

Special Education Needs

in Irish Medium Schools

**All-Island research on the support
and training needs of the sector**

June 2010



An Chomhairle um Oideachas
Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta



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Executive Summary

Currently, there are 50,000+ children attending Irish medium education throughout Ireland. This includes children attending naíonraí/ pre-school learning, primary and post-primary education in schools in the Gaeltachts, and Gaelscoileanna in the north and south of Ireland. The accepted evidence on SEN acknowledges that 20% of children will experience learning difficulties at some point during their time at school but only a very small percentage of these children will be assessed as having special education needs.

The three most commonly identified categories of special education needs in the Gaeltacht are; mild general learning disability, specific learning difficulty and borderline general learning disability.¹

The three most commonly identified SEN in Gaelscoileanna (primary schools) in the south of Ireland are; dyslexia, borderline mild general learning disability, and mild general learning disability.²

The three most commonly identified SEN in Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland are; moderate general learning disability, mild general learning disability and social and emotional behavioural difficulties.³

A high level of uncertainty as to what are the most appropriate strategies to adopt when providing for a child with SEN pervades the IME sector. Teachers, parents and professional support services have all expressed the need for better information and guidance with particular reference to SEN and bilingualism, SEN and immersion learning and/or the necessary provisions for the SEN (assessments, supports, resources), especially when the first language of the child is Irish.

The decision as to what is in the best interests of the child with special educational needs (SEN) in Irish medium education is based on a number of factors, such as the family context, the child's general development and his or her own preferences.

However, the determination of what is the optimum outcome for the child is also influenced – to varying degrees – by considerations as to whether or not the teacher and school have the operational capacity to provide for the child's needs, the professional competence and confidence to do so, and the access to the relevant support services.

This report is concerned with investigating the training and support needs of teachers providing for children with special educational needs in Irish medium education.

A number of comprehensive statements, based on quantitative and qualitative data, have set out the training and support needs of Irish Medium Education(IME) teachers providing for children with Special Education Needs(SEN).

In fact, a review of research reports on surveys of and consultations relating to the issues of training, SEN and IME, demonstrates consistent findings as to the needs and priorities of the sector.

¹ Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004*. Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, COGG Bealtaine 2005, Chapter 3, p. 31

² Nic Gabhann, *Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna*, Master's thesis 2008

³ Ní Chinnéide, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*, Department of Education (NI), September 2009. Section 4.1

There are no significant differences in the priority areas of need identified by teachers in schools in the Gaeltacht and in Gaelscoileanna North and South. All emphasise the need for relevant assessment tools, relevant training, appropriate resources, (particularly graded reading materials) and the need for professional support services that can meet the needs of the sector.

Policies and strategies for providing for children with SEN in schools are evolving. Understanding of bilingualism and second language acquisition is also increasing. There is a need to develop strategies to ensure that teachers, and the support services, can remain abreast of new information, best practice and acquire the training to apply, monitor, and evaluate new approaches in Irish medium education.

Different reasons prevail in the North and in the South to explain the lack of development of SEN training and support infrastructure to provide for the specific needs of SEN children in IME settings. However, a number of positive initiatives are underway to begin to redress this situation but there is a clear need for a more coordinated strategy and systematic change in planning and implementation processes.

The collation of information on the availability of existing relevant training, resources, and support services was considered a valuable activity by teachers and key stakeholders in the sector. This material was produced in the form of a Briefing Paper as an initial step to update the sector. It is attached as Appendix 1. However, it is essential to develop and maintain information and communication networks amongst the key stakeholders in the sector.

The sharing of information and the adoption of a North-South approach to building training and resource programmes should be further developed on a more structured basis. There was evidence of close and effective cooperation on a North-South basis in certain initiatives, which have grown out of personal contacts and connections. For example, the exchange of information during the course of the research project led to the adaptation of a High Support Learning Programme, operating in Dublin, which will be piloted in Belfast through the medium of Irish.

The development of assessment tests for children in IME settings is an area of activity that may benefit in particular from this type of approach.

The particular nature of IME settings, particularly small rural schools, requires that courses and training programmes should be provided in ways that are accessible to teachers in circumstances where geographical distances and the lack of suitable substitute cover could make attendance difficult. Exploratory roundtable discussions in relation to adapting an existing online SEN training course to meet the needs of the sector took place as part of this research project and a North-South joint initiative has been proposed. Details of the proposals are outlined in the report.

Recommendations

While it is possible to set out several recommendations to advance the SEN training and support needs of IME teachers, this report intends to focus on two key recommendations (a diagrammatical illustration is set out below).

RECOMMENDATION (1): The Department of Education and Skills⁴ and the Department of Education jointly, or separately, develop a special education needs infrastructure to meet the requirements of Irish medium education settings.

When the SEN training and support needs of the IME schools are analysed it is clear that change is required to each element of SEN provision, from the content of SEN training materials in teacher training colleges to the level of public awareness amongst teachers, parents, professionals and all involved with providing for children with in this category. The research to date focuses primarily on the identification of needs, with much less attention to the strategies or processes through which changes could be implemented.

It is difficult to envisage that initiatives on all of the training and support needs could be developed, coordinated, integrated, and implemented without a more formal infrastructure to accommodate these developments. This need for better coordination is recognised in the draft strategy, **20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language⁵** where it is proposed that the remit of COGG's work would be expanded to include, *inter alia*, responsibility for developing educational policies, syllabi, and support services, including psychological services, for Irish medium education schools.⁶

It is recommended that the infrastructure to support SEN in IME would need to be informed by a comprehensive all-Ireland research strategy, and by best international practice. The research findings would provide the information platform to inform training content, policy and practice. This would go a long way to clarify the issues surrounding SEN and IME. It would raise confidence and public awareness amongst teachers, primarily, but it would also increase awareness amongst health and educational support professionals, training providers and parents.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Education support the development of an information and communication strategy around SEN and Irish medium education.

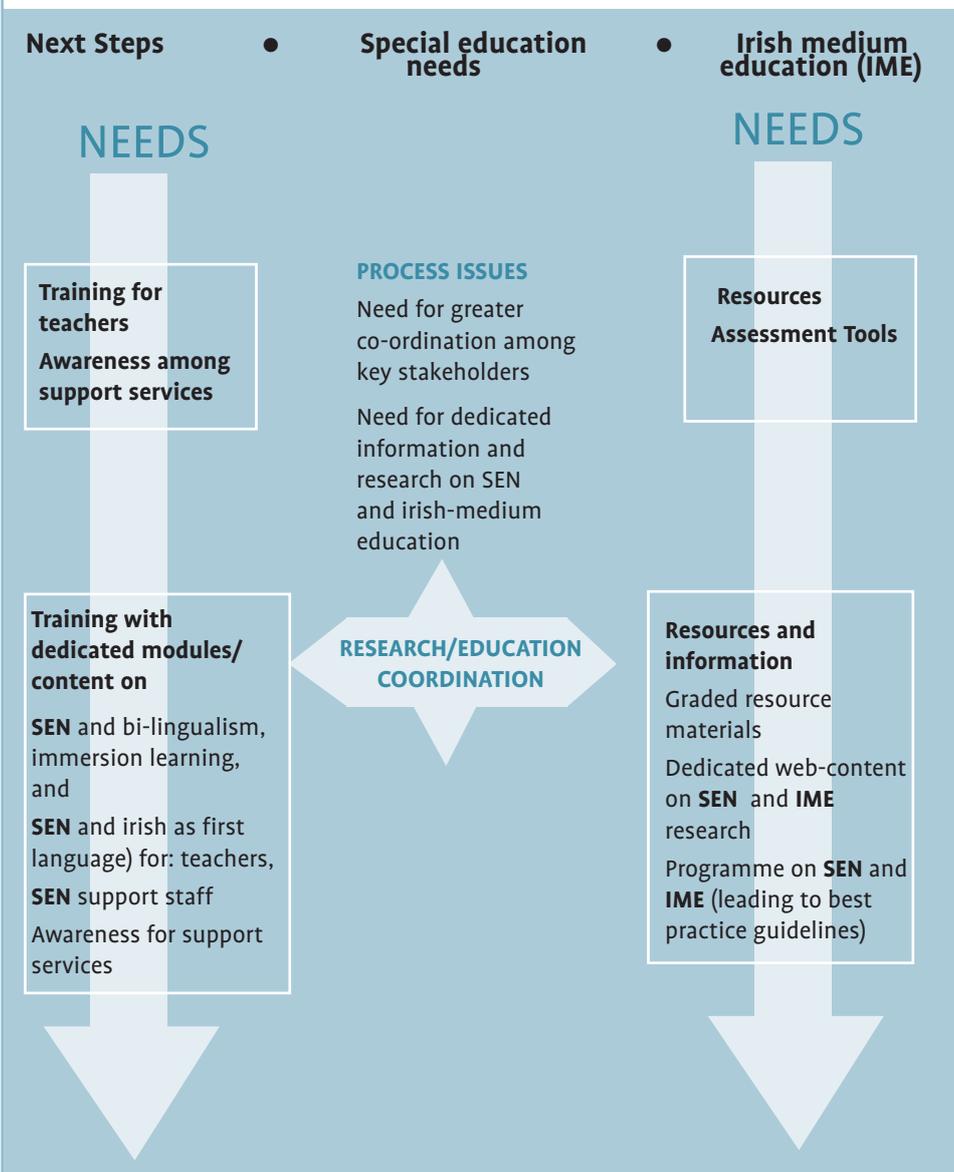
It is recommended that the two Departments support the development of a targeted coordination strategy to harness existing expertise, knowledge, and resources available in this specialised area of SEN and IME, with a particular emphasis on supporting teachers in schools. This recommendation is intrinsically linked to Recommendation 1 above. However, its emphasis would be on building on the nascent developments and initiatives already in place throughout Ireland thus enhancing the pool of knowledge, expertise, and resources available to the sector. The lessons learned from practical initiatives and pilot projects on the ground should serve to inform the sector. This information is not currently being monitored or collected in any coordinated manner.

⁴ On 23 March 2010 the Department of Education and Science was renamed the Department of Education and Skills.

⁵ The Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, November 2009.

⁶ Section 6: Remsí Gníomh, An Córas Oideacháis. <http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/index.html>

The research findings suggest that practical information on existing resources needs to be made available in accessible forms to the sector.
A diagrammatical illustration is set out below:



Introduction

This project grew out of research on the Special Education Needs (SEN) of children in bilingual (Irish-English) educational settings in the north of Ireland,⁷ carried out by POBAL, the umbrella organisation for the Irish speaking community in the North, under commission from the Department of Education (NI). One of the early findings from that research report, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*⁸ highlighted the need for further research in relation to the education and support needs of teachers providing for children with special education needs in the IME sector. POBAL received funding from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) to carry out a one-year research project - with an all-Ireland focus - to examine the training and support needs of the IME sector. The terms of reference centre on the training and support needs of teachers and pre-school leaders providing for children with SEN who are attending Irish medium education (IME) schools, i.e. pre-school, primary and post – primary schools, in the Gaeltachts⁹ or Gaelscoileanna in both jurisdictions. Commissioned by POBAL in January 2009 the research was carried out under the auspices of an Advisory Committee made up of:

- Seosamh Mac Ionmhain, Senior Education Psychologist, National Education Psychological Service (Dublin).
- Dr. Mairéad Uí Dhomhnaill, Special Education Department St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
- Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhríde, Education Officer, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (NI).
- Siobhán Ní Dhuill, Principal, Gaelscoil an Bhradáin Feasa (COGG).
- Jill Garland, St. Mary's University College (NI).
- Janet Muller, Chief Executive, POBAL (NI).

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference set about to:

- Investigate the training, resources and supports available and relevant to SEN and IME.
- To identify the training needs of the teachers providing for children with SEN.
- To identify the support, awareness and communication needs of the IME sector in relation to SEN:
- To make recommendations in relation to the needs of the sector, in particular with regard to the provision of training and support, identifying examples of good practice where practicable.

Research Plan

The research plan and methodology was discussed and agreed at the first Advisory Committee meeting.¹⁰ It was agreed that there would be three phases to the research work, namely: (i) the collation of information on existing provision, resources and services, (ii) the dissemination of this information to the schools and other key stakeholders and, (iii) the completion of a strategic report. Table 1 on page 6 sets out the primary actions taken in relation to this work.

However, at the first Advisory Committee meeting, and as a consequence of the presentations made by Committee members in their field of expertise, it became apparent that there were nascent proposals and initiatives – particularly in relation to the provision of training tailored to the needs of the sector – that seemed central to this research. It was agreed that the Research Officer should contact the parties involved and offer to facilitate the exchange of information on a North/South basis in relation to these initiatives (see Table 2 on page 6). As a consequence, roundtable discussions were organised by the Research Officer in relation to two specific initiatives. The content of these training courses is set out in detail later in this report.

⁷ Ní Chinnéide, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*, POBAL for Department of Education (NI), September 2009

⁸ Ibid. This report is under active consideration by the Department of Education.

⁹ The Gaeltacht areas are located in the counties of Galway, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, Meath, Mayo, and Donegal. The current population of the Gaeltacht districts is approximately 91,862 (according to the 2006 Census in the Republic of Ireland), which is 2.1% of the Irish Republic's 4,239,848 people.

¹⁰ 2 April 2009, Belfast.

Table 1:

Phase	Action	Output	Comment
1	Investigate the training, resources and services currently available to the sector in relation to SEN and IME. Review literature in relation to the training and support needs of SEN in IME. Meet with key stakeholders in the sector.	Briefing Paper in relation to availability of training, resources and services and identification of key priorities in these areas.	Difficulties in accessing information on IME and SEN were identified in preliminary interviews with key stakeholders. It was agreed that the production of a Briefing Paper with this information would be a valuable resource for the sector.
2	Disseminate the information to schools and other key professionals and statutory bodies, providing the opportunity for interested parties to proffer additional information and/or samples of good practice.	660 schools (pre-schools, primary and post-primary) in the north and south of Ireland received a copy of the bilingual Briefing Paper and a short survey form. The Departments of Education and other key bodies were also forwarded copies of the Briefing Paper.	Follow-up telephone contact made with a small sample of schools (with a focus on pre-school settings). The Briefing Paper was also presented to the Principals' Forum in Belfast in September 2009, and a short briefing of the Report was also made to teachers and Classroom Assistants at a workshop on SEN and IME organised by Gaelscoileanna in November 2009. Copies were then sent to participants.
3	Prepare Strategic Report in relation to the training and support needs of the sector.	Key Recommendations	Its primary focus is to assist in considering practical steps forward.

Table 2:

Initiative	Parties	Action	Outcome/Comment
On-line training	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), Coláiste Mhuire, Coláiste Phádraig, Institute of Child Education and Psychology (ICEP), An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).	Roundtable meeting in Dublin, June 2009 Joint Proposal developed to prepare two additional modules to existing on-line training course, <i>Certificate/Diploma in Special/Inclusive Education</i> , to cover bi-lingualism and SEN and immersion education and SEN.	The initiative grew out of proposals, and exploratory talks by CnaG with St. Patrick's College, and ICEP to adopt their existing on-line course to meet the needs of IME sector. The course has a number of interactive communication methods. The proposals were submitted to the Departments of Education for consideration.
High Support Training Programme	Dublin VEC (Dr. Jim Connolly), Coláiste Feirste.	Exploratory meeting in Dublin, April 2009, between the parties. Follow-up meetings in Belfast, including the Council for Curriculum Advisory and Examinations (CCEA).	Proposals drawn up and submitted in relation to the implementation of this programme, operating through Irish, as a pilot in Coláiste Feirste.

The Advisory Committee was also keenly aware of the fact that the research was being conducted during a period when policies in relation to IME, teacher training, and SEN were out for consultation and/or under review.¹¹ With this in mind, it was agreed that the Research Officer should seek to engage with these processes and, where possible, make submissions relevant to the research work. A submission was made to the Department of Education (DE) in relation to the consultation process on SEN and Inclusion¹² and the Research Officer also briefed the Department of Education and Skills on the work.¹³

¹¹ General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland, *Review of Teacher Competencies and Continued Professional Development*, 2005, The Conway Report, a study of the continuum of teacher education, commissioned by the Teacher's Council of Ireland, 2009. *An evaluation of the provision for special educational needs in Primary Schools 2007/08*, Education and Training Directorate, February 2009, *Special Education Needs in the Pre-School Sector*, A survey by the Education Training Inspectorate, 2007, *Policy Proposals Consultation Document on the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*, DENI, August 2009, *Language and Literacy in Irish medium Primary Schools: Report on the Consultation and Seminar*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, January 2007, *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities issued in 2007*, Ó Duibhir, P: "Oideachas agus forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach múinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna, Plécháipéis, COGG, Uimhir 2, 2006, Damian Knipe, Grace Bunting, Joe Ó Labhraí, Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh St. Mary's University College, Belfast: "The Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in Irish-Medium Education", Research Report Series, Department of Education, No. 34 of 2004, Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004. Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta*, COGG Deireadh Fómhair 2006, *Induction and Early Professional Development of Beginning teachers in Irish Medium Schools*, Education & Training Inspectorate, 2007, Deirdre Nic Gabhann, *Survey of Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna*, 2006-7, Master's thesis, 2008. *Review of Irish Medium Education*, DENI, 2008.

¹² Submissions were requested in relation to the consultation: *Policy Proposals Consultation Document on the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*, DENI, August 2009

¹³ This sentiment, that a collation of existing resources and training in relation to SEN and IME would be a very valuable support and resource in its own right, was echoed by many of the key stakeholders contacted in relation to the research.

Research Methodology

A review was carried out of key reports and research studies in the three overlapping areas of SEN, IME and teacher training in the north and south of Ireland.¹⁴ This review yielded valuable data on the training and support needs and priorities of teachers and pre-school leaders providing for children with special education needs in the Irish medium education sector. Because there were striking similarities in the priority lists as set out in different reports, the researcher sought to focus in on these priority areas, namely:

- The availability of relevant assessment tools.
- The provision of relevant training.
- The availability of resources, particularly graded reading materials.
- The provision of relevant professional support services.

Key stakeholders in the Irish medium education sector, as well as departmental bodies, organisations, and colleges involved in providing services to SEN and/or Irish medium education were contacted to assess current provisions and relevant developments. The results were disseminated in a briefing paper in September 2009. The briefing paper outlined existing provisions, reported on new project proposals, and detailed key priorities for the sector, as gleaned from the reports. This information was circulated to all Irish medium education providers in the country (660 centres) and to several key stakeholders at policy level, as well as academics and service providers working in this area. In addition to updating all parties on current available resources and services, the briefing paper also requested feedback and additional information from the stakeholders.¹⁵

The coordination role of the research project evolved throughout the term of the project to facilitate the exchange of information and link project initiatives in key areas of the research. As a consequence, a joint proposal was submitted in June 2009 to the two Departments of Education to create two additional modules to the existing accredited on-line SEN training programme.¹⁶ Currently the course has 4 modules on inclusion, understanding autism (effective management and teaching strategies), dyslexia, and challenging behaviour and mild general learning disabilities. Further details on the course are set out in the section on training in Appendix 1 of this report and online.¹⁷ It was also submitted for inclusion on the agenda of a new all-Ireland committee tasked with examining Irish medium education.¹⁸ It is proposed as one element in the development of a comprehensive training programme for teachers and other key stakeholders. A follow-up briefing meeting was held with the Department of Education and Science in September 2009.

Furthermore, POBAL's researcher also facilitated the sharing of information and a roundtable discussion around a high support training programme for post-primary education in Belfast between Dr. Jim Connolly, Psychological Service Support, Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and Coláiste Feirste. The High Support Learning programme had obvious potential for the newly established SEN Unit developed by Coláiste Feirste in Belfast. POBAL's researcher on the project facilitated a meeting in April 2009 and subsequent meetings led to firm proposals being developed in conjunction with CCEA to pilot the project through Irish in Coláiste Feirste. It is hoped that the programme will be ready to be implemented in September 2010. Full details of this training programme are set out under Assessment, in Appendix 1.

¹⁴ A wider literature review of international research on bilingualism and SEN and immersion education and SEN was not undertaken as Ní Chinnéide's Report, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*, commissioned by DE(NI), 2009 contains a comprehensive literature review.

¹⁵ A short survey sheet was attached to the Briefing Paper sent to the schools and the key questions related to number of children with any special needs in the previous school year, and with more detailed account of the actual needs of the child/children under the SEN spectrum. Questions also related to the language used in providing support to the child, the three most commonly used support materials, and provided an opportunity for the teachers to give an account of the most frequent challenges they face when providing for children with SEN. 20 schools provided feedback.

¹⁶ Framework proposal to meet the SEN professional development needs of teachers working in Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht areas. June 2009.

¹⁷ <http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/administration/admissions/documents/FAQ.pdf>

¹⁸ This committee was convened to examine ways to enhance cross-border cooperation in relation to Irish medium Education, primarily at post-primary level. It was headed up by Dr. Robson Davison, Deputy Secretary, DE (NI) and Paddy McDonagh, General Assistant Secretary, Department of Education and Science (DES).

Context Setting: Facts and Figures

This research is centred on the specific needs of the IME sector in providing for children with SEN. Account must also be taken of:

- Wider policy and social approaches to education and training.
- The changing understanding of special educational needs in both jurisdictions.
- Emerging national and international research on bilingual learning.
- The different development needs of Irish medium education North and South.

As a result, an attempt is made below to examine how the training and support needs of the Irish Medium (IM) teachers interact with existing policy structures and practice models.

How many children are in IME?

There are approximately 50,000 children attending IME schools, including primary and post-primary education, in the Gaeltacht and Gaelscoileanna, North and South as set out in Table 3 below. In addition to this, it is estimated that there are a further 5,000 children in pre-school education.¹⁹ For the purposes of this report the term Gaelscoil or Gaelscoileanna denotes IME settings outside of the Gaeltachts.

Table 3:

Number of children attending IME, in schools in the Gaeltacht and Gaelscoileanna.

	Gaeltacht ²⁰	South ²¹	North ²²
Primary school/bunscoil	8,368	27,342	2,763
Post-Primary school/meánscoil	3,138	7,140	607
Total	12,506	34,482	3,360

The data available for the period 2007-08 shows that there are 645 centres of learning, comprised of 365 bunscoileanna and meánscoileanna, and 280 pre-school centres.²³

Table 4:

Number of schools, including early pre-school provision.

	Naíscóil/Naíonra	Bunscoil	Meánscoil	
North (12%)	42	32	1 (+ 1 stream)	76
South ²⁴ (53%)	167	136	27 (+ 13 streams)	343
Gaeltachtaí (35%) ²⁵	71	133	22	226
Total	280	301	64	645

¹⁹ The information available from Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta Teoranta states that almost 1000 children are attending naíonraí in the Gaeltachts.

²⁰ Figures taken from National Education Psychological Service report: based on data 2005-06

²¹ Figures from Gaelscoileanna Teo. Statistics 2008-09, www.gaelscoileanna.ie

²² Ibid.

²³ This figure is a compilation of data from a number of sources including Gaelscoileanna, NEPS, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta and FNT. As all the information is not collated during the same timeframe it is possible that there are slight discrepancies in the overall data, where a new school, or an amalgamation or school closure, may be counted twice or omitted.

²⁴ Information from Forbairt Naíonra Teo (FNT) states that there are 165 centres in the South of Ireland and 44 centres in the North of Ireland serving 4,000 children, Tóstal na Gaeilge, 2008.

²⁵ Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta.

What is the range of special education needs in the IME sector?

The definition of SEN in the south of Ireland, as set out in the EPSEN Act states:

“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.²⁶

The definition of SEN embodied in the north of Ireland Code of Practice states that a child has special educational needs if he or she has learning difficulties and needs special help. This help is known as special educational provision.²⁷ A learning difficulty is where a child finds it much harder to learn than most children of the same age, or is a disability which makes it difficult to use the educational facilities in the area.

Alongside these more formal definitions, children are also referred to as having ‘learning difficulties’. It is perhaps useful to envisage the needs of the child as falling on a continuum where some children may require learning support at some stage in their life while other children may require more constant support. It is said that 20% of children will experience learning difficulties at some point during their time at school, but only a very small percentage of these children will be assessed as having special education needs.²⁸

For example, special education needs, as set out by the Code of Practice in the north of Ireland includes:²⁹ Learning difficulties; special learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia, autism; emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD); physical disability; sensory impairments: e.g. hearing difficulties, visual difficulties; speech and language difficulties and medical conditions.

The list of special needs, as set out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES)³⁰ is similar, including: physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems, borderline general learning disability, mild general learning disability, moderate general learning disability, severe/profound general learning disability, autism/autistic spectrum disorders, specific learning disability, specific speech and language disorder, children with SEN arising from an assessed syndrome, multiple disabilities, exceptional ability/giftedness.

The data available, in relation to SEN and IME,³¹ suggest that:

- The three most commonly identified SEN in schools in the Gaeltacht are mild general learning difficulty (21%), specific learning difficulty (20%) and borderline general learning difficulty (19%).³²
- The three most commonly identified SEN in Gaelscoileanna (primary schools) in the south of Ireland are: dyslexia (29.9%), borderline mild general learning difficulty (16.5%), and mild general learning difficulty (16%).³³
- The three most commonly identified SEN in Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland are: moderate general learning disability (35%), mild general learning disability (19%) and social and emotional behavioural difficulties (15%).³⁴

²⁶ Education of Persons with Special Education Needs, 30 of 2004.

²⁷ However, a consultation process underway in the north of Ireland, titled Policy Proposals Consultation document on the Way Forward for Special Education and Inclusion, DENI, August 2009 introduces the term ‘Additional Needs’ to encompass the diversity of needs falling within the remit of Family Circumstance, Learning Environment, Social and Emotional and Special Education Needs.

²⁸ Code of Practice, 1999 (Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996

²⁹ Code of Practice, *ibid.*

³⁰ The Department of Education and Science (DES) changed its name to the Department of Education and Skills in March 2010.

³¹ There is no disaggregation of data in relation to SENs and IME in the south of Ireland. In a telephone interview with the Head of Research of the National Council for Special Education, 12 May 2009, the Research Officer was informed that research has been commissioned to seek to identify the data sets available and devise an appropriate system to record data in relation to SEN.

³² Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004*. Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, COGG Bealtaine 2005, Chapter 3, p. 31

³³ Nic Gabhann, *The Special Education Needs of Children in Gaelscoileanna*, Master’s Thesis, *op cit.*

³⁴ Ní Chinnéide, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*, Department of Education (NI), September 2009. Section 4.1

³⁵ EPSEN Act, 2004.

³⁶ Implementation Report, the Phased Introduction of the EPSEN Act 2004, National Council for Special Education (NCSE), 2006.

³⁷ The NCSE Implementation Plan has not been approved.

³⁸ It is also stated that the role of the SESS is to facilitate a partnership approach involving support teams of practising teachers, Education Centres, the Inspectorate, the National Psychological Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Council for Special Education, Third Level Colleges, Health Board Personnel, Teacher Unions and other relevant bodies and services. In a similar spirit of partnership the SESS is stated to maximise the benefits of North-South co-operation. www.sess.ie

In the context of 50,000+ children attending Irish medium education throughout the whole of Ireland it is possible to extrapolate, in very conservative terms, that at least 17-20% of these children will need extra support at some stage of their schooling. Coupled with the increased awareness and identification of special education needs in all schools, it is clear that every teacher needs to have the skills and support infrastructure to be able to identify and respond adequately to a wide range of needs.

The Support Infrastructure

In the south of Ireland the infrastructure to support SEN is relatively new. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established in 2004 by the Department of Education and Science, following the introduction of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act.³⁵ The establishment of Special Education Needs Officers (SENO) also flowed from the EPSEN Act and there are currently 80 SENO employed to coordinate and advise schools at the local level in the provision of SEN services. Generally the SENO is assigned geographically, although there is provision to assign them to a particular category of school.

The General Allocation Model³⁶ was introduced just a year later in 2005. In essence it seeks to cater for pupils who are eligible for learning support, and for pupils with borderline mild and mild general learning disability and specific learning disability, through a system that provides a general allocation to primary schools to cater for these pupils. The system continues to allow for the allocation of individual resource teaching hours in respect of pupils with lower incidence special educational needs, in accordance with Department of Education and Science circulars. An Implementation Plan was prepared by the NCSE and submitted to the Department of Education and Science (DES) in October 2006.³⁷ The Special Education Support Service (SESS) work under the auspices of the Department of Education (DES) and was established to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops, and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.³⁸

As mentioned, the provision of SEN has been codified in the north of Ireland with the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998). More recently, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDI) strengthens the rights of children with special educational needs to be educated in ordinary schools.

Every grant-aided school must have a Special Educational Needs Coordinating Officer (SENCO). The SENCO is a member of staff who has responsibility for coordinating special educational needs provision. In a small school, though, the SENCO may be the principal. The SENCO is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy and provides the link to external services on the school's behalf. He or she also ensures that the register is maintained and provides help and advice to the class teacher in relation to assessments, planning, reviewing, and monitoring of the child with special education needs.

In 2006 the Department of Education (NI) commissioned a review of Special Needs Education and Inclusion, which considered:

- The arrangements for the identification and assessment of SEN.
- The nature, quality, extent of provision and support relating to assessed needs.

³⁹ Policy Proposals Consultation Document on the Way Forward for Special Education Needs and Inclusion, DENI August 2009.

⁴⁰ Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004. Léargas ó na Priomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, COGG Deireadh Fómhair 2006.*

⁴¹ Ní Chinnéide, op cit

⁴² ibid

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ A similar concern arose in the context of immersion learning. A major literature review commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), found the practice of immersion teaching varied considerably throughout the world, and that a comprehensive research study would be required to be carried out, before it would be possible to identify best practice in Ireland.

- Early intervention; pre-school provision.
- Capacity building, for example, for teachers, and
- The future role of special schools.

A consultation process on Inclusion and SEN³⁹ is underway and the proposed funding model is not dissimilar in intent to the General Allocation Model in operation in the south of Ireland. As of June 2010 the Department of Education was still in the process of analysing the submissions.

When the SEN training and support needs of the IME sector is analysed it becomes clear that change is required to each element of SEN provision, from the content of SEN training materials in teacher education colleges, to the level of public awareness extant amongst teachers, parents, professionals and all involved with providing for children. The research to date has focused primarily on the identification of needs, with much less attention to the strategies or processes through which such changes could be implemented.

However, some recommendations have been repeated in a number of reports, such as:

- The employment of a team of professionals, such as educational psychologists and speech therapists, with expertise in SEN and IME who would be able to provide advice and support to the sector (Mac Donnacha.)⁴⁰ The notion of creating a ‘centre of excellence’ has also been referred to (Ní Chinnéide.)⁴¹
- The creation and maintenance of a network of Learning Support teachers/ Resource Teachers, providing peer support and a forum for the dissemination of information and training.(Ní Chinnéide, Mac Donnacha).⁴²
- The development of a training programme on SEN in IME.⁴³
- The need for comprehensive research on SEN in IME in a national context.⁴⁴
- The attachment of a qualification in SEN as a criterion to applications for the post as principal, and the institution of induction courses for newly appointed principals.

It is difficult to envisage that initiatives on all of the training and support needs can be developed, coordinated, integrated, and implemented without a more formal infrastructure to accommodate these developments.

International research on SEN and Bilingualism

The international research trends indicate that new approaches are emerging in our understanding of the relationship between special education needs (SEN) and bilingualism. The research is having an impact on policy and practice but the lack of research at national level raises concern about the applicability of the research in IME. The need for specific research to be carried out in schools in the Gaeltacht and Gaelscoileanna in relation to children with SEN has been reiterated in many reports.⁴⁵ There is a lack of clear policy direction as to what is good, or best, practice in relation to the education of children with SEN in bilingual settings. This creates difficulties throughout the sector, North and South, and in the Gaeltacht areas, for teachers on the ground seeking to educate a child with special education needs, either in Irish as the child’s first language, or in an immersion or bilingual environment. Parents, health/educational services professionals, and teachers who are involved in this decision-making process express concern at the lack of information and advice in this area.

A review, carried out by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in 2007, of the limited available research on special education needs and bilingual learning /immersion learning noted that:

46 NEPS, unpublished report, 2009.

47 General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland, *Review of Teacher Competencies and Continued Professional Development*, 2005, *An evaluation of the provision for special educational needs in Primary Schools 2007/08, Education and Training Directorate*, February 2009, *Special Education Needs in the Pre-School Sector, A survey by the Education Training Inspectorate*, 2007 *Language and Literacy in Irish medium Primary Schools: Report on the Consultation and Seminar, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*, January 2007. *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities issued in 2007.*, Ó Duibhir, P; "Oideachas agus forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach múinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna, Plécháipéis, COGG, Uimhir 2, 2006, Damian Knipe, Grace Bunting, Joe Ó Labhraí, Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh St. Mary's University College, Belfast: " *The Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in Irish-Medium Education*", Research Report Series, Department of Education, No. 34 of 2004, Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004. Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta*, COGG Deireadh Fómhair 2006, *Induction and Early Professional Development of Beginning teachers in Irish Medium Schools*, Education & Training Inspectorate, 2007, Deirdre Nic Gabhann, *Survey of Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna*, 2006-7, Master's thesis, 2008.

- There may be no advantage in moving a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school because of specific learning difficulties
- There may be no advantage in changing a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school on the grounds of intellectual ability
- It should not be assumed that children with language disorders cannot become bilingual.⁴⁶

These statements are qualified to reflect the particular circumstances of each child's case, which must be assessed on an individual basis. The fact that NEPS have identified the need to draft these proposals is a positive step towards generating greater awareness among all service providers.

IME schools - training and support needs in SENs

The Irish Medium Education sector is emergent. In the North, it has expanded rapidly whereas in the South, IME is longer established and has a much larger school population. However, for different reasons both Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools have gaps in their support infrastructure.

This report is not the first examination of the training and support needs of the IME sector. Several previous reports have investigated the needs of the sector, and while SEN may not have been the focus of the research, there are many references to SEN and the needs and priorities of the sector in this area.⁴⁷The number of recommendations emerging from all these reports is extensive and many of them remain valid, even with the passage of time.⁴⁸

The difficulties in accessing relevant training and support services are reiterated in many of these reports. There are also insights into the most common challenges faced by teachers in the classroom, as many of the reports are based on surveys and/or summarise the results of consultation processes with teachers. Extracts from a number of these reports are set out below to highlight the consistent pattern of needs, in the context of Gaeltacht schools, and Gaelscoileanna throughout Ireland.

A comprehensive research project, *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004 /The Current State of Gaeltacht Schools. Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí, Opinions from the Principals, Teachers and Parents*⁴⁹ carried out by Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta, obtained the views of teachers, resource teachers and parents.⁵⁰

Principals and teachers, in focus group meetings, were very unhappy with the existing service provision, reported as being so English-centred as to completely ignore the all-Irish or bilingual context in which the children were receiving their education.

Examples were given in which, according to the teachers:

- Inappropriate tests were used to assess children.
- Advice was given to the school to use only English with the child with SEN, despite evidence that Irish was the language of the school and/or the home language of the child.
- Advice was given to the school to use one language only with the child, and while it was not stated that this should be English, it was clearly implied.

One parent was informed by a professional that "The worst thing I had ever done was to send my child to an IME school".⁵¹

48 Professor Coolahan's review of the Irish education system states that the history of the education system reflects periods of enthusiasm for advancement and change together, followed by periods of retrenchment.

49 Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004/The Current State of Gaeltacht Schools. Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí, Opinions from the Principals, Teachers and Parents*. COGG, 2006

50 Ibid, The researcher sent questionnaires to all schools in the Gaeltachts, and there was a 90% response rate. A series of consultation fora also formed part of this research.

51 Ibid. Translated from Irish. Section 4, pages 8-9.

Mac Donnacha's research reported the view expressed in focus meetings that uncertainty was pervasive in the IME system in relation to key policy areas, which resulted in principals and teachers being left without support when making these policy decisions. Without clear policies being set down by the Department of Education in these areas it is difficult to expect the schools to produce comprehensive policies.⁵²

This research reported the consistent view of resource teachers⁵³ that they did not have sufficient training or information relevant to their work. The fact, that there was no training provided in the post-graduate special education courses on how to provide support for children with SEN where Irish is their first language and/or where the child is in an IME school, was also highlighted.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), in their study, *Language and Literacy in Irish medium Primary Schools: Report on the Consultation and Seminar, January 2007* also has references to SEN in IME. The submissions made to the NCCA on this topic noted the lack of research on the issues of immersion learning and IME, and on the issues of SEN and IME. They were also critical of the lack of support materials in Irish and the lack of training strategies which would enable teachers to support children with SEN.

The submissions reflected a range of opinion on which language of support should be used to help the child with SEN. The issues felt to influence this decision included: the home language of the child, the language policy of the school, his/her fluency in the language, his/her general development, the nature of his/her peer group and the level of support available to the child. There were also a number of references to the lack of support for Irish and for Maths through the medium of Irish.

As part of the Review on Inclusion and SEN the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a survey, *An evaluation of the provision for special educational needs in Primary Schools 2007/08*,⁵⁴ the aims of which were to: evaluate the quality of the provision of SEN in a sample of primary schools; and identify the main trends and characteristics, including strengths and areas for improvement, in relation to current practice in special education within primary schools.⁵⁵ The report was not specifically targeted at IME but it is insightful, due to the strong emphasis placed on training in the recommendations.

With specific reference to training the recommendations listed were:

- the continuing professional development of staff in relation to the focus, format, content, ownership and preparation of IEPs.
- the deployment of a wider range of appropriate teaching approaches and strategies to ensure quality experiences and challenges for the children.
- the continuing professional development in SEN at all levels, including school leaders, SENCos, class teachers and classroom assistants, and,
- school leaders to assume greater responsibility for ensuring that all children achieve the highest possible standards and that SEN is a whole school priority.⁵⁶

An earlier report, *The Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in Irish-Medium Education*, commissioned by the Department of Education (DE) in 2004⁵⁷ recommended a range of measures that would apply equally to SEN training. For example, the Recommendations state, *inter alia*, that:

- INSET providers should become more pro-active in determining the specific training needs of Irish-medium schools and individual teachers by consulting directly with staff on issues pertaining to their professional development.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The Resource Teacher is primarily involved in providing services to children who have been assessed and found to have a SEN condition. Mostly employed in primary schools, the role is not as clearly defined as the Learning Support Teacher resulting in different support structures in different schools. Generally these teachers support children who fall within the Department of Education and Skills (DES) list of special education conditions. The major difference between a Resource Teacher and a Learning Support Teacher is time. Typically children receiving services from resource teacher will receive more time per week, possibly 2 hours per day.

⁵⁴ Education and Training Directorate, February 2009.

⁵⁵ An evaluation of the provision for special educational needs in Primary Schools 2007/08, Education and Training Directorate, February 2009.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Damian Knipe, Grace Bunting, Joe Ó Labhraí, Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh St. Mary's University College, Belfast: "The Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in Irish-Medium Education", Research Report Series, Department of Education, No. 34 of 2004. P.9-10

- INSET providers should be mindful of the relatively young age range and possible lack of experience of teachers and principals in Irish-medium schools, which would indicate the need for professional development training relating specifically to teaching in and managing an Irish-medium school.
- It was suggested by principals of Irish-medium units that training in relation to the foundations and guiding principles of Irish-medium/bilingual education would be useful to assist them in talking to parents and promoting the sector. INSET needs to be directed at these principals to help raise their confidence and competence.
- Due to the added pressures associated with being a teaching principal in an Irish-medium school, it is more difficult for them to gain release for attendance at INSET courses, compared to non-teaching principals. This fact should be acknowledged accordingly, with due consideration given to their circumstances, perhaps resulting in provision being made specifically for them outside of school hours.

Similarly, an *Education and Training Inspection (ETI) report, Induction and Early Professional Development of Beginning teachers in Irish Medium Schools*, in relation to the professional development of beginning teachers in the IM sector also made a series of not dissimilar recommendations.⁵⁸ For example,

- All CASS officers need to ensure that the specific linguistic needs of beginning teachers in the IM sector are catered for equitably when resources and materials are being provided to beginning teachers. They should liaise more closely with the IM inter-board CASS team on the content of their courses.
- The IM inter-board CASS team should work with the HEI and the other teacher education partners to establish an on-line supportive learning community extending across the IM sector.

In the *Byrne Report*⁵⁹ in 2002, recommendations in relation to SEN and Irish medium schools centred on the requirement of a compulsory element of teacher education focussed on: proficiency to teach across the diverse spectrum of learning; the need for an understanding of inclusivity; the full-time appointment of staff in Irish pedagogy; the establishment of custom-designed courses for teachers with a degree in Irish, or with proven ability, to enable them to move to Gaeltacht schools or Irish medium schools; the provision of induction for all beginning teachers and the initiation of formal partnerships between teacher training, induction and schools.

There are no specific training courses in relation to SEN and IME. Clearly, courses on SEN, organised as part of in-service training or available from the colleges, are important to the sector. However, if schools and teachers are to obtain the optimum benefit from training, then the training provided must more clearly meet sectoral needs. There are also a number of additional elements in relation to IME and SEN that warrant attention.

IME Training Needs – what kind of training is needed?

There is considerable overlap in the discourse on SEN in IME and immersion learning and second language acquisition, but it is not the intention of this research to limit the discourse on SEN in IME to these two components. Also, while the need for training has been identified, there has been less information gathered on the nature of the training required. Ó Duibhir,⁶⁰ in his Discussion Paper on the training needs of teachers in the IME sector, presents different theoretical

⁵⁸ *Induction and Early Professional Development of Beginning teachers in Irish Medium Schools*, Education & Training Inspectorate, 2007

⁵⁹ *Byrne Report, Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education Recommendations*, 2002

⁶⁰ Ó Duibhir, P: “Oideachas agus forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach múinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna, Plécháipéis, COGG, Uimhir 2, 2006. P.2-3

training models and thought-provoking commentary on how to assess training needs. Referring to a survey he carried out in 2000, he noted a difference in focus when questioning teachers and principals as to their training needs. He discovered that teachers responded by requiring practical, hand-on type training, whereas principals responded by requesting more theoretical knowledge in relation to issues such as immersion learning methodology.⁶¹ He also argued that it seemed well established that training courses on their own have little positive impact unless there are adequate support structures in place for the teachers to put their new skills into effect,⁶² and he stressed the importance of obtaining ‘buy-in’ and ownership from teachers in relation to the implementation of a training strategy.⁶³

The findings of a survey of SEN in Gaelscoileanna in the south of Ireland suggest that, when compared with the overall education sector, the IME sector has a much lower number of teachers who have completed sanctioned courses in SEN.⁶⁴ Further study is needed to determine the causes underlying this finding. The fact that the IME sector, in comparison to the overall education sector, has a proportionally higher number of young teachers and principals is acknowledged and well documented.⁶⁵ This may be a contributing factor. Nic Gabhann, commenting on Gaelscoileanna in the south of Ireland, notes that,

23% of teachers in Gaelscoileanna have completed the Department of Education and Science sanctioned course in Special Educational Needs. This is significantly lower than the national average. The Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools (1998) reports that just under 75% of remedial teachers in our survey had completed or were in the process of completing a one year, part-time course in remedial education”. (Shiel G., Morgan M., Larney, R. 1988, p. 27).

Counting on Success (2006) notes that just under half of respondents had completed a one-year, part-time course sanctioned by the Department of Education and Science, or its equivalent, and 9% were in the process of completing one.⁶⁶

In the North, Ní Chinnéid’s report shows that over 55% of teachers in the IME sector have five years experience or less.⁶⁷ Among Ní Chinnéid’s key findings in relation to training are:

- IM teachers want practical, appropriate resources in Irish which are ready for use in the classroom and one outreach centre provides tailored, appropriate effective SEN support for the IM sector. (4.9.19-22)
- A high percentage of IM sector teachers have received some form of training on SEN. IM teachers need to be encouraged to avail of ELB [Education and Library Board] opportunities for SEN training. (4.10.32-3)
- While respondents found training useful, they highlighted a need for regular, IM-specific training to equip them to identify and make appropriate provision for pupils who require additional help. (4.10.7, 17-20).⁶⁸

A teacher (in the south of Ireland) who had completed the Graduate Diploma in Special Education Needs commented:

The course content was excellent and I really learned a lot and developed new skills while participating, but the issue of special educational needs in Gaelscoileanna was not addressed at all. The lecturers and speakers seemed to see special educational needs in Gaelscoileanna as a taboo subject. The emphasis was placed on developing oral language skills in the special needs setting but no one was willing to comment on what language Gaelscoileanna should develop these skills in.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. He gives the example of a Welsh strategy to improve literacy that produced good results in the first three years but failed to make further headway. Reports written on that project seem to suggest that the lack of ownership at the level of the teacher/school was a significant factor.

⁶³ Nic Gabhann, Deirdre: SEN in Gaelscoileanna, 2008. Chapter 3

⁶⁴ Máirtín, C: Soláthar Múinteoirí do na Bunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge. Bunachar Sonraí agus Tuairimí Priomhoídí i leith Gnéithe den Staid Reatha sa Ghaelscolaíocht, COGG, Meán Fómhair 2006, Nic Gabhann, op cit, Chapter 3,

⁶⁵ Nic Gabhann, op cit, Chapter 3. Section 3.4.2.

⁶⁶ Ní Chinnéide, op cit p.243

⁶⁷ Ní Chinnéide, op cit . p45

⁶⁸ Ní Chinnéide, op cit . p45

69 Nic Gabhann, op cit. Ch.3

70 Ní Chinnéide, op cit: p.270

71 Damian Knipe, Grace Bunting, Joe Ó Labhraí, Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh St. Mary's University College, Belfast: "The Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in Irish-Medium Education", Research Report Series, Department of Education, No. 34 of 2004. P.9-10. Ó Duibhir, P: "Oideachas agus forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach múinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoil-eanna, Plécháipéis, COGG, Uimhir 2, 2006. As part of this research the colleges providing teacher training were contacted and, with the exception of St. Mary's

72 Special Education Needs in Initial Teacher Training, Report on the SENITE Conference, Trinity College, 22-23 March 2004, ScoTENS.

73 Ibid. P.2

74 Ibid. P.1

A further comment that seems to specify the 'additional elements' required:

I suppose you can have training on the syndromes outside of the IM system and it does not require something specific [for the IM sector], but anywhere that bilingualism has an influence, there ought to be specific training made available for teachers.⁷⁰

All of the training colleges provide training on SEN, as either an integral part of their initial teacher training course, or provide specific training modules on SEN during the training period. There are also many professional development courses and in-service sessions available to teachers. In the main, teachers have been positive as to the content and helpfulness of in-service training and continuing professional development courses on SEN, but the courses may not be a sufficient response to concerns about seeking to manage SEN in an IME context.⁷¹

The debate surrounding how SEN should be taught is a wider and deeper discussion than can take place within the confines of this research. In 2004, a cross-border survey was conducted of initial teacher training college practice in relation to the provision of special needs education.⁷² In a follow-up conference on SEN and initial teacher education, it was noted that most colleges offered a compulsory element and optional elements of SEN. However, the practical details of implementation raised many questions, giving a sense of the complexity involved in special educational needs training. The Conference Report notes that,

- There were real dilemmas facing teacher educators;
- A medical model of SEN was necessary for reasons of accountability;
- Traditional notions of SEN needed to be constructed but greater inclusion meant that SEN also had to be deconstructed;
- Knowledge about SEN and knowledge about teacher development had to be integrated; Teachers needed to be aware of political, legal, medical, charity, rights and cultural discourses around SEN and be able to think in more inclusive ways;
- Teachers needed SEN competence but not as a bolt-on to existing teacher education programmes; and, finally,
- A wide range of SEN competences needed to be embedded in ITE courses.⁷³

An attempt was made to identify a strategy forward and the conference report suggests:

A set of packages should be identified for different students: A mandatory package for all students in primary and in post-primary schools; an advanced package for students who have sufficient time, need and/or interest to explore further. These packages should have college-based and school-based elements and be taught in partnership with schools. The challenge of "embedding" SEN issues within many or all aspects of Initial Teacher Training Education (ITE) was thought to be particularly important. Could provision be effective if it was only discrete and not embedded? Could provision be effective if it was only embedded and not discrete? It was argued that subject, curriculum and teaching studies might seek to focus more upon the diversity of actual pupil performance and achievement within subjects, on the totality of the individual pupils responsible for the performance and on the strategies subject departments employ to address underachievement. Should subject study embrace the diversity of students studying the subject? Locating SEN within literacy, numeracy and personal/social development was "necessary but limiting."⁷⁴

There are also several postgraduate qualifications in special educational needs aimed at qualified teachers. The following are recognised by the Department of Education and Skills (DES):

Course	Aimed at	Location	Duration
Graduate Diploma in Special Education (awarded by Dublin City University)	Special and primary school teachers only	St Patrick's College	1 year
PG Diploma in SEN (awarded by Trinity College)	Post-primary teachers only	Church of Ireland College of Education	1 year
Graduate Diploma in SEN (awarded by Uni of Limerick)	Primary and post-primary	Mary Immaculate College	1 year
Higher Diploma in SEN (awarded by NUI Galway)	Primary and post-primary	St. Angela's College Sligo	1 year
Higher Diploma of the NUI, Dublin	Primary and post-primary	University College Dublin	1 year
Graduate Diploma in Learning Support ⁷⁵	Primary teachers	St. Patrick's College	1 year
PG Diploma in Learning Support Education (awarded by Trinity College)	Primary and post-primary	Church of Ireland College of Education	

In the north of Ireland, all staff in pre-schools are required to have NVQ 3 qualification with at least one member of staff with a Level 4 qualification. In the south of Ireland, staff obtain a FETAC qualification. Best practice recommends that staff would obtain competency at FETAC level 4 and/or 5. Special need education is not a mandatory element of the FETAC course on Childcare.

In-service courses are provided by the Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS)⁷⁶ in the north of Ireland and the Education Centres⁷⁷ in the south of Ireland. These courses are developed according to local need and generally there is high regard for the quality, relevance, and content of the courses provided by these bodies.⁷⁸ The Education Centres are also used by the Post-Primary Support Service and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme, to deliver their support programmes, primarily concerned with issues to do with the curriculum.

There are also a variety of courses organised by groups, such the Special Education Support Service (SESS), providing, for example, seminars on: Individual Education Planning (IEP); Transition from primary to post-primary for pupils with SEN; Autistic Spectrum Disorders; and in-service courses such as Dyslexia in School; Inclusion, etc.

In the South of Ireland, in the case of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) there is a certificate course that is organised by the local Education Centres. However, the system of providing Special Needs Assistants came under review in 2009.

As of 2009 there are only two sanctioned on-line courses by the Department of Education and Skills in relation to SEN leading to a Diploma in Inclusion/Special Needs. Both courses were developed separately as collaborative projects with the Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe (ICEPE) and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The other course is an Advanced Diploma in Professional Development (Adv Dip PD) Inclusive Education: Queen's University Belfast and ICEP Europe.

⁷⁵ In order to qualify as Learning Support Teachers (previously called Remedial Teachers), individuals who are already qualified teachers must undertake a postgraduate course. The content of courses is agreed with the Department of Education and Skills. Course duration is one year, with the time divided between attendance at the relevant course venue and teaching in participants' own schools. There are variations between the participating colleges in terms of organisation and awards

⁷⁶ The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) was formally created in the five Education and Library Boards as a result of the Northern Ireland Education Order 1989 which placed a duty on each Board to provide advice and support to teachers within its area.

⁷⁷ The education centres, are under the auspices of the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the DES, and provide training and a range of activities to teachers and other parties involved in the school community through in-service training to support locally identified needs. For example, they assist with school development plans, and are created to be responsive to demand. There are 21 full time and 9 part time centres nationwide.

⁷⁸ NI Education and Library Boards' Curriculum Advisory Support Service, Best Value Fundamental Service Review, October 2005

What resources are needed and who can provide them?

The support for children with SEN is generally provided in the areas of English and Mathematics. However, the IME sector also needs to provide support to children with SEN in Irish. When asked by the NCCA study what issues relating to Learning Support should be considered for the Irish-medium primary school, teachers who responded highlighted the need for:

- Standardised tests in Irish
- Learning support in mathematics through Irish
- Learning support for Irish
- Psychological and speech and language services through Irish and for Irish language acquisition
- Appropriate books across all curricular areas through Irish.

Very similar needs have been reiterated in other reports as well. A survey of schools in the Gaeltacht (2006)⁷⁹ suggests that children with SEN in IM receive support in relation to English, Maths and Irish and that this support was provided through English in almost half of the schools, (49%), through Irish in 28% of the schools, and through a mixture of Irish and English in 23% of the schools.

Number of pupils receiving support from Resource Teacher, according to subject and county⁸⁰

County	English	Mathematics	Irish
Galway (n=40 schools)	140	75	45
Kerry (n=14 schools)	25	11	13
Mayo (n=25 schools)	59	31	4
Donegal (n=35 schools)	96	50	9
Waterford, Meath & Cork (n=13)	38	15	11
Total (n=127 schools)	358	182	82

A survey of the Gaelscoileanna in the south of Ireland reports:

Over 51% of Special Educational Needs teachers in Gaelscoileanna are providing support in English literacy skills. A further 35% of teachers are also supporting mathematics. 10% of Special Educational Needs teachers in Gaelscoileanna are providing support in Irish literacy. 2% of teachers are providing emotional support and behavioural support.⁸¹

The survey goes on to say that,

54% of respondents are providing mathematical support through the medium of English and Irish. 36% of respondents are providing support through the medium of Irish and 10% of respondents are providing support through the medium of English.⁸²

These findings⁸³ suggest that teachers need a variety of resources for the sector. The demand for graded reading material has been a consistent demand of the sector for a very long time. A very pertinent survey of current reading materials was carried out by St. Mary's University College in Belfast investigating their usefulness to teachers, and to children learning to read. Other research has identified a lack of support material at post-primary level. While the St. Mary's survey was confined to Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland, it provides a valuable insight into the practical application of the existing materials, and what is required to augment them.

⁷⁹ Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004*. Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, COGG Bealtaine 2005, Chapter 3, p. 31

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Nic Gabhann, *op cit.* Section 3.5.

⁸² *Ibid*, Section 3.11.

⁸³ The researcher was not able to access this data for the north of Ireland.

The overall response was that the materials are not suitable for early years learning and there is an urgent need to develop a new scheme for children beginning to read. The main gaps identified in the existing materials involved issues such as: the need for materials on phonics, a lack of variety, pronunciation, old-fashioned design/images, the need for CDs for home use, texts not being graded, etc.

Unfortunately, the main publishers, An Gúm, An tAisaonad, and other web-based resource sites such as, www.ppps.ie (primary professional development service), www.slss.ie (new site to provide resources for secondary schools) do not have any immediate plans to develop such a scheme, although An tAisaonad is hoping to progress its work in this area.

However, it is clear that many teachers prepare their own materials to assist their pupils with special education needs. While this material is often prepared in the teacher's own time and without the resources to design it and produce it to high professional publishing standards, it is a valuable resource for the sector.

As part of the follow-up to the InCA assessment process, the CCEA, in conjunction with Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland, had a series of meetings with school principals, to identify good practice and relevant materials. A compilation of these findings forms the basis of the materials published by CCEA in March 2010.⁸⁴ The voluntary group which provides SEN support to teachers, parents, and children, Gaeleagras um Shainriachtanais Oideachais (GESO), has also begun the process of gathering materials and some of their materials are available on their site, www.gesoeire.com

The lack of appropriate assessment tools has also posed a challenge to teachers relying on such tests to confirm their observational assessment of the child. In the case of SEN and IME there were no appropriate assessment tools in Irish, or of Irish, in relation to children with SEN. In the last year, progress in relation to the development of relevant assessment tests⁸⁵ has taken place but the need remains for a broad range of assessments to be created. (Details of the Assessment Tools available or under development that have particular reference to IME are set out in Appendix 1.)

An important issue in relation to the provision of resources is the lack of co-ordination in ensuring that key stakeholders are aware of existing resources. This was apparent from the feedback from individuals and groups contacted as part of this research (This list is attached as Appendix 4.) The research indicates that teachers obtain most of their information and training from their initial teacher training and continuing professional development courses as well as from the advice and support available within the school. Any coordination strategy should consider utilizing these key areas.

Public Awareness - building competence and capacity to meet need

It is recognised that there are concerns about the capacity of support services to meet the needs of children with SEN in English-medium and Irish-medium schools. It should be noted that the model of service provision is under review in the North and, if the proposals are accepted, it will mean significant changes in the interaction of external services with children in the school. In the South, the adoption of the General Allocation Model has led to changes in the way the services are delivered. For example, a child with dyslexia or borderline mild general learning difficulties is now included in the general allocation model for schools and no additional teaching resources beyond the sanctioned post(s) are available to schools.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ www.nicurriculum.org.uk.

⁸⁵ Details of the Assessment Tests are set out in Appendix 2

⁸⁶ Nic Gabhann, op cit.

⁸⁷ Mac Donnacha, op cit

⁸⁸ Nic Gabhann, op cit Chapter 3. 5.3.3.

⁸⁸ This sentiment was also expressed at the conference workshop on SEN, organised by Gaelscoileanna and held in Kilkenny in November 2009.

⁸⁹ This sentiment was also expressed at the conference workshop on SEN, organised by Gaelscoileanna and held in Kilkenny in November 2009.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 184

As the previous comments in relation to training needs demonstrate, the most commonly stated area of concern in relation to services is the lack of, information, public awareness, and understanding of the ethos and approach of Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools.⁸⁷

It is difficult to find contemporary, comprehensive, and well-documented research on the effectiveness of bilingual education or immersion learning for children with diagnosed Special Education Needs. A major literature review commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature, 2006* found that the practice of immersion teaching varied considerably throughout the world, and that a comprehensive research study should be carried out, before it would be possible to identify best practice in Ireland. A review by NEPS (2007) of the limited available research on special education needs and bilingual learning/immersion learning noted that:

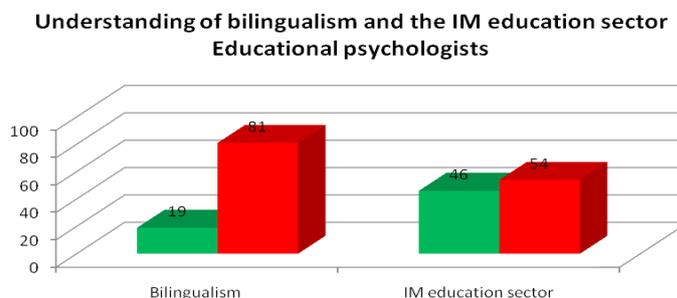
- There may be no advantage in moving a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school because of specific learning difficulties;
- There may be no advantage in changing a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school on the grounds of intellectual ability; and
- It should not be assumed that children with language disorders cannot become bilingual.

But, in general, there is a lack of confidence in the sector that it has the capacity to provide appropriate and timely information, advice and support. As one teacher puts it:

When parents ask me if their child should remain in a Gaelscoil following a diagnosis of dyslexia, I do not know what advice to give.⁸⁸

Two teaching principals referred in interviews to the lack of public awareness in the support services and stated that they would prefer to deal with an educational psychologist who understood the ethos of the school, rather than have a psychologist who spoke Irish but had no experience of the sector.⁸⁹ The concern is that there is a lack of understanding of the issues of SEN and bilingualism, and SEN and immersion education. The table below shows a significant difference between the responses from educational psychologists supplied in relation to bilingual children and in relation to the IM sector. Ní Chinnéide's research notes that, with regard to understanding of bilingual children, in general, 19% of respondents indicated little or no understanding and 81% of respondents indicated full or general understanding. In their response concerning understanding of the IM sector, 46% of respondents reported little or no understanding and 54% of respondents indicated full or general understanding.⁹⁰

Table taken from Ní Chinnéide: *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*.



Educational psychologists working with IM pupils carry out their work in the vast majority of cases (81%) using English only, none of them use Irish only, while around one fifth (19%) use a combination of Irish and English (4.3.8, 13).

28% of the Educational Psychologists interviewed prefer courteously to maintain the Irish language dynamic of IM schools and allow IM pupils the facility of interpretation (4.3.9).⁹¹

In the south of Ireland it was suggested that educational psychologists employed by the State appear to have a greater understanding and awareness of IME, than privately employed psychologists.⁹² The NEPS initiative to develop a strategy to improve awareness is a welcome and positive step.⁹³

The main organisations concerned with IME do not have specific policy positions in relation to SEN in IME.⁹⁴ From interviews with the key personnel involved, the main inhibiting factor to involvement in this area appears to be the overwhelming concern that, without the appropriate expertise, it would not be helpful to make policy pronouncements. All of the key stakeholder organisations are aware of challenges and concerns surrounding SEN and IME. As part of semi-structured interviews with them, specific instances were recounted to the researcher where they had been contacted by parents or teachers seeking information or advice as to what course of action to take. They were aware, too, of instances where children with special education needs had been advised to leave the school by the principal, on the basis that it would be 'better for the child'.⁹⁵ Nic Gabhann's Master's thesis on Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna in the south of Ireland recounts similar stories, implying that some children may be leaving Gaelscoileanna, following a diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty. The thesis also suggests that teachers may not feel that they have the advice, support, information and resources available to them to encourage parents to keep their children within the Gaelscoil.⁹⁶

Some organisational changes may also help to assist the interaction and relationships between the support services and the schools. For example, the Learning Support Guidelines (2000) issued by DES recommend that priority should be given to pupils who are performing at or below the 10th percentile in English reading and/or Mathematics. There is no reference to support for Irish, as a subject, in IM schools. The situation is the same in the north of Ireland.

Recognition of the need to support Irish in schools where the pupils are being taught through the medium of Irish is important in the context of the allocation of resources.

Furthermore, the implementation strategy for SEN in Ireland⁹⁷ does not make any reference to IME. It would assist service professionals in ensuring that considerations of SEN in IME were an integral part of planning for SEN.

The inclusion of SEN as an area of scrutiny in Inspectorate Reports⁹⁸ might also contribute towards identifying challenges and best practice.

⁹¹ Ní Chinnéide, op cit. P.154

⁹² Gaelscoileanna, Annual Conference, Kilkenny 21 November 2009. In the session on Special Education Needs the issues of awareness by service providers were discussed and the consensus was that public educational psychologists had greater awareness of IM than privately employed psychologists.

⁹³ NEPS Draft strategy (unpublished). 2009

⁹⁴ However, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has included SEN in its strategic document.

⁹⁵ It is difficult to ascertain the full circumstances surrounding such events without the input from all parties but in these interviews the interviewee had been approached by the parents seeking advice – a second opinion – as to what they should do, and what was the 'best advice' in relation to whether the IME sector could support a child with SENs.

⁹⁶ Nic Gabhann, Master's Thesis on Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna.

⁹⁷ National Council for Special Education: Implementation Report: Plan for the Phased Implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004. Submitted to the Minister of Education and Science, 1 October 2006

⁹⁸ In discussion with the Advisory committee and with the Department of Education officials it was noted that, in the South of Ireland issues of SEN policy and practice in schools do not usually form part of Inspectorate reports. In the North the issue of SEN provision in school is not always referred to, but it is becoming more common to have a section on this. In some instances it falls under the heading of Leadership in the inspectorate report.

Appendices

A chairde,

Tá taighde idir lámha ag POBAL, scátheagras phobal na Gaeilge, lonnaithe i mBéal Feiste, maidir le riachtanais oiliúna agus tacaíochta d'earnáil na Gaelscolaíochta ag freastal ar dhaltaí le riachtanais speisialta. Ó 2001 ar aghaidh tá POBAL ag obair ar thograí le cur le feasacht agus taighde ar riachtanais an pháiste dhátheangach agus, le maoiniú ó Roinn Oideachais TÉ ó 2006 - 2008, rinneadh taighde cuimsitheach *Riachtanais an Pháiste Dhátheangaigh (Gaeilge-Béarla)*. Beidh an tuairisc le foilsiú go luath ag an Roinn. Fásann an togra reatha seo as luath-thorthaí an taighde thuasluaite. Ach, tá an togra seo ag feidhmiú ar bhonn uile-Éireannach le maoiniú ó An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). Tá sé ag díriú ar na riachtanais oiliúna agus tacaíochta do mhúinteoirí ag freastal ar pháistí le riachtanais speisialta i nGaelscoileanna agus scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht, idir naíonraí, bhunscoileanna agus mheánscoileanna. *Since 2001, POBAL, the umbrella group for the Irish language sector, has been raising awareness and carrying out research on the needs of the sector to provide for bilingual children in Irish medium education with special education needs. A two year research project began in 2006, with funding from the Department of Education (DENI), to investigate these needs and the results of this research, The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children, is ready for publication by the Department. Earlier this year we began a further research project in this area to investigate the training and support needs of the sector on an all-island basis, involving Gaeltacht schools, Gaelscoileanna from pre-school up to post-primary. This research is funded by An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).*

Cé go bhfuil earnáil na Gaelscolaíochta go fóill measartha óg, tá méid ar leith taighde déanta anois. Seasann na gnéithe thíos amach arís is arís: easpa oiliúna praiticiúla do mhúinteoirí riachtanais speisialta; easpa treoirlínte chun plean tacaíochta a chur ar fáil do pháistí dátheangacha; easpa áiseanna, go háirithe scéim chéimnithe sa léitheoireacht; agus easpa trialacha caighdeánacha cuí. Chomh maith leis seo, ní bhíonn i gcónaí réimse iomlán na seirbhísí tacaíochta ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge mar atá trí mheán an Bhéarla. *A number of pieces of research have been carried out in the sector in the past concerning the special education needs of children in Irish medium education. Some areas of development stand out as priorities for the sector as they have been reiterated in various reports, namely: the lack of practical training in SEN for teachers; the lack of guidelines in relation to creating an educational support plan for the child with SEN; the lack of resources, especially graded reading material, and the lack of appropriate assessment tools. Alongside this, the lack of appropriate support services to cater for children with SEN in the sector to provide for their needs.*

Bíonn múinteoirí ag lorg comhairle agus ag déanamh tagartha do na pointí céanna:

The research to date shows that teachers are seeking advice on the same issues namely:

- Comhairle agus cabhair ó shíceolaí chun plean tacaíochta a chur le chéile don pháiste go bhfuil buairt ann go bhfuil deacrachtaí foghlama aici/aige sa léitheoireacht nó riachtanais speisialta eile uirthi/air.
- Treoirlínte, agus níos mó eolais faoin dea-chleachtas idirnáisiúnta maidir le páistí go bhfuil deacrachtaí foghlama acu.
- Treoir, bunaithe ar thaighde agus dhea-chleachtas idirnáisiúnta maidir le tús na léitheoireachta i nGaeilge/i mBéarla.
- Oiliúint phraiticiúil agus chuí don Ghaeloideachas: oiliúint réamhsheirbhíse agus inghairme de dhíth chun tacú leis an bpáiste agus riar ar na dúshláin áirithe a bhaineann leis an tumoideachas agus an dara teanga.
- Áiseanna cuí, go háirithe céim chéimnithe sa léitheoireacht, agus áiseanna cuí don Mhata agus don Ghaeilge.

- Trialacha measúnaithe cuí.
- Ról an chúntóir ranga ag tacú le páistí le riachtanais speisialta.
- Comhairle na seirbhísí poiblí (agus an gá le tógáil ar fheasacht agus chumas maidir le dátheangachas/tumoideachas i measc na gcomhairleoirí)
- *Advice and support from psychologists to develop a suitable support place for children where the teacher has concerns that the child is at risk of having learning difficulties in reading, or other special needs.*
- *Guidelines, and more information on international best practice in relation to children with special education needs.*
- *Practical appropriate training for IME: at teacher training and in-service level with especial focus on the issues of bilingualism, second language acquisition and immersion education in the context of SEN.*
- *Resources, particularly graded reading material, but also support materials for Maths and Irish.*
- *Appropriate assessment tools*
- *The role of classroom assistant*
- *The advice from the public services (and the need for greater awareness among the sector in relation to bilingualism and immersion education)*

Ní chuimsíonn na pointí seo gach gné don ábhar casta seo. Ach ba mhaith linn fáil amach cad é an tábacht a bhaineann leis na gnéithe seo, do mhúinteoirí ranga agus do Ghaelscoileanna agus scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht. Déanann an pacáiste eolais iniata leis an litir seo cur síos ar cad atá ar fáil faoi láthair chun tacú le múinteoirí scoile agus iad ag freastal ar pháistí le riachtanais speisialta in earnáil na Gaeilge. Tá áthas orainn go bhfuil roinnt tograí suimiúla ar siúl dírithe ar an nGaeloideachas agus ar riachtanais speisialta san am i láthair, agus mar sin, is togra tráthúil an togra seo, fiú mura bhfuil na cúinsí eacnamaíochta báúil faoi láthair. Feicfead go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach déanta chun uirlisí measúnaithe cuí a ullmhú don Ghaeloideachas agus go mbeidh cuid acu réidh don scoilbhliain 2009. Anuas air seo, tá idirphlé forbartha ar siúl i dtaca le cúrsa oiliúna cuí ar líne, dírithe ar riachtanais speisialta agus an dara teanga, agus riachtanais speisialta agus tumoideachas. *These points are not intended to cover all of the issues in this complex area but to act as a starting point in determining the needs of the sector.*

The information pack included with this letter is seeking to set out what is currently available or planned in these areas. We are happy to report there are a number of projects underway in this area, despite the unfavourable economic climate. Significant progress has been made in designing a range of assessment tests specifically for Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht, some of which are ready for this current school year. In addition, a series of meetings have taken place to adapt an existing on-line SEN course and include an additional module to meet the needs of the sector .

Thosaigh cuid seo na hoibre i mí Eanáir 2009 agus tá sé mar aidhm againn straitéisí gearrthéarmacha agus fadtéarmacha a fhorbairt ar na céimeanna chun tosaigh chun oiliúint chuí agus tacaíocht chuí a chur ar fáil do mhúinteoirí ag freastal ar pháistí le sainriachtanais agus go mbeidh siad réidh chun dul faoi bhráid na Roinne i gceann sé mhí. Ach, anuas air seo, tá súil againn go mbeimid ábalta tuilleadh eolais a roinnt libh maidir le tacaíocht phraiticiúil agus áiseanna cuí. Tá éiginnteacht ann fós ar an gcleachtas is fearr a úsáid sa seomra ranga. Táimid den tuairim go bhfuil an-chuid múinteoirí ag cur áiseanna lámhdhéanta le chéile agus go bhfuil samplaí de dhea-chleachtais in úsáid cheana féin. Anuas air seo, táimid cinnte go bhfuil áiseanna agus teagmhálacha agaibhse chun cur leis an stóras eolais. Bheimis an-bhuíoch daoibh más féidir libh an t-eolas seo a roinnt linn. *This research*

began in January 2009 and it is our intention to have a short-term and long-term strategy in place within 6 months to go before the Departments of Education setting out the training and support needs of the sector. In addition to this, we hope to be in a position to provide further updated information to yourselves in relation to practical support measures and resources. There is uncertainty as to what is 'best-practice' in the classroom. However, we believe that many teachers prepare their own materials and that there are examples of good practice coming out of this work. Also we are sure that you are aware of additional contacts and information sources to add to the information we have collected to date. We would be very grateful to you if you could share this information with us.

Beidh an taighdeoir, Caroline Nolan, ag iarraidh bualadh libh (mar shampla ag comhdháil Ghaelscoileanna Teo, Comhairliúchán ar 7 Deireadh Fómhair, Fóram na bPríomhoidí, chun aiseolas a fháil uaibh). Agus bheimis an-buíoch daoibh freisin más féidir libh aon eolas cuí sa bhreis a chur ar aghaidh chugainn. Tá liosta den eolas a bheadh ina chuidiú linn iniata leis an litir seo. Our researcher, Caroline Nolan, will be arranging to speak with some groups, dovetailing with planned programme of events such as the Gaelscoileanna Annual Conference, and the consultation on the future of special education needs that is taking place on 7 October (Belfast), as well as the Principals' Forum, etc., in order to gather further information and get some feedback. But once again, we would be grateful if you could contact us if you have any information that would be of assistance to us.

Janet Muller
Stiúrthóir

Briefing Paper: Assessment Tools - Resources - Training - Provision of Services

Assessment tools to assess children with special education needs in Gaeltacht schools or Gaelscoileanna

A number of assessment tools specifically created, or adapted, for children attending Gaelscoileanna or schools in the Gaeltacht are being developed. A table of these assessment tools is set out below. As these tools are new it is not possible to review or comment on them at this stage. However, the aim at this stage is to ensure that schools are aware of what is available. These tests also vary in their purpose and meet different needs. Some of the tests are designed as assessments for learning, while others are assessments of learning.

The need for appropriate assessment tools for the Irish medium education sector has been a critical issue for quite a long time. The widespread availability of assessment material and tools in English highlights the disparity. For example, the Special Education Support Service website contains a list of over 30 tests that are available in English.

It is encouraging to see progress being made at this time to develop suitable tests for bilingual children in Irish and English and to focus in on the specific needs of children whose first language is Irish. It may take an additional step to adapt some of these tests for children with special education needs but, in most cases, the advice is that this is feasible.

There are wider questions as to whether these new tests will meet existing and future needs of the sector. Accessible data on the range of special needs in Irish medium education is not available in the south of Ireland. Classroom observation and the experience of the teacher is central in seeking to identify, and respond to, the educational needs of the child. The assessment tests are additional tools. However, Inspectorate reports in the north of Ireland have stated the need for assessment tools to achieve best practice. Sometimes the emphasis on SEN in the IME sector seems to focus on language difficulties. However, a recent report completed by POBAL, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*, Sept 2009, and commissioned by the Department of Education in the north of Ireland, reports that almost 70% of children with SEN's in IME settings (primary and post-primary combined) fall into the categories of moderate (35%), mild (19%), and social and emotional (15%) learning difficulties.

The **Drumcondra Irish Tests**, prepared by the **Education Research Centre**, Drumcondra, are concerned with assessing reading and comprehension, with the additional element of providing a standardised measurement of the child's ability in comparison with children of a similar age in other Gaeltacht schools, or in other Gaelscoileanna. There are a series of 4 tests for **children from age 5+ to the end of primary school**. This test can also be administered and corrected by the teacher and, a training manual accompanies the test, and is complemented by inservice work with teachers on assessment in all subject areas. The results can also be interpreted by the teacher. It will be available from Spring 2010 onwards from: The Education Research Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

This test was developed with reference to the south of Ireland. Therefore, the standardisation involved has not been tested for the Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland. Exploratory talks with the Education Research Centre as to whether it would be possible to adapt these tests for use in Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland were positive. Further work would be required to take this project forward. The Education Research Centre, Drumcondra, has also been advising on the adaptation and **development of these tests at post-primary level** (in the South) to identify the accommodation needs of students at entry point in secondary school and also the special accommodation requirements for individual students in state examinations.

The Diagnostic Individual Assessment of Basic Reading Ability (DIABRA) test, developed by County Dublin VEC, assesses word recognition and phonic skills in English. There is a corresponding version for Irish. This is a very comprehensive, yet simple test, requiring the class teacher to undertake 1 to 2 hours of training so as to be able to administer the test with maximum benefit, as it is an assessment for learning tool. Basically, it tests the learner's word reading and word decoding level by going systematically through a series of single word cards, or multi-word pages at graded levels of difficulty, until the teacher has identified sufficient areas for intervention (letter names, sight-words, letter sounds, phonic skills, pronunciation, etc). At this point the teacher can either assist the child through the difficulty on the spot, or use the information to create a short-term learning plan for the child. This suite of tests can be used in any setting, for any age or competence level, and is particularly suitable for Gaeltacht school or Gaelscoileanna, as it can identify learning needs in both languages consistently. It requires specific one-to-one engagement between the teacher and the child, but an average session would only take 5-10 minutes to complete. The test is appropriate for children from age 5+, or when the children learn to read. The test is available electronically, at a nominal cost, with a lifetime license to print individual copies. Training, carried out in cohorts of 50 or less at the trainees' expense, can be obtained from the author, Dr James Connolly by contacting Angela Coughlan, Administrator, at psscodvec@online.ie

The Authors of the DIABRA (and MAFÁLB) have also developed and piloted a suite of teacher-administered assessments of cognitive functioning (TaCA) and literacy (TaLA) for contemporaneous use in a number of Languages (including English and Irish). These tests have yet to be normed. Development of tests of differential language functioning (c.f. BICS and CALP, J. Cummins, 1979) in these languages is also under way.

The Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCA's) tests have been developed for Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland by the **Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** to fulfil the requirement on each school, from this school year onwards, to provide a standardized test on each child in Reading and Maths. **These computerised tests provide a standardized assessment of word recognition, word decoding and comprehension in Irish** and there is a separate test for maths. The initial questions are based on the age of the child. However, if the child fails to answer a number of questions, the computer software responds and drops the age-specific questions so that the questions become easier and, visa versa, if the child is answering all of the questions correctly then the questions become increasingly more difficult.

The results of the assessment are immediate. Teachers have received a day's hands on training in InCAS and there is a helpline available should schools experience any difficulties. Any number of pupils can be assessed at the same time and it is **appropriate for children from 7– 11 years** currently but the possibility exists in the short term for the post primary sector to also use the InCAS system as it has been **trialled and standardized up to the age of 16**. However, the proviso would be that teacher supervision would be required to ensure that pupils remained engaged with the programme. In principle, it is suggested that it could be adapted for use in the south of Ireland. The Irish used is standardized Ulster Irish with a native speaker and a learned speaker doing the voiceovers. The system could at minimal expense be extended to cover all IM schools North and South. Support for all-Ireland work in this area is a key recommendation in the Review of Irish Medium Education Report (DENI, 2008). For further information see: www.nicurriculum.org.uk or www.incasproject.org

As a **follow-up to this test CCEA** recognised that the assessment tool in Reading only identified the problem, if any, with the pupil and that **remediation support strategies** would be required to assist teachers with pupils achieving low scores. What does a teacher do with a pupil who has a low score on the assessment test? In March 2009 CCEA began a series of meetings with school principals to identify existing strategies and good practice in how to provide for such pupils. This information has been collated and is now available as a consultation document within the sector.

High Support Learning Programme ^(HSLP)

Arising from the need to move beyond literacy and numeracy support, with regard to SEN interventions, an innovative **cognitive development** programme has been developed by the Psychological Support Service of County Dublin VEC. While this High Support Learning Programme (HSLP) may be summarised briefly as an **intensive group withdrawal programme** focused on children that fall below the second percentile (generally with a score of less than 70 on an IQ test), the programme is extremely sophisticated and adaptable for use with pupils (in schools or other centres) who have “met the criteria” for a diagnosis of mild or high-functioning moderate General Learning Difficulties¹ (as understood by DES) or who have considerable Additional Learning Needs arising from other circumstances, such as AD(H)D, Cultural or Linguistic Diversity, Socio-economic Disadvantage, or a history of disengagement from traditional schooling. The programme can be made available through Irish, through English, or bilingually in any pair of languages in which staff have competence (**experienced** participating pupils have, on occasion, managed to run the programme by themselves without adult involvement other than health and safety supervision). The programme and methodology have been developed in CODVEC, with DES funding, by chartered psychologist Dr Jim Connolly and a team of 16 psychologists and Special Educational Needs teachers over the past 9 years. The original programme, delivered through English, has been offered to over 40 students in County Dublin VEC Youthreach and Traveller Training Centres, since 2001 and a report on student outcomes was presented at the Psychological Society of Ireland Annual Conference in November 2004.

The content and methodology of the HSLP derive from a **rigorous, systematic application** of accepted education and learning theory (as distinct from some common educational practices), modified by the most up-to-date psycho-educational research. A manualisation of the programme and a training system for facilitators is currently being completed by the PSS team under the guidance of Elaine O'Brien, Educational Psychologist. Although specifically designed for children and young adults in the post-primary and further education sectors, it is equally applicable in primary schools. A **pilot scheme through the medium of Irish** is ready for commencement in Coláiste Feirste in Belfast, should funds become available. The CCEA is facilitating the operation of this project which could also be made available to the English medium sector (in the North) at primary or secondary level. Simultaneously, a pilot programme is planned for Deansrath Community College, a second level school in an area of severe socio-economic disadvantage in County Dublin.

The HSLP is a highly structured programme, premised on providing 12 targeted interventions (in the form of Mediated Learning Experiences, MLEs) in a 2-to-3-hour session, to a small mixed group of co-learners (about 6 pupils and 3 facilitators) a number of times per week, depending on the circumstances. Each of the 12 (timed) interventions lasts for exactly 10 minutes and the ethos of active peer-support and positive group-learning is strictly maintained. The facilitators (usually a Psychologist, a SEN teacher, and a classroom assistant) all of whom are appropriately qualified, experienced, skilled, and trained in their field are specifically trained in the HSLP intervention.

¹ There is a difference in the terminology used North and South to define medium and light general learning difficulties. Children who are defined as children with light learning difficulties in the south of Ireland, are defined in the north of Ireland, according to the terminology, with medium general learning difficulties.

It is expected that this would be provided by the staff of the **Psychological Support Service of County Dublin VEC**, in association with psychologists from the BELB. The training consists of a theoretical input (orientation component) and an apprenticeship phase (practice component) of shadowing the current programme delivery team, led by Dr Jim Connolly.

Prospective HSLP learners are assessed, and the family interviewed, by an Educational Psychologist before they can take up a place on the programme, and re-assessment takes place after a 2-year attendance. An evaluation of the first 3-year cycle of the programme was carried out in 2004 and it demonstrated that those pupils who attended consistently all displayed increased IQ, literacy and numeracy scores at the end of the programme, some of these being elevated to the average range. Marked transformations of attitude to education and the development of pro-social competencies were identified (though unsolicited) as ancillary outcomes of programme participation by the normal teaching staff of the Centres.

Queen's University Belfast is working on a **cognitive memory test** in Irish. It is believed that it will be available in 2010.

A number of individuals are also working at adapting other assessments tests for use in Irish medium education. Doctoral students in Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin are working on diagnostic tools for autism and dyslexia.

Table of Assessment tools of particular relevance to the Irish medium education sector.

Test Provider	Aimed at	Focus on	Stage of development	Training/Costs/Comment
St. Patrick's College Drumcondra tests	Primary school 4 levels	Understanding, reading, listening	Ready for roll-out in south of Ireland, September 2009	Not specifically designed for SEN but could easily be modified for this purpose.
St. Patrick's College Drumcondra tests	Post-primary	Understanding, reading, listening	Project initiated March 2009.	
CCEA InCAs in Irish	Pupils 4-16 yrs	Computer based assessment of cognition, reading, Tests for...	Ready for roll-out Sept 2009	Suggested that could be suitable for SEN at post-primary level.
CCEA InCAs remediation strategies	Pupils 4-16 yrs	Providing teaching strategies for children identified through testing as presenting with learning difficulties in Irish	Consultation and meetings with principals to identify best practice strategies. Consultation document Jun 2009	NCCA has also recently created a school network group to identify teaching strategies for teaching Irish. Pilot begins Sept 2009. It is not focused on SEN but it is highly probable that they will need to address issues of SEN as part of process.
St Mary's University College, Belfast	Primary school	Assessment of the beginning of reading	Available	
Dublin VEC High Support Learning Programme	12-17 yrs with mild learning disabilities	Intensive teaching support strategy for small group of children	Pilot (in English) has been tested and evaluated. Pilot (in Irish) begins in Belfast Sept 2009	
Dublin VEC TACA project	4-16 years Bilingual children	Developing a cognitive assessment test on children in Irish, or in English, or in Irish and English	Has been piloted but needs to be tested on larger sample of children to obtain norm-referencing.	
Dublin VEC Diabra test	5-16yrs	Reading and comprehension in Irish. Testing process identifies the learning plan.	Available	Short training session (10-20mins)

Resource materials

Priority: graded reading materials

There appears to be a Catch-22 situation in providing resources for children with special education needs in the IME sector. The lack of adequate resource materials in Irish influences the decision to provide learning support through English. Then, as much learning support appears to be through English this feeds the argument that there is no demand for materials in Irish.

However, the demand for graded reading material has been a consistent demand of the sector for a very long time. A very pertinent investigation and survey on current reading materials was carried out by St. Mary's University College in Belfast investigating their usefulness to teachers, for the age group of children learning to read. Other research has identified a lack of support material at post-primary level.

While the Coláiste Mhuire survey was confined to Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland it provides a valuable insight into the practical application of the existing materials, and profiles what is required.

The overall response was that the materials are not suitable for early years learning and there is an urgent need to develop a new scheme for children beginning to read. The main gaps identified in the existing materials involved issues such as: need for materials on phonics, lack of variety, pronunciation, old fashioned design/images, need for CDs for home use, the texts are not graded, etc. Unfortunately, at the moment, none of the main publishers, An Gúm, An tAisaonad, nor other web-based resource sites such as, www.pfds.ie (primary professional development service), www.slss.ie, (new site to provide resources for secondary schools) have any immediate plans to develop such a scheme, although the Aisaonad is hoping to progress its work in this area.

However, it is clear that many teachers prepare their own materials to assist their pupils with special education needs. While this material is often prepared in the teacher's own time, and without the resources to design it and produce it to high professional publishing standards, it is a valuable resource for the sector. As part of the follow up to the InCA's assessment process, the CCEA, in conjunction with the Gaelscoileanna in the north of Ireland, have had a series of meetings with school principals, to identify good practice and relevant materials. The voluntary group who provide SEN support to teachers, parents and children, Gaeleagras um Shainriachtanais Oideachais (GESO), has also begun the process of gathering materials, and some of materials are available on their site, www.gesoeire. As a grassroots response we are asking all schools, but particularly Gaelscoileanna in the south of Ireland and schools in the Gaeltachtaí to forward some materials so that it may be possible to gather together a body of information and material that would help support the sector. We urge you to share your materials – and not to be worried that they are 'rough and ready' – so as to help ensure that some progress is made in this area. Let's make the most of what we've got. The process as to how this information can be collated, developed, and made available in useful ways to the sector and will form part of our research over the next number of months and will inform the short and long term strategy proposals.

The need for training

The main priority is to ensure that the classroom teacher/playgroup leader is equipped to identify pupils with special education needs. The role of the classroom assistant is also important in this context.

There are a number of developments in these areas, many of them linked to policy issues, so there is some overlap in this section and the next section on policy and support services. Obviously the further development of assessment tools will also go some way to support teachers in identifying, or confirming, their observations of the pupils in their class.

The need for more adequate training, at pre-service and in-service level, has been recognised for a long time. Opinion varies as to whether the training should form an integral part of all modules and course material and/or form a core compulsory module at teacher training colleges. Both Teaching Councils North and South are actively developing policy objectives to instil a continuum of professional education development – the notion of continuous learning through initial, induction and in-service training.

The Department of Education in the north of Ireland has launched new proposals in a consultation document, August 2009, to restructure the Code of Practice for Special Education Needs to meet the additional² educational needs of the pupils within the school. There is a strong emphasis on training to ensure teachers can identify and meet the needs of the children as the new model refers to Within School, Within School Plus External support, and Coordinated Support Plans, as a strategy placing greater responsibility on all schools to provide for the early identification of the diversity of need, assessment, planning and delivery of support programmes.

The support of the classroom assistant has been identified as very valuable in the research carried out by POBAL, *The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children*. This report highlights the importance of training for classroom assistants in Gaelscoil settings to maximise their support. In the south of Ireland a new course, organised by the Irish Primary Principals Network, *Managing Special Needs Assistants, Promoting Best Practice* seems also to be concerned with maximising the role of classroom teachers. The modules on this course included organising effective training at school and wider levels and evaluating the work of Special Needs Assistants. Alongside this, a Value for Money review of the role of classroom assistants is currently underway by the Department of Education and Skills, with new implications for the sector.

Teachers can, and do, avail of existing training courses (see table on next page). For the Irish medium education sector two priority issues stand out, namely: accessibility of courses for teachers in small rural schools where geographical distances and the lack of suitable substitute cover makes attendance difficult, and the lack of training and materials relevant to the issues facing teachers in the sector, such as materials in Irish, immersion education, and second language acquisition.

Proposals have been put forward to adapt the on-line Diploma/Certificate in Education Special/Inclusive Education, on offer by St. Patrick's Collage and the Institute of Child Education and Psychology, to make it more suitable for Irish medium education. It is targeted at teachers in the primary and post-primary setting and it is hoped that it would be relevant to the all Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, taking into account the different policy (resource and delivery) contexts North and South. The proposals are: to offer an additional module on immersion/second language

² The consultation document refers to 'additional educational needs' as opposed to the more usual terminology of 'special education needs'. This terminology is proposed to suggest a wider and more inclusive approach to meeting the needs of all children.

learning and special education needs, and to ensure that the interactive elements of the course – tutors, one-to-one support and peer support networks - would be through Irish, as well as key on-line live lectures. Currently the course has 4 modules on inclusion, understanding autism (effective management and teaching strategies), dyslexia, and challenging behaviour and mild general learning disabilities. Completing these 4 modules, generally over 18 months, leads to a Certificate or, with a thesis, a Diploma in Special/Inclusive Education. Further details are available from: <http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/administration/admissions/documents/FAQ.pdf>

The evidence supports early identification and intervention in the area of Special Educational Needs. Yet, early years learning provision is almost completely divorced from the training, resource and delivery framework. Recognising this problem, the Department of Education, in the north of Ireland (DENI), has proposed, in its very recent consultation document, *Every School is a Good School, The Way Forward for Special Education Needs, (Aug 2009)*, that all pre-school providers participating in the pre-school education expansion programme should come within the revised framework. The major policy document on SEN in the south of Ireland, *National Council for Special Education Implementation Report (2006)*, following from the EPSEN Act, does not include preschool education in its remit.

Childcare training, NVQ's and FETAC training, have modules on Special Education Needs, but these modules are not a compulsory element of the training. Forbartha Naíonraí Teo estimates that between 5-10%, depending on annual intake of children, attending naíonraí present with physical special education needs.

Múinteoras, in conjunction with the University of Limerick, have organised courses on Special Education Needs for Irish medium education. However, while this course could be made available in Irish it is unlikely that this will be possible without funding. Altram have also organised Disability Awareness sessions and workshops.

Course	Aimed at	Location	Duration
Graduate Diploma in Special Education (awarded by Dublin City University)	Special and primary school teachers only	St Patrick's College	1 year
PG Diploma in SEN (awarded by Trinity College)	Post-primary teachers only	Church of Ireland College of Education	1 year
Graduate Diploma in SEN (awarded by Uni of Limerick)	Primary and post-primary	Mary Immaculate College	1 year
Higher Diploma in SEN (awarded by NUI Galway)	Primary and post-primary	St. Angela's College Sligo	1 year
Higher Diploma of the NUI, Dublin	Primary and post-primary	University College Dublin	1 year
Graduate Diploma in Learning Support	Primary teachers	St. Patrick's College	1 year
PG Diploma in Learning Support Education (awarded by Trinity College)	Primary and post-primary	Church of Ireland College of Education	
Higher Diploma in Learning Support	Primary and post-primary	Dept of Education, NUI Cork	
Higher Diploma in Learning Support	Primary and post-primary	Dept of Education, NUI Galway	
Higher Diploma in Learning Support	Primary and post-primary	Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	
Graduate Diploma in Learning Support	Primary and post-primary	St Angela's College Sligo	
Master's in SEN	Primary and post-primary	St. Patrick's College	
Graduate Certificate in the education of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Primary and post-primary	St. Patrick's College	

The provision of services

While there are many issues concerning the provision of services to children with Special Education Needs within Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools the main priority issues that have been raised again and again in different reports are:

- The need for guidelines at policy level.
- The need for guidance from the service providers on the particular aspects of special educational needs and immersion learning, special education needs and second language acquisition, etc.. (while this covers all services it appears to be the case in many instances that the first port of call is on the speech and language therapists and, for this reason, the need for speech and language therapists, who can provide a service through Irish, is a priority.
- The need for the service providers to understand bilingualism and immersion learning and to assess the child within the context of his/her school, family and local community.

According to information gleaned from previous reports there are varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the current situation. There is an ever increasing demand for services from a system that appears to be stretched to the limit of its resources at all times. This lack of resources has dominated the policy and delivery discourse, regardless of the economic climate. The evidence indicates that approximately 20% of all children in education will require some level of additional support throughout their time in school. With over 50,000 children in Irish medium education, this indicates that there are 7,000+ children potentially in need of special support needs. It is difficult to find contemporary, comprehensive and well documented research on the effectiveness of bilingual education for children with diagnosed Special Education Needs. A major literature review commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature, 2006* found the practice of immersion teaching varied considerably throughout the world, and that a comprehensive research study would be required to be carried out, before it would be possible to identify best practice in Ireland. Based on their review (2007) of the limited available research on special education needs and bilingual learning/immersion learning, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has noted that:

- There may be no advantage in moving a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school because of specific learning difficulties
- There may be no advantage in changing a child from a Gaelscoil to an English-medium school on the grounds of intellectual ability
- It need not be assumed that children with language disorders cannot become bilingual.

Obviously, these statements are qualified as the particular circumstances of each child's case must be assessed on an individual basis. The fact that NEPS have also drawn up a report on their services to Irish medium schools and are actively engaged in discussing the service delivery implications of the report should help generate greater awareness among all service providers and assist in devising appropriate delivery options.

While there are no clear answers to the questions that teachers want answered, particularly the sequencing around second language acquisition, more recent trends in research appear to suggest that more emphasis is being placed on the process of developing transferable language learning skills. This trend is premised on the view that children do not 'start from scratch' when learning a second language and that the same skill set is used. It has been likened to a tree whereby the first language creates the trunk, branches and leaves. The second language operates along the same trunk lines and many of the same branches lines. This approach substantiates the research indicators that if a child presents with difficulties in one language then those same difficulties will be apparent in the second language. This way of thinking raises interesting questions around the way language is taught, rather than the language used, and would appear to open up new areas of debate for the sector. We hope to engage with key service providers and coordinators North and South to further discussion and awareness around these issues.

2

Who's who? SEN support roles in schools

There are several groups of qualified teachers working in the system who share responsibility, along with the classroom teacher, for the education of children with special needs.

They include for example: the Learning Support Teacher, the Special Education Resource Teacher, Visiting Teachers, the language Support Teacher, the Support Teacher and the Resource Teacher. There are also Special Needs Assistants (SNA). A brief formal description of each of these roles is set out below.

Learning Support Teachers (previously known as Remedial Teachers in the south of Ireland) are involved, in assisting children who would be described as having learning difficulties, and in providing educational support to children with SEN, particularly children with dyslexia and borderline Mild General Learning Disability. Every primary school would have a teacher assigned (either full-time or part-time) and many secondary schools. In the North, Learning Support Teachers are employed by the Education and Library Board. This teacher may help the child directly or may support teachers in the school.

Special Education Resource Teachers (South) are primarily involved in providing services to children who have been assessed and found to have a SEN condition. They are mostly employed in primary schools, and their role is not as clearly defined as the Learning Support Teacher resulting in different support structures in different schools. Generally these teachers support children who fall within the Department of Education and Skills (DES) list of special education conditions.¹ The major difference between a Resource Teacher and a Learning Support Teacher is time. Typically children receiving services from resource teacher will receive more time per week, possibly 2 hours per day.

Visiting Teachers (South) provide support to children who are visually or hearing impaired.

Language Support Teachers (South) work with children to improve language skills. This is a relatively new area of teaching support to cater for children whose first language is not English, but the programme has been extended to the schools in the Gaeltacht. Generally they have been considered a valuable resource to the schools.

Support Teachers (South) provide support services to children experiencing emotional disturbances severe enough to interfere with their learning and the learning of their peers. The majority are located in the greater Dublin area.

¹ In discussion with the Advisory committee and with the Department of Education officials it was noted that, in the south of Ireland issues of SEN policy and practice in schools do not usually form part of Inspectorate reports. In the North the issue of SEN provision in school is not always referred to, but it is becoming more common to have a section on this. In some instances it falls under the heading of Leadership in the inspectorate report.

Special Needs Assistants (SNA). In the South an SNA does not have to be fully qualified teacher to take on the role, the entry requirement being 3 passes at Junior Certificate level, although many SNA hold advanced degrees and educational qualifications. Their role, as set out at policy level, states that they are not to assume a direct teaching responsibility and are to work under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher. The DES has established a training programme for SNA. Not every child with SEN is entitled to a special needs assistant and a major value for money review of these services is currently underway by the DES.

In the North, where a pupil with special educational needs requires more help than it is reasonable to expect a teacher to provide, a School-based Assistant may be provided. Depending on pupils' special educational needs a school may employ a variety of assistants. For example, there are classroom assistants, general assistants, supervisory assistants and learning support assistants. Assistants work under the overall direction of the school's principal.

Special Education Needs Officers (SENO) (South) are employed to coordinate and advise schools at the local level in the provision of SEN services. There are 80 SENO approximately in the country at present. Generally the SENO is assigned geographically, although there is provision to assign them to a particular category of school.

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) (North) Every grant-aided school must have a SENCO. The SENCO is a member of staff who has responsibility for coordinating special educational needs provision. In a small school the SENCO may be the principal. The SENCO is responsible for: the day to day operation of the school's SEN policy, and the link to external services into the school. The SENCO ensures that the register is maintained and provides help and advice to the class teacher in relation to assessments, planning, reviewing and monitoring of the child with special education needs.

Named Officer (North) The Statutory Assessment Process is complex and sometimes difficult for parents to understand. Generally the Special Education Section of the relevant Education and Library Board has a named person who can advise in relation to the relevant person(s) who can assist, advise and support during the assessment process.

Appendix 3

Glossary

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
BELB	Belfast Education and Library Board
CASS	Curriculum Advisory and Support Service
CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CPD	Continuing professional development
DE NI	Department of Education Northern Ireland
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DES	Department of Education and Skills (formerly known as the Department of Education and Science).
COGG	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ELB	Education and Library Board
EPD	Early Professional Development
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
EWO	Educational welfare officer
EPSEN Act	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
GTCNI	General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IME	Irish-medium Education
ICEP	Institute of Child Education and Psychology
INSET	In-service training
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LNI	Learning Northern Ireland
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Education Psychological Service
RTU	Regional Training Unit
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural disorder
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SENCA	Special Educational Needs Classroom Assistant
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order
SESS	Special Education Support Service

List of groups/individuals contacted

Eagrais	Organisation	Rannóg/Teagmháil	Sonraí teagmhála
ALTRAM	ALTRAM		028 9033 2517
Comhairle Curaclaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Measúnaithe (CCEA)	The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	RSO/ Gaeloideachas	028 90 261200 www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/ www.nicurriculum.org.uk/
An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta	COGG		01 634 0831 www.eolas@cogg.ie
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta	National Council for Special Education	Taighde SENCOS	046 948 6400 www.ncse.ie
An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta	The Teaching Council		1890 224 224 www.teachingcouncil.ie
An Gúm		Acmhainní	01 889 2800 angum@forasnagaeilge.ie
An tÁisaonad		Acmhainní	028 90 24 38 64 www.aisaonad.org
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna	The Department of Education and Skills	RSO/ Staitisticí Traenáil/Maoiniú	www.education.ie
An Roinn Oideachais	The Department of Education (DENI)	RSO/ Staitisticí Traenáil/Athbhreithniú ar RSO	www.deni.gov.uk
Coiste Sheirbhís Shíceolaíoch Bhaile Átha Cliath	Dublin County Psychological Service Committee	Seirbhís Thacaíochta Síceolaíche	psscvec@online.ie
Coláiste Feirste		Ionad Tacaíochta don Fhoghlaim	028 9032 0707 www.colaistefeirste.com
Coláiste Phádraig, Droim Conrach	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra	RSO	01 8842000 www.spd.dcu.ie
Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál Luimneach	Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	RSO/curaclam	061 204300 www.mic.ul.ie
Coláiste Oideachais Froebel	Froebel College	RSO/curaclam	01 288 8520 www.froebel.ie
Coláiste Ollscoile Naomh Muire	St Mary's University College	RSO/ An Fhoireann lán-Ghaeilge	028 9032 7678 www.stmarys-belfast.ac.uk
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta			028 9032 1475 www.comhairle.org
Comhar Náionraí na Gaeltachta			091 595337 www.comharnaionrai.com
Foras na Gaeilge		Taighde	www.forasnagaeilge.ie
Forbairt Náionraí Teo			01 853 5101 www.naionrai.ie
Gaeleagras um Shainriachtanais Oideachais (GESO)			www.gesoire.com
Líonra Phríomhoide Bunscoile Éireann	Irish Primary Principal's Network	Cúrsaí traenála	www.ipppn.ie
Gaelscoileanna Teo			01 853 5195 www.gaelscoileanna.ie
Institiúid Oideachais Marino	Marino Institute of Education	RSO/curaclam	01 805 7700 www.mie.ie
ICEP Europe	Institute of Child Education and Psychology	Cúrsa traenála	www.icepe.eu
Múintearas			091 551412 www.muintearas.com
Ollscoil na hÉireann Gaillimh	Galway University	Curaclam/cúrsa traenála	091 524411 www.oegaillimh.ie
Coláiste na hOllscoile, Baile Átha Cliath			www.ucd.ie
Ollscoil na Banríona	Queen's University Belfast	Síceolaíocht Acmhainní	028 9097 5445 www.psychology@qub.ac.uk
Banríona	Primary Professional Development Service		www.ppps.ie www.pcsp.ie
An tSeirbhís Tacaíochta don Dara Leibhéal	Secondary Level Support Service		http://gaeilge.slss.ie
An tSeirbhís Tacaíochta d'Oideachas Speisialta	Special Education Support Service		1850 200 884 www.sess.ie
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Síceolaíochta Oideachais	National Educational Psychological Service	Straitéis nua ar son na Gaeilge/ staitisticí	01 8892700 neps@neps.gov.uk