

FOREWORD

This Strategic Plan is being published at a time when the provision of special education in Ireland is about to undergo a sea change with the progressive implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act).

The plan reflects the functions of the National Council for Special Education as established under the Act and sets the key priorities of the Council in addressing the major change agenda envisaged by the EPSEN Act. The implementation of the EPSEN Act and embedding of its concept of inclusive education, underpinned by a series of statutory rights, will require a co-ordinated and sustained commitment by the many stakeholders involved in delivering on the vision and practicalities of the Act. While this plan sets out the key priorities and objectives of the Council and the action plan for achieving these objectives its delivery will require a collaborative approach by all who plan, support and deliver services to persons with special educational needs.

The key focus of this plan is provision of appropriate educational supports and improved educational outcomes for persons, and particularly children, with special educational needs. Its success will be judged on that basis.

Delivery on the priorities set out in this statement will ensure that children with special educational needs receive appropriate education in an inclusive environment and achieve outcomes in accordance with their abilities.

Sydney Blain

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The National Council for Special Education is delighted to present its first Statement of Strategy for the period 2008-2011. Council members have developed the Statement along with the Executive to identify core objectives, key result areas and outcome measures for the next four years. The content and approach in this four-year strategic plan reflects our duties and responsibilities under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN), 2004 and represents the articulation of these responsibilities. As the NCSE is a new and emerging body, the task of identifying our strategic priorities has been challenging. We have developed these alongside our work on an Implementation Report to the Minister for Education and Science that was submitted in October 2006. The consultation that we have engaged in for the preparation of the Implementation Report has been a key source of information in the development of this Statement of Strategy. We are confident that the high-level objectives identified in this document and our five-year implementation plan will greatly contribute to meeting our ultimate aim; that of inclusive education as set out in the EPSEN Act, 2004:

“...having regard to the common good and in a manner that is informed by best international practice, the education of people with special educational needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment.”

The National Council for Special Education was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003. The Council was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. Special educational needs are defined in the Act as:

“a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition”.

With effect from 1 October 2005 the Council has been formally established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act). That Act sets out both the general functions of the Council and its specific functions in relation to the provisions of the Act.

The general functions of the Council as set out in Section 20 of the EPSEN Act may be summarised as follows;

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- Planning and co-ordinating provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs
- Disseminating information on best practice concerning the education of children with special educational needs
- Providing information to parents in relation to the entitlements of children with special educational needs
- Assessing and reviewing resources required by children with special educational needs
- Ensuring that progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and reviewed
- Reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities
- Advising educational institutions on best practice
- Consulting with voluntary bodies
- Advising the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to special education
- Conducting research and publishing findings

The Council has specific functions in relation to the core provisions of the Act such as assessment and individual education plans.

In addition to its functions under the Act, the Council has been given specific and major functions in relation to the allocation of teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support children with special educational needs.

In carrying out its functions under the Act the Council is required to consult directly with stakeholders as necessary and to establish a formal national Consultative Forum representative of all the stakeholders.

Current Operations

The Council allocates additional teaching and other resources available to support the special educational needs of children with disabilities. It took over this function from the Department of Education and Science in January 2005. Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) are now dealing with applications for additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant support for children with special educational needs from all schools. SENOs issue decisions to schools directly and explain

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the reasoning behind these to both schools and parents as the needs arise.

SENOs deal with the following resource allocation functions;

- Processing applications from all schools for resource teacher support in respect of children with low-incidence disabilities such as moderate general learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities or autism, and deciding on the level of support appropriate to the school
- Processing applications from second-level schools for resource teacher support in respect of children with high-incidence disabilities such as mild general learning disability and deciding on the level of support appropriate to the school
- Processing applications from schools and deciding on the appropriate level of special needs assistant support for children with disabilities
- Examining applications from all schools for special equipment/assistive technology
- Examining applications from schools for transport arrangements for children with disabilities and making recommendations to the Department of Education & Science
- Assisting parents to identify the appropriate educational setting for individual children with special educational needs
- Liaising with parents of children with special educational needs in relation to a range of issues such as placements, supports available, appropriate education settings
- Liaising with the HSE and service providers to maximise the co-ordination of the various services in supporting children with special educational needs

Operational Independence

The Council has varying degrees of independence in executing its functions. The Council is required to operate within the policy parameters issued by the Minister for Education and Science when implementing current policy. In particular, it has to abide by provisions in relation to the level of supports and/or resources available in particular situations.

In the areas of research and advising the Minister for Education and Science on special education policy, the Council is free to engage in research it deems necessary and advise the Minister on

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the basis of this research and the experience gained from implementation of current policies. The Minister may also request the Council to undertake specific research or provide specific research on a particular special education issue.

CHAPTER 2

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The environment in which the NCSE operates is a complex matrix of processes and provision and a range of stakeholders who have a significant bearing on how the Council itself delivers on its function. Central to the environment in which the Council operates is its role in ensuring the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream education.

2.2 INTERNAL ANALYSIS

The NCSE was first established in December 2003 and took over responsibility for the provision of resources for special educational needs from the Department of Education and Science on January 1st 2005. It was statutorily established under the EPSEN Act, 2004 on October 1st 2005.

The NCSE has both an advisory and an executive function. Its structures and working methods are organised to reflect this. The Council is an independent statutory body that has overall responsibility for policy and governance arrangements. Its members represent a wide range of interests and organisations in the special education sector. The Council delegates management responsibility for specific areas and issues to sub-committees that report to it for final decisions.

The day-to-day work of the Council is currently undertaken by an Executive of 98 people; 18 based at Head Office in Trim, Co. Meath and 80 SENOs who are spread throughout the country. The Executive is organised on the basis of three main dimensions of the Council's work;

- **Operations** – includes the delivery of services at local level e.g. resourcing schools to meet the needs of children with special educational needs
- **Research** – includes the development of a research programme to support the Council's work, commissioning research on special education issues and provision of policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science.
- **Corporate services** – includes financial management and control, internal auditing, human resource management, information and communications technology and administration.

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A key function of the NCSE's Council and Executive is to ensure the organisation operates as effectively and efficiently as possible. In achieving this the NCSE is required and fully committed to the implementation of all initiatives arising out of the ongoing Public Service Modernisation Programme e.g. Better Regulation, Quality Customer Service, Value for Money etc. and all related requirements contained within "Towards 2016".

Integral to both of these initiatives is the need to engage with relevant stakeholders on appropriate matters relating to special educational needs in Ireland. A Consultative Forum representative of its wide spectrum of stakeholders has been established which will provide a mechanism to facilitate consultation with key partners in the education and disability sectors on a wide range of issues.

2.3 EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

Recently, there has been a significant shift in thinking in relation to children with special educational needs and the commencement of a move away from the 'deficit' model to one in which a more systemic approach is required. This has been reflected in both the development of legislation and in the allocation of resources to support those in mainstream settings.

Ireland has a long history of providing special education for children with disabilities which can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century. Initially provision was by Religious Orders for students with hearing and visual impairment. Services for students with general learning disabilities and other physical disabilities came much later. By 1950 only one special school for students with general learning disabilities had been given official recognition.

In 1965 the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap made specific recommendations regarding diagnosis, educational placement, training and care of children and adolescents with a general learning disability. The adoption of these recommendations resulted in the expansion of special educational services for students with a general learning disability in the late 1960s and early 1970s by means of special national schools and special classes in mainstream national schools.

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Key reports which included;

*The Education of Children who are handicapped by Impaired Hearing (1972),
Curriculum Guidelines for Pupils with a Moderate Mental Handicap (1980),
The Education of Physically Handicapped Children (1982),
The Education and Training of Severely and Profoundly Mentally Handicapped Children in Ireland (1983).
The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993),
The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1993),*

have influenced the development of special education provision and helped to shape the system we have today.

During the 1980s special classes for students with a moderate general learning disability were established in mainstream national schools. Through the 1990s this was followed by the establishment of special classes for students with other disabilities including specific speech and language disorders, autism and specific learning disabilities. Until the early nineties, the great majority of students with disabilities of post-primary age attended special national schools which could enrol students in the age range of 4-18 years.

As the number of students with disabilities attending mainstream post-primary schools increased, special provision was made for them on an ad hoc basis. Resources were provided by the relevant sections of the Department of Education & Science in response to demand. Provision included special classes, resource posts, individual one-to-one tuition and special needs assistants.

Change in the provision of special education has also been stimulated and accelerated by;

- International trends in the development of special education and particularly the focus on maximising inclusion.
- High court judgements in cases involving children with special educational needs which resulted in a revisiting of the concept of education for persons with disabilities and a review of general provision.
- A major breakthrough in special provision for students with disabilities was achieved with the Government decision of October 1998. The Department of Education and Science, for the first time,

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automatically provided supports in the form of extra teaching and childcare services for students with disabilities attending mainstream national schools.

- The completion and publication of the reports of the Task Forces on Autism and Dyslexia also informed new approaches in these areas, as did the development of Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- The passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 which focuses on the provision of appropriate education in an inclusive setting, gives statutory rights to assessment and individual education plans, establishes an appeals mechanism and provides for the setting up of the NCSE.
- The passing of the Disability Act 2005 further consolidated the rights of children with disabilities and complements and supports the objectives of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

PRESENT PROVISION

Special education is now provided in primary, post-primary and special schools in mainstream classes and special classes. Additional teaching, care, equipment and accommodation supports are provided to all schools to support children with special educational needs.

THE EPSEN ACT 2004

The provisions and principles underpinning the EPSEN Act 2004 provide a clear picture as to the evolving shape and scope of special education provision as the various sections of the Act are commenced over the next three years. The Act establishes statutory rights for children with special educational needs in relation to the following;

- The provision of an appropriate education in an inclusive setting other than where that would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the provision of education to other children.
- An assessment, within a fixed time scale, to identify special educational needs and the services that will be required to enable the child to participate and benefit from education.
- The right to an education plan setting out in detail the special educational need of the child and the appropriate education programme to be followed, the goals to be achieved and the supports to be provided.

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- An Appeals process in relation to the assessments and educational plans.
- Duties of both the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Health and Children to make moneys and other resources available to support children with special educational needs.

2.4 CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE EPSSEN ACT 2004 APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING THE EPSSEN ACT 2004

As required by the EPSSEN Act 2004, the Council has submitted an Implementation Report on the Act to the Minister for Education and Science. This Report sets out the views of the Council on the process to be adopted, the major issues that arise, the supports needed and the associated costs and a sequenced action plan to facilitate the full implementation of the Act by 2010.

The Minister has welcomed the Report and the Department of Education and Science are currently considering it. This Strategic Plan is predicated on the broad acceptance of the Report and on the support and implementation of the Action Plan along the lines and within the general timelines outlined in the Report.

MAIN AREAS OF INVESTMENT

The Implementation Report identifies key areas where investment will be needed in order to effectively implement the EPSSEN Act, 2004 as set out below;

Pre-School Provision

Inclusive Education at School Level

Inclusive Schools Support Framework – Educational Support Services

Inclusive Schools Support Framework – Health Support Services

Training and Development

Education and Health Sector Collaboration

Appeals and Mediation

Educational Progression

Outcome of Reviews

Further and Continuing Education

Research

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RIGHTS-BASED PROVISION

The Action Plan for implementing the EPSEN Act 2004 is based on the Council's understanding of the provisions of the Act, particularly those provisions that are granted as a matter of right. The EPSEN Act has as its primary objective the right to an appropriate education in an inclusive setting and to equity of access to education for children with special educational needs.

2.5 POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS (PES)

The Irish education system is recognised internationally as a significant contributor to the rapid economic development experienced here in the last decade. A highly educated workforce has driven economic change and developed competitive advantage. In this context, there is now greater attention being given to those whose needs have not been best served by the education system. An analysis of the economic, social, political and legislative of the system demonstrates the deficits in the special education provision in the past and highlights the need for a new differentiated approach.

POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE

At a political level there is a willingness to engage with and address the needs of those with a disability/special educational need. This is evidenced by the fact that we now have a number of pieces of legislation that, together, provide a framework for addressing these needs. The framework includes the Disability Act, 2005, the EPSEN Act, 2004 and the Mental Health Act, 2001. Taken together and implemented speedily they will provide a strong basis for provision.

The requirements in both the EPSEN Act and the Disability Act for greater co-operation between the Education and Health sectors and the convergence of operational policy in these sectors will be critical. The programmes and the resource provision have not yet been agreed and the decisions on these matters will also impact on the achievements of the objectives set out in this plan.

In the absence of clearly defined statutory rights for persons with special educational needs coupled with a lack of provision and/or uniformity of provision there is a high level of litigation. Involvement in litigation is likely to put major pressures on the Council if services are not put in place and if resources are not available to meet the needs of those with special educational needs.

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ECONOMIC

Formerly, provision for children with special educational needs was largely available in the special school sector. With the passing of legislation, a framework now exists in which provision can be made for children with special educational needs and their parents to access services locally and for schools to put in place the range of supports needed to assist the child in his/her learning.

It is now widely recognised that the further development of appropriate responses to the special educational needs of persons with disabilities will require considerable resource inputs. These will include financial, human resource and infra-structural investment in Special Education. The ability of the state to deliver these inputs at a level to meet our high level objectives over the period of this plan will be critical. In setting our high level targets we have taken on board the generally optimistic forecasts of growth in the Irish economy over the period of this plan.

SOCIAL

Indications are that our population will continue to increase during the period of this plan. Estimated numbers of children with special educational need as defined in the EPSEN Act, 2004 could be as high as 18% of those in the 0-18 year age group which will present a challenge to the Council and to Government to respond appropriately to all of their needs.

While the provision of services for an increasing population will create extra demands, the provision of special education services for children from ethnic minorities and those of migrant workers will bring new challenges and demands. Issues in relation to cultural differences, language and assessment and the supply of appropriate teaching and assessment skills will arise.

2.5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The achievement of the strategic priorities and the successful implementation of the objectives outlined in this strategy statement are dependent on a number of critical success factors, outlined below.

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ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

The development of the organisational capacity of the Council will be critical to the ability of the Council to deliver on this plan. The plan has been formulated on the basis that the organisational and staffing issues addressed in the Implementation Report will be addressed progressively in line with the Action Plan contained in the Report.

RESOURCING

The complex nature of special education provision means that the success of delivery of the organisation's mission and vision for the future will largely depend on a sustainable level of financial and human resources. The development of research and assessment processes and financial and management systems will enable the organisation to manage and control existing resources more effectively.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partners in Education (parents, teachers, agencies and the Departments of Health & Children and Education & Science) have an input into both policy development and the provision of special education services. Their continued involvement is essential to fulfil the mission and vision of the organisation and to progress the special education agenda in Ireland.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The broad acceptance and implementation of the recommendations made in the Council's Implementation Report and the extent to which these are supported will be critical in the delivery of this plan. This will require political leadership, the earmarking of resources for the implementation of the Act and a commitment both nationally at DES and DHC level and locally between the NCSE and the HSE to drive change and to put in place the services needed so that those catered for under the Act can participate fully in and benefit from education.

In this regard, the NCSE will strive to ensure that its own capacity to deliver will be significantly enhanced and that its staff will be enabled to deliver on the demands placed on it throughout the implementation phase.

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VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

There are a number of core elements that make up our strategic plan. We have developed a vision statement, five strategic priorities and associated objectives to outline our ambition for the NCSE over the next four years.

The **Mission Statement** sets out the continued purpose of the NCSE.

The **Vision Statement** sets out the NCSE's vision for special education provision in the coming years.

The **Strategic Priorities** represents the core priorities in the NCSE's culture, driving the direction and intent of our strategy.

We have also developed an **Action Plan**, which outlines a series of specific and tangible tasks to drive the implementation of this strategy.

The hierarchy of strategy is as follows:



VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

NCSE'S MISSION

The NCSE will, on behalf of the State, provide local and national services to support special education provisions, undertake research and disseminate findings and provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science on special education policy issues.

NCSE'S VISION

The NCSE is committed to a special education system that is person-centred, family-focused and is responsive to the needs of all.

We have developed five Strategic Priorities, which lead us to achieve our vision for special education needs in the future in Ireland.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2008 – 2011

1. Facilitate children with SEN to get an appropriate education in an inclusive setting
2. Promote the identification and certification of educational programmes for children with SEN and monitor outcomes
3. Coordinate the provision of supports to enable inclusive and effective education for children with SEN to be delivered
4. Enhance educational provision for children with SEN through quality research and policy advice on SEN issues
5. Ensure that the NCSE is developed and maintained as an effective organisation and that it operates in a fully compliant manner with all of its statutory, regulatory and corporate governance requirements

VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

THE NCSE WILL FULFIL ITS MISSION AND ACHIEVE ITS VISION BY DELIVERING ON THE FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ASSOCIATED OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS OUTLINED BELOW

Through the development of a challenging, but realistic Strategic Action Plan, we will endeavour to move our strategy beyond general aspirations into a series of specific, tangible steps that will support the successful achievement of our strategy.

1. FACILITATE CHILDREN WITH SEN TO GET AN APPROPRIATE EDUCATION IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING

One of the fundamental changes brought about by the EPSEN Act 2004 and by the legislative and constitutional framework into which it now sits, is the conferring of specific rights on persons with special educational needs. The EPSEN Act provides a statutory right to a child with special educational needs to be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have special educational needs unless it would not be in the best interest of the child or the effective provision for other children. Successful inclusion requires a cultural and attitudinal mind-set that facilitates flexibility of response with the priority focus on what is in the best interests of the child/young person involved.

ACTION 1: ESTABLISH A FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE LEVELS OF INCLUSIVENESS

- 1.1 Encourage and facilitate a debate on what constitutes inclusive education
- 1.2 Develop and implement a framework to measure levels of inclusiveness
- 1.3 Develop information systems to support framework
- 1.4 Review role of special schools in the context of inclusivity

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ACTION 2: INFLUENCE REMOVAL OF BARRIERS TO ENTRY

2.1 Review gaps and identify current barriers

ACTION 3: FACILITATE PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

3.1 Allocate resources to schools in accordance with the Department of Education and Science policy parameters

3.2 Improve mechanism to identify placement needs

3.3 Develop guidelines on the process of placement of children with SEN to meet the requirements of the EPSEN and Disability Acts.

ACTION 4: PROMOTE AND SIGNPOST THE DELIVERY OF BEST PRACTICE FOR INCLUSION WITH REFERENCE TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE EPSEN ACT

4.1 Deliver comprehensive briefing on inclusion of children with SEN to Boards of Management and school staff in conjunction with the SESS and through our SENO network

4.2 Increase awareness amongst general public through public engagement, interaction and publications

VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

THE KEY OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN ACHIEVING THIS PRIORITY ARE:

- The concept of inclusive education will be more clearly defined and understood
- Inclusive education will be effectively promoted and promulgated to all relevant stakeholders
- Children with SEN will be participating in inclusive educational settings at all educational levels together with their peers who do not have SEN
- Placement needs of children with SEN will be identified and met
- Transition needs of children with SEN will be identified and met
- Barriers to inclusive education for children with SEN will be identified and addressed
- Information systems will be in place to enable baseline data on inclusion to be gathered and reviewed

2. PROMOTE THE IDENTIFICATION AND CERTIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN AND MONITOR OUTCOMES.

Children with SEN will achieve outcomes from education in accordance with their abilities which will facilitate them in transferring to the workplace, progressing to further education and lifelong learning, participating meaningfully in economic, social and cultural activity and, in effect, in living fulfilled lives independently in the community. It will not be possible to know if the objectives of the EPSEN Act are being achieved without a sustained focus on outcomes and, as such, it is necessary to develop measures that will help to give practical expression to this approach within the education system.

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ACTION 1: PROMOTE CURRICULUM DESIGN AND CERTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN

- 1.1 The NCSE will actively input to curriculum design and certification of outcomes with such bodies as NCCA, NQAI, and SEC

ACTION 2: PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES TO MONITOR EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN

- 2.1 Actively engage with relevant Education Agencies to expand the range and scope of educational programmes and certification for children with SEN

ACTION 2: PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES TO MONITOR EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN

- 2.1 Actively engage with relevant Education Agencies to expand the range and scope of educational programmes and certification for children with SEN

THE KEY OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN ACHIEVING THIS PRIORITY ARE:

- Effective curriculum design embracing the needs of all pupils including those with SEN will be promoted and delivered by the education system
- Differentiated educational programming to benefit children with SEN will be effectively operating in schools
- Best practice SEN provision will be communicated to schools and promulgated and implemented in schools
- The state examination and certification of educational outcomes systems will cater inclusively for children with SEN
- Systems and procedures will be in place to monitor and track educational outcomes for children with SEN

VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

3. COORDINATE THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTS TO ENABLE INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN TO BE DELIVERED

A key consideration in the implementation of the EPSEN Act is the need for its implementation to be coordinated between the Departments of Education and Science and of Health and Children, as well as their respective agencies, in tandem with the Implementation of the Disability Act 2005.

There are many possible routes to dealing with the very challenging issues and there needs to be substantial engagement between all of the stakeholders involved in this regard. This will enable the integration of services to support inclusive education (education, health, voluntary sector, etc) and the strengthening of support structures (NCSE, NEPS, SESS, DES, etc).

ACTION 1: INCREASE OUR CAPACITY TO DELIVER ON REQUIREMENTS TO AGREED QUALITY STANDARDS

- 1.1 Promote the development of a coordinated approach to the delivery of special educational needs
- 1.2 Develop and agree operating protocols with other agencies delivering services to children with special educational needs including the HSE
- 1.3 Provide information and advice to parents to assist them deliver on their child's educational needs

ACTION 2: ESTABLISH STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOP OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS

- 2.1 Develop and agree operating protocols with key stakeholders e.g. HSE, DES
- 2.2 Establish strong links and communications with key stakeholders

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ACTION 3: LIAISE WITH DES ON THE DESIGN AND PLANNING OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

3.1 Input into the design and planning of pre-service and in-service training programmes for school staff and management

THE KEY OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN ACHIEVING THIS PRIORITY ARE:

- Effective resource allocation processes are in operation
- The coordination of supports for children with SEN to deliver effective and inclusive education is operating to agreed quality standards and protocols
- Necessary support programmes for schools, teachers, parents and other stakeholders to facilitate effective inclusive education are in place
- Effective stakeholder relationships would be built, developed and maintained
- Parents would be involved in, and effectively supported by, the process of meeting and delivering on their child's needs

4. ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN THROUGH QUALITY RESEARCH AND POLICY ADVICE ON SEN ISSUES

The NCSE is conscious of the need to reflect on whether existing policies, procedures and resources are adequate to achieve the objectives of the EPSEN Act. Under EPSEN, the NCSE is required to advise the Minister for Education and Science in relation to any matter relating to the education of children and others with disabilities. The NCSE will, therefore, continually review the effectiveness of existing arrangements in meeting the objectives of the EPSEN Act and advise the Minister of issues that need to be addressed.

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ACTION 1: DEVELOP PROGRAMMES FOR POLICY/RESEARCH REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT TO ENSURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EPSSEN ACT 2004

1.1 Develop a research programme in line with requirements of the EPSSEN Act

1.2 Develop a policy review programme to influence and assist policy decision-making processes

ACTION 2: BENCHMARK INTERNATIONAL SEN POLICY FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Participate in international fora to facilitate the identification of best practice

2.2 Commission and publish comparative reviews

THE KEY OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN ACHIEVING THIS PRIORITY ARE:

- Effective research and policy advisory programmes would be in place to influence change in the SEN regime necessary to ensure the implementation of the EPSSEN Act, 2004
- Policy change would take place on an evolutionary basis in line with the requirements of the EPSSEN Act, 2004 and with international benchmarking of effective SEN policy frameworks

5. ENSURE THAT THE NCSE IS DEVELOPED AND MAINTAINED AS AN EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION AND THAT IT OPERATES IN A FULLY COMPLIANT MANNER WITH ALL OF ITS STATUTORY, REGULATORY AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REQUIREMENTS

Our collective aim through effective collaboration between all of the key stakeholders is to deliver on our challenging high-level priorities. In order to fulfil its evolving statutory remit and comply with its regulatory requirements as a state agency, the Council will need to establish and maintain

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an appropriate organisational structure, systems and procedures and staffing levels. It will need to provide an on-going training and development programme for its entire staff to ensure the skill mix to deliver on our evolving functions is available.

ACTION 1: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGY

- 1.1 Develop an integrated Human Resource Strategy for all NCSE staff, to include the following components:

Training and development strategy
 Staff recruitment, selection, promotion and retention policies and procedures
 Implementation of the Performance Management & Development System (PMDS)

- 1.2 Secure and maintain appropriate accommodation for all NCSE staff

ACTION 2: CONTINUE TO BUILD THE NCSE'S ORGANISATION, STRUCTURES AND KEY PROCESSES TO ENSURE THE NCSE IS FULLY COMPLIANT WITH ALL OF ITS STATUTORY AND REGULATORY PROVISIONS

- 2.1 Review structures, processes and staffing within the NCSE to ensure the organisation has the organisational structure, systems and procedures, core competencies and staffing to provide a first class service

- 2.2 Ensure that corporate governance arrangements reflect established good practice

ACTION 3: PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT SERVICE TO ALL CUSTOMERS

- 3.1 Develop and implement a Customer Service Action Plan

- 3.2 Examine all application processes to improve user-friendliness.

- 3.3 Develop a communications strategy to manage and improve internal and external communication and consultation

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ACTION 4: ENSURE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF THE USE OF RESOURCES

4.1 Develop and implement an IT strategy to increase the use of new technology in improving the efficient and effective delivery of our services

4.2 Improve financial decision-making processes through the full implementation of the Management Information Framework (MIF)

THE KEY OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN ACHIEVING THIS PRIORITY ARE:

- The NCSE would provide excellent service to its internal and external customers and stakeholders
- The NCSE would have the structures, staffing and competencies necessary to fulfil its role and functions effectively
- The NCSE would have the necessary infrastructure (ICTs, accommodation, systems and procedures) to fulfil its role and functions effectively

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Performance indicators are a key component of the reporting structures to meet governance, accountability and management requirements.

PRIORITY 1

Facilitate children with SEN to get an appropriate education in an inclusive setting as set out in Section 2 of the EPSEN Act 2004

80% of applications for additional resources for children with SEN will be dealt with within 6 weeks of receipt of complete applications.

Placement needs of children will be identified at least 6 months in advance of required placement.

PRIORITY 2

Promote the identification and certification of appropriate educational programmes for children with SEN and monitor outcomes

Structured working relationships with key stakeholders such as the NCCA, NQAI, SEC, Schools and Parents Groups focused on developing appropriate education programmes and outcomes for children with special educational needs will be in place.

Information on SEN provision and programmes will be provided to all stakeholders regularly through a variety of means.

PRIORITY 3

Coordinate the provision of supports to enable inclusive and effective education for children with SEN to be delivered

Effective communication and working relationships operating between the NCSE and the DES, NEPS and the SESS.

Protocols and operational guidelines including service level agreements between the HSE and NCSE will be in place.

VISION, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

PRIORITY 4

Enhance educational provision for children with SEN through quality research and policy advice on SEN issues

NCSE research programmes will be informing policy formulation in relation to special education provision and influencing practice in schools.

PRIORITY 5

Ensure that the NCSE is developed and maintained as an effective organisation and that it operates in a fully compliant manner with all of its statutory, regulatory and corporate governance requirements

NCSE is recognised as an effective contributor to the shaping of special education policy and delivering support services to children with special educational needs.

Regular reviews of systems and procedures to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness and value for money are undertaken within the NCSE.

