they could make each other feel included.

There is evidence of similar findings in a study by Norwich and Kelly (2004) where the majority of students with mild general learning difficulties who were attending both special and mainstream schools expressed mainly positive feelings about their

current school. There was no difference in feelings between primary and secondary students. A positive school ethos helped students to acclimatise in first year of post-primary and supported the transition process from primary to post-primary school (NCCA, 2004).

Friends

An important aspect of inclusion according to the findings of this study is that students should have friends in the school for playing, talking, and listening.

Friendship can make the school better (2nd class, primary school C).

All children really belong in school when they make friends to play with. Every child should have a friend (5th class, primary school B).

The thing make students feel good is when they came in school meet some friends even he/her mad about something happened at home he will still be happy (5th year, post-primary school F).

Friends they have, activities they like, no bullying (1st year, post-primary school C).

They are all friends and play together (5th class, primary school B).

Friendship – we should all belong. That is called friendship (3rd class, primary school B).

Friends are important (1st class, primary school A).

Friends so that you have people to talk to and listen (1st year, post-primary school F).

The importance of friendships is a common theme in studies that elicit the views of children (O'Donnell, 2003; Devine & Kelly, 2006). More in-depth studies of friendships and peer relations highlight the complexity of the social world for students (Devine & Kelly, 2006; Meyer, 2001). Students in the present study referred to friends as “people to talk to and listen.” Similarly, friendship as an informal system of support at schools was mentioned by students in the research literature (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Palikara et al., 2009). While the nature of friendship was not investigated in the present study, the findings indicate that students view friends as a very important element of inclusion in their schools.

Engaging with Specific Subjects and Group Activities

Alongside PE, Art was the only other school subject specifically mentioned with any frequency. In addition to practical tasks and activity learning, these presumably are the types of subjects or lessons children can express themselves most freely in, or enjoy the most, which makes them feel included.

All the children like to do Art (1st class, primary school A).

When everyone is together like PE (5th class, primary school B).

It's about a project that its – we're making a volcano. They are happy because they see that the hot lava and its evil. Everybody is doing it together (3rd class, primary school B).

Students, particularly at post-primary level, also mentioned the range of extra-curricular and social activities as a factor that contributes to inclusion in school. These included school assemblies, school play, school trips, basketball and football teams, choir, table tennis, dancing and time to talk in the canteen where students have an opportunity to develop friendships.

Emphasis towards all skills. I believe that this school allows students who are not good at academics but good at other talent (eg. music) to develop and flourish (5th year, post-primary school F).

If there having lunch together in the cafeteria (1st year, post-primary school E).

There is a lot of extra activities after and during school for students to take part in and feel a part of a group an example of such activities are football, table tennis, dancing, choir and also there is always (someone) you can talk to in the school if you're feeling down (5th year, post-primary school F).

Group activities, if a student feels excluded or outcast from school or a particular group it is good to have them immersed in the company of their peers for team or group activities, perhaps football. The whole point as I see it is so students become friendly with one another and thus include one another (5th year, post-primary school F).

There is evidence to support the views of students in the present study in relation to a preference for certain school subjects. Across three phases of a longitudinal study of students' first three years of post-primary education, students indicated a preference for practical subjects such as Art, Woodwork, Home Economics, Computer Studies and PE (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007). This trend is also evident in a study by Riley

(2004) where students reported that they liked school because of the opportunities to engage in PE and sport.

Teachers

Teachers in school contributed to making students feel included. In general, students portrayed their teachers in a positive light, making references to teachers being “nice” and having “fun” learning with the teacher.

... playing games in the class with the teacher ... (1st year, post-primary school E).

... Also most of the teachers are really nice and make you feel welcome and confident in school (5th year, post-primary school F).

They are having fun learning with the teacher (2nd class, primary school C).

When teacher is teaching them (1st class, primary school A).

There is no ‘wall’ between students and teachers – everybody’s talking to each other (5th year, post-primary school F).

... because I can see things in English and then she gives me a paper with these things in Spanish and English (2nd class, primary school C).

These findings are in agreement with the research literature where children in general perceive their teachers to be kind and caring and want to have a positive relationship with them. (Devine, 2002; Riley, 2004; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Vekic, 2003). A study of inclusion of students having social and emotional difficulties in mainstream schools (Mowat, 2009) also identified the relationship between the teachers and students as one of the most significant variables affecting student outcomes. Voices of minority ethnic and minority language children with regard to educational experiences (Vekic, 2003) indicate that students were happy in school and prioritised the role that the staff and the teachers played in this.

A trend that emerged across the research literature was the reference by students to the characteristics of good teaching (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007). Students in the NCCA study referred to the benefits of clear explanations, group work and practical activities. Students in another study also appreciated teachers who helped them understand their work and who responded to individual requests for help (Riley, 2004). Similar themes related to the craft of teaching (46 references) emerged in the

present study when students were specifically asked how teachers could help to make children feel included in school. Many primary school students felt that teachers could achieve this by “*teaching,*” “*teaching new things,*” “*teaching a lot*” but did not elaborate beyond these comments. Older primary students were more specific in their responses and made suggested that teachers could help by “*making sure that every child understand their work*” and “*constantly encouraging students and not picking the same student for every question.*” Post-primary students suggested that teachers “*bring more variation into class,*”; “*do more group work or class activities that everyone gets to know people.*” The merits of team-teaching were recognised in an individual interview:

I prefer the two because if one teacher says something you can ask the other teacher what he meant, like if I was in class with one and one is off talking, with two teachers I could ask the other teacher (3rd year, post-primary school E).

How teachers can make a difference in delivering inclusive practice is discussed in an article by Florian (2008) where the relationship between special and inclusive education are examined. She argues that inclusive practice is more than differentiation and that teachers need to take on a broader role involving “an understanding of the interactive socio-cultural factors that interact to produce individual differences (biology, culture, family, school, rather than explanations that stress a single cause” (p. 206). Expectations of this broader role for teachers in inclusive practices are reflected in the voices of the students in the present study.

Principal

One theme that occurred across all the schools (15 references) was the need for the principal to communicate with the students and listen to their voices. Comments from primary students included:

Ask how the student was.
Ask the children how they feel and think.
Talk to all students.

A 5th year, post-primary student made a plea to the principal for the voices of students to be listened to and heard:

To be more friendly and listen to the students views as well as just the teachers.
As I think many students don't be heard that it's just teachers.

While the right to have their views heard emerged as a theme in the responses from students, there was also evidence in their comments of a welfarist role for the principal. A perception of the principal as a caring benefactor emerged from the findings from primary school students in particular who used terms such as “... *going into the classes and telling pupils how good they are,*” “*taking care*” and “*helping*” with one young person making the suggestion that the principal should “*give students support, make them feel comfortable in the school.*” Linked to this theme is their perception of the role of the principal as the person with power to award extra privileges and activities including increasing the number of activities during break times and after school (11 references). Suggestions for activities made by students included sports clubs, shows, exercises, Maths and Irish clubs. One post-primary student suggested that the principal “*let the 4th, 5th, 6th years out to lunch because younger years would be too childish.*”

The principal was also perceived by students as having an influence on discipline issues (18 references), specifically the making of rules and dealing with bullies, which would help students feel that they belong in the school. The voices of the students are intent in their plea to the authority of the principal to stop meanness and bullying supporting the very forceful comments of the students in the earlier section of the study on challenges and barriers to inclusion.

Telling them to stop being mean.
Telling them to be nice.
Not letting bullies get away with what their doing.
I think he could stop people bullying.
Give serious punishment to anyone who is bullying.

General

The following quotes, from primary and post-primary, capture the essence of students’ perspectives on inclusion or feeling that they belong in school:

I think all children belong in school. Were the ones who make it a school not one of us all of us it’s no school without people who really try hard to make it such a good school like the President is coming but she would not like it without all of us (2nd class, primary school C).

When people don’t bully you.
When people don’t leave you out.
When they have friends.
When the teachers don’t give out to them (1st year, post-primary school E).

Having presented the findings at school, teacher, class, child, family and community level and from the voice of the child the final chapter discusses the implications of these and offers recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the implications for policy and practice and recommendations arising are outlined. These are organised under leadership for inclusion, teacher education and expertise, system wide issues, curricular relevance and universal design, collaboration and shared planning, provision for minority ethnic and minority language students, social and emotional support, engaging parents and children's voice.

Leadership for Inclusion

Overall the findings in this study support a conceptualisation of inclusion as a process of increasing student access, participation and benefit through continuous organisational learning. Real barriers and challenges existed in the schools in tandem with innovative leadership, policies and teacher practices to overcome them. While movement to whole-school shared understandings and practices is important, much can be achieved through supporting smaller teams of like-minded teachers pushing out the boundaries of inclusive thinking and action in schools.

One of the key findings of this study is the potential of the principal and coordinator working together to create a culture and ethos conducive to the advancement of inclusive policies and practices. Strategically leveraging the capacity of the principal in conjunction with a leadership-oriented coordinator can initiate and sustain inclusive practices in schools. This has implications for the selection and professional development of principals and coordinators.

Principals need to be fully immersed in and committed to the philosophy, rationale and implications of inclusion for school enrolment, assessment, curricular and teaching and learning policies. They also need to facilitate distributive leadership and collaborative cultures. This also requires building a strong connection with the wider school community.

Coordinators need to achieve a balance between being able to model assessment, teaching and learning expertise for inclusion and the change agency skills required to support staff to change practices. The credibility from teaching expertise can help the

coordinator lead and embed changes in the culture of the school. This has implications for professional development initiatives for learning/resource and language support teachers who are likely to take up these positions. Given the critical importance of the role, holders should be obliged to avail of mandatory professional development.

Teacher Education and Expertise

Even in very favourable environments for inclusive education, there was evidence in the study of student learning needs not being met. Teachers reported that varied and differentiated assessment and teaching methodologies helped meet the learning needs of diverse learners. However, others spoke about students not being ready for grade level and overly emphasised within-child barriers. The level of expertise required in assessing, teaching and learning to meet all learner needs is immense and requires sustained inquiry, trial and reflection. The skill and knowledge levels required to differentiate the curriculum are complex and develop over time. Investing in teacher professional development is a prerequisite to support this. It does a disservice to suggest that embedding differentiated practices is easy and straightforward. It requires sustained personal responsibility, commitment, trial and error and support.

There are also implications for initial teacher education. While focused separate special educational input is required, it is insufficient on its own. The principles of inclusive education and differentiation need to permeate all aspects of professional formation for teachers. Planning and teaching for diversity must inform all aspects of professional practice.

Integral to the changes proposed here which involve the reculturing of schools is the need for continuing professional development, which is evidence based, relevant and accessible to all teachers. In terms of the content of CPD programmes for class and subject teachers three key areas emerge: firstly, meeting the needs of all learners through differentiated teaching and learning remains a key priority. Allied to this is appropriate authentic assessment of all learners including the use of formative assessment. Secondly, the skills, knowledge and disposition required to collaborate, plan and team teach are also crucial and thirdly, the development of a problem

solving, inquiry, leadership role in supporting colleagues to change the school and class to address the diversity of student strengths, needs and interests in the community.

Recent developments in online teaching and learning, together with the greater availability of broadband make accessing CPD in this area much more attainable. It is crucial that the quality of this provision is monitored and accredited by the teaching council and other accreditation bodies. However, it is important that other avenues for teacher learning are also developed. New forms of teacher learning and teacher learning communities need to be supported as vehicles for promoting inclusive practice. The benefits of peer classroom observation, expert modelling, videoing lessons and sharing feedback, teacher study groups accessing specialist literature, visits to schools, use of web video and formalised feedback from the large numbers of teachers doing post graduate degrees etc. needs to be disseminated. A recent audit of research in the area of special education since 2000 on the island of Ireland uncovered over 1600 references, many of them unpublished theses with very limited access (Travers, Butler & O'Donnell, 2010).

In terms of an overall vision for accredited professional development for inclusion, there is a need to have all teachers in all schools with core skills (initial teacher education level and CPD), some teachers in all schools with advanced skills (Graduate Diploma in Special Education) and some teachers in some schools with specialist skills (Masters/Doctorate in special education).

System Wide Issues

Participants in the study outlined systemic barriers to inclusion and these have also been highlighted in the literature. These include the perceived differentiated hierarchical nature of post-primary provision and the disproportionate number of students with special educational needs and minority ethnic students in some types of post-primary schools. The use of so called soft barriers to inclusion at post primary level can result in many schools not taking responsibility for the full diversity of students in their area. However, it is important that schools offer the full range of programmes necessary to meet student needs. A combination of support and pressure may be required whereby professional development is offered but sanctions

considered if schools continue to operate barriers to entry for some students. The guidelines on inclusion for post-primary schools (DES, 2007a) provide sound advice but it may be necessary to consider mechanisms in the system to ensure greater adherence, evidence of progression and accountability in implementing such guidelines once adequate support is given to schools. The use of an internal audit of inclusion in schools could contribute to this process.

The lack of coordinated planning at local level can result in many students transferring to special schools at the age of transfer when post primary schools should be catering for their needs (Ware et al., 2009). The lack of continuity of special classes between primary and post-primary contributes to this situation. As an interim measure the capacity of some post-primary schools to meet the needs of some students with SEN could be enhanced by the appointment of a specialist SEN primary teacher, given the overall generic nature of their professional education.

The closure of one of the special classes for students with mild general learning disabilities in one of the case study schools highlighted issues around the continuum of provision. Questions were raised about the capacity of the general allocation model to meet the support needs of all students with MGLD. While some special classes have a clear focus on students with specific needs (autism) and can be time related (speech and language disorder and dyslexia), others such as classes for students with mild general learning disabilities are under threat due to the general allocation model and consequently there has been a reduction in the placement options for such students. The capacity of the general allocation model and staged approach in meeting the needs of such pupils needs to be ascertained before reducing the special class option as many of these students may end up unnecessarily transferring to special schools. Where special classes are in place there is a need for all such classes to have a clear policy of how they interact with the rest of the school.

At second level there is a knock on issue arising from the general allocation model. As students with MGLD do not require an external assessment to access support at primary level, there was evidence in the second level schools of such students presenting without an assessment. As the general allocation model does not operate at second level there was a long delay between getting the required assessment and

accessing additional support through the NCSE. This is compounded by the very different traditional system of learning support allocation as second level compared to primary. In this regard extending the general allocation model to second level would alleviate this difficulty. Post-primary schools would have greater certainty in relation to staff allocation and it would mean less support time lost for students due to getting external assessments in order to access additional resources.

An additional option worth considering would be allowing schools further flexibility within the staged approach to set up a time related part time (maximum half day) special class option within an expanded general allocation model. This would have the advantage of giving some students more intensive small group tuition where their needs are not being met in mainstream classes, accessing a more specialist intervention without external assessment and labelling, and reducing the number of students transferring to special schools.

However, there was also evidence in the study from teachers, principals and SNAs, that withdrawal, as a model of additional support, acted as a barrier to inclusion, because it led to students feeling stigmatised, which had implications for self-esteem. Some feared that students may be missing out on certain subjects or elements of whole-class work and life and others referred to the impact of the withdrawal model on the integrity and cohesion of the class. This is a complex issue as some literature suggests that students prefer the option (Norwich & Kelly, 2004) and that flexibility of provision demands that the school rather than the class be seen as the unit of inclusion. It is clear that over reliance and total reliance on withdrawal models are not justified in the literature and that an interacting continuum of flexible provision may be required.

Also in terms of flexibility of provision there was evidence of the effectiveness of intensive early intervention in junior infants. Many primary schools tend to interpret early intervention as beginning in 1st class (Travers, 2007), which is in accordance with the Learning Support guidelines (DES, 2000). Further guidance on this issue may be warranted. There is also an urgent need to ensure provision of targeted language/literacy and numeracy support to all students experiencing educational

disadvantage who require it at primary and post primary levels irrespective of the designation of the schools' status.

At post-primary level there was contradictory evidence from one of the schools on the academic benefits of a streamed class combined with team teaching. The concentration of students with additional resource hours in the one class allowed for the additional team teaching. Further research is required on this model as the weight of evidence is negative in relation to streaming. If mixed ability classes could avail of additional team teaching the need to stream maybe reduced further.

The contribution of special needs assistants to inclusive education was recognised and appreciated in all schools as vital. However, there is a mismatch between the role of the SNA as officially outlined and their actual role in schools. There was evidence in the study of some over reliance on the SNA for differentiating the curriculum. This has implications for professional development in relation to the appropriate management of the SNA service as a support for inclusion and in relation to SNA education.

Curricular Relevance and Universal Design

The challenge here is part of a wider dilemma of addressing individual needs through a common curricular framework. For many students with special educational needs at post-primary level there is a mismatch between where they are at and what is offered in terms of learning experiences. The new NCCA initiative in relation to curriculum at post primary level for students with special needs highlights the need to ensure that provision is relevant, meaningful and engaging for these students. It must also lead to certification and progression to the next linked stage. There was perhaps an underestimation of the level of skill required to implement the current guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities. Within a broad framework it should be possible to offer tailored programmes for students that allow them to progress in a meaningful way. This should be done in the context of reform of the junior cycle and not as a separate add-on or adaptation but rather as part of a process of moving to universal curricular design where learner differences are embedded in all aspects from the beginning. In the context of inclusion, having two separate processes could represent a lost opportunity for designing a universal

curriculum, assessment and certification process that is flexible enough to address the diverse needs of all learners in the junior cycle in post-primary schools. This certainly would present challenges for the system but the alternative could lead to further streaming in order to deliver the new programmes. There are also implications for assessment and the importance of promoting assessment for learning as a supportive tool for inclusion. It is also important that ICT supports new forms of learning and is not used to reinforce existing limited practices.

Collaboration and Shared Planning

Inclusive practices were supported by a team approach involving deliberation, inquiry, trial and error learning and time for shared planning. Providing appropriate education to all students requires sophisticated and rigorous assessment, planning, monitoring, tracking, record keeping and evaluation of approaches. These activities need to be formalised at a system wide level so as to guarantee time for them. While progress has been made on whole school planning in recent years, there is a need for more formalised approaches at the class, grade and subject levels. This is particularly so in the context of team teaching and inclass support. The success of inclass support/team teaching rests to a large extent on the quality of shared planning before the lesson. Use of shared spaces on school servers or web-based spaces could support this collaboration.

The level of planning required to implement the provisions in the EPSEN Act (2004) will be formidable and the ad hoc, informal nature of much teacher collaboration would not be supportive of this process. There is a need for dedicated time outside existing teaching hours for shared planning and collaboration to develop high quality inclusive classroom practices.

Provision for Minority Ethnic and Minority Language Students

In relation to provision for minority ethnic and minority language students there is a need to increase the capacity of schools to appropriately meet the needs of these learners. Specific modules on teaching and learning in multiethnic and multilingual classrooms in teacher education programmes are required at all levels. Particular expertise in assessment is required in schools to plan appropriately for student needs in this area. The achievement levels for these students needs to be carefully

monitored. There is also a need to address gaps in home-school liaison provision and a shortage of dual-language resources.

There is a need also to clearly convey the message that first language maintenance and development is actually of benefit to the minority language learners in the Irish education system. This message could be conveyed through multifarious means, including policy documents, guidance to schools and WSE reports.

The feasibility of providing interpretation and translation services to schools on a national basis should also be examined. Such a programme should take advantage of economies of scale and investigate ways in which ICT could be used to facilitate the project, for instance, through webcast interpretation or downloadable school notes. This would facilitate the translation of school policy documents and communication material in the most prominent minority languages within the school. Schools should be made aware of the importance of this form of recognition. In addition there is a need to examine methods of provision of cultural mediation services in schools. This might build on the learning garnered through the SCMP project (McDaid, 2008).

The establishment of a national public translation and interpretation service would make available translations of important educational documents and important daily communications between schools and minority language parents. This would be achieved through a combination of translated documents available on a website, similar to some of the documents presently available on the Department's own website, a postal / e-mail translation service wherein a school could send documents for translation. It could also offer an online translation service wherein a school could drop information into existing letter templates and have this translated immediately online. It should be noted that the Belra organisation within the Language Centre in NUI Maynooth operates a limited version of this service and might be suitable for expansion into a national service.

With regard to interpretation, this service could provide both face-to-face and telephone interpretation for school meetings, both scheduled, such as parent-teacher

meetings, and more ad hoc meetings pertaining to issues such as medical emergencies and disciplinary issues.

In addition in this area there is an added responsibility on schools to have policies of prevention and intervention in relation to racist behaviour.

Social and Emotional Support

Schools in the study had strong systems of pastoral support. The emphasis on social and emotional support, according to the teachers, prevented, reduced and mitigated school drop out and low attendance for many students. A clear implication of the findings in relation to social and emotional support is the importance of having such supports formalised in schools. The key element here is the importance of investing in building up strong personal relationships with students so as to understand their needs. Key areas that require formalised systems of support are around transition to post-primary particularly for students with special educational needs and in prevention and intervention around bullying. There is also a need for more evidence-based approaches to dealing with behavioural difficulties in schools. This is linked to attendance difficulties, which continue to frustrate schools. The use of a dedicated, well-planned alternative room as used in one of the case study post primary schools could usefully be researched as a way supporting positive behaviour. This is also recommended by Downes et al. (2006). They also argue the need for the education system to develop alternatives to suspension. A key element here, alluded to by Wedell (2008) is the role of the curriculum and teacher pedagogy as an enabler of social and emotional support or as a contributor to student difficulties.

The findings alluded to in the literature in relation to the disproportionate negative social consequences of inclusion for some students with special educational needs presents a serious challenge for inclusive education. Further research is required on the potential of interventions such as buddy systems and strong pastoral care systems to overcome these difficulties. Teachers need to be aware of the research findings which suggest that they tend to be overly optimistic and positive about the social acceptance of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

The availability of multi-disciplinary services at school level has long been highlighted as an issue. In the absence of sufficient resources to deliver these it is imperative that what is available is distributed equitably according to need whether directly by the HSE or through voluntary bodies, regardless of school location or placement type. The lack of coordination of services continues to cause frustration in schools and such services should be integrated with school supports.

Engaging Parents

Many of the schools combined effective formal and informal communication channels with parents. The more flexible and informal way of communicating with parents helped to facilitate greater involvement from parents who might otherwise feel daunted by the experience. There was evidence of successful practices in engaging parents in the education process. In primary school B the quality of information given to parents of students with special educational needs in relation to placement options was exemplary. There is need for such a formalised system of support for parents of children with special educational needs in choosing placement options for their children.

There was a difference between schools in relation to access to HSCL coordinators. Where available the service was highly valued and other schools reported that the lack of such a post was a barrier to reaching out and including parents. The HSCL service should be empowered to respond to the changing ethnic and linguistic profile in schools. In terms of increasing the involvement of parents in their child's education the benefits of parents helping in the classroom was highlighted.

In addition the provision of education courses for parents was highlighted. One school offered metal work classes for fathers of Traveller students that were very successful in legitimising the school for the families.

In terms of extra curricular engagement the importance and provision of sport activities both in and out of school, in this study, was high on both students' and teachers' agendas. The provision of such resources across the schools was uneven and has equity implications in terms of access. Schools were very conscious of their

role in the wider community and facilities in many cases were widely used a community resource.

Children's Voice

The analysis and discussion of the findings with reference to the research literature indicate that there are implications arising from the study of specific relevance to students. While attempts were made to ascertain the perspectives of students across the three areas of special educational needs, educational disadvantage and minority ethnic education, the implications of the findings pertain to the inclusion of all students.

Alderson (2008) warns that the process of involving students in research and seeking their views “may yield surprising, challenging and even contradictory findings” (p. 45). Such is the case in the present study where, in some cases, findings relating to the students differed to a great extent from those of the adults in the study. The issue of bullying, for example, and the strong feelings that it engenders in the children and young people in the study, can only be understood through the voices of these participants. Devine and Kelly (2006) refer to the “context of child culture” which is “characterised by both inclusionary and exclusionary elements underpinned by a series of rules and regulations clearly understood by children themselves” (p. 129). Omitting students' views from the study may mean that salient factors at school level that contribute to inclusion or exclusion may not emerge in the findings. Additionally, more subtle forms of social inclusion may not be identified or recognised (Gibb et al., 2007).

Alongside the rights-based argument for the participation of children and young people in research, there is a very strong justification from the findings of the present study for taking account of the views of students on all matters affecting them. The challenge is to ensure that all children enjoy the right to express their views. Flexible and creative approaches to facilitate their participation must be developed and evaluated so that all students are included in the development of policy and practice that impact on their lives.

Social Inclusion

An aim of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) is “to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society”. Findings from the study indicate that students are more preoccupied with the social aspects of school life than on academic practices. Playing games together, friendships, engaging in activities before and after school all indicate a social culture that students have to negotiate and navigate on a daily basis. Teachers play an important role in developing social awareness and understanding and in explicit teaching of skills to enhance social relationships between learners. It is important to move away from a welfarist approach to students who are marginalised and from the concept that social inclusion is defined by the ability and willingness of more able students to support those who are less able (Devine & Kelly, 2006).

The curriculum areas of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) should be mediated to the student through integration with other subjects and in specifically allocated curriculum time (NCCA, 1999). Teachers need to be sensitive to the friendship patterns among children in classrooms so that they can plan more effectively and create learning opportunities that allow for the development of social relationships. Co-operative learning groups, for example, are effective in providing meaningful opportunities for interaction and exchange leading to the development of friendships. As “playing games together” was afforded high status by the students in overcoming barriers to inclusion, students should be taught the rules and procedures of games that are commonly played at break periods to facilitate their participation. Mentoring approaches and buddy systems should be developed and evaluated at school level to support the inclusion of students. It is also important that schools accommodate students who find the playground overwhelming and who would benefit from a quiet area or alternative activities at break times.

Bullying

The most common theme to emerge in the study from the responses to the student questionnaire was the theme of bullying. There were explicit references in the students’ comments and drawings of physical aggression, verbal aggression,

exclusion and to a lesser extent racist remarks. The frequency of the responses that included a reference to bullying is striking when one considers that no specific prompts in relation to bullying were given by the researchers. As the questionnaires were completed independently, children were not in a position to prompt each other. The findings from the study are stark and alarming and they highlight the very complex social world of children. Adults' interpretation of this world must be informed by the voices of children and young people. The bullying theme is relatively absent from the findings of the adults in the study. The literature in this area also indicates that teachers and parents are not aware of the extent of bullying in schools (Riley, 2004; ESRI, 2009b).

Clear and effective anti-bullying policies need to be in place in schools and related educational programmes and pedagogies should be based on a respect for all forms of diversity. Collaboration between teachers, parents, students and other relevant personnel is vital in the development of such programmes and policies. School mentoring programmes and peer mediation programmes (Cremin, 2002) have also proven to be successful in reducing levels of bullying in schools.

Curriculum

Practical and activity-based subjects such as PE and Art and projects involving group work were referred to by students as contributing to their inclusion in the school. Students, particularly at post-primary level, also mentioned the range of extra-curricular and social activities such as school assemblies, school play, school trips, basketball and football teams, choir, table tennis, dancing and time to talk in the canteen where students have an opportunity to develop friendships. There was evidence in the findings that students acknowledged the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities that afforded them the opportunity to "*develop and flourish,*" "*become friendly with one another and thus include one another.*" The preference of students for practical and activity-based subjects is supported in the literature (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007; Riley, 2004).

At school level, curriculum planning and design and teachers' shaping of the curriculum in classrooms requires breadth and balance in the curriculum and the inclusion of practical and activity-based subjects for students across the three areas

of special educational needs, educational disadvantage and minority ethnic education. A range and variety of extra-curricular activities should be offered to students to promote the development of friendships and foster more inclusive practices.

Principal

When students were asked in the questionnaire what the principal could do to make them feel included in the school, a common theme to emerge following analysis of the data was the need for the principal to communicate with the students and listen to their voices. In contrast, students also perceived a paternalistic role for the principal who would care for them and help them and also have the power to prevent bullying in school.

As leaders in their schools, principals are in a strategic position to promote and encourage inclusive practices such as the involvement of the students in school matters. School Councils are an effective medium in schools for giving students a voice and promoting their views in policy and practice. Circle Time is also an approach which provides students with an opportunity to express their views in the classroom facilitated by the teacher. The principal, in collaboration with staff and students, is also in a very good position to encourage practices regarded as inclusive by students such as promoting a positive atmosphere and improving the physical environment of the school by keeping it clean.

Teachers

There was a perception among the students in the study that teachers in school contributed to making them feel included and this accords with findings from various studies where students want to have a positive relationship with their teachers (Devine, 2002; Riley, 2004; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Vekic, 2003). Themes related to the craft of teaching also emerged in the present study when students were specifically asked how teachers could help to make children feel included in school. Students expressed the view that teachers could help by making sure that students understand their work and engage them in more group activities. Students who were interviewed referred to the stress of getting homework from two different teachers. The advantages for students of team-teaching were commented on by one student.

There is also evidence in the research literature that students recognise characteristics of good teaching, for example, the benefits of clear explanations and group work (NCCA, 2004, 2006, 2007) and responding to individual requests for help (Riley, 2004).

A co-operative learning environment and positive teacher-student interactions should be promoted by teachers so that all students feel included. Collaboration between class teachers and support teachers is essential to avoid work overload for students. Teachers should engage with a range of appropriate and creative pedagogies, effective teaching strategies, relevant and differentiated curriculum and individual support for learning ensuring equality of learning opportunities for all students.

Special Needs Assistants

Suggestions for the role of special needs assistants were offered by students when asked what others in the school could do to make them feel that they belong. One suggestion was that the students should be allowed by the SNA to be more independent. This view is shared in a study by Woolfson et al. (2007) where students expressed a desire to work independently and to negotiate with teachers about the amount and type of support they receive.

The organisation and management of additional support for students requires ongoing monitoring and review to evaluate its effectiveness. A clear role, based on official guidelines and directives, should be outlined for the special needs assistant (SNA) and the interpretation of this role within the school should be underpinned by the importance of developing independence in students. An opportunity to express their views about the nature and amount of support they receive from the SNA should be provided to students.

In summary, addressing the challenges and barriers to inclusion is a continuous process that involves the reculturing of the education system so the values and principles of inclusion are embedded and not just added on. This will necessitate the restructuring of how time, space, learning resources and personnel are used in schools. The rigidities of the timetable, assessment processes and subject divisions need to change to be more responsive to the needs of all students. Allowing for more

active participation of students in their own learning and listening to the student voice will facilitate more flexible options to emerge.

Recommendations

In the light of the above implications the following recommendations are made. Page references, as applicable, are given as supporting evidence in the report for the recommendations.

System Level

1. The remaining sections of the EPSEN Act should be implemented to strengthen the right of children with special educational needs to an appropriate assessment and meeting of their educational needs.
2. There is a need for further mechanisms, following adequate support, to strengthen school adherence to policy and practice guidelines involving expectations for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review. The regular completion of an internal audit of inclusion in schools may contribute to this process.
3. Prospective principals should be required to demonstrate evidence of their positive attitude and commitment to inclusive education.
4. Schools should appoint coordinators of special educational needs and minority ethnic/minority language students within the existing posts of responsibility structure and they should be part of the leadership team in the school and be required to avail of mandatory professional development.
5. As an interim measure the capacity of some post-primary schools to meet the needs of some students with SEN could be enhanced by the appointment of a specialist SEN primary teacher, given the overall generic nature of their professional education.
6. There is a need for coordinated plans for education at local level to include issues of provision for inclusion of students with SEN and minority ethnic students in particular. This should include issues of transition between primary and post-primary settings, for example, from special classes.
7. In the context of reform of the Junior Certificate the development of curricula, assessment and certification systems should begin by recognising the full diversity

of the student population and be developed to address all levels, needs and interests.

8. Schools should be enabled to offer a full range of programmes to meet the diverse needs of the student body.
9. There is a need for dedicated time outside existing teaching hours for shared planning and collaboration to develop high quality inclusive classroom practices.
10. The use of technology, shared web space and virtual learning environments should be used to facilitate collaboration and planning.
11. The requirement to team teach when in the best interests of students should be part of the professional obligation of all teachers.
12. There is a need to evaluate the capacity of the general allocation model to meet the needs of students with high incidence SEN and consideration given to expanding the model to second level.
13. There is need for a formalised system of support for parents of children with special educational needs in choosing placement options for their children.
14. Access to the benefits of the HSCL service should be extended.
15. Access to multi-disciplinary support services should to be equitable, based on need regardless of location of school or placement type and integrated with school supports.

School Level

16. At post-primary the facilitation of team teaching in mixed ability classes needs to be strengthened.
17. Within the school as the unit of inclusion there should be a flexible interacting continuum of placement options to meet the needs of all students.
18. While acknowledging the key support of special needs assistants, it is important that they do not become a substitute for student access to specialist teaching.
19. The provision of social and emotional support systems for students in schools needs be further strengthened as a means of increasing attendance, reducing behavioural difficulties and providing alternatives to suspension.
20. The concerns of teachers dealing with students with behavioural difficulties need to be further addressed.

Minority Ethnic/Minority Language

21. There is a need to convey the message clearly that first language maintenance and development is of benefit to the minority language learners in the Irish education system.
22. The feasibility of providing interpretation and translation services to schools on a national basis should be examined.
23. There is a need to examine methods of provision of cultural mediation services in schools.

Teacher Education

24. Professional development for principals, as provided by LDS, should cover issues relating to leading and supporting change for inclusion.
25. Professional development for coordinators should include an emphasis on leading and supporting change for inclusion.
26. There is a need for a comprehensive system of professional development for teachers in inclusive education that allows for differentiated levels of specialist expertise across the system.
27. Programmes of professional development should address inter alia, pedagogy for active learning, differentiation, collaborative planning, use of resources, assessment and the use of digital and elearning technologies.
28. Given the integral role that class and subject teachers play in English language development in addition to the support provided by language support teachers, all should have an opportunity to attend professional development courses on teaching minority ethnic and minority language students.
29. Measures to develop the use of formative assessment such as assessment for learning need to be promoted at all levels of teacher education.
30. There is a need for further guidance in the area of early intervention in primary schools.
31. There is a need for specific modules on teaching and learning in multiethnic and multilingual classrooms in teacher education programmes at all levels.

Student Voice

32. There is a need to develop flexible and creative approaches to facilitate the participation of all students in the development of policy and practice that impact on their lives at all levels of the system.
33. At school and class level there is a need for both formal and informal approaches to accessing, listening to and giving due weight to the voice of children in the life of the school.
34. Clear and effective anti-bullying policies need to be in place in all schools and related educational programmes on social relations in school should be based on a respect for all forms of diversity. The monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy should be informed by regular student feedback.

Further Research

35. Further research is required to assess the advantages and disadvantages of a streamed class combined with team-teaching, for students with lower academic abilities.
36. The role of buddy systems, pastoral care systems and other social interventions need further research to ascertain if they can overcome the negative social consequences of inclusion for some students reported in some of the literature.

Costs

In the present economic environment it is important to be realistic about costs and seek ways of achieving policy objectives within existing or a reduced cost structure. Many of the recommendations in relation to teacher education could initially be pursued through realignment of the objectives of some of the existing programmes. Professional development for coordinators could be pursued through the existing post-graduate diplomas in special education in the seven centres around the country and through the SESS structure. The state investment in online learning for special education could be further utilized to enhance professional developments opportunities in the area of minority language and minority ethnic education.

The key aspects of leadership for inclusion could be included within existing initiatives, such as the Toraíocht programme.

Currently the cost for five credit modules for post-graduate accredited courses ranges from €460 to €750 per student. In line with policy changes for continuing professional development that may occur with the Teaching Council, members of the profession may have to self fund CPD to a greater extent than at present.

The possible appointment of some primary teachers at post-primary level would not be in addition to existing staff schedules but within the resource teaching allocation to the schools, thus having no additional cost implications. The appointment of coordinators of special education could be done within the existing post of responsibility structure.

Most of the recommendations require a change in attitude, practice and policy at the level of the school which can be incorporated within existing cost structures. There will be increased costs at second level in relation to extra provision for students with special educational needs as they progress from primary school. The possibility of addressing this increase through a general allocation model should be explored as it might be cost neutral taking the increased numbers into account.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to key informants

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA
(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department
Telephone: +353-1-8842031
Fax: +353-1-8842294



A Chara,

The Special Education Department of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra have been funded by the DES to conduct research related to 'Addressing the Challenges of Inclusion in Irish Schools'.

In order to do this and as an explicit part of our methodology, we are seeking the advice and confidential views of key informants to help identify school/s at primary or post- primary level which exemplify innovative practice in addressing the needs of students with special educational needs and /or minority ethnic and minority language students and/or students experiencing educational disadvantage. Because of your experience and knowledge in this area, we would be obliged if you could recommend a school or schools to us that may become the focus of a case study in the research.

The research issues are further delineated below.

Research issues:

1. Identifying challenges and barriers across differing school contexts, which impede schools in fostering inclusive practices.
2. Policies and practices, which schools adopt in mitigating the effects of these barriers.
3. Examples of creative solutions and innovative thinking in addressing these challenges and barriers. The emphasis will be on exemplars of excellence and equity in meeting the needs of all learners in the school.

In mapping the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools this research will focus on how schools address the diverse needs of students with special educational needs, minority ethnic and minority language students and students who experience educational disadvantage. By conducting case studies of a small number of Irish schools (3 primary and 3 second level), this research plans to develop an understanding of educational policies and practices which are conducive to the provision of an inclusive education for children and young people in Ireland. It will build on existing international research, such as that from the US and the UK that focuses on positive academic and social outcomes for students with special educational needs and on the structural, pedagogical and curricular changes or adaptations needed to effectively include all students in mainstream schools.

We look forward to receiving your recommendation for a school(s) that might be a focus for a case study in the research project. If you email your recommendation by Nov 7th it would be great. We guarantee that all correspondence will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

We wish to express our sincere thanks for your co-operation in this matter.

Le gach dea ghúí
Joe Travers (on behalf of the inclusion research team)

Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire on Inclusion

Dear Teacher,

The Special Education Department of St Patrick's College has been granted research funding by the DES to examine the challenges facing schools in including students with a wide range of needs and from a variety of backgrounds.

Please find attached a questionnaire which aims to elicit your views on the topic of inclusive practice. The focus of this research is on barriers and challenges to inclusive education, and how these may be overcome. For the purposes of the current research, the aim of inclusion is:

“to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education” (1998 Education Act, section 6)

Three specific student groups are targeted in this research:

1.	Students with Special Educational Needs- <i>“Special educational needs means in relation to a person, 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”</i> (EPSEN ACT 2004, section 1)
2.	Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language Students, including Members of the Travelling Community. In addition to members of the Travelling Community this category broadly refers to those students referred to as “newcomer students”, “international students” and/or students learning English as an additional language
3.	Students experiencing Educational Disadvantage- This refers to <i>“the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”</i> . (1998 Education Act, section 32)

It is estimated that the questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to fill out.

Your co-operation in assisting us in this research is greatly appreciated.

Dr. Joseph Travers.

Director, Special Education Department

Section 1: Personal Information

Q 1. Please state how many years you have been teaching

1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years
 11-15 years 16-20 years 21+ years

Q 2. Please state your Gender

Male Female

Q 3. Please list all the relevant qualifications which you hold

Q 4. Does your class /classes include students with the following needs?

	✓
Students with special educational needs	
minority ethnic and/or minority language students	
Students experiencing educational disadvantage	

Q 5. Please tick the relevant boxes to describe the class, **OR** in what capacity you teach

Class Group	✓	Teaching Capacity	✓
Junior Infants		Learning Support / Resource Teacher	
Senior Infants		Multi grade class group	
First Class		English Language Support Teacher	
Second Class		Other	
Third Class			
Fourth Class			
Fifth Class			
Sixth Class			

If you ticked Other, please describe

Section 2: Open Questions

Q. 1 Please state any barriers or challenges that you experience when including each of the following groups in your daily practice

a. Students with special educational needs

b. Students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds

c. Students experiencing educational disadvantage

Q. 2 Thinking about your daily practice at a school and at a class level, how do you attempt to overcome the barriers and challenges that you have outlined in relation to the following

a. Students with special educational needs

b. Students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds

c. Students experiencing educational disadvantage

Q. 3 Looking to the future:

a. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a *school* level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class?

b. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a *class* level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Appendix C: Special Needs Assistant Questionnaire on Inclusion

Dear Special Needs Assistant,

The Special Education Department of St Patrick’s College has been granted research funding by the DES to examine the challenges facing schools in including students with a wide range of needs and from a variety of backgrounds.

Please find attached a questionnaire which aims to elicit your views on the topic of inclusive practice. The focus of this research is on barriers and challenges to inclusive education, and how these may be overcome. For the purposes of the current research, the aim of inclusion is:

“to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education” (1998 Education Act, section 6)

Three specific student groups are targeted in this research:

1.	Students with Special Educational Needs- <i>“Special educational needs means in relation to a person, 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”</i> (EPSEN ACT 2004, section 1)
2.	Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language Students, including Members of the Travelling Community In addition to members of the Travelling Community this category broadly refers to those students referred to as “newcomer students”, “international students” and/or students learning English as an additional language
3.	Students experiencing Educational Disadvantage- This refers to <i>“the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”</i> . (1998 Education Act, section 32)

It is estimated that the questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to fill out. Your co-operation in assisting us in this research is greatly appreciated.

Dr. Joseph Travers.

Director, Special Education Department

Section 1: Personal Information

Q 1. Please state how many years you have been working as an SNA

- 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years
11+ years

Q 2. Please state your Gender

- Male Female

Q 3. Please state any relevant qualifications or training which you have undertaken

Q 4. Please describe the range of students you work with, including (1) students with special education needs, (2) minority ethnic and/or minority language students, and (3) students experiencing educational disadvantage

Section 2: Open Questions

Q 1. Please state any barriers or challenges that you experience when including each of the following groups in your daily practice

a. Students with special educational needs

b. Students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds

c. Students experiencing educational disadvantage

Q 2. Thinking about your daily practice at a school and at a class level, how do you attempt to overcome the barriers and challenges that you have outlined in relation to the following

d. Students with special educational needs

e. Students from minority ethnic and/or minority language backgrounds

f. Students experiencing educational disadvantage

Q 3. Looking to the future:

a. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a *school* level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class?

b. Can you think of any initiatives or strategies that could be implemented at a *class* level to better promote the inclusion of these students in your school and in your class?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Appendix D: Student Questionnaire on Inclusion

Inclusion is about feeling that you belong in your school and that you have the same opportunity to learn and to join in as other students.



About you

I am a boy girl

I am in _____ class/year.

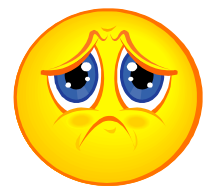
I am _____ years old.

I think *all* children should feel they belong in our school



Yes

Don't know



No

Draw a picture or write to show how *all* children really belong in our school. They are happy.

Draw a picture or write to show how some children do not belong in our school. They are not happy.

How could people make things better so that all children feel they really belong in your school?
Draw or write.

Children can make things better by



Teachers can make things better by.....



The principal can make things better by



Other people in our school can make things better by

Thank you 🌸

Inclusion is about feeling that you belong in your school and that you have the same opportunity to learn and to join in as other students.



About you

I am male female
I am in _____ class/year.
I am _____ years old.

I think all students should feel included in our school



Agree



Don't know



Disagree

Please comment:

The things that make all students feel included in this school are:

The things that make some students feel that they are not included in this school are:

What do you feel could be done to improve the school so that all students feel included?

Students could ..



Teachers could



The principal could



Other people could

Thank you!

Appendix E: Interview questions: Teachers, SNAs, principals

Interviewer briefly explains the focus of the project

This research is looking at inclusive practices. We are looking at how different groups of students are included in mainstream schools and classes. The focus is on challenges faced to including these students, how these may be overcome.

Before the Dictaphone is turned on, the teacher is given an opportunity to read the questionnaire / consent letter through, and shown the schedule, and are asked if there are any questions they reckon are most relevant to them, so that the interviewer can focus on these questions

Warm up:

Do you work with any children with special educational needs?

Are there any children from a minority ethnic or minority language group in your class/school?

Do you work with any children from a disadvantaged background?

What is your understanding of inclusive practice/inclusion?

Questions that map directly onto research questions

1. Could you outline the challenges you have experienced as a _____ (teacher/SNA/principal) in trying to foster inclusive practice (e.g. include children with EAL in your literacy lesson)?
2. Can you give me examples from your practice where you feel you are including effectively (with some degree of success):
 - a. pupils from minority ethnic/ minority language groups
 - b. pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - c. pupils with SEN?
3. Are there any policies in your school that contribute to successful inclusion of
 - a) pupils from minority ethnic and/or minority language groups
 - i. b) pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - ii. c) pupils with SEN?
4. Looking to the future, can you suggest any policies the school could implement, or practices you could engage in to foster greater inclusion?

Thank you for your time

Appendix F: Interview questions: Children

Begin by telling the children the focus of the project. Possibly illustrate with an example of inclusion using the terminology of “belonging” where appropriate.

Main Questions:

- Tell me about times when you feel that you really belong in this school. (Probe to include curriculum, teachers, teacher practice, peers, school rules).
- Can you remember any time when you felt that you didn’t belong in the school or that the school looked after other children better than you because of (where you come from, the language you speak, the problems that you have with reading, mobility etc. – relevant issue).
- Is there anything that the school (principal, teachers, SNAs, other children, children themselves, parents) could do differently to help you enjoy school more and to feel that you belong here.

Appendix G: Interview questions: Parents

Warm-up:

Explain the nature of the project again to the parent to ensure they understood the consent letter

- Do you feel that this is an inclusive school
- Do you feel that the individual needs of your child are being met by the school
 - Positive examples
 - Negative examples
- Can you tell me what you think that the school does well?
 - Mention particular practices, people and policies
- Is there anything that the school could do to improve your child’s experience in the school?

Appendix H: Observation Schedule

**Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools
Case Studies: Observation Schedule**

Observer 1: _____ School: _____
Student: _____
Date of Observation: _____ **Age:** _____
Time: Observer 1: _____ **Class/Year:** _____
Description of student: _____
Location: _____
 Description of level/model of support:

Management and Organisation of Learning

Number of **students** in class: _____
 Number of **teachers** in the class: _____
 Number of **SNA**s in the class: _____
Other adults in the class (eg resource teacher team-teaching with class teacher):

Classroom **environment** (eg. layout, displays including students' work, learning centres etc.):

Organisation of class (eg. whole class/small group/1:1 teaching/paired work, organisation of SNA support, independent work etc.):

The Observers will make notes during the observation, and write it up as a narrative, which will then be coded on using the following:
Inclusive practices/creative solutions/innovative thinking in addressing the challenges and barriers to inclusion. (Indicators adapted from: Booth T. and Ainscow, M. (2002) *Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation*, Centre for Inclusive Studies, Bristol).

<i>1. Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind</i>	<i>Evidence from observation</i>
Curriculum materials and lessons reflect backgrounds, experiences and interests of all learners	
Opportunities for paired and group work as well as individual and whole-class work	
Variety of teaching and learning activities (eg. oral presentation, listening, reading, writing, drawing, problem-solving, use of technology/computers, practical tasks)	
Provision is made for student with SEN (eg. differentiation in terms of lesson objectives, content, resources, levels of	

questioning/explanation, level of language used, expected responses from students with SEN, alternative/augmentative communication systems in place)	
Student is on-task and working purposefully	
Positive learning outcomes for student (eg. student motivation and involvement in the lesson, quality of written work, quality of responses to teacher's questions, understanding of lesson content)	
IEP targets are addressed by all staff working with the student with special educational needs	
2. Students are actively involved in their own learning	<i>Evidence from observation</i>
Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning	
Spoken and written language is made accessible to all students	
Opportunities for students learning English as an additional language to speak and write in their first language	
Classroom displays and other resources help independent learning	
Students are taught how to learn independently	
Teachers explain the purpose of the lesson	
Students with special educational needs are aware of their IEP targets	
3. Lessons develop an understanding of difference	<i>Evidence from observation</i>
Opportunities for students to work with others who differ from themselves in background, ethnicity, impairment and gender	
Staff demonstrate that they respect and value alternative views during class discussions	
4. Students learn collaboratively	<i>Evidence from observation</i>
Students are willing to share their knowledge and skills	
Students see the offering and receiving of help as an ordinary part of classroom activity	
There are established rules for students to take turns in speaking, listening and requesting clarification from each other and from staff	
Students support each other educationally and emotionally	
Students are involved in assessing each other's learning	
5. Assessment contributes to the achievements of all students	<i>Evidence from observation</i>
Teachers take responsibility for the progress of all students in their class	

Assessment is used formatively to develop learning of students	
Assessment leads to modification of teaching plans and practice	
Feedback to students indicate what they have learnt and what they might do next	
Self-assessment is encouraged	
Variety of approaches used in assessment of learning	
Ongoing monitoring and recording of progress of students to identify learning difficulties	
6. Class discipline is based on mutual respect	Evidence from observation
Approaches to discipline encourage self-discipline.	
Staff share concerns and pool their knowledge and skills in overcoming disaffection and disruption	
Class timetable available and classroom rules and routines (eg. transitions) are consistent and explicit	
Students are involved in helping to resolve classroom difficulties	
Clear procedures, understood by students and teachers, for responding to extremes of challenging behaviour	
Co-operation encouraged	
7. Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership	Evidence from observation
Collaboration with planning (eg. lesson plans, weekly plans, IEP) and problem solving	
Team or co-teaching	
Shared reflection on learning of students	
Class teachers and support teachers share in working with individuals, groups and whole class	
8. Special needs assistants (SNAs) support the learning and participation of all students	Evidence from observation
SNAs involved in planning for teaching and are working towards IEP targets	
SNAs aim to make students independent of individual support	
SNAs encourage peer support of students who experience difficulties with learning	
SNAs are careful to avoid getting in the way of young people's relationships with their peers	
Teachers and SNAs are familiar with role description of SNA	
Space in the classroom is organised so that SNAs can work	

with groups as well as individuals	
9. All students take part in activities outside the classroom	Evidence from observation
Students are taught a repertoire of playground games that can include children with a range of skills	
Games and PE lessons include activities in which everyone can take part, irrespective of skill level or impairment	
All students can avail of the same opportunities / facilities e.g. eating, leisure, recreation	
10. Student difference is used as a resource for teaching and learning	Evidence from observation
Students with more knowledge or skills in an area sometimes tutor those with less	
There are opportunities for students of different ages to support each other	
The variety of languages spoken by students are used as an integral part of the curriculum and as a linguistic resource for language work	
11. Staff develop resources to support learning and participation	Evidence from observation
Teachers develop shared, reusable resources to support learning	
Range of good quality books for all learners in a variety of languages and at different reading levels	
Appropriately adapted curriculum materials (eg large print, audio-visuals) are available for students with special educational needs	
Computers are integrated into teaching across the curriculum	
Worksheets are used only when they are clearly understood by students to extend their learning	
Resources are directed at encouraging independent learning	
Resources are directed at preventing barriers to learning	

Additional comments on evidence of inclusive practices / ways of addressing barriers/challenges to inclusion while observing the student:

- Recalls of forgotten material (Events that come back to you later)
- Interpretive ideas (notes on your analysis of the situation addressing the research question)
- Personal impressions and feelings
- Additional information (eg. IEPs, behaviour record forms)

Appendix I: Consent Letter – teacher consent for interview

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA
(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department
Telephone: +353-1-8842031
Fax: +353-1-8842294



3rd March 2009

Dear Staff Member,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received funding from the Department of Education (DES) to carry out a study looking at the challenges faced by Irish schools in becoming more inclusive. The study will entail a series of case studies looking at innovative practice in schools to overcome barriers and challenges to including three specific groups of students: (1) Students with Special Educational Needs, (2) Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language Students, including Members of the Travelling Community, and (3) Students experiencing Educational Disadvantage.

Six educational sites where there is evidence of work in relation to the development of inclusive practice and policy, are being selected for these case studies. Having consulted with various relevant agencies and people in the field with regard to identifying schools that display evidence of good practice, your school was highly recommended.

Therefore, we are now seeking your permission to progress with this aspect of the study. We have already been in contact with the principal, who has kindly agreed to be involved. Participation will involve observation of two pupils from your school over a one or two day period, followed up by interviews with their principal, teachers, special needs assistants, parents, the pupils themselves and any other professionals involved with these pupils. Participation in this research study by individual members of the school community will be on a voluntary basis. Each individual will be free to choose whether or not to participate, and individuals will be free to withdraw their consent at any time.

Your school and every member of the school community will be given a pseudonym to help preserve anonymity and within the limitations of the law, confidentiality will be respected at all times. Every effort will be taken to ensure that neither your school nor any individual will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the research. However, in view of the fact that the sample is small, anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

There is no anticipated perceived risk to the school or its members as a result of participation in this research study. It is hoped that participation in the study will provide schools with an opportunity to reflect on their policy and practice in relation to their role in the current educational context. It will also provide an opportunity for your school to "showcase" the good practice in which you are already involved. A summary of the findings will be sent to all participating schools.

If you give your permission to participate in the study, please complete the attached consent form and return it. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Joseph Travers,
Director of Special Education

Research: Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools

Consent Form

I have read / heard about the study on addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools and I understand what is involved.

I give consent to participate in this study which will be conducted by staff of the Special Education Department, St Patrick's College.

Signed:

Name:

School Name:

Date:

Appendix J: Consent Letter – parent and student consent letter for questionnaire

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA

(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department

Telephone: +353-1-8842031



12th March 2009

Dear Parents and Student,

A research team from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received money from the Department of Education to carry out a study entitled "Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools". The Board of Management and the principal, _____, have given us permission to work in the school. We are now asking you to give consent for your child to take part in this study.

Taking part in this study will mean completing a short questionnaire, by writing or drawing, in the classroom. The children will be given an opportunity to express their views on what schools can do to help children feel a sense of "belonging" or inclusion within the school community. The questionnaire will be introduced by the research team in the presence of the class teacher.

All children will be given the choice whether or not to participate in filling out the questionnaire, and all responses will be anonymous. It is entirely up to you whether or not to agree to allow your child to take part in the study. If you do not want him/her to take part it will make no difference to how your child is treated in school. We do not believe that he/she will come to any harm by taking part in the study. Instead, we hope that your child's school will learn a lot by participating and that your child and other children will be helped by what we learn.

If you are willing to take part in the study, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to _____. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated. If you have any queries, please feel free to contact me at 01 8842040, or at joe.travers@spd.dcu.ie.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Joseph Travers
Director of Special Education

Consent Form (Parents)

I have read about the study “Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools”.
I understand what is involved.

I am willing to give permission for my child
to take part in the study.

Yes No

Name of Child (please print): _____

Parent (print name): _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Dear Student,

We are researchers from St Patrick’s College, who are interested in finding out more about how your school works. We will be coming into your class to give you the chance to tell us how your school helps you and other children feel that you belong. You will be given a chance to write or draw your own ideas on how the school could help include all children. Your teacher will be in the class when this happens. You do not have to take part if you do not want to, and anything you contribute will not be shared with others in the school.

Yours Sincerely,
Dr Joseph Travers

Consent Form (Child)

I have read/heard about the study “Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools”. I understand what is involved.

I am willing to take part in the study

Yes No

Name (please print): _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix K: Consent Letter – parent and student consent for observation and interview

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA

(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department

Telephone: +353-1-8842031



9th March 2009

Dear Parents,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received money from the Department of Education (DES) to carry out a study looking at Inclusion. The focus is on the difficulties faced by schools in catering for children with a range of needs, and from a variety of different backgrounds, within the mainstream classroom. This includes children with Special Educational Needs, children from a Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language background, including children from the Travelling Community, and children experiencing Educational Disadvantage. We are conducting research looking at the difficulties of successfully including these children in mainstream classes, and how schools attempt to overcome these difficulties.

The Board of Management has given us permission to work with your child's school. We have been in contact with the principal, and we are now asking you to give consent for your child to take part in this study. If you allow your child to take part, he/she will be observed in his/her classes and in the school and then interviewed by us. These observations are intended to provide evidence of good innovative practice to allow your child to be included within the school. We would also like to hear your views and so we would appreciate it if we could also interview you as part of the study.

The interview will take place at your child's school on a date and time agreed with you and the principal and will take approximately half an hour. The discussion will be audio-taped for accuracy.

It is entirely up to you whether or not to agree to take part in the study. You are free to opt in or out at any time. If you do not want to take part it will make no difference to how your child is treated in school. If you do agree, we will do everything possible to make sure that the study is confidential. That means that we will not use your real name or the real name of the school during the study or later when we are writing up the results of the study. We do not believe that you will come to any harm by taking part in the study. Instead, we hope that your child's school will learn a lot by participating and that your child and other children will be helped by what we learn.

If you are willing to take part in the study, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to the principal. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Joseph Travers
Director of Special Education

Consent Form (Parents)

I have read about the study on the 'Addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools'. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study. I understand what is involved.

I am willing to take part in the study. Yes No

I am willing to give permission for my child to take part in the study. Yes No

Name of Child (please print): _____

Parent (print name): _____

Signed: _____
Parent

Date: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Appendix L: Consent Letter – Chairperson of the Board of Management

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, DRUMCONDRA

(A College of Dublin City University)

Special Education Department

Telephone: +353-1-8842031

Fax: +353-1-8842294



2nd March 2009

Dear Chairperson,

A group of staff from the Special Education Department at St Patrick's College has received funding from the Department of Education (DES) to carry out a study looking at the challenges faced by Irish schools in becoming more inclusive. The study will entail a series of case studies looking at innovative practice in schools to overcome barriers and challenges to including three specific groups of students: (1) Students with Special Educational Needs, (2) Minority Ethnic and/or Minority Language Students, including Members of the Travelling Community, and (3) Students experiencing Educational Disadvantage.

Six educational sites where there is evidence of work in relation to the development of inclusive practice and policy, are being selected for these case studies. Having consulted with various relevant agencies and people in the field with regard to identifying schools that display evidence of good practice, your school was highly recommended.

Therefore, we are now seeking permission of the Board of Management to progress with the case study aspect of the study. We have already been in contact with the principal, _____, who has kindly agreed to be involved. There will be two phases to the case study. A questionnaire will be distributed to all teachers, SNAs, and relevant professionals. These questionnaires will gather views on inclusive policy and practice. These questionnaires will be collected prior to phase two, where members of the Special Education Dept. will be in the school for two days to conduct the case study. Participation will involve observation of two pupils from your school over a one or two day period, followed up by interviews with their principal, teachers, special needs assistants, parents, the pupils themselves and any other professionals involved with these pupils. The views of the children in the classrooms observed will also be documented using a class-based literacy activity, where appropriate. The venue for the case study will be the school. Document analysis will also be conducted, in consultation with the principal. Participation in this research study by individual members of the school community will be on a voluntary basis. Each individual will be free to choose whether or not to participate, and individuals will be free to withdraw their consent at any time.

Your school and every member of the school community will be given a pseudonym to help preserve anonymity and within the limitations of the law, confidentiality will be respected at all times. Every effort will be taken to ensure that neither your school nor any individual will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the research. However, in view of the fact that the sample is small, anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

There is no anticipated perceived risk to the school or its members as a result of participation in this research study. It is hoped that participation in the study will provide schools with an opportunity to reflect on their policy and practice in relation to their role in the current

educational context. It will also provide an opportunity for your school to “showcase” the good practice in which you are already involved. A summary of the findings will be sent to all participating schools.

If you give permission for your school to participate in the study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to _____. Your co-operation in this research is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Joseph Travers
Director of Special Education

Research: Addressing the Challenges of Inclusion in Irish Schools

Consent Form

We have read about the study on addressing the challenges of inclusion in Irish schools and we understand what is involved. We give consent to members of our school community to participate in this study which will be conducted by staff of the Special Education Department, St Patrick’s College.

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: _____

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