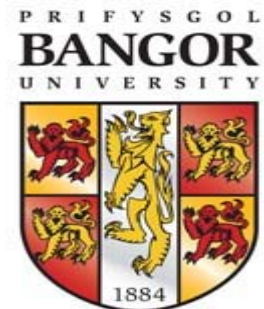


# Access to the Curriculum for Pupils with a Variety of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes

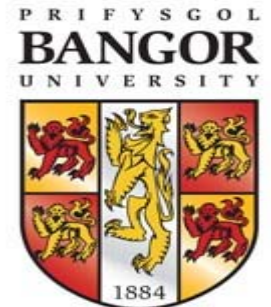
Dr Jean Ware, School of Education  
Bangor University

NCSE Research Seminar

16<sup>th</sup> November 2011



# An exploration of the experiences of young pupils in primary school



# Research team

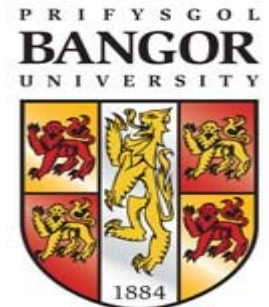
Dr Jean Ware, Bangor University

Dr Cathal Butler, St. Patrick's College

Christopher Robertson, Birmingham University

Dr Margaret O'Donnell, St. Patrick's College

Magi Gould, Bangor University



# Research Questions

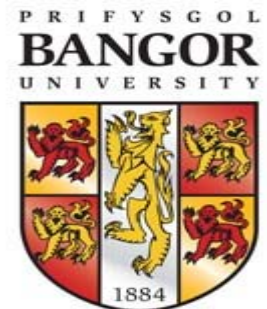
1. How is the curriculum being implemented and differentiated in mainstream primary school classes (from junior infants to second class) which include pupils with a variety of SEN?
2. How are pupils with SEN and their parents experiencing the curriculum in these settings?
3. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the curriculum and learning outcomes for pupils with SEN in these settings?
4. What are the challenges involved for teachers in implementing and differentiating the curriculum in these mainstream primary school classes?
5. What are the challenges for pupils with SEN in gaining access to the curriculum in these settings?



# Access to the Curriculum

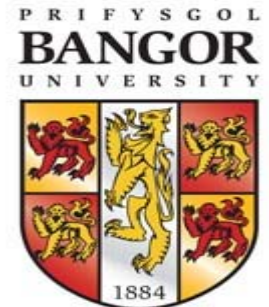
“Simplistically, maximum access is seen as that which is experienced by ordinary pupils, and which can be achieved by pupils with special educational needs when special educational provision meets these special needs.”

(Dobbins and de la Mere, 1993, p49)



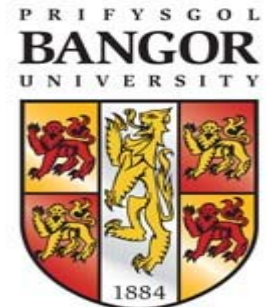
# Access to the Curriculum

the extent to which an individual child is enabled to participate in the same breadth of curriculum as other children of the same age and at a level appropriate to their needs.



# Methodology

- Multiple Case Studies
  - focused on individual children
  - in a variety of mainstream primary schools
- Using
  - classroom observation
  - interviews
  - analysis of relevant documents



# Methodology

- Preliminary questionnaire to identify potential schools
- Case studies conducted in 11 schools
  - 39 case studies in total
  - 46 children
  - Children observed in two lessons
  - Children, staff and parents interviewed
  - Some documents examined



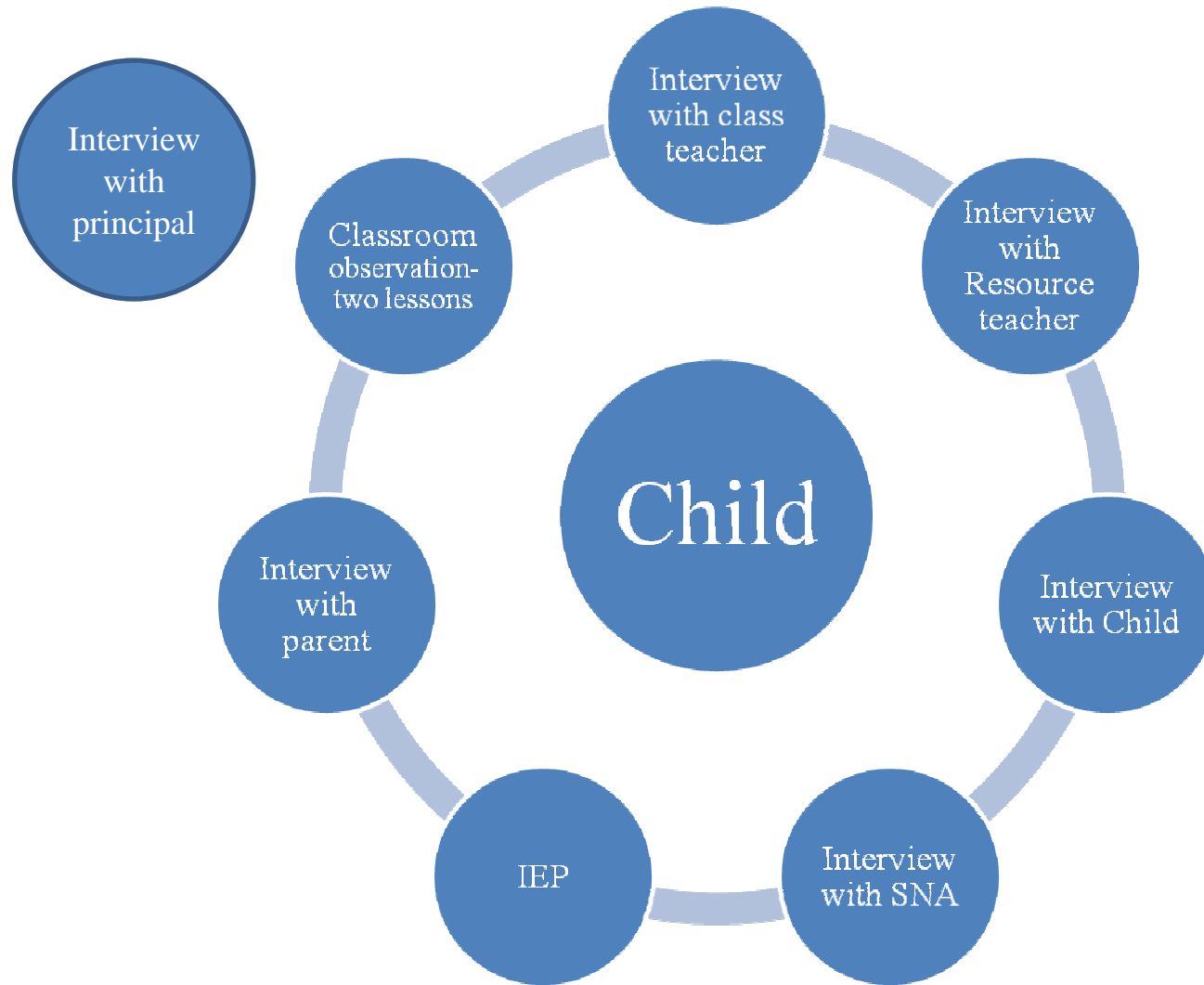
# Preliminary Questionnaire

Information requested on:

- numbers of children with high and low incidence SEN
- DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools status)
- percentage of new Irish children
- age range catered for
- Number of special classes
- school size
- religious affiliation
- number of support and resource teachers



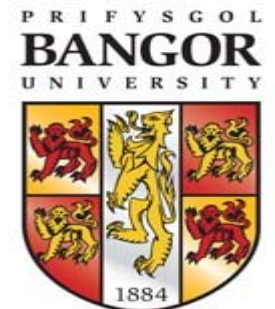
# Case Study Structure



# The Case Study Children

<b>Category of SEN</b>	<b>Junior Infants</b>	<b>Senior Infants</b>	<b>First Class</b>	<b>Second Class</b>	<b>Total</b>
Children allocated for under the GAM	1	2	9	4	16
Autism/ASD	2	1	4	2	9
Physical disability	-	1	3	1	5
Emotional disturbance	1	-	1	1	3
Hearing impairment	-	2	1	-	3
Assessed syndrome	1	-	1	-	2
Moderate general learning disability	-	1	1	-	2
Multiple disabilities	-	-	1	-	1
Visual Impairment	-	-	-	1	1
Specific speech and language disorder	-	1	-	-	1
Severe/Profound General Learning Difficulties	-	-	-	-	3 (special class)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>46</b>

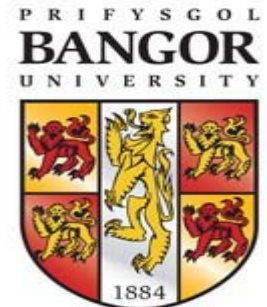
# Main Findings



# Observed Lessons and tasks

Children were observed in a number of lessons

- The lesson refers to a subject in the curriculum, e.g. English, SPHE, Mathematics
- Lessons were subdivided into tasks, described as a discrete activity which was an intentional part of the lesson content.



# Number of lessons and number of tasks observed

Lesson Type	Number of Lessons	Number of Tasks
English	27	68
Arts	20	33
Mathematics	18	40
Irish	7	12
SPHE	4	8
Physical Education	4	12
Homework	3	3
SESE	3	5
News	2	2
Playtime	1	1
Religion	1	1
Total	90	185

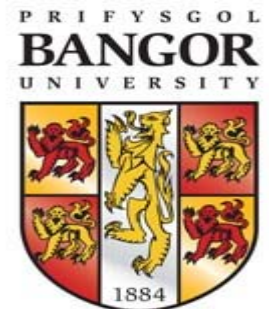
# Examples of lessons divided into tasks

A drama lesson consisted of three tasks

1. A marching song
2. A poem recited in small groups
3. A rainbow folks drama

A mathematics lesson also consisted of three tasks

- counting in 10s;
- oral addition and subtraction
- completing a worksheet.



# Levels of task accomplishment

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>The child is engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, and is accomplishing</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>84.5%</b>
the same tasks as the rest of the class without additional support	61	32.6%
the same tasks as the rest of the class, but with additional support	76	40.6%
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	7	3.7%
tasks, which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support	14	7.5%
<b>The child is attempting to engage in the curriculum and the lesson, but is not accomplishing</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
the same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support	6	3.2%
the same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support	13	7%
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, without additional support	1	0.5%
tasks which are similar to those covered by their peers, but differentiated to meet their needs, with additional support	0	0
<b>The child is not engaged with the curriculum or the lesson</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.8%</b>
The child is not engaged with the curriculum and the lesson, but is engaged in a task without similar content/aims with or without additional support	0	0
The child does not engage in any task or any part of the lesson	9	4.8%

# Curriculum Access

- Teachers were enabling children with SEN to access the curriculum in 85% of the tasks we observed:
  - The same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support: 32% of tasks
  - The same tasks as the rest of the class, with additional support: 41% of tasks
  - Similar tasks, but differentiated in line with children's needs: 12% of tasks



# Curriculum Access

In the remaining 15% of tasks the child was:

- Attempting to engage in the curriculum, but not accomplishing the task: 10.7% of tasks
- The same tasks as the rest of the class, without additional support: 3%
- The same tasks as the rest of the class with additional support: 7%
- Similar tasks, but differentiated for the children's needs: less than 1%
- Not attempting to engage: 5%



# Differentiation of the curriculum

- Support from an SNA occurred nearly five times as frequently as all other forms of differentiation combined

Teachers also used a range of other strategies:

- adapting their classroom organisation
- using additional or different resources,
- modifying the content of the lesson

Occasionally

- modifying their expectations of pupils
- using some form of specialist pedagogy

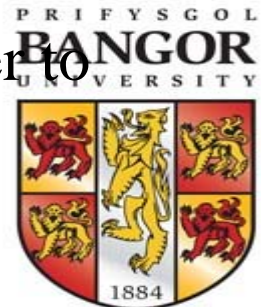
Very occasionally

- use of assistive technology
- additional or different resources



# Pupils' experiences

- Almost all pupils liked school
  - They were able to tell us about things they enjoyed
  - a minority also told us about things they did not enjoy.
- Relationships with other children, both in the playground and in the classroom were generally positive
  - They were regarded by teachers and parents alike as an important aspect of being in mainstream.
- Relationships with staff were also generally positive
  - But there was a tension between a close supportive relationship with the SNA and this becoming a barrier to full participation with peers.



# Parents' experiences

- Parents were generally very positive about their experience of school
  - good communication with the school was important to them and felt to be in place
- Parents were much less positive about their experience of the formal assessment of special educational needs
  - lack of information to guide them through this process was a key issue



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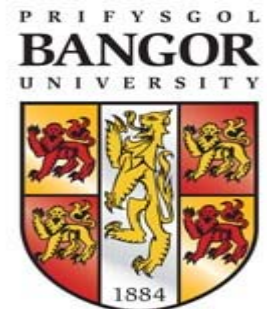
# Factors facilitating curriculum access

- Support for the class teacher from:
  - other teachers within the school with expertise in SEN
  - visiting teachers and other outside professionals
  - parents.
- Support for children with SEN from:
  - the resource/learning support teacher
  - visiting professionals.
- The role of the SNA
  - working directly with the child with SEN
  - carrying out other tasks.



# Factors facilitating curriculum access

- Leadership from the principal and from the SEN co-ordinator.
- A co-ordinated approach to planning of SEN provision
- Collaborative planning and implementation of the IEP between parents, class teachers and school SEN staff.



# Barriers to Access

- lack of support
- lack of time for collaborative planning
- no clear leadership in relation to SEN issues
- lack of appropriate training opportunities
  - Lack of relevant SEN content in preservice-training
  - Access to CPD
- child-related factors
  - nature of child's SEN
- curriculum related factors
  - exemptions from some subjects
  - withdrawal for resource teaching



# Issues raised by the study

- The role played by SNAs
- Teachers' feelings of lacking appropriate preparation to deal with pupils with SEN and lack of access to CPD which would meet their needs
- Lack of time for co-ordination between resource and class teachers and SNAs
- Differences between schools in the extent to which there was support for class teachers in facilitating access for pupils with SEN
- Differences between schools in the extent to which there was overall planning in relation to SEN.

