



# National Survey of Parental Attitudes to and Experiences of Local and National Special Education Services

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A report commissioned by the NCSE

2010

The National Council for Special Education has funded this research. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with the authors. The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the NCSE.

NCSE RESEARCH REPORTS NO: 6

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The National Council for Special Education was established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act 2004) with effect from the 1st October 2005. The Council was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs with particular emphasis on children.

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## Foreword

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was formally established in 2005 to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs, with particular emphasis on children. The NCSE has a statutory role to carry out research in special education to provide an evidence base to support its work. It also has a role to provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on special education matters.

Research evidence is a very valuable element in the development of policy and practice. Reports from the NCSE research programme, including this one, will be a key source, amongst others, that will assist the NCSE in carrying out its work and in developing policy advice. The reports will also assist in identifying and disseminating to schools, parents and other appropriate stakeholders, information relating to best practice concerning the education of children with special education needs.

In 2009, the NCSE sought the views of parents of children with special educational needs for the first time on a systematic basis through a large scale survey. Almost 1,400 parents of children with special educational needs responded to the survey providing insights into their views and experiences of issues such as finding and accessing a school; getting their child's needs assessed; school policy and resources; relationships between parents and schools and parents and SENOs; and overall satisfaction with the support being given to their child.

This report from the survey shows that the majority of parents were satisfied with their children's education and the services they received. Most parents felt that their child was welcomed at school and their needs were being met. The relationship between parents and schools played a central role in these positive experiences. Parents who were satisfied attributed this to a supportive ethos in the school, a good understanding of their child's needs among staff and good communication between schools and parents.

The findings however also showed a number of areas where parents had concerns about certain aspects of the education service. These areas included: getting their child's special need accepted or diagnosed; the process of applying for supports or resources; the length of time taken to get support; and a perceived lack of resources.

These issues and the recommendations from the authors will now be carefully considered by the NCSE in its work to improve the delivery of special education services and to provide clear and accessible information to parents on their entitlements.

**Pat Curtin,**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## **Acknowledgements**

The study team is grateful to all those who have contributed to this study, in particular the parents, teachers and Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) who participated in the fieldwork for this research.

This study was undertaken by Dr David Armstrong and Gillian Kane from the Research, Strategy and Policy Group, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Belfast, and Gillian O’Sullivan and Maura Kelly, PricewaterhouseCoopers Ireland.



## Note from the authors

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## Glossary

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DES	Department of Education and Skills (previously Department of Education and Skills)
EPSEN Act	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
GAM	General Allocation Model
HIQA	Health Information Quality Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive
IEP	Individual Education Plan
LST	Learning Support Teacher
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
SEAS	Special Education Administrative System
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist

## Executive summary

### Introduction

Education for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland has gone through significant changes over the last decade. This commenced with the Government's announcement in 1998 that all students with disabilities in mainstream primary schools should have an automatic right to appropriate provision of supports to meet their needs. In 2005, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was formally established.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (the EPSEN Act) provides the principal (and most recent) legislative framework for SEN provision in Ireland. The main aim of the Act is:

... to provide that the education of people with [such] needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (Preamble to the EPSEN Act, 2004).

Following the introduction of the EPSEN Act, the NCSE became responsible for processing resource applications for children with SEN in 2005.<sup>1</sup> The NCSE provides local and national services to support special education provisions, undertakes research and disseminates the findings, and provides policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on special education policy issues.

It was envisaged that the various components of the EPSEN Act would be rolled out over a five year period, commencing in 2005. However, due to the current economic climate, the full implementation of EPSEN has been deferred indefinitely. In this context, the Government plans to develop a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSEN, focusing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.

The focus of this current study is on a subgroup of parents of children with SEN, specifically parents of those who are in receipt of support from the NCSE. According to the NCSE, approximately 48,000 applications for support have been received from families in relation to special education services since 2005. These have been made through the network of 80 Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) across Ireland.

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1 The NCSE provides special needs assistant (SNA) support to students with both high and low incidence disabilities at primary and post-primary level. It facilitates additional resource teaching hours to students with low incidence disabilities only at primary level and low and high incidence disabilities at post-primary level. The Department of Education and Skills provides additional teaching resources to children with high incidence disabilities in primary school through the General Allocation Model.

Keen to establish the attitudes and experiences of parents regarding the special education resources provided to their children, in December 2008 the NCSE commissioned PwC to undertake a national survey of parents of children and young people with SEN. The aim of this research is to explore their attitudes towards, and experiences of local and national special educational services. Its objectives are to:

- undertake an extensive review of relevant empirical evidence which will inform and underpin the overall study
- position the study within a political and policy context
- develop a detailed methodological framework to undertake a survey of 1,000 parents of children with a range of sen in order to obtain their attitudes and experiences of local and national special education services, and
- identify possible issues for practice and policy at local school level and national level.

## Methodology

Our approach to this important study was based on four main phases of research activity. These phases are as follows: project scoping, data and policy review, survey design and implementation, and analysis and reporting.

### Project scoping

As part of the scoping phase of this study, and in order to inform the development of the questionnaire – the main survey element of this research – focus groups and depth interviews were held with parents of children with SEN, teachers and SENOs. One parent group was held in Dublin and the other in a rural area of County Cork. The teacher and SENO groups were also held in Dublin, although the SENO group was drawn from the national sample of SENOs.

### Data and policy review

Desk-based research was conducted in order to ground this study in the appropriate historical, political and policy context of SEN provision in Ireland and to document the knowledge gaps in relation to parents' attitudes towards local and national special educational services. This included a review of relevant legislation, national guidance documents and international and national studies conducted in this area. A full bibliography of sources considered is provided at the end of this report.

### Survey design and implementation

Following completion of the qualitative scoping exercise and the data and policy review, a survey questionnaire was developed and agreed in consultation with the NCSE. This questionnaire was piloted with 200 parents in receipt of support from the NCSE over a two week period in July 2009. A total of 25 per cent of parents who were contacted took part in the pilot survey.

Most of the fieldwork was undertaken in September and October 2009 to coincide with the new school term. Questionnaires were mailed to the 7,914 parents for whom we had full postal addresses. Given that some families may have more than one child with an SEN assessment, respondents were requested to tailor their responses to their child whose birthday was closest to the date of the fieldwork period. The target sample was 1,000 parents; 1,394 valid completed questionnaires were returned within the timeframe, giving an overall response rate of 18 per cent.

### Analysis and reporting

A number of cross-tabulations and other statistical analyses were carried out on the final dataset. Responses to the open-ended questions were coded and a selection of quotations were included in the report to represent the range of comments made. The sample of 1,394 gives a margin of error of  $\pm 2.10\%$  at the 95 per cent confidence interval.<sup>2</sup>

## Strategic and Policy Context

Ireland is undergoing a period of change in the provision of services to children with SEN. The EPSEN Act 2004 enshrines the right of the child with SEN to an inclusive education, with their educational need determined by a statutory assessment of need. However, full implementation of the EPSEN Act has been deferred indefinitely due to current budgetary constraints.<sup>3</sup>

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (EPSEN Act, 2004, S1.2)

## Literature Review

Key themes in the literature on the experiences, perceptions and expectations of parents of children with SEN in regard to education provision include:

- *Overall satisfaction:* parents of children with SEN are generally found to be highly satisfied with education provision to their child. However, satisfaction levels tend to vary depending on the child's disability and level of impairment.

<sup>2</sup> The margin of error is the amount of error that can be expected, due to chance, above or below the actual figure obtained in the survey results.

<sup>3</sup> However, in the Renewed Programme for Government (2009), the Taoiseach, Brian Cowan TD made the following commitment to progress the implementation of EPSEN: 'We are committed to the implementation of the Education for People with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act. To achieve this we will develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSEN focussing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.'

- *Assessment*: Studies show that parents generally express satisfaction with assessment processes; however they also report a preference for early assessment of their child.
- *Information and communication*: To facilitate effective SEN provision, good information and communication mechanisms between service providers and families are essential. However, the literature reviewed is often critical of the level of contact between providers and families.
- *Service delivery*: Parental expectations of SEN services vary hugely, and there is some evidence of mixed views regarding inclusive versus special settings. Often parents have only low or moderate expectations of education services and the educational outcomes their child will achieve.
- *Teaching quality*: There is evidence that parents believe that teachers are not sufficiently informed or knowledgeable to manage and educate a child with SEN. There is a widespread belief amongst parents that it often falls on them to fill this information gap.

## Main Findings

This section presents the findings of our primary research methods. These include the survey of parents of children in receipt of support from the National Council for Special Education, the focus groups and semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and SENOs.

### Profile of respondents

The majority of parents reported having one child with SEN. A sizeable minority said they had more than one child with SEN, which is likely to compound any pressures on accessing services experienced by these families. Almost half of parents (47%) stated that their child had more than one SEN, which is also likely to impact on their experiences. Indeed, it became clear in the course of this research that parents' individual circumstances can vary greatly. Their experiences are therefore deeply personal and related to the very specific needs of their child.

### Access to school

Almost 90 per cent of parents thought that their child attended the right type of school for their needs. The main reason provided was that parents felt their child's teacher had a good understanding of their needs. The majority reported that finding a placement for their child had been easy, although a substantial minority (20%) reported difficulties. This was related to the nature of the child's SEN. Physical access to the school was not considered a real issue, but this is likely to be influenced by the predominance of certain types of SEN in the overall sample. A quarter of parents reported that their child was in receipt of support for transport, and again, the majority was satisfied with this provision.

### **The assessment process**

Most respondents confirmed that their child had been assessed formally (94%), usually by educational psychologists or by multi-disciplinary teams. The mean age of assessment was six years. Almost four fifths of parents whose children had been assessed were happy with the assessment process and three quarters stated that they were involved in the process. However, certain concerns were raised in open-ended questions which also emerged in interviews with teachers and SENOs in relation to:

- waiting lists and the time taken for assessment
- the consequent use of private assessments by parents
- the quota-based referral system in place in schools
- difficulties in identifying less common or less evident SEN, and
- the feeling amongst some parents that they carried the burden of co-ordinating the various health and education agencies.

### **School policy on SEN and resources**

A third of parents stated that their child's school had a SEN policy. It should be noted, however, that this is not so much a measure of the prevalence of such policies as it is of parents' awareness of them. Parents most commonly cited receiving the following forms of support: special needs/resource teaching hours, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and Learning Support Teachers. A substantial 45% of parents found it difficult to access support, particularly in relation to getting their child's SEN diagnosed, the time taken for assessment and to access resources, and a perceived lack of resources.

Some parents used the open-ended questions to raise concerns regarding the interface between health and education services, particularly shortages of speech and language therapists. Those parents who found applying for support or resources to be an easy process attributed this to the active support and guidance of the school; this underlines the important impact of the school ethos and culture on parents' overall experience of special educational needs services.

While many parents were positive about the role of the SNA, concerns were raised about the current and future deployment of SNAs. In the main, these related to the current economic uncertainty and fear of possible future reductions in the education budget. Some parents argued that early intervention results in reduced future expenditure for the state. Other issues related to the sharing of SNAs between classes, access to SNAs in general, SNA's level of understanding and their training needs, and limited opportunities for parents to engage with SNAs, teachers and principals.

### **The relationship between schools and parents**

This research also explored a number of specific aspects of the relationship between parents and their child's school. These included the prevalence and use of individual education plans (IEPs), the ethos of the school, and the transition between primary and secondary schools. While IEPs are not yet mandatory, nearly half the participating

parents stated that their child had a plan in place. Four fifths of parents thought that their child's education was appropriate to their needs and a similar proportion stated that their child was making good progress. This, however, leaves a substantial minority of parents who were either undecided or dissatisfied regarding these matters.

Parents who responded to our survey were very positive about the welcome extended to their child by the school, with 92 per cent agreeing that their child was welcomed there. Parents were less unequivocal in relation to the extent to which their child was prepared for life after school. For example, only 54 per cent agreed their child was prepared for further education or the workplace, and 66 per cent felt they were ready for aspects of life outside school, such as making friends.

Three quarters of parents felt that their views were sought and welcomed by the school and the majority was satisfied with the level of contact that they had with their child's teachers. Satisfaction levels were also high in relation to the way in which the school keeps parents informed about their child's educational needs and about the child's progress. Eight in ten parents (78%) stated that they were satisfied with their child's overall education.

Just over a third of parents reported that their child had made the transition from primary to secondary school. Most of these parents were generally satisfied with the help provided in making this move, although a substantial minority of participants described this support as poor.

### **The relationship between parents and SENOs**

Just over a third (36%) of parent respondents stated that they had met or spoken to their SENo. Given that there are approximately 80 SENOs in post across Ireland, however, it is unlikely that SENOs will have had an opportunity to meet all the parents under their remit. Awareness of the role of the SENo was relatively low amongst all parents, with approximately half (51%) stating that they were either not very or not at all aware of the role of the SENo. Not surprisingly, those that stated that they had had contact with a SENo were more likely to be aware of the role; 76 per cent of those parents who had had contact with the SENo were aware or very aware of the role.

Just over a quarter of all parents stated that they were dissatisfied with their relationship with and access to their SENo. Those parents who reported having contact with their SENo were more likely to be satisfied with the relationship: 53 per cent of these parents were satisfied with the relationship compared to three per cent of those who reported no contact. Those parents who had made a complaint about the level of support provided for their child were more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationship with the SENo: 38 per cent of parents who had made a complaint stated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, compared to 21 per cent of parents who had not made a complaint.

### **Overall satisfaction with the support provided for children with SEN**

Satisfaction levels with the ways in which their child's SEN are met by their school are relatively high: three quarters of parents stated that they were quite or very satisfied in this regard. However, a small but substantial proportion of parents (12%) expressed



dissatisfaction here. Indeed, throughout the survey findings, the proportion of parents who were dissatisfied with aspects of current provision ranged from ten to 20 per cent of parents.

Parents who were satisfied with their child's school stated that this was mainly because of the following factors:

- the school staff are very supportive
- the classes are well-planned or suit their child's needs, and
- their child gets the help they need.

Parents who were dissatisfied were unhappy with the way their child was taught. They also felt that the teachers did not understand their child's needs and that they themselves were not involved. The main driver of overall satisfaction was parents' satisfaction with the supports provided for their child's SEN. Parents with more than one child with SEN tended to be less satisfied than those with one child. Parents of post-primary children tended to be less satisfied than those with primary school children.

## Discussion

Many parents welcomed the fact that this research was being undertaken, with several highlighting the need for parents' views to be taken into account on an ongoing basis. Parents' satisfaction levels with their children's overall education and with special education services were relatively high; however, a substantial minority of ten to 20 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with certain elements of support provision.

The relationship between the parent and the school played a central role in parents' attitudes and experiences of special education services. Those parents who stated that their child's needs were being met attributed this to a supportive ethos, good understanding of the child's needs on the part of staff and good communication between the school and parents. The assessment process and the subsequent allocation of resources appear to have caused parents most frustration. The need for improved information and guidance for parents was a recurring theme throughout the research, as was the level of co-ordination and co-operation between education and health services.

This research identified key areas for further consideration, notably measures which could be addressed at local and national levels. These issues are presented below under the headings of: communicating with parents, providing training and guidance to school personnel, and reviewing current processes. While it is difficult to prioritise the various suggested measures, the findings of this research would suggest that addressing some of the concerns around the assessment raised by participating parents would help increase parents' levels of satisfaction with SEN provision.

### Communicating with parents

Measures could include:

- reviewing the needs of specific groups of parents such as those with more than one child with SEN, those whose child has certain types of special educational need or

those parents with children in post-primary settings, so that their needs be better understood and supported

- examining the support that parents require throughout the assessment process with a view to streamlining the process itself, as well as information and guidance provided to parents
- providing clearer and more holistic information to parents on the services available to them in their local area
- promoting the work of SENOs (and the NCSE) at both local and national level, and
- continuing to collate the views and experiences of parents on special education services on a regular basis.

### **Providing training and guidance to school personnel**

Measures could include:

- reviewing the need for further training and guidance for school principals, teachers and other school personnel on SEN, which would be delivered in a flexible and accessible manner that takes into account existing workloads and budgetary constraints
- providing schools with guidance on engaging with parents of children with SEN on both a formal and informal basis
- disseminating best practice guidelines on managing the transition from primary to post-primary schools, particularly in terms of sharing information and preparing for the transition, and
- disseminating best practice guidelines on addressing the needs of the child in a holistic way, encompassing the social aspects of the school experience and preparation for life after second-level education.

### **Reviewing current processes**

Measures could include:

- reviewing the current assessment process in order to identify any 'bottlenecks' in the process
- reviewing the quota-based referral system in light of actual identified need
- reviewing the working arrangements between the education and health services at both local and national level
- reviewing the links between statutory and voluntary organisations in the provision of special educational services with a view to identifying models of good practice, and
- reviewing the supply of specialist practitioners such as Speech and Language Therapists across Ireland.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Defining Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion

Across the world, education for pupils with SEN has evolved greatly over the last number of decades. It has moved from little provision at all, to integration within mainstream schools through, for example, special classes or units attached to the school, towards greater inclusion in mainstream classes. There is however a spectrum of approaches to defining both SEN and the issue of inclusion. In recent years, there has been a move towards adopting a broader definition of SEN. The UK National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC) provides a useful summary of the various ways in which SEN has been conceptualised, leading to a model that takes both environmental and individual factors into account. This summary is quoted below.

The traditional way of thinking about SEN was to see it as an individual deviation from the norm. This individual has significant difficulties in learning compared to the majority of children of the same age... There is an alternative and more recent approach which argues that SEN arise when inappropriate environmental demands are placed on an individual – demands which exceed their current capabilities... When the focus is on environmental demands, it is assumed that children's current attainments at school reflect their previous learning experiences. If they are taught appropriately, they will learn more successfully. Their problem arises because of a mismatch between their current skills and what the school curriculum requires of them... The problem with this approach is that individual differences matter too, since different children will respond to teaching in different ways. Both of those views of SEN are simplistic. A preferable view, which is now widely accepted, relies on an interactional analysis. This views the level of need as the result of a complex interaction between: the child's strengths and weaknesses; the level of support available, and the appropriateness of the education being provided (NALDIC, 2009).

The Scottish Government has adopted an approach based on 'additional support needs' which reflects this complex interaction of individual and environmental factors. It recognises that support may be required on a short term or long term basis.

The definition of "special educational needs" traditionally only applies to children and young people with particular types of learning needs. The new concept of "additional support needs" refers to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support for learning. Additional support needs can arise from any factor which causes a barrier to learning, whether that factor relates to social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, disability, or family and care circumstances. For instance, additional support may be required for a child or young person who is being bullied; has behavioural difficulties; has learning difficulties; is a parent; has a sensory or mobility impairment; is at risk; or is bereaved... Some additional support needs will be

long term while others will be short term. The effect they have will vary from child to child. In all cases though, it is how these factors impact on the individual child's learning that is important and this will determine the level of support required (Scottish Government, 2004).

Neither is there a clear or legal definition of inclusion. However, there is a growing move towards defining inclusion in schools in terms of the needs of all pupils and staff rather than a focus on the needs of one particular group of students. The research literature presents the following definitions of inclusion:

A place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met (Stainback and Stainback, 1990).

A process, not a state ... inclusion is not a simple concept restricted to issues of placement. ... Key principles are valuing diversity, entitlement, dignity, individual needs, planning, collective responsibility, professional development and equal opportunities (Darlington, 2003).

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youths and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modification in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2003).

Central to these definitions are the culture and ethos of both the school and the education system in general. While, in theory, pupils with SEN in mainstream schools experience an inclusive education, they may nonetheless be excluded on a range of dimensions:

- *practically*: if removed from the class for one-to-one work in an individual teaching unit
- *intellectually*: if they cannot access the curriculum in the same way as their peers, and
- *emotionally*: their difficulties can preclude them from sustaining friendship networks and engaging with others socially (Rogers, 2008).

According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, inclusion in education is an ongoing process. It involves:

- valuing all students and staff equally
- increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools

- restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality
- reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as ‘having special educational needs’
- ensuring that lessons drawn from overcoming barriers faced by particular students are used to benefit students more widely
- viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome
- acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality
- improving schools for staff as well as for students
- emphasising the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement
- fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities
- recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society. (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2008).

For the purposes of this report, we have considered inclusion from the perspective proposed by the NCSE’s Consultative Forum<sup>4</sup> and noted by the council of the NCSE. This approach emphasises the diversity of the needs of learners, not just in relation to the curriculum but also in terms of wider access to, and participation in, culture and the community:

Inclusion is seen as a process of: addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school (NCSE Consultative Forum, 2009).

## 1.2 Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Ireland

Education for children with SEN in Ireland has also gone through significant changes over the last decade. This commenced with the Government’s announcement in 1998 that all students with disabilities in mainstream primary schools should have an automatic right to appropriate provision of supports to meet their needs, which led to the introduction of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act in 2004.

Following the introduction of the EPSEN Act, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with SEN

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<sup>4</sup> Under Section 22 of the EPSEN Act, the Council is required to establish a formal national Consultative Forum representative of key stakeholders, with which it is to consult directly on any matters related to carrying out its functions.

arising from disabilities, with particular emphasis on children. It has been responsible for processing resource applications for children with SEN since 2005.<sup>5</sup> It also has a range of other functions, including the provision of independent research and policy advice. According to the NCSE, approximately 48,000 applications for support for children with SEN have been received through the network of 80 Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) since 2005.

In 2008, PwC was commissioned by the NCSE to undertake a national survey of parents of the children and young people with SEN that it resources to explore their attitudes towards, and experiences of local and national special educational services.

Under the EPSEN Act (2004), a child with SEN is defined as anyone up to the age of 18 with 'an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which restricts the child's capacity to participate in and benefit from education.'

In Ireland, the prevalence of children with SEN is not easily or readily determined, as there is no national database of these children. There is, however, a range of data sources on the subject, including the National Council for Special Education's Special Education Administration System.

The NCSE previously commissioned research to determine the prevalence of children with SEN in Ireland in order to inform the NCSE Implementation Report (McKeown, 2006). This study estimated there were approximately 190,300 children in Ireland with a special educational need as defined by the Act; this figure equates to 18 per cent of all children with high or low incidence disabilities.<sup>6</sup> Mc Keown based this estimate on data from a number of sources including: the National Physical Sensory Disability Database, the National Intellectual Disability Database, information on mental health conditions from the Irish College of Psychiatrists, and figures on the autistic spectrum disorder from the Irish Taskforce on Autism. The spectrum of needs ranges from mild to profound disabilities. The NCSE has commissioned a more detailed and up-to-date study on prevalence which will be completed later this year.

### 1.3 Government Policy on Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The EPSEN Act 2004 provides the principal (and most recent) legislative framework for SEN provision in Ireland. The high level aim of the Act is:

... to provide that the education of people with [such] needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have

5 The NCSE provides SNA support to both high and low incidence disabilities for students at primary and post-primary level and additional resource teaching hours to students with low incidence disabilities only at primary level and low and high incidence disabilities at post-primary level. The Department of Education and Skills provides additional teaching resources to children with high incidence disabilities in primary school through the General Allocation Model.

6 High incidence disabilities include conditions which occur relatively commonly in populations such as dyslexia. Low incidence disabilities occur less commonly and include physical disabilities, hearing/visual impairments, emotional disturbances, moderate/severe/profound general learning disabilities, the Autistic Spectrum Disorder, specific speech and language disorders, assessed syndromes, or multiple disabilities (DES, 2002 (a), DES, 2002 (b), DES, 2005, (b)).

such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (Preamble to the EPSEN Act, 2004).

It was envisaged that the various components of the Act would be rolled out over a five year period, commencing in 2005. However, due to the current economic climate the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, indicated in a Dáil debate in November 2008 that it would not be possible to proceed to full implementation in 2010 and the full implementation of EPSEN has been deferred indefinitely. The sections of the Act which have been implemented are:

- the establishment of the NCSE
- the promotion of an inclusive approach to education
- the appointment of SENOs, and
- the transfer of responsibility for the allocation of resources for children with SEN from the Department of Education and Science (DES) to the NCSE.

While the current fiscal position does not allow for the full implementation of EPSEN, the Government will develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSEN, focusing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.4 The Role of the National Council for Special Education

The National Council for Special Education was established to improve the delivery of education services to persons with SEN arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. It was formed in 2003 as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science.

With effect from 1 October 2005, the NCSE was 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 NCSE and its specific functions in relation to the provisions of the Act, including:

- planning and coordinating provision of education and support services to children with SEN
- disseminating information on good practice concerning the education of children with SEN

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<sup>7</sup> In the Renewed Programme for Government (2009), the Taoiseach Brian Cowan made the following commitment to progress the implementation of EPSEN: ‘We are committed to the implementation of the Education for People with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act. To achieve this we will develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSEN focusing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.’

- providing information to parents in relation to the entitlements of children with SEN
- assessing and reviewing resources required by children with SEN
- ensuring that progress of students with SEN is monitored and reviewed
- reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities
- advising educational institutions on good practice
- consulting with voluntary bodies
- advising the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to special education, and
- conducting research and publishing findings (EPSEN Act, 2004).

In addition, the NCSE has specific functions in relation to the core provisions of the Act such as assessment and individual education plans (IEPs). The NCSE allocates additional teaching and other resources, such as Special Needs Assistants, to support the special educational needs of children with disabilities through the national network of SENOs.

### 1.5 Rationale for this Research

The NCSE has been allocating resources to pupils with SEN since its formal establishment in 2005 and is therefore keen to investigate the attitudes and experiences of parents regarding such provision of SEN for their children. Indeed, the experiences of children with SEN, and the experiences of their parents is one of the four priority research themes in the NCSE's strategic Research Framework 2009-10.

This review will provide the NCSE with baseline information about parent's current attitudes towards and experience of SEN provision in Ireland and will allow further review and benchmarking over time.

### 1.6 Structure of this Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- section 2 outlines the methodology
- section 3 provides an overview of findings in the current research literature
- section 4 presents the main findings of this research
- section 5 provides a discussion of these findings, and
- section 6 presents the conclusions drawn from this study.



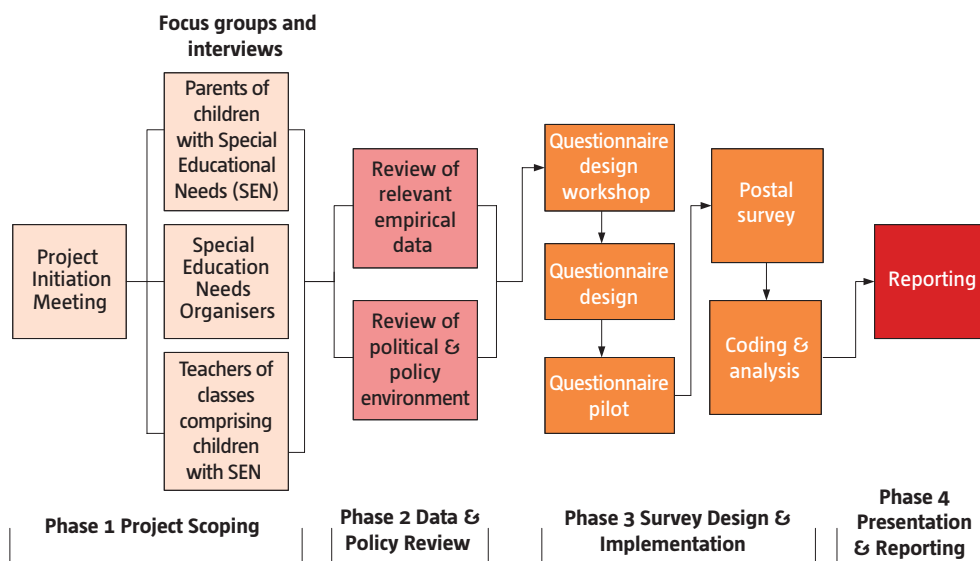
## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This section of our report presents the methodological approach taken for this research assignment. The diagram below provides an overview of methods used to explore the views and experiences of parents in relation to special education services in Ireland. Each of the phases of the study is described in further detail in the sections which follow. These stages can be summarised as:

- project scoping
- data and policy review
- survey design and implementation, and
- analysis and reporting.

**Figure 2.1 Overview of methodological approach**



### 2.2 Project Scoping

As part of the scoping phase of this study, and in order to inform the development of the questionnaire for the main survey element of this research, focus groups and in-depth interviews were held with parents of children with special educational needs (SEN), eight teachers and ten Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). One parent focus group was held in Dublin and the other in a rural area in County Cork. Recruitment to the parents' group was constrained by the fact that only postal contact details were available for parents. As only eight parents participated in these focus groups, in-depth telephone interviews were held with a further five parents in Dublin and Cork, so as to minimise the

burden of participation on them. The teacher and SENO focus groups were also held in Dublin, although the SENO group was drawn from the national sample of SENOs.

The purpose of the focus groups with teachers and SENOs was to explore participants' awareness of parents' views and issues relating to their interaction with parents. These findings were primarily used to help inform the design of the questionnaire for the quantitative phase of this study. While the primary purpose of this brief scoping phase was to identify the main issues to be addressed in the postal survey, these groups provided qualitative data in their own right. The findings section of this report therefore incorporates quotes and findings from the focus groups and interviews with parents, teachers and SENOs, where relevant.

### 2.3 Data and Policy Review

Desk research was conducted in order to ground the study in the historical, political and policy context of SEN provision in Ireland and to document knowledge gaps in relation to parents' attitudes towards local and national special educational services. Sources included relevant legislation, national guidance documents and international and national research literature on the subject.

As with the scoping stage, the findings from this review helped inform the development of the research instrument for the quantitative phase of this study.

### 2.4 Survey Design and Implementation

Following completion of the qualitative scoping exercise and the data and policy review, a questionnaire for the parent survey was developed and agreed in consultation with the National Council for Special Education. This survey comprises the main source of data for this report.

The original aim of this research was to undertake a telephone survey of parents of children with SEN. However, examination of the NCSE's Special Education Administrative System (SEAS) database revealed that only a very small number of telephone contact details were available. It was therefore agreed with the NCSE that a postal methodology should be adopted instead.

The NCSE has received approximately 48,000 applications for supports for children with SEN since 2005. Details of the resources allocated are recorded on the Special Education Administration System database. As resources are allocated to schools, the recorded data mostly concerns the schools and pupils in question, with only contact details included for some parents; these were provided by parents when schools completed the application forms for resources. Of these contacts, approximately 10,000 had full postal addresses or telephone numbers. The NCSE list was used as the sampling frame for the postal survey. This sample was cleaned to ensure that parents with more than one child with SEN did not receive multiple questionnaires.

It should be noted, however, that a number of limitations apply specifically to a postal survey which do not apply to a telephone methodology. As a self-completion method, there is a risk that bias will be introduced in response rates between different sub-groups

of the SEAS population, for example in terms of literacy levels. With this in mind, the questionnaire was designed to be as easy to complete as possible in terms of both the layout and the language used.

The questionnaire was designed in 12pt font to be as accessible as possible. It was structured around eight main headings:

- background information on the family and child (location, age of child etc)
- access to school (ease of finding a placement, mode of transport etc)
- assessment of their child's needs (age of first assessment, satisfaction with the assessment etc)
- school policy and resources (awareness of policies on SEN, supports provided to the child, in school and outside etc)
- the relationship between the parent and child and the school (whether the child has an individual education plan (IEP), whether the child is making progress against their ability)
- contact with the Special Educational Needs Organiser (awareness of the role, satisfaction with the relationship with the SENO)
- overall satisfaction with the support provided for the child (satisfaction levels, whether the parent had ever made a complaint about the support provided), and
- further demographic information on the parent and child (nationality, ethnicity etc).

A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix B. This questionnaire was piloted by post with 200 parents in receipt of support from the NCSE over a two week period in July 2009. A total of 25 per cent of parents contacted took part in the pilot. Feedback from this pilot postal survey was encouraging; participating parents welcomed both the fact that the NCSE had commissioned the study and the opportunity to contribute to shaping the future of special educational services in Ireland. The sample of parents selected for the pilot was not included in the main body of the research nor were the findings from the pilot included in the final dataset.

The main fieldwork period was undertaken in September and October 2009 to coincide with the new school term. Questionnaires were mailed to 7,914 contacts extracted by the NCSE from its SEAS database. Parents were given three weeks to complete and return the questionnaires and a survey helpline was provided during this time to assist with any queries that parents might have. Given that some families may have more than one child with a SEN assessment, respondents were requested to tailor their responses to their child whose birthday was closest to the date of the fieldwork period. The target achieved sample was 1,000 parents and, overall, 1,394 valid completed questionnaires were returned within the timeframe, giving an overall response rate of 18 per cent. Given the scope of this study and the change in survey method used, neither introductory letters nor reminder letters or calls could be used to encourage participation and increase response rates. The response rate to the final survey was lower than that achieved in the pilot phase of this research.

## 2.5 Analysis and Reporting

A number of cross-tabulations and other statistical analyses were performed on the final dataset. Cross-tabulations permit the analysis of data by key groups within a dataset. These included, for example: location of parents, parents reporting on primary, secondary and special school pupils, types of disability, and overall satisfaction with the ways in which the SEN of the child are being met. Responses to the open-ended questions were coded and some of these quotations were used to represent the range of comments made.

A number of other statistical techniques were employed:

- correlation analysis to identify the relationship between the variables in the dataset
- linear regression involving one or more independent variables that best predict the value of the dependent variable, and
- CHAID analysis (Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detector). This technique detects relationships regarding responses to different questions. The analysis subdivides the sample into a series of subgroups that share similar characteristics.

Significance tests were performed to determine whether any such differences were statistically significant, i.e. that they were due to factors other than chance. Only those findings which were statistically significant are reported unless otherwise stated. The significance values are provided in the Pearson chi-square tests tables in Appendix C. A statistically significant difference exists between the responses being compared where the significance value is less than 0.05.

The achieved sample size of 1,394 gives a margin of error of +/- 2.10 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence interval. The margin of error is the amount of error that can be expected, due to chance, above or below the actual figure obtained in the survey results.

The following paragraphs provide a profile of respondents and their children. This is then compared to both the target sample and the overall SEAS database, where possible, to assess whether or not the achieved sample is representative of the overall parental sample on SEAS.

It should be noted that, due to the nature of a postal survey, there is less control over response rates than, for example, a telephone survey, and therefore the representativeness of the survey cannot be guaranteed. Further, given that this is a self-completion methodology, there will be a number of instances where parents will not have responded in full to every question. Despite this, as the paragraphs below demonstrate, the achieved sample is broadly representative of the overall database. Please note that due to rounding of figures, totals may not sum to 100 per cent.

In terms of the potential for non-response bias, analysis is problematic given that the SEAS database only contains limited contact information for parents and the fact that parents were asked to complete the questionnaire on their experiences in regard to their child with the nearest birthday to the fieldwork date. There is no socio-economic status data available in the SEAS database, for example. Data was collected on occupation in

our survey, which was then coded to give an indication of socio-economic status, but this evidently could not be compared to the SEAS database.

Using standard definitions provided by the Market Research Society (2006), A, B and C1 classifications indicate professional/managerial/supervisory occupations while C2, D and E classifications relate to skilled/unskilled/retired/homemaker occupations. While it was found that 62 per cent of our achieved sample was in the C2, D and E lower groupings (described in more detail in paragraph 2.31 below), it should be noted that those with caring responsibilities who are economically inactive are classified in the lowest group – E. It should also be noted that 4% (around 55 parents) of those parents that participated in the survey stated that English was not their first language (and 3% did not answer this question) suggesting that language issues may not have been a barrier for a large number of parents in completing the survey.

### 2.5.1 Profile of participating parents

The following paragraphs provide a profile of parent respondents and compares it to the target sample, the overall SEAS database, and where relevant, census data for Ireland. The purpose of this exercise is to determine if the sample of parent respondents were generally representative of the overall sample of parents currently in receipt of resources from the NCSE.

As indicated earlier, resources are allocated to schools, which means that available data mainly relates to schools and pupils, with only some contact details recorded for parents. This limits the extent to which comparisons can be made between the sample and the total population.

We have compared the profile of parent respondents' children with this larger sample. However, it should be remembered that the sampling frame for the survey involved parents and not their children. For example, those parents with more than one child with SEN will only have responded in relation to one of those children.

The majority of parents (78%) who participated in this research had one child with SEN; a further 17% had two children with SEN. Most respondents were the mother of the child with SEN (86%), with only one per cent responding in the capacity of carer or guardian. This reflects the information provided in the list provided by NCSE, in which the majority of cases the mother's contact details are provided.

Seven in ten parents (71%) stated that their child with SEN was male. This proportion reflects that found in the target sample, which indicates that 69 per cent of all children in receipt of support are male. In the overall SEAS database, the proportion of male pupils is slightly lower at 66 per cent.

Table 2.1 illustrates the age of the child on behalf of whom parents responded.<sup>8</sup> Overall, the composition of the achieved sample is broadly similar to that of the target sample. This is with the exception of an over-representation of those aged between five and eight years and an under-representation of those aged 13 and 15 years in the survey sample. The fact that parents with two or more children with SEN focused on the child whose

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<sup>8</sup> Responses from four parents whose child had left school were excluded from this research.

birthday is closest to the fieldwork period should be remembered here; this will have impacted on the representativeness of the sample.

**Table 2.1: Age of child with special educational needs (SEN)**

Age of child	Achieved sample (%)	Target sample (%)
Under 5 years	1	1
5-8 years	36	28
9-12 years	24	22
13-15 years	29	39
16-18 years	6	8
Not answered	4	1
Total (%)	100	100
N=	1,394	7,914

A quarter of parents described themselves as living in a city and a further third stated that they lived in the countryside. While data is not available on the target sample's location by county, the achieved sample is broadly representative of the geographic breakdown of the general population provided in Census 2006 (CSO, 2006).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2.2: Location of participating parents**

County	Achieved sample (%)	General population (%)	County	Achieved sample (%)	General population (%)
Carlow	1	1	Longford	1	1
Cavan	1	2	Louth	2	3
Clare	4	3	Mayo	3	3
Cork	15	11	Meath	4	4
Donegal	3	3	Monaghan	1	1
Dublin	26	28	Offaly	2	2
Galway	5	5	Roscommon	1	1
Kerry	3	3	Sligo	1	1
Kildare	5	4	Tipperary	5	4
Kilkenny	2	2	Waterford	2	3
Laois	2	2	Westmeath	2	2
Leitrim	0.1	1	Wexford	2	3
Limerick	4	4	Wicklow	3	3

Source: Census 2006 (CSO Ireland, 2006: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

In terms of specific special educational needs, approximately half (53%) of participating parents reported that their child had one SEN diagnosed by a professional, with a further 25 per cent stating that their child had two identified educational needs and another 12 per cent citing three special educational needs. Speech and language disorders (20%), dyslexia (19%), dyspraxia (18%), ADHD (18%) and mild general learning disabilities

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted however that there may be some regional differences in either the prevalence or diagnoses of special educational needs across Ireland.

(16%) were the most commonly reported SEN. It should be noted that this list is not directly comparable with the SEAS database as firstly, the SEAS database lists one SEN per child and secondly, more differentiation in terms of the specific SEN was required from this survey. It should also be noted that the current resourcing model in Ireland is one based on a deficit/medical model, hence the usage of classifications such as these.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2.3: Nature of special educational needs (SEN) identified by professionals – total achieved sample and school level**

Nature of special educational needs	Total sample (%)	At primary level (%)	At secondary level (%)	In special classes (%)
Physical disability	8	8	6	18
Deaf/hearing impairment	7	9	4	7
Blind/visual impairment	6	7	3	10
Mild general learning disability	16	13	20	18
Moderate general learning disability	14	11	14	26
Severe/profound general learning disability	4	2	2	17
Dyslexia	19	12	35	8
Dyspraxia	18	21	18	8
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	15	14	8	33
Asperger's syndrome	12	13	12	8
ADHD	18	20	17	14
ODD	3	3	2	6
Clinical depression	1	-	1	1
Down syndrome	4	5	1	9
Speech and language disorder	20	25	9	25
Medical conditions	7	8	4	11
Other(s)	8	9	7	7
Not answered	1	1	1	-
Total	100 (n.1,376)	(n.731)	(n. 470)	(n. 175)

Base: 1,376 (all parents participating in the survey providing valid data).

Nearly all (88%) respondents described their nationality as Irish, reflecting 89 per cent who described themselves as Irish in the 2006 Census. A further seven per cent stated that they were of another European background. The nationality of their child, not surprisingly, followed a similar pattern, with 92 per cent of parents stating that their child was Irish. Most parents (85%) also stated that their ethnic origin was White Irish. Almost two thirds (63%) of parents who stated that they were of a non-Irish origin had

<sup>10</sup> As noted in our introduction, the term 'special educational needs' for other purposes and in other contexts acknowledges that certain children have a profile of needs which interact with each other to suggest that they respond to certain pedagogies and educational experiences in a variety of ways.

been in Ireland for four years or more. Only four per cent stated that their first language was not English.

In terms of socioeconomic status, just over half of parents (53%) fell into the D and E groups. This is consistent with the fact that many parent respondents in this research are likely to have significant caring responsibilities, and are thereby classified in the lowest economic grouping by default. A very broad outline of this socio-economic group classification scheme is provided in the table below. The occupations of parents participating in this survey were coded against this classification, using standard research definitions (see MRS, 2006 for further detail).

**Table 2.4: Socio-economic classification**

Social grade	Social status	Occupation
A	Upper middle class	Higher managerial, administrative or professional
B	Middle class	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	Lower middle class	Supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional
C2	Skilled working class	Skilled manual workers
D	Working class	Semi and unskilled manual workers
E	Those at lowest level of subsistence	State pensioners or widows (no other earner), casual or lowest grade workers

In the Irish census 2006 (CSO, 2006), economic status is categorised as follows:

- In labour force: at work; looking for first regular job; unemployed, having lost or given up previous job, and
- Not in labour force: student; looking after home/family, retired, unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, other.

The census data thus gives an indication of economic activity rather than status. The survey data was compared with these census data classifications in order to determine the representativeness of the achieved sample.

A total of 57 per cent of parent respondents and 58 per cent of Census 2006 were classified as being 'at work'. However, 37 per cent of this sample classified as 'looking after home/family' compared to only 11 per cent in the census data. This is likely to relate to the caring responsibilities of the parent respondents to this survey. It is also affected by age: in the Census data, 11 per cent of the economically inactive are retired and ten per cent are students compared with 0.4 per cent and 1.7 per cent of this survey respectively.

### 2.5.2 Profile of school attended

Just over half of parent respondents stated that their child attended a primary school setting (53%), a third (34%) reported that their child attended a secondary school and 13



per cent cited a special school.<sup>11</sup> Only 12 parents – approximately one per cent – stated that their child received home tuition.

**Table 2.5: Type of school attended – achieved sample**

Primary school	(%)	Secondary school	%
Local denominational (national) school	78	Fee/non fee paying school	54
Special school	16	Community/comprehensive school	18
Gaelscoil	4	VEC (Community College etc) school	19
Educate Together school	2	Special school	7
Home tuition	1	Gaelscoil	1
Other	2	Home tuition	1
		Other	2
N=	869	N=	507

Please note that a small number of parents stated that their child attended more than one school. Totals will not therefore sum to 100.

Just over half the participating parents (52%) noted that their child attended a special class in their school. A third of those in special classes (31%) were there on a full-time basis.

A slightly larger proportion of parent respondents' children attended primary school than secondary school. These data have not been weighted to reflect the overall school population with SEN in Ireland. This is due to a range of factors, including:

- The survey methodology was based on a sample of parents rather than pupils so the overall population is relatively unknown.
- The good level of representativeness was achieved in this sample regarding other factors.
- The NCSE's Special Education Administration System (SEAS) database records primarily school and pupil level data with only limited contact details for parents.
- Differences in recording types of special educational need on the SEAS database and in the research instrument due to the need for greater detail on the precise type of SEN required for this study.
- There is a lack of overall, up-to-date prevalence figures on children with SEN in Ireland.
- As the sampling frame was provided in January 2009, and the fieldwork took place in autumn 2009, it is likely that some of the pupils on the database would have changed school level in the interim.
- A relatively substantial proportion of parents have more than one child with SEN.
- Linked to this, the fact that parents with more than one child with SEN focused their responses to relate to one child only.

<sup>11</sup> Special schools are officially designated as primary schools but some provide post-primary programmes and certification.

All findings are statistically significant unless stated otherwise. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix B and significance values for all main findings are provided in Appendix C.

## 3 Strategic and Policy Context

### 3.1 Introduction

This section of the report presents an overview of current policy and practice in special educational services in Ireland. This desk-based stage of the research was undertaken in order to ground the study in the historical, political and policy context of special educational needs (SEN) provision in Ireland and to document the knowledge gaps in relation to parents' attitudes towards local and national special educational services. It is structured as follows:

- overview of recent developments in special educational services in Ireland
- the provision of special education services for pre-school and school age children in Ireland
- the legislative framework for SEN provision in Ireland, and
- summary.

Research literature findings regarding parents' attitudes and experiences of SEN provision are presented in chapter four of this report.

### 3.2 Recent Developments in Special Education Services in Ireland

As we noted in the introduction to this report, education provision for children with SEN in Ireland has gone through significant changes over the last decade. The EPSEN Act (2004) provides the legislative framework underpinning SEN in Ireland. The aim of the EPSEN Act is:

... to provide that the education of people with [such] needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (Preamble to the EPSEN Act, 2004)

As determined by the EPSEN Act, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for overseeing and allocating resources for children with SEN in Ireland.<sup>12</sup> It was originally envisaged that the various components of the Act would be rolled out over a five year period from 2005. While the current fiscal position does not allow for the full implementation of EPSEN, the Government plans to develop, in consultation with

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12 The NCSE provides SNA support both to those students with high and low incidence disabilities at primary and post-primary level. It also provides additional resource teaching hours to students with low incidence disabilities only at primary level, and to those with low and high incidence disabilities at post-primary level. The Department of Education and Science provides additional teaching resources to children with high incidence disabilities in primary school through the General Allocation Model.

stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSSEN. This will focus on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.<sup>13</sup> The sections of the Act which have been implemented are:

- the establishment of the NCSE
- the promotion of an inclusive approach to education
- the appointment of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), and
- the transfer of responsibility for the allocation of resources for children with SEN from the Department of Education and Science (now the Department of Education and Skills) to the NCSE.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned research to determine the prevalence of children with SEN in Ireland. This research, completed in 2006 (Mc Keown, 2006) estimated that there are 190,303 children in Ireland who have a special educational need as defined by the Act, which equates to 18 per cent of all children. A number of sources were drawn from in reaching this estimate, including the National Physical Sensory Disability Database, the National Intellectual Disability Database, information on mental health conditions from the Irish College of Psychiatrists; and figures on the autistic spectrum disorder from the Autism Taskforce. It includes a wide spectrum of mild to profound disabilities. The NCSE maintain records of children in receipt of resources. In addition, the Department of Education and Skills gathers information on children who are supported through the General Allocation Model. The NCSE has also commissioned another prevalence study, which will be completed later this year.

Under the EPSSEN Act (2004) a child with SEN is defined as anyone up to the age of 18 with 'an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which restricts the child's capacity to participate in and benefit from education' (Section 1).

On an international level, education for children with SEN has evolved greatly over the years, from no provision at all, through to education in segregated settings, to integration within mainstream schools, with contemporary good practice aiming for the inclusive provision of services. A number of definitions of inclusion exist: some of these are set out below which show the evolution and diversity in thinking on this subject over the years. The final definition (Winter and O'Raw, 2009) has been proposed by the NCSE's Consultative Forum as a potential definition to shape its work.

A place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met (Stainback and Stainback, 1990, p. 4).

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<sup>13</sup> In the Renewed Programme for Government (2009), the Taoiseach Brian Cowan, made the following commitment to progress the implementation of EPSSEN: 'We are committed to the implementation of the Education for People with Special Educational Needs (EPSSEN) Act. To achieve this we will develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of EPSSEN focusing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for children with special needs.'

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youths and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modification in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2003).

Inclusion is seen as a process of: addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning cultures and communities; and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school (Winter and O' Raw, 2009, p. 32).

### 3.3 Provision of Special Education Supports for Pre-school and School Age Children in Ireland

Provision of education in Ireland is divided into four levels: pre-school, primary level secondary level, and third level. Most pre-school services are privately funded; however, the pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme was introduced in 2009 to give children access to a free pre-school year of appropriate programme-based activities in the year before they start primary school. State involvement in this category of education has previously focused on pilot interventions for children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with SEN. Children with disabilities can also have services provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and non-statutory voluntary organisations for people with disabilities. The visiting teacher service provides a home-based service to children with visual or hearing impairments. The service is provided from time of referral through to third level education.

Children in Ireland may be categorised as having either a low incidence or high incidence disability for the purposes of SEN resource allocation. High incidence disabilities include relatively commonly occurring conditions such as dyslexia. Low incidence disabilities occur less frequently and include: a physical disability, hearing or visual impairment, emotional disturbance, a moderate, severe or profound general learning disability, the autistic spectrum disorder, specific speech and language disorders, assessed syndrome, or multiple disabilities (DES, 2002 (a) and (b), DES, 2005, (b)).

The General Allocation Model (GAM) provides additional teaching resources to assist primary schools in making appropriate provision for:

- pupils eligible for learning support teaching: where eligibility for learning support teaching is prioritised to pupils whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised reading and mathematics tests
- pupils with learning difficulties: this includes pupils with mild speech and language difficulties, pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-

ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD or ADHD, and

- pupils who have SEN arising from high incidence disabilities.

The provision of additional teaching resources to primary schools under the General Allocation Model (GAM) is intended to support the development of more inclusive schools. It aims to facilitate schools to provide additional teaching support to children with learning difficulties and SEN arising from high incidence disabilities without the requirement for the school to make applications on behalf of individual pupils. GAM allocations include additional teaching time that was previously allocated for learning support teaching, as well as an allocation of additional teaching time, referred to as resource teaching. (DES, 2005 (a) and (b), DES, 2006).

For children with low incidence disabilities at primary level and both low and high incidence disabilities at post-primary level, applications for resources must be made through the assigned SENO. The SENO processes applications for resource teaching hours, SNAs (for both high and low incidence disabilities) and for special equipment, assistive technology or transportation. Schools applying for SNA support for a child must base the application on three criteria, namely: a recommendation from a professional who has assessed the child's special care needs, evidence which describes the child's special care needs, and, thirdly, a signed certificate from the professional who diagnosed the child's special care needs (DES, 2002, (a)).

There is no GAM in the post-primary sector. In this setting, resource teaching hours are allocated to support individual students who have been assessed as having SEN. The allocation may consist of part-time resource teacher hours, whole-time teacher equivalents and/or teacher posts. The number of additional teacher hours allocated to a post-primary school depends on the number of students assessed as having SEN and on the level of their needs. The procedures set out by the Department of Education and Skills provide the basis for the allocation of resource teaching hours and SNAs to post-primary schools and is similar to that outlined above for the primary school sector.

In Ireland, provision for students with SEN in mainstream primary and post-primary schools may be made through special classes or in mainstream classes with resource teacher hours and SNA supports. Special classes generally cater for the same types and levels of disability as special schools. Special schools are designated as primary schools but can also provide post-primary education for students. Almost all cater for students aged four to 18 years, and only the larger schools organise classes according to the age of the student. Classes in most special schools cater for a considerably wider range of student needs than that which is found in many mainstream schools. Student populations in special schools are not homogeneous, and there can be a wide spread in levels of functioning and potential in any given class. This can include multiple disabilities. Special classes and special schools generally operate at significantly reduced student teacher ratios.

It is important to note, in this context, that the Irish Constitution acknowledges the family as the primary educator of the child and that parents have a right and duty to provide for the education of their children. Historically there has been an

acknowledgement that in the case of children with SEN, it was particularly important that there were close links between the learning environments of home and school. However, prior to the enactment of the EPSEN Act, there was no formal mechanism to involve parents in the planning or other aspects of the education process for their child.

In 2006, the National Disability Authority (NDA) identified the following specific issues relating to special education in Ireland: the greater availability of services in national schools than in secondary schools, and the low participation of young people with SEN in third level education (NDA, 2006).

### **3.4 The Legislative Framework for SEN Provision in Ireland**

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the main policy and legislative developments in relation to special educational services since the early 1990s up to the present. Key milestones are:

- The Special Education Review Committee Report (1993)
- The Education Act (1998)
- The EPSEN Act (2004), and
- The Disability Act (2005).

### **3.5 The Special Education Review Committee Report (1993)**

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee in 1993 was of great importance in the development of special education in Ireland. The range of difficulties and disabilities it included in the term 'special needs' was extremely wide. It defined students with SEN as including 'those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent[ed] or hinder[ed] them from benefiting adequately from education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education which is generally provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging.'

The position of this Committee regarding the integration of students with special needs in mainstream schools was in favour of as much integration as is appropriate and feasible and as little segregation as possible. It recommended the establishment of a continuum of educational provision to meet a spectrum of special educational needs. This provision was aimed at accommodating:

- full-time placement in a mainstream class, with additional support
- part-time or full-time placement in a special class or school
- full-time placement in a residential special school, and
- part-time placement in a child education and development centre or special school.

#### **3.5.1 The Education Act 1998**

The Education Act, which was signed into law on 23 December 1998, was the next development in the provision of education to children with SEN. While addressing the

education sector as a whole, it included specific terms which addressed the requirements of children with SEN. The preamble to the Act makes specific reference to provision of education of persons with disabilities or special educational needs. A stated objective of the Act is to: 'give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or other special educational needs.' This legislation set out to encourage the maximum possible level of integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools and to establish the necessary supports to facilitate this development. A number of special initiatives or supports were established to underpin this policy:

- A formalised system of special teaching support in the form of resource teachers was introduced for all students in mainstream education assessed as having special educational needs.
- A system for the appointment of full-time or part-time special needs assistants was introduced for students in mainstream settings.
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was established as a service of the Department of Education and Skills. It provides educational psychology services for students in first level and second level schools, as well as in other centres supported by the Department of Education and Skills.

### 3.5.2 The EPSEN Act 2004

As discussed previously, Ireland is moving towards a more inclusive and rights-based education system. The driver for this development is the EPSEN Act, 2004. The Act reframes special education in Ireland, specifying:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (EPSEN Act, 2004, p7).

The NCSE Implementation Report describes the core principles of the Act as follows:

- The provision of an appropriate education for all in an inclusive setting is to be provided as a right. Universal access, as a concept, will challenge current practice in a very fundamental way.
- Those with special educational needs will have the right to an appropriate education which will deliver for them the same outcomes, in the same educational settings, as those available to their peers who do not have special educational needs (NCSE, 2006b, p. 91).

The NCSE recognises that changes are required within the Irish education system and within education institutions to support the implementation of the EPSEN Act. These changes are outlined in the NCSE Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006b) and include:

- universal access and removal of barriers



- educational outcomes on a par with peers
- effective assessment of needs
- effective educational planning
- rights to appeal and mediation
- individualisation
- equity, and
- joined-up government particularly between the education and health sectors.

The remit of the NCSE will be significantly extended as the EPSSEN Act 2004 is commenced. While the implementation of key sections which confer statutory rights to assessment, education plans and appeals processes on children with special educational needs has been deferred, due to current economic circumstances, the NCSE has pledged to continue to 'work towards achieving the ambitions of the Act in every way possible, pending its commencement.'<sup>14</sup>

The main provisions of the Act relate to:

- the assessment of a child with SEN
- the development of individual education plans (IEP) and
- the right of the parent or guardian to appeals and mediation.

### 3.5.3 Roles, responsibilities and rights of parents under EPSSEN, 2004

The EPSSEN Act provides for the greater involvement of parents of children with special educational needs in the education of their children. This is operationalised as follows:

- A parent may make a request for the assessment of their child. The school or health service, or the NCSE, must facilitate the participation of the parents in the assessment. This should be done in an appropriate manner to ensure that the assessment is completed appropriately.
- If the need for an assessment is prompted within the school, the school principal is obliged to consult with the parent prior to conducting an assessment and must receive the parent's written consent. Following assessment, parents are supplied with a copy of the report.
- On completion of an assessment, an individual education plan (IEP) is developed; the school principal must inform the parent on plan completion and furnish them with a copy of the plan. Parents may be involved in the development of the plan. They may also prompt an IEP review where they believe insufficient progress has been made by their child and where more than six months have passed since the last review took place more.
- The NCSE may designate a school that meets the needs of the child, taking account of the parent's wishes.

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.ncse.ie/about\\_us/About\\_the\\_NCSE.asp](http://www.ncse.ie/about_us/About_the_NCSE.asp)

- Parents are entitled to appeal the various decisions made in relation to their child to the Appeals Board.
- The NCSE must provide information to parents regarding best practice standards in the education of children with special needs and in relation to children's special education entitlements.

### 3.5.4 Disability Act 2005

The Disability Act of 2005 and the EPSEN Act 2004 are designed to run in tandem. The Disability Act was designed to advance and underpin the participation of people with disabilities in everyday life. It provides a statutory basis for the following:

- an independent assessment of individual health needs and, where appropriate, educational needs for persons with disabilities over the age of 18 years
- a related service statement and access to complaints, appeals and enforcement mechanisms in cases where entitlements are not delivered
- access to mainstream public services and actions to support access to public buildings, services and information, and
- preparation and publication of sectoral plans in six key Government Departments, which will outline the disability related services and positive measures to be implemented.<sup>15</sup>

The Disability Act provides, among other things, for the assessment of children and persons who appear to have a disability, other than those for whom an assessment under the terms of the EPSEN Act has already been initiated.

The HSE has responsibility for the provision of assessments under the Disability Act, and the Act defines who may apply for assessments, the time scale for response to such applications and the role of the Assessment Officers who have been appointed under the terms of the Act. Standards for these Assessments of Need have been developed by a cross-sectoral committee comprised of members of the Department of Health and Children, the NCSE and the Department of Education and Skills. These standards and criteria have been formally adopted by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) and once EPSEN has been fully implemented, the NCSE will be required to comply with these standards.

In practice, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) normally takes responsibility for special educational provision, including assessments, for children between five and 18 years.

It should be noted that, under the terms of both Acts, assessments must be carried out in an independent manner, regardless of the availability of resources. However, although there is now a legal right to assessment, there is not an automatic right to all of the

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<sup>15</sup> This applies to the Departments of: Health and Children; Social and Family Affairs; Environment; Heritage and Local Government; Communications; Marine and Natural Resources; and Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

resources that might be recommended in an assessment report. The assessment of needs of children aged less than five years has already begun.

### 3.6 Summary

- In many developed countries, education for children with SEN has undergone significant reform and development over recent decades. Special education provision is shifting from provision in special schools or segregated settings to a more inclusive model whereby children with SEN are educated alongside their peers in mainstream settings.
- In Ireland, provision is made through a mixture of settings, namely special schools, special classes within mainstream schools and within mainstream classes. Additional supports may include resource or learning support teachers, special needs assistants and assistive technology. The purpose and key development of the EPSEN Act (2004) is to enshrine the right of the child with SEN to an inclusive education with their need determined by a statutory assessment of need. The EPSEN Act aims to ensure that a continuum of special education provision is available as required for each type of disability. However, full implementation of the EPSEN Act has been deferred indefinitely due to current budgetary constraints of the Exchequer.
- Under the EPSEN legislation, the NCSE was formally established in 2005. It has a network of SENOs who allocate resources to schools. SENOs also act as a point of contact for schools, parents and children with SEN. The exception to this is the allocation of additional teaching resources to children with high incidence disabilities in primary schools which is administered by the DES.
- Comprehensive guidelines have been established for the development of individual education plans (IEP). These guidelines are intended for use by parents, teachers and schools. Neither the IEPs nor the guidelines are mandatory yet.

## 4 Literature Review

As already noted, policy regarding the education of children with SEN has changed dramatically in developed countries over the last few decades, with an increasing focus on providing more inclusive educational settings. In this context, it is important that parents' attitudes, perceptions and experiences with regard to special education services are sought and understood. This is particularly vital to ensure that policies and processes are relevant, appropriate and tailored to their needs, whilst recognising the constraints on public sector budgets, particularly those caused by the current global economic crisis.

Attitudes and perceptions of parents with regard to special education have been reviewed by a number of authors in various jurisdictions. Whilst there is some current literature on the subject, it is an area which requires further research. We have categorised the main findings from the extant literature as follows:

- parents' aspirations for their children
- parents' overall satisfaction with SEN provision
- the assessment process
- information and communication
- parents' attitudes towards inclusion, and
- teaching quality.

It should be noted, however, that parental satisfaction with special education provision will depend on the specific context and policy in operation in their country of residence. The examples and research considered in this section are intended to illustrate some emerging high-level themes in relation to the drivers of parental satisfaction. These studies are therefore presented for illustrative purposes and as part of the process that informed the development of the survey tool for this research.

The literature review was conducted using the broad search terms: special education provision; parental attitudes; and parental expectations. National and international databases were used and research pre-dating 1990 was not included in this review.

### 4.1 Parents' Aspirations for their Children

In a study which examined the views of British parents about special education services for children under the age of 11 with severe learning difficulties, parents were asked to rank what they believed to be important factors that enabled their children to learn. The top three skills which parents wanted for their child were: communication skills; social skills and finally motor skills (Male, 1996).

Parental engagement with their children's education and raising aspirations across the board is a key concern across many jurisdictions. In England, for example, the Government has published Every Parent Matters (2007) as part of the Every Child Matters agenda to commit to:

- influencing parents' behaviour to encourage more of them to engage with their children's learning and development
- influencing practice at institutional level by building and sharing knowledge on effective practice
- equipping the workforce with the skills needed to support engagement by parents, and
- improving accountability for support for parental engagement within the school system.

Parental aspirations for children with disabilities receiving SEN services may be low; however, this may be a function of not just the severity of their child's needs but also their experiences of the education system. Bornfield (1994) examined attitudes in North Dakota, USA, via a postal questionnaire completed by 250 parents. Only four per cent of the respondents believed that their child would be able to progress from high school to a job. Whitaker (2007) found that parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder in the UK had modest or low expectations of teachers and schools. In fact, 20 per cent of parents expressed satisfaction with the fact that the teacher was merely willing to try to address the needs of the child.

In research conducted in the UK, by Lewis et al (2007), two thirds of the parents and carers that they surveyed were aware of the relevant policy underpinning the provision of SEN services, but were less aware of how such policy applied specifically to their own child. If parents of children with SEN have low or modest expectations for their child, this may translate into low expectations regarding the provision of services by schools and teachers. Whitaker (2007) examined parents' expectations from SEN service provision. This study found that the top five priorities of parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder in relation to delivery of SEN services were as follows:

- progress in terms of social skills
- staff understanding of the individual's difficulties
- the capacity of staff to manage the child's behaviour
- the level of structure offered, and
- the child's happiness.

Whitaker divided the sample into two groups: those expressing overall satisfaction, and those expressing overall dissatisfaction. The top five priorities were the same for both groups, although they were weighted differently. Parents who expressed overall dissatisfaction rated their child's happiness as the greatest priority. Whitaker believed that dissatisfied parents see their child's perceived unhappiness in school as an indicator that the child's needs are not being adequately met. The main factors in parents' satisfaction with SEN provision are discussed in more detail below.

## 4.2 Parents' Overall Satisfaction with SEN Provision

Parental satisfaction with SEN services for their children has been measured in many of the studies reviewed here. A good example is the National Household Education Survey in the US, which comprises large-scale longitudinal studies.

These studies had a nationally representative sample of 11,000 students. Parental satisfaction with the child's school was found to be high, with 90 per cent of parents of children aged six to 13 years somewhat or very satisfied with the school. Parents of older children (aged 13 to 17 year olds) were slightly less likely to express satisfaction here, with 80 per cent being somewhat or very satisfied (Newman, 2005). It is worth mentioning that parents of children in the elementary and middle schools reported higher satisfaction levels than those with children in post-primary schools. Whilst these satisfaction levels are generally high, it should be noted that parents of children without special educational needs are, on average, eight per cent more satisfied than those with children in receipt of special education services (US Department of Education, 1999).<sup>16</sup>

Newman (2005) found that parental satisfaction with special education provision in the USA varied, depending on the child's category of disability. Parents of children with visual, hearing or speech impairments expressed highest satisfaction levels. Parents of children with emotional disturbance reported the least level of satisfaction with special education services.

A large-scale study, which examined the views of 1,776 parents across a variety of school types in Scotland, England and Wales, identified five important themes in examining the experiences of children with disabilities and the views of their families in relation to special education services:

- independence and autonomy
- accessible/inaccessible educational environments
- knowledge and assertion of rights
- attitudes and behaviours, and
- ambitions and aspirations (Lewis, Davison et al, 2007).

A more recent survey was undertaken in England on parents' views of services for children with disabilities (Hamlyn et al, 2010). It encompassed education, health and care and family support services and found that 73 per cent of parents rated the education services available to them as good or better than good. In this study, the following groups were 'most strongly associated' with a greater level of satisfaction with services:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> This information is collected by the US Department of Education through the National Household Education Survey. The survey covers learning at all age groups and is based on random sampling across the population in a census type survey.

<sup>17</sup> The overall indicator is calculated by taking the average of each of the 15 sub-indicator scores. The baseline overall national indicator score for 2009-10 is 61 out of 100, a rise from 59 out of 100 since 2008-09. A higher score denotes greater satisfaction with services. Across the 145 local areas and 150 PCTs4, scores ranged from 55 to 68. (Hamlyn et al, 2010)

- children for whom parents reported a single area of difficulty arising from their condition
- children with a condition related to consciousness or sensory impairment such as vision, hearing
- girls
- younger children of pre-school age
- black children.

Conversely, those groups associated with lower levels of satisfaction included:

- children with special educational needs but no statement of need
- children suffering depression or conditions affecting cognitive function such as learning, communication, autistic spectrum disorder and behaviour
- children from mixed or 'other' ethnic backgrounds, and
- children with five or more areas of difficulty associated with their condition.

In a small-scale Irish study which examined the perceptions of a group of seven parents of children with Down syndrome, parents reported that the school system was often unprepared for and resistant to the inclusion of their child in the mainstream setting. Parents believed that this was because access to inclusive education was not based on the rights of the child as enshrined in legislation and/or public policy etc (Shevlin et al, 2003). In a separate study, Kenny et al found that parents described their children's experience of accessing the mainstream school system as a broadly positive one, but note that their perception of their reception was that it was 'provisional, fragile and undependable' (2005, p17).

Whitaker (2007) examined the perception of parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder in mainstream schools. The opinions of 173 parents were surveyed by post across the county of Northamptonshire. Parents of children who had a statement of need were found to be more satisfied (50%) than the parents of children who did not have a statement (33%). Parents of 'non-statemented' children were concerned that their child's needs would not be fully addressed.

Overall, the assessment of a child's special educational needs emerges as a key driver of parental satisfaction with SEN provision overall. The international literature on the assessment process is considered in more detail in the next section.

### 4.3 The Assessment Process

In most jurisdictions, there are two distinct components to the assessment of children with SEN. Initial assessment outlines the SEN of the child; the second stage of assessment is ongoing and relates to the assessment of outcomes based on the special education input, thus monitoring the child's progress.

Grove and Fisher (1999) interviewed a non-representative sample of 20 parents in the US who had recently enrolled their child with SEN in an inclusive education setting. They

found that, in relation to assessment processes, parents often reported that there was no contact person in the system to facilitate their child's special education. The interviewed parents therefore believed that responsibility to advocate on behalf of their child fell to them.

Roll-Pettersson and Heimdahl Mattson (2007) studied the perspectives of seven mothers of post-primary children with dyslectic<sup>18</sup> difficulties in Sweden. The mothers who were interviewed believed that if it had not been for their persistence and advocacy on behalf of their child, the child would not have been adequately assessed; and as a result,, would not have received the correct support or resources. These mothers also identified a tendency for schools to 'wait and see' how the child progressed rather than moving to formal assessment. They believed that the delay that often took place in the identification of their child's level of learning led to a consequent delay in the allocation of appropriate support to the child.

In 2003, the University of Ulster conducted a large-scale study with the aim of ascertaining the views of parents regarding statutory assessment and statementing procedures used in the special education sector. A mixed method approach was taken; questionnaires were issued to a sample of 7,222 parents<sup>19</sup>, and follow-up, qualitative interviews were conducted with 165 parents. Over 79 per cent of parents expressed satisfaction with the statutory assessment procedure. However, in relation to the initial assessment, a high proportion (43%) said they would have preferred their child to have received earlier initial assessment, stating that the delays in assessment were material to their child's progress (O' Connor et al, 2003).

Mothers in the Roll-Pettersson and Heimdahl Mattson (2007) study that was conducted in Sweden felt that there was a disassociation between the assessment of the child's needs or strengths and the selection of teaching methods to support the child. This disassociation was also described in relation to the development of individual education plan (IEP) goals for the child.

In the Northern Ireland study (O' Connor et al, 2003), 81 per cent of parents were satisfied with the written assessment they received for their child. However, they felt the assessment was overly focused on the child's deficits rather than on what the child could actually do. Again, parents were critical of the education plans, suggesting that the plans were developed to a template rather than individualised to needs of their child. Some of these parents made useful suggestions as to how the statutory assessment process in Northern Ireland could be improved, including:

- earlier intervention assessments
- spending more time with the child as part of the assessment process
- giving greater consideration to the parent's knowledge of the child, and
- reducing the level of bureaucracy and paperwork.

18 The term dyslectic difficulties refers to children who have been diagnosed with dyslexia as well as those who do not have a diagnosis, but who are deemed to have significant difficulties with reading and writing.

19 With a response rate of 32 per cent.



The final report of the Lamb Inquiry in England in 2009 emphasised the anxiety that can surround the assessment process for parents. It also identified communication issues between statutory agencies and parents, in relation to their children's needs.

The assessment process drives much of the controversy and dissatisfaction in the system. Many parents found the statutory assessment process stressful and difficult due to a lack of information, poor support and the negative attitudes they often encountered. Parents need to have confidence that their children's needs are accurately assessed and regularly reviewed as the child changes and develops (Foreword to the Lamb Inquiry: Special educational needs and parental confidence by Brian Lamb OBE).

In February 2010, the then Government published its response to the 51 recommendations in the Lamb Inquiry report, including the introduction of pupil and parent guarantees from September 2011 and a consultation on information for parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It should be noted, however, that while some of the recommendations are currently in the process of being implemented, the change of administration and the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review may impact on future policy direction in this regard.

In relation to the ongoing or continuous assessment process for children with SEN, the previously cited national longitudinal study that was conducted in the US (US Department of Education, 1999) recommends that the progress of children should be evaluated under four domains, namely: school engagement; academic achievement; social adjustment and emerging independence.

Multivariate analysis was conducted to examine the issues which facilitate student's achievement in each of these domains. Several factors are thought to be contributory and include: student characteristics; household factors; school programmes; and school experiences. The findings of the survey indicated that about two per cent of young people in the general population have academic scores that are more than two standard deviations below the mean, whereas between 14 per cent and 27 per cent of young people with disabilities are at this level. This suggests that a higher percentage of children with disabilities may struggle to achieve academically.

In relation to emerging independence, this study notes that 75 per cent of students with disabilities were still living with their parents two years after high school graduation, which indicates a lower level of independence compared to their non-disabled peers, 80 per cent of whom were living away from home (Wagner et al, 2006).

Finally Lewis et al (2007) make valuable observations in relation to parents' views of the assessment of children with SEN. They suggest that some parents may struggle with the notion of their child being assessed as having difficulties and many wish for their child to be treated 'normally'. In addition, parents want their child to receive an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses, in order to assist the child in realising and accepting the extent of their needs and difficulties.

#### 4.4 Information and Communication with Parents

Parents of children requiring special education services need information in relation to these services at various stages, not just at the assessment stage. Information is required to help them in relation to:

- the services available to them
- school-related information
- teacher-related information
- appeals/mediation related information, and
- information specifically related to their own child, including the results of assessments or individual education plans.

Grove and Fisher (1999) found that many parents in the US receive information in the form of newsletters or by attending special education conferences. When deciding on the type of special education service for their child, only 20 per cent of those they interviewed were afforded the opportunity to observe inclusive education in practice. In the Northern Ireland study referenced above, parents made a number of suggestions to help improve communication between the relevant statutory agencies and families (O'Connor et al, 2003). These include:

- greater communication with parents
- appointment of a designated and easily accessible contact person
- the provision of an independent advice service for parents
- the establishment of a SEN helpline, and
- the development of parent partnership schemes.

In a study of parental attitudes to inclusive schooling in Australia, parents suggest that a 'communication book' could facilitate information exchange between home and school settings. This Australian study examined the attitudes of 354 parents who had a child with a disability in receipt of special education services in Queensland. The children were in a range of classes, from special schools to schools with in-class help provided by a special teacher or assistant (Elkins, van Kraayenoord and Jobling, 2003).

The concept of more a co-operative relationship between schools and parents is raised in a UK study which examined the views of 107 pupils, parents and school staff involved in inclusion initiatives in two Local Education Authorities. It found that parents consider good communication with schools to be of particular importance. They appreciated clear, two-way communication between school and home and believed that good communication could facilitate the development of more co-operative relationships. Interestingly, teachers and pupils did not express any concerns or issues regarding communication between school and home settings (Frederickson et al, 2004).

A study conducted in Los Angeles surveyed the opinions of parents whose children had severe disabilities and who were in a non-inclusive school environment (Palmer et al, 2001). The study sample size was 476 parents, which comprised a response rate

of 15 per cent. Parents highlighted the importance of services providers obtaining the views of parents of children with severe disabilities, as these children are most likely to experience difficulties, not least in the transition from special education classes or programmes to an inclusive school environment (Palmer et al, 2001).

Finally, in relation to information and communication, Whitaker (2007) found a strong correlation between high satisfaction among parents and the experience of good, two-way communication between the school and the family. Parents are appreciative when schools seek their opinion and expertise.

#### 4.5 Parents' Attitudes towards Inclusion

Education services for children with SEN can be met in a variety of school settings. A spectrum of such services can range from the 'traditional' special needs school to the inclusive education model in which children with SEN are educated in a mainstream classroom and receive additional support as necessary within that setting.

The research literature presents mixed views regarding inclusion, with some parents expressing concerns that the holistic needs of their child would not be fully met in an inclusive school environment (Grove and Fisher, 1999). However, Shevlin et al (2003) found in their Irish study on the perceptions of parents of children with Down syndrome that inclusion had benefitted their child in a number of ways. These included:

- socialisation with their school peers
- better relationships outside of school as a result of the inclusive education, and
- a positive ripple effect for all pupils as they learn to view differences both objectively and positively.

Despite the positive findings emerging from the above study, parents did identify some difficulties their child experienced while attending mainstream education. These included the perceived inaccessibility of health services and teachers' lack of knowledge regarding inclusion strategies.

A small scale study of parents trying to place their child with Down syndrome in a mainstream school found that their experience was framed by the fear of rejection (Kenny et al, 2005). For many parents, this replicated their initial experience of introducing their child to the community. Parents in this study also reported that they experienced difficulty with each transfer point within the education system, such as the move from pre-school to primary school, and from primary school to post-primary.

Specific concerns expressed by parents relate to inclusive education and the children's level of disability. They were concerned that, for various levels of disability, inclusive education may not be appropriate for their child. In a study of 140 parents in the US, 46 per cent agreed with the notion of inclusive education for children with severe disabilities. Interestingly, slightly less (44%) felt it would be of benefit for their own child with severe disabilities. A number of reasons were suggested to explain why inclusive education would not be suitable for their child. For some, this related to their child having exceptionally high needs such as seizures or multiple disabilities. Others felt

their child would impact on the general education of other students, or that their child would need education emphasising the development of functional skills rather than an academic curriculum (Palmer et al, 2001).

Ring and Travers (2005) conducted a very interesting case study involving a child in a four teacher primary school in rural Ireland. It raised some interesting issues regarding the provision of inclusive SEN services to a child with a severe general learning disability in a rural mainstream school. Difficulties experienced by this particular child related to social inclusion rather than academic issues. The authors question the benefit of a model of education which purports to be inclusive and yet, under which, children are withdrawn from the general class to receive resource teacher support.

Allied to this Irish case study, Petroff (2001) examined conducted a postal survey of the views of 204 parents of young people in the US aged between 18 and 24 years who were deaf-blind. They found that the issue of social integration may be compounded for children with certain disabilities; for example, a child who is deaf-blind may have great difficulty in developing a social network and therefore be less able to participate in community activities.

Palmer et al concluded that parents of children with severe disabilities do not necessarily subscribe to the belief that inclusive education can meet the needs of all children with SEN. Despite this, parents believed that children experiencing inclusive education would achieve more, and develop greater functional skills. This belief was due to perceived higher levels of stimulation and expectations in a regular classroom than would be found in a segregated or special needs classroom. However, in a separate study, Australian parents suggest that children require education in special classes due to perceived deficits in teachers training in mainstream schools. This was despite the fact that they regard special class placement as leading to impaired or slower social and emotional development (Elkins et al, 2003).

In the Northamptonshire study referenced earlier, high satisfaction levels were expressed by 61 of the respondents – parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder in mainstream schools. Levels of dissatisfaction were higher amongst parents of children receiving services in mainstream classes than those with children in special schools or units. Whitaker notes that parental satisfaction does not provide a guarantee that a child's needs are actually adequately addressed and this is worthy of consideration by policymakers in the area of SEN provision (Whitaker, 2007).

There is some consistency with regard to what parents expect from SEN services accessed by their child. The non-academic components of a child's education were highlighted as important for children with autistic spectrum disorder (Whitaker, 2007). Parents want teachers to encourage interaction and promote relationships within the school setting. In this study, it was found that only 20 per cent of parents stated that their child was accepted by their peers, with ten per cent noting that their child had experienced bullying in school. One in ten of parent respondents wanted schools to promote understanding and acceptance within the school.

Drivers of successful inclusion for children with SEN have been identified by several authors (Frederickson, 2004; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Sailor, 1991) and include the following:

- restructuring of the physical environment
- sufficient resources
- organisational changes
- instructional adaptations
- enrolment of the student in a chronological age appropriate general education classroom
- delivery of special education services in the integrated setting through collaboration between the general and special education services, and
- avoidance of the exclusion of students from participation on the basis of the severity of their disability.

In the Frederickson (2004) study cited earlier, teachers, pupils and parents deemed the focus of inclusive education to be securing social and academic benefits for the pupils with SEN. Gilmore et al (2003) examined the attitudes of community members and teachers towards inclusive education for children with Down's Syndrome in Australia. The sample included 2,053 general community members and 538 experienced teachers. The educational, social and emotional benefits of inclusive education for children with SEN were recognised; a fifth of each group believed that the regular classroom was the best setting for delivery of education services to children with Down's syndrome. Grove and Fisher (1999) found that parents believe that education in an inclusive school setting better prepares their children for work and their place within the community. In this study, parents identified the following components of successful inclusive education:

- smaller class sizes
- time for consultation
- use of teacher aides
- specialist advice
- in-service training, and
- therapy services.

Furthermore, they suggested that the greatest requirement for the successful inclusion of their child was the positive attitudes of the teachers and the school principal (Elkins et al, 2003).

Bevan-Brown (2001) considered the needs of children with SEN in New Zealand who also had culture-specific needs. Maori children with SEN are over-represented in special education services. As part of this study, the views of 166 parents of Maori children with SEN were examined over a three year period. Overall, parents felt that their children had benefited from the provisions of the special education policy in New Zealand. However, it was believed that relatively few schools made specific provision to meet the cultural needs of the child (Bevan-Brown, 2001).

It is interesting to note that parents/carers and children with SEN may differ in their views about how support to children should be provided. Parents want the support to be clearly defined and systematically provided. Children may be more relaxed and flexible in how they wanted their support delivered. Lewis et al believe this stems from the children's desire for independence (Lewis et al, 2007).

#### 4.6 Out of School Provision and Support

Time spent in school is only part of a child's education. Children often require help with homework to reinforce school-based learning. Drawing from the results of the US longitudinal study, Wagner and Blackorby (2004) reported that parents of children with SEN are more likely to need to help their children with homework. They found that 50 per cent of students with SEN required help with homework compared with 16 per cent of other students. This may be a significant consideration for parents. Mothers interviewed in the Roll-Pattersson study (2007) identified some issues in assisting their child with homework. These included the time-consuming nature of helping a child with SEN with homework and parental level of ability in relation to more difficult subject requirements. The findings from this study are, however, contingent on the approach taken to homework by the school i.e. whether pupils with special educational needs are required to complete homework which has been differentiated for them.

Lewis et al (2007) found that parents and children are consistent in their view that there is a lack of assorted informal activities for the child with SEN outside of school and the home, which involved other children or young people. Interestingly, the majority of parents surveyed believed that their child's difficulties would not hamper their involvement in extra-curricular activities. This was also the view of parents in the sample whose children had severe difficulties.

#### 4.7 Teaching Quality

Several of the studies reviewed examined parental views with regard to their child's teacher. Parents view teachers as the lynchpin of SEN services. Some of the key findings in relation to teaching quality are outlined in subsequent paragraphs.

According to Grove and Fisher (1999), parents' overarching perception of their children's teachers, is that they have insufficient knowledge and expertise in the area of special education. Almost half (49%) of parents surveyed in a Queensland-based study believed that more teacher training was required to meet the SEN of their children (Elkins et al, 2003). A similar issue was identified in the Roll-Pettersson et al (2007) study in which mothers informed new teachers of their child's needs and in one case provided information in relation to dyslexia.

Whitaker (2007) found that satisfaction levels of parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder regarding SEN provision were strongly influenced by their perception of the level and quality of the teachers understanding of the child's difficulties. A high proportion (50%) of parents expressed concern in relation to this. When asked what would constitute 'a good understanding of their child's condition', 25 per cent cited the

correct deployment of appropriate teaching and management strategies. Parents from this study also wanted teachers to be able to appreciate the implications of their child's diagnosis and to empathise with the child's condition and arising needs.

Often it falls to the parent to provide support and education to teachers regarding the specific needs of a child with SEN. Parents obviously know their children and understand their needs intimately. The phrase 'entrepreneurs of meaning' was coined by Grove and Fisher (1999) to describe this parental role. Parents perceived the exchange of information with teachers, specifically relating to their child, as both a necessity and an investment in the future of their children. They recognised the difficulty and tensions teachers experience in the reality of educating a heterogeneous group of children. This is particularly true in inclusive education environments where the aim is to educate children with SEN in regular classroom settings.

Closer to home, these concerns are reiterated by parents in Northern Ireland. There, parents expressed concern with respect to the ability of teachers with general education qualifications to meet the needs of children with SEN. To bridge this gap they suggested both the allocation of additional funding to further develop in-service training, and the provision of a trained SEN teacher in every school (O'Connor et al, 2003). It is interesting that teachers involved in inclusion programmes in the UK believed that children with SEN needed 'to learn to cope with the world and differentiating or individualising work would not help them with that', i.e. teachers believed that students should learn to cope with the approach taken in school rather than vice versa (Frederickson, 2004, p54).

Overall, some evidence suggests that parents perceive teachers to often have insufficient knowledge and experience in the area of SEN and that they are frequently required to provide information and insight on their child and their condition to the teacher.

## 4.8 Summary

Selected extant literature was reviewed to examine the perceptions and expectations of parents of children with SEN regarding the education system being accessed by their child. Some key themes emerged:

- **Parents' aspirations for their children:** Parental expectations of SEN services vary hugely. In some cases, parents may have only low or moderate expectations of both the education services and the outcomes their child will achieve. Parental expectations of their child's education provision included:
  - progress in terms of social skills
  - staff understanding of the child's needs
  - the capacity of staff to manage the child's behaviour
  - the level of structure offered
  - the child's happiness
  - the teacher's willingness to address the child's needs, and
  - the development of communication, motor and social skills.



- **Parents' overall satisfaction:** Parents of children with SEN were found to be largely satisfied with their child's education provision. However, satisfaction levels depended on the child's disability and their level of impairment. Parents of children with high levels of disability were found to be less satisfied with services and their ability to meet the needs of their child.
- **Assessment:** There are two components to the assessment of a child with SEN. The initial stage identifies the needs of the child while the second, ongoing aspect of assessment monitors their needs on a continuous and regular basis. Many studies reported parental satisfaction with assessment processes. However, some identified a preference among parents for an earlier assessment of their child. Parents suggested the following mechanisms to improve the assessment process:
  - a nominated contact person to assist parents in their navigation of the system
  - optimal matching of the child's assessed needs and the selected teaching methods, and
  - greater consideration given to the parent's knowledge of the child's requirements.
- **Information and communication:** To facilitate effective SEN provision, good information and communication mechanisms between service providers and families are essential. The literature reviewed is somewhat critical of such provision. Parents in various studies felt that the information and communication they received needed improvement; as it was, it did not facilitate the development of co-operative relationships between schools and families. The importance of good communication and information should not be underestimated; indeed one of the studies reviewed demonstrated a high correlation between parental satisfaction levels with SEN provision and good, two-way communication between the school and family. Various studies have suggested methods to improve information and communication exchange between schools and families, including:
  - greater communication with parents
  - appointment of a designated and easily accessible contact person
  - the provision of an independent advice service for parents
  - the establishment of a SEN helpline
  - the development of parent partnership schemes
  - communications books, and
  - service user satisfaction surveys.
- **Parents' attitudes towards inclusion:** Children with SEN can be educated in a wide variety of settings. Whilst the inclusive education model is posited to be good practice and is recognised as such by most parents, some parents believe it may not be sufficiently capable of meeting the needs of their child.



- **Teaching quality:** Parents view teachers as the lynchpin of SEN provision. However, many of the studies reviewed demonstrated mixed parental views on their experience of teaching quality. Issues raised included:
  - insufficient teacher knowledge and expertise in relation to particular conditions, disabilities and impairments
  - teachers' inability to empathise with the child's condition and arising needs
  - difficulties experienced by teachers in educating a heterogeneous group of children with SEN.

## 5 Main Findings

### 5.1 Overview

This section of our report presents the main findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research, namely, the findings from our survey of parents (n=1,394) and, where relevant, draws on data from the focus groups with parents, teachers and Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). The main source of data is, however, the survey of parents. The section is structured as follows:

- profile of participating parents and their children
- the accessibility of schools for children with special educational needs (SEN)
- the assessment process
- school policy on SEN and resources
- the relationship between the school and parents
- the relationship between parents and SENOs
- overall satisfaction with the support provided for children with SEN, and
- summary.

### 5.2 Profile of Participating Parents and their Children

In the methodology chapter, we presented a profile of participating parents and their child<sup>20</sup> against information from the Special Education Administration System (SEAS) database maintained by the NCSE. In summary, the main characteristics of our achieved sample are as follows:

- Approximately four out of five (78%) parents stated that they had one child with SEN, and almost a fifth (17%) stated that they had two children with SEN.
- The majority of pupils (as selected by their parents) were male (71%) which is consistent with the gender breakdown of the pupils on the NCSE database (69%).
- Almost six in ten (61%) of parents had a child with SEN of primary age (i.e. between the ages of five and 12 years).
- The majority of both primary and secondary age pupils were in mainstream settings.
- Just over half the participating parents (53%) stated that their child had one SEN identified by a professional; however, in addition to this, a sizeable proportion (25%) had had two needs diagnosed. One in eight (12%) had three needs and 8 per cent had four or more diagnosed needs.

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<sup>20</sup> Please note that if parents had more than one child with special educational needs, they were invited to respond on behalf of the child with the nearest birthday to the period in which the fieldwork was conducted.

- The most commonly reported types of SEN included: speech and language disorders (20%); dyslexia (19%); dyspraxia (18%); ADHD (18%) and mild general learning disabilities (16%).
- There was a good geographical spread of responses, with a quarter of respondents stating that they lived in urban areas and one third in rural locations.
- Only four per cent noted that their first language was not English.

### 5.3 The Accessibility of Schools for Children with SEN

Overall, the vast majority (87%) of parents believed that their child was in the right type of school for their needs. There was no statistically significant difference to this by geographical location (i.e. whether parents live in a rural or urban setting), or by parent's socio-economic background.

**Table 5.1: Parents' perception that their child is in the right school for their needs, by type**

Type of school	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not answered (%)
Primary	90	8	3
Secondary	85	11	4
Special	85	13	2

Base: 1,394 (all parents participating in the survey).

Table 5.1 illustrates the proportion of parents stating that they believed that their child was in the right type of school for his or her needs by school phase. It should be noted that there is no statistically significant difference by school phase however there are significant differences in relation to school type within phases. There is, for example, a significantly higher proportion of parents of primary school pupils who believe their child is in the right type of school if their child attends a local denominational (national) school compared to other types of primary school. For secondary school pupils, a significantly higher proportion of parents whose child is at a fee-paying secondary school or non-fee paying secondary school believe their child is at the right type of school for his or her needs and a significantly higher proportion of parents whose child attends a Community and Comprehensive school believe their child is not at the right type of school for their needs.

The main reasons why parents felt their child was in the right type of school for their needs are presented in Table 5.2 below. Most of these relate to teaching quality, inclusion and the social aspects of school life. Parents of primary level children and children attending special schools were slightly more likely to state that teachers were well trained or understand their child's needs than those of secondary school pupils, at 20 per cent and 21 per cent compared to 15 per cent, respectively. Please note, however, that this was an 'open-ended' question which was then coded during the analysis phase of this research; therefore responses do not total 100 per cent.

**Table 5.2: Reasons why parents believe their child is in the right school for their needs**

Reasons	(%)	N
Teachers are well trained/understand my child's needs	19	225
There is good support in class	16	189
Lessons are appropriate/well-planned/suitable for my child	14	165
My child's needs are met while remaining in mainstream education	13	163
My child is progressing well there	8	100
My child is mixing with other children with similar needs	8	92
My child is happy/has friends	7	80
My child's needs do not merit attending a special school	6	67
The class size is appropriate for my child	6	75
The child has a Special Needs Assistant	5	62
Special needs units/classes are appropriate for my child	5	61
The school is well-equipped	4	51
Other	7	87
Not answered	17	203

Base: 1,216 (all parents who thought that their child was in the right type of school for their needs – including 'not answered')

Conversely the factors were cited by parents (n=131) who did not believe that their child was in the right school for their needs were:

- a preference for a special school (22%)
- teachers are not sufficiently specialised/well enough trained (20%)
- lessons are not appropriate for their child (16%)
- class sizes are too big (15%)
- insufficient support (12), and
- their child is not making sufficient progress (8%).

*If the classes were smaller. Sometimes you go in to help and they are too big. My son gets quite muddled and the overcrowding and cluttered rooms don't help. It's hard for the teachers too with children at all different levels. It's not good for the pupils' confidence either to have some at the front of the room and to be given easier work (Parent, telephone interview).*

Teachers who participated in the teacher focus group also reported that large class sizes represent a challenge to providing effective teaching for children with SEN.

Just over two-thirds (68%) of parents said that their experience of finding a school placement for their child had been either quite or very easy. However, a further one fifth (20%) stated that this was either quite difficult or very difficult. Participating parents of pupils at special schools reported more difficulty in finding a placement. No statistically significant difference was found regarding the socio-economic status of the family. Parents living in the countryside and small towns were more likely to report that the

process was easy compared to parents in larger towns and cities. This is perhaps due to the likelihood of fewer options in terms of choice of settings in rural areas.

**Table 5.3: Ease of finding a placement by school type**

Response	Primary (%) n=731	Secondary (%) n=470	Special (%) n=175
Very easy	46	40	19
Quite easy	27	30	25
Neither/nor	11	11	8
Quite difficult	10	10	24
Very difficult	5	7	22
Not answered	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses).

Parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorder and severe/profound general learning disabilities were more likely to report that their experience was quite or very difficult. There were mixed views in the SENO and teacher focus groups regarding the real extent of inclusive education that was being provided, with some suggesting that certain schools develop a better reputation for their inclusive approach than others.

*Some schools may have no children with SEN. There may be a policy in the school to discourage SEN students from attending. This happens particularly in post-primary schools (Participant 5, SENO focus group).*

In the main, physical access to school does not appear to be an issue for parents with 61% stating that the access is good or very good and 7% overall stating that access is poor or very poor (proportions of those describing it as poor or very poor ranged from 13% for parents of pupils with physical disabilities to 4% of those with children with Asperger's syndrome for example). Views on physical access will, however, be determined by the child's SEN. Indeed, a quarter of parents responding to our survey stated that this was not applicable to them.

The majority (66%) live 5km or less from their child's school, with only a small proportion (6%) living more than 20km from the school. As might be expected, eight in 10 (79%) of parents responding in relation to a primary pupil stated that they lived 5km or less from the school compared to 60% of parents of secondary school level students and 28% of parents of pupils attending special schools. Just over half (51%) of parents with children at special schools stated that they lived more than 10km from the school and, of these, a quarter stated that the school was more than 20km away (25%). Again, not surprisingly, parents who live in rural areas were more likely to report that they lived further from the school. In the focus groups, there was some evidence of a lack of school choice for children with SEN living in rural areas and the need to travel longer distances to access specialist SEN services.

*Not every kid will do well in a mainstream school, but here in West Cork we've no choice – we don't have the option of a special school with four or five children in a class (Parent 5, Cork focus group)*

Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents stated that their child received support in relation to transport to school: of these, buses were the most common type of transport support (70%); this was followed by taxis (22%) or an escort (18%). The majority (87%) of parents of pupils attending special schools reported receiving some sort of support with transport. These parents were more likely to receive this support than others. Of those parents whose child was not in receipt of transport support, three quarters (75%) lived five miles or less from the school, compared with 33 per cent who were in receipt of support.

**Table 5.4: Type of transport support received by parents**

Type of transport support received	Primary (n=102)		Secondary (n=67)		Special (n=152)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Bus	62	63	76	51	74	113
Taxi	25	26	15	10	21	32
Grant towards the cost of transport	11	11	10	7	4	6
An escort	18	18	4	3	24	37
Not answered	2	2	3	2	1	2

Base: 321 (all parents whose child is in receipt of transport support)

Please note that some parents reported that their child was in receipt of more than one type of transport support.

Again, and as would be expected, this varied by type of SEN. Those children with physical disabilities; moderate or severe/profound general learning disabilities; ASD; and medical conditions appeared to be more likely to be in receipt of transport support. Regarding socio-economic status, parents in the C2, D and E economic groupings were more likely to receive this support than those in the A, B, and C1 groups, at 27 per cent compared to 18 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

The majority of parents (63%) whose child received support with transport stated that they were very satisfied with this support, with a further 24 per cent stating that they were quite satisfied. There were no statistically significant differences in levels of satisfaction by location.

## 5.4 The Assessment Process

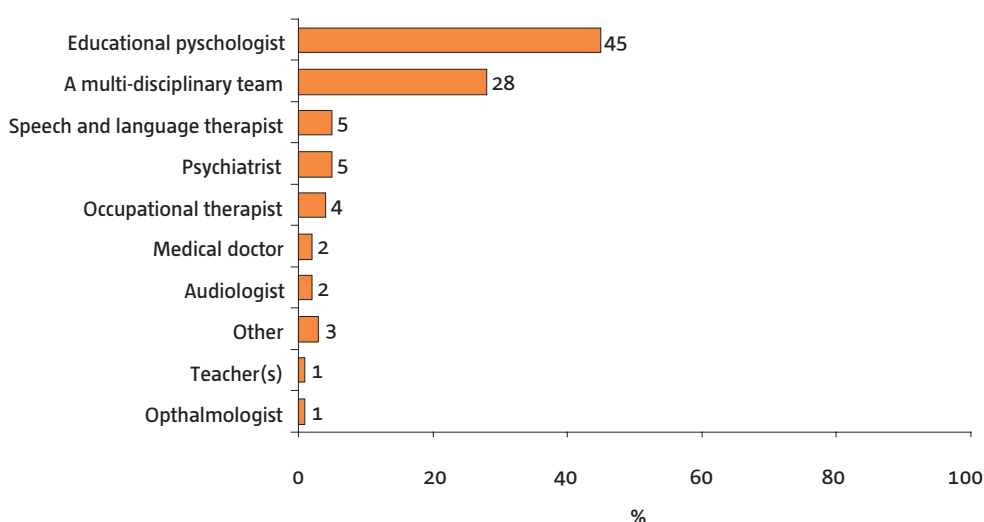
Nearly all parents (94%) reported that their child's educational needs had been formally assessed, with only a very small percentage (2%) unaware of whether or not their child had been assessed. There was no statistically significant difference in levels of formal assessment by socio-economic status. Nearly half (45%) stated that this assessment was undertaken by an educational psychologist and almost three in ten (28%) said that their

<sup>21</sup> ABC1 classifications indicate professional/managerial/supervisory occupations while C2DE classifications relate to skilled/unskilled/retired/homemaker occupations

child was assessed by a multi-disciplinary team. The majority of parents (81%) stated that their child was aged eight or under when first assessed – with a mean age of six years old for the first assessment.

It should be noted, however, that, as might be expected, the pupil's age when the assessment was carried out varied by the type of SEN. Pupils with physical or sensory disabilities tended to be diagnosed earlier than those with conditions such as dyspraxia or dyslexia. Almost half of parents responding on behalf of pupils attending primary school (49%) stated that their child had been assessed when they were under five years of age, compared to 12 per cent of parents responding in relation to a child of secondary school age. For pupils attending special schools, 57 per cent of those assessed were under the age of five. Just over a quarter of parents responding in regard to a secondary school pupil stated that their child was assessed between the ages of nine and 12 years (27%). This stage of assessment could potentially create difficulties for parents at the transition stage. CHAID<sup>22</sup> analysis suggests that those children who were assessed by a multi-disciplinary team were more likely to be under the age of 12.

**Figure 5.1: Professionals undertaking the formal assessment**



Base: 1,316 (all parents whose child's needs have been formally assessed)

Participants in the teacher focus group reported that they had varying levels of experience of pre-school assessment. They noted that very few children came to school with an assessment unless they came from a disadvantaged area and were already involved with an 'early years' service. There was a general consensus among focus group participants that early intervention is vital. They also raised concerns regarding the time taken for assessment and the quota system for NEPS assessments in schools.

Overall, satisfaction with the assessment process was relatively high, with 78 per cent of parents stating that they were either quite satisfied or very satisfied. Just over one in ten parents (12%), however, were either quite dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Three quarters

22 CHAID stands for Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detector. It is a technique that detects interaction between variables (responses to questions). The analysis subdivides the sample into a series of subgroups that 1) share similar characteristics towards a specific response variable and that 2) maximises the ability to predict the values of the response variable.

of parents (76%) believed that the assessors had 'often' or 'always' involved them in the process. There was no significant difference in satisfaction between parents reporting on primary school children and those reporting on secondary school pupils. Parents of pupils attending special schools tended to be more satisfied, with 83 per cent stating that they were quite satisfied or very satisfied with the assessment process. There was no difference in satisfaction levels by socio-economic status of the parent.

Parents of children with physical or sensory disabilities tended to be more satisfied than those parents with some form of learning disability. Satisfaction levels ranged from 87 per cent for parents with a child with physical difficulties, to 80 per cent for those with a child with sensory disabilities, to 67 per cent of parents with children with Asperger's Syndrome and 68 per cent of parents with children with ADHD.

**Table 5.5: Satisfaction levels with the assessment process**

Response	Primary (%) n=691	Secondary (%) n=445	Special (%) n=164
Very satisfied	34	38	27
Quite satisfied	45	40	56
Neither/nor	9	8	8
Quite dissatisfied	7	7	5
Very dissatisfied	4	7	2
Not answered	1	1	2
Total	100	100	100
N (all those whose child had been assessed)	691	445	164

Base: 1,300 (all parents whose child has been formally assessed and who responded to type of school).

When asked about their overall views on special educational services in an open-ended question, several parents raised concerns about the length of time taken to access an assessment. Some had paid for a private assessment but then encountered barriers to implementing the reports' recommendations. One of the participants in the teacher focus group highlighted geographical variations in the time taken for assessment.

*My child was assessed in national school by an educational psychologist employed by the Department of Education. They diagnosed her with a mild learning disability – non specific. This meant she was entitled to no help. Eventually having paid a private psychologist... she was diagnosed dyslexic and dyspraxic and received some help from the DES (Parent – survey respondent).*

*I didn't make a formal complaint, but I did mention it to the public occupational therapist that a three year waiting list for an assessment was absolutely ludicrous and I therefore had a private assessment done (Parent – survey respondent).*

No speech language services – we had him assessed privately but had no way of implementing the recommendations (Parent – survey respondent).



*We were in the lucky position that we were able to source help for our son privately (which did not come cheap). Many parents and children are left for years to be seen for assessment on so-called waiting lists (Parent – survey respondent).*

*The length of time waiting on assessment is too long. I was able to go privately and pay for the assessment, otherwise I would have waited over six months for a Department psychologist (Parent – survey respondent).*

*We had to get a private assessment and we have had to do everything ourselves. We have an autistic child as well and we have had to fight all the way to get him into a proper school (Parent – survey respondent).*

*HSE services are appalling. A lip service. The child and the school are dependent on private assessments constantly (Parent – survey respondent).*

*[We were waiting a] very long waiting list for the initial assessment. I wanted to have my son seen before he started school. This was not possible as the public list was too long, so we felt we had to go privately in the best interest of our child. This was very costly but we felt we had no choice (Parent – survey respondent).*

The main issues identified in relation to the assessment process during the qualitative phase of this research included difficulties with identifying less evident SEN and the quota system of two referrals per year per school, which leads some parents to opt for a private assessment.

*With our older daughter, we had to push to get her assessed – eventually privately, paying ourselves. The school couldn't get her assessed, the problem wasn't as apparent ... The more severe the problem, the much more attention it gets. The Department left it up to us and we had to get the private assessment done again recently. The older daughter has a mild form of dyslexia – the problem wasn't as blatant so she doesn't get the help (Parent 3, Dublin focus group).*

*The school couldn't refer him (due to the limited number of referrals that can be made annually) so I got his assessment carried out privately. He changed school about the age of 10 and he got more confidence after that (Parent 4, Cork focus group).*

*The school pushed for the assessment to get him the resource teacher. He would struggle without her. If you didn't have the money to get the private assessment, not that I am loaded, but if you didn't you would be waiting the two years and where would he have been at if he didn't get the support he needed then? (Parent, telephone interview).*

The time taken for the assessment to be undertaken was criticised by some parents who took part in the research. Some noted that a lack of awareness on the part of school staff and educational psychologists added to the length time taken.

*I'm fairly knowledgeable but I didn't know what an OT [occupational therapist] does but when I spoke to the teachers they had no idea what to do and even when we spoke to the resource teacher she didn't even suggest to us to get an assessment – all she said was 'I can't help you'. Even the educational psychologist didn't know – she saw the behavioural problems but it took a long time to get around to saying 'maybe you should see the Occupational Therapist'. I think they're in the dark ages as to knowing how to deal with kids with that level of frustration (Parent 5, Cork focus group).*

*I knew there was a big problem with my foster daughter and her natural parents were denying it which made matters more complex. The help came from the HSE but they were desperately slow. The poor child was in the hospital for most of a year, but she has come on with help from the educational psychologist (Parent 3, Cork focus group).*

Several parents raised the issue of co-ordination between the various services and types of provision, suggesting that the parent was often responsible for maintaining communication.

*Our son was attending CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] and they couldn't identify his depression even when I was telling them about it. I was phoning the educational psychologists and they were talking about the Occupational Therapist and the CAMHS people. Meanwhile my son was missing lots of school while no-one was seeing him for two months. I was asking them 'who's coordinating all these different people?' and no-one would take responsibility and what I eventually realised was it's the mother that has to coordinate all this (Parent 5, Cork focus group).*

Of those parents whose child had been assessed, the large majority (90%) had received a written report of the assessment. Again, satisfaction levels with the assessment report were high, with 85% describing themselves as quite or very satisfied with the information provided in the report. However, the SENOs that participated in this study highlighted issues such as variations in diagnoses between social groups and problems among some parents regarding the clarity of the information contained in assessment reports.

Table 5.6 presents satisfaction levels with the assessment report for parents of primary, special and secondary level children. There was no significant difference in satisfaction by school type.

**Table 5.6: Satisfaction with the information provided in the assessment report**

Satisfaction level	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Special (%)
Very satisfied	37	41	31
Quite satisfied	48	43	54
Neither/nor	8	8	9
Quite dissatisfied	4	5	4
Very dissatisfied	2	3	1
Not answered	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100
N	618	398	156

Base: 1,172 (all parents whose child has been given a written report of their assessment)

While there was no statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels regarding assessment between parents of pupils in different phases, several parents did note that assessments often had to be redone at the point of transition.

*There was no natural flow. From primary to secondary and as a parent I did much of the phoning and chasing up reports to support the application for extra resource (Parent – survey respondent).*

*Since the introduction of the GAM model there have been fewer assessments/ reports at secondary level. There can be a scramble then to get support at post-primary level (Participant 4, SENO focus group).*

## 5.5 School Policy on SEN and Resources

A third of parent respondents stated that the school attended by their child had a written policy on SEN; over half (54%) did not know whether or not their school had a policy. Parents responding in relation to a child at primary school were very slightly more likely to state that the school had a written policy on SEN – at 30 per cent compared to 29 per cent of parents with children at secondary schools. However, this difference was not significant. A majority (60%) of parents of children in special schools stated that their school had a SEN policy.

There was a general consensus among teachers participating in this study that policies are developed within schools and that these are well communicated to staff and families. However, teachers also identified a number of problems including:

- a perceived high turnover of teaching staff, leading to challenges in familiarising all staff with school policy on SEN
- waiting lists for training, and
- access to SEN training being limited to those working in the area of learning support.

Table 5.7 below presents the most common forms of support provided to the children of parent respondents. The main type of in-school support is special needs/resource

teaching hours (75%) whilst the most common type of support provided outside school is speech and language therapy (29%). It should be noted however, that a large proportion of parents (49%) did not respond to the question regarding support outside school, suggesting perhaps that there is little access to support outside the school setting.

**Table 5.7: Types of support provided to parents**

Type of support	Support in school (%)	Support outside school (%)
Special needs/resource teaching hours	75	-
Special needs assistant (SNA)	50	-
Learning support teaching	26	-
Speech and language therapy	15	29
Occupational therapy	11	24
Psychologist	7	13
Guidance counsellor	6	-
Physiotherapy	5	9
School Nurse	5	-
Technical assistance	5	-
Psychiatrist	-	7
Not answered	1	49

Base: 1,394 (all parents participating in the survey)

Parents of primary school pupils were more likely to report that their child was in receipt of special needs/resource teaching hours and an SNA (84% and 56% respectively) than those reporting on behalf of a secondary school student (71% and 32% respectively). For special schools, the proportions were 54 per cent and 77 per cent respectively. There were no statistically significant differences in responses regarding rural/urban location. Parents of pupils with a visual impairment, dyspraxia, Asperger's Syndrome or a mild general learning disability were more likely to report that their child received special needs or resource teaching hours. Those whose children had a physical disability, visual impairment, severe or profound general learning disability, ASD, or Asperger's and Down's Syndrome were more likely to report that a special needs assistant had been provided. It should be noted however that a large proportion (47%) of participating parents stated that their child had been diagnosed with more than one SEN – these figures should therefore be read as broad trends rather than indicating discrete categories of support.

Parents were less satisfied with the process of applying for supports or resources for their child. Almost a quarter (23%) found the process very difficult and a similar proportion (22%) found it difficult. This seems to be the aspect of SEN provision that caused parents most dissatisfaction. This was particularly the case for parents of pupils attending special schools; 52 per cent of this group were quite or very dissatisfied with this, compared to 44 per cent of parents of primary pupils and 45 per cent of parents of pupils at secondary schools. There was no statistically significant difference by socio-economic status or location (i.e. whether the parent lives in the countryside, town or city). Further analysis

demonstrates that there was no significant difference in the characteristics of either the parent or the child in terms of those who stated that application process is very difficult. These parents, however, were more likely to have had to complain about the support their child received and to have more than one child with SEN. Similarly, those who found the process easiest were less likely to have complained about the support, and were more likely to have only one child with SEN and to believe that their child attended the right type of school for their needs.

The most commonly cited reasons why parents found the application process to be a difficult one were: difficulties in getting the child's SEN accepted or diagnosed, the time taken to get support and a lack of resources (see Table 5.8). It also emerged, in both the focus groups and in an open-ended survey question, that some parents felt isolated in this process.

**Table 5.8: Reasons parents found the process of applying for resources difficult**

Cited reasons	(%)	N
Difficulties in getting child's SEN accepted or diagnosed	34	216
Length of time taken	34	217
A lack of resources	34	215
Parents have to 'fight' for any help or support	30	187
A lack of available information	15	95
No organised support system in place	13	82
A lack of funding	9	56
A lack of continuity between classes and/or schools	5	34
Not answered	7	43
Other	13	80

Base: 631 (all those parents who found the process of applying for supports or resources difficult)

In their verbatim responses, many parents highlighted problems in accessing appropriate health professionals, such as psychologists and speech and language therapists. In some cases, parents had obtained additional support for their child through privately provided services.

*In the early years we had trouble getting speech and language therapy and we accessed this privately. We also accessed special tuition re: reading and spelling for her once again privately. I don't know how well she would be getting on if we hadn't been in a position to pay for this additional support for her! (Parent – survey respondent).*

*I feel that if the school had access to a speech and language therapist she wouldn't have to go outside and if there was more IT [information technology] available it would help children with needs to be included in mainstream schools (Parent – survey respondent).*

*Waiting lists are dreadful. My son was on a waiting list for speech and language social skills (which is an area he is really lacking in). I enquired after a couple of months as to when this might come about, I was told four months, but it actually ended up being another four after that. It took 11 months to get one hour per day for four days (Parent – survey respondent).*

*The lack of speech and language therapists is preventing my son from progressing in this crucial area (Parent – survey respondent).*

*The health board [sic] is not funding enough therapists, occupational, physical, speech and language to the clinic... this has a major effect on the vital availability of these essential therapies (Parent – survey respondent).*

*I would like there to be more speech therapy available in school, most children on the autistic spectrum suffer language problems and this needs to be introduced on a regular basis or speech and language classes should have openings in their classrooms for children with other disabilities (Parent – survey respondent).*

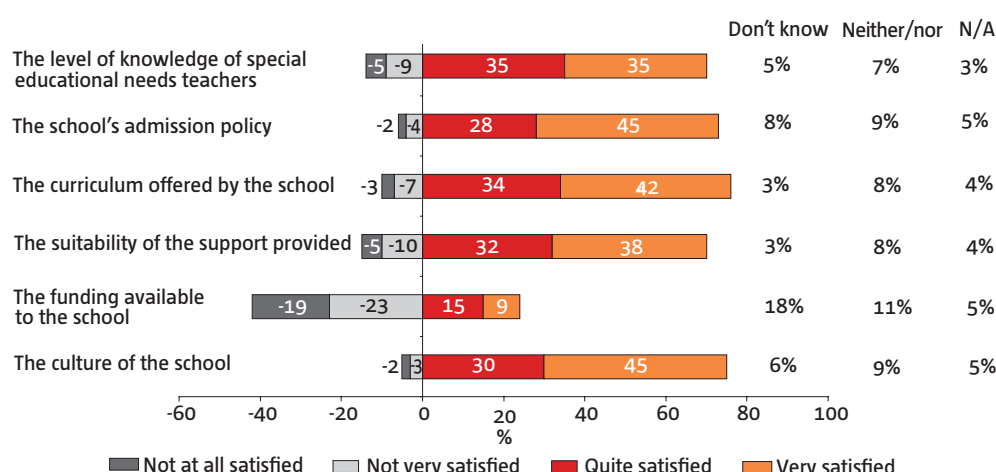
Conversely, those parents (n. 485) who found the process either quite easy or very easy noted that this was because:

- the school was very helpful/it organised everything (54%)
- once the assessment report was received, the support was automatic (19%)
- a specialist or support group gave us assistance (18%)
- support was received when requested (9%), and
- the support network was already in place in the school (7%).

*The school do very well, they call me from time to time and give me advice and ask me for advice what to do. I have a very good relationship with the school. From time to time they ask me to let them know if I am not happy (Parent 1, Dublin focus group).*

*In school it's very good. There is one SEN teacher and two SNAs to six children but there is no external review of his progress (Parent, telephone interview).*

When asked to respond to specific aspects of school provision, parents were generally satisfied with: the level of knowledge of SEN teachers (70%); the school admissions policy (73%); the curriculum offered by the school (76%); the suitability of the support provided (70%); and the culture of the school (75%). Parents were less satisfied with the funding available to the school attended by their child, with 24 per cent stating that they were satisfied and 42 per cent stating that they were either not very or not all satisfied in this regard.

**Figure 5.2: Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in school**

Base: 1,394 (all parents)

Parents of pupils in special and primary school settings tended to be more positive in relation to each of these aspects of support than those with children in secondary settings, particularly in regard to: the level of knowledge of SEN teachers and the curriculum offered by the school (see Table 5.7). Significant differences occurred between special/primary and secondary responses to all of these aspects, with the exception of the school's admissions policy. There was no statistically significant difference by the socio-economic status of the parent responding to the survey.

**Table 5.9 Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

Type of support	Primary (% quite or very satisfied)	Secondary (% quite or very satisfied)	Special (% quite or very satisfied)
The level of knowledge of SEN teachers	73	64	83
The school's admissions policy	74	71	78
The curriculum offered by the school	78	71	78
The suitability of the support provided	74	64	77
The funding available to the school	24	19	35
The culture of the school	76	73	78
	Base: 731	Base: 470	Base: 175

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses)

Again, these findings were echoed in the focus groups and interviews with parents, many of whom expressed the view that the smaller, more intimate environment of a primary school and a single classroom teacher in this setting meant that their child received support that was more tailored to their needs.

Some parents did highlight, however, some issues in relation to co-ordination between staff and the levels of awareness of SEN amongst teachers. Several parents noted that

they had experienced more problems with the Health Service Executive than with the special educational services.

*We're getting the resource teacher support now. The school teachers don't know what they're looking for and I don't think they see it as their job. There's a link missing because the SNA doesn't see them and doesn't know their problems if they have not previously been formally diagnosed (Parent 2, Cork focus group).*

*He is allocated four hours of resource work for his speech. It's not a speech therapist; it's a resource teacher that is doing this work with him. It would obviously be much better if there was a speech therapist involved because that is what his difficulty is and the regular teacher in the school is only relying on experience. There doesn't seem to be any liaison between them and the speech therapist in the HSE so they are 'winging' it themselves as they are not qualified to give speech therapy (Parent, telephone interview).*

*Parents get bounced back between the Departments of Education and Health and the kids lose out (Parent – survey respondent).*

The SENOs that participated in a focus group at the outset of this research identified a number of issues relating to attitudes towards inclusion and provision for SEN, particularly around the deployment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). In their view, parents often see SNAs as a 'cure all' rather than a part of a wider package of support. They also voiced concerns over the fact that the quality of provision is not monitored.

*The profile of kids with SEN in schools varies hugely. The severity of need in mainstream is much greater. This can cause difficulties in the differentiation of the curriculum. There can be issues around SNA allocation and the parent feeling that it's their child's SNA indefinitely... If the child's condition improves or where they make significant progress and the SNA provision is reduced the parent can feel like their child is being penalised (Participant 2, SENO focus group).*

The participating SENOs echoed the concerns of some parents relating to out-of-school provision, particularly in relation to the interface between education and health. Issues here included the sharing of information on the child's needs; waiting lists for health services; and the need for the child to be 'labelled' in order for them to access support.

*There is no catch-all office for the sharing of information between health and education (Participant 2, SENO focus group).*

*I'm reluctant to recommend HSE as there are such long waiting lists. I feel to some extent service provision in education is compensating for the deficits in health (Participant 4, SENO focus group).*

*The education system and the requirement to have a child labelled can put pressure on the health system especially in the area of mental health services (Participant 5, SENO focus group).*



Teachers also expressed concern about funding and fears of potential budget cuts, with some schools examining ways in which existing resources such as SNAs may be deployed most effectively within the school.

*The provision of services will change due to the expected cutbacks in the system. There is insufficient access to therapies such as psychology, speech and language therapy and counselling services (Participant 3, teacher focus group).*

*We are looking at sharing SNAs within the school, so that scarce resources are maximised (Participant 7, teacher focus group).*

### 5.5.1 Parents' views on the provision of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

When parents were asked about their general views of the special educational services available to their child, a number commented specifically on the provision of Special Needs Assistants. While most were positive and supportive of the benefits that an SNA can bring to their child's education and well-being, concerns were raised about the current and future deployment of SNAs. In the main, these concerns related to the current economic uncertainty and fears around future reductions in the education budget. Some parents argued that early intervention resulted in reduced future expenditure for the state. Other issues related to the sharing of SNAs between classes; access to SNAs in general; the level of understanding and training of SNAs; and the opportunities for parents to engage with SNAs, teachers and principals.

**Table 5.10 Verbatim responses on the role of Special Needs Assistants**

Selected comments on the provision of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs): survey of parents	
SNAs shared between classes	<p>"The SNA was shared between three other lads who were in a lower class than my child so he never got to know her."</p> <p>"In our school, the same SNA is not with a child as they move from class to class. I think the same SNA through school would provide consistent support to the child especially at the beginning of the new school year."</p>
Access to SNAs	<p>"I would like my child to get access to the SNA and resources he needs, how many reports do you need to get these things? There are three SNAs in my son's school with 350 pupils."</p>

Selected comments on the provision of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs): survey of parents	
Reductions in SNA hours	<p>"I feel that the SNAs play a very important part in any child's life who needs them, and that when they were introduced to schools they were given to a lot of kids who did not need them. Now when the kids do really need them they are taking them away."</p> <p>"I was happy with my child's progress to date. However, her hours of contact with her SNA have been cut since the SNA review. I am worried that she will not make the amount of progress and fall behind. I think that the teacher will find it very difficult to give her time to practise her O.T. [occupational therapy] and speech therapy exercise."</p> <p>"I would have grave reservations about my child going to school if the Department withdrew any more services, she needs a certain amount of one to one coupled with SNA assistance."</p> <p>"I feel very angry about the recent cutbacks in the educational system. SNAs and resource teachers are a must for all schools and should not be touched by all these cutbacks."</p> <p>"After 3 years we have to meet our daughter's SENO to put our case forward as the Department of Education is trying to take away her SNA. If she loses her SNA her future education will be destroyed and the progress she has made since the beginning of the school year in September 2008... will be undone. The Department of Education is playing God with my child's future."</p>
Parents have to 'fight' for any help or support	<p>"In my opinion it is a constant battle. Every year as a parent I am fighting for more SNA hours and a greater understanding of the problems... I feel I have to constantly make contact with the principal, SNA and resource teacher and class teacher to find out how things are progressing."</p> <p>"Services available to our daughter are totally inadequate, they do not meet her educational needs, she will never reach her potential. We had to take legal action in 2000 when she started school to ensure a SNA, she has an SNA to date because of this court order."</p>
The level of knowledge and training of SNA	<p>"I don't think the SNAs are fully trained to deal with special needs children and don't seem to want to try and understand the child's needs."</p>
The role of the SNA	<p>"My main concern is about the way in which Special Needs Assistants are reviewed... The Department of Education reviews my child's need for an SNA based solely on his requirement for assistance (if any) to go to the toilet and any other health and safety needs. This ignores completely the vital role played by the SNA in ensuring my child to integrate in a mainstream classroom... The role of the SNA needs to be recognised and sanctioned as being for far more than health and safety if the needs of children are to be met in the process of integration in mainstream school."</p>

It is relevant to note that SNAs are recruited specifically to assist schools in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special care needs in an educational context. Schools may apply for an SNA post for a pupil with a disability who also has a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant physical or sensory impairment, or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils.<sup>23</sup>

23 DES Circular SP ED 0009/2009

## 5.6 The Relationship between the School and Parents

Our research also explored a number of specific aspects of the relationship between parents and the school attended by their child with SEN. These included the prevalence and use of individual education plans (IEPs); the culture of the school; and the process of transition between primary and secondary schools.

### 5.6.1 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

As noted in the previous section, IEPs, which were introduced under the EPSEN Act 2004, include all educational and non-educational needs identified for the child.

Despite the fact that IEPs are not yet mandatory, a large proportion (45%) of parents who responded to our survey stated that their child had an IEP, with a further quarter (25%) who were unsure whether or not their child had one. The table below presents the distribution of IEPs across primary and secondary level education. It appears that children in special schools and primary schools are more likely to have an IEP in place than those in secondary schools. In total, 73 per cent of parents of special school pupils, 51 per cent of parents of primary pupils and 26 per cent of parents of secondary level pupils stated that their child had an IEP. Parents from the higher socio-economic grouping were slightly more likely to report that their child had an IEP (48% of A, B and C1s compared to 43% of C2, D and Es).<sup>24</sup>

**Table 5.11 Distribution of Individual Education Plans by type of school**

	Parents stating that their child had an IEP in place (%)	N*
Primary school	51	375
Secondary school	26	121
Special school	73	127
Total	45%	623

\* n=total number of parents responding

Base: Primary – 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses)

Parents whose child had an IEP were more likely to state that their child was in the right school for their needs, at 91 per cent compared to 84 per cent. They were also more likely to report that their school had a written policy on SEN (43% compared to 28%). These parents were also more likely to state that their child's learning was either quite or very appropriate to their needs (88% compared to 71%); that their child was making progress according to their ability (84% compared to 71%) and to be satisfied with the level of contact that they had with their child's teachers (88% compared to 74%). In terms of overall satisfaction with their child's education, 84 per cent of parents with a child with an IEP stated that they were quite or very satisfied, with 45% of these reporting that they were very satisfied; this compared to 72 per cent of parents whose child did not have an IEP.

<sup>24</sup> ABC1 classifications indicate professional/managerial/supervisory occupations while C2DE classifications relate to skilled/unskilled/retired/homemaker occupations

Of those parents whose children had an IEP, around half (52%) said that the school 'always' involved them in its development. One in ten, however, stated that they were 'rarely' or 'never' involved by the school. Almost three quarters (74%) reported that their child's IEP was regularly reviewed, and of these, nearly all – 93 per cent – were satisfied with their involvement in the review. Parents reporting on pupils attending primary and special schools were more likely to state that the IEP was regularly reviewed, at 75 per cent and 76 per cent respectively, compared to 67 per cent of parents of secondary level children. Several parents commented that an IEP would allow them to engage on a more meaningful basis with school personnel and SENOs.

*IEPs should be automatically done for all children with a special educational need and parents should be requested to attend at least two or three meetings per year at beginning, middle and end of year to provide input on assessing needs, setting targets and strategies, and automatically [be] given a copy of [the] IEP for themselves. This does not always happen. In most situations, I have had to request this. When we lived in Canada, the parent was automatically part of the child's educational team and treated as such (Parent – survey respondent).*

*I would like to see the IEP process implemented in a formal way. As a parent I would like to formally meet (around a table in a collaborative way) the SNA, SENO, principal, resource teachers and be present with my husband to represent our child's needs. This process also needs regular reviews built in (Parent – survey respondent).*

It would be of benefit to student, parents, teachers to have an IEP in place, on the student entering primary school, and the resources to implement the programme (Parent – survey respondent).

Eight in ten parents (79%) considered that their child's learning programme at school was appropriate to their needs, with only seven per cent stating that it was quite or very inappropriate. A similar proportion (78%) of parents thought that their child was making progress according to their ability. As shown in Table 5.12, parents reporting on behalf of primary school pupils and pupils attending special schools were more positive about the appropriateness of the learning than those of secondary school children. These parents were also more likely to state that their child was making good or very good progress according to their ability – this was the case for 84 per cent of parents of pupils at primary level and 80 per cent of parents of pupils at special schools, compared with 69 per cent of parents of secondary school students). There was no statistically significant difference by socio-economic status.

**Table 5.12 Appropriateness of learning to the child's needs**

	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Special (%)
Very appropriate	40	25	42
Quite appropriate	44	45	40
Neither/nor	8	13	7
Quite inappropriate	4	7	5
Very inappropriate	1	4	2
Not answered	2	7	3
	Base: 731	Base=470	Base=175

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid results)

An open-ended question in the survey invited general comments on the special educational services available to their children. Here, several parents commented on the importance of good communication between school and home regarding their child's progress. Several parents sought a more collaborative approach between teachers and families, suggesting that they do not feel sufficiently informed about the progress their child is making.

*I would like if every school term the parents could be called in to meet the person in charge of his support classes to discuss his progress, and [if] some guidance [was] given to parents on how they could help a more 'work together' approach! (Parent – survey respondent).*

*Need more communications from the school department or special needs on her progress (Parent – survey respondent).*

*[We need] more understanding in class from teachers... more understanding with homework... more communication between parents and the special needs teacher... more awareness of parents towards what goes on in class. Teachers and parents should become involved together in the child's progress (Parent – survey respondent).*

*My son informs me how he is getting on but unless I phone his year head I am never informed of his progress (Parent – survey respondent).*

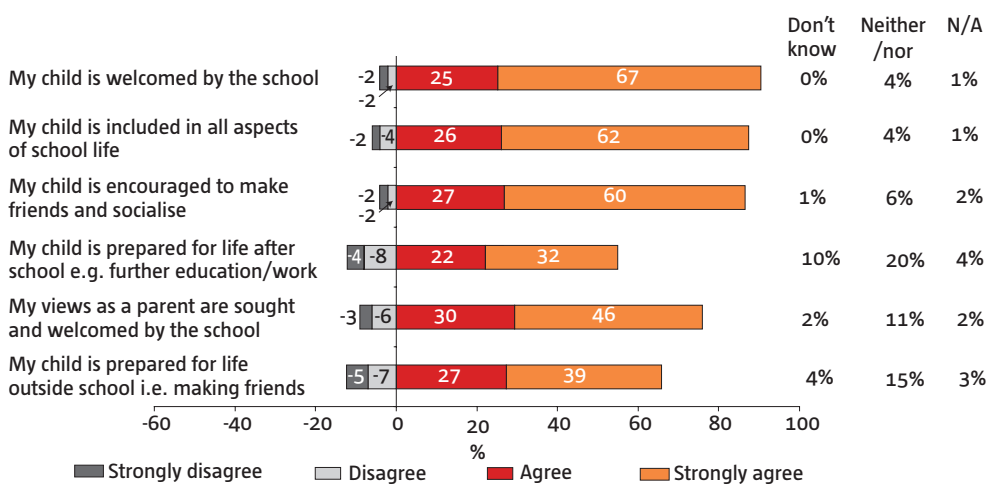
The SENOs who participated in this study welcomed the introduction of IEPs but noted that the Plans are easier to implement in primary than in secondary settings. They also stated that both principals and parents have a role to play in their successful implementation. There is also an issue around the extent to which SENOs have access to a child's IEP; often this is at the discretion of the school.

*SENOs have no role with IEPs. They have not received any training in the area. It depends on the school how much access the SENO has to the IEP. Some schools are proactive and will share the IEP with the SENO, others don't (Participant 9, SENO focus group).*

### 5.6.2 The culture of the school

Parents who responded to our survey were very positive about the welcome the school extended to their child, with 92 per cent agreeing (among whom 67 per cent strongly agreed) that their child was welcomed. Similar proportions agreed that their child was included in all aspects of school life and was encouraged by the school to make friends and socialise (88 per cent and 86 per cent respectively). Parents were less unequivocal regarding the extent to which their child was prepared for life after school, for experiences such as further education or the workplace. In this case, 54 per cent agreed that they were prepared. A higher proportion of 66 per cent felt that their child was prepared for life outside school, i.e. making friends.

**Figure 5.4 Satisfaction with selected aspects of the culture of the school**



Base: 1,394 (all parents providing valid responses)

Three quarters (76%) felt that, as parents, their views were sought and welcomed by the school and 79 per cent were satisfied with their level of contact with their child's teachers. Satisfaction levels were also high in relation to the way in which the school keeps parents informed about their child's educational needs, with 73 per cent either quite or very satisfied in this matter. The same proportion was also happy with the progress their child was making. Overall, eight in ten parents (78%) stated that they were satisfied with their child's education – with 37 per cent of these parents describing themselves as very satisfied.

While parents were generally very positive about these aspects of the school ethos, parents who responded on behalf of a child attending a primary or special school setting were more likely to be positive than those in a secondary secondary setting.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, there is some indication that more could be done, particularly in special schools, to prepare young people with SEN for life after and outside school.

<sup>25</sup> There are significant differences between the responses of parents of primary and secondary level pupils on all aspects, with the exception of 'my child is prepared for life after' and 'outside school'.

**Table 5.13 Satisfaction with selected aspects of the pupil's education by level**

Aspects of child's education	Primary (% stating satisfied or very satisfied)	Secondary (% stating satisfied or very satisfied)	Special (% stating satisfied or very satisfied)
The level of contact with your child's teachers	85	68	86
The way in which the school tells you about your child's educational needs	77	66	82
The way in which the school tells you about the progress your child is making	78	64	79
Your child's overall education	83	71	80
	Base: 731	Base: 470	Base: 175

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses)

Parents of pupils in primary and special schools tended to be more positive (see Table 5.13) than those of pupils in secondary schools, particularly in regard to the level of information provided by the school on the pupil's needs and level of progress. In terms of the pupil's overall education, there was a significant difference between the satisfaction levels of parents of secondary level children and those whose children attended primary or special schools. There was no difference in opinion by socio-economic background.

In general, participants thought that the culture and ethos of the school was a crucial factor, with pupils making most progress in settings with a welcoming, inclusive and supportive ethos.

*To schools additional staff resources mean additional staff to them rather than what it means to the child. A lot of how SEN is managed depends on the attitude of the school principal (Participant 1, SENO focus group).*

*The school she attends is where her friends go, socially this is most important and they have supported her over the years through national school. She knows she has a learning difficulty but gets on with life. Support and reassurance would be very important and the school has a wonderful community ethos (Parent – survey respondent).*

*He has a SNA who is with him all of the time during school hours. He has a meeting every week to speak about his behaviour. Each teacher gives us a feedback weekly [sic] about his work and his behaviour. We work in a team to help him (Parent – survey respondent).*

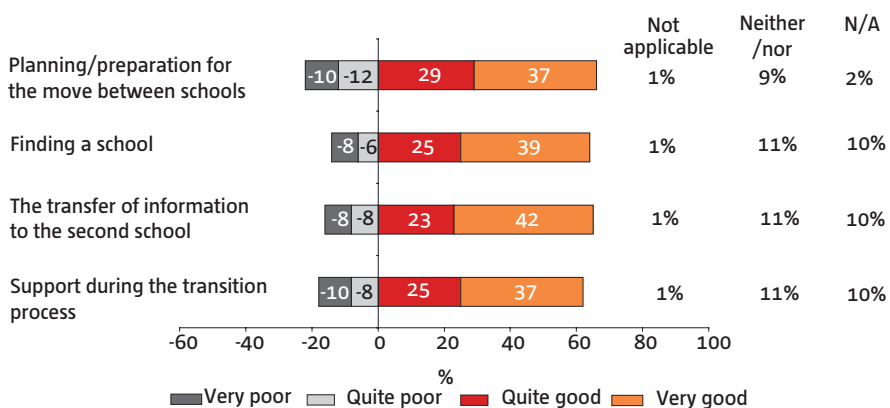
**Table 5.14 Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

School culture	Primary (% stating agree or agree strongly)	Secondary (% stating agree or agree strongly)	Special (% stating agree or agree strongly)
My child is welcomed by the school	93	89	95
My child is included in all aspects of school life	89	85	92
My child is encouraged to make friends and socialise	89	83	88
My child is prepared for life after school e.g. further education, work	51	58	56
My views as a parent are sought and welcomed by the school	79	72	80
My child is prepared for life outside school i.e. making friends	68	66	55
	Base: 731	Base: 470	Base: 175

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses)

### 5.6.3 Transition from primary to secondary school

Just over a third of parents reported that their child had made the transition from primary to secondary school. Again, these parents were generally satisfied with the help provided in making this move, but a substantial minority of these respondents (between 13% and 22%, as illustrated in Figure 5.5) described the quality of this help as poor. This was particularly the case regarding help with planning and preparation; support during the transition itself; and the transfer of information to the child's new school. Those parents whose children had transferred to a fee-paying or non-fee paying secondary school, or a secondary community and comprehensive school, were more likely to describe this support as good (64% and 70% respectively).

**Figure 5.5 Satisfaction with selected aspects of the transition process from primary to post-primary**

Base: 498 (all parents whose child has made the transition from primary to secondary school)



Around three quarters (76%) of parent respondents whose children had made the transition from primary to secondary school stated that they were satisfied with the range of subjects, courses and qualifications available for their child at secondary school.

**Table 5.15 Satisfaction with the range of subjects, courses and qualifications available at secondary school**

Satisfaction with curriculum	%
Very satisfied	33
Quite satisfied	43
Neither/nor	10
Quite dissatisfied	10
Very dissatisfied	3
Not answered	2
Total	100
N	Base: 498

Base: 498 (all parents whose child has made the transition from primary to secondary school)

Several parents noted, however, that the assessment process has to commence again, once the child starts secondary school.

*There is a huge transition and different experience of special needs support between primary and secondary. Starting secondary school we seem to have to start from square one again we feel a lot more support needs to be put in place you have to chase for everything (Parent – survey respondent).*

There is not enough differentiation of the curriculum e.g. the same list of books is given to all students. [While] parents can go to the SESS for help they are not inclined to as they don't want to show what they don't know. Parents have difficulties where their child moves class and the previous teacher managed and the current one can't. There are transition difficulties for the child and parent in the move from primary to post-primary as in primary [school] the child has one teacher and in secondary they have multiple. In secondary school there is difficulty around the emphasis on subjects and academic achievement rather than on the holistic needs of the child such as life skills (Participant 4, SENO focus group).

## 5.7 The Relationship between Parents and Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)

Just over a third (36%) of all parent respondents stated that they had met or spoken to their SENO; a further six per cent were unsure whether they had or not. It should be noted, however, that, given that there are approximately 80 SENO in post across Ireland, it is unlikely that SENO will have had an opportunity to meet all the parents of pupils in schools under their remit. Parents of primary school children were slightly more likely to have had contact with their SENO, at 39 per cent compared to 33 per cent of parents reporting on children attending secondary and special schools.

There was also some variation in the amount of contact, by the nature of the child's SEN. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting these results, given the relatively low bases for some conditions and the fact that 45 per cent of parents in our achieved sample stated that their child had two or more identified needs. Parents of children with Down syndrome, autistic spectrum disorder, ODD, Asperger's syndrome and/or physical disabilities were more likely to have had contact with a SENO than other parents who responded to our survey.

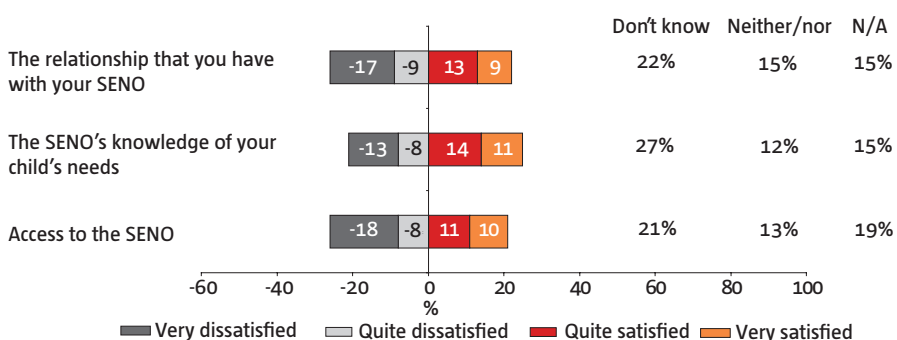
In the SENO focus group, it was suggested that the list of SENOs on the NCSE website should provide a list of the schools which fall under their remit; the aim here was to improve the level and quality of information available to parents. Teachers also reported that communication between the family and the SENO is typically at a minimal level and that it is the educational psychologist who usually meets with the parents before and after the assessment.

Awareness of the role of the SENO was relatively low amongst all participating parents, with approximately half (51%) stating that they were either not very aware or not at all aware of the role of the SENO. Approximately one in seven (16%), however, described themselves as very aware of the role. There was no significant difference in levels of awareness by school phase.

Overall, approximately one quarter of all parent respondents were dissatisfied with their relationship with their SENO and with access to the SENO (26% in each case). It should be noted, however, that a relatively high proportion of respondents were undecided on this issue, whose responses were either 'don't know' or 'neither/nor'. This may reflect the low level of direct contact that parents report with SENOs and indeed their level of awareness of the role.

Those parents who reported contact with their SENO were more likely to be satisfied with the relationship; 53 per cent of these parents were satisfied with their relationship with the SENO, compared to three per cent of those who reported no contact. Those parents who had made a complaint about the support provided for their child were more likely to be dissatisfied with the relationship with the SENO; 38 per cent of parents who had made a complaint stated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, compared to 21 per cent of those who had not made a complaint.

**Figure 5.6: Satisfaction with selected aspects of the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)**



Base: 1,394 (all parents participating in the survey)

Many parent respondents used an open-ended question on their overall views of special education services in Ireland to comment on the role and responsibilities of SENOs. Table 5.14 highlights some of their views and concerns around their awareness of SENOs, access to SENOs, and the relationship between SENOs, schools and parents. Some of these concerns may be attributable to wider issues around parents' understanding of the role of the SENO, the relationship with the school and the support that a SENO can provide, and wider fears around budget constraints in general.

**Table 5.16 Selected survey responses on the role of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)**

Verbatim responses from parents	
Awareness of SENOs	"I didn't know there was a SENO. I would have contacted them if I had known. I find that there are major differences in schools and how they managed."
Access to SENOs	"It is an ongoing struggle to get services on SENO for the whole of the County." "The SENO position for our area was vacant for many months last year leaving both school and parents very frustrated... For children with Special Needs, it is devastating to lose almost a full school year of support."
The level of knowledge and training of SENOs	"I feel that the SENO does not know my child but yet she can make a decision on what his needs are on whether he needs a full-time SNA or not." "The SENO appointed to my child's school has no clue about my child. I don't understand how she qualifies to dictate what child receives what."
The role of the SENO	"I was told that SENOs deal with the school and not the parent so all questions asked are not very relevant, unless I was misinformed – or not informed as is sadly my experience." "It just seems to be a bureaucratic minefield – teachers tell the principal who contacts the SENO who decides how much times can be given to the pupil despite what is recommended in the report. The SENO person does not go by its recommendations. Budgetary constraints are huge presently." "The needs of the child are left very much to the principal while my child's assessment recommends very desirable and logical help. Goodwill from Principal and staff is essential in ensuring this becomes a reality. The SENO takes no responsibility for enforcement. Moving schools was the answer for my child and the change in attitudes is unbelievable." "The SENO is the worst part of the process from my experience when reviewing their roles and responsibilities under [EPSEN], you can see the divorce between reality and theory. There is a dread when they spring surprise visits on the child at school as they can see the child's disability out of context and modify decisions accordingly. They also drag parents kicking and screaming into a process that they should have nothing to do with them. A parent's role changes from advisory to confrontational when dealing with a SENO."

Verbatim responses from parents	
Relationship with SENO	<p>"Our SENO has been made life very easy for me as the mother of a child with a disability. She is very enthusiastic, hard working and effective lady who has been of tremendous support to us and our son. She ensures our son has everything he is entitled to and needs. She is an able administrator and a tremendous support."</p> <p>"There is a lack of communication from SENOs directly to parents. Any work in terms of supporting placement in school to date has been initiated by parents and SENOs have not been involved."</p> <p>"I feel that as a parent when finding out your child has needs for special education services, that we should receive a pack of what our child is entitled to from schools SENO and others. As a parent I am very angry with the school for my son to be allowed to carry on and not know anything."</p> <p>"I think it would be helpful if the SENO met with parents. In my child's school she came out, observed our child for 20 minutes and made her decisions based on her observation and also speaking with the principal/ SNA etc. I didn't understand why us as parents weren't asked to meet with the SENO to hear our side/opinions on our child."</p> <p>"It is very intimidating meeting SENOs as there is a presumption that if your child has made progress that the resources available will be taken from her and that progress will suffer."</p>

In the qualitative phase of the research, classroom teachers also reported that they had little contact with SENOs and that the main point of contact for SENOs was the school principal. Some had little awareness of the role of the SENO. Several commented that they appeared to have a heavy workload and might only be in a position to visit the school once a year. The SENOs that participated in this research also noted a certain level of confusion around their role and that they, contrary to perceptions, do not have a role in ensuring quality of provision in the classroom.

## 5.8 Overall Satisfaction with the Support Provided for Children with SEN

Overall, satisfaction levels with the ways in which their child's SEN are met by the school were relatively high with three quarters of parents who responded to our survey (75%) stating that they were quite or very satisfied. Nonetheless, a small but substantial number of parents (12%) were dissatisfied. Parents reporting on behalf of a child in a secondary setting were more likely to be dissatisfied than those in a primary or special setting; at 19 per cent compared to nine per cent and eight per cent respectively).

**Table 5.17 Overall satisfaction with the ways in which their child's special educational needs (SEN) are met by the school**

Parents' overall satisfaction with the ways their child's needs are met	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Special (%)
Very satisfied	41	28	49
Quite satisfied	40	42	38
Neither/nor	9	12	5
Quite dissatisfied	7	13	5
Very dissatisfied	2	6	3
Total	100	100	100
N	618	398	156

Base: 1,376 (all parents providing valid responses).

Parents in the C2, D and E socio-economic groupings were more likely to be satisfied with the ways in which their child's needs are met by the school than those in the A, B and C1 categories, at 78 per cent compared to 72 per cent.<sup>26</sup> The main reasons provided for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction are presented in Table 5.18.

**Table 5.18 Reasons why parents are satisfied or dissatisfied with the ways in which their child's special educational needs (SEN) are met by the school**

How satisfied are you with the ways in which your child's SEN are met by the school (quite/very satisfied)	%	How satisfied are you with the ways in which your child's SEN are met by the school (quite/very dissatisfied)	%
The school staff are very supportive	29	I'm not happy with the way my child is taught	26
The classes are well-planned/suit my child's needs	16	The teachers do not understand my child's needs	25
My child gets the help he or she needs	16	Parents are not involved	14
The school communicates regularly/involves parents	16	Not enough/no support	13
My child is progressing well	14	Teachers are not interested	10
Staff are well-trained and understand my child's needs	13	Inadequate resources/funding	10
Base: 1,047		Base: 169	

Base: 1,394 (all parents participating in the survey)

Please note that these are coded responses from an open-ended question and that responses will not therefore total 100%

Factors associated with significant differences in satisfaction with the ways in which the school meets the child's SEN were:

- Parents with more than one child with SEN tended to be more dissatisfied than those parents with one child with SEN.
- There was some significant variation by age, with parents of children aged between five and eight years more satisfied than those parents with children aged between

<sup>26</sup> ABC1 classifications indicate professional/managerial/supervisory occupations while C2DE classifications relate to skilled/unskilled/retired/homemaker occupations.

13 and 15 years. This may relate to the timing of the roll out of the EPSEN Act 2004 and some of the issues around providing support in a post-primary setting that have been identified.

- Similarly, the mean satisfaction score of parents reporting in regard to primary children is higher than those reporting in relation to post-primary students (4.13 compared to 3.75).
- Parents of children with dyslexia and ADHD were more likely to be dissatisfied than parents whose children have other SEN.
- Not surprisingly, parents who thought that their children were not in the right type of school for their needs were more likely to be dissatisfied with the school. This may indicate relate to a problem with student placement, at a system-level, rather than the quality of the service provided by an individual school.
- Both parents who were dissatisfied with the assessment process and those who found the process of applying for support difficult were more likely to be dissatisfied with the way in which the school was addressing their child's needs, while those who stated that they were 'always' involved in the assessment were more likely to be satisfied.
- Parents whose children had an IEP were more likely to be satisfied.

Satisfaction with the ways in which the school meets the child's SENs was also correlated with all other variables. Where there was a high, significant correlation (greater than 0.5), a regression analysis was performed to assess the impact of the drivers on satisfaction. This analysis illustrates that the main drivers of parents' satisfaction with the ways in which the school meets the child's special educational needs are, in descending order:

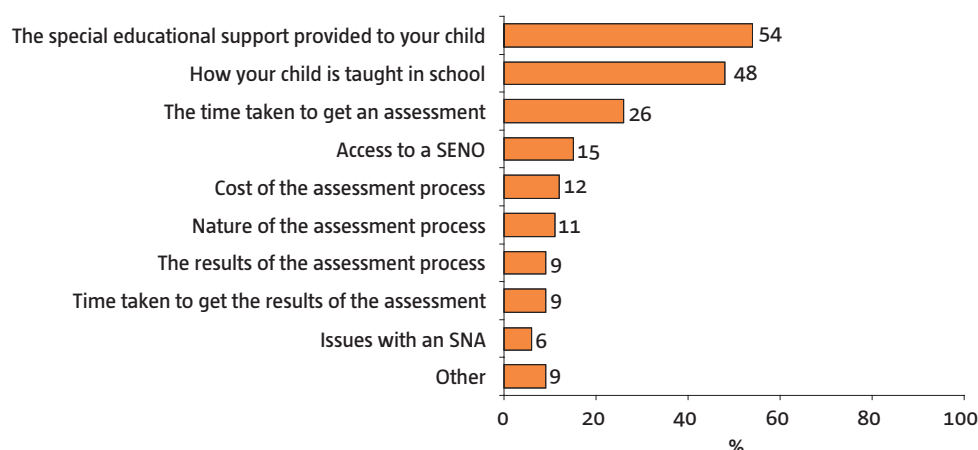
1. the suitability of the support provided (36% impact)
2. satisfaction with the child's overall education (35.8% impact)
3. satisfaction with the way in which the school informs the parent about their child's educational needs (13.5% impact)
4. satisfaction with the way in which the school informs parents about the progress their child is making (9.6%), and
5. satisfaction with the culture of the school (5.2%).

When asked whether they had ever had to make a complaint about the support received by their child, a third of parents (31%) reported that, at some stage, they have had to complain about the support that their child received. Parents of pupils at secondary schools were more likely to report making a complaint than those with children at primary and special schools, at 37 per cent compared to 27 per cent and 32 per cent respectively.

These complaints were made to: a teacher (61%); the school principal (60%); a SENO (28%); or to a Special Needs Assistant (15%). The main causes of complaint related to the SEN support provided to the child (54%); the way in which the child is taught in

school (48%) and the time taken to get an assessment. Among those parents who had made a complaint, only one third (33%) was satisfied with the outcome. Parents in the A, B, and C1 socio-economic groups were more likely to have made a complaint; 37 per cent of parents in these categories did so, compared to 28 per cent of those in the C2, D and Es categories.

**Figure 5.7 Reasons why parents had complained about the support provided**



Base: 428 (all parents giving a reason for their complaint)

## 5.9 Summary

The main primary research findings from this study are as follows:

- Profile of respondents:** the majority of parents stated that they had one child with identified SEN. A sizeable minority (17%), however, had more than one child with SEN, which is likely to compound any difficulties in accessing services experienced by these families. Almost half (47%) of parents stated that their child had more than one SEN which is also likely to impact on their experiences. Indeed, it became clear through the course of this research that parents' individual circumstances vary greatly and that their experiences are deeply personal and related to the very specific needs of their child. The main types of special educational need identified in the sample were: speech and language disorders, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and mild general learning disabilities.
- Access to school:** almost nine in ten parents thought that their child was in the right type of school. The main reason provided for this was that their child's teacher had a good understanding of their needs. Those parents who did not agree stated that they would have preferred a special school for their child or that their child's teachers needed better awareness and/or training in SEN. Again, while the majority reported that finding a placement for their child was easy, a substantial minority (20%) reported difficulties in doing so. This experience varied by the nature of SEN. Physical access to the school was not considered a real issue, but this is likely to be influenced by the predominance of certain types of SEN in the overall sample. A quarter of parents were in receipt of transport support, and again, the majority was satisfied with this provision.

- **The assessment process:** most parent respondents stated that their child had been assessed formally (94%), usually by educational psychologists or by multi-disciplinary teams. The mean age of assessment was six years old. A majority of almost four in five of parents were happy with the assessment process with three quarters stating that they were involved in the process. However, concerns were raised by parents, teachers and SENOs in relation to:
  - waiting lists and the time taken for assessment, which could be 18 months for access to speech and language specialists and up to two years for an occupational therapist
  - the consequent use of private assessments by parents, leading to additional costs and issues around implementing the recommendations of the assessment reports
  - the need to balance early intervention with avoiding ‘labelling’ a child at an early stage in their development
  - the quota-based referral system in place in schools
  - difficulties in identifying less common or less evident SEN, and
  - the feeling amongst some parents that they carried the burden of co-ordinating the various health and education services.
- **School policy on SEN and resources:** a third of parents stated that their child’s school had a SEN policy. The teachers that participated in this research noted that, while such a policy was in place in all their schools, implementation was made more problematic by a high turnover of teaching staff and the limited amount of training on SEN available to teachers. The most common forms of support provided, as reported by parents, were: special needs/resource teaching hours; Special Needs Assistants; and Learning Support Teachers. Nearly half (45%) of parents found accessing support difficult, mainly in terms of: getting their child’s SEN accepted or diagnosed; the time taken to do this; and a perceived lack of resources. Several participants raised issues around the interface of the health and education services, particularly around shortages of speech and language therapists. Those parents that found the process easy attributed this to the active support and guidance of the school – underlining again the importance of the school ethos and culture to the overall experience of SEN services.

When asked to respond to specific aspects of school provision, around three quarters of parents were generally satisfied with: the level of knowledge of SEN teachers; the school admissions policy; the curriculum offered by the school; the suitability of the support provided; and the culture of the school. Parents were less satisfied with the funding available to the school attended by their child. While many parents were positive about the SNA role, concerns were raised about the current and future deployment of SNAs. In the main, these related to the current economic uncertainty and fears of future reductions in the education budget. Some parents argued that early intervention results in reduced future expenditure for the state. Other issues related to the sharing of SNAs between classes; access to SNAs in general; the level



of understanding and training of SNAs; and the opportunities for parents to engage with SNAs, teachers and principals.

- **The relationship between schools and parents:** our research also explored a number of specific aspects of the relationship between parents and their child's school, namely the prevalence and use of IEPs; the culture of the school; and the transition between primary and secondary schools. While IEPs are not yet mandatory, nearly half the participating parents stated that their child had an IEP in place. Of these, half stated that the school 'always' involved them in its development. Some SENOs suggested that IEPs work better in the primary context given there is a single teacher in regular contact with the child. Four in five parents thought that their child's education was appropriate to their needs and a similar proportion stated that their child was making good progress. This, however, leaves a substantial minority of parents who are either undecided on these points or who disagree. Parents who responded to our survey were very positive about the welcome extended to their child by the school, with 92 per cent agreeing that their child was welcomed. Similar proportions agreed that their child was included in all aspects of school life and was encouraged by the school to make friends and to socialise.

Parents were less unequivocal in relation to whether or not they felt their child was prepared for life after school, in fields such as further education and the workplace, as well as life outside school, i.e. making friends. Three quarters also thought that, as parents, their views were being sought and welcomed by the school and the majority was satisfied with the level of contact that they had with their child's teachers. Satisfaction levels were also high in relation to the way in which the school kept parents informed about their child's educational needs and about the progress their child was making. Eight in ten parents (78%) stated that they were satisfied with their child's overall education, with 37 per cent reporting that they were very satisfied. Overall, participants thought that the culture and ethos of the school was a crucial factor, with pupils making most progress in settings with a welcoming, inclusive and supportive ethos.

Parents reporting on behalf of primary and special school pupils tended to be more positive and satisfied with provision. Just over one third of parents reported that their child had made the transition from primary to secondary school; most of these parents were generally satisfied with the help provided in making this move. However, a substantial minority, ranging between 13 per cent and 22 per cent, described different aspects of the help that they had received as poor. This was particularly the case for help with planning and preparation; support during the transition itself; and the transfer of information to the child's new school.

- **The relationship between parents and SENOs:** Just over a third (36%) of parent respondents stated that they had met or spoken to their SENO. It should be noted, however, that, given that there are approximately 80 SENOs in post across Ireland, it is unlikely that SENOs will have had an opportunity to meet all the parents under their remit. Parents of primary school children were slightly more likely to have had contact with their SENO and there was also some evidence of variations in

the amount of contact by the nature of the child's SEN. Awareness of the role of the SENO was relatively low amongst parents, with approximately half stating that they were either not very or not at all aware of the role of the SENO. Almost one in five (17%), however, described themselves as being very aware of the role. Overall, approximately a quarter of parents stated that they were dissatisfied with the relationship that they have with their SENO and with access to the SENO. Parents' levels of satisfaction with their SENOs appear to be mostly related to their level of contact with them. Those parents who reported having contact with their SENO were more likely to be satisfied with the relationship. Classroom teachers also reported that they had little contact with SENOs and that the main point of contact for SENOs was the school principal. Some had little awareness of the role of the SENO. The SENOs that participated in this research also noted a certain level of confusion around their role and that they, contrary to perceptions, are not responsible for ensuring quality of provision in the classroom.

- **Overall satisfaction with the support provided for children with SEN:** satisfaction levels with the ways in which their child's SEN are met by the school are relatively high; three quarters of parent respondents (75%) were quite or very satisfied on this issue. However, a small but substantial proportion of parents (12%) are dissatisfied in this regard. Indeed, throughout the survey findings, a subgroup ranging between ten per cent and 20 per cent of parents expressed dissatisfaction with different aspects of current provision.

Parents who were satisfied with their child's school stated that this was because of the following factors: supportive school staff; classes that are well-planned or suit their child's needs; their child receiving the help they need; regular two-way communication from the school; their child's level of progression and staff who are well-trained and understand their child's needs.

Parents who were dissatisfied gave a number of reasons for this. Some were unhappy with the way their child was taught. Some felt their child's teachers do not understand their needs. Others cited a lack of involvement of teachers, a lack of support; a lack of interest from teachers; and/or inadequate resources and funding.

The most important factor relating to overall satisfaction was parents' level of satisfaction with the level of supports provided for their child's SEN. Parents with more than one child with SEN tended to be more dissatisfied than those parents with one child with SEN. It was also found that parents reporting in regard to primary children were more satisfied than those reporting in relation to post-primary students. Finally, parents of children with dyslexia and ADHD were more likely to be dissatisfied than parents whose children have other needs.

A third of parents reported that, at some stage, they have had to complain about the support provided for their child. Most of these complaints were made to: a teacher or the school principal, followed by a SENO (28%) and a Special Needs Assistant (15%). The main causes of complaint related to the SEN support provided to the child; the way in which the child is taught in school and the time taken to get an assessment. Of those parents who had made a complaint, only a third were satisfied with the outcome.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Overview

This section of our report provides a detailed discussion of the potential implications for local (school-level) and national special educational services that have emerged from the findings of this research. This discussion is grounded in the commitment to inclusive education enshrined in the EPSEN Act 2004, whilst acknowledging the current budgetary constraints faced by the Government. It is structured as follows:

- parents' satisfaction with special education services
- the culture of the school
- the assessment process
- information and guidance
- the interface between education and other services, and
- summary.

### 6.2 Parents' Satisfaction with Special Educational Services

As we have seen, parents' satisfaction levels with both their children's overall education and with special education services are relatively high, although a substantial minority ranging between ten per cent and 20 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with certain elements of the provision.

It is relevant to note that the research literature presents some evidence (paragraph 4.11) that the satisfaction levels of parents whose child does not have a special educational need (SEN) are, on average, eight per cent higher than those with children with SEN. It would therefore be useful to benchmark the findings of this survey to the views of parents in the wider population regarding education services in Ireland. Furthermore, it should be noted that the target population for this survey was parents in receipt of support for their children. It may be that those parents whose applications were unsuccessful would have higher levels of dissatisfaction.

Overall, many parents from both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of our research welcomed the fact that this research was being undertaken, with several highlighting the need for parents' views to be taken into account on an on-going basis. Indeed, a large proportion (84%) of participating parents stated that they would be happy to be re-contacted by the NCSE to take part in any future research exercise.

The three factors most strongly associated with parental satisfaction regarding the way in which schools meet the SEN of their children were: the nature of the support provided; satisfaction with the overall education received by the child; and the way in which schools inform parents of their child's SEN. However, certain groups of parents shared higher levels of dissatisfaction than others. These included those with more than one child with SEN, parents of children identified as having dyslexia and/or ADHD, and those whose children were in post-primary settings (paragraph 5.70). Consideration

could therefore be given to ways in which the needs of these groups could be better understood and supported.

### 6.3 The Culture of the School

A common theme emerging from the findings of this survey of parental attitudes to and experiences of special education services is the central role of the relationship between the parent and the school.

Those parents who stated that their child's needs were being met attributed this to the following factors:

- very supportive school staff
- classes that are well-planned and that suit their child's needs
- provision of the help their child needs
- regular, two-way communication between the school and the parents
- good progression of their child, and
- well-trained staff who understand their child's needs.

Teachers and Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) that participated in the study highlighted the central role of the school principal in setting the school ethos and promoting an inclusive, welcoming environment. The fact that 45 per cent of parents reported that their child had an IEP despite the current non-mandatory basis of the Plans indicates that many schools are taking a proactive approach to inclusion.

This theme has a number of potential implications for school-level and national education services. These implications are discussed in further detail below.

#### 6.3.1 Knowledge and awareness of teaching staff

Our research has shown that classroom teachers and principals are the key points of contact for parents, both on a day-to-day basis and on the occasions where parents have made a complaint about SEN provision (six in ten respondents stated that they had contacted a teacher and/or the principal in this regard).

Teachers are also often the first person to identify that a child has a SEN, particularly in cases where they are a first child and their parents have no appropriate developmental benchmarks. Participating teachers also highlighted the difficulties of mainstreaming school SEN policy within individual institutions, drawing attention to barriers such as high turnover among teaching staff and limited access to SEN training for those who are not specifically designated to this area.

This finding suggests the need to increase teachers' awareness levels regarding SEN and SEN services in general, and to deepen their knowledge of specific special needs in particular. This is relevant at both a national and a school level.

Given the current economic outlook, it is unlikely that classroom-based training could be implemented on a national level. Nonetheless, a range of other measures could

be taken to build on the existing, and substantial, CPD programme provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the Colleges of Education. These include at a national level: the development of national guidance on developing an inclusive school environment; specific guidance and issues associated with particular types of SEN and the further development of relevant e-learning modules to support teachers and principals. Indeed, it should be noted that the NCSE is currently developing an inclusive framework and self-reflection template to help schools assess their levels of inclusiveness.

Approaches such as these would enable school personnel to access support where and when they need it and would also allow the existing workloads of teachers and principals to be taken into account.

At school-level, consideration could be given to new ways of sharing the experience of working with children with SEN through in-house training, observation and disseminating good practice between teachers, SNAs and other relevant school staff. Schools could also perhaps be encouraged to deepen their links with special schools in their local areas, with a view to sharing and learning from their knowledge and experience of meeting the needs of children with SEN.

### **6.3.2 Communication with parents**

In both the research literature and the research findings of this study, the quality of communication between parents and the school emerges as playing a crucial role in improving the experience of parents and in enhancing the ways in which their child's educational needs are met. Indeed, some of the parents that participated in this research praised the 'community ethos' of their school and the way in which they and the school staff worked as a 'team' to the benefit of their child.

Despite this, a number of problematic aspects of communication between parents and schools were identified by this research. The teachers and SENOs that participated in this research actively acknowledged that the process, particularly at the assessment stage, can be a traumatic one for parents. There was some evidence that parents who were well supported by the school found the assessment process to be less arduous than those who were not. On the other hand, during the SENO focus group, it emerged that some schools erroneously advised parents to get a private assessment.

The development of IEPs goes some way to meeting this communication need, but, in the absence of the universal implementation of the Plan, and in the wider context of day-to-day communications, schools could be given more guidance on engaging with parents of children with SEN.

This support could be provided in the form of clearer guidelines regarding the availability of resources, the assessment and allocation processes. It could also comprise additional assistance being provided in informing, supporting, and challenging parents, where necessary.

On a national level, good practice guidelines on parental engagement could be developed and disseminated. This would be particularly useful for those 'hard to reach' groups, and could perhaps draw on international examples of good practice.

### 6.3.3 The transition from primary to secondary school

Our research has identified some issues around the transition of a child with SEN from a primary to a post-primary setting. This was particularly the case in relation to help required by the parent(s) regarding planning and preparation; support during the transition itself; and the transfer of information to the child's new school.

It is generally accepted that this transition can be problematic on an educational level for many children, regardless of whether or not they have a special educational need. For children with SEN, it is likely that the academic and social prospects of changing schools could be even more daunting.

Consideration should therefore be given to ways in which this transition could be managed more smoothly, perhaps through strengthening the links between secondary and their feeder primary schools and facilitating the flow of information between the two schools. Again, the roll out of IEPs could help improve this process.

### 6.3.4 Raising aspirations

There was some evidence from the survey (and indeed the research literature) that parents are less satisfied with the ways in which their children are prepared for life both outside school and life after school (i.e. further education and work).

Many parents thought that mainstream schooling is important in the development of their child's social skills but there were some views that teachers could be more aware of children's social as well as academic needs. As with the transition from primary to post-primary discussed above, the links between schools and further education establishments could be explored in more detail, in order to facilitate the transition to third level education.

### 6.3.5 Deployment of resources

The need for clarity regarding roles and responsibilities within the school was a strong theme, particularly concerning the SNA. There appears to be a need to clarify the role of the SNA, both within schools and for parents, given that there is a perception amongst some parents that the SNA is attached to the child rather than the school. There may also be value in reassessing the skills and training they require – and indeed that SNAs could potentially transfer to other members of the school workforce.

Further consideration should also be given to clarifying whether or not the SNA should be attached to the child or to their class, and the level and nature of support to be provided by the SNA, in the fields of health and safety, educational support and social support.<sup>27</sup>

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27 SNAs are recruited specifically to assist schools in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special care needs arising from a disability in an educational context. Schools may apply for an SNA post for a pupil with a disability who also has a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory impairment or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils. DES Circular SP ED 0009/2009

## 6.4 The Assessment Process

The assessment process and the subsequent allocation of resources appear to be the areas that cause parents most frustration. Key issues included:

- waiting lists and the time taken for assessment
- the consequent use of private assessments by parents
- the quota-based referral system in place in schools
- difficulties in identifying less common or less evident sen, and
- the feeling amongst some parents that they carried the burden of co-ordinating the various health and education services.

These issues are discussed in further detail below.

### 6.4.1 The time taken for assessment

Parents and teachers highlighted the length of time taken to access an assessment for a child with SEN, sharing concerns that, in the interim, the child was disadvantaged on an educational level.

Consideration should be given to reviewing the assessment process and pathways across all relevant education, health and other agencies in order to identify any potential bottlenecks impacting on the process, including any regional variations. Through this, any specific skills shortages in the system could be identified. Our research has highlighted, for example, concerns regarding the level of supply of speech and language therapists across Ireland.

### 6.4.2 The quota-based referral system

Many participants in this research shared concerns about the restrictions placed on the number of referrals that a school may make each year. Some felt that actual need is higher than that catered for by the current referral system.

In light of this, it would be beneficial to engage with schools, or a sample of schools in different contexts (i.e. urban and rural; disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged areas etc), in order to assess their full range of need, both in terms of low and high incidence disabilities, and whether, in their view, the referral system is currently operating effectively.

### 6.4.3 Identifying less common special educational needs (SEN)

Several participants raised concerns regarding difficulties around identifying less common or less evident SEN in children and young people. This is linked to the role of teachers in the initial identification of SEN in many instances. Several participants commented that publically funded assessment reports could be more detailed.

Given teachers' workload and prime responsibilities as educators, it would be unrealistic to provide them with training on less common SEN. However, the greater availability of training on SEN awareness in general and easier access to information on specific



SEN would make it easier for teachers to identify at an early stage when a pupil is experiencing difficulties.

The interface between education and health is another important factor in this context; improved communication and understanding between the two sectors could help in the identification of less common SEN.

#### **6.4.4 The role of the parent in the assessment process**

It is essential that parents are fully involved in the assessment process. However, many participants in this research expressed the view that too much of a burden is placed on parents to co-ordinate the various professionals and services involved in the assessment process. This is exacerbated by the fact that many parents start this process with a low level of knowledge of their child's condition, the special educational services system, and of the support that can be provided by education and health practitioners.

This suggests a need to review both the support mechanisms for parents going through the process (perhaps through a dedicated contact person) and the information that is available to them at this time.

### **6.5 Information and Guidance for Parents**

The need for improved information and guidance for parents is a recurring theme throughout the research. Indeed, the NCSE is in the process of enhancing its communications with parents and other key stakeholders through its website and other publications, including a parental information booklet, and through its planned information sessions for parents. These sessions are intended to not only disseminate information on the NCSE's policies and procedures but also to collate the views and concerns of both schools and parents.

On-going engagement with parents should address the desire expressed by parents in this survey for more clarity and streamlined communications, both at a school-level and a system level.

In the research literature, suggestions from parents included: the appointment of a designated, easily accessible, contact person; the provision of independent advice for parents; the establishment of a SEN helpline; and the development of parent partnership schemes. Our findings also highlighted varying levels of awareness of the work of Special Educational Needs Organisers and of the NCSE itself. This theme has a number of potential implications for school-level and national education services.

#### **6.5.1 Local-level communication**

We have already considered communication between schools and parents at a school level. Evidence also suggests that local special education services in the community could be promoted to parents in a more effective way. Several SENOs indicated, for example, that they lack visibility in that they have no dedicated office space in which to meet parents.



There also appears to be a need to signpost local information and contacts more clearly. While parents repeatedly expressed frustration about a perceived lack of co-ordination between local agencies, a number of participants that had accessed support and services through them welcomed the help that they had been given.

Consideration should also be given to disseminating information on other services, such as sporting or cultural activities in the local area, given the importance of social engagement that emerged in both the research literature and this survey.

### 6.5.2 System-level communication

Our research has highlighted varying levels of awareness of the roles of the SENO and of the NCSE. While the NCSE is working to develop the information it provides to parents through its website and other activities, consideration could also be given to promoting the work of the NCSE and SENOs through stakeholder organisations, such as public bodies, local councils and voluntary groups.

The presentation and communication of information for parents could be usefully tested with panels of parents of children with SEN to ensure it is fit for purpose. Finally, given the importance of the parental voice, and the support expressed by parents for this research study, it will be important to continue to collate their views and experiences on a regular basis.

## 6.6 The Interface between Education and Other Services

The level of co-ordination and co-operation between education and health services emerged as a theme of this research.

One of the key aims of the NCSE is to “progressively improve the co-ordination between the education and health sectors in providing the supports for children with special educational needs”.<sup>28</sup> The NCSE participates, for example, in the Education/Health Cross Sectoral Group which comprises representatives from the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive (HSE) at national level, and through interaction with the HSE and their service providers at local level.

This research identified a number of issues which could be usefully addressed in order to improve the interface between education, health and other services.

### 6.6.1 The information that is provided to parents

There is a need for clearer, more streamlined guidance information at the assessment and diagnostic stage, which brings together all the relevant education and health-related information for parents.

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28 [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)

### 6.6.2 Information-sharing between health and education services

Linked to the above point, some of the participants in the research highlighted the need for better information sharing between health, education and other professionals.

### 6.6.3 The role of voluntary organisations

Parents were largely positive about the support provided by voluntary organisations and other local providers. Further consultation with such groups could help identify models of best practice in engaging with parents and in supporting their children's SEN.

### 6.6.4 Mapping shortages in specialist practitioners

The process of assessment and accessing of resources for their children was often a lengthy process for parents, many of whom felt it was exacerbated by shortages in specialist staff, such as speech and language and occupational therapists. Consideration should be given to mapping the supply of these specialists, and taking necessary steps to address these shortages.

## 6.7 Summary

This section of our report has considered the implications of the main findings from our survey of parents' attitudes and experiences of local and national special education services. It has presented these implications under the following headings: parents' satisfaction with special education services; the culture of the school; the assessment process; information and guidance for parents; and the interface between education and other services.

As we have seen, parents' satisfaction levels with their children's overall education and with special education services are relatively high; however a substantial minority ranging between ten per cent and 20 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with certain elements of the provision. A common theme emerging from the findings of this survey of parental attitudes to and experiences of special education services is the central role of the relationship between the parent and the school. Those parents who stated that their child's needs were being met attributed this to a supportive ethos, good communication and good understanding of their child's needs on the part of staff.

The assessment process and the subsequent allocation of resources appear to be the areas that cause parents most frustration. The main issues identified included waiting lists and the time taken for assessment. The need for improved information and guidance for parents was a recurring theme throughout the research, as was the level of co-ordination and co-operation between education and health services.

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Disability Act, 2005. Dublin: Government Publications Office.

## Appendix A: Questionnaire

### Your views on Special Education Services in Ireland

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is conducting a survey of parents' views and experiences of special education services. This research will help us develop our services to parents of children with special educational needs in the future. Given the importance of this research, we would be very grateful if you could find the time to complete this questionnaire, which should take you no more than 20 minutes.

The survey will be conducted in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, which guarantees your confidentiality. Your personal views will not be shared with anyone outside PwC and no identifying information will be included within the final report, which may be published by the NCSE.

We would be grateful if you would return the questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope by 23rd October 2009. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Jonathan King on +44 (0)28 9041 5064.

Please enter your unique reference number provided on your letter here:

### Section 1 – About you and your child

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to gather some background information about you and your child.

Q1. How many children in your household have special educational needs?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
One	<input type="checkbox"/>
Two	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three	<input type="checkbox"/>
If more than three please record number in box	<input type="text"/>

Q2. Please state which <i>county</i> you currently live in...	
County (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

Q3. Do you live...?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
In a city	1
In a large town (population between 18,000 – 75,000)	2
In a medium town (population between 10,000 – 18,000)	3
In a small town (population between 4,500 – 10,000)	4
In the countryside	5

If there is more than one child in your house with special educational needs please answer the rest of the questions on your experiences of services for one of your children. Please choose the child in your house whose birthday is closest to today's date.

Q4. What is your relationship to the child?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Mother	1
Father	2
Mother and father	3
Guardian/carer	4
Other (please specify)	94

Q5. Could you please indicate the gender of your child?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Male	1
Female	2

Q6. Could you please tell us the age of your child?	
	Years old

Q7. What is the nature of your child's special educational needs as diagnosed by a professional?			
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply			
Physical disability	1	Asperger's syndrome	10
Deaf/hearing impairment	2	ADHD	11
Blind/visual impairment	3	ODD	12
Mild general learning disability	4	Clinical depression	13
Moderate general learning disability	5	Down syndrome	14
Severe/profound general learning disability	6	Tourette syndrome	15
Dyslexia	7	William's syndrome	16
Dyspraxia	8	Speech and language disorder	17
Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	9	Medical conditions	18
Other(s) please specify	94		

Q8. What type of school does your child currently attend?					
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply					
Primary		Secondary			
Local denominational primary (national) school e.g. Catholic/Church of Ireland/Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Fee paying secondary school/Non fee paying secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Special school	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Community and Comprehensive school	<input type="checkbox"/>	7
Gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	VEC school (Community College etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	8
Educate Together School	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Special school	<input type="checkbox"/>	9
My child receives tuition at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	Gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/>	10
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	94	My child receives tuition at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	11
			Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	94

Q9a. Does your child attend a special class in this school?		
Please tick <b>one</b> box only		
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 (go to Q9b)
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 (go to Q10)
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	97 (go to Q10)

Q9b. Is this on a full or part time basis?		
Please tick <b>one</b> box only		
Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	97

Q10. Is your child enrolled in more than one school?		
Please tick <b>one</b> box only		
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	97

Q11a. In your view, is your child in the right type of school for his or her needs?		
Please tick <b>one</b> box only		
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	2



Q11b. Why do you say that?

## Section 2 – Access to school

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to hear your views on your child's access to their school.

Q1. How would you describe your experience of finding a school placement for your child?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very easy	Quite easy	Neither/ nor	Quite difficult	Very difficult
5	4	3	2	1

Q2. How would you rate the physical access to your child's school e.g. ramps, lifts etc.?					
Please tick <b>one</b> box only					
Very good	Quite good	Neither/ nor	Quite poor	Very poor	Not applicable
5	4	3	2	1	98

Q3. What distance is the school from your home?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Less than 1 km	1
1 – 5 km	2
6 – 10 km	3
11 – 20 km	4
More than 20 km	5

Q4a. Does your child receive any support in relation to transport?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1 (go to Q4b)
No	2 (go to Section 3)

Q4b. Which of the following supports does your child receive?	
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply	
Bus	1
Taxi	2
Grant towards the cost of transport	3
An escort	4

Q4c. How satisfied are you with the suitability of the transport provided for your child?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

### Section 3 – Assessment of your child’s needs

In this section of the questionnaire, we want to explore matters relating to your child’s assessment of special educational needs.

Q1 a. Have your child’s special educational needs been formally assessed?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1 (go to Q1b)
No	2 (go to Section 4)
Don’t know	97 (go to Section 4)

Q1 b. If yes, who did this assessment?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Educational Psychologist	1
Speech and Language Therapist	2
Occupational Therapist	3
Medical Doctor	4
Ophthalmologist	5
Audiologist	6
Psychiatrist	7
Other (please specify)	94

Q1 c. If yes, at what age was your child first assessed?	
	Years old

Q2. How satisfied were you with the assessment of your child’s needs?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Q3. How satisfied were you with the way in which you were told about the results of the assessment?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Q4 a. Were you provided with a written report from the assessment?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1
No	2

Q4 b. If yes, how satisfied were you with the information you were given in the report?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Q5. Do you feel that the people who assessed your child involved you in the process?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

## Section 4 – School policy and resources

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to hear what you think is important to support your child's special educational needs in school.

Q1. Does your school have a written policy on special educational needs?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	97

Q2. Could you please indicate the type of supports your child receives both in school and outside school?			
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply			
In school		Outside school	
Special Needs/Resource Teaching hours	<sup>1</sup>	Speech and Language Therapy	<sup>1</sup>
Special Needs Assistant	<sup>2</sup>	Occupational Therapy	<sup>2</sup>
Speech and Language Therapy	<sup>3</sup>	Physiotherapy	<sup>3</sup>
Occupational Therapy	<sup>4</sup>	Psychologist	<sup>4</sup>
Physiotherapy	<sup>5</sup>	Psychiatrist	<sup>5</sup>
School Nurse	<sup>6</sup>	Other (please specify)	<sup>94</sup>
Psychologist	<sup>7</sup>		
Guidance Counsellor	<sup>8</sup>		
Learning Support Teacher	<sup>9</sup>		
Technical Assistance	<sup>10</sup>		
Other (please specify)	<sup>94</sup>		

Q3. How would you describe the process of applying for supports/resources for your child?					
Please tick <b>one</b> box only					
Very easy	Quite easy	Neither/ nor	Quite difficult	Very difficult	Not applicable
<sup>5</sup>	<sup>4</sup>	<sup>3</sup>	<sup>2</sup>	<sup>1</sup>	<sup>98</sup>

Q4. Why do you say that?

<b>Q5. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of support for children with special educational needs in your child's school? (Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all satisfied" and 5 is "very satisfied".</b>						
Please tick <b>one</b> box in each <b>row</b>						
	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/nor	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't Know
<b>How satisfied are you with...?</b>						
The level of knowledge of special educational needs teachers	5	4	3	2	1	97
The school's admission policy	5	4	3	2	1	97
The curriculum offered by the school	5	4	3	2	1	97
The suitability of the support provided	5	4	3	2	1	97
The funding available to the school	5	4	3	2	1	97
The culture of the school	5	4	3	2	1	97

## Section 5 – The relationship between you, your child and the school

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to hear what you think is important about the relationship between you, your child and the school.

<b>Q1. Does your child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?</b>	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	97

<b>Q2. If your child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), to what extent did you feel that the school involved you in the development of your child's Individual Education Plan?</b>					
Please tick <b>one</b> box only					
Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not applicable
5	4	3	2	1	98

Q3. Is the Individual Education Plan (IEP) regularly reviewed?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> (go to Q4)
No	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> (go to Q5)
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup> (go to Q5)

Q4. How satisfied are you with your involvement in this ongoing review?					
Please tick <b>one</b> box only					
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>98</sup>

Q5. Do you consider that what your child is learning at school is <b>appropriate</b> to their needs?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very appropriate	Quite appropriate	Neither/nor	Quite inappropriate	Very inappropriate
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>

Q6. Do you consider that your child is <b>making progress</b> according to their <b>ability</b> ?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very good progress	Good progress	Neither/nor	Not very good progress	No progress at all
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>

Q7. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree".)						
Please tick <b>one</b> box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
My child is welcomed by the school	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>
My child is included in all aspects of school life	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>
My child is encouraged to make friends and socialise	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>
My child is prepared for life after school e.g. further education/work	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>
My views as a parent are sought and welcomed by the school	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>
My child is prepared for life <b>outside</b> school i.e. making friends	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>97</sup>

**Q8. When considering each of the following aspects of your child's education, please rate the extent of your satisfaction. Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all satisfied" and 5 is "very satisfied".**

Please tick **one** box in each row

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't Know
<b>How satisfied are you with...?</b>						
The level of contact that you have with your child's teacher(s)	5	4	3	2	1	97
The way in which the school tells you about your child's educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97
The way in which the school tells you about the progress your child is making	5	4	3	2	1	97
Your child's overall education	5	4	3	2	1	97

**Q9. Has your child moved from primary to secondary school?**

Please tick **one** box only

Yes	1	(go to Q 10)
No	2	(go to Section 6)

**Q10. If your child has made the move from primary to secondary school, how would you describe the help you received in relation to the following. (Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "very poor" and 5 is "very good").**

Please tick **one** box in each **row**

	Very good	Quite good	Neither/ nor	Quite poor	Very poor	Don't Know
Planning/ preparation for the move between schools	5	4	3	2	1	97
Finding a school	5	4	3	2	1	97
The transfer of information to the second school	5	4	3	2	1	97
Support during the transition process	5	4	3	2	1	97

<b>Q11. How satisfied are you with the range of subjects, courses and qualifications available to your child at the secondary school?</b>				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

## Section 6 – Contact with your Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to hear your views on your contact with your Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO).

<b>Q1. Have you met or spoken to the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for your area?</b>	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	97

<b>Q2. How aware are you, of the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)?</b>				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very aware	Quite aware	Neither/ nor	Not very aware	Not at all aware
5	4	3	2	1

<b>Q3. When considering each of the following aspects of your child's education, please rate the extent of your satisfaction of your child's SENO. Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all satisfied" and 5 is "very satisfied".</b>						
Please tick <b>one</b> box in each row						
	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/ nor	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't Know
<b>How satisfied are you with...?</b>						
The relationship that you have with your SENO	5	4	3	2	1	97
The SENO's knowledge of your child's needs	5	4	3	2	1	97
Access to the SENO	5	4	3	2	1	97



## Section 7 – Overall satisfaction with the support provided for your child

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to hear about your overall satisfaction with your child's education and any other issues that you might have

Q1 a. Overall, how satisfied are you with the ways your child's special educational needs are met by his or her school?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Q1 b. Why do you say that?

Q2. Have you ever had to complain about the support that your child receives?	
Please tick <b>one</b> box only	
Yes	1 (Go to Q3)
No	2 (Go to Q6)
Don't know	97 (Go to Q6)

Q3. Who did you complain to?	
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply	
Teacher	1
Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)	2
Principal	3
Special Needs Assistant	4
The National Council for Special Education Head Office	5
The National Educational Psychology Service	9
Other (please specify)	94

Q4. What was your complaint about?	
Please tick <b>all</b> that apply	
The time taken to get an assessment	1
Nature of the assessment process	2
The results of the assessment process	3
The time taken to get the results from the assessment	4
The cost of the assessment process	5
Access to a Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)	6
The special educational support provided to your child	7
How your child was being taught in school	8
Other (please specify)	94

Q5. Overall, how satisfied were you with the response to your complaint?				
Please tick <b>one</b> box only				
Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither/nor	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Q6. Are there any other comments you would like to make about special education services available to your child?

## Section 8 – You and your child

In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to get a few more details about you and your child.

Q1. Could you please indicate your nationality and your child's nationality?			
You		Your child	
Nationality		Nationality	

**Q2. If you have stated that you and/or your child's nationality is not Irish, please indicate the year that you and/or your child came to Ireland?**

You		Your child	
Year (For example 2001)		Year (For example 2001)	

**Q3. Is English the first language of you and your child?**

Please tick **one** box only in each column

You		Your child	
Yes	<sup>1</sup>	Yes	<sup>1</sup>
No	<sup>2</sup>	No	<sup>2</sup>

**Q4. Please indicate your ethnic origin and your child's ethnic origin**

Please tick **one** box only in each column

You		Your child	
White (Irish)	<sup>1</sup>	White (Irish)	<sup>1</sup>
White (Traveller)	<sup>2</sup>	White (Traveller)	<sup>2</sup>
White (Other)	<sup>3</sup>	White (Other)	<sup>3</sup>
Black or Black Irish (African)	<sup>4</sup>	Black or Black Irish (African)	<sup>4</sup>
Black or Black Irish (Other)	<sup>5</sup>	Black or Black Irish (Other)	<sup>5</sup>
Asian or Asian Irish (Chinese)	<sup>6</sup>	Asian or Asian Irish (Chinese)	<sup>6</sup>
Asian or Asian Irish (Other)	<sup>7</sup>	Asian or Asian Irish (Other)	<sup>7</sup>
Mixed	<sup>8</sup>	Mixed	<sup>8</sup>
Other	<sup>94</sup>	Other	<sup>94</sup>

**Q5. What is your occupation?**

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**Q6. Would you be happy to be contacted again to take part in future research that may be undertaken by the National Council for Special Education?**

Please tick **one** box only

Yes	<sup>1</sup>
No	<sup>2</sup>

**Q7. If you would be happy to participate in further research, please provide your contact details below**

Name:	
Telephone number:	
Address:	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please complete and return this questionnaire in the envelope provided by Friday 23rd October 2009.

## Appendix B: Statistical significance tests

This appendix presents the significance tests for the main findings discussed in Section 5 of this report. A significance test is performed to determine if there exists statistical difference between proportions. The Pearson Chi-Square Tests table shows the test statistic Sig. If the Sig. value is less than 0.05 there exists statistically significant difference between proportions being compared.

**Table 5.1: Parents' perception that their child is in the right school for his or her needs by type**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.1 Q 11a In your view, is your child in the right type of school for his or her needs?	Yes	Count	656	400	149	1,205
		Col N%	90%	85%	85%	88%
	No	Count	55	52	22	129
		Col N%	8%	11%	13%	9%
	Not answered	Count	20	18	4	42
		Col N%	3%	4%	2%	3%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.1 Q 11a In your view, is your child in the right type of school for his or her needs?	Chi-square	8.353				
	df	4				
	Sig.	0.079				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub-table.						

**Table 5.3: Ease of finding a placement by school type**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.2 Q1 How would you describe your experience of finding a school placement for your child?	Very difficult	Count	37	32	38	107
		Col N%	5%	7%	22%	8%
	Quite difficult	Count	72	45	42	159
		Col N%	10%	10%	24%	12%
	Neither/nor	Count	79	54	14	147
		Col N%	11%	11%	8%	11%
	Quite easy	Count	195	139	44	378
		Col N%	27%	30%	25%	27%
	Very easy	Count	336	189	33	558
		Col N%	46%	40%	19%	41%
	Not answered	Count	12	11	4	27
		Col N%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.2 Q1 How would you describe your experience of finding a school placement for your child?	Chi-square	107.275				
	df	10				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.4: Type of transport support received by parents

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.2 Q 4b Which of the following supports does your child receive?	Bus	Count	63	51	113	227
		Col N%	62%	76%	74%	71%
	Taxi	Count	26	10	32	68
		Col N%	25%	15%	21%	21%
	Grant towards the cost of transport	Count	11	7	6	24
		Col N%	11%	10%	4%	7%
	An escort	Count	18	3	37	58
		Col N%	18%	4%	24%	18%
	Not answered	Count	2	2	2	6
		Col N%	2%	3%	1%	2%
	Total	Count	102	67	152	321
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: ‘Yes’ at S.2 Q 4a		
Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School
S.2 Q 4b Which of the following supports does your child receive?	Chi-square	26.894
	df	10
	Sig.	.003(*,a)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		
a. More than 20% of cells in this sub table have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.		

Table 5.5: Satisfaction levels with the assessment process

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.3 Q 2 How satisfied were you with the assessment of your child’s needs?	Very dissatisfied	Count	29	29	3	61
		Col N%	4%	7%	2%	5%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	47	33	8	88
		Col N%	7%	7%	5%	7%
	Neither/nor	Count	64	34	13	111
		Col N%	9%	8%	8%	9%
	Quite satisfied	Count	311	176	92	579
		Col N%	45%	40%	56%	45%
	Very satisfied	Count	233	168	44	445
		Col N%	34%	38%	27%	34%
	Not answered	Count	7	5	4	16
		Col N%	1%	1%	2%	1%
	Total	Count	691	445	164	1,300
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: ‘Yes’ at S.3 Q 1a		
Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School
S.3 Q 2 How satisfied were you with the assessment of your child’s needs?	Chi-square	22.424
	df	10
	Sig.	.013(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

Table 5.6: Satisfaction with the information provided in the assessment report

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.3 Q 4b How satisfied were you with the information you were given in the report?	Very dissatisfied	Count	11	10	1	22
		Col N%	2%	3%	1%	2%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	25	20	7	52
		Col N%	4%	5%	4%	4%
	Neither/nor	Count	51	33	14	98
		Col N%	8%	8%	9%	8%
	Quite satisfied	Count	296	170	84	550
		Col N%	48%	43%	54%	47%
	Very satisfied	Count	231	163	49	443
		Col N%	37%	41%	31%	38%
	Not answered	Count	4	2	1	7
		Col N%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Total	Count	618	398	156	1,172	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: ‘Yes’ at S.3 Q 4a						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.3 Q 4b How satisfied were you with the information you were given in the report?	Chi-square	8.837				
	df	10				
	Sig.	.548(a,b)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
a. More than 20% of cells in this sub table have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.						
b. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						



Table 5.7: Types of support provided to parents in school

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 2 Could you please indicate the type of supports your child receives in school?	Special Needs/ Resource Teaching hours	Count	614	336	95	1,045
		Col N%	84%	71%	54%	76%
	Special Needs Assistant	Count	407	149	135	691
		Col N%	56%	32%	77%	50%
	Speech and Language Therapy	Count	88	19	93	200
		Col N%	12%	4%	53%	15%
	Occupational Therapy	Count	67	16	63	146
		Col N%	9%	3%	36%	11%
	Physiotherapy	Count	20	7	39	66
		Col N%	3%	1%	22%	5%
	School Nurse	Count	12	6	55	73
		Col N%	2%	1%	31%	5%
	Psychologist	Count	40	19	34	93
		Col N%	5%	4%	19%	7%
	Guidance Counsellor	Count	6	67	8	81
		Col N%	1%	14%	5%	6%
	Learning Support Teaching	Count	160	154	38	352
		Col N%	22%	33%	22%	26%
	Technical Assistance	Count	30	26	17	73
		Col N%	4%	6%	10%	5%
	Other	Count	22	19	7	48
		Col N%	3%	4%	4%	3%
	No support	Count	1	7	0	8
		Col N%	0%	1%	0%	1%
	Not answered	Count	18	29	7	54
		Col N%	2%	6%	4%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						

**Table 5.7 (continued): Types of support provided to parents in school**

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School
S.4 Q 2 Could you please indicate the type of supports your child receives in school?	Chi-square	1,205.007
	df	26
	Sig.	.000(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

## Process of applying for resources, ref. bottom page 58

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 3 How would you describe the process of applying for supports/ resources for your child?	Very difficult	Count	169	106	46	321
		Col N%	23%	23%	26%	23%
	Quite difficult	Count	155	103	45	303
		Col N%	21%	22%	26%	22%
	Neither/nor	Count	88	54	26	168
		Col N%	12%	11%	15%	12%
	Quite easy	Count	186	120	24	330
		Col N%	25%	26%	14%	24%
	Very easy	Count	88	49	12	149
		Col N%	12%	10%	7%	11%
	Not applicable	Count	12	20	11	43
		Col N%	2%	4%	6%	3%
	Not answered	Count	33	18	11	62
		Col N%	5%	4%	6%	5%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.4 Q 3 How would you describe the process of applying for supports/ resources for your child?	Chi-square	30.115				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.003(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.9: Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the level of knowledge of special educational needs teachers?	Not at all satisfied	Count	31	26	7	64
		Col N%	4%	6%	4%	5%
	Not very satisfied	Count	68	46	9	123
		Col N%	9%	10%	5%	9%
	Neither / nor	Count	45	47	5	97
		Col N%	6%	10%	3%	7%
	Quite satisfied	Count	271	166	50	487
		Col N%	37%	35%	29%	35%
	Very satisfied	Count	264	130	94	488
		Col N%	36%	28%	54%	35%
	Don't know	Count	34	32	6	72
		Col N%	5%	7%	3%	5%
	Not answered	Count	18	23	4	45
		Col N%	2%	5%	2%	3%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School	
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the level of knowledge of special educational needs teachers?	Chi-square	52.546
	df	12
	Sig.	.000(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

**Table 5.9 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the school's admission policy?	Not at all satisfied	Count	15	12	1	28
		Col N%	2%	3%	1%	2%
	Not very satisfied	Count	25	20	4	49
		Col N%	3%	4%	2%	4%
	Neither / nor	Count	57	42	17	116
		Col N%	8%	9%	10%	8%
	Quite satisfied	Count	201	139	51	391
		Col N%	27%	30%	29%	28%
	Very satisfied	Count	341	193	86	620
		Col N%	47%	41%	49%	45%
	Don't know	Count	68	36	7	111
		Col N%	9%	8%	4%	8%
	Not answered	Count	24	28	9	61
		Col N%	3%	6%	5%	4%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Base: All respondents		
Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School	
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the school's admission policy?	Chi-square	17.877
	df	12
	Sig.	0.119
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		

**Table 5.9 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the curriculum offered by the school?	Not at all satisfied	Count	13	20	3	36
		Col N%	2%	4%	2%	3%
	Not very satisfied	Count	42	44	13	99
		Col N%	6%	9%	7%	7%
	Neither / nor	Count	58	39	9	106
		Col N%	8%	8%	5%	8%
	Quite satisfied	Count	246	166	51	463
		Col N%	34%	35%	29%	34%
	Very satisfied	Count	323	168	90	581
		Col N%	44%	36%	51%	42%
	Don't know	Count	25	9	4	38
		Col N%	3%	2%	2%	3%
	Not answered	Count	24	24	5	53
		Col N%	3%	5%	3%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: All respondents		
Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School	
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the curriculum offered by the school?	Chi-square	30.093
	df	12
	Sig.	.003(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

**Table 5.9 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the suitability of the support provided?	Not at all satisfied	Count	28	29	8	65
		Col N%	4%	6%	5%	5%
	Not very satisfied	Count	66	56	16	138
		Col N%	9%	12%	9%	10%
	Neither / nor	Count	47	48	7	102
		Col N%	6%	10%	4%	7%
	Quite satisfied	Count	233	160	53	446
		Col N%	32%	34%	30%	32%
	Very satisfied	Count	309	139	83	531
		Col N%	42%	30%	47%	39%
	Don't know	Count	24	10	1	35
		Col N%	3%	2%	1%	3%
	Not answered	Count	24	28	7	59
		Col N%	3%	6%	4%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the suitability of the support provided?	Chi-square	40.613				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

**Table 5.9 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the funding available to the school?	Not at all satisfied	Count	134	100	23	257
		Col N%	18%	21%	13%	19%
	Not very satisfied	Count	158	118	40	316
		Col N%	22%	25%	23%	23%
	Neither / nor	Count	94	39	21	154
		Col N%	13%	8%	12%	11%
	Quite satisfied	Count	116	57	37	210
		Col N%	16%	12%	21%	15%
	Very satisfied	Count	62	32	25	119
		Col N%	8%	7%	14%	9%
	Don't know	Count	141	95	19	255
		Col N%	19%	20%	11%	19%
	Not answered	Count	26	29	10	65
		Col N%	4%	6%	6%	5%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the funding available to the school?	Chi-square	38.090				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						



**Table 5.9 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of support for SEN in child's school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the culture of the school?	Not at all satisfied	Count	15	11	6	32
		Col N%	2%	2%	3%	2%
	Not very satisfied	Count	19	17	4	40
		Col N%	3%	4%	2%	3%
	Neither / nor	Count	68	41	15	124
		Col N%	9%	9%	9%	9%
	Quite satisfied	Count	206	163	48	417
		Col N%	28%	35%	27%	30%
	Very satisfied	Count	350	178	90	618
		Col N%	48%	38%	51%	45%
	Don't know	Count	44	36	5	85
		Col N%	6%	8%	3%	6%
	Not answered	Count	29	24	7	60
		Col N%	4%	5%	4%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.4 Q 5 How satisfied are you with ... the culture of the school?	Chi-square	21.132				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.048(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.11 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q1 Does your child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?	Yes	Count	375	121	127	623
		Col N%	51%	26%	73%	45%
	No	Count	173	197	18	388
		Col N%	24%	42%	10%	28%
	Don't know	Count	173	148	27	348
		Col N%	24%	31%	15%	25%
	Not answered	Count	10	4	3	17
		Col N%	1%	1%	2%	1%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
Column N %		100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q1 Does your child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?	Chi-square	146.477				
	df	6				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.12: Appropriateness of learning to child's needs

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 5 Do you consider that what your child is learning at school is appropriate to their needs?	Very inappropriate	Count	9	18	3	30
		Col N%	1%	4%	2%	2%
	Quite inappropriate	Count	31	32	9	72
		Col N%	4%	7%	5%	5%
	Neither/nor	Count	61	62	13	136
		Col N%	8%	13%	7%	10%
	Quite appropriate	Count	319	210	70	599
		Col N%	44%	45%	40%	44%
	Very appropriate	Count	296	117	74	487
		Col N%	40%	25%	42%	35%
	Not answered	Count	15	31	6	52
		Col N%	2%	7%	3%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 5 Do you consider that what your child is learning at school is appropriate to their needs?	Chi-square	59.388				
	df	10				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.13: Satisfaction with selected aspects of the pupil's education by level

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the level of contact that you have with your child’s teacher(s)?	Very dissatisfied	Count	14	26	4	44
		Col N%	2%	6%	2%	3%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	44	59	14	117
		Col N%	6%	13%	8%	9%
	Neither/ nor	Count	41	47	4	92
		Col N%	6%	10%	2%	7%
	Quite satisfied	Count	252	194	57	503
		Col N%	34%	41%	33%	37%
	Very satisfied	Count	374	129	92	595
		Col N%	51%	27%	53%	43%
	Don’t know	Count	0	2	2	4
		Col N%	0%	0%	1%	0%
	Not answered	Count	6	13	2	21
		Col N%	1%	3%	1%	2%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the level of contact that you have with your child’s teacher(s)?	Chi-square	100.519				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*,a)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						
a. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						

Table 5.13 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the pupil's education by level

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the way in which the school tells you about your child’s educational needs?	Very dissatisfied	Count	25	33	4	62
		Col N%	3%	7%	2%	5%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	75	61	14	150
		Col N%	10%	13%	8%	11%
	Neither/ nor	Count	58	44	10	112
		Col N%	8%	9%	6%	8%
	Quite satisfied	Count	238	185	66	489
		Col N%	33%	39%	38%	36%
	Very satisfied	Count	323	128	77	528
		Col N%	44%	27%	44%	38%
	Don’t know	Count	3	5	2	10
		Col N%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Not answered	Count	9	14	2	25	
	Col N%	1%	3%	1%	2%	
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the way in which the school tells you about your child’s educational needs?	Chi-square	50.621				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 5.13 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the pupil's education by level

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the way in which the school tells you about the progress your child is making ?	Very dissatisfied	Count	21	34	5	60
		Col N%	3%	7%	3%	4%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	71	65	15	151
		Col N%	10%	14%	9%	11%
	Neither/ nor	Count	59	53	10	122
		Col N%	8%	11%	6%	9%
	Quite satisfied	Count	248	162	63	473
		Col N%	34%	34%	36%	34%
	Very satisfied	Count	323	142	76	541
		Col N%	44%	30%	43%	39%
	Don't know	Count	0	2	2	4
		Col N%	0%	0%	1%	0%
	Not answered	Count	9	12	4	25
		Col N%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... the way in which the school tells you about the progress your child is making ?	Chi-square	49.585				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*,a)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						
a. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						

Table 5.13 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the pupil's education by level

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... your child’s overall education?	Very dissatisfied	Count	16	30	4	50
		Col N%	2%	6%	2%	4%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	57	38	13	108
		Col N%	8%	8%	7%	8%
	Neither/ nor	Count	41	51	10	102
		Col N%	6%	11%	6%	7%
	Quite satisfied	Count	299	200	64	563
		Col N%	41%	43%	37%	41%
	Very satisfied	Count	305	133	76	514
		Col N%	42%	28%	43%	37%
	Don’t know	Count	1	2	4	7
		Col N%	0%	0%	2%	1%
	Not answered	Count	12	16	4	32
		Col N%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 8 How satisfied are you with ... your child’s overall education?	Chi-square	59.950				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*,a)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						
a. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						

Table 5.14: Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is welcomed by the school	Strongly disagree	Count	9	8	3	20
		Col N%	1%	2%	2%	1%
	Disagree	Count	11	10	0	21
		Col N%	2%	2%	0%	2%
	Neither/nor	Count	30	20	3	53
		Col N%	4%	4%	2%	4%
	Agree	Count	173	127	37	337
		Col N%	24%	27%	21%	24%
	Strongly agree	Count	503	292	130	925
		Col N%	69%	62%	74%	67%
	Don't know	Count	2	3	0	5
		Col N%	0%	1%	0%	0%
	Not answered	Count	3	10	2	15
		Col N%	0%	2%	1%	1%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is welcomed by the school	Chi-square	21.853				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.039(*,a,b)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						
a. More than 20% of cells in this sub table have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.						
b. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						



**Table 5.14 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is included in all aspects of school life	Strongly disagree	Count	10	18	3	31
		Col N%	1%	4%	2%	2%
	Disagree	Count	30	17	4	51
		Col N%	4%	4%	2%	4%
	Neither/nor	Count	34	20	4	58
		Col N%	5%	4%	2%	4%
	Agree	Count	181	124	48	353
		Col N%	25%	26%	27%	26%
	Strongly agree	Count	470	275	113	858
		Col N%	64%	59%	65%	62%
	Don't know	Count	3	3	0	6
		Col N%	0%	1%	0%	0%
	Not answered	Count	3	13	3	19
		Col N%	0%	3%	2%	1%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is included in all aspects of school life	Chi-square	26.210				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.010(*,a,b)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						
a. More than 20% of cells in this sub table have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.						
b. The minimum expected cell count in this sub table is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.						

**Table 5.14 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is encouraged to make friends and socialise	Strongly disagree	Count	7	13	4	24
		Col N%	1%	3%	2%	2%
	Disagree	Count	21	7	1	29
		Col N%	3%	1%	1%	2%
	Neither/nor	Count	43	38	9	90
		Col N%	6%	8%	5%	7%
	Agree	Count	191	129	45	365
		Col N%	26%	27%	26%	27%
	Strongly agree	Count	458	265	109	832
		Col N%	63%	56%	62%	60%
	Don't know	Count	7	6	3	16
		Col N%	1%	1%	2%	1%
	Not answered	Count	4	12	4	20
		Col N%	1%	3%	2%	1%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School	
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is encouraged to make friends and socialise	Chi-square	25.122
	df	12
	Sig.	.014(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

**Table 5.14 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is prepared for life after school e.g. further education/work	Strongly disagree	Count	26	29	6	61
		Col N%	4%	6%	3%	4%
	Disagree	Count	49	43	18	110
		Col N%	7%	9%	10%	8%
	Neither/nor	Count	155	87	27	269
		Col N%	21%	19%	15%	20%
	Agree	Count	142	131	38	311
		Col N%	19%	28%	22%	23%
	Strongly agree	Count	233	140	59	432
		Col N%	32%	30%	34%	31%
	Don't know	Count	91	30	20	141
		Col N%	12%	6%	11%	10%
	Not answered	Count	35	10	7	52
		Col N%	5%	2%	4%	4%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is prepared for life after school e.g. further education/work	Chi-square	36.893				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.000(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

**Table 5.14 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my views as a parent are sought and welcomed by the school	Strongly disagree	Count	15	17	7	39
		Col N%	2%	4%	4%	3%
	Disagree	Count	53	26	8	87
		Col N%	7%	6%	5%	6%
	Neither/nor	Count	74	69	14	157
		Col N%	10%	15%	8%	11%
	Agree	Count	209	146	55	410
		Col N%	29%	31%	31%	30%
	Strongly agree	Count	364	191	85	640
		Col N%	50%	41%	49%	47%
	Don't know	Count	12	7	3	22
		Col N%	2%	1%	2%	2%
	Not answered	Count	4	14	3	21
		Col N%	1%	3%	2%	2%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my views as a parent are sought and welcomed by the school	Chi-square	30.286				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.003(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

**Table 5.14 (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the school culture by level**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is prepared for life outside school i.e. making friends	Strongly disagree	Count	38	22	6	66
		Col N%	5%	5%	3%	5%
	Disagree	Count	48	29	18	95
		Col N%	7%	6%	10%	7%
	Neither/nor	Count	110	70	32	212
		Col N%	15%	15%	18%	15%
	Agree	Count	208	131	37	376
		Col N%	28%	28%	21%	27%
	Strongly agree	Count	289	180	60	529
		Col N%	40%	38%	34%	38%
	Don't know	Count	27	20	11	58
		Col N%	4%	4%	6%	4%
	Not answered	Count	11	18	11	40
		Col N%	2%	4%	6%	3%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.5 Q 7 Agreement that ... my child is prepared for life outside school i.e. making friends	Chi-square	24.714				
	df	12				
	Sig.	.016(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Figure 5.6: Satisfaction with selected aspects of the role of the SENO

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ... the relationship that you have with your SENO?	Very dissatisfied	Count	134	72	23	229
		Col N%	18%	15%	13%	17%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	69	41	19	129
		Col N%	9%	9%	11%	9%
	Neither/nor	Count	117	57	28	202
		Col N%	16%	12%	16%	15%
	Quite satisfied	Count	87	71	20	178
		Col N%	12%	15%	11%	13%
	Very satisfied	Count	65	49	9	123
		Col N%	9%	10%	5%	9%
	Don't know	Count	151	111	45	307
		Col N%	21%	24%	26%	22%
	Not answered	Count	108	69	31	208
		Col N%	15%	15%	18%	15%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ... the relationship that you have with your SENO?	Chi-square	16.499				
	df	12				
	Sig.	0.169				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						

Figure 5.6: (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the role of the SENO

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ... the SENO’s knowledge of your child’s needs?	Very dissatisfied	Count	104	56	21	181
		Col N%	14%	12%	12%	13%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	64	33	12	109
		Col N%	9%	7%	7%	8%
	Neither/nor	Count	82	48	31	161
		Col N%	11%	10%	18%	12%
	Quite satisfied	Count	105	70	20	195
		Col N%	14%	15%	11%	14%
	Very satisfied	Count	80	65	12	157
		Col N%	11%	14%	7%	11%
	Don’t know	Count	189	130	50	369
		Col N%	26%	28%	29%	27%
Not answered	Count	107	68	29	204	
	Col N%	15%	14%	17%	15%	
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ... the SENO’s knowledge of your child’s needs?	Chi-square	17.029				
	df	12				
	Sig.	0.149				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						

Figure 5.6: (continued): Satisfaction with selected aspects of the role of the SENO

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ...Access to the SENO?	Very dissatisfied	Count	144	82	25	251
		Col N%	20%	17%	14%	18%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	62	37	14	113
		Col N%	8%	8%	8%	8%
	Neither/nor	Count	96	57	24	177
		Col N%	13%	12%	14%	13%
	Quite satisfied	Count	75	57	17	149
		Col N%	10%	12%	10%	11%
	Very satisfied	Count	75	54	10	139
		Col N%	10%	11%	6%	10%
	Don't know	Count	145	103	45	293
		Col N%	20%	22%	26%	21%
	Not answered	Count	134	80	40	254
		Col N%	18%	17%	23%	18%
Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376	
	Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.6 Q 3 How satisfied are you with ...Access to the SENO?	Chi-square	13.181				
	df	12				
	Sig.	0.356				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						



**Table 5.17: Overall satisfaction with the ways in which their child's special educational needs are met by the school**

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.7 Q1a Overall, how satisfied are you with the ways your child’s special educational needs are met by his or her school?	Very dissatisfied	Count	17	28	5	50
		Col N%	2%	6%	3%	4%
	Quite dissatisfied	Count	50	58	8	116
		Col N%	7%	13%	5%	9%
	Neither/nor	Count	67	53	9	129
		Col N%	9%	12%	5%	10%
	Quite satisfied	Count	287	190	63	540
		Col N%	40%	42%	38%	41%
	Very satisfied	Count	288	125	83	496
		Col N%	41%	28%	49%	37%
	Total	Count	709	454	168	1,331
		Column N %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: All respondents		
Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School	
S.7 Q1a Overall, how satisfied are you with the ways your child’s special educational needs are met by his or her school?	Chi-square	50.671
	df	8
	Sig.	.000(*)
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.		

## Complaints made to school about support, ref. bottom page 76

			Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School			
			Primary	Secondary	Special school	Total
S.7 Q 2 Have you ever had to complain about the support that your child receives?	Yes	Count	194	174	56	424
		Col N%	27%	37%	32%	31%
	No	Count	511	275	112	898
		Col N%	70%	59%	64%	65%
	Don't know	Count	7	9	1	17
		Col N%	1%	2%	1%	1%
	Not answered	Count	19	12	6	37
		Col N%	3%	3%	3%	3%
	Total	Count	731	470	175	1,376
Column N %		100%	100%	100%	100%	
Base: All respondents						
Pearson Chi-Square Tests						
		Type of school – Primary, Secondary and Special School				
S.7 Q 2 Have you ever had to complain about the support that your child receives?	Chi-square	19.279				
	df	6				
	Sig.	.004(*)				
Results are based on non-empty rows and columns in each innermost sub table.						
*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.						

