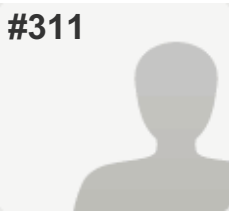


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PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

Q1: Name:

Mary Byrne

Q2: Organisation:

National Council for Special Education. There is no Council in place at the moment so this response has been prepared by NCSE officials and should not be taken to be the official Council position.

Q3: Email:

mary.byrnepo@ncse.ie

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Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

In 2013, the NCSE published a comprehensive policy advice paper setting out the supports required by students with special educational needs in schools. This paper is available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/policy-advice>.

NCSE review of special education found that students with special educational needs are being well supported in schools and making good progress. However a number of recommendations for further improvement were made to ensure students with special educational needs have fair and equitable access to supports. Key recommendations included:

1. The adoption of a robust regulatory enrolment framework to ensure all students with special educational needs can access a school placement.
2. Teaching resources are allocated equitably to schools in line with their educational profile of need without the need for a diagnosis of disability. ↗
3. A framework is developed to improve teachers' knowledge and expertise in supporting and educating students with special educational needs. ↗
4. Additional supports drive improved educational outcomes through individualised planning. ↗

Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

In its 2013 policy advice paper the NCSE recognised that the most effective route to the assessment and planning for students with special educational needs lies in the full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) which provides a blueprint for supporting and educating these students.

We recommended that the Education for Person with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 should be fully commenced as soon as resources permit.

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Q6: 2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

Based on widespread consultation with stakeholders, the NCSE's 2013 policy advice paper detailed our view of what was working well for students with special education needs. In summary this included:

1. Many students with special educational needs are making significant progress in school.
2. Supports already in place in schools are those which continue to be required so that students with special educational needs are enabled to participate in, and benefit from, education and generally to fulfil their potential. These supports include additional teachers, SNAs, special classes, additional teacher training, SESS, NEPS, transport, assistive technology, early intervention classes and so on.
3. Teachers knowledge and expertise has grown.

Recommendations for further improvement are provided under previous question.

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Q7: 3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

Further investment in early education is required to ensure that pre-schools are of sufficient quality to include young children with complex special educational needs.

Joint working across relevant Government Departments is required to ensure that students with special educational needs have consistent and equitable access to necessary therapeutic supports.

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Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

Success on achieving strategies for students with special educational needs should be measured by:

1. Retention rates for students with special educational needs in school
 2. Measuring outcomes for students with SEN, including academic, social, communication, behavioural, independence, end of school, and so on.
 3. Successful post-school transfer - this necessitates Government Departments to work together to ensure that transfer is seamless.
-

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Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

The NCSE considers that the following aspects of the continuum of education are very important for students with special educational needs:

1. Schools Admissions Bill - as the most fundamental requirement is that students are welcomed and enabled to enrol in a school.
2. Cross-Departmental review of post-school options for students with special educational needs
3. Adequate and consistent provision of necessary therapeutic and nursing supports.
4. Further development of teacher capacity and expertise.
5. Where necessary, additional funding for special schools to create safe, alternative environments for students with exceptionally challenging behavioural needs with the aim of re-integrating these students as soon as possible with their peer.

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Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018

Respondent skipped this question

PAGE 8: A Programme for a Partnership Government - Chapter 10: Education

Q11: 1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The approach on early years should prioritise building a quality and inclusive pre-school system. This requires a concentrated focus on raising the qualifications levels required of pre-school staff to the point where services are required to be lead by a holder of a level 8 qualification in a relevant area.

Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

1. Staff qualifications
2. Services should be measured against agreed inclusion criteria
3. Impact of pre-school on children - are targets met and are children ready for school?

Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Up skilling staff and increased qualification level
2. Phasing out of segregated placements for young children with special educational needs, unless absolutely necessary.

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Q14: 2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome the approaches contained in the Programme for Government - particularly the proposed development of a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, additional NEPS psychologists and summer programmes for children.

In addition, we suggest that the DES might consider whether having two separate funding schemes for disadvantage and special educational needs is the optimum model as there are areas of clear overlap between the two schemes. We note that as part of the proposed new model for allocating additional teachers, educational disadvantage is included as one component of the school profile.

Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

Outcomes for students - social, academic, behaviour, attainment, communication, successful post-school transitions

Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Provision of adequate and consistent therapeutic supports to students in disadvantaged areas who require them. Limited or inconsistent provision of therapeutic supports can have a particularly harmful impact where parents cannot afford to procure private assessment and treatment.

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Q17: 3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome the commitment to publish new School Admissions legislation and the enactment of such legislation for the start of school year 2017-2018.

We suggest that the DES might review the provision in the Special Transport Scheme whereby transport is provided to the nearest school even when necessary therapeutic supports are only available in other schools that are further away.

Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question

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Q20: 4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome much in this approach including:

1. Introduction of new technology bringing remote learning into classrooms
2. Investment in additional continuous professional development for teachers and preparation courses for newly appointed school principals.
3. Measures to assist teaching principals.

We emphasise that additional funding will be required to bring these changes about particularly in the area of CPD for teachers.

Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

No. of teachers and principals who have engaged in quality CPD thereby raising the competence of teachers to engage in working with the full range of needs in the classroom.

Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question

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Q23: 5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome much in the approach to promoting excellence and innovation in schools including:

1. Emphasis on building mental health awareness
2. Promotion of transition initiatives

We would propose consideration be given to providing support or an award for students who demonstrate exceptional creativity and/or entrepreneurship in creating more inclusive schools.

Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question

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Q26: 6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We support the proposal for the increased use of school buildings, both throughout the day and throughout the year, for activities such as afterschool care, homework clubs.

We suggest that consideration be given to the use of school buildings for the provision of summer programmes for students in disadvantaged areas and for students with complex special educational needs.

However, we emphasise that consideration must be given as to how the care needs of these students are to be met for the duration of these activities.

Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

Extent and nature and quality of additional use made of school buildings

Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Supports are available, as necessary, to enable students with additional needs to participate in activities associated with the increased use of school buildings, to the fullest extent possible in accordance with their individual needs. This will require adequate supervision by people competent to provide any necessary care, medical and/or behavioural support.

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Q29: 7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome the approaches outlined in this section, particularly that:

1. NCSE will be requested to provide assistance in examining the adequacy of current special education access and funding provision.
2. Consideration is to be given to the extension of the July Provision Programme to support families over summer months.
3. Consultation will take place with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act.
3. A new model of in-school Speech and Language Therapy service will be established.
4. Additional resources will be provided to NEPS.

Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

1. Increased teacher competence, expertise, knowledge and skills in working with students with special educational needs
2. Measurement, recording and reporting on student outcomes, including academic, social, communication, behaviour, independence, end of school.
3. Successful post-school transition

Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Increased opportunities for teacher continuing professional development
2. Increased focus on student outcomes
3. Implementation of the proposed new allocation model to ensure that students have equitable and consistent access to educational supports in schools.

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Q32: 8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We welcome the proposed Review of Further, Adult and Community Education sector by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and the implementation of reforms to ensure the effectiveness of the sector.

Further to that review we consider that the relevant Departments should jointly review their respective policies for post-school options for students with special educational needs, to ensure these students have access to a full range of meaningful post-school work, educational and other placement opportunities.

Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question