

Measuring Educational Engagement, Progress and Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs

A Review

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH REPORT NO.11

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An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

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Foreword

The NCSE is pleased to publish this new research review on measuring educational engagement, progress and outcomes. The purpose of the study was to explore how best to measure and assess how children with special educational needs are doing in the education system, in order to ensure that the system is adequately serving their needs. This was particularly important given significant increases in investment to support children with special educational needs over the past decade or so.

The review examines practices and policies across a number of countries, as well as in Ireland, to measure and assess the outcomes of students with special needs, not just on academic attainment, but in relation to the very important issues of independence and well being.

The findings show that building up a better knowledge base on these student outcomes remains a challenge, both here and internationally. While acknowledging the huge amount of work done at school level, the review makes recommendations for more inclusive forms of assessment, and for improved information systems at national level to help us understand how these students are faring nationally.

This review is both valuable and broad ranging and will be of great interest to parents, principals, teachers, policy makers and others working to support pupils with special educational needs. Lessons arising from the review will also be of great value to the NCSE in developing policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills.

Teresa Griffin,

Chief Executive Officer

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Abbreviations

AA-AAS	Alternate assessments – alternate achievement standards (US)
AA-MAS	Alternate assessments – modified achievement standards (US)
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (Australia)
AfA	Achievement for All (UK)
AfL	Assessment for Learning
ASN	Addition Support Needs (Scotland)
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress (US)
Booklet UH	Booklet une heure (linked to PISA)
C4EO	Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services
CSP	Co-ordinated Support Plan (Scotland)
CVA	Contextualised Value Added (England)
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act (Australia, UK)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Ireland)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (Ireland)
DfE	Department for Education (England)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (England)
EADSNE	European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education
ECM	Every Child Matters (England)
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act (Ireland)
ERC	Education Research Centre (Ireland)
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council (Ireland)
GIRFEC	Getting it right for every child (Scotland)
GLD	General learning disabilities (Ireland)
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual education plan (Ireland)
JC	Junior Certificate (Ireland)
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme (Ireland)
LC	Leaving Certificate (Ireland)
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied (Ireland)

NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress (US)
NAP	National Assessment Programme (Australia)
NAPLAN	National Assessment Programme for Literacy and Numeracy (Australia)
NC	National Curriculum (England)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Ireland)
NCEO	National Center on Educational Outcomes (US)
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics (US)
NCLB	No Child Left Behind (Act) (US)
NCSE	National Council for Special Education (Ireland)
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service (Ireland)
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications (Ireland)
NLTS2	National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (US)
NPD	National Pupil Database
NSAA	National Study on Alternate Assessments (US)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census (England)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England)
RACE	Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (Ireland)
RFT	Request for tender
SATs	Standard Attainment Tests (England)
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
SEELS	Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (US)
SEN	Special educational needs
SSLD	Specific speech and language disorders
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
WSE	Whole school evaluations (Ireland)

Note: The term children with special educational needs (SEN) is generally used in the report even though various national case studies may use different language. Terminology is explained in each country case study.

Executive Summary

Introduction/Background

The NCSE request for tenders for the project Measuring Educational Engagement, Progress and Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Review clearly outlined the Council's ambition 'to explore how best to measure and assess how children with SEN are doing in the education system, in order to ensure that the system is adequately serving their needs'. The NCSE required the review to explore a broad definition of engagement, progress and outcomes – both 'formal (eg numeracy or literacy) and informal (eg well-being, socialisation and independence)'.

The project had the following aims and research questions:

Aims

- To provide an overview of how educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal [eg numeracy or literacy] and informal [eg well-being, socialisation and independence]) are currently recorded or measured in the Irish education system and these data's potential for helping us to understand how children with SEN are doing in school.
- To review and document how educational engagement, progress and meaningful outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with special educational needs are tracked and measured internationally.
- To identify models of good practice for measuring and tracking educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs that are both appropriate to their learning needs and sensitive to school and national contexts.
- To identify lessons from this review relevant to the Irish education system.

Research questions

- What can be learned from the international literature about frameworks for measuring meaningful educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with SEN?
- How is this done currently in a selected number of countries/jurisdictions?
- What data on educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with SEN are currently collected in Ireland?
- What can be learned about children with SEN from this data?
- What are the gaps and what information do we need to gather in order to establish improved and meaningful data for pupils with SEN?
- Do we need new indicators or additional data?

- How can this data be collected/generated, drawing on the international experience and how can we strengthen current systems or create new systems of data collection?

Method

The research involved several strands of work each with the associated methods outlined below.

International literature and policy review

This review involved a hand search of policy and report materials combined with a more systematic search of the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) online database. The identified material was used to develop an initial framework for informing the other aspects of the research:

- Different types of outcome measure: attainment-related outcomes; attendance-related outcomes; happiness-related outcomes, and independence-related outcomes.
- Different approaches to data collection: national/state accountability records; national general surveys/censuses; large-scale evaluations, and research studies (often surveys, interventions and tracking studies focused on particular groups).
- Different approaches to including children in assessment: assessment accommodation (which seeks to make an assessment accessible while maintaining the same assessment criteria); alternative assessment (which aims to ensure that all people, irrespective of their ability, can be assessed appropriately), and additional assessment (of areas of particular relevance to people with SEN).

Country case studies

Using the framework described above, case studies were developed describing approaches adopted in five countries: Australia, England, Finland, Scotland and the US. Data were gathered from various sources including internet-based policy documents, research and administrative reports (often carried out by government departments, or government funded), academic literature (which in general was policy orientated), as well as telephone and email enquiries with relevant contacts.

Analysis of Irish policy and practice

This strand of work involved three separate analyses.

Policy analysis of assessment of children with SEN in Ireland

As with the country case studies an analysis of approaches taken in Ireland was undertaken. This involved a greater depth of analysis, examining:

- the policy context and policy guidance in relation to assessment of children with special educational needs in Ireland

- the implementation of policy guidance
- the policy guidance in relation to providing information on engagement, progress and outcomes for children with SEN in the system.

Analysis of special school evaluations

A search through the DES database for whole-school evaluations during the period from 2006 to 2011 reveals 44 evaluations of special schools. An analysis of the assessment evaluations of these reports provided an insight into approaches to assessment carried out in these schools which cater for children with more complex special education needs. Statements on assessment in the reports were first grouped according to whether they were 'positive comments' on practice or whether they contained 'suggestions for improvements in practice'. These were then analysed and organised into sub-themes.

Survey of 55 teachers in Ireland

A small scale exploratory survey with a convenience sample of teachers mapped the range of practices and policies they adopted. Fifty-five teachers from primary, post-primary and special schools settings returned the questionnaire. Most completed the questionnaire while attending a course which contributed to the high response rate for a long and complex survey instrument. The questionnaire included sections on: the record keeping and assessment of student engagement and student progress in the curriculum; how schools may modify assessment methods (or assess additional things which are relevant) for particular SEN groups; and teacher views about national assessments and the involvement of students with SEN.

Main Findings

Different approaches to measuring engagement, progress and outcomes

The review revealed that educational outcomes in relation to children and young people with SEN are usefully grouped into:

- attainment-related outcomes
- attendance-related outcomes
- happiness-related outcomes
- independence-related outcomes.

The review also highlights that data on educational engagement, progress and outcomes are gathered in different ways. These were categorised as:

- national/state accountability records
- national general surveys/census
- large-scale evaluations
- research studies: often surveys, interventions and tracking studies focused on particular groups.

The review notes that in practice the ways of gathering data and the types of data gathered are often linked. For example, accountability records and national assessments often focus on attainment-related outcomes of particular aspects of the curriculum (eg literacy and numeracy) as well as attendance-related outcomes. It appears to be far less common for countries to collect system-based data related to independence- and happiness-related outcomes.

Inclusive assessment

Drawing on the review's findings, the position of fully including all children (including those with SEN) in assessment practice – inclusive assessment – is developed. It is proposed that an inclusive assessment approach would incorporate the following three features (with associated explanations and rationale):

- Assessments should include all children and young people. Different countries assess and collate young people's educational engagement, progress and outcomes in different ways. Within an inclusive assessment approach, assessments should be carried out for *all* children and young people. The data generated from such assessments should be appropriately disaggregated as required and as is useful (eg to show outcomes for different special educational needs groups).
- Assessments should be accessible and appropriate for those being assessed. Procedures should be designed to include the diverse range of children and young people within the educational system. For children with SEN, assessments should be accessible (through suitable accommodation) and appropriate (through suitable breadth of assessment and range of criteria).
- Assessments should measure and report areas of relevance. First, they should seek to measure progress and outcomes in relation to the full breadth of the curriculum which an education system offers. Second, the inclusion of a diverse range of children and young people within the educational system means it will be necessary to assess areas of particular relevance to people with SEN (in some countries this is referred to as a wider or 'additional' curriculum). Therefore, systems also need to be in place to record educational progress in these areas that may be of particular interest or concern to given stakeholders. Examples include aspects of mobility and use of specialist technology for those with physical and sensory disabilities.

In summary then, an inclusive assessment approach should: include all, be accessible and appropriate, and assess and report areas of relevance. This is true whichever aspect of the learner's education is being assessed, i.e. whether it is attainment-related, attendance-related, happiness-related or independence-related.

The proposed approach was used as a framework to identify examples of where inclusive assessment is implemented (or absent) in different countries, including Ireland.

Educational standards assessments and inclusive assessment

The US and England offer interesting case studies in relation to inclusive assessment. Both countries draw on standards-based education principles in which all pupils

are assessed against national educational standards at various points during their school career. All (or most) students are included in the assessments. While the broad approach of national assessments is alien to Ireland's current educational policies (as it is in Scotland and Finland), of relevance is that England and the US have developed assessment approaches which include all students. They provide accommodated and alternative versions of national assessments (eg P scales in England and 'alternate' assessments in the US which include young people with the most complex cognitive disabilities).

Ireland has traditionally not carried out such assessments at a national level. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011), however, includes proposals to carry out more assessment at various levels. There are associated requirements for schools to report pupil results to parents and to report aggregated results to the DES. The first implementation (May/June 2012) of the standardised tests did not include all children with SEN.

Award-bearing assessments and inclusive assessment

Australia, England and Scotland each have award-bearing nationally set external examinations broadly equivalent to Ireland's Junior Certificate. Each collates national data in relation to these. While England and Scotland collect and present data in a form that offers the possibility for disaggregation in relation to different special educational needs groups, Australia appears not to present data in this way. Similarly, Ireland does not collect data in relation to special educational needs for the junior or senior cycle.

In Ireland the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) offers indicators of outcomes at ten levels. The NFQ's clarity and inclusive nature are extremely helpful because the framework recognises the achievement of all students. It is interesting to note that in terms of further education (FETAC), assessments have been developed from levels 1 to 6. However, at the earlier post-primary phase the proposed junior cycle reforms will begin at level 2. Given that a national framework exists with the breadth to develop more inclusive assessments, it seems an opportunity is being missed to include level 1 qualifications at post-primary level.

National sample-based assessments and inclusive assessment

The US, Finland, Scotland and Australia all carry out sample-based national assessments in relation to different curriculum areas (different countries operate these assessments with different regularity and different focuses – although maths and literacy feature strongly). While each country allows some assessment accommodations enabling many students with SEN to participate, none appears to offer disaggregation by SEN. Further, the standardised assessments used do not include alternative versions to assess broader ranges of abilities, and therefore are inappropriate for many children and young people with learning disabilities. Ireland also carries out periodic sample-based national assessments, most recently in 2009, in mathematics and English reading in primary second and sixth classes. The sample for each age group was about 4,000 pupils, although this excluded some students with SEN (eg special schools and special classes were excluded at the sampling stage).

The development of alternative assessment materials for the different population of students with more complex learning disabilities may offer a useful insight into their progress, although the research team did not identify examples of this occurring in the literature or country case studies in relation to sample-based assessments.

International assessments

In their current form, international assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) offer little insight into the outcomes for pupils with SEN, particularly regarding specific countries. PISA's sampling and assessment process excludes students with more complex SEN, and the number of students with SEN is low in the sample for a given country (eg just 103 students with SEN in Ireland in PISA 2003). Nevertheless, PISA is exploring greater inclusion of students with SEN through the development of alternative assessment materials (Booklet UH), and is seeking to standardise the definition of SEN used. As such, there may be future opportunities for countries to make greater use of international assessments to gain a better understanding of the progress of students with SEN.

Breadth of assessment and inclusive assessment

The proposed definition of inclusive assessment emphasises that assessments should be appropriate and relevant. Therefore, assessments should attend to the broader aspects of the curriculum rather than those which are traditionally assessed through examinations and attainment tests. The review labels these as happiness- and independence-related outcomes, and they include more specific outcomes such as resilience, self-esteem, well-being, relationship building, optimism, employment, independent living skills and successful transition after school. This broader analysis of outcomes also included curriculum areas which may be particularly relevant to children and young people with SEN. Some of these areas are identified along with examples demonstrating that they may be particular (or particularly important) to different SEN groups (eg aspects of mobility to children with physical disabilities or visual impairment, areas of social communication to children with autistic spectrum disorder).

The review and country case studies identified some useful approaches in this regard, although these were rarely linked to system-based data collection. They included:

- Research projects of varying sizes and complexity. Current studies in Ireland which follow this approach include the Growing Up in Ireland study and NCSE's longitudinal study project IRIS. A particularly powerful example of this approach is a US-based longitudinal study of people with disabilities (NLTS2).
- The US appeared to be the only country case study to include system-based data collection of employment outcomes and disability. The collection and reporting of the data are required by law.
- The use of national pupil databases (eg in Scotland and England) enables data gathered from a wide range of sources to be 'connected' together. Such an approach is very efficient because the same data (eg SEN status, gender and ethnicity) do not have to be collected many times and measures of relevance to people with SEN,

which are broader than attainment-related outcome measures, can be efficiently incorporated into a country's monitoring process. Significant studies in Scotland and England are identified which demonstrate the power of this approach (eg Scottish Government, 2011a; Humphrey & Squires, 2011).

A national pupil database does not currently exist in Ireland although the DES's data strategy plans to implement an initial student database (the Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD)) by autumn 2013 (DES, 2012d). However, the report authors were unable to clarify the likely inclusion of a SEN 'marker' in the database to enable the disaggregation of data in relation to SEN categories.

Classroom assessment and inclusive assessment

The concept of inclusive assessment (ie the position that all young people [with and without SEN] benefit from classroom assessment which is accessible, appropriate and relevant to them) is relevant to classroom assessment as well as system-based national assessment. If done well, this should enable the measurement of pupil engagement and progress. It informs teaching (contributing to an assessment for learning approach) and can be shared with teachers, parents and the student themselves (eg through report cards). Such assessment is also important in a school's self-evaluation of practice.

The report explored classroom assessment in Ireland in some detail. The survey of teachers suggested children with SEN were extensively included in classroom assessment. Indeed, respondents reported that additional assessment of pupils with SEN often took place in relation to areas of particular interest or concern (related to particular special education needs or disabilities). To this extent, reported practice appears to demonstrate qualities of inclusive assessment. The analysis of special school evaluations provides a different perspective. Although limited to a particular setting, the analysis revealed that a range of good quality and inclusive classroom assessments take place in these schools. However, concerns were raised in whole school evaluations that classroom assessment could be inconsistent within and between schools, pupil progress could be difficult to monitor and assessment could be narrow because it misses some important areas of the curriculum (including areas of relevance to particular SEN groups).

While classroom assessment has limited use regarding system-based data collection, quality data are required for monitoring engagement and progress at the individual and school level. This is true for students with SEN, just as it is true for all other pupils. Scotland is an interesting example here because its current educational reforms include a central role for the Scottish Framework for Assessment as a mechanism for raising standards. Unlike other case study countries, Scotland's model involves improving the quality and consistency of classroom assessment and record-keeping without system-based national data collection for accountability purposes.

Unintended consequences of collecting the data

Literature on 'unintended consequences' of assessment was identified in the US and England case studies. There are concerns about the potentially negative consequences of

an increased emphasis on testing (particularly ‘high stakes’ testing) on the educational experiences of students generally, and students with SEN in particular. Concerns raised include a narrowing of the curriculum and accusations of teachers ‘teaching to the test’. A concern is also raised in the literature that assessments may place undue pressure on students with SEN, and they can be scapegoated and held responsible for a school’s poor performance.

Although the Irish education system differs to those in England and the US (particularly in relation to the amount of assessment undertaken), any development of assessment and monitoring policies needs to guard against these potential unintended and undesirable consequences for students with SEN.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The NCSE should adopt and promote a definition of inclusive assessment to support its work in the area of measuring progress, engagement and outcomes of children with SEN. The framework proposed in this report is recommended. In summary, an inclusive assessment approach should ensure:

- All students are included and benefit from assessment.
- Assessments are accessible and appropriate for the diverse range of children in the education system.
- The full breadth of the curriculum is assessed (including curriculum areas of particular relevance to students with special educational needs).

Recommendation 2

The planned national pupil/student database should include a SEN code in relation to defined categories to allow for the disaggregation of engagement, progress and outcome data for such students. The NCSE might usefully investigate the progress being made on the DES data strategy and contribute to this development by advising how pupils with SEN are best included.

Recommendation 3

Following the principles of inclusive assessment, a range of award-bearing assessments should be available to recognise the achievement levels of all learners in line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The development of a level 1 assessment within the new junior cycle arrangements would be particularly welcome.

Recommendation 4

The national literacy and numeracy strategy should be developed to include a commitment to the development of accommodated and alternative approaches to the assessment for children excluded from the norm-referenced standardised tests.

Information on these children should be forwarded in a consistent format to the board of management of each school and to the Department of Education and Skills, as it is for their peers. Consideration of alternative assessment approaches in England and the US may be helpful.

Recommendation 5

The NCSE should have discussions with the DES in relation to including the collection of special educational needs data as part of the sample-based national assessments. Exploratory discussions on the potential use of alternative assessments to include students with complex cognitive disabilities would also be helpful.

Recommendation 6

Relevant stakeholders should ensure that there are clear expectations of schools regarding consistent assessment and recording of progress of students with SEN across the whole curriculum. This should define minimum standards of assessment to ensure uniformity of approach and equity of provision. Similarly, there should be clear expectations regarding the assessment and recording of student progress against IEP goals. The development of teacher practice through a range of professional development will be necessary to support positive change. The ongoing development in Scotland may be of interest.

Recommendation 7

The NCSE might consider how other primary research which measures student engagement, progress and outcomes might be designed, funded and carried out in the context of contracting resources. This might include collaboration with other studies which are not focused on people with SEN. This research project provides examples of a range of study designs.



1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The NCSE's request for tender (RFT) for the project Measuring Educational Engagement, Progress and Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Review clearly outlined the Council's ambition to explore how best to measure and assess how children with special educational needs are progressing in the education system, in order to ensure that the system is adequately serving their needs. The NCSE required the review to explore a broad definition of engagement, progress and outcomes – both formal (eg numeracy or literacy) and informal (eg well-being, socialisation and independence)'. The RFT outlined the following aims and research questions.

Aims:

- To provide an overview of how educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal [eg numeracy or literacy] and informal [eg well-being, socialisation and independence]) are currently recorded or measured in the Irish education system and these data's potential for helping us to understand how children with special educational needs are doing in school.
- To review and document how educational engagement, progress and meaningful outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with special educational needs are tracked and measured internationally.
- To identify models of good practice for measuring and tracking educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs that are both appropriate to their learning needs and sensitive to school and national contexts.
- To identify lessons from this review relevant to the Irish education system.

Research questions:

- What can be learned from the international literature about frameworks for measuring meaningful educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with SEN?
- How is this done currently in selected number of countries/jurisdictions?
- What data on educational engagement, progress and outcomes (both formal and informal) for children with SEN are currently collected in Ireland?
- What can be learned about children with SEN from this data?
- What are the gaps and what information do we need to gather in order to establish improved and meaningful data for pupils with SEN?
- Do we need new indicators or additional data?

- How can this data be collected/generated, drawing on the international experience and how can we strengthen current systems or create new systems of data collection?

1.2 Approach and Structure of the Report

A team of academics from the University of Birmingham (UK) and St Patrick's College (Ireland) was commissioned to conduct this research. In keeping with the RFT, the team carried out three significant pieces of overlapping empirical and review work and these form sections of this report (the analysis of Irish policy and practice is split into three sections for ease of reporting):

- international literature and policy review
- country case studies
- analysis of Irish policy and practice:
 - policy analysis of assessment of children with special educational needs in Ireland
 - analysis of special school evaluations in Ireland
 - survey of 55 teachers in Ireland.

These sections seek to answer research questions 1, 2 and 3 (linked to aims 1, 2 and 3). The other research questions are more reflective (question 4) or focused on the application of the findings to Ireland (questions 5, 6 and 7, linked to aim 4). The analysis and discussion in the final section of the report seek to address these questions.

Details of the methods are presented in the relevant sections (and summarised in the Executive Summary). Nevertheless, for clarity it is useful to describe how the research progressed and how the different sections relate to one another.

The international literature and policy review was carried out in spring 2011 and a report was presented to the advisory group in June 2011. This work provided the framework for writing the country case studies which followed in summer/autumn 2011. In parallel with both these work packages, an analysis of Irish policy and practice took place. This began in spring 2011 (when the survey of teachers took place) and review work continued until autumn 2011. All the preliminary reports including draft recommendations were presented to the advisory group in December 2011. The draft report was then formally reviewed by the NCSE executive and an academic referee, and subsequently by the NCSE research committee. The final report integrates feedback received from the advisory committee and from the NCSE formal review process.

1.3 Conceptual Frameworks

1.3.1 Input-process-outcomes

The RFT highlighted an increased investment and commitment in Ireland to support children with special educational needs in the previous decade. The NCSE was concerned, however, that little evidence existed on the educational engagement,

progress or outcomes of these pupils. The RFT emphasises this by referring to the NCSE Implementation Report (2006a): ‘... no structured emphasis on outcomes and an almost endemic fascination with inputs, with no means of ascertaining what outcomes are being achieved for children with SEN’ (p17).

This interest in drawing links between ‘inputs’ and ‘outcomes’ is in keeping with an ‘input-process-outcomes’ model of effectiveness and such an approach has been taken by the European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education (EADSNE). For example, Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009, pp14-15) argue that educational input and resources denote all aspects provided to the system: eg financial resources, legislation, qualified teachers and infrastructure. Education processes transform these inputs and resources into outputs and outcomes which include pupil participation rates and curricular achievements: eg academic and functional literacy, independence or citizenship. Process refers to all educational activities including procedures, state/school/district practice, or classroom instructional practice.

1.3.2 SEN-specific issues

While there are general issues regarding measuring educational engagement, progress and outcomes for all children with SEN (which are captured in an input-process-outcomes model), the research team took the position that there are also specific issues which must be considered in relation to different SEN groups. This reflects findings from reviews on specific SEN groups (eg those commissioned by the NCSE on autism, hearing impairment and visual impairment – Parsons *et al*, 2009; Marschark and Spencer, 2009, and Douglas *et al*, 2009 respectively). This is relevant because different measures of engagement, progress and outcomes may be particularly meaningful, or have particular nuances, for different groups. For example, academic progress and outcomes must consider issues of learning difficulty while engagement may have different meaning for students with ASD, sensory impairments or physical disabilities.

1.3.3 Pragmatics – application to Ireland

Aim 4 of the commissioned research was ‘to identify lessons from this review relevant to the Irish education system’. This requires a pragmatic analysis which must account for the existing Irish education system and how children with SEN are included within it. This is by no means straightforward as it requires drawing evidence from countries with different education systems to Ireland’s, including differences in the definition of SEN. To deal with this challenge, the research team proposed an ‘inclusive assessment’ approach and situating this within the Irish education system.

1.4 Definitions

An important part of any review is defining the key terms of interest, in this case: engagement, outcomes and progress, as well as children with SEN. The following working definitions informed the reviews and questionnaire designs and were presented to the project advisory group and the NCSE in March 2011 before proceeding. In keeping

with the review's exploratory remit, the review process further informed and refined these initial definitions.

Engagement drew on the concept of school engagement as defined by Chapman (2003) where a distinction is made between school process engagement and engagement in specific learning tasks. The former refers to a willingness to participate in routine school activities: attending classes, submitting required work and following teacher directions in class. In contrast, the latter is more specifically linked to effort and interest in actual learning tasks, and Chapman breaks these down into cognitive engagement ('extent to which students are attending to and expending mental effort in the learning tasks encountered'), behavioural engagement ('the extent to which students are making active responses to the learning tasks presented') and affective engagement (the level of students' investment in, and their emotional reactions to, the learning tasks, eg high levels of interest or positive attitudes towards the learning tasks). This summary tallies with Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' (2004) review article on the potential of the concept of school engagement which similarly refers to behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement.

Outcomes is a much broader term than engagement. The research team drew on terms in the RFT (literacy, numeracy, early school leaving, well-being, socialisation, independence), as well as terms used by Rix *et al* (2006) in their systematic review of inclusive practices for children with special educational needs (attainment/attainment levels, attitude, confidence, self esteem, independence skills). Also used were terms generated by the research team: dropout/school dropout, school attendance, employment outcomes, quality of life/QoL, high stakes testing). The different outcomes were combined and grouped under attainment-, happiness-, independence- and attendance-related (the latter having clear links to school process engagement as described above).

Progress implies change over time regarding educational outcomes and engagement. For this reason the research team did not consider progress alone, but rather in relation to outcome and engagement.

Children with special educational needs. International agencies, such as the EADSNE and OECD, have attempted to compare definitions and policy differences in the field as well as to gather comparable statistics. Such comparisons are difficult as definitions and policies vary widely from country to country.

To improve the quality of cross-national comparisons, the OECD has proposed that countries reclassify their own classification schemes and data into a new tripartite cross-national classification system:

- Category A: covers those students whose disabilities have clear biological causes – disabilities.
- Category B: covers those students experiencing learning and behaviour difficulties for no particular reason – difficulties.
- Category C: covers those students with difficulties arising from disadvantages – disadvantage.

While the rationale for this classification is contentious, it usefully highlights that special educational needs has a varied definition when reviewing international literature. Importantly for this review we were interested in disabilities and difficulties (A and B) rather than the broader term disadvantage. This is in keeping with the special educational needs groups as defined by the Irish Department of Education and Skills for resource allocation purposes, and the EPSEN Act's broad definition of special educational needs.

2 International Literature and Policy Review

2.1 Introduction and Aims

This aspect of the research focused on the methods used to measure engagement, progress and outcomes for children with SEN. This relatively technical analysis, it should be stressed, generated a large number of articles and we pragmatically focused on selecting literature which represented a range of relevant approaches and measures rather than an exhaustive list of all that was available. In particular, the search generated large numbers of relatively small research studies. While these may be legitimate and potentially useful approaches to demonstrating the impact of educational approaches, the summary presents only illustrative examples. The findings are presented in two sections:

- Approach and design – studies which offered a variety of methodological approaches to the measurement of educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs.
- Measurement – studies gathering data relevant to the project, that is engagement, progress and outcomes (including outcomes which were happiness-, attainment-, independence- and attendance-related).

A third discussion section critically reflects on the findings by considering how children with SEN are included in these approaches to measuring these areas. The section concludes with a framework for the country case studies which follow in the report.

2.2 Method

The nature of this review makes it extremely broad in the range of publications examined (empirical, methodological and policy pieces) and the topics covered (how educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs are tracked and measured). To avoid being overwhelmed by the volume of potentially relevant literature the review was split into the following stages:

- stage 1 – top-down literature search (hand search materials)
- stage 2 – bottom-up literature search (identifying literature through database search)
- stage 3 – Combine stage 1 and stage 2
- stage 4 – Discussion and critical reflections.

2.2.1 Stage 1 – Top-down literature search (hand search materials)

It was anticipated that the systematic stage 2 search of the ERIC database would identify valuable academic literature but might not identify general government/jurisdiction reports (eg the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services [C4EO] or DfE in the UK) or reports produced by international data collection

agencies (eg the World Bank, OECD). Therefore hand searches of international data collection agencies identified key educational outcome indicators gathered and the extent to which children with special educational needs are included. Hand searches refers to searching of relevant organisational and government websites.

2.2.2 Stage 2 – Bottom-up literature search (identifying literature through database search)

The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) is the world's largest digital library of education literature and a resource which provides unlimited access to more than 1.3 million bibliographic records of journal articles and other education-related materials. For this reason the research team focused on the bottom-up literature search on this database. Key focuses were:

- children with special educational needs
- engagement
- progress
- outcomes.

Taking these terms in turn, the research team identified potential equivalent search terms/synonyms which may reveal relevant papers. Table 1 contains these search terms and the resulting number of hits.

Table 1. Search terms and results from ERIC (spring 2011)

Term	Search terms	Rationale
Children with special educational needs	SEN or special education* need* or special needs education or disability	Based on previous literature review for the NCSE (Douglas <i>et al</i> , 2008)
Engagement	engagement	167 hits in ERIC for engagement alone
Outcomes	Range of searches because of the far-reaching nature of outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment-related • happiness-related • independence-related • attendance-related 	Terms presented in: RFT; Rix <i>et al</i> (2006); and the research team. See definition in Introduction. [Outcomes alone gave 1059 hits]
Attainment-related	attainment (and levels)	183 (5)
	literacy (and outcomes)	335 (45)
	numeracy (and outcomes)	42 (4)
	high stakes testing	13
	Outcomes AND any of the above	94
Happiness-related	confidence	126
	happiness	11
	self-esteem	118
	attitude (+ measures)	292 (170)
	well-being	202
	quality of life (including QoL)	240
	Outcomes AND any of the above (excluding attitude)	116
	Outcomes AND any of the above	142
Independence-related	socialisation	9
	independence (+ skills)	83 (35)
	employment (+ outcomes)	278 (67)
	Outcomes AND any of the above	84
Attendance related	early school leaving	3
	dropout (school +)	44 (7)
	school attendance	12
	Any of the above	56
Progress		Implies change over time in terms of educational outcomes and engagement
	added value or value added	7
	longitudinal	304
	progress	340
	OR all of the above	636
	Engagement AND all of the above	10
	Outcomes AND all of the above	139

Note: Search carried out on Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Note: * is a wildcard, so education* would match education and educational.

Note: all searches on publication 2000-11; any publication type; any education age; refereed.

2.2.3 Stage 3 – Combining stage 1 and stage 2

The search results from stage 1 and stage 2 above needed to be reduced in order to identify a useful representation of relevant sources (and remove irrelevant sources). The literature review was primarily concerned with research methods rather than research findings, i.e. how the data has been collected (and what it measures, and the relative validity and reliability) rather than what the research has found. Therefore the literature generated was categorised in the following ways:

- Approach (studies which drew on national data collection approaches as part of accountability, on-going national surveys, commissioned evaluation studies).
- Measure (attainment-related outcomes, engagement).

2.2.4 Stage 4 – Discussion and critical reflections

Part of the thrust of the proposal was that different special educational needs groups have particular requirements in relation to assessment of educational engagement, progress and outcomes. Drawing on the expertise within the research team, stage 4 of the review reflected on the range of measures and approaches identified for different special educational need groups.

2.3 Review Findings – Research Approach and Design

This section summarises and explores the different research approaches and designs used to measure engagement, progress and outcomes for children with SEN:

- international approaches
- national/state accountability records
- national general surveys/census
- large scale evaluations
- surveys, interventions and tracking studies focused on particular groups.

2.3.1 International approaches

Two key organisations provide internationally comparable data on SEN provision in developed countries: the OECD and EADSNE. They provide detailed information on education provision and student characteristics, but information is far more limited on pupil engagement, outcomes and progress. In no small part, cross-national comparisons on student outcomes are difficult because definitions of SEN differ from country to country.

An important process for collecting international comparative data on (all) student outcomes is through international comparative assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Of these three, only PISA is explicit in its aim to include, as far as possible, young people with special educational needs and this is briefly discussed.

PISA comprises a series of assessments taken by 15-year-old students designed to 'assess student performance and collect data on the student, family and institutional factors that can help explain differences in performance' (OECD 2001, p4). PISA is administered by the OECD and it covers three areas: language, mathematics and science. PISA runs in three-yearly cycles and while each subject area is assessed in each cycle, one subject is given prominence. The first wave in 2000, focused mainly on language, the second on mathematics and the third on science. The latest wave of PISA in 2009 focused once more on language. In addition to test score outcomes, PISA also gathers data on student perceptions of school, their demographic characteristics and other indicators of school climate. This enables the collection of rich data on pupil experiences which extend beyond academic attainment. In 2009 around 470,000 students from 65 countries or economies participated in PISA. Ireland has participated in all four of its sweeps.

In 2003 PISA collected data on students' special educational needs status for the first time. This was repeated for PISA 2006 and 2009. In fact the PISA 2009 operation manual is explicit about the need to include students with special educational needs '... the exclusion of special education students and students with insufficient assessment language experience is to be kept to a minimum' (OECD 2008a, p24).

The two-stage sampling process employed by PISA involves selecting schools and then pupils within those schools. This means there are two points at which students with SEN might be excluded. First, particular types of school may not be included, eg in England in PISA 2009, special schools and pupil referral units were excluded from the sampling frame (Bradshaw *et al*, 2010). Second, within each sampled school PISA co-ordinators were expected to identify students with special educational needs and decide whether or not they were to be included (a brief set of guidelines is provided to assist with this). While PISA aims to be as inclusive as possible, some students will not be able to participate for various reasons. Exactly how this sampling process operates on SEN must depend on different national policies on school placement. However, the OECD (2007) notes that 'up to a total of 5% of the relevant population may be excluded either by excluding whole schools or students within schools' (p179).

Nevertheless, the name and characteristics of all students who are included in PISA are recorded; a code (1–4) is allocated to those who are identified as having special educational needs (OECD, 2008b, pp. 15-16):

1. Functional disability – student has a moderate to severe permanent physical disability.
2. Cognitive, behavioural or emotional disability – in the opinion of qualified staff, student has a cognitive, behavioural or emotional disability. The manual for PISA 2003 (OECD, 2002) used a slightly different label of 'Intellectual Disability' (p16).
3. Limited assessment language experience – student is not a native speaker of any of the languages of the assessment in the country and has limited proficiency in these languages.
4. Optional additional category ('The last category 'other' was uniquely defined by each country PISA manager and approved by the international PISA centre. It is

believed that the majority of the students in this category were diagnosed with dyslexia.' OECD, 2007, pp.180-181).

OECD (2007) provides an analysis of the participation and performance of students with special educational needs in PISA 2003. Table 2 shows the proportion of national country samples identified as having SEN who took part in PISA. The table illustrates two things: (i) the proportions of students with SEN who were included in PISA 2003 are very small and are lower than national prevalence (compare to figures in the country case studies, [see Table 5, page 44](#)); (ii) as participating countries can define how they will use the four broad categories of special educational needs there are wide discrepancies in the use of these labels and comparison is difficult.

Table 2. Students with SEN participating in PISA 2003, selected countries

	All	Ireland	Finland	US	UK*	Australia
Any special education needs (%)	1.4	2.7	7.2	3.6	5.1	1.9
Functional disability (n)	311	4	5	8	67	29
Intellectual disability (n)	1815	50	10	144	399	78
Limited test language proficiency (n)	900	24	45	43	22	135
Other (n)	741	25	355	0	0	0
Total PISA participants with SEN (n)	3767	103	415	195	488	242
Total PISA participants (n)	276165	3880	5796	5456	9535	12551

Source: OECD (2007, p182); *Figures for Scotland and England are combined within an overall UK category.

Given the sampling and definition challenges, the analysis suggests that PISA provides little precise insight into the engagement, outcomes and progress of children with SEN, particularly at a country level. The insight offered by PISA is perhaps particularly limited for attainment-focused measures. Even so, the analysis presented by OECD (2007) offers more useful insights on student perception of school; indeed there was some indication that students with SEN felt more out of place in their school than students without SEN.

However, partly in response to these limitations, since PISA 2003 there has been an optional test instrument for students with special educational needs (Booklet UH ['une heure', one hour]). This instrument was designed for use in schools where all students have special educational needs or are all primary school students, such that the standard test booklet would be considered inappropriate. The UH booklet was shorter and contained a sub-set of items from the regular test deemed most suitable for students with special educational needs (OECD, 2005, p233; OECD, 2012, p29). Detailed data on the uptake of the UH booklet does not appear to be in the public domain (although OECD, 2007 report 1048 participants used the UH booklet in PISA 2003), but it has been available in all PISA sweeps since 2003. This provides evidence that PISA is seeking to better include young people with special educational needs.

2.3.2 National/state accountability records

This involves the analysis of routinely collected system-based data. It requires data to be available to researchers and collected and stored so that student records contain details on their special educational need (as well as measures of engagement, progress and outcomes).

Examples in the literature are: Blackorby *et al* (2010) (US-based, drawing on the USA National Assessment data and attendance data); DfE (2010) (England- and Wales-based, drawing on performance at 'key stages' and GCSEs as well as school exclusion data).

Key challenges and strengths of the approach: Firstly, the approach obviously assumes data collection systems are in place (as in England and the US). The breadth of system-based data collection is usually limited to academic performance in some areas of a 'core' curriculum (often in limited subjects, eg mathematics and literacy) and the broad issue of school attendance. It also requires that data on pupils' special educational need are collected and systems in some countries allow this to take place.

A challenge of the approach is that the assessments related to academic performance may not be accessible to many children with special educational needs. This may lead to poor representation of these children (and possibly particularly for some groups). In the US this is partly addressed by requiring schools to return data relating to at least 95 per cent of their pupils so that states must offer accommodated or alternative assessments. In a later section of the report we consider this important issue.

Assuming these procedures are in place, it is possible for data to be analysed in a variety of ways, including disaggregating different special educational needs groups, or by exploring changes over time.

2.3.3 National general surveys/census

There are a variety of designs of these significant and costly studies including census, cross sectional and longitudinal designs. Some approaches may sample from the general population and have a sub-sample of participants with special educational needs, while others are particularly concerned with participants with special educational needs.

Examples in the literature are: The recent National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) in the US provides a significant (though not unique) example of a longitudinal study of children and young people with special educational needs (eg Newman *et al*, 2009; Wagner *et al*, 2007). Another unusual illustration includes questions on education in a general survey of adults with disabilities (Winn, 2007 provides an example in the area of deafness). In Ireland, 'Growing Up In Ireland' is a major Government longitudinal national study of nearly 20,000 children (Williams *et al*, 2009). The study commenced in 2007 and takes place over seven years following the progress of two groups of children; 8500 nine year olds and 11,000 nine month olds. Although the survey is not specific to children with special educational needs it provides possibilities for disaggregating the data in relation to these sub groups (the survey is

discussed further in the section of the report Policy analysis of assessment of children with SEN in Ireland).

Key challenges and strengths of the approach: The particular strength of longitudinal studies is that they can observe change over time and gather data on a variety of topics. Large-scale surveys (whether longitudinal or not) often use instruments and questions used elsewhere which enables comparison (eg Newman *et al*, 2009, compared findings from the NLTS2 to general population data gathered in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth). In addition, careful sampling enables relative confidence in the generalisability of findings. Nevertheless, a challenge of large-scale surveys (even those specifically linked to special educational needs/disability) is that the special educational needs population is heterogeneous and divided into a variety of sub-groups, and some of these may still have small numbers (particularly on low-incidence disabilities). Some researchers have therefore sought to carry out smaller scale projects which focus on particular special educational needs sub-groups (see below). Nevertheless in terms of the particular group of 'emotional disturbance' in the US, Wagner *et al* (2005) argue positively about the use of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), 'SEELS and NLTS2 are offered as exemplars of the type of studies needed to supply critical information to the [education/emotional disturbance] field' (p25).

Another challenge is ensuring the survey is relevant and accessible to a broad range of special educational needs groups (eg the appropriate inclusion of participants with learning disabilities). A common approach adopted in the literature identified was the surveying of parents (instead of the young people themselves).

Perhaps the biggest challenge of this approach is the high cost of carrying out such studies.

2.3.4 Large-scale evaluations

Evaluations seek to establish the effectiveness of new or existing programmes/interventions against particular criteria. They involve collection of data on the programme in question, and would usually involve a comparison (eg before versus after the programme; with or without the programme). Evaluations might draw on system-based data and/or purposefully collected data.

Examples in the literature are: *Achievement for All Evaluation* in the UK (eg Humphrey & Squires, 2010, 2011) drew on system-based pupil attainment and attendance data, as well as purposefully collected interview and questionnaire data from parents and teachers. Blatchford *et al* (2011) sought to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching assistants involving purposefully collected data through observation (related to student confidence, motivation and independence) as well as system-based data on attainment. The two examples provided are contrasting in that the former is an evaluation 'arm' of a significant pilot project (*Achievement for All*), while the latter is the evaluation of broad educational strategy of interest (use of teaching assistants in England).

Key challenges and strengths of the approach: Evaluation covers a wide range of study designs and sizes. The contrasting examples presented are clearly far reaching and

relatively expensive. The expense is partly linked to the relative scale of the evaluations (numbers of participants), but also the amount of (expensive) purposeful (primary) data which is collected compared with the (relatively cheaper) system-based data used. Importantly, the availability of reliable system-based data in the given context is a critical factor in designing and costing such evaluations – as noted, some countries have this data while others do not.

2.3.5 Surveys, interventions and tracking studies focused on particular groups

This covers a very wide range of study designs and sizes. Nevertheless, a feature of such studies is that they will often focus on particular SEN groups (as opposed to the population as a whole), and may focus on particular areas: eg employment, self-esteem and relationships. Designs vary according to the research questions and resources available, but include: survey studies; tracking/longitudinal studies; retrospective cohort studies, and intervention studies (or smaller scale evaluation studies).

Examples in the literature are: An example of a survey study (in this case with the additional dimension of following-up a cohort): Carroll and Dockrell (2010) explored the educational outcomes of pupils with specific language impairment at age 22 by conducting a follow-up of students identified through school records (measures included employment outcomes). An example of a tracking study: Buckley *et al* (2005) tracked the educational progress of pupils with Down syndrome over a 13-year period (measures included progress of literacy as well as speech and language, socialisation, daily living skills and behaviour). An example of a retrospective cohort study: Spencer (2009) examined patterns of attendance and academic performance of students identified as truants at about age 13 (and made links with special educational needs). An example of an intervention study: The evaluation studies above offer examples of studies which explore the effectiveness of an intervention. Another example is provided by Somers *et al* (2010) in relation to reading interventions.

Key challenges and strengths of the approaches: As with evaluations, the cost of the given studies is linked to their relative size, and also the balance of purposeful and system-based data collection. Nevertheless, relatively small scale studies are sometimes carried out within the higher education sector (without additional funding) or can be funded relatively cheaply compared with other approaches through a commissioning process. Perhaps the key strength of the ‘particular group’ approach is that methods/measures are usually chosen or designed with the particular requirements of the special educational needs group in mind. Another related strength is that if done well such studies can have a very particular focus which addresses tighter research questions, and in relation to particular groups. Of course, this strength is arguably a weakness in that such studies may have limited generalisability or application to other situations.

2.4 Measurement: Engagement, Outcomes and Progress

This section summarises and explores the identified different measures of engagement, progress and outcomes for children with SEN which can be usefully split into:

- engagement measures
- attainment-related outcomes
- attendance-related outcomes
- happiness-related outcomes
- independence-related outcomes
- progress.

2.4.1 Engagement

Relatively little relevant literature was found on engagement and special educational needs. Taking Chapman's (2003) *Engagement in Specific Learning Tasks*, some small scale studies appear to be concerned with particular groups. As an example of a small scale intervention/tracking study, Kishida and Kemp (2006) develop a measure of engagement that could be used in practice with children with disabilities, including those with severe intellectual disabilities. Their individual child engagement record (ICER) observed and recorded the engagement of individual children to identify optimal programmes for them: five children with mild to severe disabilities were observed in an inclusive childcare setting across four types of ongoing activities. Such small studies provide a template for how data could be gathered more widely.

The literature may be more helpful on Chapman's (2003) School Process Engagement, and in fact the measure identified is closely linked to attendance-related outcomes. This included studies measuring school attendance (eg Humphrey & Squires, 2010), exclusion (eg DfE, 2010), exit type and dropout (eg Blackorby *et al*, 2010). These are discussed in more detail below.

A different conceptualisation of engagement of relevance is on school participation. EADSNE (2011) argue that a key indicator of engagement is that students with disabilities participate in education in an equal way to their non-disabled peers. Notable examples of indicators are: participation regarding admission (being there); in assessment, and in lessons and school-related activities. EADSNE (2011, p29) provides examples of data sources in different settings. Nevertheless, important though these measures are, many are focused on provision rather than direct measures of pupil engagement.

2.4.2 Attainment-related outcomes

Unsurprisingly, this aspect of the literature search generated a range of approaches including those that draw on national/state accountability records and data derived from national general surveys. Aud *et al* (2010) is an example of a large-scale synthesis of status and trends in US education (with a focus on racial and ethnic groups, but with a sub-section concerned with special educational needs). This is an example of a report that draws on a wide range of data sources, 'the indicators in this report present data

from a variety of sources. [...] Most of these sources are federal surveys and many are conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)' (p151). Some of this was national accountability data, some large-scale survey data. Kewalramani *et al* (2007) present an earlier version of the analysis.

Blackorby *et al* (2010) present a substantial analysis of the US National Assessments. This report provides an example of how the data can be collated, though it has the potential for analyses beyond those presented here. The indicators used are largely attainment scores, but also have some links with eventual 'exit type' from high school (including high school graduation and dropout). Factors included in the analysis include some state-by-state breakdowns, different special educational need groups, different ages (ages 0–3, 3–5, 6–9, 10–13 and 14–17), comparisons made with non-disabled children and changes over time (ie national assessment data over 10 years). Internationally, the US appears to have the most sophisticated system of collection of accountability data on student attainment (linked to the No Child Left Behind legislation). The report by Blackorby *et al* (2010) exemplifies how such datasets can be utilised in relation to young people with special educational needs. A similar style of report (though less sophisticated) for England is presented by DfE (2010). The data drawn on are performance at key stages and GCSEs (similar to the Irish Junior Certificate).

Somers *et al* (2010) provide an example of a large-scale US-based evaluation (in their case on supplemental literacy courses for struggling ninth-grade readers – 5,595 pupils in 34 high schools from ten school districts). These types of design particularly suit the evaluation of large-scale educational initiatives. A parallel one in the UK is Achievement for All Evaluation (eg Humphrey and Squires, 2010, 2011). Such evaluations may collect specific data on outcomes of interest, as well as draw on existing data (eg national/state accountability records). For example, Humphrey and Squires (2010) used pupil attainment data in English and mathematics (as part of the national strategies in England) as well as pupil attendance data (collected by the participating local authorities).

In terms of relatively smaller scale studies concerned with student attainment, researchers have used surveys and intervention/tracking studies to focus on particular groups. For example, Buckley *et al* (2005) present an example of a survey focused on pupils with Down syndrome. The data collected over a 13-year period (1986–99) examined the impact of different interventions received (special classes versus mainstream classes), but more relevant here is that the researchers tracked progress of literacy and also less traditional curriculum areas (certainly beyond England's national curriculum). These were speech and language, socialisation, daily living skills and behaviour. Durkin *et al* (2009) present a similarly designed study, but this time its focus was young people with specific language impairment. Here the authors recruited 120 young people with specific language impairment in their final year of compulsory education (in the UK), gathered information on educational experiences, and eventually educational attainment outcomes and satisfaction with their education. Other even more specific examples are Meinzen-Derr *et al* (2011) who investigated outcomes for children with cochlear implants.

2.4.3 Attendance-related outcomes

Through the attendance-related literature search, most results were articles to do with student dropout rates. Again, articles range from small scale studies to much larger reviews of national initiatives.

Wagner *et al* (2005) present a comparison of findings on school completion from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) – two US-based longitudinal studies specifically concerned with students with special educational needs (data related to 1987 and 2003). School completion was measured in three ways: dropout, completion of high school and completed high school at an age in line with non-disabled peers. The analysis allowed the demonstration that school completion had improved between 1987 and 2003 and enabled breakdown by different disability groups.

Cobb *et al* (2006) explored the relationship between cognitive-behavioural interventions and therapies and school dropout outcomes among secondary-age youth with disabilities and violent verbal or physical aggression behaviour. The systematic review identified 16 studies intervening with 791 youth with a variety of SEN.

A small scale US-based study conducted by Spencer (2009) examined patterns of attendance and academic performance of urban students identified as truants in grade 8. The author reviewed 42 student records, from school entry through to grade 8, identifying high frequencies of absenteeism and academic performance issues. The author argued that ongoing analysis of attendance data within a school system could help to identify early patterns of absenteeism (that lead to truancy) in upper elementary (junior-primary) and middle school grades (early post-primary). Implicit in this argument is that links with special educational needs can be made through this approach. This assumes that school records are available to provide this information.

2.4.4 Happiness-related outcomes

The papers below on happiness-related outcomes are thin. Of note, however, are a small scale action research article set in a New Zealand school and a study on the differences of perceptions of adolescents with ADHD with learning disabilities and without.

Mears and Stevenson (2006) present an action research project which aimed to develop and increase the social resilience of students with special educational needs in both school and community settings. The small scale study looked at one school in New Zealand. An assessment tool was developed to measure self-esteem among the students which became a learning resource for them.

McNamara *et al* (2005) compared the perceptions of adolescents with learning disabilities (n=230), with co-morbid learning disabilities/ADHD (n= 92), and without learning disabilities or ADHD (n=322) regarding their academic orientation, temperament, well-being, loneliness, parental relationships, victimisation, activities and friendships. The survey was one of the few identified examples of research that used a variety of measures of social well-being.

Some larger scale surveys of pupils with SEN (eg NLTS2) do include measures of well-being and optimism. In addition, the evaluation study carried out by Humphrey and Squires (2011) includes measures of student experiences of bullying and positive relationships.

2.4.5 Independence-related outcomes

Most studies identified were concerned with post-school outcomes, particularly the transition to adulthood for young people with special educational needs. Contrasting methods have been used.

Kaehne and Bayer (2009) report the findings of a survey of teaching professionals on transition to post-statutory education and employment for young people with learning disabilities in the UK. This is an example of exploring outcome measures through professional rather than pupil views. Interviews were conducted with professionals in schools and colleges, in employment support services or in wider roles in local transition partnerships in six local authorities to determine transition arrangements that helped people with learning disabilities consider employment as a next step after school or college.

In contrast, Carroll and Dockrell (2010) looked at young people's outcomes by examining the academic, employment and social outcomes of a cohort of pupils who attended a residential special school in the south-east of England for pupils with specific language impairment (SLI). Sixty participants aged 17 to 22 completed a telephone survey that examined education, work and training, leisure and social life, and views on the future. While this is a small sample from one school, it illustrates a methodology which explores educational outcomes after the young people have left school. Steele *et al* (2005) described a similar design in which 28 high school graduates with disabilities were surveyed to establish their situation (outcomes related to employment, educational experience, leisure/recreational/community activities, and residence with family or not) and reflections on the transition support they had received.

On a much larger scale, Newman *et al* (2009) drew data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Much of the data was derived from either a telephone interview, a self-administered mail survey or reported by parents – if parents felt the young person was unable to respond. Similarly, Wagner *et al* (2007) present findings on expectations related to educational and independence achievements for youth with disabilities (securing a job, holding a driving licence, living independently). Again, the study presents data from the NLTS2. The young people's relative optimism is an interesting outcome measure in itself (and it is contrasted with parental views), but the authors also note '... the longitudinal design of NLTS2 permits the monitoring of progress of youth with disabilities in their future pursuits, as well as an assessment of the extent to which the expectations examined here are realized in the years following high school' (p26).

An alternative design is to survey adults with disabilities and to collect data, when relevant, on educational experience and current situation. Winn (2007) presented an example of this in an analysis of deaf people's employment rates and educational

attainment which was drawn from a larger adult survey in Australia. It was also contrasted with previous cross-sectional surveys of the same population – giving an insight into changes over time. Pavey *et al* (2008) offer a similar analysis taken from a survey of visually impaired adults in Britain. A methodological challenge for this type of survey of adults is that educational experience is generally recorded retrospectively if at all. Should researchers wish to make links with school experience then data must be collected to ensure the relevant disability/special educational need was present when at school (not always the case for some disabilities which may be later-onset for a variety of reasons).

2.4.6 Progress

The general search related to progress generated a relatively rich set of longitudinal studies, eg Cameto *et al* (2004), Newman *et al* (2009) and Wessel *et al* (2009). Most of the literature identified here has overlaps with the other sections described above (eg the US-based NCTS2 and SEELS). Cameto *et al*'s 2004 study, for example, has overlaps with literature within the search on independence as it looks at transition planning for students with disabilities. The report examines what efforts are made to prepare young people with disabilities for the transition from secondary school to adulthood, highlighting the transition planning process started during high school with and for young people with disabilities as they prepare for life after school. One topic covered was parent and teacher perceptions of the suitability and usefulness of the transition planning process. Data were gathered from two sources: parents or guardians of NLTS2 study members, and school staff best able to describe students' overall programmes were surveyed by mail.

Newman *et al* (2009) present findings from the NLTS2 in which much of the data comes from young people with disabilities (responses to either a telephone interview or a self-administered mail survey) or their parents. General population comparison data were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 and 2001 data collection, and from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This report focuses on the subset of young people with disabilities who were out of secondary school aged 17 to 21.

Louie and Ehrlich (2008) had a particular focus on gender gaps in assessment outcomes, so they had a subset of disability in their investigation. This is an example of a report that uses a wide range of data sources – the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP).

The approach adopted by Blatchford *et al* (2011) was a short-term longitudinal study over a school year for seven different age groups, examining various pupil measures at the end of the school year on the amount of support they received. This study particularly looked at the support provided by teaching assistants in a large sample of English schools (primary and secondary school stages; two cohorts; wave 1 focused on pupils in 76 schools in years 1, 3, 7 and 10; wave 2 involved an increased sample of pupils in 77 schools in years 2, 6 and 9). The study design involved purposefully collected data on support and positive approaches to learning (PAL) measures of confidence, motivation

and independence. In addition, this data was combined with system-based data on attainment.

2.5 Discussion and Critical Reflection

2.5.1 Review summary and other factors

The literature review distinguishes between different approaches/research designs and different areas of measurement. Another important distinction relates to the apparent purpose for collecting the data. While all data are collected for some purpose, it is useful to distinguish between purposeful data collection for the given research project and system-based data which may be collected for more general reasons (eg management or accountability) but used by the researchers in a given analysis. National/state accountability records (eg attainment in national tests, attendance records) are an example of system-based data. Depending on national arrangements, they may be collated or aggregated for particular or general special educational needs groups. Some literature is essentially the description of system-based data. For example, Blackorby *et al* (2010) present this on US National Assessments; the DfE (2010) present 'key stage' data for England and Wales. As might be expected, system-based data collection is focused on attainment and attendance-based outcome measures:

- Attainment-related outcomes on a 'core curriculum' – or parts of it, particularly literacy and numeracy – appear to be a strong theme in the literature.
- Attendance-related outcomes, which arguably might also be linked to 'school process engagement' measures, are similarly well represented in the literature. These measures include school exclusion, dropout, high school graduation and attendance.
- Attainment- and attendance-related outcomes are usually collected as part of system-based record keeping, so the relatively common availability and analysis of such data are unsurprising.
- Studies involving students with special educational needs appear to rarely measure student engagement other than 'school process engagement' (related to school attendance and similar).
- Independence-related outcome measures were identified in some literature on employment which was gathered through longitudinal studies and surveys of particular groups. Other independence-related measures identified included: holding a driving licence, living independently, reflections on school and transition beyond school.
- Unsurprisingly, the general concept of 'progress' appears to be most clearly measured in longitudinal studies or methods involving participant tracking. Such studies provide a broad range of measures including attainment, attitudes to education, and longer term outcomes including employment.
- Happiness-related outcome measures (eg self-esteem) were identified in a few studies only.

- Independence- and happiness-related outcome measures were not identified as part of system-based data collection approaches.

2.5.2 Balance of the findings

The approach of this review was to seek evidence of different approaches to measuring educational engagement, progress and outcomes of children with SEN. In order to identify a breadth of outcome types, reflecting the distinction between formal/informal measures made in the project RFT, the four areas of attainment-, attendance-, happiness- and independence-related measures were used as a framework.

As outlined in the previous sub-section, the literature identified has more emphasis on attainment-related measures than other areas. This apparent emphasis/bias requires further consideration – does it reflect the method of the literature search, or the balance of literature which exists?

2.5.2.1 Method

It is of methodological concern that the ERIC search did not identify some national reports, in fact they were not even part of the ERIC database. For example, some UK-based reports of significant national surveys and evaluations which the authors knew of already were not identified DfE (2010). This is probably partly linked to US literature being over-represented in ERIC – in contrast, US-based reports of national surveys were identified. Given the importance of system-based data collection to this project as a whole, and how these systems are specific to given countries/jurisdictions, the country case studies developed later in the report are clearly very important in fulfilling the project's aims. As will be evident in later sections, while country case studies revealed additional literature the dominance of attainment-related measures persisted.

Another feature of the review and search is the sharp focus on system-based data collection. There were several reasons for this:

First, this was linked to the RFT emphasis on how engagement, progress and outcomes were measured within educational *systems* in Ireland and other countries/jurisdictions, and required the research team to construct recommendations for data collection *systems* in Ireland.

Second, this was also linked, with hindsight, to the enormous scope and ambition of the research brief which raised fundamental questions on what educational systems are trying to achieve and what outcomes should a given country value and target.

Third, the role of assessment is key in educational systems. Assessment of learning, including that which has associated qualifications, is crucial to measuring student progress and outcomes. Indeed, the terms measure(ment) and assess(ment) are often used interchangeably in education. The following sections consider assessment and special educational needs in some detail. Through the project the research team have further developed their thinking on assessment, and propose a concept of inclusive assessment (see Discussion).

2.5.2.2 Other literature

The above discussion raises questions on whether other literature exists, particularly on happiness- and independence-related outcome measures and SEN. Examples of literature under different topic/discipline headings are given below. Although the literature has not been systematically searched, the examples presented suggest that some rich strands of research exist. However, this tends to be part of general research agendas, often conducted by academic researchers in universities, rather than as part of a national system-based approach.

- **Well-being and self-esteem.** Fox (2002) presents a review of self-esteem measures and children with physical disabilities. The review noted that while the construct of self-esteem may be useful for examining outcomes for this group – and cited several studies – many measures used in previous studies were biased towards an able-bodied perspective (p1). Other studies carried out among other SEN groups – eg Nalavany *et al* (2011) on dyslexia; Vetter *et al* (2010) on deaf pupils – compared the impact of different mainstream and special settings on self-esteem. Banks *et al* (2012) investigated whether an emotional and behavioural difficulty (EBD) identified by teachers or within certain schools is matched by the child's own performance on an internationally validated emotional and mental health measure (the Piers-Harris). The study used data from the Growing Up in Ireland study (The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland). The Banks *et al* article focuses on identification of students with EBD in Ireland. Nevertheless, the methods adopted show how these data can be used as a source of educational progress and outcomes in the area of well-being.
- **Social participation and friendship.** Wendelborg and Tossebro (2011) explored the experience of relationships with peers among children with SEN aged 11 to 13 in Norway. The approach taken was a survey of parents (n=262) which gathered data on social participation at school and a range of contributing factors. Law *et al* (2006) investigated the engagement and leisure activities among 427 children with complex physical disabilities in Canada. They surveyed families using the Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment (CAPE) measure, although no links were made with school experience.
- **Daily living skills and independence.** Jung-Ae Hur (1997) investigated a range of independence skills outcomes in different educational programmes for children with cerebral palsy in England. Again, this compared different educational settings, and standardised scales of independent behaviour were used.

2.5.3 Special educational needs groups and assessment

Part of the thrust of the proposal in response to the RFT was that different SEN groups have particular requirements in relation to assessing educational engagement, progress and outcomes. To some extent the literature review above revealed that different approaches to research appear to interact with the needs/requirements of different SEN groups. This interaction seems to have an impact on the way outcomes are measured and what outcomes are measured:

- Assessments are changed to include children with SEN – attainment-related measures often need modification if they are to be meaningful and sensitive to the special educational needs groups. This may be in the form of an accommodated or alternative version of the assessment.
- Particular and additional outcomes may be needed to include children with SEN – some studies focus on outcomes relevant to certain SEN groups (eg reading performance for students with reading difficulties). In addition, aspects of the curriculum usually assessed in detail may be particularly important for some special educational needs groups.

Greenen and Ysseldyke (1997, pp.226-227) analysed the contemporary issues on educational standards and students with disabilities, proposing different types of accountability systems in terms of their relative inclusion or exclusion of students with disabilities. The first five are relevant here:

- *Total inclusion:* in which a single assessment method is suitable for all students. (More recently, Lazarus *et al* (2009, p78) referred to this as a universally designed assessment).
- *Partial inclusion:* in which assessment can be modified to include students with disabilities (assessment accommodations).
- *Dual systems:* in which an alternative assessment targets students with disabilities.
- *Multiple systems:* in which a variety of alternative assessments are designed for different student groups (and may be specific to particular special educational needs groups).
- *Total exclusion:* in which assessment does not take place.

Arguably these system types could be applied to measurement generally (irrespective of whether it is being used for accountability purposes). Greenen and Ysseldyke present an early analysis of options available when considering how to 'measure meaningful educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs', and their vocabulary can be considered in relation to more recent distinctions, namely assessment accommodation and alternative assessment:

- **Access/accommodation.** This is linked to partial inclusion and can be understood in relation to the concept of access – the assessment is inclusive so that it is relevant and accessible to children and young people with particular special educational needs, eg it can be accessed by a child who reads Braille, it covers a broad curriculum for children with learning disabilities.
- **Alternative/additional.** This is linked to dual systems and multiple systems. It can be understood by considering methods through which alternative assessments can be developed to ensure that the full range of abilities can be measured. More controversially, perhaps, it can be also understood through the concept of additional curricula, sometimes called alternative curricula. This latter term is specifically avoided in this review as it can be associated with exclusion from a mainstream/core curriculum (eg a child with learning disabilities being denied access to a mainstream curriculum because he or she is not seen as capable). Here the interest is in the

teaching of specific and atypical skills which are seen as important (eg mobility for children with visual impairment, social skills to children with autism, independent-living skills for children with learning difficulties), and as such may warrant particular assessment and monitoring. This review distinguishes between:

- *Alternative assessment of the core curriculum* – alternative arrangements are made to assess areas of the core curriculum. An example in England would be use of the P Levels for children with learning difficulties to assess progress on national curriculum subject areas.
- *Assessment of additional curriculum areas* – particular methods to assess additional curriculum areas (ie areas considered to require additional learning opportunities for a certain disability group). These areas will have relevance to particular disability groups and include for example, mobility, social, communication and independent living skills.
- **Exemption.** This is linked to Greenen and Ysseldyke's (1997) total exclusion category. Within this, students may be exempt from some assessments.

2.5.4 Assessment accommodations

Formal assessment of children through examinations and assessment is a central feature of most education systems. However, standard assessment formats and procedures can present barriers to pupils with special educational needs, which means they may not be able to demonstrate their abilities under normal assessment conditions (eg Hopper, 2001; Lazarus *et al* 2009). Standard assessment arrangements that incorporate accommodations for children with special educational needs have been found to be important in reducing potential barriers to access. As reported by Lazarus *et al* (2009) on practice in the US, accommodations policies affect how students with disabilities are included in large-scale assessments. They draw on information collected by the National Center on Educational Outcomes to analyse how accommodations policies changed between 1993 and 2005, reporting that whereas in the 1990s these policies often sought to 'level the playing field for students with disabilities', more recently, ensuring that the accommodations permit valid measurement of test constructs is more emphasised. They report that accommodations involving use of technology as well as extended time are generally better accepted now. They note, however, that there continues to be no consensus across states about how particular accommodations should be included in the policies (eg use of a calculator, spell-checker, read-aloud questions and sign-interpreted questions). They go on to suggest that states should consider the creation of 'high-quality, universally designed assessments' (p67) that reduce the need for accommodations.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England (2007) present a briefing document describing assessment accommodation arrangements in 25 different countries. This document was based on research using international networks and relevant literature. Its main focus is on assessment of students in secondary education with disabilities but with reference also to dyslexia and primary education where

relevant. The accommodations are considered in relation to a typology of assessment accommodations outlined by Hopper (2001) for disabled students, namely:

- **Presentation accommodations** – changes made to the presentation of the test or test directions such as large print versions, Braille versions, sign language translations or reading aloud.
- **Response accommodations** – changes made to how students respond to a test question or prompt, such as allowing a student to indicate an answer by pointing or gesturing, using a scribe to record written answers or using technological recording methods.
- **Setting accommodations** – changes to the testing environment or location, such as administering the test in small groups, individually, or even at a student's home.
- **Scheduling accommodations** – described as changes in the timing or scheduling of testing, such as extending the length of given time for the test to be completed and allowing breaks in testing.

Of note, QCA (2007) found that while there was 'some variation in the types of disabilities for which assessment arrangements can be changed, and some variation in the types of assessment arrangements that are permitted or encouraged in relation to disabilities' (p8), it was possible 'to assign almost all of the various assessment arrangements for disabled students in each of the countries to this typology of accommodations' (p13). All 25 countries made presentation accommodations, most made response or scheduling accommodations, while setting accommodations were less apparent.

On assessment exemptions, the QCA briefing paper reports that disabled students are permitted exemption in certain countries including Germany, Greece and Latvia. In Australia (Queensland), exemption is permitted only if there is 'enough alternative evidence of students' assessment' (QCA, 2007, p11) – which links with the next section. In Greece, students with visual impairment, a physical disability or dyslexia may take oral examinations, while those with hearing and speech impairments take only written examinations. Further, in Finland and Lithuania, hearing impaired students are exempt from exams that involve listening comprehension. Notably, in Lithuania it is reported that students can be exempted from some areas of a marking scheme. For example, when assessing scripts of students with hearing impairment, confusion between some letter pairs (eg p and b) is not counted as an error.

The US provides a contrasting example because the No Child Left Behind and Individual with Disabilities Education Act legislation requires that all students, including those with special educational needs, should be included in state assessment and accountability systems (eg Lazarus *et al*, 2009). Therefore, exemption is not possible and students either take part in the unmodified assessment, an accommodated version of it, or an alternative assessment.

QCA (2007) breaks down the varied approaches to accommodation taken in different countries. Lazarus *et al* (2009) provide a detailed analysis of how the available accommodations have changed across the different states in the US between 1993

and 2005, which coincided with a period of great change as No Child Left Behind and Individual with Disabilities Education Act legislation took effect. Space and remit do not allow us to describe this literature in detail, but some relevant points are:

- Different special educational needs groups have specific requirements.
- The extent to which accommodations are available for assessments is likely to vary from country to country. QCA (2007) suggested that most countries have accommodations policies, or certainly practice, but details of their application is less clear. In England and the US accommodations are available for assessments which lead to student accreditation (eg GCSEs in England), and are also available for non-accredited national assessments (eg SATs in England and National Assessments in the US).
- The previous point is linked to exemptions from assessment. The QCA briefing paper reports that exemptions for disabled students are permitted in certain countries. Nevertheless, they are context dependent – students (and their parents and teachers) may be reluctant to be exempt if it means exclusion from receiving accreditation as in high stakes assessments such as GCSEs. But it may be seen more positively if the student is exempt from taking tests which are not high stakes, at least from the student's viewpoint. Nevertheless, such exemption has an impact on the meaningfulness and representativeness of national assessments, especially for students with special educational needs. In the US exemption is not allowed, so arguably there this problem is overcome.

2.5.5 Alternative assessment of the curriculum

The concept of alternative assessment, a term used interchangeably in the literature with alternate assessment, seems closely related to countries specifically concerned with monitoring all children within the education system against particular standard assessments. Countries particularly concerned with this standards-based reform approach in recent years are the US, England and Wales. Given that it involves assessing against standards which children of a certain age might be expected to achieve, this presents challenges for the meaningful assessment of young people, for whatever reason, performing below these standards hence the need for alternative assessments.

Cameto *et al* (2009) report on the US-based National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA) which was required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). Specifically, the law called for a 'Study on Ensuring Accountability for Students Who Are Held to Alternative Achievement Standards'. Quoting IDEA, Cameto *et al* described an alternate achievement standard as 'an expectation of performance that differs in complexity from a grade-level achievement standard' (pp2-3). This ties into the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) agenda: 'NCLB required states, beginning in 2005-06, to administer assessments in reading/language arts and in mathematics in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12. Although states were required to develop achievement standards in science by 2005-06, assessments in science were not required to be administered until 2007-08' (p3).

Lowrey *et al* (2007) report that NCLB is 'the driving force behind alternate assessment' in the US (p245) which they define as 'an assessment tool for students with disabilities that is used in place of the statewide assessment' (p245). In considering the use of this approach, they note that most of these students need an alternate assessment:

... because of their inability to respond to the format and content of the statewide assessment. That is, the required response mode, context, and content of the statewide assessment may be too challenging or may be inappropriate for students with severe disabilities. Alternate assessment allows for different modes of responding, a different context of assessment, and different content that is still linked to statewide standards. (p245)

Similarly, the performance or P scales were introduced in 1998 to enable schools in England to measure attainment and progress of children whose attainment levels could not be recorded through English National Curriculum scales (Ndaji & Tymms, 2009). The P scales are a set of descriptions used in schools for recording the achievement of pupils with special educational needs who are working towards the first level of the National Curriculum. They provide best-fit level descriptors on a scale of P1 to P8. Level P8 leads into National Curriculum level 1. The P scales are described as having uses in mainstream and special schools including summative assessment, tracking individual pupil progress and providing information for school managers setting targets (QCA, 2009a). This is discussed further in the England country case study.

2.5.6 Assessment of additional curriculum

As highlighted in the literature review, national system-based data collection commonly focuses on attainment-related outcomes regarding specific parts of the curriculum (especially literacy and numeracy). Although this will be explored in further detail later, evidence shows that countries which carry out national assessment as part of a standards-based reform approach (eg England and the US) place particular attention on the assessment of specific aspects of the curriculum – literacy, numeracy and science. The same is true for international assessments such as those carried out as part of PISA. Ireland also has existing and planned national assessments – again these are focused around narrow aspects of the curriculum relating to maths and literacy.

As considered above, additional curriculum is a broad term used to define curriculum areas of relevance to particular disability or SEN groups. It is difficult to pin down because different countries may have differing definitions of what constitutes a common educational curriculum. Therefore the additional curriculum is context dependent: in England it may be that which is beyond the National Curriculum; in the US it may be that which is beyond the core curriculum).

Therefore, this section seeks to identify curriculum of particular relevance to children with SEN and therefore worthy of assessment. Additional curriculum is used in the field of visual impairment education to include areas which would not typically be taught as part of the National Curriculum in England: mobility skills, independent-living skills, access technology skills (eg Douglas *et al*, 2009). While the term does not appear to be used specifically for other SEN groups, there is literature that alludes to it. As an example,

Lowrey *et al* (2007) highlight a concern about the use of alternative assessments for students with severe learning disabilities at the expense of other 'meaningful targets' noting that,

... under NCLB [No Child Left Behind], teachers are currently accountable only for core content areas; however, IDEIA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act] also requires a vision and plan for adult outcomes that are functional. A curriculum assessment must be established that incorporates both the general curriculum standards paired with individualized, meaningful targets that will improve a student's quality of life after leaving the public school system (p251).

In effect, they are referring to a need to consider areas that relate to functional life skills beyond the core curriculum. This sentiment is in keeping with US conceptions of visual impairment education where the term expanded core curriculum (eg Koenig & Holbrook, 2000) is used in much the same way, and with reference to similar curriculum areas, as additional curriculum is used in England (and the rest of the UK).

It is noted previously that these additional curriculum areas may be particular to different special educational needs groups. Illustrative examples for a number of such groups, mainly drawing on practice in the UK and Ireland, are provided below.

- **Specific speech and language disorders (SSLD).** There is a consensus in the literature that standardised tests are the main pillar of clinical diagnosis and ongoing assessment in SSLD (Schwartz, 2009; Oetting & Hadley, 2009; Hasson & Botting, 2010) with these tests used to assess children's knowledge of syntax, morphosyntax, semantics and phonology (Schwartz, 2009; Oetting & Hadley, 2009; Hasson & Botting, 2010).
- **Hearing impairment.** Generally agreed areas for assessment are communication and language skills (in spoken language and sign language, including speech intelligibility); reading and writing; functional hearing ability, and personal social functioning, including social inclusion (eg Archbold, 2010; Marschark & Spencer, 2009; NatSIP, 2010; Powers, 1996).
- **Visual impairment.** Additional curriculum areas identified in the literature include: mobility and independence; independent living skills; social development; Braille proficiency; functional vision; use of assistive technology (eg Douglas *et al* 2009).
- **Autism.** Assessment should include the following to capture the needs of children on the autism spectrum: communication (eg joint attention and symbol use); generalisation of learning; sensory processing, and the 'spiky' development of children on the autism spectrum in which children display high levels of skill or functioning in one area, while these are often not matched in other areas (eg Jones *et al*, 2008; Jordan & Jones, 1999; Whetherby *et al*, 2004).
- **Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).** Assessment of an affective curriculum including: personal and social development; managing relationships with others in the classroom or during wider activities in and around the school; links with community and employers; vocational learning (eg Elton Report,

DES, 1989). More recently, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme as part of the Achievement for All (AfA) initiative in England (see eg Humphrey & Squire, 2010) identified specific areas to be developed among young people with SEBD, including: developing positive relationships with others; increasing participation in extended services provision; including extra-curricular activities.

- **Learning disabilities.** Authors have argued for a greater focus on functional outcomes (Lowrey *et al*, 2007) and specialist curriculum areas (Aird & Aird, 2006; Imray *et al*, 2010). For pupils with the most profound learning difficulties these specific curriculum areas might include: early thinking skills, early communication, physical and life skills. ASDAN (<http://www.asdan.org.uk/>) has devised a set of qualifications specifically for young people with learning difficulties and many other awarding bodies offer curriculum and assessment at a level where all pupils can succeed.
- **Physical disability.** A key thrust of literature on pupils with physical disabilities is linked to curriculum access rather than additional curriculum areas per se (Farrell, 2012). Nevertheless, teaching on specialist equipment to engage fully in certain subjects is common (Best *et al*, 2010). They may also need more time to carry out particular learning activities and will benefit from sensitive timetabling that enables therapeutic interventions such as physiotherapy, and personal care needs to be integrated into the school day. Pupils with dyspraxia benefit from interventions on motor learning and access to the curriculum (Henderson, Sugden & Barnett, 2007). During the past decade a plethora of motor skills development programmes have been introduced to schools (eg Drew, 2006) to help pupils catch up with their peers in motor learning, and to gain associated learning benefits like improved handwriting.

These examples present a strong case for the importance of conceptualising curriculum assessment in special educational needs as being broader than just areas of a core curriculum, however defined. Importantly, an educational system concerned with how well children with SEN are doing would, logically, be interested in careful assessment and monitoring of engagement, outcomes and progress relating to aspects of the curriculum which fall beyond those things typically recorded in national assessments.

2.5.7 Summary and framework for country case studies

Emerging from the initial literature analysis is a framework for considering approaches to measuring educational engagement, progress and outcomes of children with SEN. The first part of the framework is methodological – what is measured and how it is measured. The literature reviewed suggests that measures can be usefully split between engagement, attainment-related outcomes, attendance-related outcomes, independence-related outcomes and happiness-related outcome measures. Progress is measured by observing changes in these measures over time. There are various approaches to the collection of such data however; some countries have relatively sophisticated system-based mechanisms involving data collection for more general

reasons (eg management or accountability). Analysis of systems in different countries reveals the relative strengths and weaknesses of such approaches.

The second part of the framework is in relation to assessment and how it includes children with SEN. Three techniques are highlighted which can better include this group in assessment – accommodation (linked to access), alternative (linked to breadth) and additional (linked to relevance).

This framework is used to analyse approaches adopted in different countries in section 3.

3 Country Case Studies

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Selection of countries

The request for tenders (RFT) for this work specified that up to six country case studies were needed to support the research. Previous phases of the project had also generated literature which led the research team to make suggestions to the NCSE and seek advice from the project advisory group. All the chosen countries take part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The following countries, with rationale, were agreed:

Table 3. Rationale for choice of country case study

Target country/ jurisdiction	Rationale
Australia	Undergoing educational reform at the time of the study. English speaking.
England	High-assessment culture, including large amount of high stakes national testing (SATs, GCSE). In addition an interest in a range of other national indicators beyond attainment through Every Child Matters agenda. English speaking, local.
Finland	A large literature base and interest in Finnish education system. Often regarded as a successful and inclusive education system which has traditionally performed very well in PISA. Similar population size to Ireland.
Scotland	Contrast with England (less assessment), but with some similarities. Undergoing educational reform at the time of the study. Population and population distribution have some similarities to Ireland. English speaking, local.
US	The US offers an interesting general case because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) agenda which emphasises accountability and high stakes testing. Nevertheless, through the requirements of NCLB and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children with special educational needs are included in these assessments (or accommodated/alternate versions). The US provides a large amount of literature. English speaking.

The US has a decentralised education system and the research team anticipated that different states would have different approaches to NCLB and including children with SEN. The states of California, New Jersey and Arizona, explored in detail, differed in their implementation of federal requirements (most notably in their assessment procedures) and internal reports to the project advisory group presented additional analyses at a state level. The research revealed, however, that these states shared a significant literature base and this forms the thrust of the case study presented in this report.

3.1.2 Framework for case studies

Previous phases of the research provided a framework for organising the country case studies as follows:

- Context
- Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils
 - National/state accountability records (including attainment data and SEN disaggregation)
 - National general surveys/census
 - Other relevant literature
- Assessment approaches
 - Assessment accommodations
 - Alternative assessment of the curriculum
 - Assessment of additional curriculum

The structure was arranged on an electronic form for individual researchers to complete, accompanied by additional notes and term definitions as reminders – the broad structure had been identified in a previous project report so research team members were broadly familiar with these. The team met and discussed the framework and countries were assigned to pairs of researchers. They drafted case studies and iterations were passed between the principal investigator and researchers. Finally, key points of the case studies were identified and presented at the beginning of each.

Data were gathered from various sources, but most notably internet-based policy documents, research and administrative reports often carried out by government departments or government funded, academic literature (in general policy oriented) as well as telephone and email enquiries with relevant contacts. Available project resources limited travel, although a team member did gather data while visiting Arizona on an unrelated study visit.

Each case study author was encouraged to seek data on all aspects of the framework. Inevitably different countries generated different volumes of data, avenues of interest and dead-ends – and the case studies reflect this.

Table 4. Ireland education year group labels and equivalents for Australia, England, Finland, Scotland and the US

Age	Ireland	Australia	England	Finland	Scotland	US
4+	Junior infant	Pre-school	Reception (Foundation)	Pre-school	Pre-school (Early)	Pre-school
5+	Senior infant	Kindergarten	Year 1 – Key Stage 1 (Primary)	Pre-school	Primary 1	Kindergarten (Primary/ elementary school)
6+	First class	Year 1	Year 2	Pre-school	Primary 2 (First)	1st Grade
7+	Second class	Year 2	Year 3 – Key Stage 2	Grade 1 (Comprehensive sch.)	Primary 3	2nd Grade
8+	Third class	Year 3	Year 4	Grade 2	Primary 4	3rd Grade
9+	Fourth class	Year 4	Year 5	Grade 3	Primary 5 (Second)	4th Grade
10+	Fifth class	Year 5	Year 6	Grade 4	Primary 6	5th Grade
11+	Sixth class	Year 6	Y7 – Key Stage 3 (Secondary)	Grade 5	Primary 7	6th Grade (Secondary: Junior high school)
12+	First year (secondary school, junior cycle)	Year 7	Y8	Grade 6	S1/First Year (Third)	7th Grade
13+	Second year	Year 8	Y9	Grade 7	S2	8th Grade
14+	Third year	Year 9	Y10 – Key Stage 4	Grade 8	S3	9th Grade (Secondary: High school)
15+	Transition year	Year 10	Y11	Grade 9 (plus Grade 10 as required)	S4 (Fourth)	10th Grade
16+	Fifth year (senior cycle)	Year 11	Y12 – Key Stage 5 (non-compulsory)	1 (Upper secondary or vocational school)	S5 (Senior)	11th Grade
17+	Sixth year	Year 12	Y13	2	S6	12th Grade

Table 5. Summary of SEN terms for case study countries (and Ireland), % of school age population identified as having SEN, and % of school age population in special school/segregated provision

Country (and approximate school age population)	SEN term used	% school age population identified as SEN	% school age population in special school/segregated provision	Notes/Sources
Ireland (0.6 million)	Special educational need (SEN)	5.2% ¹	0.8% ² 0.4% ³	1. Based on children with formal diagnosis of SEN. Does not include primary school pupils with high incidence SEN with no formal diagnosis but who may receive support under the General Allocation Model (GAM). Recent prevalence data suggest that up to 25% of young people may have SEN as defined by the EPSEN Act (2004) – Banks and McCoy (2011). 2. Special schools. 3. Special classes in mainstream schools. <i>Source: EADSNE (2010).</i>
Australia (3.4 million)	SEN is a broader term, which includes students with disabilities	4.6% ¹	0.4% ²	1. Based on all students with reported disabilities in school. However, based on definition used in Australian Disability Discrimination Act, an estimated additional 10 to 15% of school students have disabilities. 2. Students aged five to 14 attending special schools. <i>Source: The students with disability working group (2010).</i>
England (8.0 million)	Special educational need (SEN); special educational need and disability (SEND)	20.6% ¹ 2.8% ²	1.3% ³	1. Based on all children with SEN (with and without a statement of SEN). 2. Based on all children with a statement of SEN (more severe). 3. Based on placement of children with SEN (with and without statement). Most of the 1.3% attend special schools, but also pupil referral units. An approximate additional 0.2% attend schools with a resource base in a mainstream school. <i>Source: DfE (2011a).</i>
Finland (0.5 million)	Special educational need (SEN)	8.3% ¹ 31.4% ²	1.2% ³ 2.7% ⁴	1. Based on children with official full-time special education support. 2. Based on children with official full-time (8.3%) and part-time special education support (23.1%). 3. Special schools. 4. Special classes in mainstream schools. <i>Source: EADSNE (2010).</i>
Scotland (0.6 million)	Additional support needs (ASN), including disabled children and young people	7.0% ¹ 10.0% ²	1.0% ³	1. Based on children with ASN. <i>Source: EADSNE (2010)</i> 2. Based on children with ASN. <i>Source: Doran (2010)</i> 3. Special schools. An approximate additional 0.2% attend schools with a resource base in a mainstream school. <i>Source: EADSNE (2010).</i>
US (49.1 million)	Disability	13.2% ¹	0.4% ² 7.7% ³ 2.9% ⁴ 1.9% ⁵	1. Based on all students with disabilities (2008). 2. Separate schools for pupils with disabilities (public and private). 3. Regular school (less than 21% of time outside general class). 4. Regular school (between 21% and 60% of time outside general class). 5. Regular school (more than 60% of time outside general class). <i>Source: NCES (2011b).</i>

3.2 Australia

3.2.1 Key points

- Traditionally, assessment of student progress and outcomes has been state- and school-based.
- Recent developments have led to increased federal centralisation around four national curriculum framework areas (English, maths, science and history) and the setting up of the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2009 to monitor and report.
- The National Assessment Programme for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) – an annual assessment of all students aged eight, ten, 12, and 14 – has taken place since 2008. Data are presented thus: national collation of assessment data; school-based data (publicly available); and individual student reports to parents. ACARA now conducts NAPLAN.
- Limited breakdown of data appears to be available in relation to SEN.
- Assessment accommodation enables many students with SEN to be included in national and state assessment programmes.
- There appear to be no alternative assessments to include students who are below the minimum standards for the standard assessments (eg those with severe learning disabilities). Current developments may change this.
- The research team found no examples of system-based measurement of educational progress and outcomes in happiness and independence for children with special educational needs.
- Even so, Australia has some national surveys that provide data on progress and outcomes for this group (eg educational engagement, employment). However, most surveys appear to use different less detailed definitions of disability than those used in the education system so links between education and measured outcomes are ambiguous.

3.2.2 Context

3.2.2.1 Education system overview

In Australia education is a devolved issue and is mainly the responsibility of the six individual states and two territories (henceforth collectively referred to as states). Therefore, until recently policies and data collection have varied from state to state, including curriculum frameworks and national examinations. However, the national government recently announced an Educational Reform Agenda to improve schooling quality. This includes a significant increase in funding to schools and greater transparency in school performance data, reporting and assessment, and a move to more national frameworks for curriculum and assessment, with the development of a national curriculum, a national assessment programme and an Australian Certificate of Education (DEEWR, 2011).

With the absence of a strong centralised system, decisions have been made at local level including individual classroom level; an apparent consequence is the lack of literature on alternative and adapted curriculum and assessment (Cumming & Maxwell, 2004). It seems likely that such alternative and adapted arrangements have been made in the past; however, little was written about them until the recent emergence of national curriculum frameworks and assessments.

A range of terms is used in Australia to refer to students with learning difficulties, but the most common one seems to be disability. A recent major government document on school testing had over 50 uses of the term disability, about ten uses of special educational needs and a few uses of the term special needs (ACARA, 2010a). In New South Wales (NSW) the term special learning needs refers to children with learning difficulties, a behaviour disorder or a disability. Disability includes intellectual and/or physical disability, vision and/or hearing impairment, language disorder, mental health conditions and autism (NSW Public Schools, 2011). According to the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) disability is defined broadly and refers to 'the person learning differently' as well as more traditional medical and health-based definitions.

3.2.2.2 Identification of, and provision for, children with special educational needs

The different states have similar ways to identify and provide for children with SEN. For example, in NSW identification of disability or learning difficulty can occur at any age. For children with a disability this needs to be assessed and confirmed using disability criteria through the school counselling service.

Descriptive categories in NSW have changed over the years and this appears to have been at least partly driven by funding considerations (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). In 1996 eight categories were eligible for support: intellectual and physical disability; vision and hearing impairment; behaviour and conduct disorder; emotional disturbance and learning disabilities including reading language disorder. In 2004 children with learning disabilities were removed and were supported through a new funding mechanism. In 2009 just five categories of disability were used: intellectual and physical disability; vision and hearing impairment; psychological disability/mental health – including emotional disturbance, behaviour disorder and autism).

Currently the range of educational provision for students with a disability or learning difficulty comprises regular classes, support classes in regular schools and special schools. Those in regular classes are supported by itinerant support teachers.

In October 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set up a new national education authority to bring together, for the first time, the functions of curriculum, assessment and reporting at national level. In 2009 the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established to improve the quality and consistency of school education through a national curriculum, national assessment, data collection and performance reporting. ACARA led on the development of a national curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 and set a timetable in three phases (ACARA, 2011a), the first starting in 2011 and focusing on English, mathematics, science and history.

ACARA is tasked to provide clear statements on the expected curriculum content in subject areas and achievement standards for students. It has set up the Equity and Diversity Advisory Group, representing the interests of various groups including students with disabilities, to advise on the development and preparation of curriculum and assessment materials. Since 2011, ACARA has been developing additional curriculum content and achievement standards for students with disabilities, but as yet there is no published information.

3.2.3 Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils

3.2.3.1 National/state accountability records

NAPLAN (National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy)

Universal national testing began relatively late in Australia (see ACARA, 2011b). Before the introduction of NAPLAN, each state and territory had conducted its own numeracy and literacy testing for primary and secondary school students, for example the Basic Skills Tests in New South Wales which began in 1989. In July 2003, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) decided to improve the comparability and diagnostic potential of national literacy and numeracy data through the development of common national tests. The first NAPLAN tests (overseen by MCEETYA, and since overseen by ACARA) were conducted in May 2008 for all Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students (ages eight, ten, 12 and 14) in government and nongovernment schools. For the first time all students in the same year level were assessed on the same test items in the four domains of reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. NAPLAN tests aim to provide the main measure of individual student progress in basic skills and the main measure of programme effectiveness to indicate which areas need to be prioritised for improvement; it is also intended that the tests will be aligned with the Australian Curriculum once this has been substantially implemented in schools after 2013. NAPLAN tests appear to be the best available, nationally comparable student outcome measures and the best measures for the comparative performance of schools.

For each of the assessed aspects of literacy and numeracy there is a single continuous scale of student achievement across ten national achievement bands spanning Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Test scores are such that all students are located on a single national scale with scores that range from 0 to 1000. The use of a common scale for each assessed aspect allows student achievement to be monitored and reported throughout a student's years of schooling. An equating process is undertaken each year to ensure results can be compared so that any given scaled score represents the same level of achievement over time. For example, a score of 700 in reading will have the same meaning in 2012 as it had in 2008.

Individual student test results are sent to parents using a pro forma standard across Australia which shows their results against the national average and the middle 60 per cent of students nationally. The scales allow parents to monitor progress across the

years. Teachers use results to help them identify students who require additional support including those performing below national minimum standards.

In national reporting ACARA's stated policy is to report the whole distribution of student performance and not to focus only on the mean or only on the proportion whose performance lies below the minimum acceptable level for their year level. A contrast is drawn with those countries where the focus is on the proportions above or below a particular level which it is argued encourages schools to focus on students close to that level and can cause schools to pay less attention to both high and very low performing students (see discussion on unintended consequences of testing elsewhere in the final section).

The report of the national analysis of NAPLAN results is released to the public in two stages. The first stage summary report, released in September before reports are sent to parents, shows participation rates (calculated as all assessed and exempt students) and results at each year level and domain by state and nationally (by percentage below, at and above the national minimum standard level). Students can be exempt from NAPLAN if they have insufficient English language proficiency or if, following consultation between school principal and parent/carer, they are judged to have a significant intellectual disability that inhibits their access to tests even after adjustment. These students are deemed not to have met the minimum standards. Also shown is whether achievement for the state on each scale is significantly higher, lower or no different from the previous year. The second-stage full national report, published a year later, includes detailed results by gender, indigenous status, language background other than English status, parental occupation, parental education and location (metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote) at each year level and for each domain of the test. Special educational need or disability is not included in this disaggregation.

Additionally, considerable detail on student results for individual schools is provided on the *My School* website (www.myschool.edu.au) launched in 2010. It provides profiles on almost 10,000 schools. It gives contextualised information as well as NAPLAN results and allows parents and others to track the performance of a school over time. It is intended that schools use the data to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching programmes and to set goals in literacy and numeracy. School systems and governments use results to review programmes and support offered to schools. Individual school results are displayed against results for statistically similar schools – those where students are from statistically similar backgrounds in terms of parents' socio-educational backgrounds, whether the school is remote, the proportion of indigenous students, the proportion of students from a language background other than English – and all Australian schools, indicating whether the selected school's results are substantially above, above, close to, below or substantially below the other scores.

The *My School* website has four key elements for each school, each with a dedicated webpage which are:

- School profile – an overview of key information as well as comparative data on average results for NAPLAN tests over the most recent two years.

- Results in bands – detailed analysis of the collective results of students in bands. It details where the range of student achievement lies in a school in comparison with the information on the homepage.
- Statistically similar schools – average NAPLAN scores of the selected school compared with those of up to 60 statistically similar schools, displayed in alphabetical order.
- Local schools – a list of up to 20 schools closest geographically to the school selected.

While the *My School* website breaks down given school statistics and is an impressive technical achievement, its relevance is limited for this report as its information on special education is restricted. This is because no disaggregation is presented for students with special educational needs in terms of numbers of students or outcome/progress measures. While special schools are described within the schools profile, no outcome/progress measures are presented because most/all students were exempt from NAPLAN's assessments.

Other

In subjects other than literacy and numeracy, national testing to monitor academic standards is conducted on samples of students rather than the whole population.

The National Assessment Programme (NAP) Sample Assessment started in 2003 and provides a sample-based assessment of the academic progress of children and young people from across Australia. Every three years samples of Year 6 and Year 10 students are tested in either science literacy (Year 6 only), civics and citizenship, or information and communications technology (ICT) literacy. Sampling takes place at school level and all eligible pupils are included with the following exceptions:

- the student can be withdrawn from the assessment at the request of parents/ caregivers, or
- granted exemption because of disability, unfamiliarity with the English language or special circumstances.

To maximise participation in the NAP Sample Assessment special provisions and considerations are available to students with a language background other than English or disability and have been selected to participate. The sample selection method gives warning of provisions necessary for individual participants in the test and guidelines state that students requiring reasonable special provisions must be catered for during testing.

Individual student reports are not provided for NAP Sample Assessment participants; however, participating schools receive reports summarising student results. A national public report and a technical report are released. They contain no breakdown by special educational needs.

The Australian Certificate in Education (ACE) is a new national secondary school certificate which will be replacing the state certificates after the introduction of the new Australian National Curriculum. The current state certificates include the New South

Wales Higher School Certificate (HSC), the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Western Australia Certificate of Education (WACE). Some schools in the past (it is not known if this continues) chose to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma in Education. Publicly available data on these attainment-based outcomes seem limited – while different state examination boards appear to present some data on grade distribution and some breakdown by pupil characteristics (eg gender), there appears to be no presentation of data on special educational needs.

3.2.3.2 National general surveys/census

The National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) is an annual national census of all Australian schools, including special schools. It gathers data on the number, age, sex, year/level, category of school, apparent retention rate and participation rates of students at state and national levels, as well as information on school staffing. The research paper, *Deriving Measures of Engagement in Secondary Education from the National Schools Statistics Collection in 2006*, raised questions about the accuracy of retention rates measures (Rossiter & Duncan, 2006). Also, we found no evidence that the data could be disaggregated at student level, and therefore analysis of pupils with special educational needs appears not to be possible.

As with many countries, Australia conducts surveys which may be relevant here. However, it appears to have no data collection strategy which links pupil-based data, such as that collected through NAPLAN, and other data sources. Two significant surveys provide the potential for analysis as they collect attainment and attendance-related data and data on employment (*Survey of Education and Training* and the *Student Outcomes Survey*). These have a variable on disability, which does not align with school data/definitions and therefore is of limited use. Linked to this, significant data are collected through the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC). This survey provides national population data on disability gathered from households and cared accommodation such as hospitals, nursing homes and hostels. Proxy interviews are conducted for all children under 15 identified as having a disability and for children aged 15 to 17 identified as having a disability and whose parents do not permit them to be personally interviewed (AIHW, 2004).

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) track young people as they move from school into further study, work and other destinations (<http://www.lsay.edu.au/index.html>). It uses large, nationally representative samples of young people to collect information on education and training, work and social development. Survey participants (collectively known as a cohort) enter the study when they turn 15. Individuals are contacted once a year for ten years. LSAY aims to provide information to help better understand young people and their transitions from school to post-school destinations, as well as exploring social outcomes such as well-being. Information collected covers a wide range of school and post-school topics including student achievement, engagement with school, aspirations, school retention, social background, attitudes to school, work experiences and what students are doing when they leave school. Since 2003, participants have been selected from those who participate in PISA. This close link with PISA means the proportions of young participants

in LSAY will be representative of those in PISA. As noted previously, PISA does not include all young people with SEN in its current form.

3.2.4 Inclusion of children with SEN in assessment approaches

NAPLAN, NAP and state examinations all have assessment accommodations (known as special provisions) in place to include children with SEN and a summary of procedures in Australia was included in the QCA (2007) review described elsewhere in this report.

Taking NAPLAN to illustrate, students with disabilities can apply for special provisions which are meant to reflect the support normally provided in the classroom. A formal exemption can be granted for students with severe or complex disabilities; however, this is not automatic and signed parental consent forms are required for any exemption. Therefore, a decision to withdraw a student from the tests is the responsibility of the parent and not the school so parents can choose whether their child participates.

State Test Administration Authorities (TAAs) are responsible for the implementation and administration of the NAPLAN tests in their jurisdictions including the administration of special provisions to assist eligible students with particular needs to participate in testing. ACARA has nationally agreed protocols for the administration of NAPLAN testing that are used by all TAAs (ACARA, 2010b). These protocols necessarily draw on the *Disability Standards for Education* (Australian Government, 2006) which set out the rights of students with disabilities on education and the obligations of school education providers under the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992). The standards set out a process whereby education providers can meet this obligation which includes a requirement to make reasonable adjustments (accommodations) where necessary to ensure the maximum participation of students with disabilities – including participation in assessment.

Students who qualify for exemption and do not submit a test attempted under test conditions are considered as assessed students and are counted in the below minimum standard calculations for reporting purposes. The text that appears on the individual student test reports for which they are exempted reads: 'Your child was exempt from this test and is considered not to have achieved the national minimum standard.' Where a student is exempted from all tests it is recommended that an individual student report not be issued. Therefore there appears to be no alternative assessment for these students and limited literature has been found. This is perhaps not surprising given that curriculum and assessment practices until very recently were decided locally, including within the individual classroom (Cumming & Maxwell, 2004). Nevertheless, during 2011 a draft curriculum for students with disabilities who are progressing to the foundation level of achievement was being developed. The consultation process refers to progression through four phases: from a pre-intentional or awareness level (responsive) of learning and communication; to early symbolic (exploratory); and symbolic approaches (active); to those with increasing independence (purposeful). The construction of this broader curriculum may lead to a nationally agreed approach to assessment (akin to the P scales in England and Wales).

It is unclear if this development will be just on extending the achievement standards of the existing curriculum only, or whether assessment of an additional curriculum will be introduced. It seems, therefore, there is no system-based collection of these data and evidence is limited to survey-based studies and individual research studies.

3.3 England

3.3.1 Key points

- A key feature of the approach taken in England is linked to standards-based education – the specification of a national curriculum and the assessment of most children's progress on national tests.
- All local authority schools, including special schools, must deliver the national curriculum which should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different paces and styles of learning. Pupils are awarded a level of attainment to show progress in particular subject areas.
- A series of preparatory levels, known as performance or P scales, monitors progress at the foundation level of the national curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Performance tables, compiled and published since 1997, contain statistics on student test and examination results for each school. All subjects are assessed through teacher assessments with progress reported to parents every year.
- Most pupils are included in assessment tasks and tests at the end of each key stage (ie age seven, 11, 14, 16) with accommodated and alternative versions of these provided to increase inclusion in the assessment.
- Data on student characteristics, including details on SEN), school characteristics, attainment and attendance are collated within the National Pupil Database (NPD). Analysis of this data allows disaggregation of pupils with SEN and there is a legal requirement that the government presents data on the progress and outcomes of this group each year.
- The NPD provides a flexible mechanism for combining a range of datasets gathered from different sources (eg surveys and evaluations). Examples of studies have included measurement of educational progress and outcomes in happiness and independence which have made use of the NPD.
- Limited system-based data is gathered on an additional or wider curriculum for children with SEN.
- The standards-based agenda has been characterised as seeking to raise standards through a focus on narrow outcomes of academic attainment. Some authors have highlighted the detrimental impact this might have on the education of children with SEN.

3.3.2 Context

England is described as having a ‘highly regulated system of curriculum and assessment, with the government responsible for almost every aspect of schooling’ (Isaacs, 2010, p315). Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states:

- The parent of every child of compulsory school age (ie 5–16) shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable
- (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and
 - (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. (DfE, 1996).

Compulsory schooling is divided into four compulsory *key stages* (see Table 4, page 43). The National Curriculum (NC) was introduced in 1988 through the Educational Reform Act which mandated that ‘schools teach certain subjects and carry out certain assessments’ (Isaacs, 2010, p316). As well as outlining the knowledge, skills and understanding pupils should have at the end of each key stage, the Act also laid out arrangements for assessing pupils at or near the end of each key stage to ascertain their achievements on the attainment targets for that stage. Performance tables were compiled and published from 1997, containing statistics about student test and examination results for each school (Isaacs, 2010). NC subjects are assessed through teacher assessments with progress reported to parents every year. Currently, at the end of Key Stage 2 (age ten to 11) most children take national tests in English, maths and science.

As noted by Desforges and Lindsay (2010), the English system requires no diagnosis of a disability to determine that a child has special educational needs (SEN) with assessment focusing on the needs of each individual. The SEN Code of Practice (CoP) for England in use at the time of writing was published in 2001 and provides guidance on the identification and assessment of and the provision for pupils with SEN in early, primary and secondary education settings. As noted by Desforges and Lindsay (2010), although the CoP is based on a statutory framework governing SEN, it is not itself a *statutory document*, instead providing guidance to local authorities, schools, health and social services who are required to have ‘regard to it’ in fulfilling their statutory duties towards children with SEN. The CoP provides the following definition of SEN:

- Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a learning difficulty if they:
- (a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
 - (b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority
- (DfES, 2001, p6)

The CoP involves three stages of SEN identification which reflect the level and source of support provided to the student with SEN. In all, 20.6 per cent of pupils across all schools

are identified as having a SEN (2.8 per cent with a 'statement of SEN' – the highest level of support need) (DfE, 2011a). The broad categories of SEN outlined in the 2001 CoP are:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- behaviour emotional and social development
- sensory and/or physical needs
- medical conditions.

The 2011 Government Green Paper on SEN (Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability, DfE, 2011b) presented proposals for a different process of SEN identification involving the replacement of the statement of SEN with Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Following consultation (and as of summer 2012) the Department for Education were moving forward with these plans and piloting different approaches to implementation through 20 Pathfinder projects (an early evaluation report is presented by SQW, 2012).

3.3.3 Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils

3.3.3.1 National assessment: SEN progression rates

National assessment, which occurs within the framework provided by the national curriculum, is divided into three phases: early learning, primary and secondary. It is carried out with regard to the concept of adequate progress in national curriculum attainment targets (Desforges & Lindsay 2010). These assessments are referred to as standard attainment tests or SATs. The Key Stage 4 national curriculum assessments lead to GCSE qualifications which are similar to Ireland's Junior Certificate. All pupils are expected to take part in these assessments and guidelines and procedures exist to allow this (see below).

3.3.3.2 Sources of Data – collation and management

The mechanism for national data collation and management associated with these assessments is the School Census (SC) and the National Pupil Database (NPD). The census collects key data on around eight million pupils and around 25,000 schools. Individual pupil-level data have been collected since 2002. The Key Stage attainment dataset is updated yearly. Until 2007 the census was referred to as the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), the change in name reflecting the decision to collect data three times a year. Similar data collections began for pupils in alternative provision and pupil referral units in spring 2008 and 2010 respectively. Data are available at the individual level with each student allocated a unique identifier which enables their details to be linked to the NPD and other datasets (see below). Coverage includes:

- general school characteristics: number of schools by type, status, religious character and size

- pupil characteristics: number of pupils by age, gender, free school meal eligibility, ethnicity, first language, mode of travel, and gifted and talented status as well as information on class sizes
- pupil absence
- pupil exclusion
- special educational needs
- school admission appeals.

The pupil database holds the assessment, test and exam results at each key stage for all pupils at maintained schools in England which are collected through standard attainment tests. It also holds individual pupil-level attainment data for pupils in non-maintained and independent schools which take the tests/exams. The database is an amalgamation of different datasets including Key Stage attainment data and School Census data which are linked using a unique identifier for each pupil. Pupil characteristic information for maintained schools only is also included in the NPD (such as age, gender, ethnicity and SEN) which is obtained by matching records to the census. Guidance and information for end-users of the data are available through an online users group based at the University of Bristol (PLASC/NPD Users' Group).

Special educational need provision is recorded in January of the final year of the key stage. The key stage data contain the attainment scores for children taking key stage assessments in each year. Information about each stage (1 to 5) is contained on a separate file which contains around 700,000 records (depending on the size of the cohort in each year). NPD data are used to report the proportion of pupils at maintained mainstream schools with special educational needs who made the expected level of progress in attainment levels between Key Stage 1 (mainly pupils aged seven) and Key Stage 2 (mainly pupils aged 11) as well as progression between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (mainly pupils aged 16) (NPD, wikispaces, 2011).

The NPD has allowed the calculation of contextualised value added (CVA) measures, which take account not only of prior attainment, but also of a number of other pupil and school characteristics associated with performance differences outside schools' control. These characteristics include gender, special educational needs, movement between schools and family circumstances. As such it can be used to compare attainment and pupil characteristics at the school and local authority level as well as for detailed analysis of pupil-level attainment. From 2003 onwards the categories of SEN have related directly to the CoP (ie no SEN; School Action, School Action Plus, Statement). It has been possible to request the type of SEN (eg severe learning difficulties, visual impairment, physical disability) as a sensitive data request since 2003-04 for pupils at School Action Plus or with a statement. Requests are submitted to a dedicated NPD email address through which all NPD extracts and general enquiries about NPD data are made.

The NPD is the source for analyses in Statistical First Releases (SFRs) published in the Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway. For example, each year the relevant government department publishes an SFR on national curriculum assessment and GCSE attainment by key pupil characteristics such as ethnic group,

special educational needs status and free school meals take-up in England. In relation to SEN, this release is in accordance with the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Information Act (2008) that requires the Secretary of State to publish information about this group of children in England with special educational needs to help improve their well-being. The DfE makes a statistical publication available to meet the Act's requirements (eg DfE, 2010; DfE, 2011a). This publication includes new information on pupils with SEN alongside further interpretation of existing findings. Sections are included on looked after children (under the legal care of the local authority or with foster carers or in residential homes) with SEN, as well as reasons why these pupils are absent and excluded from school and information on the types of school they attend. All figures are provided at national level, supplemented with some regional and local authority information. Data are derived from a range of sources including the School Census and National Pupil Database. The publication is divided into six key themes (particularly related to attainment- and attendance-focused outcomes):

- Theme 1: Characteristics of pupils with SEN.
- Themes 2 to 5: Attainment of pupils with SEN.
- Theme 6: Absence and exclusions from school of pupils with SEN.

The 2011 Government Green Paper on SEN, *Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability*, notes that the Government will 'introduce an indicator in performance tables which will give parents clear information on the progress of the lowest attaining pupils' (DfE 2011b, 3.6). At the time of writing no further information was available on the form this indicator would take.

3.3.3.3 Concerns about the NPD and standards agenda

This approach to data collection has raised some concerns in the literature at a conceptual and technical level regarding children with SEN. In recent years, based on general data previously described, it has been argued that school standards in England have risen steadily and substantially in all key stages and in all main subjects of the curriculum (DCSF, 2010). Of concern, however, is that this increase masks the relative under-performance of children with SEN. For instance, within the general improvement, the SEN sub-population may not be improving to the same extent. Despite recent guidance that considers what works well for local authorities and schools in improving outcomes for this cohort (eg DCSF, 2010), the literature features concerns about how the standards agenda – the push to raise pupils' academic attainments – may be sidelining these children with the current focus on their inclusion in mainstream contexts (eg Dyson *et al*, 2002; Wedell, 2005; MacBeath *et al*, 2006). As an example, a report written by the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee on SEN (2006) discusses the detrimental impact such an agenda has had on special needs education: 'There is a recognised conflict between the aims of raising standards and SEN: raising standards focuses on the narrow outcome of academic attainment while a SEN focus would require a broader definition of outcomes (para.277).

Similarly, a report by Ofsted (2004) noted that for some schools, a narrowly focused agenda with rigid timetabling, inflexible staffing and lack of inventiveness could serve

to handicap effective developments for this group and recommended that ‘schools evaluate their provision for SEN thoroughly and act on the findings to improve standards of achievement’ (p6). A particular issue was raised in the report about how adequate progress (a term used in the SEN CoP) is monitored noting that:

The SEN code of practice places emphasis on whether the pupils’ progress is ‘adequate’. This concept is insufficiently well defined within the guidance. Those schools visited that set targets for raising standards for pupils with SEN made their own decisions about how much progress is to be judged adequate. Their criteria varied widely, even taking account of differences in the type of learning needs (pp10-11).

On quality and usefulness, Gorard (2010) critiqued some analyses of data derived from the NPD in England, noting that quality of analyses must consider quality of the data – completeness, accuracy and quality of measure (p748). In terms of completeness, Gorard (2010) states that ‘it is probable that less than 50% of children in England in any age cohort have a record in all relevant databases that is complete in terms of all key variables’ (p749). This seems very low but is partly explained by complex variables suffering from poorer completion when provided by schools. The variables related to special educational need provide a relevant example. The simpler variable on level of SEN support (split into four categories in England at this time) has better completion than the more complex variable with 12 categories of special education groups. Missing data are a problem but with careful and sensitive analysis it is not insurmountable. For example, Gorard (2011) looked carefully into missing data on free school meals (FSM, a variable commonly used as a proxy measure of disadvantage) and concluded: ‘Being aware of its limitations, [...] analysts need not apologise for continuing to work with FSM.’ He highlighted that missing data need to be considered particularly carefully regarding vulnerable groups, such as those with SEN, who may be disproportionately represented in missing data. Gorard (2010) also takes a pragmatic line that careful analysis is key, noting: ‘[NPD] provides a wonderful and welcome resource for the researcher, at least the equal of equivalent datasets in other developed countries. Nevertheless, the records are not complete’ (p748).

Concerns exist about the quality of data entry. For example, DfE (2010) reporting on attainment data for special educational needs sub-groups, note that a (small) number of young people with ‘profound and multiple learning difficulty’ had achieved two A-levels or equivalent in 2008 and 2009 (p106). Given the nature of this disability group, these data do not appear accurate. It is unclear, however, whether the initial error was at time of data collection (eg the incorrect categorising of a number of pupils).

On quality of measure, the arguments are more complex and not related to quality of the NPD per se, but rather the quality of the assessment data which feed into it. For example, Florian *et al*, (2004) question the validity of how SATs scores are combined to get measures of progress. Also, considerable work has gone into developing the P scales as an alternative assessment (see below) but the assessment probably still does not fulfil the requirements for a standardised test outlined by Sheil *et al* (2010).

Florian *et al* (2004) also had conceptual concerns about the use of SEN categories which will often oversimplify the complexity that many young people with SEN have a combination of disabilities and/or special needs – categorisation according to primary type of need means these combinations cannot be properly accounted for or investigated further during analysis.

Nevertheless, despite these concerns, Florian *et al* (2004) concluded: ‘Questions about inclusion and achievement can start to be addressed by interrogating these data and they provide an important resource in helping with this crucial task’ (p120).

3.3.3.4 Examples of NPD use

The NPD provides a significant source of national data on attainment- and attendance-focused outcomes. It can be utilised as part of other projects in combination with other data sources. This makes the approach undoubtedly efficient. Below are some examples.

Example: Evaluation of initiatives to raise achievement of children with SEN

Humphrey and Squires (2011) offer an example of a study that included collection of information on specific outcomes by drawing on existing datasets. The evaluation examined the impact of Achievement for All (AfA), a pilot school improvement framework with a focus on raising achievements of the lowest 20 per cent of learners in all schools on a variety of outcomes for pupils with SEN and disability. The outcomes included were behaviour, bullying, positive relationships, attendance, wider participation, parental engagement and confidence, and academic attainment. In the evaluation, Humphrey and Squires (2011) report on pupil attainment data in English and mathematics (as part of the national strategies in England) as well as pupil attendance data (collected by the participating local authorities). At the start of AfA, academic attainment data were collected on behalf of the evaluation team and repeated one year later. The progress of about 7,770 pupils during that time was analysed and compared to population data for children with and without SEN provided by DfE. The study reported that noticeable improvements were made across the AfA cohort in English and maths, and in broad terms those in the AfA cohort made significantly better improvements than children nationally (this held for those with and without SEN). The evaluation also combined this system-based data with additional bespoke data collected on broader outcomes (see Assessment of additional curriculum for this case study below).

Example: Evaluation of SEN programmes

A study by Keslair, Maurin and McNally (2009, 2011) uses data from the NPD to analyse progress through an evaluation of individual SEN programmes. Keslair *et al* (2011) note that it is difficult to evaluate the causal effect of SEN programmes because children selected for them may be different from other children in ways not observable to the researcher. The study sought to overcome this through the use of variation in school context which was shown to be important in determining the probability of entering a SEN programme – a child with learning difficulties may not have access to remediation in one school but may in another). The study evaluated whether participating in a programme had any effect on educational attainment by the end of primary school (through the use of KS2 tests). The analysis shows that the decentralised design of SEN

policy in England (ie programmes designed at a local school level) can serve to generate significant inequalities in access to remedial resources across children with similar moderate difficulties at age seven.

Example: Analyses of Longitudinal Datasets

Some large-scale longitudinal studies of children and young people have been carried out in England in recent years including:

- Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)
- The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) and related extension projects (see <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/>)
- Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), University of Bristol.

Access to the datasets from these projects has provided opportunities to examine the effect of selected variables on children with SEN. As an example, the LSYPE was used with the NPD for evaluative purposes in a study commissioned by the National Equality Panel to investigate SEN in England (Keslair & McNally 2009). The study included an analysis of SEN type and schooling outcomes (eg using test scores at the end of primary and secondary school). Similar analyses were undertaken for a range of other variables: SEN type and attendance, truancy, attitudes to school. Other examples include a study by Crawford and Vignoles (2010) which used the ALSPAC to analyse the educational progress of children with SEN.

3.3.3.5 Additional sources

Assessing areas of the curriculum beyond literacy and numeracy has been of concern in England, given the focus on a standards-based agenda. As an example, a recent report by Ofsted (2010) notes that to provide the best outcomes educational providers need to have 'high aspirations and focus on enabling children and young people to be as independent as possible' (p50). While Ofsted does not detail how independence is achieved or measured, it does report that young people were listened to in devising the curriculum and 'there was a very well-understood view of how to help an individual become as self-reliant and as independent as possible' (p51).

Of particular significance in promoting a focus on a wider outcomes agenda for all children in England was *Every Child Matters*, a national initiative (2003) that focused on the well-being of all children from birth to 19. The aim was to ensure children were provided with opportunities to achieve in five broad areas commonly referred to as *ECM outcomes*: Be healthy; Stay safe; Enjoy and achieve; Make a positive contribution; and Achieve economic well-being.

Significant efforts have been made to develop methods which interrogate existing data sources to establish measures against these outcomes for children with SEN (Morris *et al*, 2008; Kendall *et al*, 2008). However, while some conclusions could be drawn the quality of the available data (including inconsistency in definition of disability/SEN) meant this was limited (Morris, undated; Morris *et al*, 2008). This interest in measurement of broader outcomes for all children, including those with SEN, generated much interest in England. However, at the time of writing the DfE makes no explicit reference to Every

Child Matters or related terminology and as such its future as a broad policy initiative on a wider outcomes agenda is unclear.

3.3.4 Inclusion of children with SEN in assessment approaches

3.3.4.1 Assessment accommodations

England has agreed accommodation approaches which are applied to some assessments, such as SATS and assessments leading to accreditation. Since 2009 the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), and before that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), has had responsibility for developing curriculum and assessment and advising government. As noted by Isaacs (2010), the QCDA serves as an awarding organisation for the national curriculum tests, although it outsources their development to one or more of the nationally accredited awarding organisations (currently there are four). Note: at time of writing the Standards and Testing Agency (STA), an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE), was taking over from the QCDA as part of government reform.

3.3.4.2 Alternative assessment of the curriculum

The performance or P scales were introduced in 1998 to enable schools in England to measure attainment and progress of children whose attainment levels could not be recorded through English national curriculum scales (Ndaji & Tymms, 2009). The P scales are a set of descriptions used in schools for recording the achievement of pupils with SEN who are working towards the first level of the national curriculum. The scales provide best-fit level descriptors on a scale of P1 to P8. Level P8 leads into national curriculum level 1. The P scales have a number of functions in mainstream and special schools including (eg QCA, 2009a):

- supporting summative assessment, enabling staff to make and record judgments on pupil attainment at the end of a year or key stage
- tracking individual pupils' linear progress towards subject-specific attainment at national curriculum level 1 and beyond
- identifying and recording individual pupils' lateral progress by helping staff to look for related skills at similar levels across subjects
- looking for patterns in the attainment of pupils
- providing information for school managers setting targets for whole-school improvement.

The performance descriptions for P1 to P3 are common across all subjects of the national curriculum and outline the types and range of performance that some pupils with learning difficulties might characteristically demonstrate (QCA, 2009b). Level descriptors for P4 to P8 are provided for the range of curriculum subject areas (including for example, art and design, PE, music). The curriculum areas English and maths include specific descriptors for related curriculum strands: speaking, listening, reading and writing for English; using and applying maths; number, shape, space and measures for

maths). While children with special educational needs can be disapplied from all or parts of the national curriculum and its assessment, in practice this rarely happens as there are flexibilities within it, including the use of the P scales for assessment, that makes this unnecessary. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2001, 2009b) has published guidelines for teachers with ideas on how to modify the curriculum and its assessment to suit individual and group needs.

In England, children with moderate learning difficulties are educated mainly in mainstream schools and are included in the arrangements for end of key stage standard attainment tests (SATs) and teacher assessment with all other children. If their performance is below Level 1 of the curriculum (expected to be achieved between age five and six) it is measured through the P scales. These children are likely to fall just below level 1 and so may have level description around P6 to P8 depending on their age. The performance of children with severe and profound learning difficulties (English terms) is also described using the P scales. Some older students (post 16) with severe learning difficulties may give a performance that is above the P scales but it is unlikely to be higher than level 2 of the curriculum (achieved by typical children aged six to seven).

The use of P scales is statutory when reporting attainment for pupils with special educational needs who are working below level 1 (QCDA, 2011) in English, mathematics and science. Ndaji and Tymms (2010) note that from 1999 until 2004 annual collection and analysis of P scales were organised by QCDA through the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University. The aims of the annual data collection were to:

- collect enough data to present a national picture of the performance of pupils working below age-related expectations
- from the resulting dataset, to prepare feedback for schools to help in their self-evaluation and target setting.

The P scales data collection project is currently being run at Durham University with schools paying annual fees (Ndaji & Tymms 2010).

Ndaji and Tymms (2010) offer a recent evaluation of P scales use in England. They note that although the scales data collection and analysis have been found to be successful 'in the sense that many schools participate in it each year and their comments indicate approval' (p199), there have been questions concerning the data quality. They report, as an example, in the first year (1999) 'there were very high correlations between the ratings in different subject areas, suggesting that performance in different areas was not differentiated, and there have been suggestions by teachers that a bottleneck exists between level P8 of the P scales and Level 1 of the National Curriculum' (p199). Their analysis of data was based on information collected for 22,506 pupils aged five to 16 classified as having one or a combination of special educational need and for whom schools had submitted data to the project (in English, maths and science). The study's findings included the following:

- The P scales provide satisfactory discrimination between attainments levels within each of the curriculum areas (ie between level 1 and level 2). Further they show that the relative difficulties of attaining different levels in any subject are differentiated and that each level is more difficult to attain than the one below it.

- The P scales do not provide satisfactory discrimination between the curriculum areas when taken together because 'all the subjects seem to measure the same attribute' (p207). It was noted however that when restricted to high achieving pupils (ie those with moderate learning difficulties), the scales seem to measure two attributes and therefore they 'could be said to discriminate between the subject areas to some extent when applied to higher achieving pupils' (pp207-208).
- Analysis using longitudinal data offered no evidence that a bottleneck exists at P8 of the P scales. It was concluded that teachers' fear of a possible bottleneck at P8 causing some of their pupils to get stuck at that level is unfounded.
- The study showed that a P level in one subject can be equated to the same P level in another subject: P5 in reading is equivalent to P5 in writing or number.

Using these findings, it was concluded that 'the P scales are working' (p208) with a recommendation that they could be reviewed in 'consideration of the observed evidence of bias by some subjects across the learning difficulties' (p208).

3.3.4.3 Assessment of additional curriculum

There appears to be no evidence of system-based collection of progress or outcome data on different aspects of SEN-specific additional curricula. Most data collection appears to be limited to purposefully designed research studies, and many of these are limited to surveys to establish if young people are engaging in these types of learning activities. It therefore appears that such assessment is limited to the individual classroom, school or service practice.

An exception to this is provided by strand three of the Achievement for All (AfA) school improvement framework which focuses on effective practice to improve wider outcomes for children and young people with SEN. The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) Programme is an important element of this. Strand three has five areas of focus:

- improving attendance
- improving behaviour
- eliminating bullying
- developing positive relationships with others
- increasing participation in extended services provision, including extra-curricular activities (p42).

In reporting on the evaluation of the AfA pilot, Humphrey and Squires (2010) found schools have made 'considerable progress' in implementing strand three and have 'responded well' to the flexibility that it allows (p33). Evaluation findings discuss the five wider outcome areas and give examples of what schools have done to meet these. For example, to improve attendance schools engaged in breakfast/wide-awake clubs and offered rewards for those with attendance problems.

Humphrey and Squires (2011) evaluate the programme on these outcomes the quantitative component of which comprised:

- An online survey of teachers and parents of children with SEN. Humphrey and Squires (2010) present details of the surveys' development noting: 'A review of the literature on the wider outcomes targeted in AfA revealed that there were no suitable existing measures that could be used "off the shelf" and so the evaluation team developed bespoke surveys for use in the project' (p7). The developed teacher survey looked at behaviour, bullying and positive relationships, while the parent survey did this too as well as wider participation and parental engagement and confidence. Items in the survey questionnaire collected data on specific outcomes, eg a sample item linked to positive relationships was '[Pupil name] has at least one good friend'.
- Survey at school level by school AfA lead to determine what factors impact most on pupil outcomes.
- Pupil attendance data.
- Academic attainment in English and maths data.

3.4 Finland

3.4.1 Key points

- Finland has a relatively decentralised education system – broad responsibility for curriculum and assessment is devolved to schools.
- Three formal levels of support approaches exist for pupils with special needs, sometimes referred to as 'full-time special education' (percentages based on 2008/9):
 - differential mainstream teaching (4.4 per cent, although about half of these spend some of their day withdrawn from mainstream classes)
 - special education classes in mainstream schools (2.7 per cent)
 - special school provision (1.2 per cent).
- A fourth level of more informal support, sometimes referred to as part-time special education, is provided within mainstream schools for pupils experiencing minor learning difficulties (23.1 per cent – high incidence needs including dyslexia, speech language and communication difficulties). This level of support does not require an official decision or formal assessment and is characterised by focused teaching within the mainstream classroom or in a separate classroom. Support normally focuses on early reading, writing and arithmetic and pupils participate in teaching sessions for up to two hours a week for a limited period (four to ten weeks typically).
- The Finnish approach emphasises early intervention which results in a high proportion of students receiving special education (about 31 per cent at any given time, which includes the 8.3 per cent of pupils receiving formal full-time special education support in ordinary mainstream classes, special classes in mainstream schools and special schools). For this reason high proportions of pupils have

some kind of formal or informal SEN-related support at some point during their educational career, particularly in primary (aged seven to 12).

- There is little evidence of system-based collection of educational progress and outcomes data for any pupils. This appears to be true for all domains: attainment-, attendance-, happiness- and independence-related measures.
- Periodic sample-based national assessments (in approximate age groups of 12 and 15 years) do occur, but seem not to include students with special educational needs.
- A key national measure of educational outcomes appears to be through the consistently impressive PISA performance.
- However, queries are evident on the clarity of the inclusion of students with SEN in PISA, specifically the lack of distinction between low attaining pupils and pupils with high incidence SEN (eg mild general learning disabilities). Therefore the insight provided by PISA in relation to outcomes for this group may be limited.

3.4.2 Context

3.4.2.1 Education system overview

In Finland compulsory education starts at seven and finishes at 17 and the comprehensive School Act in 1970 guaranteed equal opportunity for all children, with an emphasis on locally available provision for most children. Kindergarten is not compulsory but 96 per cent of children attend pre-school at age six and high proportions attend at earlier ages (OECD, 2006, p320). Schooling is based on national goals that guide local decisions and the country has a national curriculum, overseen by the Ministry of Education. Ninety-nine per cent of schools are public and run by municipalities (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). Early intervention is seen as best practice and is part of a new national strategy on special education (Kivirauma & Ruoho 2007).

Finland, in common with other Nordic countries, has been reluctant to adopt any large-scale accountability approaches or high stakes testing (see Sahlberg, 2007). In general, the cultural climate for the teaching profession tends to be based on the perspective that schools 'are seen as places run by highly educated and esteemed teachers who know best how to do their job' (Hopmann, 2008, p432). In other words, the core role of teachers as professionals is emphasised (Hopmann, 2008; Sahlberg, 2007).

Finland's success on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores is widely acknowledged – it is consistently ranked among the top performers in mathematics and reading among the 41 participating countries. Its performance scores have extremely narrow standard deviations, in that differences between the best and worst performing schools are small (Kivirauma *et al*, 2006). Weaker performing students also experience high success (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007).

The most commonly cited explanations for success in PISA are the focus on early intervention; the congruence of PISA test content with Finland's curriculum requirements and associated pedagogy; the stability of the teaching profession; the provision of extra funding and capacity resources for schools with disproportionately more disadvantaged

students, as well as the success in supporting weaker students (Hausstatter & Takala, 2010). Pedagogical conservatism – that is a culture of persisting with established and traditional teaching methods, and associated general parental satisfaction with existing services – is often mentioned as a reason for the system’s stability because it is seen as leading to considered decision making (see Jahnukainen, 2011, p499). At the same time, this conservative tradition has also been subject to criticism: can it meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing society (Simola, 2007)– In addition it has been referred to, indirectly, as a possible reason for the separate provision of special education in mainstream schools, of a kind that manages deviancy and ensures the smooth running of normal comprehensive provision (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007).

It is argued that Finland’s good results in PISA are linked to the emphasis of teaching within special education, specifically, emphasis for mother-tongue language learning and mathematics, coupled with a strong focus on early intervention and on reading and writing (Hausstatter & Takala, 2010). For example, at the Finnish primary stage, special education emphasises reading and writing, covering 53 per cent of the whole support. Itkonen and Jahnukainen (2007) argue that special education use within the school system is the reason for Finland’s success (see also Sahlberg 2007). Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) have also focused on the Finnish special educational system, especially the role of informal support (part-time special education), in explaining the successes in the PISA test.

Recent challenges to Finnish school policy have been noted by Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007), highlighting moves towards: increasing opportunities for parents to choose a school for their children outside a local district; improving provision for particularly talented students; greater autonomy in shaping and managing local provision, and improving school effectiveness. Despite these developments, when compared with many other OECD countries, Finland stands out as resisting ‘new policy emphasising competition, choice and individually orientated school ideology’ (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007).

3.4.3 Special Education

The Basic Education Act (Finland) 1998 aimed for more coherent, explicit and flexible legislation, stating that all children had the right to enrol in their local school. The Finnish system is built on the idea of the least restrictive environment, and a continuum of different placement options. As far as possible, students with disabilities will be educated in the option closest to that of the regular classroom. The vision is that special needs education should be organised with other education or else in a special needs classroom or another appropriate facility. Special education is thus not an autonomous field in relation to general education and the school system (Kivirauma *et al*, 2006).

Special education – and its utilisation of informal and formal levels of support – is nevertheless still an important aspect of provision for children with SEN today. The Finnish school system uses full-time special education in segregated settings extensively (Kivirauma *et al*, 2006) as well as making wide use of informal special education provision for pupils with minor learning difficulties delivered in focused weekly teaching hours for a limited period of time. The national special education system gives easy

access to special support (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007; Moberg & Savolainen, 2006) provided through informal and formal special education intervention within mainstream school (including special classes) and special school settings for over 30 per cent of students (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). The country currently adopts inclusive (mainstream) education in delivery of special support for students in part-time special education. However, this provision appears to make extensive use of informal and formal withdrawal teaching and does not have a developed collaborative dimension involving class/subject teachers and specialist teachers and teaching assistants (Saloviita & Takala, 2010; Takala, 2007; Takala, Pirttimaa & Tormanen, 2009).

A key characteristic of the Finnish education system is being able to access special education services without a diagnosis, based on the student's observed needs, and therefore the special education label is not such a crucial part of organising the services. The Finnish definition of special education eligibility is based on observed needs (a difficulty model) rather than diagnosed disabilities (a disability model) (Jahnukainen, 2011). Easy and timely access to part-time special education support may, partially at least, explain why so many students are deemed to have a special educational need. One commentator referred to Finland's world record on such high numbers of students with SEN (Vislie, 2003). It is worth noting, however, that easy identification and referral have also been regarded as a key mechanism to put early intervention in place, and with a view to helping children overcome difficulties frequently deemed temporary in nature. This easy entry and exit approach seems relatively informal and carries no potential stigma of SEN labelling for at least the 23.1 per cent of pupils with minor learning difficulties.

The Finnish system has 14 categories of special needs, eight of which are defined as difficulties in learning, the remaining six are low-incidence and generally more profound impairments. As noted above, over 30 per cent of compulsory school children receive additional support, whether this is accessed informally or via more detailed identification and assessment procedures. Official statistics state that this number has gradually increased since 2003. It has been suggested that this could be linked, in part at least, to the funding structure (eg Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011).

To summarise, Finland's special education provision is organised through the use of four types of support (percentages taken from EADSNE, 2010, and based on figures for Finland in 2008/9). The first support is available to a range of students with formally assessed special educational needs within ordinary classrooms in the comprehensive school (4.4 per cent, although approximately half of these spend part of their day withdrawn from mainstream classes). A second type of support for those with formally assessed special educational needs is provided through teaching in special classes within the mainstream comprehensive school (2.7 per cent). A third type for students with formally assessed special educational needs is provided through teaching in special school settings (1.2 per cent). A fourth type of support is available to students without a formally assessed special educational need within ordinary classrooms in the comprehensive primary-high school (23.1 per cent of pupils). These students experience minor learning difficulties and their teachers can refer them for focused teaching (eg in

reading, writing and arithmetic) provided by specialist teachers for time limited periods (eg two hours for 12 weeks). Focused teaching sessions take place in the ordinary classroom or in a withdrawal setting.

Therefore, over 30 per cent of students are taught through these approaches to support and placement. The approach in mainstream comprehensive school is characterised by some in-built fluidity and students appear to move into and out of the provision informally on the basis of teacher assessment. However, Saloviita and Takala (2010) have noted the concerns of school officials in the city of Helsinki about a 'worrying increase in the number of students removed from mainstream and placed in special classes'. This indicates a possible tension between the informal and formal approach to identification of special educational needs, and how these are reflected organisationally within the comprehensive school (eg referral boundaries between the mainstream school and special classes attached to it). To counter this, in part, and to improve differentiated teaching, a new national requirement to individualise learning on the general curriculum has been introduced recently (Strategy of Special Education, 2007).

A small number of pupils receive full-time special education in special schools (1.2 per cent in 2008-09). Links between special and mainstream schools, for example, on joint placements for pupils, or pupil transfer from mainstream to special school (or vice versa), are not discussed here because of a lack of clear information.

As previously noted, a distinctive feature of the Finnish education system is the effective use of informal focused support and early intervention (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). The focus of the part-time special education is in prevention, usually given during some period for a few lessons a week, and it starts as soon as difficulties in pupil learning are identified. The emphasis, then, is on early intervention, and it most frequently takes place during the primary grades (grades 1 to 5). Indeed, the percentage of part-time special teaching resources is particularly high for grades 1 (highest), 2 and 3 (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007, p292).

Researchers have argued that the outcomes of this approach are clearly demonstrated in the smallest standard deviation between student achievements in every area of PISA 2003 and 2006 school attainment tests (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). In other words, there is a contention that the informally accessed but carefully focused approach to special education is narrowing the gap between the high and low achievers, giving additional help for struggling students. The curriculum focus on these time-limited special interventions also seem important. These are concerned primarily with the teaching of core subjects, most notably mother tongue language, reading, writing and mathematics (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). Furthermore, the content of specialist teacher training programmes equips teachers to intervene effectively (Hausstatter & Takala, 2008). This expert approach to teaching core areas tested by PISA would seem to be an important contributory factor in helping weaker Finnish students to perform well.

Evidence on the performance of students in full-time special education (special classes in mainstream schools and special schools) has been difficult to ascertain in this short review. PISA is one of the few system-based collections of data and this does not include these pupils. This lack of available evidence may also reflect the Finnish tradition of not

placing a premium on high stakes testing combined with approaches to assessing the attainment and achievement of students that are individually focused.

3.4.4 Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils

As spelled out in public education law, the goals for assessment are: to inform national policy; to inform local decision making, and to support teaching, learning and school development. High stakes examination results are not published in newspapers and do not serve to rank schools. The concept of absolute, individual success frames testing policy (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2010). It is defined according to an individual student's achievement over time, or relative to standards.

Literature reviewed for this case study has not accessed any relevant state/national level accountability data directly. This does not mean such information is unavailable, but it appears not to be used for accountability purposes. However, it is worth emphasising Finland's resistance to the use of these, or more specifically, their use in the public domain. As Simola (2007) has noted, the country '... has never had a tradition of standardized testing at the comprehensive school level' and only introduced a standard scale for giving marks on the comprehensive school graduation certificate in 1999. Nevertheless, Statistics Finland (http://www.stat.fi/index_en.html) conducts annual educational surveys. For example, the school-specific comprehensive education statistics questionnaire runs every autumn, collecting from each school on completers of comprehensive school in the previous academic year, numbers of school pupils at time of survey, special education provided and pupil subject choices. For example 2010 statistics on special education categories are presented (OSF, 2011a). Personal correspondence with Statistics Finland shows the data are not collected at a pupil-level but seem to be combined aggregates provided by schools. The data therefore are limited and disaggregation of other variables by special educational needs categories is not possible. An exception to this appears to be vocational education students with SEN, for which individual-level data are gathered (email correspondence, Riikka Rautanen, Senior Statistician, Education Statistics, Statistics Finland). Interestingly, data are not linked back to schools and it appears much of what is presented is process data (eg in terms of special education, data is presented on numbers, disability categorisation and teaching provision). Minimal data on outcomes are presented on Statistics Finland's website. An exception is perhaps on employment rates for 2009 graduates (graduates here refers to all those who have left education in a given year, whatever the educational level) (see OSF 2011b). Very basic figures on numbers of students graduating at various levels are available but none is broken down by special educational needs or disability.

This lack of accessible records might explain the interest in analysing Finland's PISA data from a special educational needs perspective. It is, perhaps, more available than other data. Interpretations of PISA results can be found in recent articles by Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) and Hausstatter and Takala (2010). These authors recount familiar and impressive findings on the attainments of students with special educational needs. Two cautions should be borne in mind however. First, there is a difficulty defining students with special educational needs included in PISA test results. Some might argue these

students should not be identified as having special educational needs at all – at least they would not be in other countries. Second, PISA results for Finland do not appear to record test results for students in full-time rather than part-time special education. Some of these students may have been included, but we have been unable to verify this. OECD (2007) analyses participation and performance of students with special educational needs in PISA 2003 (and is reported in more detail previously). The reported proportion of this cohort students with SEN included in PISA for Finland is 7.2 per cent, the highest proportion of all the participating countries. However, most of these (86 per cent) were not categorised as having a functional or an intellectual disability or limited language proficiency. Rather they were categorised as other. This category is ambiguous (it is thought the majority of the students in this category were diagnosed with dyslexia, OECD, 2007) but is likely to include students with less severe special educational needs – those students most likely to be receiving part-time special education as defined in Finland.

Another potential source of data is national assessments. These have been implemented by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) at the end of grades 6 and 9 since the early 1990s (see for an example summary Sheil, Kellaghan & Moran, 2010). Their purpose is to examine the extent to which objectives set in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education have been achieved. Another aim is to investigate achievement of educational equality in Finland (particularly on gender, region and first language groups). Assessments are based on samples representing the whole country. An example report from this process is presented for four national assessments of mathematics learning in grade 9 students (1998-2004) (see FNBE, 2004a). The sample was designed 'to represent the whole country included just above 5 per cent of the relevant age group (15-16-year-olds)' (p7) although no reference is made to special educational needs or disability in the report. The assessment complexity appears to be in line with National Core Curriculum for Basic Education expectations for the age group (in keeping with the assessment purpose). The report presents no descriptions of accommodations or alternative versions of the assessment so it is reasonable to assume that many students with special educational needs are not included in the data collection.

3.4.5 Inclusion of children with SEN in assessment approaches

Formal examinations/testing in Finland relate to the basic education certificate final assessment awarded at the end of comprehensive school, and matriculation examination as part of upper secondary education. The final assessment for the basic education certificate does not involve nationally set external examinations as is the case in most countries. Instead individual schools assess pupil performance in relation to the national curriculum. This essentially involves grading performance over the final two years of compulsory education (grades 8 and 9) or an extra year for some (grade 10). The nature of the assessment is at the discretion of the schools and might involve tests and project/course work. Given this decentralised approach, it is not surprising that the QCA (2007) international review of assessment procedures for disabled students noted:

On the basis of national assessment guidelines in Finland, schools determine their own set of guidelines for their teachers' assessment of pupils, including

those with disabilities. [...] At post-compulsory level, 'allowances are made for the hindrances to learning resulting from the pupil's disability or disorder'. (QCA, 2007, p5)

Nevertheless, within this framework and drawing on given pupil individual education plans, QCA (2007) found that accommodation procedures common in other countries were used (eg reading assistance, use of adaptive technology, extra time). However, the adaptations in assessment are noted on students' certificate of achievement.

The curriculum content (course topics) for students training to be special education teachers, as reviewed by Hausstatter and Takala (2008), is revealing in that it shows the priority given to pedagogy that is theoretically rigorous and related to interventions. At the same time it also shows that less attention appears to be given to assessment issues. This might indicate a gap in provision or the use of a different approach to assessment, one that intrinsically links teaching and assessment for example (ie assessment for learning emphasis).

In terms of alternative assessment, little evidence in the literature reviewed for this case study was identified. Finland's limited use of assessment in education generally might account for this. Nevertheless, QCA (2007) noted that:

Pupils with special needs have an individual education plan. This defines whether they will be assessed on the national core curriculum with methods that enable them to demonstrate their attainment, or assessed on an individualised programme of study, possibly verbally. (QCA, 2007, p5)

This reflects the FNBE (2004b) *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education*:

If it has been decided in the IEP that the pupils study according to an individualised syllabus in one or more subjects, the pupil's performance will be assessed on the basis of the objectives established for him or her personally and defined in the IEP. In this case the pupil's performance is not assessed on the final assessment criteria defined in the national core curriculum. (FNBE, 2004b, p264)

Therefore, again it appears to be at the discretion of the school/teacher to find an appropriate method of assessing some pupils which is presented on school year reports and eventually the basic education certificate as part of final assessment. This tallies with the observation that special education support teachers do spend a proportion of their time assessing students, particularly in secondary schools (Takala, Pirttimaa & Tormanen, 2009).

Such flexibility is a powerful way of including all pupils in a curriculum seen as relevant to their individual needs. A lack of a precise assessment framework, however, means analysis of educational outcomes across a population may be impossible.

Linked to this, the literature reviewed for this case study has not revealed any approaches to measuring additional curriculum outcomes at a system-level. However, the flexibility

offered by the IEP to define alternative curriculum targets suggests any additional curriculum can be easily accommodated within outcome targets.

3.5 Scotland

3.5.1 Key points

- Scotland is undergoing significant educational reform at time of writing.
- The reform appears to offer an interesting example of having educational standards at the centre, a strong philosophy of measuring pupil progress against these standards, yet in contrast to other countries such as Australia, England and the US not having prescribed standardised methods of assessment which are nationally collated.
- Investment in teacher development in assessment is designed to lead to consistency in assessment approaches.
- The term additional support needs (ASN) is used in Scotland in preference to SEN and has a broader definition than in many countries.
- The Pupils in Scotland Census gathers data each year on all pupils in publicly funded schools. A variety of data is gathered on pupils, including ASN status.
- The census and the associated database provide a flexible mechanism for combining a range of datasets gathered from different sources (potentially on all domains: attainment-, attendance-, happiness- and independence-related measures). Disaggregation of this data by ASN is possible. Examples of this kind which were identified include analyses of secondary age attainment data, school attendance and post-school destination.

3.5.2 Context

3.5.2.1 Education system overview

The 1980 Education (Scotland) Act is the principal piece of legislation governing the general system of universal provision of public education for all children. All educational provision is the remit of the local authority which must provide schools for those aged five to 16 in the area, as well as school or college places for those who want to remain after 16.

Following the publication of the OECD's review of the Quality and Equity of Education Outcomes in Scotland (SEED, 2007), the Curriculum for Excellence was launched in 2009 which restructured Scotland's educational curriculum and assessment frameworks for those aged three to 18. This is in the process of implementation, including the launch of a new assessment framework in 2011 (see below). Therefore the Scottish education system is in a process of transition at the time of writing.

3.5.2.2 Conceptualisation of special educational needs

In line with developments elsewhere to advance inclusive educational policies, Scotland has outlined its support underpinned by legislative policies since the 1980s. The Doran Review (2011 p5) outlines Scottish legislative developments in this regard. It notes that the 1980 and 2000 Acts highlight the right for an appropriate education for all children; the 2000 Act highlights the right for children to be educated alongside their peers in a mainstream school unless there is a good reason for not doing so; the 2004 Act highlights children's right to have any additional support needs identified and met so they can benefit from school education.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) introduced a new framework for supporting students and their families. A key clause of the Act (4(1)) which distinguishes it clearly from previous legislation is the broadening of special needs to include all those who at some stage of their school life may experience additional support needs. This concept is central to the 2004 Act and goes beyond making a general provision, such as special schools and/or a network learning support service. It outlines the responsibility of each education authority to 'make adequate and efficient provision for such additional support as is required by that child or young person having additional support needs'.

Additional support is defined as additional to, or otherwise different from, general provision in mainstream schools. Children and young people have additional support needs when they need support to help them minimise or overcome barriers to their learning, achievement and full participation in school life. The spectrum of additional support needs ranges, therefore, from long-term, profound and complex to short-term and quickly met.

As well as children traditionally identified as having an SEN in other countries (eg learning, physical and sensory disabilities), additional support needs may include those who:

- Are being bullied.
- Are in general exceptionally able as learners or are talented in particular areas, such as sport, music or art and design.
- Require support in acquiring full fluency in English.
- Have experienced a bereavement.
- Are not attending school regularly.
- Experience interrupted learning.
- Do not learn or develop effectively as persons because of:
 - the ethos and relationships in the school;
 - inflexible curricular arrangements;
 - inappropriate approaches to learning and teaching.
- Live in difficult circumstances, such as with parents who abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Are looked after away from the family.

Drawing on Scottish Government data from 2007, Weedon, Riddell and Kakos (2011) provide a summary of pupils with ASN in Scotland (estimated between 7 and 10 per cent of all pupils in Scotland – see Table 5, page 44). The largest category included those with a learning disability and the second largest were those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Together, these two categories accounted for just over one-third of the ASN population. Young people with autistic spectrum disorder, other moderate learning difficulties and language or speech disorder account for nearly another third. Dyslexia, other specific learning difficulty (SpLDs) and physical and motor impairments each account for 7 to 9 per cent of the ASN population. The remaining categories each accounts for 4 per cent or lower of the total ASN population.

The Statutory Guidance relating to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* describes the co-ordinated support plan (CSP), a statutory document to allow education authorities to identify those children and young people, under their jurisdiction, with additional support needs and needing a co-ordinated support plan. The pupil must have additional support needs (ASN) arising from one or more complex factors or multiple factors which have a significant adverse effect on most areas of their learning that lasts more than a year.

If a pupil does not meet the criteria for a CSP, the authority must still meet their additional support needs. One way they may do this is by providing a non-statutory individualised education programme (IEP). The IEP is there to help support planning, teaching and reviewing pupil progress. It will describe the nature of the additional support needs, the targets they are working towards and the type of support required.

Currently the range of educational provision for students with a disability or learning difficulty comprises regular classes, support classes in regular schools and independent/special schools. Drawing on summaries offered by Doran (2011), in 2010, 69,587, or 10 per cent of pupils in Scotland, were identified as having additional support needs. Of these, about 90 per cent were supported in mainstream schools and the remainder in special schools. These figures do not include pupils who attend independent special schools (in 2009, 982 pupils were supported in one of the 45 such schools, although in the main the places were state funded).

3.5.3 Curriculum and assessment overview

Curriculum for Excellence, launched in 2009, is a recent restructuring of the educational curriculum and assessment frameworks in Scotland for children and young people aged three to 18. It '... aims to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18' (Education Scotland Website, *What is Curriculum for Excellence?*). Central to this is the development of four capacities in each pupil, namely: to be a successful learner; a confident individual; a responsible citizen, and an effective contributor to society. The learning experiences are organised into eight curriculum areas: expressive arts; health and well-being; languages; mathematics; religious and moral education; sciences; social studies, and technologies. There are five curriculum levels from early childhood to young adult level.

For assessment, The Scottish Framework for Assessment (Scottish Government, 2011b) outlines the overall strategy and describes how the standards, expectations and outcomes set out in the Curriculum for Excellence will be achieved. It differs from previous assessment arrangements by highlighting the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) to help teachers develop the knowledge and skills required to achieve greater consistency and confidence in their assessment and decision making. For example, the associated online National Assessment Resource is a mechanism for sharing and developing assessment practice – it is not a prescriptive assessment approach. Therefore it seeks to empower teachers to make their own choices on appropriate assessments. This seems to follow a Scottish tradition of encouraging rigorous assessment through teacher development and professional sharing rather than mandatory procedures (eg The National Assessment Resource appears to be broadly replacing the National Assessment Bank and previously National Tests in 2004).

In their review of international assessment procedures, Sheil, Kellaghan and Moran (2010) argued that ‘the degree of autonomy enjoyed by teachers in Scotland is notable, in that teachers decide on the most appropriate tests for students, based on the likelihood that they will be successful’ (p88). This emphasis on principles underpinning the assessment policy being aligned to that of improving the teaching and learning rather than as an external audit of school achievement seems to be broadly maintained in the Framework for Assessment. For example, student profiles – a snapshot of a child’s best achievements at a given time – are required as part of the framework which even specifies that these should be taken at times of transition (specifically Primary 7 and S3). However, unlike standard assessments elsewhere (eg SATs in England, No Child Left Behind in the US), the framework does not specify the precise nature of the assessment (as long as it adequately and appropriately profiles the pupil) nor are the data centrally collected.

Instead the process involves periodic stock-takes and standards are monitored over time. The stock-take enables decisions on broad standards and expectations regarding whether a curriculum level has been achieved or whether any additional learning and support are required. It involves teachers evaluating a range of evidence produced over a period of time to produce a summary of progress and achievement which includes qualifications and awards. Stock-taking can be done in several ways: for example through weighing up relevant evidence and looking at breadth, challenge and the application of work (see Scottish Government, 2011b). For students with additional support needs, links are made between CSPs, IEPs, the nature of the stock-take and what is recorded in the student profile.

It is through ‘rigorous and robust’ (Scottish Government, 2011b, p35) quality assurance and moderation that standards can be maintained and teacher judgements relied on. In keeping with the earlier discussion, it appears schools are expected to give teachers the opportunities to discuss and share expectations across the curriculum to achieve consistency.

3.5.4 Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils

Formal examinations/testing in Scotland are the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (in S3 and S4 most pupils take standard grades which have a range of levels) and Scottish Highers (in S5 and S6). The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which sets these national external assessments, offers a range of accommodation options (see below). It presents analysis of pupil attainment annually though it is unclear if there are breakdowns on special educational needs. Nevertheless, the SQA attainment data can be (and has been) combined with the Scottish pupil census and other datasets.

The Scottish Annual Pupil Census (also called the Pupils in Scotland Census) gathers data each year from all pupils in publicly funded schools in Scotland. A variety of data is gathered on pupils, including ASN status and whether the pupil has an IEP, CSP or a declared disability. More detailed information on primary disability does not seem to be gathered (or at least not reported). In terms of relevant outcomes, exclusion rates and school attendance are recorded and can be disaggregated by pupil characteristics. A strength of the Scottish census approach is that different datasets can be combined using the unique Scottish Candidate Number and/or other unique identifiers (similar to those in England). A relevant example here is a report by the National Statistics Publication for Scotland on pupil attainment, leaver destinations and school meals (Scottish Government, 2011a). The analysis combines datasets, including those from SQA (attainment data), the annual pupil census (including data on pupil special educational need), and the annual Skills Development Survey on destinations of school leavers. The report can therefore present attainment levels on ASN and positive destinations on ASN (this refers to activities post-compulsory education such as education, training or employment; a non-positive destination is therefore unemployment). Data on school attendance can also be combined with this data from the Attendance and Absence Survey. In 2009 ASN sub-categories (including primary disability) were used in the annual statistical bulletin (Scottish Executive, 2009). Figures for 2010 seem a little more ambiguous so recording and/or reporting of this data may be being changed.

Until recently the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) collected data on a range of statistics regarding the reading and writing attainment of pupils across Scotland comparative to the national 5 to 14 curriculum levels at P3, P5, P7 and S2. It was an annual national random sample survey and took place annually in April/May as pupils neared completion of their year. The survey covered English language (2005), social subjects (enquiry skills) (2006), science (2007) and mathematics (2008). Literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem solving and working with others were also assessed each year in the subject contexts.

The Scottish Government (2005) argued that SSA findings could be used for a range of purposes including to help provide information on national strengths and weaknesses of pupil performances in subjects, and to allow schools to reflect on performance of their own pupils against the national scores. No individual school information or information by ASN appears to be given.

The SSA has now been replaced by the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) in order to align it with the Curriculum for Excellence. The first numeracy survey took place in May 2011 and findings were published in spring 2012. Up to 4,000 pupils from all schools participated. The literacy survey was scheduled for May 2012 with results reported in February 2013.

Assessment accommodation is permitted for selected pupils with additional support needs. Nevertheless, if the survey is anticipated to cause undue stress to any pupil, they will not be required to take part. Additionally, the school can complete a questionnaire to provide feedback on perceptions and experiences of participating in the survey (Scottish Government, 2011c).

Scotland also has a wider outcomes agenda called Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) – it has some similarities to the Every Child Matters agenda in England, but it is newer and ongoing. The associated framework for interagency approaches to working and pathfinder projects are relevant to all children, but are of particular relevance to the vulnerable and this includes those with ASN (see Scottish Government, 2012). The eight GIRFEC outcomes are that children should be healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included, and safe. The agenda appears to be developing still although evaluations of pathfinder projects have occurred – Kosonen (2011) on children affected by parental substance abuse, and Watt *et al* (2011) on children affected by domestic violence. While these evaluations sought to measure improvement in GIRFEC outcomes, very little data were gathered. Kosonen (2011) limited evidence to interview quotes from stakeholders, and Watt *et al* (2011) noted: ‘Due to a combination of factors including limited data, a delayed focus on intended outcomes at the beginning of the process and the longer-term nature of many outcomes for children, it has been difficult to assess the detailed outcomes for children [...]’ (p31).

3.5.5 Inclusion of children with SEN in assessment approaches

In Scotland assessment accommodations for standard grades and Scottish Highers are called assessment arrangements, previously known as alternative assessment arrangements and special arrangements. They are intended to ‘allow candidates who are disabled and/or who have been identified as having additional support needs appropriate arrangements to access the assessment without compromising its integrity’ (SQA, 2010, p4). Schools and centres which present exam candidates may request use of appropriate assessment arrangements to meet the specific needs of the candidate and the assessment. Candidates can request, for example, extra time; use of a reader/scribe; use of ICT (word processor and/or digital question paper); papers in a different format including large print, Braille, adapted print, printed on a different colour, transcription of the paper, modification of language used in the paper or use of sign language.

Scotland also has recently introduced innovative electronic access to examinations. Following piloting (eg Nisbet, 2007), it is now a standard option for assessment arrangements in Scotland (see SQA, 2010).

Undoubtedly a range of assessments is used by teachers in Scotland to assess the progress of young people with complex needs, eg the P scales are reportedly used in

some Scottish schools (Riddell *et al*, 2006). However, we were unable to find examples of alternative assessments use at a system-level involving collation of data. Similarly, the literature reviewed for this case study revealed no approaches to measuring and collating additional curriculum outcomes. However, the flexibility offered by the CSP/IEP and the Framework for Assessment suggests that individual teachers may record progress in these areas.

3.6 US

3.6.1 Key points

- A key feature of the US approach is the link to standards-based education, where schools and school districts are held accountable for progress towards state-defined learning standards which are a key focus of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB require standards-based accountability monitoring for all students with SEN. States must assess student progress against these standards and these data are published.
- All students must be included in these assessments, and therefore strict requirements exist for states to provide accommodated and alternative versions of assessments to include students with disabilities.
- Additionally, monitoring and assessing progress and participation is through the 20 IDEA Part-B indicators which cover developmental, academic, social and procedural indicators for monitoring IDEA and NCLB requirements.
- Analysis of these data allows disaggregation of pupils with SEN, although capacity for disaggregation by disability/SEN sub-groups varies from state to state.
- Views are mixed on the inclusion of all students with SEN in assessments. Positively, it means attention and resources are consequently linked to the progress of these students. Other arguments, however, highlight unintended consequences including narrowed curriculum with too great an emphasis on maths and reading assessment to the detriment of other important areas, and students with disabilities scapegoated and held partly responsible for a school's failure to make adequate progress.
- Another significant source of data is the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) which has a nationally representative sample of around 11,000 students receiving special education services. The survey gathers data on educational progress and outcomes in a range of areas, including attainment-, attendance-, happiness- and independence-related areas.
- Additionally, the scale of the NLTS2 means that disability-specific data is gathered on additional curriculum areas.

3.6.2 Context

3.6.2.1 Education system overview

The US has a decentralised system of education, with much of the control over the day-to-day running of schools left in the hands of school districts acting on behalf of the individual states. No national system of assessment or a national curriculum exists. Responsibility for ascertaining standards, assessment tools and curriculum coverage lies with each state.

Each state is required to set out a series of learning standards but school districts have flexibility in determining how these are met, for example which textbooks will be used. State-wide standards have only become compulsory relatively recently (most notably through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), see below). There is no equivalent to Ireland's Junior Certificates or Leaving Certificate but the Act has compelled states to assess students in mathematics, reading/language/arts and science. Each state is responsible for determining how it will undertake these assessments. For example, some states design their own tests, others use commercially available assessments.

From grade 9 onwards, student school grades and attendance start to become part of their official transcript for college and/or employers. In addition to the official transcript/report card offered from school (which presents, if high enough, the student's average school grades leading to high school graduation), students must take a standardised test in 11th grade for college entry (the SAT and ACT are commonly used tests).

To gauge trends in attainment across the whole country there is the NAEP or National Assessment of Educational Progress. Also known as the nation's report card, NAEP is undertaken annually with a national sample of students in grades 4, 8 and 12 (not all grades are assessed each time). Assessment is uniform and subjects tested include maths, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography and US history. Students with SEN are included in NAEP, although the data cannot be disaggregated according to disability. Accommodations are available to assist inclusion but students with severe cognitive impairment or whose IEP team feel the test is not appropriate are excluded from NAEP (2011). Recently there have been attempts to increase the proportion of children with SEN who participate in NAEP. To aid this, the NAEP governing body has set targets for states to ensure that 85 per cent of the sample who have disabilities are included in the assessment (Maxwell & Shah 2011).

3.6.2.2 Conceptualisation of special educational needs

The 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that all children and young people aged three to 21 with disabilities are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The Act specifies 14 categories of disability: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, mental retardation (intellectual disabilities), multiple disabilities, orthopaedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or

language impairment, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment including blindness. Different states may have different wording for these categories.

Pupils identified as having a disability have their development monitored and assessed through an individual education plan (IEP). By law, this must include a statement of the child's present level of performance, annual goals and short-term objectives plus details of all special support to be provided (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). In 2008-09, 6.483 million students were receiving support under IDEA, this corresponds to about 13 per cent of all public school enrolment (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011a). The largest group receiving support were those with specific learning disabilities followed by speech and language impairment.

According to NCES (2011b, Table 46), in 2008 around 95 per cent of these students aged six to 21 were taught in regular schools; 3 per cent were in a separate school for students with disabilities (public or private) and 1 per cent had been placed in regular private schools by their parents. NCES provided a further breakdown of the 95 per cent of disabled students in regular schools in relation to time spent outside general class: 58 per cent spent less than 21 per cent of time outside general class; 22 per cent spent 21-60 per cent of time outside general class, and 15 per cent spent more than 60 per cent of time outside general class. Unsurprisingly, the proportion of young people taught in different settings did vary according to disability type.

Since being introduced in 1975, IDEA has undergone numerous revisions, the most recent in 1997 and again in 2004. These latest reauthorisations have, according to some commentators, led to a 'palpable and positive change' (National Council on Disability 2008, p55) in the approach to accommodating students with disabilities. A key shift is that schools and school districts are now to be held accountable for progress of these students by including them in state-wide testing. Previously, accountability and monitoring were through the student's IEP. These changes have arisen in part because of the disability community's concerns over the poor educational performance of this group (McLaughlin & Thurlow 2003).

3.6.3 Key approaches to measuring outcomes, progress and engagement of pupils

3.6.3.1 National/state accountability records – No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, passed into law in 2002, requires all schools and school districts that receive Title-1 funding (about 90 per cent of US school districts) to put into place a set of standards for improving student achievement, together with detailed plans charting how these standards will be monitored and met. A major consequence of this is that schools must set targets and monitor the progress of students, and sub-groups of students, to ensure they all reach certain minimum proficiency levels by 2014. Failure to achieve proficiency would lead to 'corrective action', which in its most extreme manifestation would result in school closure.

The concept of accountability coupled with high stakes testing is not new in US educational policy; indeed NCLB is a composite of earlier legislation, including state-wide accountability protocols and testing regimes. During the 1990s, most states

introduced an element of state-wide testing and, to a lesser extent, accountability measures, and by 2002 most had some form of testing procedure in place (Rudalevige, 2003). However, what is new is the scope and potential impact of the NCLB sanctions.

NCLB requires that states assess performance annually in grades 3 to 8 in reading/language/arts, mathematics and science with additional tests for grades 10 to 12. Under NCLB, states had to develop plans detailing how both schools and school districts would demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) towards full proficiency by 2014 and make public their test results. States determine their own timelines for achieving proficiency. They must ensure tests are implemented (although they decide which tests to use) and that curriculum standards in the state are in line with federal guidelines. School performance data is disaggregated according to different student sub groups eg sex, minority group, disability, level of economic disadvantage and English language proficiency.

In addition to annual testing, schools must also ensure that at least 95 per cent of all students are assessed. If this target is not met, then schools will not make AYP, regardless of the proficiency scores of the remainder of the cohort (Popham, 2004). If a school fails to make AYP, the school district can administer a series of sanctions ranging from district level monitoring through to giving parents the option to transfer their children out of 'failing' schools and providing those who remain with additional tutoring. In more extreme cases, where a school fails to make AYP for four or more consecutive years, it can be faced with having to replace staff, aspects of the curriculum or, at the extreme, be re-structured as a charter school or one run by a private company.

3.6.3.2 NCLB and special education

IDEA mandates that all students with disabilities are involved in state-wide testing. Students with disabilities in school for one academic year are included in AYP assessments for that school. If they cannot participate in standard state-wide assessments then states must accommodate them through differentiated assessments. The nature of these varies from state to state. The decision to include students with disabilities in all forms of accountability assessment is supported by past concerns that they were overlooked in school:

By including all students in State accountability systems, schools pay attention to the performance and progress of all students; educating students with disabilities becomes a shared responsibility of both general and special education teachers (US Department of Education 2007, p11).

There are several ways in which students with disabilities might be included in state-wide assessments (and these are elaborated on below). Most students with disabilities are expected to participate in a general grade-level state assessment with or without accommodations. If alternative assessment is required then it is the state's responsibility to develop appropriate alternative assessment tools. The student's IEP team, following state-approved criteria, decide whether a student will participate in alternative assessments (US Department of Education, 2007).

The combination of IDEA in ensuring improved access and support for education for those with disabilities and NCLB which ensures that schools are held accountable for the educational progress of these students has generally been viewed positively (see for example Cole, 2006). For example:

- Students with disabilities now have to be included in state-wide assessments.
- They are now more likely to be included in the general education classroom.
- There has been a greater emphasis on inclusion.
- School administrators must now recognise the academic development of these groups.
- Now that all students have to be included in state-wide assessments due regard is paid to the progress of those with disabilities.

Views on the increased focus on the educational development of students with disabilities that have arisen as a consequence of NCLB and IDEA (2004) can be neatly summarised by the following quotations:

... holding schools accountable for students with disabilities has made people more aware of how talented these students are (National Council on Disability 2008, p43).

People teach what is tested and who is tested – so now that students with disabilities are included in the accountability system, they are being taught. (National Council on Disability 2008, p55)

3.6.3.3 Unintended consequences of NCLB

Arguably NCLB is equitable in its intent. As its title suggests, it demands that the academic progress of every child, regardless how able, be open to scrutiny. The concern among many commentators is that by forcing school improvement through sanctions linked to testing, many otherwise successful schools – in particular those which serve students in disadvantaged communities – may be unfairly labelled as failing (see Smith, 2005). These schools, which may serve communities with very transient populations, as well as teaching large proportions of students with limited proficiency in spoken English, are perhaps more likely to fail to secure the rigorous minimum competency levels demanded by the NCLB tests (for example those with SEN). As a consequence, such schools are likely to face sanctions such as the transfer of pupils, reductions in school finance and, ultimately, closure (Sunderman, 2008). Cole (2006, pp4-5) provides four examples of unintended consequences of NCLB and other standards-based accountability measures:

- Narrowed curriculum: an over emphasis on maths and reading assessment to the detriment of other important areas of the curriculum.
- Students with disabilities as scapegoats: if schools fail to make AYP then it is often because of the performance of students with disabilities.

- Impact on inclusion and integration: if students with disabilities are considered to be one reason for a school's failure to make AYP then this might slow progress on integration.
- Increased dropout and retention rate: again hindered by the need to meet AYP.

Additional concerns include the practice of grouping together different types of disabilities rather than reporting on sub-groups of disabilities. An interviewee in a National Council on Disability study (2008) sums up thus:

... There is so much lumping together of disabilities, and we need to really differentiate them. NCLB should have more varied testing and accountability standards for students with disabilities given the differences in disabilities. NCLB should be more sophisticated in its requirements for proficiency, not just one standard (National Council on Disability study, 2008, p66).

Under NCLB states are not required to report separate disability categories, rather all students in special education are collapsed into a single category. Indeed, in 2009 fewer than half of the states disaggregated results by disability category (primary disability) (Altman *et al* 2010). Further, while disaggregating into primary disability groups is seen as preferable to not doing so, the concept of primary disability can be problematic because many young people have a complex set of multiple conditions (eg AFB, 2009).

Other concerns are about the technicalities of deciding on alternative assessments and how criteria for eligibility for the test assessments can be linked to the IEP, especially as some pupils with disabilities will have difficulty mastering an academic curriculum:

We set expectations for students with disabilities to meet NCLB standards, but some have real problems because of their disability, and we negate the importance of their IEP and individualized learning process because we are trying too hard to get them to pass the NCLB tests. (National Council on Disability, 2008, p67)

Possibly the most widespread concern is the increased frequency of testing (for all students, not just those with disabilities) that NCLB requires. This leads to a narrowly defined curriculum where, arguably, curriculum content that will feature in the tests is over-emphasised. This, of course, is not a concern that applies only to students with disabilities but has relevance for all pupils. But the consequences for those with disabilities are perhaps more profound and may result in them being held back an academic year, subjected to 'humiliating' tests which they are unable to answer or being denied entry to a particular school in the first place. For example:

Everything revolves around testing and the punitive nature of the system. It pervades everything, and kids pick up on it. And then you have the stress of the IEP. Teachers don't feel like they can just try something creative or different to help meet the needs of students with disabilities. There is no time to be creative – teachers are always planning for tests. (National Council on Disability, 2008, p75)

NCLB places a burden on special education students. We have fought hard to have them accepted by their peers and teachers. Now they become responsible for schools not meeting AYP. Who wants to accept these students with the stakes so high? (Cole, 2006, p5)

3.6.3.4 Monitoring the progress of children and young people with disabilities

As a consequence of the re-authorisation of IDEA in 2004, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the US Department of Education developed a list of 20 indicators which states must use to track the progress of pupils with a disability and ensure compliance with IDEA. This is reported back to the federal government. The 20 indicators (also known as Part B indicators) are presented by the National Dissemination Centre for Children with Disabilities (2011). They are a mixture of target-based criteria around measures of educational inclusion as well as procedural requirements that reflect on the administration of support for special education within states. As each state has to report annually on progress towards each indicator, provision for children with disabilities in each state is based around target setting and compliance with each indicator.

Indicators are linked to procedures (eg parental involvement) and provision targets (eg school placement) but many are also linked more directly to pupil engagement, progress and outcomes, most notably: Indicator 1 – Graduation Rate; Indicator 2 – Dropout Rate; Indicator 3 – Participation and Performance on Assessments; Indicator 4 – Rates of Suspension and Expulsion; Indicator 7 – Preschool Outcomes; Indicator 12 – Preschool Transition; Indicator 13 – High School Transition; Indicator 14 – Post-High School Outcomes; Indicator 15 – Effective Corrective Action.

For each indicator the state must set measurable and rigorous targets and include a plan for monitoring progress towards targets and initiate a programme of improvement activities.

3.6.3.5 National general surveys/census

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) provides a national picture of the experiences and achievements of students with SEN during high school and as they transition from high school to adult life. It involves a nationally representative sample of around 11,000 students aged 13 to 16 and receiving special education services in December 2000. These students were followed until 2010 to understand their educational, vocational, social and personal experiences as they move to early adulthood. Findings from NLTS2 generalise to special education students nationally as a group, to each of the 12 disability categories sampled and to each single-year age group. Data collection involved telephone interviews with parents and pupils who were able to complete a telephone interview, direct assessments and interviews as well as teacher surveys.

As the project title implies, this is the second of two similar longitudinal studies. The first (National Longitudinal Transition Study, NLTS) started 15 years earlier in 1985. Both allow comparisons across two different time periods (eg employment outcomes – see Newman *et al*, 2010).

The survey covered a wide range of topics over the ten-year study including what we have referred to elsewhere as attainment-, attendance-, independence- and happiness-related outcome measures. As a result many reports have been produced from the project, and examples are:

- Graduation, employment and independent living outcome measures (eg Wagner *et al*, 2007; Sanford *et al*, 2011).
- Disciplinary experiences and behaviour (eg NLTS2 factsheet, 2006).
- Substance use (Yu, Huang and Newman, 2008).
- Orientation and mobility outcomes among students with visual impairments (Cameto & Nagle, 2007).
- Academic achievements among students with hearing impairment (Shaver *et al*, 2011).

They also provide evidence that NLTS2 collected data which is disability specific –ie additional curriculum areas (eg mobility and orientation in relation to visual impairment, communication and sign in relation to hearing impairment/deaf).

3.6.4 Inclusion of children with SEN in assessment approaches

A large amount of literature exists on including students with SEN in state assessments – key sources are presented below. Nevertheless, this development is ongoing. The 12th report on how states are responding to standards-based reform to improve participation and performance of students with disabilities in assessments, the National Centre on Educational Outcomes (Altman *et al* 2010) identifies the following areas for development:

- positive outcomes in improving test design and content
- positive outcomes in reporting and monitoring practices
- progress in the use of assistive technologies
- progress in developing procedures for tracking individual student performance
- increased attention to the quality and validity of alternative assessments
- continued difficulties in ensuring correct provision for students granted accommodations in accordance with the IEP (eg awareness of procedural arrangements, having an appropriate scribe on site).

3.6.4.1 Assessment accommodations

As reported by Lazarus *et al* (2009) on practice in the US, accommodations policies affect how students with disabilities are included in large-scale assessments. Drawing on information collected by the National Center on Educational Outcomes to analyse how accommodations policies changed between 1993 and 2005, they reported that whereas in the 1990s these policies often sought to ‘level the playing field for students with disabilities’, more recently, seeking to ensure that they permit valid measurement of test constructs is more emphasised. They reported that accommodations involving the

use of technology as well as extended time are generally better accepted. They noted, however, that there continues to be no consensus across states about how particular accommodations (eg use of calculator, questions read aloud, sign interpreted questions and spell-checker) should be included in the policies, and suggested that states should consider focusing on the creation of 'high-quality, universally designed assessments' (p67) that reduce the need for accommodations.

3.6.4.2 Alternative assessment of the curriculum

Quoting IDEA, Cameto *et al* (2009) described an alternative (the term 'alternate' is used in the US, and used elsewhere in this section) achievement standard as 'an expectation of performance that differs in complexity from a grade-level achievement standard' (pp.2-3). The measurement of student performance against these standards requires an appropriate 'alternate' assessment. Lowrey *et al* (2007) defined this as 'an assessment tool for students with disabilities that is used in place of the statewide assessment' (p245). In considering its use they noted that most of these students have need of an alternate assessment

... because of their inability to respond to the format and content of the statewide assessment. That is, the required response mode, context, and content of the statewide assessment may be too challenging or may be inappropriate for students with severe disabilities. Alternate assessment allows for different modes of responding, a different context of assessment, and different content that is still linked to statewide standards. (p245)

In the US context then, alternate assessments refer to tests which provide assessments in line with NCLB (reading, mathematics and science) which are appropriate and accessible to children with special educational needs (for whom the standard assessment – with or without accommodations – is not suitable). These students are said to be working within achievement standards at a basic level (cf the proficient or advanced level), although different states appear to use different language.

Individual states must fulfil these requirements to include these students but implementation can differ from state to state. Cameto *et al* (2009) presented the US-based National Study on Alternate Assessments (NSAA) which was required by IDEA. Cameto *et al* reported on the progress each state had made in implementing these assessments. Four broad approaches were reported:

- rating scale/checklist
- portfolio/body of evidence
- performance task/events
- multiple choice/constructed response.

Additional distinctions have emerged in more recent educational policy in the US (April 2007): modified achievement standards (MAS) versus alternate achievement standards (AAS). This led to the distinction between alternate assessments – modified

achievement standards (AA-MAS) versus alternate assessments – alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS).

AA-MAS is optional for states while they must provide AA-AAS, and accommodations for their standard assessments. Students who are able to participate in the AA-MAS must have an individualised education program (IEP) along with instruction based on grade-level content standards. Their progress to date, in response to appropriate instruction, must be such that they are unlikely to achieve grade-level proficiency within the school year covered by the IEP (Lazarus *et al*, 2011). Therefore the AA-MAS appears to provide another option for states to create an appropriate assessment for students not adequately included by accommodations policies, but for whom the alternate achievement standards are inappropriate (ie too easy). Elliot *et al* (2008) argued that this approach would be expensive but would increase the fair inclusion of more students with disabilities. In contrast, Crawford (2007) argued that this additional option for AA-MAS assessments may offer an easy solution to states as they attempt to meaningfully include all students in their inadequate assessment systems. In keeping with this, an analysis by Lazarus *et al* (2011) suggested an association between states with more restrictive accommodations policies and their likelihood to be implementing the AA-MAS.

This shows that the US system appears to have initially generated two approaches to achieve inclusive assessment (alternate and accommodation), but more recently there may be other approaches (based around modification) emerging. Arguably, this three-layered approach to assessment may be serving to segregate students with disabilities rather than include them within a single well designed assessment process. Either way, it certainly seems to be true that the development and implementation of such approaches is expensive (eg Elliot *et al*, 2008, p151).

Unsurprisingly, a growing corpus of literature exists that examines the validity of selected state alternate assessment approaches both in psychometric and philosophical terms. For example, Lowrey *et al* (2007) highlight a concern about the use of alternate assessments for students with severe learning disabilities at the expense of other 'meaningful targets that will improve a student's quality of life after leaving the public school system' (p251).

To this extent Lowrey *et al* question whether the alternate assessments miss the point, and do not really measure educational outcomes which should be more important for some young people.

3.6.4.3 Assessment of additional curriculum

Evidence of a system-based collection of progress or outcome data on different aspects of SEN-specific additional curricula appears limited. As with other countries, it would appear that such assessment is largely limited to the individual-level and purposefully-designed research studies. A notable exception is the US's commitment to significant longitudinal studies of young people with SEN. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) described above is a very large scale study involving about 11,000 young people with SEN. The data collected include core survey elements covering all aspects

of the outcomes identified earlier in this report (attainment-, attendance-, happiness- and independence-related outcomes). It also includes SEN group-specific additional curriculum elements and provides powerful evidence of young people's engagement and outcomes in relation to these areas of their life.

4 Policy Analysis of Assessment of Children with SEN in Ireland

4.1 Introduction

The assessment of children's learning has long been discussed in Irish education. This section examines the policy context and policy guidance on assessment of children with special educational needs in Ireland. It then focuses on the implementation of policy guidance before finally analysing it in relation to providing information on the progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs in the system. Since the 1990s several documents have addressed and influenced assessment policy including: The Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (DES, 1990); Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Towards the New Century (NCCA, 1993), and Charting our Education Future, the White Paper on Education (DES, 1995).

Policy guidance can be gleaned from the following documents: the Education Act (Ireland, 1998); The Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999); Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000); Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, (Ireland, 2004); Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process (NCSE, 2006b); Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities (NCCA, 2007), and Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools (NCCA, 2009a).

Taken together these documents represent shared thinking on the development of assessment policy in the Irish context and attest to the following principles:

- Assessment is integral to teaching and learning.
- Assessment of learning and for learning are both necessary.
- Assessment relates to all aspects of the curriculum and encompasses the cognitive and affective domains.
- A variety of assessment modes exist along a continuum from child-led to teacher-led.
- Assessment can play a critical role in the early identification of learning difficulties.
- Schools should implement procedures both at school and classroom levels for recording and reporting assessment outcomes.
- It is important for teachers to recognise the technical qualities of different assessment instruments.
- Teachers need support in the implementation of assessments, and in the recording and reporting of assessment outcomes.

4.2 Policies and Guidelines

4.2.1 Education Act (1998)

The Education Act places a statutory responsibility on principals and teachers to give parents accurate and clearly accessible information on their children's progress and attainment. The Act states:

22. — (2) ... the Principal and teachers shall —
 (b) Regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents.

Section 9 of the Education Act places another requirement on schools:

9. — A recognised school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and ... it shall use its available resources to —
 (a) ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for.

This obliges schools to develop an assessment policy with structures and procedures for identifying pupils with learning difficulties, liaising with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) where appropriate, co-ordinating the monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment by the class teacher, learning support/resource teacher(s) and other professionals, and developing an efficient system for recording and storing the results of assessment.

The 1998 Education Act makes no specific reference to standardised tests. However, Circular 0138/2006 which was sent to primary schools identified standardised tests as one of the tools that schools should use to fulfil the requirement of Section 22 of the Act. The circular requested that schools administer standardised tests in English reading and mathematics at the end of first class or at the beginning of second class and again at the end of fourth/beginning of fifth class. The primary purpose of this testing was to inform parents of student progress and identify those needing additional support. The testing outcomes were reported to parents with effect from the 2007-08 school year in accordance with a reporting template developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

4.2.2 Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999)

The Primary School Curriculum offers an educational rationale and imperative for assessment in the teaching and learning process. The view that assessment contributes significantly to the teaching and learning process is strongly supported throughout the curriculum which contains a statement on assessment for each subject. It also outlines its formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative functions along with recognising its wider purposes. The methods and tools of assessment recommended in the curriculum range on a continuum from less structured, informal methods such as teacher

observation to more formal structured methods such as the use of standardised tests and diagnostic tests.

The Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum (1999) states that:

Assessment is central to the process of teaching and learning. It is used to monitor learning processes and to ascertain achievement in each area of the curriculum. Through assessment the teacher constructs a comprehensive picture of the short-term and long-term needs of the child and plans future work accordingly. Assessment is also used to identify children with specific learning difficulties so that the nature of the support and assistance they need can be ascertained and appropriate strategies and programmes put in place to enable them to cope with the particular difficulties they are encountering. Assessment assists communication about children's progress and development between teacher and child, between teacher and parent and between teacher and teacher. (DES, 1999, p17)

Regarding pupils with SEN, assessment should reflect the integrated nature of learning across the curriculum by the full range of the child's learning, encompassing the cognitive, creative, affective, physical and social dimensions of his/her development. On the areas to be assessed the curriculum states that:

Assessment is integral to all areas of the curriculum and it encompasses the diverse aspects of learning ... In addition to the products of learning, the strategies, procedures and stages in the process of learning are assessed. Assessment includes the child's growth in self-esteem, interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviour, and the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. (DES, 1999, p17)

Recognising that no single form of assessment is adequate in developing a comprehensive profile of a child's progress, attainment and development, the curriculum recommends a broad range of assessment tools ranging from:

- teacher observation
- teacher designed tasks and tests
- work samples, portfolios and projects
- curriculum profiles
- standardised tests
- diagnostic tests.

4.2.3 Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000)

All curriculum policy documents referred to are unanimous in stressing the importance of identifying learning difficulties at the earliest possible stage and of providing learning support to deal with these difficulties. This is addressed in detail in the Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) which recommend:

- The preliminary screening of pupils by their class teacher, using checklists, rating scales, screening profiles or curriculum profiles in the case of very young children, and standardised norm-referenced tests from the middle of first class onwards.
- The selection of pupils for diagnostic assessment and an initial diagnostic assessment by the learning-support teacher.
- The interpretation of assessment outcomes, and a determination of the most appropriate form of learning support for each pupil, a review of their progress at the end of an instructional term, comprising assessment of the pupil's progress, evaluation of the learning programme implemented.
- Consideration of the future level of learning support the pupil may require, and revision of learning targets, construction of an individual profile and learning programme for each pupil getting support from the learning-support teacher.

In recognising that some pupils with SEN may need further assessment and support, the guidelines advise that, following assessment, the learning-support and class teachers should decide if teachers and parents should consult the school's NEPS psychologist, or another professional. This route would consider further possible approaches and interventions, including the option of a psychological-educational assessment.

In such cases, the NEPS model of service code proposes a three-stage process for individual casework:

Stage One involves the class teacher and parent(s). Concerns are shared on the basis of screening results and observation of the child's work and personal development. An individualised approach to the child's needs is developed collaboratively resulting in an individual education plan (IEP).

Stage Two involves more specialised teachers, for example the learning-support teacher, along with the class teacher and parent(s). The effectiveness of the initial IEP is reviewed and, if appropriate, more diagnostic testing is carried out. The psychologist's role continues to be advisory, but may involve indirect support for the child on the basis of the information available. A new IEP is developed collaboratively and consultation about the possibility of more formal casework may take place at this stage.

At **Stage Three**, the NEPS psychologist, subject to parental consent, will become involved directly with the pupil, and a formal individual assessment of his/her needs may take place. Based on all information available, a support programme will be drawn up in consultation with the class teacher and the learning-support teacher to address the pupil's needs. Timelines for implementation and review of the recommended support to the pupil are outlined at this stage.

4.2.4 Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Schools (DES, 2007a, 2010a)

The NEPS published guidelines for teachers in primary schools in 2007 (DES, 2007a) to support them in assessment of and intervention for pupils with special educational needs. They aim to assist teachers in primary schools to identify needs and develop and evaluate interventions to meet those needs. They are intended to be used to assess, and

intervene with, the continuum of special educational needs that pupils may present with in mainstream schools. They include templates for planning and reviewing interventions at different levels of need.

The Continuum of Support Guidelines complement the Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) and are intended for use with the Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006b).

A further set of guidelines produced for primary school teachers in 2010 – Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties, a Continuum of Support (DES, 2010a) – aim to support teachers in assessment and intervention for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, who comprise a large proportion of pupils with special educational needs for whom additional resources are provided to schools.

These guidelines emphasise a whole-school approach to assessment and intervention. They place pupil needs in context and take account of the his/her voice in the assessment of needs and prioritisation of interventions and desired outcomes. Assessment therefore involves assessment of whole-school policies and practices, including screening of needs, appraisal of environmental factors which could be adapted to meet a pupil's needs and involvement of parents in assessment and intervention.

4.2.5 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004)

While previous legislative Acts point to the policy commitment of including pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, the enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (Ireland, 2004) solidifies the Irish policy commitment to furthering inclusive practices in mainstream schools at all levels.

Its purpose is to:

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

provide that people with special needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs; assist children with special 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; to provide for the greater involvement of parents of children with special educational needs in the education of their children. (Ireland, 2004, p5)

A key provision of this Act is to provide a legislative basis for the introduction of IEPs for students assessed as having special educational needs.

The Act defines special educational needs as:

... special educational needs means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account

of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition, and cognate words shall be construed accordingly. (Section 1)

The content of IEPs is specified to include the:

- nature and degree of the child's abilities, skills and talents
- nature and degree of the child's special educational needs and how those needs affect his or her educational development
- present level of educational performance of the child and special educational needs of the child.

The requirement to provide IEPs is not yet mandatory, however, as that section of the Act has not been commenced.

4.2.6 Guidelines on the individual plan process

In 2006, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) issued national guidelines on IEPs which would underpin a uniform national approach to their planning and implementation. The guidelines present the main features of the IEP process as outlined in the EPSEN Act 2004 and support teachers in engaging in the whole identification, planning and implementation process for pupils with special educational needs.

They advise on the IEP's educational purpose as providing evidence of the agreed special educational interventions and other supports to be provided for the child together with recording parent, student and teachers' professional views.

4.2.7 Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities

Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities (NCCA, 2007) were developed to support teachers in meeting the teaching and learning needs of pupils with general learning disabilities ranging from mild and moderate to severe and profound general learning disabilities. The guidelines seek to support schools and teachers in developing curriculum experiences that are broad, balanced, relevant, differentiated, progressive and continuous. They advise on many aspects of school and classroom planning, approaches and methodologies, differentiation, individual educational planning, the use of ICT, and assessment. Exemplars are provided to illustrate how and in what manner the needs of this student cohort can be effectively addressed.

The guidelines advise that assessment plays a crucial role in acknowledging student potential and in celebrating progress and achievement since it enables teachers to make critical decisions about differentiating the curriculum for students with general learning disabilities (ie formative). In addition, the importance of assessment as a communicative tool in reporting to parents/guardians on their child's progress and

achievement is highlighted (ie summative). The participatory nature and active engagement of the pupil in the assessment process are advised by the NCCA:

... In the case of students with general learning disabilities the teacher may need to provide additional support to familiarise students with the terms used when giving and receiving feedback. Group work and interactive learning will be of primary importance in facilitating the development of learning skills for some students with general learning disabilities. Effective assessment recognises the positive achievements of students and informs planning. (NCCA, 2007, p17)

Advice on planning for effective assessment of students with general learning disabilities is outlined and the importance of adopting a holistic approach to assessing pupil needs is highlighted. Teachers in turn are advised on recording and reporting on assessment information:

It is important that assessment

- is meaningful and appropriate to the age of the student
- takes place throughout the range of curriculum areas and experiences
- concentrates on the whole student and not just on his/her areas of difficulty
- takes account of a wide definition of progress
- takes account of the student's preferred learning styles
- supports effective communication between parents and professionals
- is part of the teaching and learning cycle
- identifies the need to re-evaluate learning targets.

(NCCA, 2007, p17)

The guidelines advise that for pupils with SEN, assessment methods should be suitable for the learning being assessed. Methods advised and detailed include:

- teacher observation
- teacher-designed tasks and tests
- portfolios
- self-assessment
- peer-assessment
- standardised testing
- diagnostic testing.

The guidelines address the importance of assessment as a tool to record and celebrate pupils' progress. For some students with general learning disabilities, the often apparent lack of progress makes it vital for the teacher to find a way to identify and record progress that is sufficiently sensitive to each student's level of ability. As the focus for some may be

on pupil needs, celebrating abilities and achievement is extremely important in shaping the perceptions of other students and adults in the students' environments.

For most students with general learning disabilities, progress can be demonstrated in the form of new skills and increased knowledge, understanding and awareness. For some students with general learning disabilities progress may be difficult to predict as these students may follow the same development pattern as their peers, but not necessarily at the same rate. (NCCA, 2007, p18)

The guidelines, launched in draft form in 2003, followed a wide consultation and piloting process. Findings revealed that teachers had difficulties with assessment, more specifically with understanding the language of assessment and in knowing what constitutes normal language development. These issues were addressed in the 2007 publication. It should be noted, however, that the same level of guidance is not yet available for teachers working with children with special educational needs other than general learning disabilities.

Further guidance on assessment from the NCCA in 2007 was intended to build on the primary curriculum's emphasis on why assessment is important by including how teachers can use assessment to make learning more interesting and motivating for children. There is a strong emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL) strategies (ie formative). It outlines the following classroom assessment methods conceptualised as part of a continuum from child-led approaches to teacher-led approaches:

- self-assessment
- conferencing
- portfolio assessment
- concept mapping
- questioning
- teacher observation
- teacher-designed tasks and tests
- standardised testing.

A key issue for usefulness of assessment data is how it is recorded. The NCCA link this to the purposes of the assessment:

The purpose of an assessment determines what and how information is recorded. The teacher can make immediate use of much of the information gathered from AfL in structuring and supporting the child's learning. The teacher can judge what assessment information is important for recording in his/her notes. For example, the teacher would not record the minutiae of a class discussion but might note the unexpectedly enthusiastic contribution of a child who rarely participated. Similarly, the teacher is unlikely to note detailed errors in mathematics work but might record that much of the class showed evidence

of requiring additional support in computation skills. The child too can record information about his/her progress in learning, for example as part of portfolio assessment. (NCCA, 2007, p70)

Teachers can also communicate assessment information regularly to children, parents, other teachers and other relevant professionals.

The assessment and recording obligations arising from the Education Act (1998) and EPSEN Act (2004) are also referred to:

Arising from the Education Act (1998) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004), the school needs to ensure that the educational needs of all children, including those with a disability or other special educational needs are identified and provided for. The school's assessment policy should therefore also refer to the role of diagnostic assessment, and specify the diagnostic instruments to be used as well as the timescale of interventions. Similarly, the school's procedures in identifying and responding to the needs of exceptionally able children should be specified. Under the terms of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) each child assessed with a special educational need should have a personal Education Plan. The school's assessment policy should indicate the procedures for drawing up and using this plan to support the child's learning. The child's parents, the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) with responsibility for the school concerned and *such other persons as the principal considers appropriate* (EPSEN Act, 2004, Section 9 (a)) must be consulted in the preparation of the Education Plan. (NCCA, 2007, p78)

There is also advice on the importance of the assessment element of early identification of children with learning difficulties. The use of screening tests in the second year of school is advocated alongside teacher observation. Early literacy, numeracy and developmental skills are specifically mentioned in this regard:

Because the early years provide the foundation for subsequent learning it is important to identify children who experience learning difficulties as soon as possible. To facilitate this, the school should implement a screening policy in the second school year, preferably by February of the second term. Screening involves teacher observation of children and the administration of group and individual tests of early literacy, numeracy and developmental skills. [...] Screening facilitates the early identification of learning difficulties and allows for effective communication with the child's parents. (NCCA, 2007, p78)

The guidelines outline the requirements of schools under the Education Act (1998) to create and maintain individual records of children's learning while they are attending school. It details three kinds of records:

- the teacher's day-to-day records
- the pupil file
- the report card.

The pupil file:

... takes account of the child's strengths and needs, the progress he/she has made, and any areas of learning and development that need particular attention. Other useful and pertinent information may also be stored in the Pupil File, such as home contact details, enrolment data, school attendance record, medical history (where appropriate), information concerning experiences at pre-school (if made available to the school on transfer), and the products of assessment (for example, completed standardised test booklets). (NCCA, 2007, p79)

The report card:

... is an important element of the Pupil File in which salient information about the child's educational progress and achievement (including interests, strengths and needs) is recorded. The key purpose of the Report Card is to share assessment information with parents in an accessible format so that they can use the information to help their children to learn, and thus strengthen the link between school and home. The Report Card allows for the recording of assessment information twice a year. The cards are completed by all who teach the child during the course of his/her primary school education. The results of children's assessments are recorded to facilitate the sharing of the most relevant and useful information about a child's progress and achievement with parents, teachers, and other professionals concerned with the child's education. (NCCA, 2007, p79)

In reviewing the above, it is clear that the records' primary function is for teachers, children and parents. The information should be 'objective and instructive'. Beyond teachers and parents the only other personnel mentioned in terms of access to the records are 'other professionals concerned with the child's education' and that the assessment information in the pupil file and on the report card 'should be accessible and comprehensible to all relevant interests'. Access for other professionals or relevant interests is not detailed in the guidance or issues such as permissions or providing records in an anonymous manner.

Interestingly there is no mention of how any of the information collated may be used by policy makers or in evaluating standards of achievement, or that this might be a legitimate expectation in an assessment policy and how it could best be facilitated.

In schools involved in the school support scheme as part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative (DES, 2005) guidance was offered on the use of specific assessment tools linked to commercial programmes such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery and First Steps. Additional assessment data are generated and passed on to the Educational Research Centre by schools participating in this initiative. In some schools assessment data on the Incredible Years programme are collated.

Further assessment guidelines followed the publication of the Aistear framework for early childhood education and these will be discussed below in analysis of policy.

4.3 Assessment at Post-Primary Level

The Inspectorate published guidelines for post-primary schools on inclusion of students with special educational needs (DES, 2007b). The assessment section covers the purposes of assessment, with methods divided into formal, informal and diagnostic, and the selection of assessment instruments. There is also advice on devising a whole-school policy in the area. The DES has also issued a circular to post-primary schools which lists approved assessment instruments.

The NEPS published guidelines, *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools – Guidelines for Teachers* (DES, 2010b) which are intended to complement the inspectorate guidelines (DES, 2007b). The model of assessment and intervention outlined in the guidelines addresses the continuum of special educational needs presenting in post-primary schools. It promotes a response offered along a continuum, from whole school and preventative approaches to individualised and specialist approaches. As is the case with the NEPS guidelines for primary schools, a graduated solution-oriented framework of assessment and intervention in schools is promoted.

A recent analysis by the ESRI (Banks & McCoy, 2011) of prevalence estimates of students with special educational needs suggests that 25 per cent of students have such needs using the definition of special educational needs in the EPSEN Act (2004). Working from this figure, it is clear that many such students, identified and not identified, complete the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations, with and without accommodations. At Junior Certificate level a few subjects can be taken at three levels (foundation, ordinary and higher) and the others at two levels. At Leaving Certificate level all subjects are offered at two levels (ordinary and higher).

Results can be differentiated by gender and the first systematic examination of differential performance by gender and achievement was undertaken by Elwood and Carlisle (2001) for the NCCA. Without a special educational needs marker on the examination database, the only differentiated figures available, in this regard, are for the number of students granted exemptions and accommodations ([see section 4.11](#)).

While current assessment policy and implementation processes are well documented at primary level, at post primary the picture is less clear. A study by Shiel, Kellaghan and Moran (2010) commissioned by the NCCA, examined the nature of assessment that takes place; how the outcomes are recorded and reported to students and their parents; and the impact of testing on teaching and learning in schools across countries such as Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, the Netherlands, Scotland, New Zealand, England, Canada and Northern Ireland. The review supports the need for standardised testing in lower secondary to assist teachers in diagnosing learning difficulties and in establishing learning programmes to address them.

Another initiative to address the needs of students with SEN at lower secondary level is the Junior Certificate School Programme introduced in 1995 to target, initially, students identified as being at risk of early school leaving.

4.3.1 Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) was designed to target Junior Cycle students identified as being at risk of early school leaving. Following a pilot phase, the JCSP was introduced to schools in 1996. Since then, programme uptake has extended to all post-primary schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. While most settings providing the JCSP are post-primary schools, it is also offered in special schools, children detention schools, Traveller training centres and youth encounter projects. While the JCSP targets students at risk of early school leaving, it has also been found useful in addressing the needs of pupils with special educational needs in that the programme offers a flexible approach to teaching and learning in the context of the Junior Cycle curriculum.

At its core this is a profiling system which facilitates teachers in monitoring and recording student progress and achievements. It comprises a series of statements, which may be subject-specific or cross-curricular, broken down into learning targets thus providing realisable short-term manageable units of work which encourage students to become more effectively involved in their own learning. At the time of writing, the JCSP is under review in the context of the wider review of the Junior Cycle being undertaken by the NCCA.

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year programme for those who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes: the Leaving Certificate Established and the Leaving Certificate Vocational. Participants in the Leaving Certificate Applied are mainly engaged in work and study of an active, practical and learner-centred nature. Students are assessed and awarded credits on completion of modules. The programme promotes the use of a broad range of teaching methodologies and participant-centred learning, and has been availed of by students with special educational needs. While originally intended for post-school years, FETAC programmes have been adopted for use in some schools in response to the lack of appropriate curriculum access and certification for some categories of students.

4.3.2 Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) awards

FETAC awards aim to meet learner needs by making relevant awards that give access to opportunities in further and higher education and training, and in employment. FETAC supports schools and other providers in meeting diverse learner needs and to maintain, improve and promote the quality of further education and training. Many special schools and youth centres use FETAC awards for the achievement of individual blocks of learning, which can stand alone or build towards the achievement of a full certificate. Certificates are awarded for the achievement of major awards, where learners achieve the national standard in a prescribed range and number of component areas. These certificates have national and international recognition and belong on the National Framework of Qualifications from levels one to six. Since 2006, FETAC has set standards for named awards at levels one and two and has recently introduced three certificates at these levels which are often suitable for students who cannot access the post-primary certification programmes.

ASDAN is a UK-based approved awarding body which recognises personal and social development through the achievement of a wide range of ASDAN Awards and Qualifications. Some of these, developed for learners with moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities, are available in a few special and mainstream schools in Ireland.

4.4 Assessment: Implementation at School Level

Following a national programme of induction for all primary teachers in support of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999), the NCCA (2005, 2008) conducted a review of its implementation in two phases:

- Phase 1 examined the implementation of the English, visual arts and mathematics curriculum.
- Phase 2 examined the implementation of curaclam na Gaeilge, the science curriculum and the social personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum.

While the reviews took a wide focus and explored the views of principals, teachers, parents and children, in this document assessment will be the primary focus.

In Phase 1, findings reveal that teachers had similar challenges with all three curriculum areas: time, the appropriateness of the assessment tools, catering for the range of abilities and with respect to visual art – an additional concern related to teachers' knowledge of visual arts assessment.

Table 6 (taken from the review) presents the frequency with which teachers reported using the six assessment tools in the English curriculum. It shows that most commonly, teacher observation and teacher-designed tasks and tests were used as assessment approaches. Teachers rarely used standardised approaches. A similar pattern emerges on use of assessment in the visual arts curriculum and mathematics curriculum.

Table 6. The use of assessment tools in the English curriculum

Class Teacher	Hardly ever/never n (%)	Once or twice a month n (%)	At least a few times a week n (%)	Total n (%)
Teacher observation	1 (0.2)	2 (0.3)	661 (99.5)	664 (100)
Teacher-designed tasks and tests	12 (1.8)	179 (26.8)	476 (71.3)	667 (100)
Work samples, portfolios and projects	66 (10.1)	234 (35.9)	352 (54)	652 (100)
Curriculum profiles	371 (63.5)	158 (27.1)	55 (9.4)	584 (100)
Diagnostic tests	389 (67.9)	148 (25.8)	36 (6.3)	573 (100)
Standardised tests	449 (78.6)	94 (16.5)	28 (5)	571 (100)

From NCCA (2005) Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1 Report with recommendations

Across the three subjects, in Phase 2 of the curriculum review, lack of time, class size and perceived curriculum overload presented the major challenges for teachers when implementing assessment procedures.

4.5 Assessment: Are Parents Adequately Informed?

Hall, Conway, Rath, Murphy and McKeon (2008) investigated the reporting of children's progress to their parents. They found that while schools did administer a range of tests and assessment procedures (typically reading assessments in infant classes and Drumcondra Achievement Tests in middle and upper levels), schools tended not to forward assessment information in the form of test results to parents.

Most schools interpret the results of assessments, particularly standardised assessments, and communicate their interpretations to parents in parent-teacher meetings. The case studies and the survey show that results of standardised tests tend to be given to parents only by appointment. (Hall *et al*, 2008, p172)

Children deemed to have special educational needs (SEN) experienced higher levels of assessment and were reported on in more detail and more frequently than their peers not so specified (Hall *et al*, 2008).

4.6 School Self-Evaluation

The DES has recently disseminated two draft documents on school self-evaluation at primary and post-primary level (DES, 2012a, 2012b). The documents outline the rationale, principles, methods and instruments of self-evaluation. It will result in a school self-evaluation report with targets for improvement. The current chief inspector sees this area as a weakness in the Irish system:

To date, robust self-evaluation that examines the quality of learning outcomes and the quality of teachers' practice in classrooms is relatively rare in Irish schools. The lack of clearly articulated criteria or standards for self-evaluation and the lack of practical guidance on how to conduct self-evaluation may partly explain why robust self-evaluation did not become established in Irish schools, despite extensive support for and engagement in school development planning. (Hislop, 2012, p18)

School self-evaluation of assessment policy is an integral part of the draft guidelines.

4.7 Analysis of Assessment Policy

Looney (2006), chief executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, in a critique of assessment in the Republic of Ireland contrasts the rhetoric on assessment in the introduction to the 1999 revised primary curriculum documents and the lack of clarity on how pupil progress is to be assessed in the various subject documents:

Given the rhetoric in the introduction to the curriculum, it might be expected that assessment would feature large across the curriculum; however, this is not the case with generic statements about using a broad range of assessment tools, and some descriptions of the kinds of assessment tools that might be

used including teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests and 'work samples, portfolios and projects' (Government of Ireland, 1999b, p118). (Looney, 2006, p348)

Given this lack of guidance, Looney (2006) is not surprised with the findings of the evaluations of the curriculum on assessment:

Given the lack of clarity on how pupil progress is to be assessed, initial evaluations of the implementation of the 1999 curriculum in schools and classrooms reveal patterns of assessment practice that are not surprising, with teachers reporting observation as their most commonly used assessment tool in English, the visual arts and mathematics, but unable to provide descriptions of what was being observed, or how data collected in this way was used to provide feedback or inform planning (NCCA, 2005). (Looney, 2006, p348)

Looney also refers to the lack of consistency between schools on transition and the use of a plethora of different tests for a wide variety of purposes including the identification of students who may require learning support:

There is no test associated with transfer between primary and post-primary school, with the latter required to publish detailed admissions policies. However, tests organized by post-primary schools on entry or just before entry to post-primary schools are used by the vast majority of schools (only 6 per cent do not use them). Recent research showed that 26 different tests (some school designed) are currently in use. Principals of post-primary schools reported using the results of these tests to identify students who may require learning support, to provide base-line data for ongoing monitoring of students' achievement and to assist in allocating students to class groups in banded or streamed settings (Smyth *et al*, 2004). (Looney, 2006, pp.348-349)

Looney (2006) acknowledges that on the issue of assessment at primary level progress has been made and on the need for reform of transition information from primary to post-primary schools. On reform of the post-primary system she is less optimistic:

In post-primary schools, the silence is filled with the deafening noise of two formal public examinations, which, despite the efforts of the NCCA in its Assessment for Learning Initiative, drowns out the whispers of other assessment discourse. (Looney, 2006, p352)

It remains to be seen if current reforms lead to a more balanced system of assessment. She also reiterates NCCA's position on the need for system-wide data:

In addition, the NCCA advice suggests that further investment is needed in providing system-wide data to assist schools in planning, to provide policy-makers with data on system effectiveness and improvement, to guide those who allocate resources, to inform the work of the NCCA and to report on the education system to the public at large (NCCA, 2005, p24). (Looney, 2006, p 352)

In mapping the issues on the policy context of assessing engagement, progress and outcomes for students with special educational needs, O'Leary's (2006) critique of assessment in the Irish system and proposals for a balanced system has implications for students with special educational needs.

O'Leary (2006, p10) draws a distinction between classroom assessment and official assessment in Ireland in terms of its purposes. The former is concerned with informing the learning process while the latter is concerned with meeting requirements such as reporting to parents, selection for third-level entry and evaluating standards of achievement nationally.

The NCCA distinguish between assessment for learning and assessment of learning in the context of discussing the diagnostic, formative, summative and evaluative functions of assessment. A rationale is presented for 'assessment approaches that would be used to understand prior knowledge, be used to support learning, be integrated with instruction, involve learning processes as well as learning outcomes and involve pupils in self-assessment' (Shepard, 2000 in O'Leary, 2006).

This emphasis towards assessment for learning draws heavily on the work of Black and Wiliam and O'Leary (2006, p11) notes that 'the effects they found for formative assessment were larger than for any educational intervention they knew of, including class size.'

Another important finding by Black and Wiliam (cited in O'Leary, 2006, p11) was 'that improved formative assessment helps low achievers more than other students and so reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall.'

While this is promising for many students with special educational needs, O'Leary draws attention to the difficulties in implementation. In the Irish context, he refers to the implementation evaluations of the 1999 primary school curriculum which mentions assessment as an area requiring 'significant attention and improvement' (DES Inspectorate, 2005, p51; NCCA, 2005).

He also draws attention to the negative consequences of official mandated testing such as that while test scores might increase, improvements in real achievement (as measured by other assessments) do not necessarily follow and the 'high cost to teachers' and pupils' lives in terms of decreasing self-esteem and motivation' (O'Leary, 2006, p14). He argues that 'in many countries assessment systems are out of balance as bureaucratic information needs are prioritised over the needs of learners' (O'Leary, 2006, p7).

O'Leary then presents a tentative model for a balanced system in Ireland. He outlines priorities for classroom assessment with a heavy emphasis on assessment for learning approaches. On official assessment at the policy level he states that:

At the policy level, high quality assessment information needs to be available to inform decisions about achievement standards and about targeting resources where they are most needed. Over the past twenty or thirty years the national assessments conducted at the Educational Research Centre have provided good trend longitudinal data about reading and mathematics ... In addition, international studies such as IAEF2, TIMSS and PISA have allowed us to compare the reading, maths and science achievements of our primary and

secondary students with their counterparts all over the world. However, while such information is generally of high quality, some would argue that since it is derived from samples it is not detailed enough to support good decision making with respect to issues concerning individual schools and the targeting of resources for learning support. (O'Leary, 2006, p16)

In addition, it could be argued that this official assessment largely excludes many children with special educational needs at the sampling stage, so they are not represented at all.

O'Leary (2006) advocates consistency of assessment information on record cards for each pupil with clear statements on pupils' achievements and that these should be the basis for providing information to psychologists and the inspectorate.

On official assessment, O'Leary (2006) outlines five elements of a balanced system. The implications of these for children with special educational needs will be reviewed. Firstly, he argues for a common format for recording summative information for all pupils in schools. It may be difficult to agree a format which addresses the needs of all pupils in the system and some choices may be required.

Secondly, O'Leary (2006, pp.17-18) states a preference for the following types of testing¹:

A set of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced standardized tests should be developed and added to the list of those already being used by schools. In my view, priority should be given to (a) diagnostic instruments that help teachers with the process of identifying learning difficulties in primary school and (b) instruments that aid the process of assessing cross curricular skills (eg problem solving, critical thinking) especially in secondary school.

General achievement testing of reading and mathematics at the end of First Class (or early in Second Class), Fifth Class and early in the Second Year of secondary school. Pupils with *perceived* learning difficulties should be excluded from this testing and administered diagnostic tests instead. The information from the diagnostic tests could be used by teachers, the inspectorate and policy makers to confirm judgements about the numbers of pupils requiring learning support in schools.

Testing of cross-curricular skills perhaps at one point in Primary school eg Fifth Class and early in Second Year of secondary school.

O'Leary (2006) underlines the word 'perceived' learning difficulties and suggests that pupils with such difficulties should be excluded from the general achievement testing. He suggests that they should be administered diagnostic tests and that the results of

1 O'Leary (2006) makes a distinction between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests (references to these tests are made elsewhere in this report). Performance in criterion-reference tests is based on where a student stands on some external performance standard (eg number of correct responses in a spelling test, skills demonstrated on a checklist). Performance in norm-reference tests is based on where a student stands on a peer group (eg the student has performed in the top 10% of national scores in a mathematics examination, a reading score is in the bottom 25% for children of the same age). See, for example, Plake and Melican (1987).

these could be used by policy makers. How this might be done is not discussed or other options such as using standardised criterion referenced tests which could be constructed at different levels.

Thirdly, he argues that the system of national assessments using representative samples currently in place for reading, mathematics and Gaeilge in primary schools should continue and that science could be added to the list in time. Currently, many children with special educational needs are exempted from this process. Again it should be possible to design a wider range of standardised criterion referenced tests appropriate for children with special educational needs.

Fourthly, he suggests that that Ireland's involvement in international assessments should continue at post-primary level and be expanded to primary level to include literacy given the concerns about attainment level particularly in areas designated as disadvantaged. He argues against mandated national testing (eg as per England) because 'it has little to offer in educational terms, has poor consequential validity, and is open to argument about what the outcomes mean in terms of real achievement' (p19).

Fifthly, O'Leary believes schools need to be much more proactive about providing a wide range of information to parents and the public about what they do and the achievements of their students without leading to the publication of league tables of results.

At primary level he suggests that 'methodologies such as curriculum profiling provide a possible means of supporting efficient recording and clear reporting of achievement in primary school without overburdening the teacher' (p20). Curriculum profiles have been developed in the Educational Research Centre for English and Mathematics but have not been part of a process of supported implementation. They are highly relevant for children with special educational needs given the developmental focus of the profiles and could be used more widely as part of the assessment and recording of achievement process.

O'Leary concludes that:

At this point in the history of educational testing and assessment it seems fair to say that in most countries around the world assessments providing information for evaluative/bureaucratic decision making at the system level tend to be prioritised over assessments supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. The former enjoy a higher public profile, get more development money, get more attention from the measurement experts and are prized as methods of leveraging change in school systems that are seen as slow to change. However, there is a great irony in the fact that research seems to indicate that official assessments are nowhere near as powerful a mechanism for raising pupil achievement as classroom assessments. (O'Leary, 2006, p20)

In the Irish context, Lysaght (2009) examined the potential of a teacher learning community to bring about changes in teachers' understanding and use of Assessment for Learning, and the extent to which these changes would impact on the reading achievement of a cohort of 170 children in a school in a disadvantaged context. Findings from the study reported that, although there were no statistically significant differences

in mean reading achievement between control and experimental groups following the intervention, significant differences were found for reading strategies.

Also, significant differences were detected in reading scores following the AfL intervention in favour of children with special educational needs in the experimental group with a large effect size. However, it did not lead to an increase in their reading scores but rather their scores did not decrease as much as those in the control group.

Positive findings were reported, also, on teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes to AfL and the approaches to reading adopted by the children in the experimental group. As noted by the author (Lysaght, 2009), these findings raise serious questions about the appropriateness of existing assessment measures and tools to detect subtle, but significant, changes in the educational performance of vulnerable populations.

4.8 Assessment Policy in Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Aistear is the curriculum framework for children aged from birth to six years developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and launched in October 2009. The framework is described as the first curriculum framework for all children aged from birth to six in Ireland (Daly & Forster, 2009) and is designed for use by parents and professional early years educators in the range of early childhood settings including children's homes, childminding settings, full and part-time day care settings, sessional services (pre-schools, playgroups and naíonraí) and infant classes in primary schools.

Within the Framework, assessment is included in the section on Guidelines for Good Practice, and its use is linked explicitly to monitoring children's progress and development across Aistear's four themes: well-being; identity and belonging; communicating; exploring and thinking. These themes are described as embodying what children learn during the years from birth to six with this learning defined as the development of dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge and understanding (Aistear, Principles and Themes, NCCA, 2009b, p13).

While the importance of assessment of learning is noted, there is a clear statement of purpose which identifies assessment for learning as the focus of the guidelines. Assessment is seen as an ongoing process of collecting, documenting, reflecting on and using information to build 'rich portraits' of children as learners so as to support future learning (Aistear, Guideline for Good Practice, NCCA, 2009b, p72). The guidelines recognise the fact that for some children, assessment will serve the critical function of helping to identify special educational needs and of informing the kinds of educational intervention required.

This view of assessment (as directly linked to, and providing information about, processes of children's learning) is in line with current trends in the assessment literature within the field of early intervention for children with special educational needs. There has been a growing emphasis in the literature on the need to move beyond an over reliance on static measures of achievement and towards assessment of children's learning in naturalistic contexts with evaluation of children's learning patterns and rates of progress, including their progress in generalising learning beyond initial

intervention contexts (Cole, Dale & Thal, 1996; Notari-Syverson & Losardo, 1996; Camarata & Nelson, 2006; Hasson & Botting, 2010). In turn, this emphasis is informed by the view that assessment practices should reflect current understandings of the social nature of learning and should include contextually relevant forms of assessment which acknowledge active, social transaction as the context for teaching and learning (Camarata & Nelson, 2006).

However, for young children who have, or who are at risk of developing, special educational needs, the assessment methods proposed and the focus on child-led assessment in Aistear raise some concerns as to whether the assessment policy in the curriculum framework is comprehensive enough to include the diverse needs of this population of children. The guidelines propose and describe five assessment methods. The first two are self-assessment and conversations and here it is intended that children will take the lead in making judgements about their progress as learners. There are three methods in which the adult takes the lead: observation, setting tasks and testing (Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment, NCCA, 2009b, p80). The five methods are sequenced along a continuum with self-assessment placed first and conversations placed second followed by observation, setting tasks and testing. The explicit rationale for the sequencing is that it reflects socio-cultural theory and prioritises 'children having opportunities to lead the assessment process' (Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment, NCCA, 2009b, p80). For children with special educational needs, two main considerations arise.

Firstly, it is not clear from the guidelines whether the privileging of assessment which is child-led assessment through self-assessment and conversation methods is grounded in a consideration of the diverse nature of the population of young children for whom these methods are proposed. The assessment guidelines do not include a discussion on diversity and do not allow for a differentiated approach within these methods. As it is outlined, the discussion suggests an assumption that children with diverse abilities and needs are equally able to comment on, think about and make decisions for the future direction of their own learning, which is how self-assessment is defined (p81), and in terms of conversation, are equally able to engage with adults and/or children, and 'talk to each other about what they are doing and thinking' (p84). Such assumptions are not inclusive of a range of children with special educational needs including children with autistic spectrum disorders, children with specific speech and language impairments and children with serious levels of intellectual impairment. Also, with regard to child-led assessment the reference to socio-cultural theory (p84) suggests that this view of teaching and learning privileges child-initiated learning. In contrast, recent work from the field of early intervention outlines how a social-constructivist paradigm allows for differentiated degrees of child-initiated and adult-initiated transactions, according to the abilities and needs of the child, with the emphasis on the adult providing the maximally supportive environment within which to enable the child's progress as understood in Vygotsky's long established notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (Hancock & Kaiser, 2006).

A second concern is that of the assessment methods proposed, those described as teacher led do not take account of, or include, the forms of assessment which have been developed within intervention research and which would be expected to inform

an inclusive assessment policy. These forms of assessment include the collection of language samples along a continuum from spontaneous to highly structured, including the use of specific probes and elicited forms of response to assess for the use of specific target structures (Camarata & Nelson, 2006; Fletcher, 2009), the recording of structured narratives (Botting, 2002; Wetherell, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2007), the use of dynamic assessment (Hasson & Botting, 2010) and the use of criterion referenced testing (Oetting & Hadley, 2010) within a diagnostic framework. The guidelines recognise diagnostic assessment as having a role in helping to identify children with special educational needs. However, they allow that most practitioners do not use these forms of assessment and they make no recommendation in this regard.

4.9 The Post-Primary Context

4.9.1 Curriculum at post-primary level

The report of phase one of the review of the role of special schools and classes in Ireland (Special Education Department, St. Patrick's College, 2007) contains data on the programmes offered by 106 special schools:

The only subject omitted from the curriculum by a significant number of special schools and classes is Irish. Thirty nine (39) special schools state that they omit Irish. This is likely to be a considerable under-estimate; and we hypothesize that some schools for pupils with General Learning Disabilities (GLD) assume that Irish does not apply to them. One hundred and twenty two (122) primary schools (53 per cent) with special classes omit Irish completely and 11 have some pupils who are exempt. Sixty-six (66) special schools use the draft curriculum guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities as do 137 schools with special classes. (p16)

Table 7. Second level programmes on offer in special schools (n=84)

Qualification	Leaving Cert	Leaving Cert Applied	Junior Cert	JCSP	NCVA/FETAC
Total Number of Schools offering programme	4	7	25	16	39
Mild GLD Schools offering programme	2	5	15	9	18

From Special Education Department, St. Patrick's College, 2007, p16

Table 7 shows that some schools for pupils with mild GLD offer a comprehensive range of second level programmes.

In a consultative document, the NCCA (2009) outlines proposals to design a new curricular framework for some students with learning disabilities at post-primary level. This document was based on feedback from the education partners on the Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities (NCCA, 2003):

This feedback informed the final publication of the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* (2007). However, that feedback also flagged a gap in curriculum, assessment and certification provision at the Junior Cycle for students within the mild to moderate range of general learning disabilities. The view emerged during the consultations that there existed a group of students who, even with the support of teachers using the most sophisticated approaches to differentiation – including the JCSP – would never access the mainstream Junior Cycle curriculum. A further and more significant point was also made – the mainstream curriculum was not appropriate for this group of students who needed concerted support in personal, social and vocational development. (NCCA, 2009, p6)

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

However, the introduction of a framework would represent a movement away from the idea of a single junior cycle school qualification. Concerns related to the emergence of a two-tier junior cycle would be raised. These could be addressed somewhat by establishing a close relationship between the learning outcomes of the framework and those of the Junior Certificate but, nonetheless, in the current thinking, there would be two different qualifications involved. (NCCA, 2009c, p13)

The NCCA Junior Certificate reform consultative document outlines the importance of qualification frameworks to development in this area with their emphases on learning outcomes, standards, levels and evidence of achievement, and the principles of access, transfer and progression. It also highlights the key element of flexibility and raises the issue again of a new or related qualification at level 1 or 2 of the NFQ for some students with special educational needs:

But if there is one dimension that the existence and growing influence of frameworks has introduced it is that of flexibility and this is of enormous relevance to the Junior Cycle developments. We no longer have to think about a Junior Cycle qualification as relating solely and directly to an examination! We can think about the kind of learning and the qualities of the learner that we would like to see rewarded by a qualification and about the best ways of gathering evidence of achievement of that learning and of those emerging qualities in the learner; in other words we can look beyond grades in terminal examinations as the only expression and source of recognition of achievement. We can reflect on the question of how much of the educational programme at the Junior Cycle should be part of the qualification and whether parts of the programme should be unrelated to the qualification? We can legitimately address the issue of whether, given the wide-ranging ability of learners at the Junior Cycle, it is one qualification or more that is needed. For example, should new or related Junior Cycle qualifications at level 1 and 2 of the NFQ

be introduced to meet the needs of specific groups of learners with special educational needs? (NCCA, 2010, p30)

In the report on the Junior Certificate consultation process the NCCA raise the issue of how to ensure that reform leads to greater equity and inclusion and the dangers of too stratified a system is raised:

The fact that there are inequities within the system and that it doesn't serve the needs of all students equally is not contested. Competition between schools in the 'market place' was mentioned as a current reality. Many of the submissions were concerned that any change would not contribute to highly differentiated experiences for junior cycle students and lead to a further 'stratified' system and even greater educational disadvantage (CEE OA). On the other hand, some submissions suggested that many of the ideas for change could result in greater inclusion and engagement in learning as well as broader opportunities for recognition of learning. The key to ensuring that reform does not contribute to further inequalities in the system or increase social differentiation between schools, according to some submissions, is in equity of access to resources and support in bringing about change. It is essential that significant change at junior cycle should be accompanied by the resources necessary to implement that change in such a way that disadvantaged students can benefit from it (JCSP). (NCCA, 2011, p21)

Arising out of the consultation process the NCCA (2011) has published its recommendations for reform of the Junior Cycle. The proposals include a new Level 2 certificate qualification:

The Level 2 Certificate is designed to support post-primary schools and special schools in developing programmes to meet the specific learning needs of a group of students who are participating in junior cycle, but are usually unable to achieve the learning outcomes involved in subjects leading to the Junior Certificate examination. The students in question have learning difficulties from the lower functioning mild to higher functioning moderate categories of general learning disability. As such, they are small in number and represent the target group for this qualification. At present they participate in a range of settings: in mixed-ability classes and special classes in post-primary schools, and in various types of classes and groups in special schools. The Level 2 qualification is designed for this target group, so that their learning achievements in junior cycle are fully recognised. It is a qualification that will be taken on an exceptional basis. (NCCA, 2011, p35)

Students working towards this qualification will have completed Level 2 Learning Programmes. There are two curriculum components that are central to these programmes – Priority Learning Units (PLUs) and short courses.

This does not mean that students following a programme leading to the Level 2 Certificate are completely confined to learning associated with Level 2. Many will be

in classrooms where learning leading to the Level 3 qualification will be taking place. Where it is suitable for the student involved, he/she could take a subject or short course at Level 3 and also receive a certificate at that level (NCCA, 2011, p35).

This is a welcome development but it raises the question as to whether it will capture the achievement levels of all children with special educational needs at post-primary level. The consultative document raised the possibility of level 1 qualifications. The reasons for not pursuing this option are not given in the final proposals.

There is little information on how well post-primary schools use the assessment information at their disposal. Hislop (2012), drawing on the experience of the inspectorate, suggests that:

At post primary level, the data available are generally limited to the outcomes from the State examinations. The degree to which this is interrogated fully by schools varies considerably at present.

4.10 At a System Level: The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The new National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (DES, 2011a) significantly includes an emphasis on the achievement levels of students with special educational needs:

The purpose of this strategy is to raise achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, including those with special educational needs. As with all students, the learning potential of students with special educational needs should be recognised and developed as fully as possible. Assessment, differentiation and personalisation in teaching and learning are vital skills for all teachers and ECCE practitioners in all contexts but are particularly important in the case of children and students with special educational needs. (p66)

The strategy is clear in terms of expectations and teaching and learning outcomes for all. However, it is less clear in its discussion and aims on assessment. The strategy has as one of its objectives to:

Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students with special educational needs as part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process. (p70)

On assessment, the strategy outlines the various levels at which information is required and its analysis improved significantly. This includes information at the level of the individual student, the school and also at a system level.

At the level of the student and the school there is much in the strategy that applies to students with special educational needs. However, in outlining the approaches to be adopted at a system level there is no discussion, modifications or adaptations proposed that would allow the systematic collection of data on the achievement levels of students with special educational needs.

Three sources of data collection (standardised assessment tests, National Assessments of mathematics and English reading, and participation in PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS) are proposed, all of which involve the exclusion of many students with special educational needs in the process or are an inappropriate way of capturing their achievement levels. This is disappointing given the submission from the NCSE (2011b) and others on the draft literacy and numeracy strategy highlighting the concerns in this area:

Currently some formal educational outcomes data are recorded nationally on a range of measures and from a number of sources, both within national and international initiatives in Ireland (eg standardised test results or national assessments in primary schools, state examination results, PISA). However, there are limitations associated with these data which may have implications for what can be learned about educational outcomes and progress among children with special educational needs. For example, available data may not be collected in a way that allows for the disaggregation of the outcomes for children with special educational needs and standardised tests may not be best suited to assessing progress among these learners.

The NCSE proposes that the national plan address the needs of learners with special educational needs not just in the implementation of the strategy, but also in the design and development of progress indicators and outcomes. (NCSE, 2011, p5)

This clearly has not been done in the plan or commitments made that it will be addressed in the future.

In terms of using information available at a system level in a better way the ERC (2011, p21) make the valid point that 'Junior Certificate results have the potential to provide far more detailed information on student performance than standardised test results. In the JC examinations, students are assessed over a far broader range of outcomes than on a typical standardised test.'

However, Hislop (2012) seems to suggest that there are problems with this approach and favours the standardised test route:

Terminal state examinations, for example, while useful, cannot give us long-term comparable data on student learning, simply because the examination must change each year. Standardised tests of reading and mathematics, and perhaps of other skills, can provide restricted but useful information about students' achievement. Properly analysed by teachers at school level, they can be used to identify weaknesses in students' learning and to help in designing the next appropriate learning steps for students.

Circulars (DES, 2011b, 2012c) have been issued to schools on the strategy. School management and staff are requested to review their assessment policies and practices in the light of the NCCA (2009) publication, *Assessment in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* and the requirements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011a, p5).

However, regrettably the sole reference to children with special educational needs in the Circulars is on exemptions from national standardised testing:

Students may be excluded from standardised testing if in the view of the school principal they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate. (DES, 2011b, p6)

These results must be reported to parents and with effect from 1 June 2012 the aggregated assessment data must be reported to the board of management in each school. In addition, the aggregated data in the form of STEN scores will be reported annually to the Department of Education and Skills.

Hislop (2012) further explains part of the rationale for this requirement:

National analysis of some assessment data from schools also has the potential to allow identification of schools where unexpectedly high or unexpectedly low levels of student performance occur and where further analysis is merited. This is why the National Literacy Strategy incorporates the collection of national assessment data for the first time. Unfortunately, we will be doing this without the infrastructure of a national individual pupil database at primary level.

However, no reference is made to the reporting of the progress of children excluded from the tests. A template for reporting aggregated assessment data is provided and includes a section on the number of children excluded from the assessments in relation to each class assessed in English reading and mathematics. However, the section makes no distinction between the reasons for exclusion. Therefore isolating the number of exclusions in relation to special educational needs as against English language proficiency would not be possible. In addition there is no way of identifying those with special educational needs included in the assessments at a national level.

A key issue at policy level will be the extent to which teachers, schools and parents perceive the results on a continuum of low to high stakes. The evidence is very clear that when the stakes are high the risks of teaching to the test increase and temptation to influence the results in various ways not intended by the test developers increases (Mansell, James & the Assessment Reform Group, 2009). The recent changes at primary level in reporting the aggregated scores from standardised tests to the Board of Management and the DES may heighten this possibility. In many schools only one teacher will be responsible for the class grade in which the test is given and school policies on assessment may need procedures in place to safeguard the integrity of the process. For example, Mac Ruairc (2011) reports on a survey of 160 primary teachers in Ireland where 40 per cent agreed with the statement 'I am aware of other teachers engaging in non-standard practices to raise the scores their classes achieve'.

4.11 Information on Outcomes Held by the Examinations Commission

Earlier reference was made to the following point highlighted by the ERC that,

Junior Certificate results have the potential to provide far more detailed information on student performance than standardised test results. In the JC examinations, students are assessed over a far broader range of outcomes than on a typical standardised test. (ERC, 2011, p21)

In this regard the Examinations Commission was contacted and asked if results for students with special educational needs could be disaggregated and analysed further and if not what would be required for this to happen. In response figures for reasonable accommodations only were supplied. The tables below outline the range of accommodations and exemptions which apply in the Irish context.

Table 8. Leaving Certificate reasonable accommodations statistics 2007-11

Type of Accommodation	LC 2007	LC 2008	LC 2009	LC 2010	LC 2011
Tape Recorder (Learning)	194	149	174	144	128
Tape Recorder (Physical)	49	26	73	127	36
Reading Assistance	967	1152	1401	1685	1854
Scribe	204	267	293	349	470
Word Processor	135	170	223	141	351
Enlarged Question Papers	30	30	41	41	39
Braille Question Papers	1	1	1	0	5
Exemption from Aural Tests	12	16	11	6	15
Exemption from Oral Tests	16	7	8	6	19
Exemption from Practical Tests	0	0	0	0	0
Modified Papers (Visual)	10	13	11	15	5
Spelling/Grammar Waiver	1841	2143	2395	2679	2755

Table 9. Junior Certificate reasonable accommodations statistics 2007-11

Type of Accommodation	JC 2007	JC 2008	JC 2009	JC 2010	JC 2011
Tape Recorder (Learning)	580	424	355	303	270
Tape Recorder (Physical)	72	43	95	41	33
Reading Assistance	3101	3230	3391	3620	3770
Scribe	447	535	586	615	832
Word Processor	177	177	240	313	360
Enlarged Question Papers	45	30	41	52	44
Braille Question Papers	0	1	3	1	2
Exemption from Aural Tests	11	15	6	9	18
Exemption from Oral Tests	0	1	0	5	0
Exemption from Practical Tests	12	9	12	0	20
Modified Papers (Visual)	18	18	17	14	2
Spelling/Grammar Waiver	4378	4553	4824	4979	5163

Table 10. Leaving Certificate Applied Reasonable Accommodations Statistics 2007–11

Type of Accommodation	LCA 2007 Year 1 and 2*	LCA 2008 Year 1 and 2	LCA 2009 Year 1 and 2	LCA 2010 Year 1 and 2	LCA 2011
Tape Recorder	159	90	76	69	42
Reading Assistance	744	588	615	647	754
Scribe	82	84	35	113	121
Word Processor	18	11	20	62	28
Enlarged Question Papers	10	10	12	7	6
Modified Papers (Visual)	1	0	0	0	1
Oral Exemption	1	0	0	0	0
Aural Exemption	2	0	0	0	0
Whole Subject exemption	1394	1729	2409	2078	1013

* The LCA is assessed over two years and students carry credits forward from year 1.

Table 11. Numbers of separate centres 2007–11

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of Centres	6572	7118	7576	8474	8860

Source for tables 8–11: Information supplied by the Examinations Commission

From these figures it can be seen that over the past decade there has been an increase in the numbers of candidates being granted reasonable accommodation in state examinations. By far the largest category of accommodations has been in the spelling and grammar waiver where candidates are not penalised for spelling and grammar errors. The use of reading assistance, a scribe or word processor is also relatively common and generally increased between 2007 and 2011.

Hyland (2011, p11) comments that ‘There have been reported instances of students who have not previously been diagnosed with special educational needs seeking reasonable accommodation in the Leaving Cert examination, if they perceive that such an accommodation might gain them some extra marks.’

The National Education Psychological Service which is responsible for administration of the scheme at senior cycle level express a number of reservations about the system in their submission to the Advisory Group on Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE). Firstly they state the principle that ‘in our view any element that is set out in the syllabus as integral to that subject should not be capable of being waived’ (NEPS, not dated, p14).

The application of this principle raises issues about a number of the accommodations:

With regard to the reader accommodation the purpose of the examination, inter alia, may be to assess the ability to read literary or descriptive passages in context. In that event this ability may not be accurately assessed if the extracts are read to the candidate. NEPs is concerned, therefore, that the inclusion of reading comprehension difficulties as a basis for granting the Reader accommodation may in fact militate against the purpose of the examination and confer an unintended advantage on the candidate. (NEPS, not dated, p15)

Instead of the use of readers, NEPs recommends that permitting access to audio versions of papers for all would address concerns regarding the 'possible misuse of separate centres. Apart from the possibility of candidates being encouraged to listen carefully or vocabulary explained, help may be provided inadvertently through emphasis in reading' (p15). Audio versions of papers made available to all candidates either on request or routinely would address the 'issue of the inclusion of reading comprehension difficulties as a basis for the granting the Reader accommodation. Candidates who have difficulty in assimilating the import of the question on first reading could replay the questions as often as required' (p16).

NEPS also questions the validity of the spelling and grammar waiver: 'The question arises as to whether the granting of the waiver reduces the construct being assessed'. They go on to state that:

Psychologists generally consider that Grammar should not be included under this accommodation. Apart from the difficulties in assessment of eligibility there is the concern that candidates may assume that they will not be assessed on the syntactic structure of the language, and consequently specific grammar questions can effectively be ignored. (p17)

They go on to argue that 'the granting of 10 per cent of the entire examination in Honours English for spelling and written punctuation is believed to serve as an incentive to obtain the waiver arrangement' (p17). In addition the submission relates that a number of psychologists 'have raised the issue of whether candidates using tape recorders really require the ten minutes extra per scheduled hour of each question paper as specified in Circular S40/94. It is possible that the use of a tape recorder may allow the candidate to produce significantly more text than would normally be the case.' (p18)

The difficulty of applying the discrepancy model of specific learning disability to students with mild general learning disabilities is alluded to and NEPS recommends that 'a blanket threshold for accommodations should be allowed for MGLD candidates irrespective of their intellectual functioning. It could be based on the readability levels for the LCA' as most students with mild general learning disabilities 'sit for the Leaving Certificate Applied Examination (LCA)' (p22).

On school practice, NEPS recommends that school examinations should incorporate special arrangements from first year so students are familiar with all elements of the accommodation.

4.11.1 Exemptions of Irish students with special educational needs from national evaluations and international assessments

Table 12 outlines the types of exemptions allowed from national and international assessments. In guidance given to schools on evaluation of the School Support Plan (SSP) under the DEIS programme in literacy and numeracy in 2007 and 2010 schools were encouraged to include as many as possible and if in doubt include. The Guidelines had three categories of exemptions: (i) diagnosed with a moderate or severe or profound general learning disability; and if in the judgement of the teacher (ii) the

child needed a special accommodation for a physical disability and (iii) if proficiency in the English language was an issue. In total 1.5 per cent of students were exempted in the 2010 evaluation (Weir, Archer, O' Flaherty & Gilleece, 2011, p30). In this regard it is important to note that exemption figures are coming down. For example, in the evaluation of the Breaking the Cycle scheme the exemption figure was 7.7 per cent in the mathematics test (Weir, 2003).

Across these types of assessment there is general agreement on categories of exemption except dyslexia where in some cases it is not mentioned as a category at all.

Table 12. Type of exemptions across assessments for some students with special educational needs

Type of discretionary Exemptions	PISA 2009	TIMSS and PIRLS 2011	National Assessments of mathematics and English reading 2009	DEIS (School Support Programme (SSP)) Evaluation 2010
Functional disability (moderate to severe permanent disability)	Yes Category 1*	Yes	Yes: Physical disability (eg visually impaired)	Yes: Eg. A pupil with serious mobility difficulties
Moderate/severe general learning disability	Yes: and behavioural or emotional disability Category 2*	Yes: and includes emotionally or mentally unable to follow even the general instructions of the test	Yes	Yes
Specific learning disability (severe dyslexic difficulties)	Yes Category 4*	No: Pupils should not be excluded solely because of poor academic performance, disciplinary problems, or a diagnosed learning disability (eg dyslexia)	Yes	No
Limited assessment language experience (3 criteria: not a native speaker, limited proficiency and less than one year instruction)	Yes Category 3*	Yes	Yes	Yes: Proficiency is at a level that they are unable to attempt the tests
Percentage of students exempted	2.5%	Figures not available yet	1.5% (second class) 1.2% (sixth class)	1.5%

Source: Information supplied by the Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College

*Note: Categories as defined in PISA 2009 Manual (OECD, 2008b), [see page 20](#) of this report.

Shiel *et al* (2010, p103) discuss the merits of standardised testing at the lower secondary level, arguing that:

There also appears to be variation in how the term standardised test is interpreted. Some of this may be due to different experiences in the use of such tests. It is, however, surprising that in some systems, considerable teacher discretion is allowed in administration. In Scotland, teachers assess listening and talking, and can provide support to students with special educational needs. In Denmark, it is left to teachers to decide how much support to give students whose first language is not Danish. These provisions clearly violate standards for test administration set out in Chapter 2 [of the authors report].

This raises the question of the appropriateness of these measures for capturing the achievement levels of students with special educational needs and the requirement for other forms of assessment to be used in parallel. Table 13 outlines a summary of the above outcome information.

Table 13. Summary of outcomes information in the Irish educational system

Name of outcome information	Body emanating from	Audience	Purpose	Type of data
Junior Certificate	Examinations Commission	Students, parents, DES, employers and wider public in aggregated form	End of Junior Cycle assessment	Marks and grades at student and national level
Junior Certificate Schools Programme	Examinations Commission	Students, parents, DES, employers and wider public in aggregated form	End of Junior Cycle assessment	Marks and grades at student and national level
Leaving Certificate	Examinations Commission	Students, parents, DES, third level providers, employers	End of post-primary assessment selection process for third level and employment	Marks and grades at student and national level
Leaving Certificate Applied	Examinations Commission	Students, parents, DES, third level providers, employers	End of post-primary assessment selection process for third level and employment	Marks and grades at student and national level
Leaving Certificate Vocational	Examinations Commission	Students, parents, DES, third level providers, employers	End of post-primary assessment selection process for third level and employment	Marks and grades
PISA	OECD	Policy makers and public in aggregated form	International comparison of student achievement	Marks, percentages, and ranks with narrative interpretation
TIMMS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)	Policy makers and public in aggregated form	International comparison of student achievement in maths and science	Marks, percentages, and ranks with narrative interpretation
PIRLS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)	Policy makers and public in aggregated form	International comparison of student achievement in literacy	Marks, percentages, and ranks with narrative interpretation
DEIS School Support Programme evaluations	Educational Research Centre	Policy makers, DEIS schools and wider public	Evaluation of the effects of specific DES interventions	Statistical information, narrative accounts and interpretation

Name of outcome information	Body emanating from	Audience	Purpose	Type of data
National assessments of literacy and numeracy	Educational Research Centre	Policy makers, schools and the wider public	Information on standards of literacy and numeracy	Statistical information, narrative accounts and interpretation
Standardised tests of literacy and mathematics	Individual teachers/schools	Parents, students and Board of Management and DES in aggregated form	Information to parents and wider system on standards of literacy and numeracy	Marks, standard scores, percentiles and STEN scores at individual class and school level
Annual individual student school report	Individual teachers/schools	Students and parents		Marks, grades, percentages and narrative comments
Whole school evaluations	DES Inspectorate	Public		Narrative accounts at level of school
State examinations at individual school level (optional)	Boards of Management of individual schools	School body and wider public		Statistical information
FETAC programmes	FETAC			
Publications from Inspectorate	Evaluation and Research unit of the Inspectorate	Public	Evaluation of national curricula	Statistical information and narrative accounts
Research publications	Research bodies			Marks, grades, percentages and narrative interpretations
League tables of percentage of leavers per school going to third level	Newspapers following FOIs to third level colleges	Public	Public information	Percentage of students going to third level and ranking position of school
Evaluation of Individual Education Plans	Teachers/schools	Parents of children with special educational needs	Review of progress	
Psychological/speech therapy/occupational therapy/psychiatric assessments	NEPs, HSE, voluntary bodies and private providers	Parents, teachers and resource allocation providers	Assessment of need, review of progress, resource determination	Results of formal, informal and diagnostic assessments
Individual teacher assessments	Teachers	Students, parents, teachers and other professionals	Evaluation of progress	Formal and informal numerical measures, narrative accounts, photographs, video, work samples
School self-evaluation report	School management	Parents, teachers, policy makers	Identification of areas for improvement	Whole school data drawn from student assessments, observations, interviews and surveys
Attendance outcomes	National Education Welfare Board	Policy makers and public	Analysis of attendance data	Statistical data disaggregated according to school type and sector

4.12 Other Sources of Data – Surveys and Commissioned Research

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) publish a yearly analysis of attendance data in primary and post-primary schools. The latest analysis shows that non-attendance is ‘substantially higher’ in special schools and in schools with special classes than other primary schools (Millar, 2012, pii):

Pupils in mainstream primary schools were absent for 5.6% of the available days in 2009/10. The percentage days lost was higher for mainstream schools with special classes (7.5%) and highest in special schools (11.3%). (Millar, 2012, p9)

Growing Up In Ireland is a major Government longitudinal national study of nearly 20,000 children (Williams *et al* 2009). The study commenced in 2007 and takes place over seven years following the progress of two groups of children; 8500 nine year olds and 11,000 nine month olds. During this time two rounds of research will be carried out with each group of children. Drawing on data from the study, Banks and McCoy (2011) estimate the prevalence rate for children covered by the definition of special educational needs in the EPSEN Act to be 25% of the age cohort based on parent and teacher reports. The study provides very valuable information on the educational and social outcomes of these children. Data specific to outcomes was collected in relation to: attitudes to school, standardised scores for reading and mathematics, absenteeism, homework completion, school setting, pupil-teacher ratio, discipline policy, classroom management, support for learning at home, mother's expectations, reading related resources in the home, peer relations, bullying, health and development, family relationships, use of health care and community services (Williams *et al* 2009).

On literacy and numeracy the Drumcondra Reading (vocabulary section) and Mathematics Tests (part A) were administered. The number of exclusions is not reported. However, questions arise as to the validity of these measures for children not included in the original sample of these tests. In the education chapter of the first report on nine year olds separate results are not reported for children with special educational needs.

Banks and McCoy (2011) suggest, but do not give figures, that achievement levels for children with special educational needs are far behind their peers which suggests that disaggregation of data for students with special educational needs is possible:

Growing Up in Ireland provides information on student's reading and mathematics test scores, engagement with school and social interactions with peers and teachers. The gap in attainment between children with SEN and their peers is still large. (Banks & McCoy, 2011, p123)

Banks and McCoy also draw on data from another ESRI study Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students (Smyth *et al*, 2009) to highlight differences in the distribution of children with special educational needs across school types. This could be a major mediating factor in the educational outcomes for children with special educational needs. This study found that DEIS schools and in particular Urban Band 1 DEIS schools are much more likely to have high concentrations of students with literacy, numeracy and emotional behavioural difficulties than other school types. At post-primary level such students were more likely to be in DEIS schools, particularly vocational schools.

Also drawing on the Growing Up in Ireland data McCoy and Banks (2012) used a broader measure of academic engagement and social/peer relations to show how children with special educational needs experienced primary school compared to children without

such needs. They found that pupils with special educational needs were less likely than their peers without special educational needs to like school and across both dimensions 'face considerable barriers to fully engage in school life' (p84).

Two other ongoing NCSE research projects have a focus on outcomes. Project IRIS is a longitudinal project of inclusive education which will contain data on student outcomes over a three-year period. A project evaluating the effectiveness of special class provision will also provide useful information on pupil progress and outcomes in these classes.

4.13 Individual Education Plans (IEPS)

A key mechanism for assessing the progress of students with special educational needs is the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The use of IEPs is proposed in the EPSSEN Act, but this requirement is not yet mandatory for schools, as this element of the Act has not been commenced. IEPs could be a significant rights-based safeguard for students in gaining access to an appropriate education. In addition they could provide a very useful mechanism for assessing outcomes across a range of areas relevant to each child's needs. However, many questions remain on the implementation of this process when that part of the Act is commenced. Who will be entitled to an IEP? What evidence will be used to determine if targets have been reached? Who will decide if targets have been adequately assessed? Who will monitor the achievement of targets? What record keeping procedures will be in place? Evidence from whole school evaluations suggests that there is variable practice within and between schools in relation to the quality of the IEP process ([see section on WSE evaluations of assessment in special schools](#)).

4.14 Conclusion

In terms of classroom assessment a wealth of non-standardised assessment data is collected by teachers within schools in the form of checklists, observations, narrative comments, and teacher-designed tests and tasks. These are not designed with dissemination to the wider system in mind. This prompts the question as to whether this information could be recorded in such a way as to be helpful to policy makers. It would seem the answer is 'probably not', not least because evidence suggests that assessments used by teachers rarely follow standardised procedures.

Standardised assessments for literacy and numeracy are used widely and the results from all primary schools will be collated at a national level for the first time from June 2012. However, these may or may not include students with special educational needs (not identified) and questions arise as to their appropriateness once initial screening of difficulties has occurred.

In schools involved in the School Support Programme under the DEIS initiative there are more formal assessment measures gathered for the First Steps and Reading and Mathematical Recovery interventions but results for students with special educational needs are not necessarily collated separately. Exemptions for students with special educational needs while understandable present challenges at a system level in devising appropriate measures to capture the engagement, progress and outcomes for these

pupils. Similarly, proposals under the National and Literacy Strategy have to date not addressed the evaluation and recording at a system level of the progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs in these core areas of learning.

At post-primary level and in special schools all the Junior and Senior Cycle programmes are being used (though not universally available), but there is no identified automatic system for disaggregating results for students with special educational needs. There remains a considerable issue over assessment of students in post-primary and special schools who do not participate in these programmes. The new proposed developments in the Junior Cycle are a step to further inclusion in terms of curriculum and assessment but are unlikely to include all pupils (particularly those with more severe general learning disabilities). The potential of curriculum profiles and criterion-based assessments could be explored in relation to addressing this gap.

The question of disaggregating results raises the issue of a special educational needs marker as part of a wider student database which would allow disaggregation of results on all national programmes of assessment.

The DES (2008, p26) data strategy outlines the situation on data collected and future plans. Currently the DES collects the following statistical information:

- Aggregate information on total number of pupils in ordinary primary schools taught by a Special Class teacher (classified by age, sex, type of special learning need, entry source and destination code). Since 2008 information on the number of pupils receiving support through the General Allocation Model has also been sought.
- Aggregate information on total number of pupils in Special Schools (classified by age, sex, type of special learning need, entry source and destination code); and
- Information collected at Second Level.

The DES data strategy (DES, 2008) contains advice received from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 2003, who examined the data holdings of six government departments. The advice advocates the introduction of a primary pupil database with the capturing of the personal public service (PPS) number essential for coherence with other data sources. The advice from the CSO also recommends that development of coding frames for disability and special or social needs as well as ethnicity should be pursued with the CSO, DSFA and the Equality Authority.

The DES Data strategy 2008–2010 identified the following gaps through their consultation process (DES, 2008):

- imprecise and poor quality data on school drop-out especially at primary level
- poor linkage of data from primary through to second level (including pupil transfer)
- absence of socio-economic data to enable policy on social inclusion
- incomplete information on special needs.

It goes on to state that it envisages that most of the new information will be supplied by the National Council for Special Education:

Special educational needs is a particularly complex, sensitive and expanding area of information interest. Data users need to know how many learners have a special education need, what it is, where SEN learners are, how they compare with other groups and when they complete full-time education. The present supply of data does not adequately reflect the growth in the range of low- and high-incidence special learning needs as well as the need to classify all pupils with special learning needs by various other features such as age, social, ethnic background etc. It is envisaged that most of the new information required in relation to SEN will be provided under the SEAS (Special Education Administration System) currently being developed by the National Council for Special Education. (DES, 2008, p26)

It further states that:

In conjunction with the National Council for Special Education, and following consideration of information needs relating to Special Education Needs as well as reporting requirements by international organisations, we will establish a standardised set of statistical categories for special educational needs, and apply these at primary and second level in the context of an Individualised Learner Database. (DES, 2008, p42)

The strategy refers to the NCSE's duties in this regard under the EPSEN Act: '... to ensure that the progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and that it is reviewed at regular intervals' and 'to assess and review the resources required in relation to educational provision for children with special educational needs.'

It envisages the database being linked with other public databases such as the State Examination Commission, NCSE and the National Education Welfare Board.

The DES has informed post-primary schools of the Post-Primary Online Database, which is hosted by the Department and will be available to all post-primary schools from November 2013. Initially it will be pre-populated with student data which schools return to the Department in October 2013.

P-POD will allow schools and DES to share information and will connect to any future developments with other databases:

The IT solution will facilitate smooth connectivity between a central database hosted by the Department and post primary school administration systems. It will also accommodate any future development to meet the full implementation of the Department's Data Strategy to link information on the characteristics and needs of individual learners from pre-primary to higher and further education. (*One of the High level goals of the Data Strategy 2008-2010*). (DES, 2012d, p5)

No further reference is made to a specific special education marker in the new database.

The National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives 2011–2016 from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011, p26) outlines research and

data priorities and builds on the DES strategy by identifying the following deficits in knowledge of children's learning outcomes:

- factors affecting attendance, retention/progression and early school leaving
- long-term impacts of early learning experiences
- learning pathways and outcomes in non-traditional or out-of-school settings
- the impact of arts, cultural and sporting activity on learning
- services and supports for general education attainment, in particular for those children with a learning or intellectual disability
- behavioural issues, both pro- and anti-social, in educational settings
- measures of literacy and numeracy at key stages and by key characteristics.

However, the action plan set out in the strategy of 59 actions to be implemented by 24 organisations does not commit to developing a primary school database with a marker for special educational needs. Actions for DES include continuation of a series of retention rate reports, with inclusion of markers of disadvantage; and a pilot project linking the post-primary database with other databases to provide information about learners studying for FETAC qualifications.

It commits an action group (led by the National Disability Authority and including the National Council for Special Education) to analyse disability markers leading to 'a harmonised set of markers for use with surveys and administrative data' (DYCA, 2011, p63). In addition, the NCSE will engage with the DYCA on developments in its information systems.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012) present an organisational and review group report of the DES which states that stakeholders in the education sector were: '... especially critical of the absence of a primary pupil database, which in the view of some, militates against strong student-centric approaches to evaluation' (p54).

The development of 'a standardised set of statistical categories for special educational needs' (DES, 2008, p42) will be onerous. Who has special educational needs under the EPSEN Act (2004) is a contested question and the dilemma of identifying it for administrative purposes or not labelling for inclusive purposes is a real issue for those with high incidence special educational needs. Under the general allocation model, pupils with special educational needs receive resources independent of identification. Thus pupils with similar profiles may or may not be identified and present a challenge in the construction of markers in a database.

The implications of the Data Protection Acts will also need to be considered. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (2012, p52) review urges the DES 'to resolve any legislative or administrative issues relating to the sharing of personal data under the Data Protection Acts'.

5 Analysis of Special School Evaluations

5.1 Summary of Approach and Rationale

A search through the DES database of whole school evaluations (WSE) during 2006-11 reveals 44 evaluations of special schools. Hislop (2012) argues: 'Evaluations of practice in schools, conducted by experienced inspectors who can make context-sensitive judgements about the work of the school are a rich source of meaningful information about schools.' As special schools cater for children with more complex special education needs than mainstream schools and can present additional challenges in relation to assessment, an analysis of the assessment evaluations of these reports was carried out. Time constraints meant a similar analysis in mainstream schools was not possible but would be a useful additional source of data. However, in relation to the present analysis the assessment comments in the inspectorate reports relate entirely to students with SEN whereas the comments on assessment in mainstream school reports can refer to the whole school context and would be more difficult to analyse separately with a special education focus only.

Statements on assessment in the reports were initially grouped according to 'positive comments' on practice or 'suggestions for improvements in practice'. These were then analysed and organised into sub-themes. Evidence for each sub-theme is presented in turn and quotations are presented as example evidence. The latter are from different schools which are not identified to preserve anonymity.

5.2 Positive Comments

5.2.1 Staff implementing a consistent whole-school policy

Ten schools were identified as having a consistent whole-school policy and practice in place for assessment. As shall be seen later, variability within schools is a marked feature of the evaluations:

A consistent plan for assessment, recording and reporting runs throughout the school. [The] assessment involves teacher observation and noting of the level of pupils' responses and engagement. Assessment is also used to identify strengths and priority needs, as well as starting points for learning. (WSE, 12)

The school has developed a revised whole-school policy on assessment. The policy refers to the assessment for learning and assessment of learning methodologies in accordance with guidelines provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The school has acquired an extensive range of appropriate assessment materials to track pupil progress and attainment in communication skills, social development, literacy, numeracy and curriculum subjects. (WSE, 10)

The whole school policy for assessment provides for the pupils to have opportunities for reflection and self-assessment in relation to their long-term aims. This approach is commended, particularly in relation to the post-primary age pupils as it promotes a sense of independence and individual responsibility for setting and reaching specific learning goals. (WSE, 7)

5.2.2 Systematic monitoring, recording and review of progress

This is commented on as an area of strength in six schools where admirable practice was observed:

The teachers are conscientious in monitoring and recording the students' work, progress and achievements. They observe and support the engagement of their students in the learning process and provide them with ongoing and constructive feedback. Student writing tasks, teacher designed tests, students' projects, checklists and folders of students completed work are all usefully employed in tracking student progress. (WSE, 26)

An excellent assessment instrument has been developed and the pupils' progress in word processing, data handling, internet use and ability to use e-mail are tracked. The subject specific, criterion-referenced assessment booklets designed by the teachers are particularly impressive. Assessment booklets have been devised for English, spelling, mathematics, and physical education. Samples of the pupils' work across the curriculum are maintained. (WSE, 14)

5.2.3 A wide range of assessment tools being used

The evaluations suggest a wide range of assessment approaches is used with 23 of the schools prompting positive comments:

As well as having a strong focus on teacher observation, the school has access to an extensive range of formal assessment tools including screening tests, differential aptitude tests, diagnostic assessments and standardised tests. Other assessment strategies used include teacher-designed tasks and tests, work samples, project work, portfolios and student self-assessment. (WSE, 30)

Teachers use a range of assessment strategies in classrooms. Checklists have been developed or sourced in relation to specific skills, including toilet training, self-help, household and community skills. The contributions of the special needs assistants and nurse are significant in relation to tracking of progress in a number of areas. (WSE, 42)

Conscientious work has been undertaken on the school assessment policy and a draft document is included in the school plan. Assessment of learning and assessment for learning are both well developed in classrooms. A wide range of assessment approaches is emphasised to cater for the age range and abilities

of the pupils from the preschool years to school leaving age. The assessment approaches employed include teacher observation, curriculum checklists, pupil profiles, teacher-designed tasks and tests, monitoring and filing of pupils' work samples and portfolios; screening instruments, standardised tests and diagnostic tests. (WSE, 7)

5.2.4 Assessment results are used to inform planning, teaching and learning

There is less evidence of assessment information being used systematically to inform teaching and learning. Two schools are mentioned specifically in this regard:

The results of these assessments are effectively used to mediate the curriculum and to inform future planning of whole-class, group and individual work. Students' work is monitored regularly. (WSE, 30)

Assessment outcomes and information are discussed by teachers at the end of each year and used sensitively to improve the teaching and learning programmes and to inform future planning. There are also meetings between teachers and therapists on an ongoing basis. (WSE, 14)

5.2.5 Sharing of information with parents and other stakeholders

Good practice on information sharing with parents is also highlighted in two schools but, given that only one received negative comments, it is assumed all other schools do this.

Formal multi-disciplinary feedback meetings are organised and written progress reports are furnished for parents at the end of each student's term. (WSE, 30)

Reports are shared with parents, and with relevant professionals when this is required and appropriate. (WSE, 41)

5.2.6 A multi-disciplinary collaborative approach

Two schools are commended for the strength of their collaborative approaches:

A school report, which includes multi-disciplinary reports, is provided to the base school of each student on their return to their mainstream base schools. The ongoing communication and advisory links established with each student's base school is praiseworthy. Multi-disciplinary resource packs are also developed to assist some students in reintegrating back to his/her base school. This practice is to be commended. (WSE, 30)

5.2.7 Linking of individual education plans with daily and weekly planning

Thirteen schools are referred to for commendable practice in relation to the linking the IEP process with wider school planning:

The school uses a universal template for the annual individual education plans (IEP). Across the school, IEP aims are laid out with specific objectives in academic, functional, and personal areas. A narrative is written up on each pupil's progress in addressing IEP targets. Progress is recorded of pupils' progress towards the achievement of objectives. A record of the level and type of prompt necessary to assist the pupil is maintained. IEP targets are displayed clearly on the walls or in workstations in some classrooms. The IEP template has a section for the summary of assessment information available on the pupil. (WSE, 18)

Appropriate and regular reference is made to the student's IEP, so that the teacher is aware of strengths and gaps in the student's work and can act as necessary. Individual records of achievement are closely linked to the detailed planning for that student's progress. (WSE, 40)

There is a well established system for individual education plans (IEPs) that is informed by clinical assessments. In preparing IEPs, the teachers gather information about the pupil's strengths and needs, likes and dislikes from sources such as parents, therapists and psychologists. (WSE, 12)

5.2.8 In-school professional development in assessment

One school is highlighted in this regard:

An admirable process is underway to develop the use of assessment practices in the school. The deputy principal has a remit to develop a whole-school assessment policy as part of her post of responsibility and, at the time of the evaluation, she was engaged in an examination of the assessment processes within the school, conducting research into assessment, creating a school inventory of tests, and consulting with therapists, psychologists and teachers. She had recently led a staff day on assessment which presented information on tests and encouraged teachers to pilot their use for consideration for use by the whole school. This is commendable practice. (WSE, 8)

5.2.9 The use of JCSP and FETAC modules and inclusion of students in state examinations

Some schools are mentioned as using the JCSP (nine schools) and FETAC (nine schools) approved modules to good effect as instruments to assess and certify student progress:

Portfolio assessment is a key feature of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and modules accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). Detailed monthly progress reports are compiled to reflect pupils' progress in relation to identified priority educational goals. (WSE, 41)

The range of assessment information gained by the teachers contributes to the individualised education planning process. At post-primary level, the Junior

Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) statements and FETAC checklists of specific objectives provide a mechanism for continuous assessment. Each year a number of pupils sit the Junior Certificate examination. (WSE, 7)

5.3 Suggestions for Improvements in Practice

5.3.1 The need to review the policy on assessment and have whole-school policies

The need to review assessment policy and have whole-school policies was a major theme highlighted by the inspectorate across 17 schools. This arose in ten cases because of the uneven variety of practices evident within the schools:

Bearing in mind the variety of practice that exists across the school and indeed within the junior, middle, and senior sections, it is recommended that the school reviews its assessment policy to ensure a shared understanding and consistent approach to the use of formative and summative assessment tools. (WSE, 24)

... there is considerable variety in teachers' approaches, particularly in the way records of pupil progress are maintained. As provided at present, short-term plans are often too general. They do not consistently show precisely what it is intended that pupils will learn. This limits the rate at which pupils acquire literacy, numeracy and knowledge and understanding of other subjects. In a number of classes, teacher planning also needs to be more closely matched to pupils' individual targets in literacy and numeracy. A whole-school framework for planning and record keeping should now be developed and used across the school. Record keeping should facilitate the transfer of information from teacher to teacher at year end. (WSE, 9)

The need for a formal written policy was stressed in several evaluations:

It is recommended that the school should now develop a written, whole-school policy in relation to assessment. The policy might make reference to the purposes of assessment and identify the various assessment tools that are to be used at different stages in the school. Test results could be analysed from a whole-school perspective in order to identify changes and trends. Relevant information gleaned from the analysis could be used to inform planning, the organisation of students and adjustments to be made to teaching arrangements. (WSE, 11)

The school could now consider developing a written, whole-school policy in relation to assessment. The policy might make reference to the purpose of assessment and identify the various formative, summative and diagnostic assessment tools that are to be used at different stages in the school. The most recently developed published tests could also be acquired while valuable criterion referenced checklists could be devised by the teachers

themselves and could be allotted a central place in the assessment policy. Arrangements for sharing relevant information with parents could also be outlined. (WSE, 35)

5.3.2 The need for school systems to track pupil progress over time

The second key area highlighted in the evaluation of assessment was the need for schools (eight) to have systems to track pupil progress. The emphasis here is on recording the achievement of targets in relation to knowledge and skills and not just content areas covered. Reference is also made to an annual education profile for each child.

The teachers maintain a range of Cúntais Mhiosiúla. In addition to recording the content areas covered and the certification programmes being followed, the skills, knowledge and progress of the pupils should also be documented. (WSE, 6)

In general, the recording of individual progress in group lessons or other areas of the curriculum are not as well-developed. The assessment and progress recording of pupils' participation in some areas of arts education are of particular merit and could profitably be extended to other subjects in the school. (WSE, 12)

There could be further development of concurrent recording systems within the classrooms to detail the individual progress made by pupils on assigned tasks. This is particularly relevant for the classes for pupils with significant additional disabilities such as ASD. Concurrent recording systems could detail the method of presentation and language or signing system to be used with pupils for consistency across all classroom personnel. Sufficiently tight recording systems will clearly indicate progress and can be used to inform further assessments. (WSE, 22)

5.3.3 The need to broaden the range of areas assessed and measures used

Two related issues arose here: broadening the range of areas assessed (six schools); recommendations on widening the variety of assessment tools used including named specific tools (14 schools). Areas to do with the former include: hearing and visual impairment; communication and social development; mobility and independence; sign language; behaviour; the triad of impairment for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and for sensory programmes deployed in multi-sensory rooms:

Pupils with additional impairment in vision and hearing would benefit from functional assessments of vision and hearing conducted over time and under varying conditions. As ophthalmologists or audiologists may use measures that are unlikely to provide information specific enough to help in the classroom, there is a need for the school staff to identify the optimum conditions for learning in order to maximise the vision or hearing. Given the sensorial needs of many of the pupils, comprehensive assessments of their response to sensory

stimuli, particularly in a multi-sensory environment, would be beneficial to establish reinforcing activities, preferences and aversions. (WSE, 12)

Building on current practice, particular attention should be given to monitoring communication and social development. (WSE, 1)

In extending information available from clinical assessments, functional assessments should be carried out of pupil's mobility, independence and sensory abilities where appropriate. (WSE, 5)

On widening the variety of assessment tools, reference is made to expanding the range of diagnostic and criterion-referenced assessments used:

A wide variety of suitable assessment methods, including diagnostic, criterion referenced and summative tests, should be used in every classroom to identify areas of learning need, inform educational objectives and underpin the formation of instructional groups. (WSE, 6)

Expansion of the diagnostic instruments used in the school to include tests such as Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) and the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) would enhance the assessment material for the younger age group in the school who would be unable to achieve profiles within the existing instruments. (WSE, 38)

Expansion of the assessment instruments currently in use in the school could include the Affective Communication Assessment and the Early Communication Assessment. The school might consider using a formal assessment such as the Callier-Azusa Scales (H) (CAS (H)) for the assessment of communicative abilities. (WSE, 12)

5.3.4 The need to develop the IEP process

The need for the school to have a mechanism for assessing and tracking pupils' progress on the IEP process and providing evidence of the achievement of targets (ten schools) was referred to:

While most teachers maintain folders of pupils' work and assessment records of pupil progress, a mechanism to assess and track pupils' progress in relation to their individualised education plans should also be considered as a way of providing evidence of each pupil's ongoing progress. (WSE, 7)

A wider variety of assessment tools should be developed and should be used to inform IEP objectives and underpin the formation of instructional groups. In particular, pupil profiles in English and mathematics should be developed to facilitate the tracking of pupils' progress over time. (WSE, 1)

Other issues emphasised in relation to IEPs include the need for an educational profile for each pupil, greater specificity with targets, having a review date, developing a

collaborative approach to the process and involving pupils in target setting where appropriate:

In order to enhance the IEP process further, it is recommended that an educational profile is compiled in respect of each pupil, targets are stated with greater specificity and a review date is clearly identified. (WSE, 32)

In general, IEPs are not sufficiently specific, and do not clearly identify the learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils are to acquire within a specified timescale. In preparing IEPs at all levels, staff should establish a system of short-term target setting for all pupils to improve their attainment. It is recommended that staff engage further with the IEP process and develop a collaborative approach to setting and sharing specific targets for individual pupils. Further consideration could now be given to how the longer-term IEP goals and targets can be integrated into existing short-term planning and review arrangements, in order to provide a cohesive plan that addresses each pupil's individual targets and learning goals. Consideration should also be given to enabling the senior pupils to participate as far as practicable in setting some of their own learning goals. As part of the post-primary and FETAC programmes provided in the senior classes, pupils have a role in reflecting on their attainment of short-term objectives using portfolio formats. This self-monitoring and reflection by the pupils in relation to their own learning could profitably be extended to aspects of the IEP process for some of the pupils of post primary age, in order to promote greater capacity for self-regulation and the development of a sense of personal responsibility and ownership of their own learning goals and targets. (WSE, 9)

The current system of developing individual education plans should be reviewed and the knowledge and skills that pupils are to acquire within a defined timescale should be clearly indicated. (WSE, 2)

5.3.5 The need to use assessment results to inform planning and teaching at school, class and individual pupil level

Using the valuable information from the assessment process to inform teaching and learning is also highlighted by the inspectorate (five schools):

Recently, standardised testing has been introduced to assess pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy. The results in reading and mathematics attainment should now be reviewed at whole school level to identify particular areas of strength or weakness and to plan whole school strategies to address areas of particular difficulty. (WSE, 9)

Test results could be examined from a whole-school perspective and, from time to time, an analysis could be made of the results, and changes and trends could be examined. Relevant information gleaned from the analysis could be used

to inform planning, and the organisation of pupils and adjustments made to teaching arrangements. (WSE, 35)

5.4 Summary

Overall the analysis reveals much variability between and within schools on assessment practices and policies. Lack of consistency on having or not having a whole-school policy, tracking student progress or not, using a wide range of assessment procedures or not, assessing a broad range of areas or not and using assessment results to inform planning or not is worrying. Some children with special educational needs are benefiting from having their progress monitored and assessment results informing their individual education plans while others are not.

The variability and lack of consistency presents challenges to the system in designing and implementing a policy which ensures a minimum guaranteed service to all children with special educational needs in this area. In the moves towards greater school self-evaluation in the inspection process (Hislop, 2012) it is important that schools are challenged to produce evidence of a clear and consistent approach to assessment that includes tracking the progress of children with special educational needs as a key component of their practices.

6 Survey of Teachers

In the absence of empirical data on assessment practices for children with special educational needs in Ireland it was decided to undertake a small scale exploratory survey with a convenience sample of teachers to map the range of practices and policies they adopted.

6.1 Method

6.1.1 Questionnaire

The research team, with support from the project advisory group, designed a substantial questionnaire containing five sections:

Section 1: About you and your school

Section 2: General class/School records on student engagement

Section 3: General class/School records on student progress in the curriculum

Section 4: Special educational needs groups. This gathered data on how schools may modify assessment methods or assess additional relevant items, for particular special educational needs groups – here we use the special educational needs groups, low and high incidence, as defined by the DES. This section was generated by topic specialists from across the research team.

Section 5: Your views on assessment for students with special educational needs. This gathered data on participants' general opinions on national assessments for this group.

6.1.2 Ethics

The Ethics Committees of the University of Birmingham and St Patrick's College granted ethical approval for this project.

6.1.3 Sample

In Spring 2011 the questionnaire was given to a convenience sample of 70 teachers from different schools in a variety of special educational contexts who were undertaking a programme of professional development. The survey was part of an exploratory study and as such sought to map a range of practices and policies occurring across schools. As a convenience sample it just represents the views of the teachers concerned and cannot be generalised to the wider population. Fifty-five (79 per cent) teachers returned the questionnaire. Most completed it while attending a course which contributed to the high response rate for such a long and complex survey instrument. We report all respondent data and the reported percentages are based on numbers of valid responses for a given question. The percentages are based on low numbers and should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 14 outlines the school type of questionnaire respondents across the primary, post-primary and special school sectors. Each teacher worked in a different school. Total pupil

population across the schools was 16,492. Forty teachers gave figures for the number of support staff in their schools with a total of 223 between them and a mean of 5.58. There were 37 special classes across the mainstream schools. The 13 special schools had 177 teachers between them.

Table 14. School type of respondents to questionnaire

School type	Number of schools
General type of school:	
Primary school	31
Post-primary school	11
Special school	13
Other school categorisation:	
Junior primary school	4
Senior primary school	6
Primary school – all grades	19
Gaelscoil	2
Secondary voluntary school	6
Community school	4
Community college	1
Special school	13
Gender intake:	
Single sex boys	9
Single sex girls	2
Co-educational	39
DEIS:	
Yes	12
No	41
Total number of schools:	55

Note: As with all results tables, we present all available data. In some cases participants missed out questions so totals do not always add to full sample size.

Of the 55 teachers, 49 were female and nine were male. Nine of the teachers had provisional recognition. Participants on average had been teaching for 12.21 years and the average number of years of participants in a special educational post was 4.26 years. Table 15 outlines the range of students with special educational needs that schools had experience of working with.

Table 15. Number and percentage of teachers responding whose schools have experience of teaching students with listed special educational needs

Category of special educational need	Number of teachers (n=55)	%
Physical disability	22	40
Hearing impairment	17	30.9
Visual impairment	7	12.7
Emotional disturbance/and or Behavioural problems	27	49.1
Moderate general learning disability	20	36.4
Severe or profound general learning disability	5	9.1
Autistic spectrum disorder	29	52.7
Specific speech and language disorder	19	34.5
Assessed syndrome	12	21.8
Multiple disabilities	4	7.3
Borderline mild general learning disability and mild general learning disability	33	62.3
Dyslexia	32	58.2
Specific learning disability (non-literacy)	4	7.3

6.2 Results: General School/Board Records Related to Student Engagement

6.2.1 Formal records on student behaviour

Table 16 outlines who retains records on which students in the schools surveyed. Where records are kept they tend to be kept for all students. Many different practices were outlined on how schools record pupil behaviour, with 50 respondents to this section. These include use of behaviour books and cards:

... all teachers record behaviours in teachers' books which are given out at the start of the year. All records are then photocopied in June and given to the principal (Primary teacher, 8); Each teacher has a behaviour book – after three incidences notes sent home. Records also held in office for behaviour in yard (Primary teacher, 26); Pupil behaviour book. Each class teacher fills/records all types of behaviour in this book – it stays/moves with the class each year – continuous record (Primary teacher, 44); We also have behaviour book for class and yard behaviour and behaviour reflection sheets of students who have misbehaved (Primary teacher, 11).

Some schools differentiate between behaviours and have a separate system of recording for more serious incidents:

Teacher keeps diary/folder with behaviour (ABC) record; if behaviour more serious – incident form (recorded by school) (Teacher in special school, 45); Detailed reports of behaviour which is anti social or indicates a learning issue (Post-primary teacher, 50); We have incident behaviour report forms which are

filled out, discussed in morning meetings and signed by all staff working with the child. These are filed by the school principal (Teacher in special school, 12).

Recording of behaviour in some schools is part of a wider behaviour support planning system:

Some students recorded through use of scatterplots (behaviour) (Teacher in special school, 14); Starting to implement NEPS/DES continuum of support (Primary teacher, 34); If pupil misbehaves he may be given a listing which notifies the parents of the incident. Listings are recorded in homework journal. Three listings merit a booking form. Completed booking form kept on file in school (includes details of listings, apology by pupils and parents signature) (Primary teacher, 39); Record and kept on computer. Very efficient system. Points allocated to each student (Post-primary teacher, 48).

In many cases teachers report that the annual report contains comments on behaviour. However, it is not clear how much access parents have to the totality of comments on their children. One teacher reported: 'We write mid-term reports which are kept on file (not sent to parents). In these reports we complete a section on behaviour' (Primary teacher, 21). The purpose of such report is not clear.

For students with behavioural difficulties more individualised recordings are used: 'SNA keeps a log of incidents for children with diagnosis of behaviour difficulties. Class teacher does the same' (Primary teacher, 43). Another teacher reports using functional analysis and ABC charts (Teacher in a special school, 23).

Of the small number with no records, one gave a reason: 'We have no significant behaviour needs, rural country school, no low incidence' (Primary teacher, 40).

Table 16. Teacher and school records kept of student behaviour (n=55)

Records of student behaviour	Class teacher records (n)	%	School records (n)	%
For all students	26	47.3	30	54.5
For all students with special educational needs	4	7.3	6	10.9
For some students	5	9.1	3	5.5
For some students with special educational needs	3	5.5	4	7.3
For some students without and some students with special educational needs	2	3.6	4	7.3
No records kept			3	5.5
Total	40		50	

6.3 Formal Records on Student Participation

Table 17 outlines the findings on records kept of student participation in class. Where records are kept, they tend to be for all students and maintained by individual teachers more so than at school level. Descriptions of student participation records centred on teachers' own systems and the recording of narrative comments on participation in end-of-year reports:

Each teacher has a folder in class which stores/builds up information ie tests, projects each child has participated in. Also these folders include a personal progress/report which the child uses daily (Teacher in a special school, 12); Class teacher keeps records in each child's file of individual participation (Primary teacher, 44); School report cards detail pupil participation levels. These are stored in school and referred to by teachers taking in a new class. Teachers record pupil participation levels for parent-teacher meetings in November. Again these are kept on file in the school (Primary teacher, 39).

Methods of recording include narrative comments following observation and 'tick sheets and accounts of significant progress or lack of it' (Primary teacher, 29). Others 'use the NEPS booklet' (Primary teacher 5) and 'written, observation, tally charts, self made assessments' (Teacher in a special school, 51).

In one school the 'SNA records time on task or off task for certain students with behavioural difficulties' (Primary teacher, 43).

Table 17. Teacher and school records kept of student participation in class (n=55)

Records of student participation in class	Class teacher records (n)	%	School records (n)	%
For all students	29	52.7	14	25.5
For all students with special educational needs	6	10.9	8	14.5
For some students	1	1.8		
For some students with special educational needs	1	1.8	1	1.8
For some students without and some students with special educational needs	2	3.6	3	5.5
No records kept			10	18.2
Total	39		36	

6.4 Formal Records of Student Participation in Other School Activities

Table 18 outlines the extent to which the schools surveyed record student participation in other school activities. Twenty-four teachers gave qualitative comments for this question. Where recorded, the most common method was as part of the IEP process: 'IEP – at the beginning of each year (home/school links – parents) LS resource teacher keeps individual record of outside activities. Principal keeps record of children attending after school activities' (Primary teacher, 44); 'Included in IEPs for children who might

need extra support at this time or there is an opportunity to develop social/safety skills' (Teacher in a special school, 38). Other schools had records on the following: 'Charts relating to food intake and toilet use. Some pupils would have SCERTS or ABLIS-R play targets' (Teacher in a special school, 23); 'Records are kept for attendance at breakfast club, homework club etc but no records kept of activities during break time' (Post-primary teacher, 54). Other schools confined this recording only to negative behaviour: 'Only in relation to negative behaviour of pupils during break time' (Primary teacher, 39). Others had records on individual pupil files: 'Class record on each child' (Primary teacher, 37); 'Inclusion book documented by mainstream teacher/SNA' (Primary teacher, 27). One teacher commented that this type of recording 'would be very time consuming and teachers are wary of putting anything on paper for legal reasons. Parents are informed orally' (Primary teacher, 42).

Table 18. Teacher and school records of student participation in other school activities (n=52)

Records of student participation in other school activities	Class teacher records (n)	%	School records (n)	%
For all students	8	15.4	8	15.4
For all students with special educational needs	4	7.7	1	1.9
For some students	6	11.5	4	7.7
For some students with special educational needs	4	7.4	1	1.9
No records kept			19	34.5
Total	22		33	

6.5 Formal Records of Student Relationships with Peers

Table 19 outlines the retention of records on student relationships with peers. Of those who replied more than half reported not keeping formal records. Thirty-seven teachers gave comments on how records were kept. Most related to the retention of records for incidents of bullying or negative behaviour:

A record of bullying is kept by the teacher; any information on bullying is kept by year heads (Primary teacher, 4); Again, negative peer relationships are recorded as listings and if necessary booking forms (Primary teacher, 39); Class teacher and SNA record any behavioural incidents in relation to disagreements with peers (Primary teacher, 43).

For those not recording in this area comments included that it would be unworkable and hard to record and 'usually records are not kept to document positive participation/behaviour' (Post-primary teacher, 35).

Table 19. Teacher and school records of student relationships with peers (n=52)

Records of student relationships with peers	Class teacher records (n)	%	School records (n)	%
For all students	11	21.1	11	21.1
For all students with special educational needs	3	5.8	2	5.8
For some students	11	21.1	6	11.5
For some students with special educational needs	3	5.8	2	3.8
For some students without and some students with special educational needs	1	1.9		
No records kept			15	28.8
Total	29		36	

6.6 Formal Records of Student Relationships with Staff

As evidenced in Table 20 fewer teachers and schools record information in this area. If recorded the emphasis is on the negative:

If good relationship exists – no records kept. If poor relationship exists it may be kept by teacher and depending on nature passes to principal at the end of the year (Primary teacher, 8); If there are any issues of poor relations or strained relations toward teachers from pupils teachers record these (Primary teacher, 43); Serious incidents of challenging behaviour are formally recorded by teacher and for school records and kept in student's file (Teacher in a special school, 20).

Where not recorded it was not seen as relevant or a priority: 'Has not been done in the school. No template. Not seen as relevant' (Post-primary teacher, 3); 'Not regarded as important enough' (Teacher in a special school, 38).

Table 20. Teacher and school records of student relationships with staff (n=55)

Records of student relationships with staff	Class teacher records (n)	%	School records (n)	%
For all students	7	12.7	6	10.9
For all students with special educational needs	1	1.8		
For some students	7	12.7	3	5.5
For some students with special educational needs	2	3.6	2	3.6
No records kept			36	65.5
Total	17		47	

6.7 Results: General School/Board Records Related to Student Progress

6.7.1 Frequency of use of assessment methods

In terms of the type of assessment methods used, teacher/school-designed tests were reported as the most frequently used (Table 21). These are followed by observations and the use of standardised tests. Methods associated with assessment for learning, such as self and peer assessment, were less used. Use of video recording for assessment was also low.

Table 21. Frequency (percentages) of teachers using the assessment methods listed below

Method of assessment	Number of respondents	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Self-assessment rubrics	55	61.8	14.5	23.6	0.0
Peer-assessment rubrics	55	74.5	10.9	14.5	0.0
Pupil-created portfolios	55	38.2	9.1	29.1	23.6
Diagnostic interviewing	55	45.5	3.6	34.5	16.4
Narrative assessment	55	54.5	7.3	21.8	16.4
Observations	55	5.5	1.8	32.7	60.0
Teacher/School-designed tests	55	3.6	0.0	23.6	72.7
Standardised tests	51	11.8	5.9	25.5	56.9
Language samples	55	43.6	16.4	23.6	16.4
Video samples	55	80.0	7.3	3.6	9.1
Photography	55	65.5	3.6	12.7	18.2
Computer-based assessments	55	58.2	20.0	14.5	7.3

6.7.2 Types of published assessments used

As can be seen from Table 22 and Table 23, a very wide variety of assessment tests were reported as being used in schools. The most popular are the Irish standardised tests of reading and mathematics. This can be expected to continue with the expansion of national requirements on standardised testing (DES, 2011). In terms of diagnostic assessment used the focus was predominately in literacy followed by mathematics.

Table 22. Type of tests reported as used in schools

Type of standardised test used	N
Drumcondra primary reading	17
Drumcondra primary mathematics	17
Drumcondra primary spelling	2
Sigma T	20
Sigma T (Irish version)	1
Micra T	20
Belfield infant assessment profile	2
Neale analysis of reading ability	21
Cognitive abilities test (CAT)	3
Differential aptitude tests (DATS)	1
York assessment of reading for comprehension (YARC)	1
Maths assessment for learning and teaching (MALT)	5
Early literacy test	2
Middle infant screening test (MIST)	11
Non reading intelligence test (NRIT)	10
Graded word reading test (GWRT)	2
Wide range achievement test (WRAT)	9
Marino graded word reading test	1
Schonell tests	9
Test of language development (TOLD)	1
Quest	2
Norman France maths profiles	1
Macmillan individual reading analysis (MIRA)	1
Daniels and Diack reading experience and spelling	1
Young group reading test	2
Psychoeducational profile PEP 3	2
Stanford Binet	1
Vineland adaptive skills	1
Brehen concept	1
Wechsler individual achievement test (WIAT)	1
Wechsler intelligence scale for children (WISC)	2
Wechsler Adult intelligence scale (WAIS)	1
Other commercial tests used	N
Aston Index	1
Bangor dyslexia	1
Dyslexia screener	2
Jackson phonics test	3
Lucid assessment system for schools (LASS) secondary	1
Mathemagic assessment tests	2
Single word spelling test (SWST)	1
Non verbal reasoning	1
Developmental reading assessment (DRA)	3
RAIN sentence test	2
STAR reading	1
Junior dyslexia screening test	1
Maths tracker	2
Observational survey	1
Basic number diagnostic test	1
Dyslexia early screening test (DEST)	1
Assessment of basic language and learning skills (ABLLS-R)	1
New word reading test	1
TEACCH transition assessment profile (T-TAP)	1
Vernon	1
Graded reading test GR11	1

Table 23. Early assessment measures used

Early intervention assessment measures used	N
Aston Index	1
NRIT	1
DRA	1
BIAP	2
MIST	7
Early literacy screening test	2
DEST	1
Parents' comments	1
MALT	2
Behaviour checklist	2
Group reading test GRT (Post-primary)	1
Maths recovery assessments	2
Quest screening	2
None – teacher observation	1
Numbershark	1
PM benchmark test	1
Ready set go maths	1
PEP-3	1
Reading recovery	1

As can be seen from Table 24, 16 schools reported using computer-based assessment materials. It can be expected that this type of access to assessment will increase as test developers switch to more online and computer-based approaches.

Table 24. Software and online tests used in schools

Software and online test materials used	N
Dyslexia screener	1
LASS secondary dyslexia screener	2
Lexia	2
Lucid dyslexia screener	1
MALT	1
Numberworlds	1
Maths tracker	4
Numbershark	1
Wordshark	1
Active inspire	1
Sherston software	1

Table 25 outlines reported use of intervention programmes used in schools. Such programmes often include detailed assessments associated with finding a baseline for intervention and for monitoring progress. Twenty schools of the 55 detailed use of such programmes. Some of these such as reading, maths recovery and First Steps are supported initiatives of the DES under the School Support Programme as part of the DEIS scheme (DES, 2005). Additional data on progress in these schools are also collected at national level by the Educational Research Centre as part of the ongoing evaluation of DEIS.

Table 25. Records of interventions used in schools

Record of intervention programmes	N
ABLLS-R	1
Social communication, emotional regulation, transactional support (SCERTS)	1
Forward together programme	1
Incredible years	3
Handwriting without tears	1
Maths mastery	1
Maths recovery	1
First steps	4
PM plus benchmark test	1
Reading recovery	7
Records from Wilson phonics scheme	1

6.7.3 Assessment and curriculum areas

This section reports on the type of records kept for students generally and for students with special educational needs to demonstrate progress across the primary curriculum. On quantity of records kept across the curriculum more information is generally kept on pupils with special educational needs (Table 26). This is manifested in the greater use of checklists, profiles, standardised test results and narrative comments maintained for students with special education needs than for their peers. More records are retained on communication and language, literacy, mathematics, and social, personal and health education than other curricular areas.

Table 26. Type of records kept for students generally and for students with special educational needs to demonstrate progress in the primary curriculum

	Marks	Grades	Language samples	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised test
Communication and language (English and Irish): n=43								
Pupils generally	32.6	32.6	20.9	25.6	23.3	25.6	16.3	25.6
Pupils with SEN	30.2	32.6	41.9	51.2	60.5	37.2	30.2	37.2
Literacy: n=45								
Pupils generally	37.8	31.1	13.3	22.2	20.0	28.9	20.0	60.0
Pupils with SEN	35.6	24.4	20.0	48.9	57.8	51.1	33.3	71.1
Mathematics: n=47								
Pupils generally	38.3	27.7	6.4	23.4	14.9	25.5	17.0	57.4
Pupils with SEN	38.3	23.4	12.8	42.6	55.3	48.9	36.2	70.2
SPHE: n=37								
Pupils generally	10.8	18.9	10.8	32.4	18.9	35.1	5.4	8.1
Pupils with SEN	13.5	13.5	10.8	48.6	48.6	56.8	13.5	13.5
SESE: n=34								
Pupils generally	20.6	26.5	5.9	20.6	20.6	35.3	8.8	5.9
Pupils with SEN	23.5	14.7	14.7	38.2	41.2	52.9	17.6	5.9
Art: n=31								
Pupils generally	9.7	19.4	3.2	9.7	22.6	35.5	9.7	6.5
Pupils with SEN	9.7	16.1	6.5	19.4	41.9	54.8	16.1	6.5
PE: n=31								
Pupils generally	6.5	16.1	3.2	22.6	16.1	35.5	6.5	3.2
Pupils with SEN	9.7	12.9	3.2	38.7	41.9	48.4	12.9	6.5
Drama: n=28								
Pupils generally	7.1	14.3	3.6	7.1	14.3	42.9	3.6	7.1
Pupils with SEN	3.6	10.7	3.6	17.9	35.7	64.3	7.1	7.1
Music: n=32								
Pupils generally	9.4	18.8	3.1	9.4	18.8	37.5	9.4	6.3
Pupils with SEN	9.4	15.6	3.1	28.1	40.6	50.0	15.6	6.3

6.7.4 Reasons for exempting students from standardised testing

Twenty-six teachers outlined three main reasons for exempting students from standardised testing. Some are excluded on the basis of their special educational need:

A girl with a moderate general learning disability would not be able to do the MIST and was excluded (Primary teacher, 17); A child with a moderate learning disability may be excluded from assessment (Primary teacher, 4); Children in our school have dyslexia so do not do national assessment in literacy but do maths test (Teacher in a special school, 13).

Others are excluded because teachers feel it would be too stressful for them:

Children can get very anxious, worried in seeing a test in front of them (Teacher in a special school, 12); Child may become upset with level of difficulty of age appropriate test (Primary teacher, 7); If it is felt they will fail most areas. Seen as damaging to self esteem of child (Primary teacher, 8).

Teachers question the validity and appropriateness of the results when the child is not part of the group on whom the test was standardised:

Validity of test may be questionable eg time considerations not applied (child with SEN may need to complete the test in 10 minute spurts over three days) (Primary teacher, 7); He would have a percentile of 1-2 or no score at all. Feel it is a useless exercise which frustrates the pupil concerned (Primary teacher, 55); Children in higher classes may need to do a lower grade that may need to be read out to him/her (Primary teacher, 5); Inappropriateness of administering a test that you know the pupil hasn't a chance of interpreting let alone attempting' (Primary teacher, 39).

There were also comments on the need to administer standardised tests to access resources:

Need to include children in these tests or else they will not receive learning support/resource (Primary teacher, 44); Sometimes a norm is needed [that] can only be got by completing norm referenced tests (Primary teacher, 8).

One teacher said students with special educational needs in her school 'would usually be asked to sit anyway. They usually want to feel part of the class group' (Primary teacher, 11).

6.7.5 Separate access to records for students with special educational needs at post-primary level

Generally, records for state examination records for post-primary students with special educational needs are not recorded separately except in the case of special schools, but information could be compiled from individual student files at school level.

Table 27. Response to whether records for students with special educational needs can be accessed separately for the following programmes (n=15)

Programme	No	Yes	If yes describe type of record held
Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited programmes	5	6	Individual student files and records
Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)	6	8	Records held by class tutors and year heads; kept in student file in office
Junior Certificate	6	7	Kept in student file in office
Leaving Certificate Applied	7	5	Portfolio
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	6	3	Portfolio
Leaving Certificate	7	8	Individual student file in office
Other (please state)		1	Portfolio moderated and certified

On records kept for students with special educational needs not involved in the above programmes there were four responses. Records kept included: end-of-year tests,

end-of-year reports, teacher-to-teacher reports, folders of work, teachers' records of achievement, individual education plans and individual student files.

Eighteen teachers gave responses on reasonable accommodations for examinations with 15 schools being involved in the process. The accommodations included: one-to-one supervision in a separate room, scribes, use of laptops, readers, spelling and grammar waiver, special seating, taped responses, additional time and use of bilingual dictionaries.

On satisfaction with the process of reasonable accommodations, seven teachers were satisfied and eight were not with three unsure. Explanations for their views included the following positive comments: 'Exam commission most helpful to ease participation' (Teacher in a special school, 30); 'The JSCP, FETAC and Junior Certificate programmes work very well and we are fortunate to have a psychologist in the school to support this process' (Teacher in a special school, 16).

All negative reactions focused on the process at Leaving Certificate (LC) level:

Although students receive [reasonable accommodations] for Junior Cert they are not entitled to it for LC which is a huge disadvantage (Post-primary teacher, 33); Inconsistencies between allocation of Junior Cert and Leaving Cert criteria means a lot of paperwork is needed (Post-primary teacher, 35); Very dissatisfied at LC level as it is a much stricter process and often students with SEN had RACE at JC level and are not granted this at LC. Therefore student unable to cope and experiences failure (Post-primary teacher, 54).

Similarly, another teacher reported that 'Junior Certs get them too easy; Leaving Certs aren't guaranteed to get it even if they had it at Junior Cert' (Post-primary teacher, 18). This difference in response between the junior and senior cycles is to be expected as schools have discretion over this area for the former but must receive external permission involving the NEPS for the latter. This leads to inconsistent examination conditions across the two cycles which is problematic for students.

6.8 Results: Special Educational Needs Groups

This section deals with modifications and additional areas assessed for particular special educational needs groups. Most significantly, results show teachers appear assess specific areas, for particular SEN groups, and in many areas this is likely to be additional assessment to that carried out for pupils without SEN. Across all groups a clear pattern emerges of a greater propensity for collecting information on student progress through use of checklists and narrative comments.

6.8.1 Physical disability

Twenty-two teachers reported school experience of teaching students with physical disabilities. Twelve gave data on adaptations made and on how information on student progress and achievement is collected. On adaptations to assessment the following were outlined: giving more assessment time for standardised tests; the special needs assistant

helping the student to stay on task; alternative and augmentative communication devices adapted to suit the assessments, for example target words/pictures/symbols are uploaded for students to access by touch screen; Clicker software and alpha smart were also mentioned.

Table 28 outlines how information in student progress is collected. Other areas mentioned include tests carried out by occupational therapists and progress in the Teoderescu perceptuo-motor programme. Use of narrative comments, checklists and profiles are the main vehicles for recording student progress reported across the 12 schools.

Table 28. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with physical disabilities (n=12)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised test
Outcomes related to speech and language (eg aligned with speech and language therapy interventions and goals)						
3	1	6	4	7	2	2
Outcomes related to motor development (eg aligned with physiotherapy/occupational therapy interventions and goals)						
1	1	5	2	7	4	1
Outcomes related to mobility (eg wheelchair use, car driving)						
1	1	2	1	5	1	0
Outcomes related to activities of daily living (autonomy and independence)						
1	1	4	4	8	1	0
Outcomes related to leisure/community participation						
1	1	3	3	6	1	0
Outcomes related to the use of ICT (eg as mode of communication in a range of contexts – school, home, community)						
1	1	5	3	7	2	0

6.8.2 Hearing impairment

Seventeen teachers reported school experience of working with students with a hearing impairment. Of these, 11 outlined how their schools collected the information. Adaptations outlined include one-to-one assessments, extra time given, and the teacher wearing a microphone in a classroom with speakers; Lámh, PECS and board marker symbols are used as well as photographs to facilitate access to assessment processes.

Table 29. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with hearing impairment (n=11)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Reading						
2	3	5	3	6	2	3
Writing						
2	3	4	3	5	2	0
Social-emotional outcomes (eg behaviour, friendships, participation in sport, mental health)						
0	1	3	3	6	1	0
Speech intelligibility						
1	1	4	3	6	1	0
Lip-reading (speech reading) skills						
0	1	2	3	3	1	0
Intelligibility of sign						
0	0	1	2	4	1	0
Functional hearing ability						
0	0	2	3	3	1	0
Spoken language levels						
0	1	3	3	6	1	1
Sign language levels						
0	0	1	2	3	1	0

6.8.3 Visual impairment

Seven teachers reported school experience of working with students with a visual impairment. Five gave data on adaptations and how progress is recorded. Adaptations made included one-to-one assistance for assessments and magnification of assessment materials using screen magnifiers, vision aids and zoom TV monitors.

Table 30. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with visual impairment (n=5)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Braille Literacy (reading or writing in braille)						
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Print Literacy (reading or writing in print)						
2	2	2	2	3	1	2
Social and emotional behaviour outcomes (eg friendships with peers, participation in sports and extra curricula activities etc)						
0	0	1	1	3	0	0
Mobility training outcomes						
0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Independent living skills						
0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Use of specialist equipment (eg low vision aids)						
0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Assistive technology (ICT)						
0	0	1	1	3	0	0
Functional vision assessment						
0	0	0	0	1	0	0

6.8.4 Emotional and behavioural difficulties

Twenty-seven teachers reported school experience of working with students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Of these, 15 explained adaptations made and how progress is reported. Adaptations include one-to-one assessments and breaks given; use of visuals to aid comprehension and simplifying the language; practical tactile materials used with teacher-designed tests. In one special school the teacher said in most assessments an incentive would be highlighted before the test using pictures or role play if required. These could be computer time, extra PE and homework passes. In this setting classroom observations of interaction and behaviour is used. Progress towards behaviour targets is recorded and teachers link with the social care team who also maintain records on each child on social skills training.

Table 31. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties (n=15)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Student attitudes to learning and school						
2	0	6	7	12	1	2
Understanding of self (intrapersonal intelligence)						
2	0	5	5	11	1	0
Understanding of others (interpersonal intelligence)						
1	0	5	5	11	0	0
Insight into students' own interpersonal relationships						
1	0	4	4	12	1	0
Empathy and interpersonal skills						
0	1	6	4	12	1	0

6.8.5 Moderate general learning disabilities

Twenty teachers reported school experience of working with students with moderate general learning disabilities. Nine gave data on adaptations and how the school collects information. Teacher-made assessments predominate. One teacher outlined how the school had its own diagnostic reading and phonics assessment at three different levels; junior, middle and senior. Students can be assessed at junior level even if they are older as the level is not printed on the test. Another reported that no formal assessments are conducted and that IEP targets are reviewed and that teachers use their own checklists. A second level teacher reported that shorter tests are used based around differentiating the JCSP and a reader provided.

Table 32. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with moderate general learning disabilities (n=9)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Communication and language (unintentional and intentional/interaction/ vocabulary/semantics/syntax/pragmatics)						
0	0	4	5	7	2	1
Cognition (exploration/cause and effect/early problem solving/creative thinking/social cognition)						
1	1	4	5	6	1	0
Life skills (eg shopping/cooking/travel/housekeeping/leisure/supported work)						
0	0	3	3	5	1	0
Personal care skills (toileting/washing/dressing/eating/drinking)						
0	0	3	3	4	1	0
Physical development (gross motor/fine motor/sensory integration/sports)						
0	0	3	4	6	1	0
Basic academic skills (literacy and numeracy)						
1	2	6	5	6	2	0
Understanding how the world works (science & technology/humanities/arts)						
1	1	3	3	5	1	0
Emotional and social development						
0	0	3	4	6	1	0
Augmentative and alternative communication						
0	0	3	3	4	2	0
Supportive technology						
0	0	3	3	3	1	0
Therapies (physical, communication, occupational, arts, play, animal, music)						
0	0	4	2	5	0	0
Medical and nursing						
0	0	3	1	3	0	0

6.8.6 Severe and profound general learning disabilities

Selected sections from the Galway developmental checklists used and selected tests from ABLES and the Routes for Learning Routemap.

Table 33. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with severe and profound general learning disabilities (n=3)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Communication and language (unintentional and intentional/interaction/vocabulary/semantics/syntax/pragmatics)						
0	0	2	1	1	0	0
Cognition (exploration/cause and effect/early problem solving/creative thinking/social cognition)						
0	0	2	1	2	0	0
Life skills (eg shopping/cooking/travel/housekeeping/leisure/supported work)						
0	0	2	1	2	0	0
Personal care skills (toileting/washing/dressing/eating/drinking)						
0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Physical development (gross motor/fine motor/sensory integration/sports)						
0	0	2	1	2	0	0
Basic academic skills (literacy and numeracy)						
0	0	2	1	2	0	0
Understanding how the world works (science & technology/humanities/arts)						
0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Emotional and social development						
0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Augmentative and alternative communication						
0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Supportive technology						
0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Therapies (physical, communication, occupational, arts, play, animal, music)						
0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Medical and nursing						
0	0	1	0	1	0	0

6.8.7 Autistic spectrum disorders

Twenty-nine teachers were in schools with experience of teaching students with autistic spectrum disorders. Nineteen gave information on adaptations to assessments and on how their school collected information for these students. Specific assessments and assessments arising out of specific approaches were outlined for these students. These included PEP 3, ABLLS-R, TEACCH, SCERTS and T TAP. Others mention use of teacher-made tests which are highly visual and manipulative and others the use of checklists and personal observations.

Table 34. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with autistic spectrum disorders (n=19)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Communication and language						
3	3	12	9	13	4	3
Life skills (eg shopping/cooking/travel/housekeeping/leisure/supported work)						
1	1	10	6	10	4	1
Emotional and social development						
1	1	13	7	9	2	0
Outcomes related to leisure /community participation						
1	1	9	7	7	2	0
Sensory processing difficulties						
1	1	9	7	7	2	0
Therapies (eg physical, communication, occupational, play)						
1	1	8	6	6	3	1
Medical and nursing						
0	0	4	3	4	1	0
Pupil's interpersonal relationships						
1	1	12	8	11	3	0
Play						
1	1	9	6	7	1	0
Flexibility of behaviour						
1	1	10	6	10	2	0

6.8.8 Specific speech and language disorder

Nineteen teachers reported experience in their schools of working with these students. Eight gave data on adaptations and the collection of information on student progress. Students have access to a speech and language therapist who also conducts assessments. Adaptations include use of more visual cues and concrete materials when the child has insufficient expressive language to describe what they are doing.

Table 35. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with specific speech and language disorder (n=8)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Comprehension of sentences including understanding of concepts and understanding of complex sentences						
0	1	4	4	3	2	4
Understanding of story						
0	0	4	2	2	1	2
Ability to infer meaning from sentences in a conversation or story						
0	0	3	3	5	1	0
Word knowledge and word finding skills including accurate meaning, word recall, appropriate use, appropriate sound/phonology, knowledge and use of emotional terms						
0	0	2	3	4	1	2
Articulation/phonology						
0	0	5	3	2	1	2
Ability to engage with the teacher (other adults) in a conversation, speaking to a topic over a number of turns						
0	0	4	2	3	0	0
Ability to engage with a peer(s) in a conversation, speaking to a topic over a number of turns						
0	0	3	2	2	0	0
Knowledge about words						
0	1	5	3	4	2	2
Ability to formulate sentences of increasing complexity						
0	0	4	4	2	1	0
Correct use of pronouns, negatives, conjunctions, wh- questions						
0	0	4	4	3	1	1
Appropriate use of plurals, tense markers (-ed, -ing)						
0	0	4	4	4	3	1
Understanding of figurative language						
0	0	3	3	2	0	0
Ability to explain the meaning of expressions						
0	0	3	3	3	0	0
Ability to retell a story including appropriate content, correct grammatical structure, correct sequencing of events in a cohesive narrative						
1	0	4	3	2	1	0

6.8.9 Mild general learning disabilities

Similar adaptations are reported as above for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. Eighteen gave information on how their schools collected information on student progress. Use of standardised tests for literacy and mathematics appears relatively common.

Table 36. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with mild general learning disabilities (n=18)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
Communication and language						
1	2	11	9	10	2	0
Literacy						
6	5	11	8	10	6	9
Mathematics						
7	4	10	7	10	6	7
Physical development (gross motor/fine motor/sensory integration/sports)						
1	1	9	7	9	3	0
Life skills (eg shopping/cooking/travel/housekeeping/leisure/supported work)						
0	0	9	6	9	3	0
Personal care skills (toileting/washing/dressing/eating/drinking)						
0	0	8	5	9	2	0
Emotional and social development						
0	1	10	8	10	2	0
Supportive technology						
1	1	6	5	7	3	0

6.8.10 Dyslexia

Sixteen teachers gave information on adaptations and the collecting of information on student progress. Adaptations included questions read to student, one-to-one testing situation, line trackers, use of teacher-designed tests, spelling waiver, oral assessment, observational survey to track progress, provided with reader in examinations. Portfolio used: student given a scrapbook for collecting samples of good work in all subject areas. On recording progress, use of standardised tests was fairly common.

Table 37. How teachers collect information on the progress of students with dyslexia (n=16)

Marks	Grades	Checklists	Profiles	Narrative comments	Programme level achieved	Standardised Test
General communication and language						
3	3	7	5	8	3	2
Phonological awareness						
3	3	10	4	6	5	3
Writing						
5	4	7	8	9	3	1
Spelling						
6	5	9	3	6	2	7
Reading fluency						
5	5	8	4	7	4	5
Reading accuracy						
5	5	8	4	7	4	5
Word identification						
5	4	10	5	5	4	7
Reading comprehension						
6	5	8	4	8	4	8
Supportive technology						
1	1	4	1	5	3	0

6.9 Results: Views about Assessment for Students with Special Educational Needs

6.9.1 Students with special educational needs taking part in national assessments

Given the extension of national standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy in primary and post-primary schools, respondents views here are noteworthy. Most believed children with SEN should not be exempted from national assessments and over 90 per cent believe approaches should be developed so that more students with special educational needs could be included in national assessments of literacy and numeracy. There was more uncertainty and mixed feelings on the use of criterion-referenced tests for children with special educational needs in contrast to norm referenced measures. While over 38 per cent agreed, over 27 per cent disagreed and a large number (33 per cent) reported not knowing.

Table 38. Percentage of teachers' level of agreement with following statements (n=43)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I think that all students with special educational need should be included in national assessments of literacy and numeracy	9.3	34.9	39.5	4.7	11.6
I think it is fairer that some students with special educational need should not be included in national assessments of literacy and numeracy	16.3	46.5	25.6	4.7	7.0
I think approaches should be developed so that more students with special educational need could be included in national assessments of literacy and numeracy	53.5	37.2	2.3	0.0	7.0
I think it would be sensible if all students with special educational need were exempt from national assessments of literacy and numeracy	4.9	7.3	61.0	14.6	12.2
I think students with special educational need should be assessed using standardised criterion-referenced tests at 2nd and 4th grades in primary schools	10.3	28.2	20.5	7.7	33.3

6.9.2 Information to the wider system on student engagement, progress and outcomes

Fifteen respondents have suggestions on schools giving information to the wider system. On engagement, these centred around checklists and teacher observations. On student progress, they included data from different levels of literacy and numeracy assessment on a yearly basis; material that fairly records in small steps progress made by students 'which is so important to them personally and which will encourage further learning' (Primary teacher, 39); teacher-designed tests and tasks 'are possibly the best way to measure progress and to assess if targets set have been achieved' (Primary teacher, 17). Others mentioned IEP progress sections and results of tests, checklists, observations, digital recordings and standardised tests. For outcomes, suggestions included checking of IEP targets achieved; checklists, observations, work samples, project work, teacher-designed tests and 'practical demonstration of goals achieved recorded through observation or digitally' (Teacher in a special school, 20).

6.9.3 Additional comments on assessment

Other individual comments included: Students with special educational needs need to be incorporated into national literacy/numeracy assessment scores because leaving out a certain percentage means 'national scores are only based on a certain group of children' (Primary teacher, 43). All students with mild general learning disabilities should be incorporated into the standardisation process for literacy and numeracy tests. Another favoured standardised criterion-referenced tests if all peers are doing the same. A Gaelscoil teacher raised the issue of valid assessment of bilingual learners with special educational needs. Another said students with special educational needs should only be involved in national testing if they are not unduly stressed (as raised elsewhere by others).

6.10 Summary

Given the nature of the sample, the findings of this exploratory survey relate to the practices of the 55 respondents in their own schools and not to the general school population. A large variability between the teachers' schools in the level, quantity and nature of approaches to assessing the engagement, progress and outcomes of children with special educational needs is evident. There were differences between schools on the recording of student behaviour, participation, relationships and homework completion in terms of what is recorded, who it is recorded on, whether it is retained by the school or teacher or recorded at all. Teacher- and school-designed tests were the most frequently used assessment methods used followed by observations and the use of standardised tests. Methods associated with assessment for learning such as self- and peer-assessment were less used. Use of video recording was also low.

For this sample, the wide range of school assessment approaches used makes it clear that data on engagement, progress and outcomes is gathered and valued at an individual pupil level. However, the variation and inconsistency of approach taken across

schools (and within schools as evidenced from the analysis of whole-school evaluation reports) suggest these data could not be aggregated for other administrative purposes.

On quantity of records held by teachers and schools, the survey indicated that more information was generally kept on pupils with special educational needs. This was manifest in the greater use of checklists, profiles, standardised test results and narrative comments maintained for students with special education needs than for their peers. More records were retained on communication and language, literacy, mathematics, and social, personal and health education than other curricular areas.

Across all groups a clear pattern of preference for collecting information on student progress through the use of checklists and narrative comments was very evident. An issue with use of checklists is the production, quality and retention of the evidence supporting statements that are checked as mastered. What systems are in place to judge the quality of the evidence? Will evidence be recorded and how much of it retained?

Where behaviour records were kept they tended to be kept for all students. Some schools appeared to differentiate between behaviours and teachers reported having a separate system of recording for more serious incidents.

Where records were kept for student participation they tended to be for all students and maintained by individual teachers more so than at school level. Descriptions of student participation records centred on teachers' own systems and the recording of narrative comments on participation in end-of-year reports.

A wide variety of assessment tests were reported as being used in the schools. The most popular are the Irish standardised tests of reading and mathematics. This can be expected to continue with the expansion of national requirements on standardised testing. For diagnostic assessments, the focus is predominantly in literacy followed by mathematics.

There was a high level of variability in the range of adaptations made and areas assessed for different categories of children with special educational needs (in part reflecting the particular needs of different groups). On adaptations and modifications to the assessment situation for students with special educational needs the following were reported:

- giving an increase in assessment time for standardised tests
- a special needs assistant helping the student to stay on task
- alternative and augmentative communication devices adapted to suit the assessments, for example target words/pictures/symbols are uploaded for students to access by touch screen
- Clicker software and Alpha Smart used to provide adaptations
- assessments carried out under one-to-one supervision and breaks given
- use of visuals to aid comprehension and simplifying the language
- practical tactile materials used with teacher-designed tests
- teacher-designed tests at level of the child

- questions read to student, line trackers, spelling waiver, oral assessment, observational survey to track progress, provided with reader in examinations
- portfolio of samples of good work in all subject areas
- Lámh, PECS and board marker symbols used as well as photographs to facilitate access to assessment processes
- use of specific commercial assessments for pupils with ASD and severe and profound general learning disability.

Most surveyed teachers believed children with special educational needs should not be exempted from national assessments and over 90 per cent thought approaches should be developed so that more students with special educational needs could be included in national assessments of literacy and numeracy (Table 38).

7 Discussion and Recommendations

The international literature and policy review (section 2) showed that educational outcomes for students with special educational needs (SEN) are usefully grouped into:

- attainment-related outcomes
- attendance-related outcomes
- happiness-related outcomes
- independence-related outcomes.

The review also highlighted that measures of educational engagement, progress and outcomes are gathered in different ways. These were categorised as:

- national/state accountability records
- national general surveys/census
- large-scale evaluations
- research studies: often surveys, interventions and tracking studies focused on particular groups.

Sheil *et al* (2010, pp.33-35) make a further useful distinction between *classroom*, *national* and *international assessment*. Classroom assessment includes formative and summative assessments carried out by teachers to support individual student learning. National assessments fulfil a variety of purposes including the award of qualifications to individual students. Nevertheless, they also have a critical monitoring function such that 'the focus of interest is on the aggregation of data collected from the students, not on the performance of individual participating students' (p34). This enables policy makers to use the data to answer specific questions such as: How well are students learning with reference to general expectations, the aims of the curriculum, or preparation for life? or Do particular sub-groups in the population perform poorly? International assessments have many of the features of national assessments but aim to provide information on standards of student achievement in a number of countries, and individual countries can compare student performance against that in other countries.

Given the remit of this research, the literature review undertaken within the project focused on international and especially national rather than classroom assessment. However, the country case studies and the analysis on Ireland revealed that the relationship and sometimes tension between classroom and national assessment is important with different countries placing different emphases on these areas.

Classroom, national and international assessments can, in principle, seek to measure any progress or outcome – whether attainment-, attendance-, happiness- or independence-related. However, it was noted in the international literature and policy review and the country case studies that in practice types of data and how they are gathered are often linked. For example, accountability records and national assessments often focus on attainment-related outcomes of some parts of the curriculum such as literacy and numeracy as well as attendance-related outcomes. It appears to be far less

common for countries to collect data related to independence- and happiness-related outcomes.

The literature and policy review provided a framework to consider how different countries, including Ireland, include children with SEN in their assessment and data collection procedures. Building on this, the concept of *inclusive assessment* is developed in this discussion and the approach proposed is the principle used to draw out the key themes from the country case studies (section 3) and the analysis of Irish policy and practice (sections 4, 5 and 6). Recommendations are drawn from this discussion and analysis.

7.1 Inclusive Assessment

The principle at the heart of the EPSEN Act (2004) is that people with SEN have the same right as others in Ireland to an appropriate education:

... 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. (EPSEN Act, 2004, Preamble)

Assessment of and for learning is a central part of a child's school education. It follows that:

- Appropriate assessment procedures should be available for students with special educational needs.
- They should be included in relevant national assessments.

The position of fully including all children (including those with SEN) in assessment practice – inclusive assessment – is developed in this section. The term inclusive assessment has been used elsewhere in the literature. A notable example has been by the EADSNE (eg Watkins, 2007). Watkins presents an analysis of 'assessment processes within inclusive settings' (p7) in 23 countries. The analysis had a different emphasis to the current review since it focused on assessment in mainstream primary school settings, rather than across education as a whole. But it offers relevant conclusions on inclusive assessment. Watkins (2007, p47) notes: 'The overall goal of inclusive assessment is that all assessment policies and procedures should support and enhance the successful inclusion and participation of all pupils vulnerable to exclusion, including those with SEN.' Watkins also discusses some technical aspects of modifying assessments to accommodate a diverse range of pupils. On this, the report also highlights that inclusive assessment should 'aim to 'celebrate' diversity by identifying and valuing all pupils' individual learning progress and achievements' (p48) and that 'a wide range of assessment methods are necessary in inclusive assessment in order to make sure that there is a wide coverage of areas (non-academic as well as academic subjects) assessed' (p49).

Drawing on this work and the review findings, an inclusive assessment approach is proposed incorporating the following three features with associated explanations and rationale:

- Assessments should include all children and young people. Different countries assess and collate pupils' educational engagement, progress and outcomes in different ways. Within an inclusive assessment approach, assessments should be carried out for all children and young people. The data generated from such assessments should be appropriately disaggregated as required and as is useful (eg to show outcomes for different SEN groups).
- Assessments should be accessible and appropriate for those being assessed. Procedures should be designed to include the diverse range of pupils within the educational system. For children with special educational needs, assessments should be accessible through suitable accommodation and appropriate through suitable breadth of assessment and range of criteria.
- Assessments should measure and report areas of relevance. They should seek to measure progress and outcomes on the full breadth of the curriculum which an education system offers. The inclusion of a diverse range of students within the educational system means it will be necessary to assess areas of specific relevance to people with SEN (in some countries this is referred to as a wider or additional curriculum). Therefore, systems also need to be in place to record educational progress on these areas that may be of particular interest or concern to given stakeholders. Examples include aspects of mobility and the use of specialist technology for those with physical and sensory disabilities.

In summary then, an inclusive assessment approach should: *include all, be accessible and appropriate*, and assess and report areas of *relevance*. This is true whichever aspect of the learner's education is being assessed, in other words, whether it is attainment-, attendance-, happiness- or independence-related.

The first proposed feature of inclusive assessment is based on the notion that students with SEN should be included in assessment of educational engagement, progress and outcomes to the same extent as their peers – in line with the spirit of the EPSN Act. Nevertheless, this is necessarily context-dependent because different countries have different approaches to assessment generally. Of the countries explored in this research, England and the US have a highly developed system-based approach to some aspects of curriculum assessment (particularly for literacy and numeracy). In some respects the approach taken by both countries is inclusive because it requires that all children be included in these assessments. In contrast, Finland appears to have no system-based approach to national assessments in this way. That is not to say the Finnish system-based approach is not inclusive – it just does not exist.

The second proposed feature of inclusive assessment is more technical and relates to the implementation of including all students, with their diverse needs, in assessments. Two key approaches have been explored in detail within this research: assessment accommodation which seeks to make an assessment accessible while maintaining the same assessment criteria; and alternative assessment which aims to ensure that all

pupils, irrespective of their ability, can be assessed appropriately. Some authors have proposed a *universal design* approach in which a single assessment can be designed to include all (eg Lazarus *et al*, 2009). This seems an important aspiration – with attention to such principles the need for accommodated and alternative assessments could be reduced. Nevertheless, in practical terms – in part linked to the common use of norm-referenced and standardised assessments often used when assessing attainment-related outcomes – use of accommodated and alternative assessments seems an inclusive and pragmatic approach to take when required.

The third proposed feature of inclusive assessment emphasises that assessment should attend to all aspects of a given education system – a full and diverse curriculum. This includes progress and outcomes identified as relevant to people with SEN. To this extent some assessments do not include all people in the education system. Instead some assessments are applied to those for whom it is particularly relevant, to ensure that their broad and diverse needs are recognised and monitored.

The proposed definition of an inclusive assessment also refers to the disaggregation of assessment data associated with people with SEN. There are overlapping reasons why this is an important requirement. First, it is important in understanding how the educational system is working as a whole. By including variables on a range of pupil characteristics (including SEN, but also other characteristics of relevance such as gender, poverty and ethnicity), overall engagement, progress and outcomes can be better understood, and resources and interventions can be better targeted. Second, there is the social justice argument. If there is a particular concern for the engagement, progress and outcomes on a certain group or groups it seems imperative to seek ways of carrying out necessary monitoring. Third, technical reasons on the design of the assessment procedures might require such disaggregation – certain groups may require particular versions of assessments.

The proposed approach seeks to offer a full and rounded picture of a child's educational engagement, progress and outcomes. To this extent it links back to the input-process-outcomes model discussed in the introduction of this report. Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009, pp14-15) argue educational *processes* transform educational *inputs* into *outcomes* which include pupil participation rates and curricular achievements, eg academic and functional literacy, independence or citizenship. Inclusive assessment seeks to measure the full range of educational outcomes achieved by pupils with special educational needs.

7.2 Educational Standards Assessments and Inclusive Assessment

The US and England offer interesting case studies on inclusive assessment. In their review of standardised testing in lower secondary education, Sheil *et al* (2010) excluded the US and England from their country case studies 'because the kind of high stakes testing being carried out in those countries did not seem appropriate, or acceptable, in an Irish context' (p19). This makes sense, and the country case studies on Finland and Scotland in the current report may have more in common with broad assessment approaches in

Ireland. Nevertheless, on the inclusion of students with special educational needs, the US and England offer an interesting and relevant insight.

Both countries draw on *standards-based education* principles in which all pupils are assessed against national educational standards at various points during their school career. England uses SATS and individual states use standardised assessments in the US. It is the inclusion of all or most students which is relevant here because it has led to innovative development of accessible and appropriate assessment for students with SEN. Both countries provide accommodated and alternative versions of national assessments. In England P scales are used in schools for recording the achievement of pupils with SEN who are working towards the first level of the English national curriculum (level 1). In the US, individual states must provide alternative assessments for students working below that state's 'grade-level achievement standard'. Therefore, in each country the progress on these attainment-related measures is recorded for students with SEN, including those with the most complex cognitive disabilities. Both countries also link this assessment data to demographic data so that results can be disaggregated by different SEN groups.

Australia has recently developed annual national assessment tests on numeracy and literacy (NAPLAN) for monitoring and reporting purposes – the developments appear to have similarities to approaches in England. While accommodated versions of NAPLAN assessments exist, there was no evidence of alternative versions being available yet (similar to the P scales in England). It would appear therefore, that a proportion of students with SEN would need to be recorded as below the minimum standards on this national assessment, which offers very limited information.

Finland and Scotland do not have these same national assessments. Scotland is undergoing significant educational reform at the time of writing however, and a framework for assessment is being introduced which makes reference to national standards. It would appear that the planned reforms emphasise teacher assessment rather than national testing. In part this may reflect the relatively high status the teaching profession has in these countries (indeed, this was particularly noted in the case study for Finland).

Ireland has traditionally not carried out such assessments at a national level. However, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) includes proposals for more assessment at various levels. There are associated requirements for schools to report pupil results to parents and to report aggregated results to the DES. The first implementation (May/June 2012) of the standardised tests did not include all children with SEN.

7.3 Award-Bearing Assessments and Inclusive Assessment

Australia, England and Scotland each have award-bearing nationally set external examinations broadly equivalent to Ireland's Junior Certificate. Australia's are currently set by states, but the national Australian Certificate in Education will soon replace these. Each country collates national data on these. While England and Scotland collect and present data in a form that offers the possibility for disaggregation on different special educational needs groups, Australia does not. Similarly, Ireland does not collect data in relation to special educational needs for the junior or senior cycles.

The US and Finland operate a system by which individual schools assess pupil performance on the national or state standards. Finland has nationally set external examinations at matriculation level – similar to Ireland’s Leaving Certificate. There seems to be minimal national collation of data in Finland in this regard, and even less that allows disaggregation of data into particular special educational needs groups. The US operates a system in which individual states are obliged to report high school graduation rates disaggregated by category of special educational needs.

In Ireland the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) offers indicators of outcomes at ten levels. The clarity and inclusive nature of the NFQ are extremely helpful because the framework recognises the achievement of all students. It is interesting to note that in terms of further education (FETAC), assessments have been developed from levels 1 to 6. However, at the earlier post-primary phase the proposed junior cycle reforms will begin at level 2. Given that a national framework exists which has the breadth to develop more inclusive assessments, it seems that an opportunity is being missed to include level 1 qualifications at post-primary level.

7.4 National Sample-Based Assessments and Inclusive Assessment

The US, Finland, Scotland and Australia all conduct sample-based national assessments on different curriculum areas (different countries operate these assessments with different regularity and different focuses – although maths and literacy feature strongly). Although each country allows some assessment accommodations enabling many students with SEN to participate, none appears to offer disaggregation by SEN. Further, the standardised assessments used in these national assessments do not include alternative versions to assess broader ranges of abilities, and therefore are inappropriate for many pupils with learning disabilities. Some case study countries appear to have a *laissez faire* view of the inclusion of students with SEN in national assessments. For example, Scotland and Finland do not require students with SEN to take part in the sample-based national assessment if it is deemed to cause undue stress.

Ireland also carries out periodic sample-based national assessments, most recently in 2009 in mathematics and English reading in primary second and sixth classes. The sample for each age group was about 4,000 pupils, although this excluded some students with SEN (eg special schools and classes were excluded at the sampling stage).

These sample-based national assessments are conceived for specific purposes (eg the 2009 national assessments in Ireland was to ‘establish current reading and mathematics standards of second and sixth class pupils’, Eivers *et al*, 2010). Often the assessments themselves are norm-based and therefore their purposes and usefulness are closely linked to the structure of the sample used, which may explicitly exclude people with more severe learning disabilities. Improving accessibility and clarity about who should, and should not, take part in national assessments should improve the quality of the assessment itself. Although such apparent exclusion of some groups seems at odds with the inclusive assessment approach espoused above, this may be pragmatic for sample-based approaches to national assessment. The development of alternative assessment material for the different population of students with more complex learning disabilities

may offer a useful insight into their progress, although the research team did not identify examples of this taking place in the literature or country case studies for sample-based assessments.

7.5 International Assessments

In their current form, international assessments such as PISA offer little insight into the outcomes for pupils with SEN, particularly for specific countries. Although the total number of participants identified as having a SEN in the PISA sample is reasonable (1.4 per cent, 3,767 of the total sample from PISA 2003), for a given country numbers are low (eg 2.7 per cent, 103 of the sample from Ireland – see Table 2, page 21). Further, as illustrated through the country case studies, definitions of SEN differ from country to country. The sampling and assessment for PISA is such that it excludes students with more complex SEN. Nevertheless, PISA has increased inclusion of students with special educational needs through the development of alternative assessment materials (Booklet UH), and is seeking to standardise the definition of SEN used. As such, there may be opportunities for countries to make greater use of international assessments for students with SEN in the future.

7.6 Breadth of Assessment and Inclusive Assessment

Much of the discussion to this point has highlighted that a focus on educational assessment, particularly national assessments, and administrative records are associated with the measurement of attainment-related outcomes and progress – in other words, related to traditional curriculum areas, especially literacy and mathematics. But what about the broader outcomes identified in the review such as engagement and independence- and happiness-related outcomes?

The definition of inclusive assessment proposed emphasises that assessments should be appropriate and relevant. Therefore they should attend to the broader aspects of the curriculum as well as those traditionally assessed through examinations and attainment tests. These were labelled as happiness- and independence-related outcomes in the international literature and policy review, and they include more specific outcomes such as resilience, self-esteem, well-being, relationship building, optimism, employment, independent living skills and successful transition after school. This broader analysis of outcomes also included areas of the curriculum which may be relevant to pupils with SEN. The international literature and policy review identified some of these, providing examples that demonstrated they may be particular or important to different SEN groups (eg section 2, page 37).

The review and country case studies identified useful approaches in this regard, although these were rarely linked to system-based data collection. Indeed evidence presented in the US case study suggested an unintended consequence of including students with severe learning disabilities in national assessments which focus on attainment-related measures may be that other meaningful targets linked to functional life skills are neglected (Lowrey *et al*, 2007).

Arguably, an educational system concerned with how well children with SEN are doing should also be interested in careful assessment and monitoring of engagement, outcomes and progress on aspects of the curriculum which fall beyond those things typically recorded in national assessments – as demonstrated in the review and case studies.

The review appears to show that such an approach to data collection is relatively rare; where national systems of data collection are in place they tend to focus on attainment-related measures. England, the US and Australia demonstrate this emphasis – all three countries appear to rarely collect independence – and happiness-related data for monitoring purposes through national assessments and accountability records. Nevertheless, other mechanisms exist by which these data can be collected.

Of relevance here are research projects of varying sizes and complexity – with different designs (eg survey, longitudinal, retrospective and intervention studies) and focusing on different populations (a range of SEN groups, or a specific sub-group). These studies can contribute to the understanding of engagement, progress and outcomes of students with SEN and they are particularly linked to the third proposed feature of inclusive assessment. The strength of such approaches is that they often seek to measure engagement, progress and outcomes which go beyond relatively narrow attainment-related measures. Depending on the scale of the research these research studies can also be relatively inexpensive. Current studies in Ireland which follow this approach include the Growing Up in Ireland study and NCSE's longitudinal study project IRIS.

A particularly powerful example of this approach is a US-based longitudinal study of people with disabilities (NLTS2). The study not only gathered valuable data on attainment and a variety of procedural and experiential topics, but also gathered data on employment and lifestyle outcomes along with well-being. The study provides a wealth of outcome data which are independence- and happiness-related, as well as information on disability-specific areas (eg mobility and students with a visual impairment).

The review has identified some links between system-based data collection and measurement of broader measures of engagement, progress and outcomes. For example, the US is very unusual in that its No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require some data on employment outcomes and disability to be gathered and presented at state level. Of greater relevance still is the use of national pupil databases in England and Scotland. In England, the National Pupil Database is central to that country's standards-based reform agenda because it is the mechanism for tracking students as they progress through the educational system enabling attainment-related outcomes data to be monitored and reported. The database contains information on student SEN, therefore disaggregation is possible. However, such a database is not limited to a standards-based reform agenda with its associated reporting strategy (as typified by school league tables in England). In fact, it does not need to be used in this way at all. After all, Scotland has a national pupil database but does not use it in that way. Such national pupil databases are powerful because, if implemented appropriately, data gathered from a wide range of sources can be connected together. For example, the Scottish Skills Development Survey

gathered data on school leavers' destination (employment, training, education or unemployment). Through the linkage with data collected in the annual pupil census, the Skills Development Survey could be explored in relation to SEN, therefore giving valuable insight into the outcomes for this vulnerable group (Scottish Government, 2011a).

Another example is the evaluation work undertaken by Humphrey and Squires (2011) in England. The authors drew on attainment and attendance data already collected as part of England's national assessment programme and recorded within the National Pupil Database and combined this with other broader measures of pupil progress collected as part of the evaluation (eg developing positive relationships with others; increasing participation in extended services provision, including extra-curricular activities). Such an approach is efficient because the same data (eg special educational needs status, gender and ethnicity) does not have to be collected many times.

In the context of this specific discussion it means that outcome measures which are broader than attainment-related outcome measures can be efficiently incorporated into a country's monitoring process.

7.7 National Pupil Databases

The construction of a national pupil database is a substantial undertaking and some approaches taken in England and Scotland are described in the country case studies. The approach taken in a given country is part of that country's national data collection strategy. Such a strategy inevitably has conceptual, technical, ethical, legal and economic dimensions. This report's section on policy analysis of assessment of children with SEN in Ireland presents details on the DES's data strategy which includes reference to an individualised learner database, and this data strategy considers these dimensions.

However, aspects of a national pupil database are relevant to students with SEN. A starting point in this discussion is the reference to the proposed definition of inclusive assessment. The definition highlights the importance of including all young people in assessment including those with SEN, and enabling disaggregation of data in relation to SEN categories. To this extent, it follows that any development of procedures for assessing and recording engagement, progress and outcomes of pupils should include pupils with SEN and allow relevant disaggregation of data. This is also recognised in the current DES data strategy which, for example, makes explicit reference to involving the NCSE.

As already noted, the features and content of national pupil databases are inevitably connected to the purpose to which the data is put in a given country – the contrast between England and Scotland illustrates this clearly. The recording of high stakes test scores and their analysis and reporting at school level is associated with the national pupil database in England. Such data collection and analysis may have implications for pupils with SEN. This is discussed elsewhere in relation to the unintended consequences of assessment. Importantly, however, this is not specifically an issue for national pupil databases.

Of greater relevance here is the quality and usefulness of the data recorded in these databases – the completeness, accuracy and quality of measure (see Gorard, 2010).

The country case study for England notes that concerns have been raised about all these issues in regard to SEN-related data in the National Pupil Database. However, with appropriate analysis such a resource still has immense power and utility – Florian *et al* (2004) conclude that ‘questions about inclusion and achievement can start to be addressed by interrogating these data and they provide an important resource in helping with this crucial task’ (p120).

In Ireland, the DES’s data strategy currently appears to plan to implement an initial student database (the Post-Primary Online Database [P-POD]) by autumn 2013 (DES, 2012d). However, the authors of this report were not able to clarify the likely inclusion of a SEN marker in the database which would enable the disaggregation of data in relation to SEN categories.

7.8 Classroom Assessment and Inclusive Assessment

The discussion to this point has considered inclusive assessment from the perspective of system-based data collection at a national level. However, assessment has a much broader purpose than this and the detailed analysis of policy and practice in Ireland highlighted the significance of classroom assessment. The concept of inclusive assessment is also relevant to classroom assessment – all young people with and without SEN benefit from classroom assessment which is accessible, appropriate and relevant to them. If done well, such assessment should enable the measurement of pupil engagement and progress. It informs teaching, contributing to an assessment for learning approach which has been highlighted as important and can be shared with teachers, parents and the student themselves eg through report cards. Such assessment is also important in a school’s self-evaluation of practice.

Given the project focus on system-based data collection, we presented less information in the country case studies on classroom assessment. Even so, all of them referred to classroom assessment in relation to broader areas of the curriculum, including disability-specific areas referred to as ‘additional curriculum’ areas in the country case studies. Finland, where collection of system-based data is minimal, appears to emphasise the role of teacher-based classroom assessment. Also, Scotland is an interesting example because its current educational reforms include a central role for the Scottish Framework for Assessment as a mechanism for raising standards. Unlike Australia, England and the US where assessment data are collected centrally, Scotland’s model involves improving the quality and consistency of classroom assessment and record keeping without system-based national data collection for accountability purposes.

The details of classroom assessment which takes place in the case study countries was not explored. Nevertheless, the analysis of Irish policy and practice explored the nature and range of classroom assessment in some detail. The teacher survey suggested pupils with SEN were extensively included in classroom assessment. Indeed, respondents reported that additional assessment of pupils with SEN often took place in areas of interest or concern related to particular special education needs or disabilities. To this extent, reported practice appears to demonstrate qualities of inclusive assessment. The analysis of special school evaluations provides a different perspective. Although

limited to a particular setting, it revealed a range of good quality and inclusive classroom assessments in special schools. However, concerns were raised in whole school evaluations that classroom assessment could be inconsistent within and between schools, pupil progress could be difficult to monitor and assessment could be narrow because it misses important areas of the curriculum including areas of relevance to SEN groups.

While classroom assessment has limited use for system-based data collection, quality data are required for monitoring engagement and progress at individual and school levels. This is true for students with SEN, just as it is true for all other pupils.

7.9 Unintended Consequences of Collecting Data

Literature on unintended consequences of assessment was identified in the US and England case studies, and to an extent these concerns were identified in the analysis of policy and practice in Ireland, most notably in finding the balance between assessment of and for learning. Other countries also appear to exempt students with SEN from assessment to avoid causing them undue stress.

An important part of the unintended consequences debate is the notion of high stakes assessment. Commonly the latter refers to the importance of the assessment to the given student. Typically assessments which lead to a qualification or award are high stakes in this way. In some countries which implement a standards-based reform agenda, the term can also refer to assessments which have high stakes implications for the teacher or service (often school). SATs (England) and NCLB assessments (US) are examples. These assessments have limited high stakes impact on the student (there is no associated qualification), but they can have an impact on the school (league table position in England, potential funding in the US), or the teacher (eg disciplinary action or promotion opportunities).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, concerns exist about the negative consequences of an increased emphasis on testing and monitoring on the educational experiences of students generally, and students with SEN in particular. Much of this literature relates to the US where enormous investments have been made to carry out such assessments. Examples of concerns raised include a narrowing of the curriculum, accusations of teachers teaching to the test and an overemphasis on low-level skills (see Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The narrowing of the curriculum around topics assessed, most notably literacy and mathematics, may be at the expense of wider curriculum areas that have value for all students, but perhaps particular value for those with special educational needs where measuring a broader range of achievement may be especially valuable. There is also a concern raised in the literature that assessments can place undue pressure on students with special educational needs as they may be the students at greatest risk of performing and progressing least well. Related to this, concerns exist that students with disabilities are made scapegoats and held responsible for a school's poor performance. Such a view may hinder students with SEN being included within some schools or lead to increased dropout (eg Cole, 2006).

These tensions are a product of education systems which emphasise standards-based reform approaches in combination with particular reporting and funding mechanisms, as in England and particularly the US. Arguably these systems are equitable in intent because all children including those with SEN are included – ie the US and England draw on many of the principles of inclusive assessment. Nevertheless, perhaps the reporting mechanisms are not sensitive enough to all the variables involved and the focus on attainment-related measures of particular aspects of the curriculum which can lead to the unintended consequences summarised here.

Clearly national policies on educational assessment are broader than issues related to special educational needs alone. However, it is argued that an inclusive assessment approach would seek to include all students in the nationally agreed procedures. While this approach is important and central to the research team's position, certain policies may have specific consequences for pupils with special educational needs and these need to be considered carefully when reporting and analysing data.

7.10 Implications for Ireland

This discussion section of the report has developed and used a definition of inclusive assessment as a framework for considering how to measure educational engagement, progress and outcomes of children, including those with special educational needs, in different countries. The research team has argued that this general framework provides a helpful mechanism for evaluating whether assessment approaches are appropriate and complete. To this extent it forms the authors' first recommendation because it offers a useful language for policymakers monitoring progress of young people with SEN. In particular it is hoped it will support the NCSE in this aspect of its work as specified by the EPSEN Act ('to ensure that the progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and that it is reviewed at regular intervals' Ireland, 2004, Section 20(e), p21), as well as the NCCA in relation to assessment policy.

Recommendation 1

The NCSE should adopt and promote a definition of inclusive assessment to support its work in the area of measuring progress, engagement and outcomes of children with SEN. The framework proposed in this report is recommended. In summary, an inclusive assessment approach should ensure:

- All students are included and benefit from assessment.
- Assessments are accessible and appropriate for the diverse range of children in the education system.
- The full breadth of the curriculum is assessed (including curriculum areas of particular relevance to students with special educational needs).

The following recommendations the research team has identified reflect areas of development which would improve inclusive assessment approaches in Ireland.

A current challenge facing Irish policy makers is that data collected on the outcomes of students in general do not appear to include variables on student characteristics such as SEN. To disaggregate the outcomes of children with special educational needs, or any particular group of children, a coding system is required at the level of the student record. This is true for any national assessment undertaken. Currently such data may be available for students who request reasonable accommodations in state examinations. However, these accommodations are not universally used by students with special educational needs and are only relevant to particular SEN groups. Introducing a SEN marker into relevant databases if they exist (eg related to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate) is one helpful solution. A more ambitious, efficient and reliable approach is the construction of a national student database with an associated unique identifier for each pupil. Such a database enables the connection of different data sources on engagement, progress and outcomes and pupil variables including SEN. Of particular value is that outcome measures which are broader than attainment-related outcome measures can be efficiently incorporated into a country's monitoring process. Scotland and England have successfully implemented such an approach. Significant work and planning have already been undertaken by the DES (eg DES, 2008) which maps out its strategy and the identified stakeholders including the NCSE. Nevertheless, concerns exist over the rate of progress of this development (The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2012).

Recommendation 2

The planned national pupil/student database should include a SEN code in relation to defined categories to allow for the disaggregation of engagement, progress and outcome data for such students. The NCSE might usefully investigate the progress being made on the DES data strategy and contribute to this development by advising how pupils with SEN are best included.

In developing a more inclusive national assessment structure, developments such as the JCSP (under review) and FETAC modules (levels 1 and 2) are a welcome broadening of the award-bearing assessment architecture as is the proposed level 2 assessment as part of the new junior cycle changes. These developments include or will include a broader range of students including those with special educational needs. Nevertheless, a challenge remains. At primary level, questions have been raised on the application of the assessment approaches in *Aistear* and whether they are inclusive of all children with special educational needs. Difficulties can arise in curriculum and assessment design when the full diversity of learners is not recognised from the beginning. Application of the principles of inclusive assessment outlined above would lead to a system in which the achievement levels of all learners are recognised.

Recommendation 3

Following the principles of inclusive assessment, a range of award-bearing assessments should be available to recognise the achievement levels of all learners in line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The

development of a level 1 assessment within the new junior cycle arrangements would be particularly welcome.

A major gap in developing an inclusive assessment structure is evident in the proposed national assessment of literacy and numeracy at four points in the compulsory school cycle. These proposals are problematic because no accommodated or alternative assessment approaches are suggested or mandated for the cohort of students excluded from the norm-referenced standardised tests of literacy and numeracy. Information on all students is forwarded by mandate to the management board and Department of Education and Skills with the exemption of these excluded students. This approach sends out exclusionary signals to students, parents, teachers, management boards and policy makers of the value of assessing the progress and achievement levels of these students. It is also at odds with the earlier sections of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which stressed the importance of assessing the progress of children with special educational needs and with the inclusive spirit of the EPSEN Act (2004). It is also a missed opportunity to gather valuable information on the progress of these students.

The current assessment strategy appears to fail to acknowledge and discuss the exclusion of this group of students or consider possible solutions. Given that the strategy covers a period up to 2020 this is particularly disappointing. It should be noted that most teachers in the survey undertaken as part of this study favoured a more inclusive approach to the national standardised assessments.

Recommendation 4

The national literacy and numeracy strategy should be developed to include a commitment to the development of accommodated and alternative approaches to the assessment for children excluded from the norm-referenced standardised tests. Information on these children should be forwarded in a consistent format to the board of management of each school and to the Department of Education and Skills, as it is for their peers. Consideration of alternative assessment approaches in England and the US may be helpful.

On sample-based national assessments of literacy and numeracy it is acknowledged that the development of alternative measures is more problematic. As well as developing appropriate assessment procedures, meaningful data collection would require a relatively large sample size (disproportionate to the prevalence of these students in the population). Nevertheless, this would be an innovative approach which was not observed in any of the country case studies. In terms of the current sample-based national assessments, there may be ways of increasing their utility for students with special educational needs. Given recent data on the prevalence estimates of students with special educational needs covered by the EPSEN Act (2004) of up to 25% of 9 year olds (Banks & McCoy, 2011), large numbers of students with high incidence special educational needs are likely to be part of the sample. Therefore disaggregation of data in relation to such students would be helpful in reporting.

Recommendation 5

The NCSE should have discussions with the DES in relation to including the collection of special educational needs data as part of the sample-based national assessments. Exploratory discussions on the potential use of alternative assessments to include students with complex cognitive disabilities would also be helpful.

An educational system which pays attention to inclusive assessment should also be interested in careful assessment and monitoring of engagement, progress and outcomes on aspects of the curriculum which fall beyond those things which are typically recorded in national assessments (as demonstrated in the review and case studies). The review labelled these as happiness- and independence-related aspects of the curriculum, and they include more specific outcomes as identified in the literature such as resilience, self-esteem, well-being, relationship building, optimism, employment, independent living skills and successful transition after school. Approaches to measuring these broader concepts of engagement, progress and outcomes can be usefully split into school/classroom approaches and beyond-school approaches. In terms of school/classroom approaches, the presented evidence of the large variability of approaches to assessment within and between schools presents challenges to the system from a quality assurance perspective. Clearer expectations in terms of recording progress and types of recorded data across the curriculum should be made known to schools. The monitoring of this could be part of school self and external evaluation systems.

The IEP process has the potential to elicit data relating to the progression of children with special educational needs as measured against the targets set in their plan. It would be difficult for these assessment protocols to be standardised to a format which would enable the collation of such data at a system level. Indeed such standardisation may have unintended consequences of narrowing the curriculum or teachers setting inappropriately easy targets to ensure progress is demonstrated. However, greater uniformity in approach within and across schools would be good practice and enable meaningful measures of progress to be shared with pupils, parents, other teachers and other institutions at time of transition. The development of new assessment procedures is currently under way in Scotland. The approach taken appears to involve collaboration with teachers – the process and outcomes of the current consultation on this topic in Scotland may be of interest to Ireland.

Particular attention might also be paid to disability-specific assessments of additional curriculum areas as described elsewhere. Evidence from the teacher survey and analysis of school evaluations (sections 5 and 6) highlighted that assessment of additional curriculum does take place in Ireland, but, as with other aspects of the curriculum, appears to be inconsistent.

Recommendation 6

Relevant stakeholders should ensure that there are clear expectations of schools regarding consistent assessment and recording of progress of students

with SEN across the whole curriculum. This should define minimum standards of assessment to ensure uniformity of approach and equity of provision. Similarly, there should be clear expectations regarding the assessment and recording of student progress against IEP goals. The development of teacher practice through a range of professional development will be necessary to support positive change. The ongoing development in Scotland may be of interest.

In terms of beyond-school approaches to assessment, the review has highlighted that other countries appear rarely to assess progress or outcomes of broader areas of the curriculum as part of their system-based data collection. However, other approaches to collecting this type of data were identified and include national surveys (eg the US-based longitudinal study of people with disabilities, NLTS2), large-scale evaluations (eg Humphrey and Squires, 2011) and a variety of research studies of different scales and designs, eg survey studies, tracking/longitudinal studies, retrospective cohort studies, and intervention studies or smaller scale evaluation studies. Such designs can gather data which can be difficult, even impossible, to gather through school/classroom or national assessments. An obvious example is when considering outcomes for young people who have left school, eg in terms of independent living and employment. The NCSE already commissions research of this kind, and might consider how other research which measures student engagement, progress and outcomes might be designed and carried out (including collaboration with other studies which are not focused on people with special educational needs, eg Growing Up in Ireland). This research project provides examples of a range of study designs.

Recommendation 7

The NCSE might consider how other primary research which measures student engagement, progress and outcomes might be designed, funded and carried out in the context of contracting resources. This might include collaboration with other studies which are not focused on people with SEN. This research project provides examples of a range of study designs.

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