



**An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation  
Model to Support Inclusion in Irish Primary Schools**

by

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## **Abstract**

### **An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model to Support Inclusion in Irish Primary Schools**

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The global movement towards inclusive education (Anderson *et al.* 2007; Garrote *et al.* 2017) sees a fundamental obligation on State to provide an effective model which supports and enables school staff to include and cater for students with special educational needs (SEN) in the mainstream school. This study examines the current national directive with regard to inclusive educational practice for primary schools in Ireland, *Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017*, which introduced the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM).

This research set out to unveil the workings of the SETAM, by giving a voice to teachers, as the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools, to understand how they have interpreted and implemented this model in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) and to examine the implications of their views for policy direction and practice in the classroom.

A mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. The sample consisted of principals, SEN coordinators, class teachers and special education teachers. A national, online survey was carried out, followed by semi-structured interviews, which aimed to examine the perspectives and experiences of teachers who had been working under the SETAM since its introduction in September 2017. These interviews were conducted in four Contexts of Practice, i.e., a boys' school, a girls' school, a mixed school (non-DEIS) and a DEIS school (mixed). Analysis of the datasets, guided by the theoretical framework of Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle, revealed a number of significant findings.

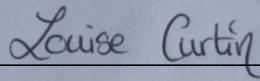
This study highlighted the complexity of policy implementation in schools, as the notion of teacher agency versus increased responsibility, and the dilemmatic nature of such within Contexts of Practice, emerged. Interesting data, surrounding the use of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support (DES 2007a) as a framework for inclusive practice, were also revealed, providing insights into the need for greater continuing professional development for all teachers on SEN and inclusive practice in schools. Furthermore, a move towards more collaborative practice to meet the needs of students with SEN in schools was found, with increased use of in-class support and co-teaching approaches evident under this model. However, data also suggest the remaining need for withdrawal practices within this inclusive policy.

In summary, this study argues that evaluating current practice on a micro level is vital to inform those at the macro level of policymaking about what is happening on the ground, to create a well-informed, evolving policy cycle (Ball 1994). The study listened to teacher voice and in doing so, identified areas of success within the SETAM and potential for improvement, according to those at the coalface of policy implementation in schools. Thus, findings may provide an important evidence base to underpin and inform the evolution of inclusive education policy and practice for students with SEN in Irish primary schools.

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louise Curtin". The signature is written in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. A horizontal line extends from the end of the signature to the left, meeting the "Signed:" label.

Louise Curtin

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021

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## **List of Acronyms**

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CoS	Continuum of Support (framework)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CT	Class Teacher
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering of Equal Opportunity in Schools
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
DoE	Department of Education
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EAHCA	Education for All Handicapped Children Act (USA) 1975
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EASNIE	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (formerly EADSNE)
EHC	Education, Health and Care (Plans) (UK)
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
GAM	General Allocation Model
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison (Coordinator)
HI	High Incidence (disability)
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive

IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (USA)
IDEIA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (USA)
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LI	Low Incidence (disability)
LDA	Learning Difficulty Assessments (UK)
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
NB	New Brunswick (Canada)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act (USA)
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OT	Occupational Therapist
PDST	Professional Development Support for Teachers
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
PMC	Primary Maths Curriculum
POD	Primary Online Database
REI	Regular Education Initiative
RTH	Resource Teacher Hour (Model)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co Ordinator

SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS*	Special Education Support Service
SET	Special Education Teacher
SETAM	Special Education Teacher Allocation Model
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
UNCRPD	United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

\* This organisation no longer exists. The service is provided is now provided by the NCSE.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Inclusive education in Ireland has made significant advances in the past two decades (Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015), resulting in the flourishing of education for students with special educational needs (SEN), increasingly located in mainstream schools (Tomlinson 2012; McCoy *et al.* 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018; Rose *et al.* 2017). This global movement (Anderson *et al.* 2007; Garrote *et al.* 2017) towards inclusive teaching and learning sees a fundamental obligation on State to provide an effective model which supports and enables school staff to include and cater for students with SEN in the mainstream school. The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circular 0013/2017) is the Irish education system's response to this, as a revised funding model to allocate special education teacher (SET) resources to schools to facilitate and support inclusion. The current study seeks to examine this new model in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) to explore how teachers have interpreted and implemented this policy change in schools and to identify the benefits and challenges associated with such, according to teachers on the ground. For the purpose of this study, the official title of this model will mainly be used (i.e., the SETAM), however, this model is also commonly referred to as the 'new model', both in schools and within the policy text, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) (Appendix 1). Therefore, interchangeable use of both titles can be found within this thesis.

The main focus of this study is the SETAM (DES 2017a), which was introduced to schools in 2017 to provide a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs in schools, based on that school's educational profile. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the SETAM, tracing the development of this policy by examining previous allocation models in Ireland, reviewing studies and pilot schemes which led to the proposal and introduction of this policy, and analysing the official policy text, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and the Guidelines which accompanied the Circular (DES 2017b). This study is significant as it will examine the perspectives of principals, SEN coordinators (SENCO), class teachers (CT) and special education teachers (SET) in Irish primary schools, regarding this revised, needs-based model (DES

2017a). The objective of the study is to give a voice to teachers, as the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools, to understand how they have interpreted and implemented the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006) and to examine the implications of their views for policy direction and practice in the classroom. This study is timely, given that SET allocations for schools under this model initially remained in place for two-year periods. Revised profiled allocations were due to be considered for schools from September 2021 (DES 2019a), however, recent communication from the Department of Education (DoE)<sup>1</sup> states that ‘in order to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations will be maintained for schools for the 2021/22 school year’ (DoE 2021b, p.10). Personal correspondence with the Special Education Section of the DoE (April 2021) confirmed that re-profiled allocations are now due to be made from September 2022. Findings of this study which identify aspects of the model that are successful in practice and aspects which could require improvement may, therefore, influence future re-profiling within the next review of this SET model, when it occurs.

The relevance of this study is clear, considering the recent policy advice from the National Council of Special Education (NCSE) to the Minister for Education and Skills regarding the educational provision for students in special schools and classes. Currently, in Ireland, there is a continuum of educational provision for students with SEN (see Section 2.4) which sees a range of placements available, including mainstream classes, special classes in mainstream schools and special schools. However, the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Committee’s interpretation of Article 24 (Education) of the convention<sup>2</sup> is that ‘having a mainstream educational system and a separate special education system is not compatible with its view of inclusion and that parallel systems are not considered inclusive’ (NCSE 2019, p.9). Considering this, in 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills in Ireland, Minister

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1 The Department of Education and Skills (DES) was renamed the Department of Education (DoE) on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 (Irish Statute Book 2020). Therefore, throughout this thesis, all documents published before this date will be cited as DES and all those published after this date will be cited as DoE.

2 In 2018, the Irish Government ratified the CRPD, Article 24 (2), which obliges the State to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. The ratification of such brought with it new obligations which led to the then Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh, requesting the NCSE to conduct a review of whether special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex SEN or whether greater inclusion in mainstream classes offers a better way forward (NCSE 2019).

Joe McHugh, requested the NCSE to develop a policy advice report on how best to educate students with SEN, particularly those enrolled in special schools and classes. The NCSE recently presented the emerging findings from their initial analysis in a progress report (NCSE 2019), which brought the concept of ‘full inclusion’ to the fore, as a possible response to meet the UNCRPD’s obligation of fully inclusive education systems. This concept is further discussed in Chapter Two, as Section 2.4.1 outlines the influence of international models of allocation on Irish practices. Within this section, ‘full inclusion’ is detailed as a proposed future direction for education provision in Ireland, as influenced by the model of inclusion currently adopted in New Brunswick (NB), Canada. In addition to this, the NCSE are currently piloting a new School Inclusion Model (SIM) (DES 2019f) which includes an In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project (DES 2018b; Lynch *et al.* 2020). The demonstration project firstly took place over the course of the 2018/19 school year to trial a model of tailored therapeutic supports by providing occupational therapy and speech and language therapy within educational settings. 75 schools [primary, post primary, and special schools] and 75 pre-school settings, associated with the participating primary schools, took part in the project (DES 2018b; Lynch *et al.* 2020). This was initially designed as a one-year pilot, however, following the review of the Special Needs Assistance (SNA) Scheme (NCSE 2018), an additional pilot of the new SIM was established the following year, and so for the 2019/20 school year, the demonstration project continued in the context of the SIM (DES 2020b). The SIM aims to provide the right supports at the right time to students with additional needs (NCSE 2018) by introducing a frontloaded allocation model for SNAs in line with profiled need, reflecting the current system for allocating SETs to schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Additional features of this model include an expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the development of NCSE Regional Support Teams<sup>3</sup>, the creation of a National Training Programme for SNAs and the introduction of a nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools (DES 2020b). However, due to the closing of schools in March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot could not be completed. In a recent press release, current Minister for Education, Norma Foley and the Minister of State for Special Education and

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<sup>3</sup>NCSE Regional Support Teams include specialists in relevant disciplines (Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Behaviour Practitioners), in order to inform teacher Continuing Professional Development and best practice in schools in that area (DES 2020b).

Inclusion, Josepha Madigan, announced that the pilot of the SIM, which includes the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, would continue for the 2020/21 school year (DES 2020b) and would be expanded to include additional schools within the pilot. This expansion includes the recruitment of 80 additional therapists (speech and language therapists and occupational therapists) and 30 educational psychologists (DES 2020c).

As we are currently within a period of national review concerning the most appropriate and beneficial educational provision for all students in Irish schools, this study is timely and of utmost importance. It is vital to examine and evaluate the current model of support allocation in mainstream primary schools in Ireland, the SETAM (DES 2017a), which will inform us of how ‘inclusive’ our schools really are, by gaining an insight into teachers’ perspectives and experiences of implementing a model which aims to facilitate inclusion in schools. The subsequent section provides a summary of international and national policies which have mirrored the aforementioned global movement towards more inclusive schools (Garrote *et al.* 2017) and provided the legislative framework to enable the advances made within special education provision in Ireland, and beyond, throughout the past number of years (Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015).

## **1.2 Inclusive Education Policy: Setting the Policy Context**

Inclusive education policy directs the provision of education for students with SEN, therefore, this section will trace the progression of international and national policies surrounding inclusion which have framed and influenced the current legislation and practices in Ireland. The legislative requirements laid out in these policies mirror the evolution of the societal perspective towards special education and inclusion which occurred throughout the years (see Section 2.3.1 for a description of these perceptions of inclusion). Therefore, the progression and culmination of the philosophies, ideas and perspectives, represented in the policies below, provided a basis for the SETAM (DES 2017a) and paved the way for this model to be embedded into schools.

### **1.2.1 International and National Legislation Underpinning Inclusion**

An abundance of international educational policies advocate for and mandate inclusive education and have had a significant impact on national legislation today. On an international level, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United

States of America (USA), and the associated social developments of the time, acted as a catalyst for the evolution of special education. Court decisions, such as the historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka* (1954), highlighted the need for integrated education systems, in terms of race, as the Supreme Court ruled that segregation ‘denied equal educational opportunity’ (Yell *et al.* 2017, p.56) and therefore, declared that education must be made available to all students on equal terms (Egan 2013). Advocates for students with disabilities subsequently argued that to exclude such students was similarly a denial of equal educational opportunity, and so, 1975 saw a breakthrough for special education policy and provision in the USA with Congress passing Public Law 94-142; the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This pivotal piece of legislation focused on the rights of children with disabilities to free and appropriate public education (Deiner 2009; Lipsky and Gartner 2012), mandated integration, outlined an expectation of parental participation (Connor 2013) and promoted the concept of the least restrictive environment (LRE) (EAHCA 1975). In accordance with the EAHCA, the LRE refers to the education of students with SEN alongside their non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate (Musgrove 2012; Yell *et al.* 2017). It is a strong preference of the EAHCA that students are educated in regular settings while being provided with appropriate supports and resources, i.e., withdrawing students to resource settings for additional support (Egan 2013). However, Madeline Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the USA Department of Education in 1986, disputed the ‘well-intentioned’ practice of the withdrawal or ‘pull-out’ approach. She argued that this practice inadvertently created barriers to the successful inclusion and education of students with SEN and could lead to stigmatisation (Will 1986, p.142) (the concept of withdrawal is further discussed in Section 2.6.4 and 3.2). Will’s argument was seminal in that it led to an educational reform movement known as the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (1986)<sup>4</sup>. In 1990, the EAHCA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)<sup>5</sup>, to reflect one of the most significant changes within this amendment, which was to use person-first language. Along with the

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4 The REI had three primary goals; to bring about a unified system of general and special education where instruction and responsibility was shared between general and special education teachers in the mainstream classroom, to increase the amount of students with SEN being educated in the mainstream classroom through ‘full-scale mainstreaming’ rather than the ‘case-by-case approach’ and to enhance academic competence in schools (Pfeiffer and Reddy 1999; Winzer and Mazurek 2000).

5 The most recent reauthorisation of this Act was in 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004).

renaming of the law, terms such as ‘handicapped child or student’ were changed to ‘child or student with a disability’ (Yell *et al.* 2017). Although general education settings are favoured, the IDEA also recognises that students must be educated in a setting which can best accommodate for their needs, and which provides them with fair and equal access to education. Considering this, the LRE may not necessarily be the mainstream classroom for some students with SEN (Yell *et al.* 2017), but rather the act states that an individualised educational plan (IEP) for these students must be executed to provide a ‘normal’ learning environment similar to that which is offered to students without SEN (Laws Administrative 2019). The meaningful inclusion and responsibility for students with disabilities were accounted for in the IDEA. However, the accountability for these students was introduced with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. In line with the IDEA’s requirement of an IEP for all students with SEN, the NCLB states that during the development of these IEPs ‘specific justification’ must be provided if a decision is made that a child will not participate alongside non-disabled peers in ‘academic, extracurricular and non-academic activities’ (Lipsky and Gartner 2012, p.14), to ensure exclusion is not proposed without a great deal of consideration.

Closer to home, legislation in the United Kingdom (UK) was making a noteworthy impact on special education policy. The Warnock Report (1978) introduced the terminology of ‘special educational needs’ as opposed to the previously used term ‘handicapped’ and advocated integration rather than segregation of students with SEN (Shaw 2017). According to Norwich (2016) the use of the term ‘need’ introduced a different way of thinking about children’s difficulties or deficits and so these changes, as outlined in the Warnock Report (1978) and the subsequent Education Act (1981), ‘reflect a paradigmatic shift from the psycho-medical to the sociological paradigm’ (Egan 2013, p.86) (see Section 2.4.4 for further discussion on theories of the medical/social model). The conditions outlined in these policies in the UK and other international inclusive movements including; the United Nations (UN) Convention of the Rights of the Child, (1989), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) World Declaration for All (1990) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994)<sup>6</sup>, all impacted on special education policy and provision and influenced Irish legislation. The Salamanca Statement (1994) was particularly

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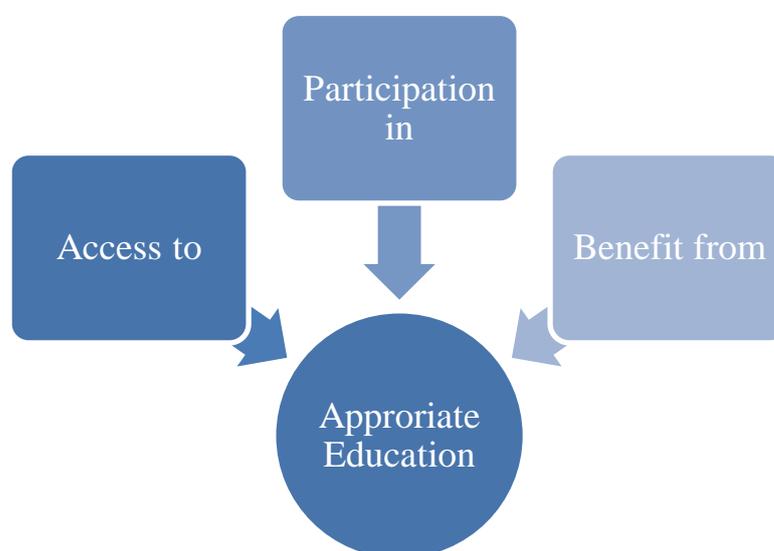
<sup>6</sup> The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was developed at the World Congress on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994.

influential (Hick *et al.* 2019) in that it was the first policy to bring ‘students with disabilities to the fore’ (Hunt 2011, p.463). It is argued to be the ‘most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education’ (Ainscow *et al.* 2019, p.671) as it endorsed and defined inclusive education (see Figure 2.3) and it requested all governments to ‘give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive, and to adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy’ (Westwood 2013, p.3). The spirit of Irish special education legislation has been influenced by the aforementioned international policies (see Policy Table in Appendix 2), encompassing an inclusive education (NCSE 2013), as evidenced in the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC Report) (Government of Ireland 1993), the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland 2004).

Inclusive education in Ireland, in terms of legislative commitment, is somewhat of a recent phenomenon (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007), with a series of court cases in the 1990s having a significant impact on special education provision (McCoy *et al.* 2016). As recently as 1993, the State refused to educate certain groups of children who were deemed to be uneducable within the meaning of Article 42 of the 1937 Constitution (Egan 2013), which led to the case of O’Donoghue v. Minister for Health. Within this case, the High Court found that the State had failed to provide Paul O’Donoghue, a 9-year-old boy with severe disabilities, with his constitutional right to free primary education. This verdict placed an obligation on State to make the necessary changes to provision within the Irish education system to ensure all students, including those with disabilities, could achieve their full potential. This high-profile case paved the way for others, and according to Egan (2013, p.58), ‘demonstrated the potential of public interest litigation to convince a political system to the call for reform’.

The Special Education Review Committee was established in 1991 by the Minister for Education to review, and make recommendations on, existing educational provision for students with SEN (Government of Ireland 1993) and presented its report to the Minister in the same year as the aforementioned O’Donoghue case. The SERC Report (1993) was ground-breaking in terms of special education policy and practice in Ireland (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 1999; MacGiolla Phádraig 2007) as it recommended seven principles to guide future development of special education policy. These principles included the right of students with SEN to an

individualised and appropriate education, emphasised the important role of parents in the decision-making process related to their child’s education and outlined a preference of access to local mainstream schools for students with SEN. These principles are evidenced in a number of subsequent legislations such as the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998), which represented a ‘singular landmark in Irish life’ and provided, for the first time, a ‘national legislative mandate in education’ (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007, p.293). This Act placed an emphasis on the education of *all*, by recognising the constitutional right of every student, including those with SEN, to an appropriate education, as outlined in Figure 1.1 below. The Act promotes the inclusion and equality of access and opportunities for all students, which was further reinforced by the Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland 2000).



**Figure 1. 1: Appropriate Education as defined in the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998)**

Furthermore, within the SERC Report principles, a continuum of provision was promoted (McCoy *et al.* 2016), which was supported by the White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future (DES 1995)<sup>7</sup>. This continuum allowed for the full-time

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<sup>7</sup> This White Paper outlined policy directions and set out a framework for the development of education into the next century, to reflect a rapidly changing and evolving society (DES 1995). This Paper supported the continuum of provision recommended in the SERC Report and detailed it as one of the main objectives for future practice to cater for students with SEN in the primary sector.

placement of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms with additional support<sup>8</sup>, which mirrors the position advocated for in international policies, as discussed, above, and favoured ‘as much integration’ and ‘as little segregation’ as necessary (Government of Ireland 1993, p.22). Considerable advances in special education policy in Ireland were then made in 2004 with the passing of the EPSEN Act. The purpose of this Act was to make further provision for the education of students with SEN in an inclusive environment (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) 2021) and is considered the ‘most significant piece of legislation in the history of the State related to the education of children with special needs’ (Carey 2005, p.153). The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland 2004) is underpinned by inclusion and mandates that students with SEN should be educated in mainstream schools alongside their peers who do not have SEN unless the nature or degree of the needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child with SEN or the effective provision of education for that student’s peers (Government of Ireland 2004). Under this Act, the NCSE was established with effect from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, which developed the Inclusive Education Framework and introduced Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENO). The purpose of the SENO is to coordinate and advise schools on the provision of special education services, to identify the ‘level of resources that may be sanctioned for a school to support a particular child’ and to support and advise parents of children with SEN (NCSE 2014a, p.48). The hugely important EPSEN Act still determines current educational practice and outlines the right for parents of students with SEN to be actively involved in their child’s education and decision making, which is echoed in the principles of the SERC Report (1993). This shows the significant impact the SERC Report has had on special education policy in Ireland over the past number of years and conveys that it is still influential and continues to provide a basis for Irish legislation today (NCCA 1999; Carey 2005; Egan 2013; European Commission 2018). While the EPSEN Act legislates for best practice, and is Ireland’s current legislation, further providing for those with SEN, it has not been fully implemented due to ‘economic constraints’ (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Rose *et al.* 2015, p.24). Along with the EPSEN Act, the Disability Act (2005) also relates to the assessment of students with SEN, and together, these acts provide a framework to

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<sup>8</sup> The continuum of provision also allowed for full-time or part-time placement of students in special classes or schools or full-time placement in a residential special school.

plan for and deliver specialist support services to children with SEN, which is further elaborated on in Section 2.4.1 and Section 2.4.2.

Special Education Circular 02/05 ‘Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools’ (DES 2005) was issued by the Department to all schools in 2005 and is pertinent to this study as it introduced the General Allocation Model (GAM) (DES 2005), which remained as the allocation model in Ireland until the recent publication of Circular 0013/2017, the SETAM (DES 2017a). It could be argued, that the SETAM represents an expansion of a general model of allocation to schools as forecast by Egan (2013). The GAM will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three (Section 3.2) as the Context of Influence (Ball 1994) for the development of the SETAM (DES 2017a). Following this, a full section is dedicated to the SETAM, whereby the key steps in its evolution [i.e., the impact of the Context of Influence on the Context of Policy Text Production (Ball 1994)] will be outlined and components which comprise this new model will be discussed (see Section 3.3). In order to explore the SETAM, a number of research questions were developed. The subsequent section details the process involved in forming such questions and establishing the main topics of investigation for this study.

### **1.3 Developing the Research Question**

The SETAM (DES 2017a), as a new, needs-based, special education policy, was introduced to schools in September 2017. Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) was issued to advise schools of this revised allocation process for SETs to mainstream primary schools in Ireland, which replaced the pre-existing GAM, English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support Scheme and NCSE Resource Teaching Hour (RTH) Model (DES 2005). This policy change came shortly after the first phase of the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019e)<sup>9</sup> was rolled out to schools in 2016, and, while a new Primary Maths Curriculum (PMC)<sup>10</sup> was also on the horizon at this time, concern was expressed regarding the pace of change within the primary education sector (Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN) 2018). While recognising the need for continuous review and

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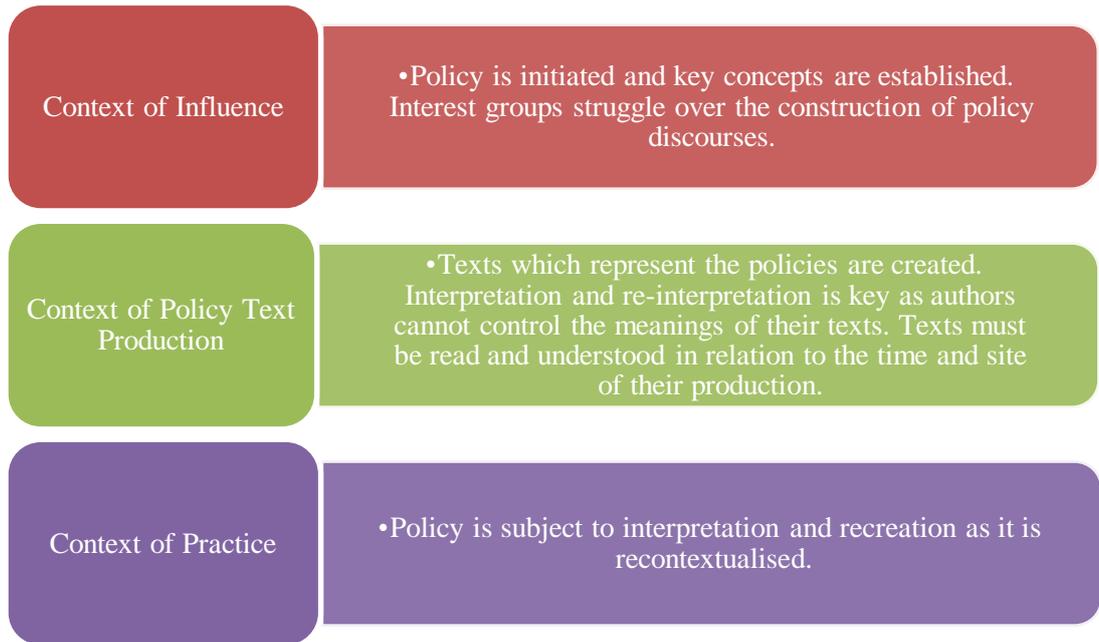
<sup>9</sup> Developed in 2015, the Primary Language Curriculum was introduced for junior infants to second class on a phased basis from September 2016 and was rolled out to all classes from September 2019 (DES 2019e).

<sup>10</sup> Following concerns raised regarding reform on the Irish primary school sector, a decision was made by the Minister for Education and Skills in December 2018 to delay the introduction of the new Primary Maths Curriculum. The PMC now aims to be published in September 2021, with implementation in schools beginning in September 2022 (DES 2019d).

redevelopment of school practices, in order to adequately respond to the changing profile of mainstream classrooms (Casserly and Padden 2018), the researcher, as a primary school teacher herself, wondered how much policy change, and to what extent, was achievable in practice (Day 2007; Schulte 2018). At a time when huge changes were occurring within the Irish education system, the researcher wanted to examine how accurately changes on the ground reflect the original intent of policy (Egan 2013; Giudici 2020) by analysing the practical application of the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Therefore, an exploration of how teachers were negotiating the changes involved with the SETAM, and the benefits and challenges associated with this new system, was carried out.

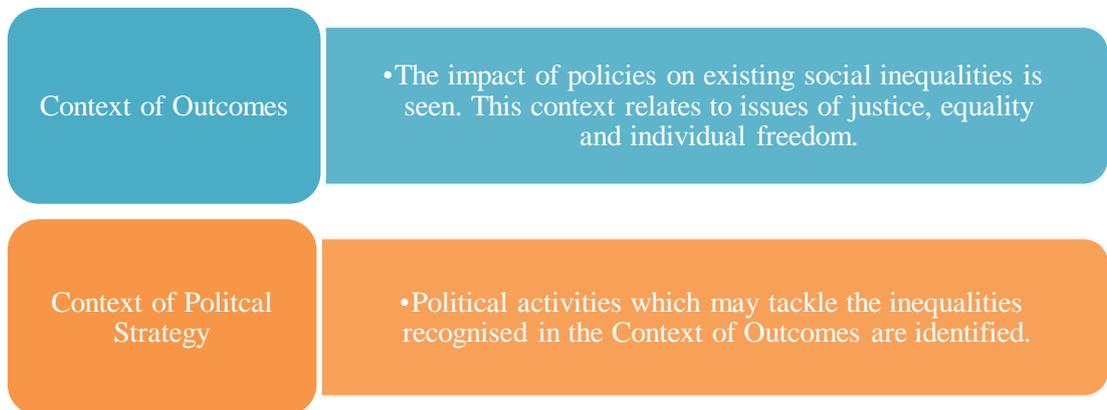
### **1.3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The development of the research questions was guided by the theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), as the researcher was interested in examining the relationship between policy development and policy implementation (Mainardes 2010; Giudici 2020), i.e., what teachers have been directed to do by policy and how they have actually interpreted this policy and implemented it on the ground (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006). As this study is concerned with policy analysis, Policy as Cycle was adopted as the over-arching analytical framework for this study (see Section 3.4). Firstly developed by Stephen Ball and his colleagues (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), this framework rejects the notion of policy as a top-down, linear approach from development to implementation (Looney 2001; Egan 2013), instead, redefining it as an interrelated and interactive cycle (Mainardes 2010). Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) acknowledges the complexity of educational policy (Giudici 2020) as an ongoing process rather than a product and so, it avoids the idea that policy is just something imposed onto people, but rather, it involves ‘competing contexts’ where policies are remade and reworked (Aubrey and Durmaz 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016, p.4). As a result, this framework is underpinned by the involvement of practitioners in the generation and implementation of policy, with each context involving public and private arenas of action, ad hocery, struggle and compromise (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Goodwyn and Findlay 2009; Lall 2012; Egan 2013; Reagan *et al.* 2016). Three such contexts are specified in Bowe *et al.*’s (1992) work, the Context of Influence, the Context of Policy Text Production and the Context of Influence.



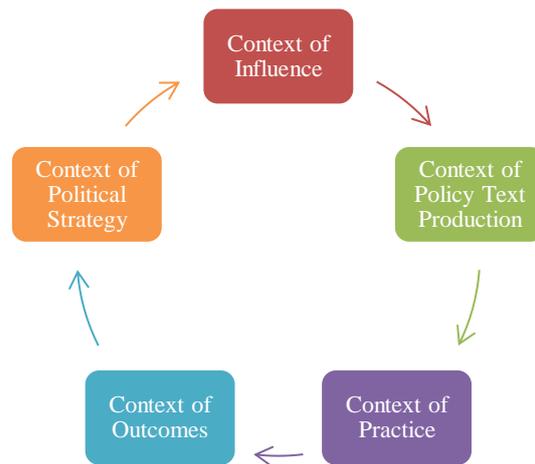
**Figure 1. 2: Contexts of Policymaking (Bowe *et al.* 1992)**

Ball (1994) later developed two additional contexts; the Context of Outcomes and the Context of Political Strategy, to act as a feedback loop from the micro level back to the macro level (Lall 2012), thus creating a continuous policy cycle (see Section 3.4.2).



**Figure 1. 3: Ball's (1994) Extended Contexts**

All five contexts represent the full policy cycle as outlined by Ball (1994), which is illustrated in the figure below:



**Figure 1. 4: The Full Policy Cycle (Ball 1994)**

While this study considers the full cycle, the researcher was mainly interested in the application of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice, i.e., in Irish primary schools. According to Bowe *et al.* (1992), within this Context, policies are not read naïvely, but rather, are interpreted by those on the ground, who draw on their personal experiences, histories and values to develop their own meanings and understandings of policy and how it should be implemented within their practice. This concurs with the perspective of Looney (2001), who maintains that interpretation upon implementation is inevitable. With this in mind, the SETAM (DES 2017a) was open to interpretation by those charged with its implementation (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006; Aubrey and Durmaz 2012), i.e., teachers, school management and staff, who play an active role in the policy process (Mainardes 2010) by constructing their own meaning of policy based on their understanding, histories, and interests (Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to unveil how this model was being enacted on the ground by unearthing the lived experience (Mertens 2015) of key stakeholders implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice. The below question guided the overall investigation:

### 1.3.2 Research Questions

- ❖ How are teachers implementing the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in schools?

Guidelines, which accompanied the SETAM, offered information to schools on the ‘use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs’ (DES 2017b, p.3), and so, the steps recommended within these Guidelines directed the study’s key research questions which would contribute to answering the main question presented above.

1. How are students’ needs identified under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?
2. How are special education teaching resources allocated to effectively meet students’ needs under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?
3. How are students’ outcomes monitored and recorded under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?

These questions reflect the steps outlined in the DES (2017b) Guidelines to support students with SEN and implement the revised model effectively. The researcher sought to problematise the space to discover if schools were following such steps, if, and how, they had adapted the steps in order to successfully implement the SETAM or if there were potential areas for improvement within this new the model. This prompted the formulation of the embedded questions.

#### *1.3.2.1 Embedded Questions*

A number of embedded questions were then devised to uncover topics of interest within the study and to facilitate the exploration of the main research questions listed above:

- What do teachers consider the benefits/challenges of the SETAM?
- Has practice changed since the introduction of the SETAM, if so, how?
- Was this policy change a top-down or bottom-up approach?
- What supports (including initial teacher education [ITE] and continuing professional development [CPD]) have been given to teachers in relation to the implementation of the SETAM?
- What models of support are most frequently used under the SETAM?

- What systems are in place in schools to effectively monitor, evaluate and record students' outcomes?

These questions were developed inductively as they were influenced by the extant literature surrounding inclusion in practice and relevant policy documents (as discussed in Chapter Two and Three). In line with the study's theoretical framework, discourse analysis (see Section 4.7.3) of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) which outlines the SETAM, the accompanying Guidelines (2017b) and Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), which detailed the revised profiled allocations for schools under the SETAM, was also undertaken to facilitate the formulation of the research questions. The following section provides a rationale for the study in the context of Irish educational policy and details the researcher's motive for choosing to engage in this research. The significance of this research will also be discussed, highlighting its possible impact on future policy and practice.

#### **1.4 Rationale for Study**

The current study seeks to examine DES Circular 0013/2017, which introduced the SETAM by advising schools of the 'revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream primary schools from the 2017/18 school year' (DES 2017a, p.1). This is a crucial development in SEN provision in Ireland as the SETAM now focuses on the individual learning needs of students and the identification of need within the socio-cultural context of the school, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability (Health Service Executive (HSE) 2019b; DES 2017a; DES 2019a). Therefore, students in Irish primary schools no longer require a formal diagnosis to access support, which reflects the current move away from labelling of students with SEN, which will be discussed in Section 2.4.4. It is now at the discretion of the principal and teachers as to who can be sanctioned additional support based on their needs. As a result of this change, schools have more responsibility and control over the use and organisation of additional teaching resources (DES 2017a). This study sets out to examine how schools are negotiating these changes and to investigate how this model is being implemented on the ground, i.e., in the Context of Practice, by analysing how teachers are identifying need and prioritising support, how schools are deploying their staff to meet the needs of students with SEN and how students' outcomes are monitored and recorded under this

new model. This research will explore if the aims of the SETAM are being accomplished in practice and identify the benefits/challenges associated with such for key stakeholders. This is significant as it will enhance our understanding of the perspectives of Irish primary school teachers in relation to the workings of the SETAM (DES 2017a) to support inclusion in practice. Through exploration and analysis of the research questions, effective practice of the implementation steps outlined in the Guidelines (DES 2017b) will be identified, which may have positive implications for Irish teachers' future practice when supporting and including students with SEN.

According to national reports conducted by the NCSE and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), a rise in the prevalence of SEN in Irish primary schools is evident, increasing from 18% in 2006 (NCSE 2006b) to 25% in 2011 (Banks and McCoy 2011). While this percentage [25%] is in line with international rates [Netherlands 26%, UK 26%] (McCoy *et al.* 2016), a recent NCSE progress report acknowledged that 'much has changed in the educational landscape' (NCSE 2019, p.2) since 2011, with the increase in special education provision reflecting the growing number of students with SEN in our schools. From 2011-2019 government expenditure on special education has increased by 46% from €1.3bn to €1.9bn (NCSE 2019). This increase continues to grow as Budget 2021 sees €2 billion being invested in special education, which is over one-fifth of the total education budget (DES 2020c). In addition to this increased funding, the SETAM was introduced in 2017, which saw an additional 1,000 SETs being provided for schools, resulting in the total number of SETs available for allocation to both primary and post primary schools increasing from 9,740 in 2011 to over 13,300 in 2019 (DES 2019a). Budget 2021 also allows for an additional 145 SETs to be recruited. This is noteworthy, as according to Watson (2009, p.278), 'provision of appropriately resourced policies, services, personnel and communities is central to achieving inclusive education'. This study intends to unveil if the SETAM (DES 2017a), as our current funding model, provides sufficient resources to match the current demand for special education teaching support in schools, and thus, facilitates an inclusive learning environment for all students. The findings of this study will be extremely relevant as it is essential to have evidence of how effective this model is in practice to impact future revisions of the model and to secure the associated funding.

By analysing the research questions listed above (see Section 1.3.2), our understanding of how the SETAM (DES 2017a) is being implemented in schools, to

support inclusion in practice, may be enhanced. Apart from work commissioned by the NCSE and the DoE (NCSE 2013; Rix *et al.* 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b) leading up to the proposal and roll-out of the SETAM, to date, there has been no published data on the workings of the model in the Context of Practice, i.e., in schools (Shevlin and Banks 2021), therefore, indicating a gap between the domains of research and providing an opportunity for future exploration. Considering this, the study may have significant implications for the future development of an under-studied, but critically important, aspect of the Irish education system. The outcomes and findings of this research may contribute to existing knowledge in a climate of change for inclusive and special education in Ireland. The NCSE's examination of inclusive practices in Irish primary schools, including their review of special education provision in terms of whether to move towards a 'full inclusion' approach (NCSE 2019), and the pilots of the SIM (DES 2019f) and the In-School Demonstration Project (DES 2018b) (see Section 1.1 for further detail on these pilots) demonstrate the current period of national review in Ireland and highlight the relevance of this study as our understanding of current special education policy will be extended by identifying areas of the SETAM proven to be effective in practice, along with recognising areas which Irish schools may find challenging. It is vital that the findings of this research fall on the ears of policymakers, as Day (2007, p.21) maintains that 'change as a result of research, policy and legislation can be slow and is often resisted'. This study is concerned with how teachers implement national policies at a local level and so, underpinned by the overall theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), this study will analyse the effects and consequences produced by the policy in the Context of Practice and examine how closely they reflect the original policy intent (Mainardes 2010). Egan (2013, p.14) maintains that it is often a 'small group with a certain knowledge (power/agency) who are involved in devising policy with little consultation or participation from those involved in its implementation', which may lead to the slow, resisted change Day (2007) mentions. The objective of the current study is to portray the voice of the teacher in the policy process to inform key educational organisations involved in the production of such policies, such as the DoE and the NCSE, of how teachers have responded to the introduction of this new policy, how they are implementing the SETAM on the ground and what aspects of the model they believe are successful, or indeed, are in need of change. According to Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle, practitioners are active participants in the policy process as the outcomes of policies in

practice can act as a feedback loop from the micro level back to the macro level (Lall 2012) to influence the creation of new policies. This research examines the Context of Influence and Context of Policy Text Production of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) to explore if this were the case. The findings of this study may, therefore, contribute to the impact of key stakeholders, i.e., teachers, on the evolution of future special education policies in Ireland.

While this section has justified the reasonings for undertaking this study, on a practical level, and conveyed the significance of the research by highlighting the impact it may have on current and future special education policy and practice, the subsequent discussion centres around the researcher's personal investment in the study.

#### **1.4.1 Personal Investment**

Contemporary discourse maintains that inclusive education represents a commitment to provide meaningful learning experiences to all students, while valuing and respecting diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO 2019a). Throughout my Undergraduate Studies in Mary Immaculate College, where I studied on the Bachelor of Education programme, I realised my passion for learning about, and working with, students with SEN in primary schools. Far greater diversity is evident in schools today than was the case during my own schooldays, reflecting the significant movement towards more inclusive schools within the past decade (Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015). This welcome diversity, which 'enriches our classrooms and challenges us to craft a responsive pedagogy' (Ring *et al.* 2018, p.4), was of particular interest to me, and so, encouraged my exploration of how schools are implementing the current SET allocation model (DES 2017a), to identify best practice when including students with SEN in mainstream classes. This study is relevant to me on a personal level as I believe upskilling in the area of SEN is vital to ensure that teachers have the appropriate understanding, knowledge and skills to successfully include and teach all students, including those with SEN. Therefore, although there is a fundamental obligation on the state to provide an effective model which supports and enables school staff to include and cater for students with SEN in the mainstream school, responsibility also lies with the teachers themselves to take steps to further enhance their knowledge within this arena. Furthermore, carrying out this study is of benefit to me as it will enhance my understanding of the workings of the SETAM to support inclusion on the ground,

informing my own teaching by identifying effective and best practice. Similarly, this research process will further develop my understanding of educational policy, having positive implications on my own teaching. The knowledge, experience and skill set that I have gained from engaging in this study will enable me to make a contribution in the classroom, at policy level and in the field of inclusive education, generally.

For the purpose of objectivity, and as I am considered an implicit element of the research process throughout this predominantly qualitative-based study, I believe it is necessary to outline my current stance towards inclusion and present a definition which reflects this. Therefore, I admit that I view inclusion as a culture rather than a rhetorical device, a common goal which must be embedded in our minds, schools and communities to welcome, accommodate and respect diversity by creating settings that eliminate all forms of discrimination and guarantee effective and appropriate learning for all students (UNESCO 2003; UNESCO 2019b). Inclusion, therefore, is an ongoing process (Hornby 2015; UNESCO 2017) and a reform (Ainscow and Miles 2009) whereby the education systems, rather than the students themselves, adapt and transform to remove the barriers which limit the participation and achievement of all students. The subsequent section will briefly describe the chosen paradigm and research design of the study, which includes the context of the study, i.e., where phase one and phase two of data collection took place.

### **1.5 Paradigm and Research Design**

A pragmatic paradigm, underpinned by constructivism, was considered consistent with the philosophical stance of the researcher throughout this study. The epistemological stance of a pragmatic paradigm provided scope to the researcher to engage with methods which are deemed appropriate to achieve purpose (Mertens 2015), therefore facilitating a mixed-methods research design. A constructivist approach then guided the thinking and actions of the researcher to ‘understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it’ (Costantino 2008, p.119). As the theoretical domain of ontology which underpins the constructivist paradigm claims that reality is socially constructed, concepts such as inclusion and inclusive policy can be viewed as ‘socially constructed phenomena’ which mean ‘different things to different people’ (Mertens 2015, p.14). Therefore, this study sets out to unearth the phenomenon of effective practices of inclusive education in Irish primary schools by investigating how teachers are implementing the SETAM in the Context of Practice.

Mixed-methods research is widely credited in the literature (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011; Hesse-Bieber 2015; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018) as it combines the strengths and offsets the weaknesses of stand-alone quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed-methods approach was adhered to for this study, as it was believed to be necessary to achieve the desired purpose of the study (Mertens 2015). The national, online survey facilitated data collection from a larger sample, over a greater area, and aimed to inform the development of the interview schedule for the subsequent qualitative phase. Furthermore, the qualitative, semi-structured interviews were essential within this study to get a real sense of the lived experiences of teachers who were implementing the SETAM in the Context of Practice, by constructing purposeful conversations (Kvale 1996; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) with participants in meaningful contexts.

In order to examine the SETAM, from the perspectives of those implementing it on the ground, this research was carried out in Contexts of Practice, i.e., in Irish primary schools. Firstly, a national, online survey (N=47) was sent to randomly selected schools throughout Ireland. Stratified random sampling (Teddlie and Yu 2007) was utilised as the selection process, whereby geographical location (rural/urban) and socioeconomic status (DEIS<sup>11</sup>/non-DEIS schools) were considered, to ensure a diverse range of schools were included in the sample. This survey, designed on Google Forms, was sent via email for the attention of school principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted in four primary schools. Site selection was influenced by a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Two main factors; gender and socioeconomic status, were considered when selecting schools for the qualitative phase, as such factors are taken into account for the allocation of resources deployed to schools under the SETAM, in accordance with ‘social context component’ of the ‘school’s educational profile’ (DES 2017a) (see Section 3.3.4). Therefore, a Girls’ School, a Boys’ School, a Mixed School (non-DEIS) and a DEIS School (mixed) were sourced within a specified radius [the Munster region] to carry out a total of seventeen semi-structured interviews with principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> DEIS schools are those who are participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan, which is designed to give ‘tailored support to schools who have high concentration of disadvantage’ (DES 2017d). Appropriately chosen, the Irish word ‘deis’ directly translates to ‘opportunity’.

<sup>12</sup> It was originally intended to interview one principal, one SENCO, one CT and one SET from each of the four schools, however, as the selected DEIS school was participating in the Home School Community

While this section introduced the study's paradigm and research design, and briefly described the data collection procedures, a more comprehensive account of the overall methodological process is provided in Chapter Four. The following section presents a timeline of work, representing the researcher's progress throughout the duration of the study.

## 1.6 Timeline of Study

The below figure illustrates a general timeline of the study, including the main steps and events with approximate timeframes. It was deemed important to complete the study within the desired timeframe, due to the timely and relevant nature of the research. Reasons for such were two-fold. Firstly, SET allocations for schools under the SETAM were due to remain in place for a two-year period. Allocations were initially notified to schools for September 2017 (DES 2017a), followed by a re-profiling of school allocations for September 2019 (DES 2019a). Revised profiled allocations were then intended to be considered for schools for September 2021 (DES 2019a), however, in light of the current circumstances, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing SET allocations will now be maintained for schools for the 2021/22 school year, 'to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations' (DoE 2021b, p.10). In an email to the researcher (April 2021), the Special Education Section of the DoE clarified that re-profiled allocations are now due to be made to schools from September 2022. This is also in line with policy advice, outlined in the NCSE (2014b) report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way*<sup>13</sup>, which recommended that while 'additional teaching supports will be left in place initially for a two-year period...as the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years' (NCSE 2014b, p.48). It was, therefore, vital that the research be completed prior to the next review, to allow for the findings of this study to fall on the ears of policymakers and therefore, contribute to revisions which may occur in the future re-profiling of this allocation model. By identifying areas of success within the model and potential areas for improvement, as noted by teachers on the ground, such findings may

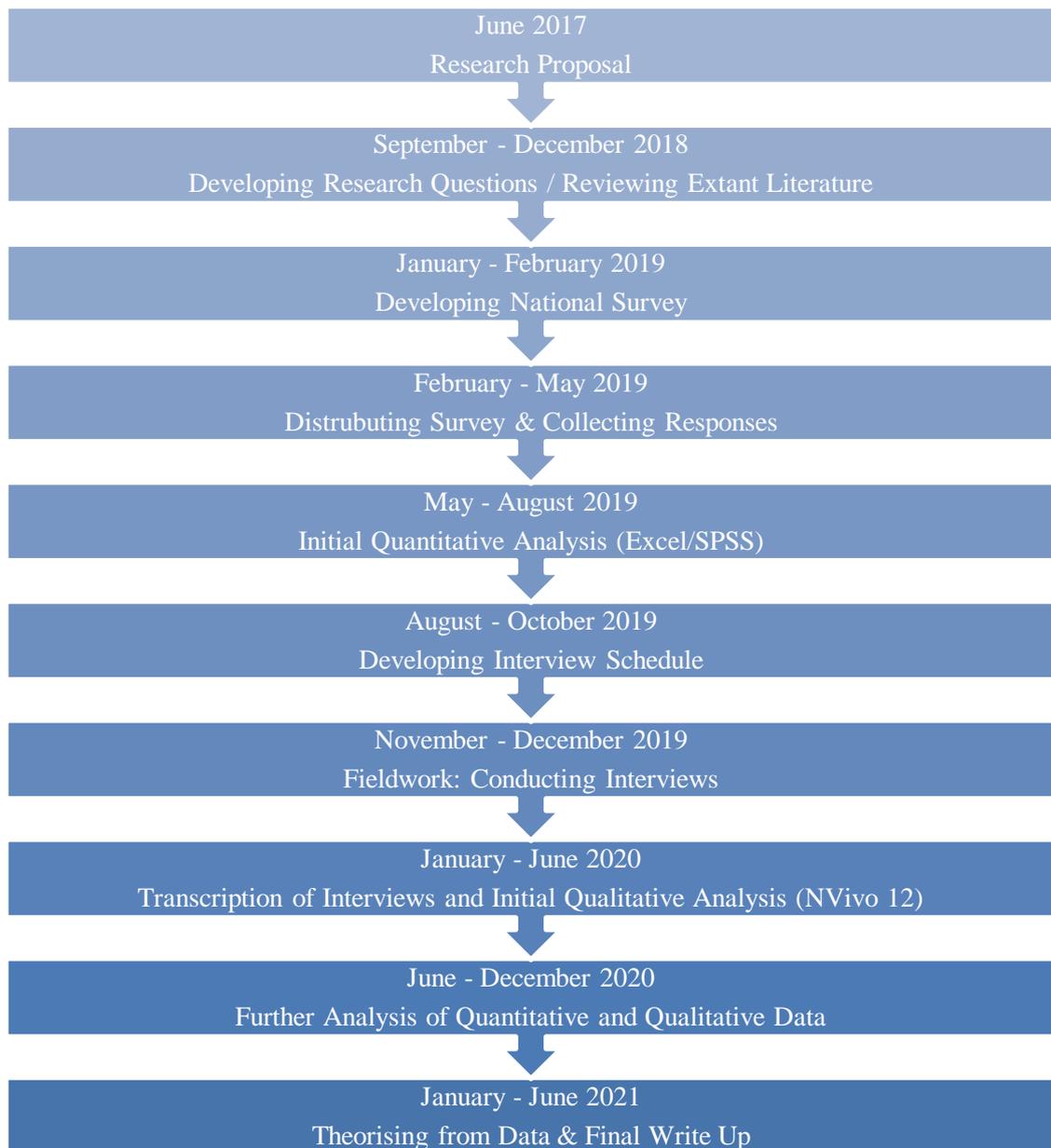
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Liaison Scheme (DES 2019b), the researcher thought it would be beneficial to interview their Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator, as she was a member of the SEN team and was significantly involved in the application of the SETAM within the school.

<sup>13</sup> The current SETAM is based on this NCSE Working Group Report, which proposed a new model for allocating teaching resources for students with SEN (NCSE 2014b). Please see Chapter Three, Section 3.3.1, for further details.

enable the voice of the practitioner to be heard, making them active agents in the policy cycle (see Section 3.4.1) and perhaps contributing to future policy development, as Giudici (2020, p.14) claims that ‘by voicing their experiences and concerns, teachers can change the beliefs of those in power’. Secondly, as ‘inclusive education’ in Ireland is currently under review (NCSE 2019), it is important to carefully examine the practical application of the current funding model which is in place (i.e., the SETAM) before considering ‘full inclusion’ as a possible direction for the future of special education provision in Ireland (as discussed in Section 1.1 and Section 2.4.1).

The timeline below illustrates the main steps undertaken by the researcher throughout this research process.



**Figure 1. 5: Timeline of Study**

The study which took place over three years is briefly outlined on the above timeline. A detailed Gantt Chart describing tasks undertaken to carry out this research is provided in Appendix 3. The subsequent section of this chapter will provide an overview of the thesis in total, briefly describing the contents of each chapter.

## 1.7 Overview of Thesis

This study aimed to deconstruct the SETAM (DES 2017a), as a national special education policy, to examine how it is put into practice at a localised level by those charged with implementation on the ground. Guided by the theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Looney 2001; Lall 2012; Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2013; Egan 2013), this research set out to analyse policy documents, in particular Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), its accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) and Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), and to delve into the Context of Practice to explore the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) from the perspective of Irish primary school teachers.

Chapter One introduced the study, outlining national and international inclusive education policy and legislation which set the context for this research. The research questions which guided the overall investigation were presented and Ball's (1994) theoretical framework which underpinned the analysis was briefly described. This chapter provided a rationale for the study, conveying the significance of the research, while the researcher's personal investment in the study was also described. The paradigm which directed the research was introduced, as well as a brief outline of the research design and data collection procedures. Following this a general timeline illustrating the main steps involved in the study was presented.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the extant literature surrounding inclusion and its varying definitions (Ainscow 2005; Winter and O'Raw 2010; Westwood 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015). Special education provision is explored at an international level, leading onto a discussion of identification of students' needs in the Irish context. Recognising the complexities involved within this area of identification, Norwich's (2008) 'dilemmas of difference' are discussed, followed by a discussion on the movement away from labelling of students with SEN. Eradicating the requirement of a diagnosis in order for students to access support in schools provided teachers with greater agency under the SETAM. This notion of increased autonomy and the increased responsibility associated with such, is explored within this chapter, followed by an in-depth discussion of collaborative practice, as advocated under the SETAM (DES 2017a).

Chapter Three describes the Context of Influence and Context of Text Production (Ball 1994) of Circular 0013/2017, which introduced the SETAM, by providing an overview of national allocation models used in the past, followed by a critical analysis of

the main focus of this study; the SETAM (DES 2017a) and the policy documents which preceded (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b) and accompanied it (DES 2017b). This chapter describes the theoretical framework, Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle in further detail, providing a context for exploring the SETAM within this study.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological approaches used to collect data to unveil the workings of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice, according to Irish primary school teachers. In line with a pragmatic paradigm, underpinned by constructivism, a mixed-methods approach was utilised, consisting of a predominantly qualitative-based methodology, with quantitative data used to inform the development of the interview schedule. Information based on the sample of the study and each school site, whereby semi-structured interviews were conducted, is provided. Following this, quantitative data analysis, using Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and qualitative data analysis, using NVivo 12, is described. Measures to enhance the reliability and validity of the study, as well as ethical considerations which were adhered to throughout this process are then outlined, before noting the limitations associated with the study.

Chapter Five presents the findings and discussion of phase one of the study. A number of interesting themes emerged from the national, online survey, which are presented under the 'three-step process', as outlined in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b), that guided the study's research questions. Findings are interlinked with the theoretical framework of the study and the extant research literature, as detailed in Chapter Two and Three. Adhering to the sequential design of the study, this chapter illustrates how analysis of the survey findings influenced and shaped the succeeding, qualitative data collection phase.

Chapter Six thematically presents the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews with principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs applying the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). Interview excerpts and direct quotes from participants are provided within this chapter to evidence that all themes derived from inductive analysis of the raw data. Such findings are discussed discursively within the context of the literature presented in Chapter Two and Three and are interconnected with Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle, as the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter Seven, as the conclusion of the thesis, provides a summary of the study. Theoretical implications of this research, along with its contribution to existing

knowledge and literature, are identified. Recommendations for future policy and practice are made at this point.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the significant advances made in inclusive education throughout the past number of years and outlined the relevant legislation, particularly in the USA, the UK and in Ireland, which reflects this progression. Inclusion is a complex concept, which can be perceived in a variety of ways (Topping and Maloney 2005; Acedo *et al.* 2009; Armstrong *et al.* 2010; Lipsky and Gartner 2012; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015). Therefore, ‘best practice’ in terms of creating inclusive learning environments is continually being examined, questioned and revised, as is evident in the current conversation surrounding ‘full inclusion’ as a possible future direction for special education provision in Ireland (see Section 1.1 and 2.4.1.1). The SETAM (DES 2017a) was introduced in 2017 as a new system of allocating SET resources to schools. This model eradicated the need for official diagnoses of disabilities for all students with SEN to access support in schools, therefore, moving away from a system somewhat based on a diagnostic/medical model (Shyman 2016) under the RTH Model (DES 2005). This is a significant move for inclusivity in SEN provision in Ireland as the SETAM now focuses on the individual learning needs of students and the identification of need within the socio-cultural context of the school (HSE 2019b; DES 2017a; DES 2019a), therefore, enabling all students who require additional support to access it in a fair and timely manner (NCSE 2013). This chapter offered a rationale for engaging in this research by presenting the context of this special education policy and its implementation. The current study aims to reveal this inclusive policy in practice, examining the perspectives of those charged with policy implementation on the ground, i.e., Irish primary school teachers, in relation to the workings of the SETAM in the Context of Practice.

The structural reform of the SETAM intended to bring about changes in terms of resource allocation to schools and the deployment of resources within schools (DES 2017a), however, literature maintains that change, as a result of policy, may not always occur (Day 2007), or indeed, the ‘intended outcomes of educational policies’ may not be identical to such policies’ ‘factual outcomes’ (Schulte 2018, p.624). As this study is interested in examining the relationship between policy development and policy implementation (Mainardes 2010; Giudici 2020), i.e., how the application of the SETAM

on the ground reflects the original intent of policy (Egan 2013), this chapter described Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) as the over-arching theoretical framework for this study. This provided a context and rationale for the current study, which seeks to explore the relationships and behaviours of the macro and micro systems involved in the policy process (Ozga 1990; Ball 1993).

Guidelines, which accompanied Circular 0013/2017, were available to schools on the introduction of the SETAM, which provided direction on the ‘use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs’ (DES 2017b, p.3) (see Section 3.3.3). This policy text offered information and guidance to teachers on the implementation of this new policy, however, in accordance with Ball’s (1994) Policy Cycle, those charged with implementation (Aubrey and Durmaz 2012) of the SETAM in the Context of Practice would interpret and understand these implementation steps based on their own histories, experiences and values and based on the contexts which they find themselves in. The research questions which directed this study, are therefore guided by this theoretical framework and influenced by the implementation steps provided in the DES Guidelines (2017b), to unveil the lived experience of teachers when implementing the SETAM in their own Contexts of Practice. These key research questions, followed by a number of embedded questions, were presented in this chapter.

Although there is much discourse surrounding inclusive policies, both nationally and internationally, literature surrounding the SETAM (DES 2017a) and its impact in schools is limited. Available data related to this model are primarily found in NCSE and DoE publications (NCSE 2013; Rix *et al.* 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b), all of which were commissioned prior to the introduction of the SETAM in schools. These are widely cited in this thesis, as they provide a review of previous models, a rationale for proposing this new system and present data on the pilot scheme of the SETAM. However, apart from these works, to date, there has been no published data on the application of the model in the Context of Practice, i.e., in schools (Shevlin and Banks 2021). Therefore, this chapter provided a rationale for engaging in this study by indicating a gap between the domains of research which provided an opportunity for future exploration. The potential impact of this research on future policy and practice was also identified, followed by the researcher’s personal motive for choosing to engage in this study and the benefits she hopes to gain from conducting this research. The mixed-methods research design was

outlined throughout this chapter, as guided by a pragmatic paradigm, underpinned by constructivism (Mertens 2015). Data collection procedures, including the sampling techniques and site selection were briefly described in this chapter, with a more detailed account of the methodology provided in Chapter Four. A timeline, illustrating the main steps involved in this study, was presented, before providing an overview of the thesis at the latter end of this chapter.

In order to formulate the research questions and embedded questions as presented in this chapter, a review of the literature surrounding inclusion and inclusive policy was required. This can be seen in the forthcoming chapter where greater inclusion in mainstream schools, as a ‘global phenomenon’ (Anderson *et al.* 2007), is firstly described, followed by a discussion of the varying definitions (Winter and O’Raw 2010) and perceptions of inclusion found in the extant literature. National and international models of special education provision are outlined, leading to discussions surrounding the identification of SEN and the current move away from labelling, as advocated for within the SETAM (2017a). The SETAM, as the main focus of this study, is then critically analysed in the following chapter, and as this research is concerned with policy analysis, the study’s theoretical framework, Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) and its contexts of policymaking, are also described in detail within Chapter Three.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: International Context**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Throughout this chapter an extensive review of the literature surrounding inclusion and special education policy is provided. The global movement towards inclusive education and the corresponding policy changes is reflected in the available literature and is discursively embedded within this review. The varying definitions of inclusion (Winter and O’Raw 2010) and the changes of perspective towards special education that occurred over time are outlined. Mirroring this progression; the implementation of ‘inclusive education’ and the provision of education for students with SEN is reviewed. International allocation models are explored with specific reference to those used in the UK and the influence of such on Irish approaches to special education provision. Recognising the complexities involved within this arena, Norwich (2008) highlights that there are, what he calls, ‘dilemmas of difference’. These dilemmas are discussed, with a focus on the identification and labelling of students with SEN. The movement away from such labelling is portrayed through a discussion of pre-existing allocation models, such as the GAM (DES 2005), which acted as the Context of Influence (see Figure 1.2) for the development of the current Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a) and initiated a transition away from labelling students in order to access SET resources in schools. The development of educational policies which mandate inclusive education has gathered international momentum in recent years, which in turn has implications on schools. However, according to Giudici (2020, p.5) what is ‘practised in and around classrooms seldom corresponds to what is officially legislated’, therefore suggesting a gap between policy introduction and effective implementation and practice of such policies (Mainardes 2010; Rose *et al.* 2017; Schulte 2018; Giudici 2020). Aspects which may contribute to practitioners’ resistance to change, such as the implications of continuing professional development (CPD) and initial teacher education (ITE), or perhaps lack of such, on teacher confidence to implement policies, are considered, following a discussion of the newfound autonomy offered to schools under the SETAM and the increased responsibility associated with such. This study will examine whether change, in terms of collaborative practice and models of support for students with SEN within the Context of Practice, has occurred as a result of the the

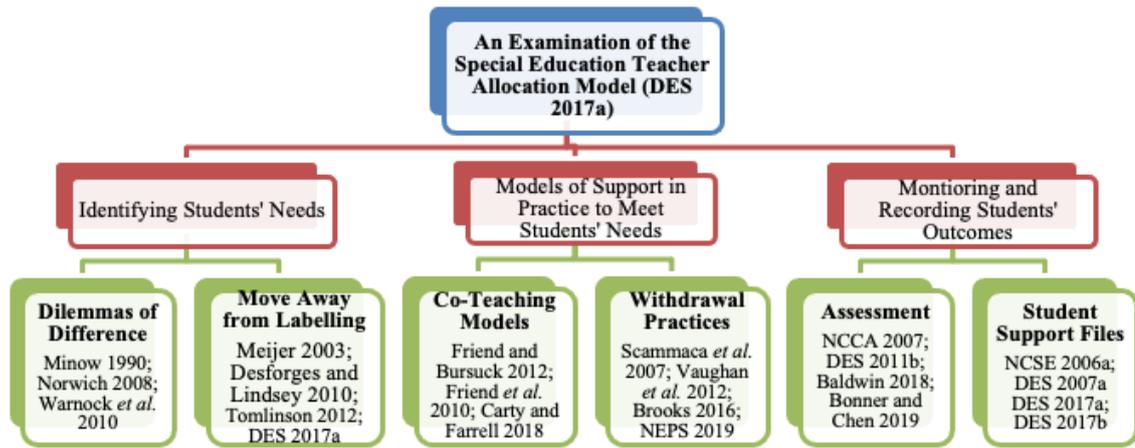
SETAM, therefore, Friend and Bursuck's (2012) co-teaching approaches are examined, as credible models of support to meet the needs of students with SEN within a general education setting. These key themes, which emerged from the review of the existing literature surrounding special education policy and inclusion, form the basis of discussions within this chapter. The process which unearthed these themes became apparent will be discussed in the subsequent section.

## **2.2 Literature Search**

The study is predominantly concerned with special education policy which is underpinned by inclusion; therefore, these topics formed the basis of the initial literature search. A keyword-focused electronic search of databases such as Summon 2.0, SAGE and Google Scholar was conducted. Terms such as 'inclusion', 'special education policy', 'inclusive education policy', 'special education provision' and 'teacher allocation models' were searched to identify relevant literature on desired topics. Internet sites including education.ie<sup>14</sup>, the NCSE's website (NCSE.ie) and the EASNIE's website (European-agency.org) were also examined to attain previous and current policy documents, reports, advice papers and reviews in relation to special education policy in Ireland. Apart from work commissioned by the NCSE, there is a dearth of published research related to the SETAM, therefore, the researcher intends to contribute to filling the identified gap in the existing literature. Themes which emerged from the literature were organised through literature maps (Rose *et al.* 2010), as illustrated in the below figure.

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<sup>14</sup> Education.ie is the official website of the Department of Education in Ireland.



**Figure 2. 1: Excerpt of a Literature Map: Themes Emerging from the Literature Review**

A more detailed excerpt of a literature map is provided in Appendix 4. The subsequent section will delve into the concept of inclusion as underpinned by international principles and trace the progression of inclusion throughout the past number of years.

### 2.3 Inclusion: A Worldwide Phenomenon

Contemporary discourse maintains that inclusion is an ‘ever-growing phenomenon’ (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.73) which starts with the fundamental principle of education as a basic human right, as stated in Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Education is the foundation for a more equitable society and a driver for worldwide development (Ainscow and Miles 2009; UNESCO 2017). In-keeping with this belief, UNESCO is currently leading the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. Education is recognised as an essential goal (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4) within this movement, with a primary focus on inclusivity, as the pivotal aim of this goal is to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UNESCO 2016, p.7). According to a number of international conventions, including the aforementioned UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the previous practice of placing children in special education schools, separate from their non-disabled peers, began to be viewed as an ‘infringement on the right to equal educational opportunities’ (Bakker *et al.* 2007, p.48). This change in societal and educational

perspective led to a broader inclusive education movement in international education systems (Banks and McCoy 2011). As a result, a momentous movement towards more inclusive schools and a change in policy focus of the Irish education system, which prompted a significant development of SEN policy in schools, is evident over the past two decades (Banks and McCoy 2011; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015). Since the early 1990s, the development of inclusive schools has become an ‘important aspect of Department of Education and Science policy’ (DES 2007, p.1), resulting in the expansion and flourishing of special education, increasingly located in mainstream schools (Tomlinson 2012; McCoy *et al.* 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018; Rose *et al.* 2017). The progression of this international and national movement towards inclusion and the corresponding legislative changes was discussed in Section 1.2, while setting the context for this study. The following section will outline how perceptions of inclusion have transformed throughout the years, in line with such legal frameworks, and will identify the varying definitions of inclusion found in the literature.

### **2.3.1 Perceptions of Inclusion**

Although the promotion of the integration and inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools has been a central topic in the field of special education in the past number of years, interchangeable use of such terms, and countless definitions associated with each, highlight the complexity of realising ‘inclusion’ in practice. Particular uncertainty results from the broad definition of inclusive education found in the literature (Acedo *et al.* 2009; Ainscow and Miles 2009; Winter and O’Raw 2010; Norwich 2014). Therefore, it is important and necessary to discuss the progressive movement which saw the notion of inclusion transforming from a focus of prioritising the placement of students with SEN in general education settings to the actual participation and accommodation of all students (Banks and McCoy 2011).

One of the most prominent concerns relating to special education throughout the late twentieth century was the physical placement of students with disabilities, leading to an emphasis on where, and not how, these students should be taught (Crockett and Kauffman 1999; Pfeiffer and Reddy 1999; Anderson *et al.* 2007). Advocates of this particular view of inclusion, which is often termed ‘full inclusion’ (Westwood 2018) strongly believe that the mainstream classroom is the setting in which all students, regardless of their needs, abilities, or degrees of such, should receive an appropriate

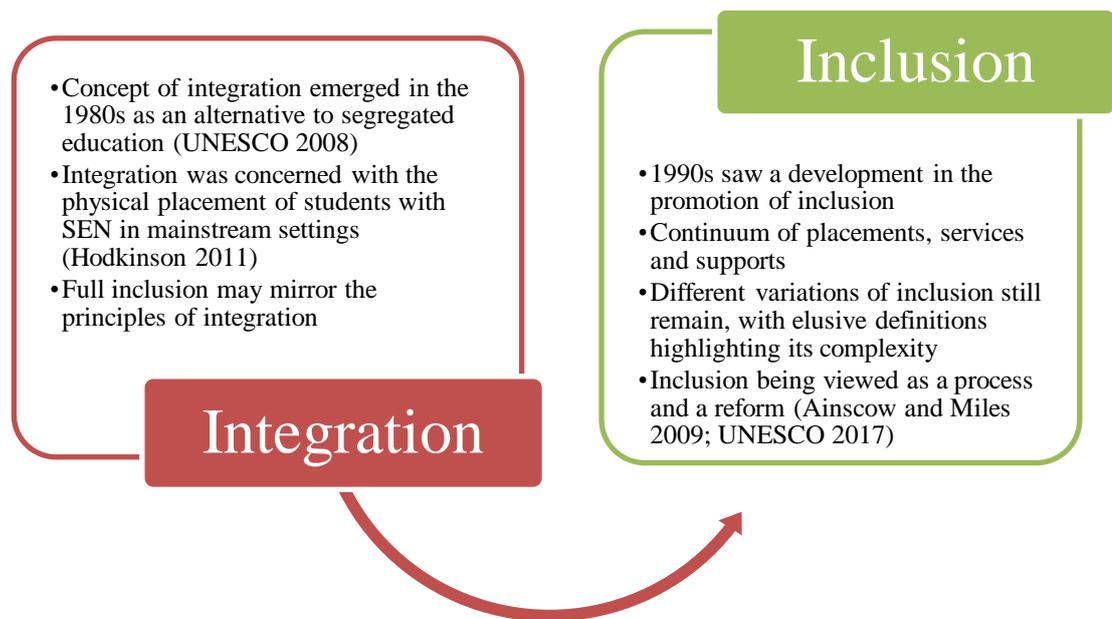
education (e.g., Lipsky and Gartner 1997; Voltz *et al.* 2001). This perspective of total inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools (further discussed in Section 2.4.1.1), was referenced by UNESCO as a goal of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), and, interestingly, has since been described as ‘impossible to achieve in practice’ (Hornby 2015, p.236). It could be argued that this approach to inclusion may relate more directly to integration rather than inclusion, as an emphasis is put on the presence and physical placement (Hodkinson 2011; Kauffman and Badar 2016) of students with SEN in mainstream settings, as opposed to segregating them into special settings (Anderson *et al.* 2007). It is important to note that UNESCO also warned that such integration models can

risk becoming a rhetorical device rather than a reality in practice; it can become more about a spatial change of school classrooms than a change of curricular content and pedagogy relevant to children’s learning needs.

(UNESCO 2008, p. 8)

In light of this, integration models changed considerably after the 1990s as it was recognised that simply placing students in mainstream schools did not respond to the diverse needs of all students, as such models required the students themselves to adapt to existing practices and norms of the education system (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007; UNESCO 2008). Therefore, models of inclusion began to represent a ‘philosophical shift’ from such ‘mainstreaming’ practices (Anderson *et al.* 2007, p.132) to focus on the ‘quality of what is being learned and how, rather than solely on where and when’ (Murphy 2011, p.333). Consequently, the integration/inclusion discrepancy began to merge, with other advocates arguing that a continuum of alternative placements or services is often necessary for some students with SEN (e.g., Hatlen 2017; Kauffman and Badar 2016). This view promotes a range of options for students with SEN, including placement in mainstream classrooms, part-time inclusion (i.e., support classes), special classes, attendance at a special day or residential school, or home-tutoring (Westwood 2018). Many international and national educational organisations currently view inclusive education as an approach and an ongoing process (Hornby 2015; UNESCO 2017), which seeks to address the diverse needs of all students and attend to their unique progress (Ainscow and Miles 2009; Brown 2016; EASNIE 2017). Therefore, inclusive education can be viewed as a reform (Ainscow and Miles 2009), whereby the education systems, rather than the students themselves, adapt and transform to remove the barriers which

limit the participation and achievement of all students, in order to welcome, accommodate and respect diversity by creating settings that eliminate all forms of discrimination and guarantee effective and appropriate learning for all students (UNESCO 2003; UNESCO 2019b).



**Figure 2. 2: The Movement from Integration towards Inclusion**

As discussed above, our current definition, understanding of and perspective towards inclusion significantly differs from that of the past. In light of this, it can be argued that inclusion is a complex notion with many different conceptions (Topping and Maloney 2005; Acedo *et al.* 2009; Armstrong *et al.* 2010; Lipsky and Gartner 2012; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015), which lacks a single, agreed definition (Power-deFur and Orelove 1997; Ainscow 2005; Winter and O’Raw 2010; Westwood 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015; Nilholm 2020; Rose and Shevlin 2020). The plethora of definitions associated with inclusion within educational policies and literature results in variations in our understanding of it and leaves some confusion within the field as to what inclusive education really means (Acedo *et al.* 2009; Ainscow and Miles 2009). According to Kiuppis (2015, p.10) ‘discursive changes in the meaning of inclusive education have been made in the course of this concept’s diffusion and translation processes’ which reflects

Ball’s (1994) Policy Cycle, in particular the Context of Practice, as inclusion may be interpreted and implemented uniquely, dependent on teachers’ own values, histories and experiences and the contexts they find themselves in. Although there is much discourse around inclusion generally, this study seeks to explore inclusion, and inclusive policies, in *practice* (i.e., the workings of policies on the ground and how schools negotiate the changes involved with the introduction of new policies), in line with the view of Westwood (2018, p.9) who acknowledges that ‘it is much harder to implement successful inclusion than it is to write about it’. Throughout the literature it is recognised that teachers interpret inclusive education in a unique and individualised manner, thus inclusion has come to mean many different things (Clough and Corbett 2000; Armstrong *et al.* 2010; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015). Therefore, such interpretations affect how inclusion is implemented and performed on the ground (Glazzard 2011). Some of the definitions, which may be used to guide Irish practitioners’ interpretations of inclusive education, are shown in the figure below.



**Figure 2. 3: Defining an Inclusive Education in International and National Contexts**

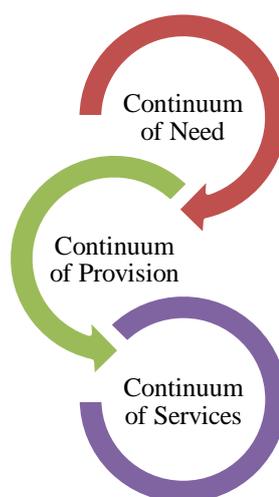
The figure above illustrates some of the withstanding definitions of inclusion that have been developed by national and international bodies which were heavily influenced by special education legislation throughout the past number of years. These policies, which underpin inclusion and have led to the current views towards special education and inclusion in Ireland today, were discussed in Chapter One (Section 1.2.1). The following section will outline how these definitions of inclusion are put into practice, as international models which direct special education provision, and how these models have influenced allocation systems in Ireland, will be reviewed, before leading onto a discussion of previous (i.e., GAM) and current (i.e., SETAM) national, special education teaching allocation models, in the following chapter.

## **2.4 Special Education Provision**

Throughout this section, models, which direct the provision of education for students with SEN, will be explored. International models and practices will be outlined, with a focus on how these have influenced allocation models in Ireland. Current practices to identify students' needs in Irish primary schools will be discussed, with particular emphasis on the NEPS Continuum of Support (CoS) framework (DES 2007a), which, hereafter, will be referred to as the CoS. It is internationally argued that the identification of SEN is 'not a straightforward process and that there are tensions and complexities that must be recognised' (McCoy *et al.* 2016, p.164). Therefore, the provision of education for children with SEN 'creates a range of questions related to governance, curriculum, detection and placement' (Rix *et al.* 2013, p.8). Such complexities and questions involved with special education provision will be explored through a discussion of Norwich's (2008) concept of 'dilemmas of difference', leading onto the controversial, yet timely, topic of identification and labelling of students with SEN. This is of particular relevance in relation to this study as a move away from labelling was firstly initiated under Ireland's previous allocation model, i.e., the GAM, and is now evident in current practice, as the SETAM no longer requires a formal diagnosis in order for students to receive support in schools. This progressive pattern will be discussed in depth at the beginning of the next chapter (Chapter Three), through an overview of previous national allocation models, before describing the SETAM (DES 2017a) as the main focus of this study.

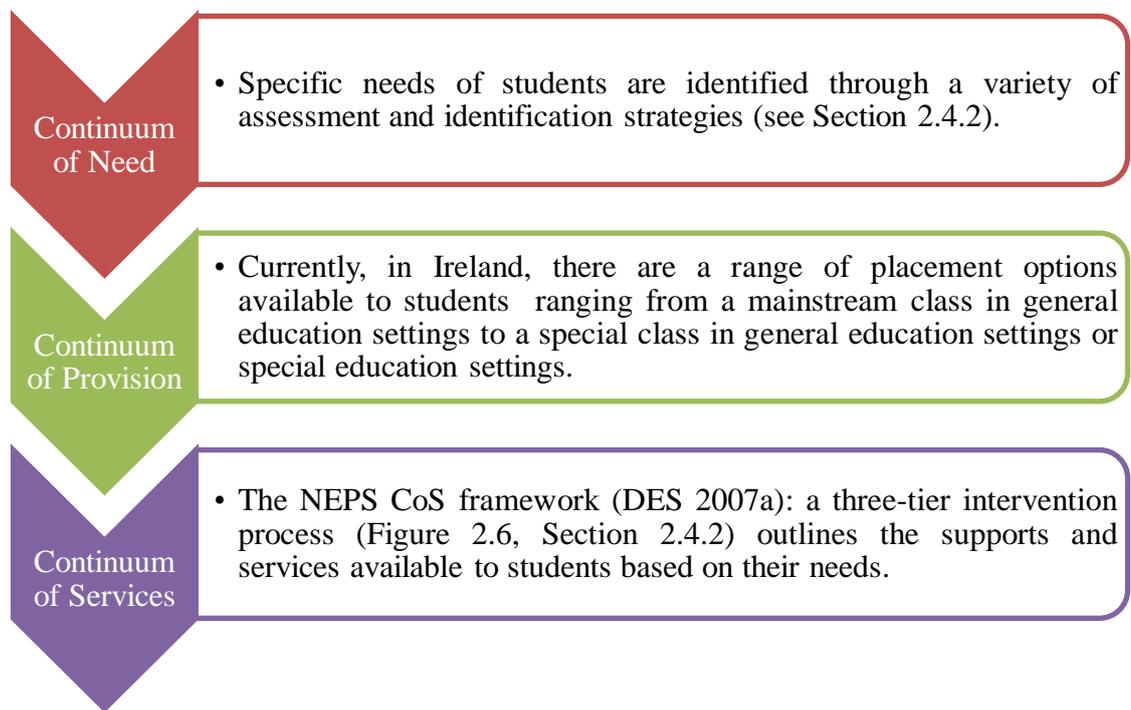
#### 2.4.1 The Influence of International Models of Allocation on Irish Practices

According to a comprehensive study, conducted by the NCSE (Rix *et al.* 2013), which reviewed policy across fifty countries, provision of special education varies internationally in terms of who organises and deploys resources, who receives support and to what limit. However, typically, across countries, interlinking continua constitute special education delivery, as children are placed upon a continuum of need, supported within a continuum of provision and supported by a continuum of services (Rix *et al.* 2013).



**Figure 2. 4: Interlinking Continua**

The widely accepted practice of assessing and identifying students' needs and placing them along a continuum, recognises that students require varying levels of support depending on their specific needs, which can range from mild to severe and transient to long-term (DES 2007a). Similar to international practices, the Irish education system provides a continuum of provision options for students (see Figure 2.5) and has developed a continuum of supports (see Section 2.4.2.1) and services to match the continuum of needs in schools, in line with recommendations of the SERC Report (1993). The below figure briefly outlines the current system for special education provision in Ireland based on the interlinking continua.



**Figure 2. 5: Special Education Provision in Ireland based on the Interlinking Continua (see Section 2.4.1)**

Currently, this continuum of provision is Ireland’s interpretation of inclusive education, as the range of placement options ‘makes it possible to place a student with SEN in the most appropriate and least restrictive setting’ (Westwood 2018, p.3). This position is adopted by many countries, e.g., Canada, Italy, Scotland, Australia, Norway and Japan (Rix *et al.* 2013), and was recently termed ‘responsible inclusion’ by Hatlen (2017) as it focuses on the importance of matching a student to the most appropriate setting where they can access the necessary curriculum and support (Westwood 2018; Howe and Griffin 2020). However, in a recent policy advice progress report from the NCSE (2019) to the Minister for Education and Skills, a ‘full inclusion’ approach was proposed as a possible future direction for the Irish education system, which will be further described in the following section.

#### **2.4.1.1 The Full Inclusion Approach**

Ireland is currently at a crossroads in terms of inclusive education (Howe and Griffin 2020; Shevlin and Banks 2021), with much discourse surrounding the most appropriate educational provision for students with SEN. Different understandings and interpretations

of what an inclusive education system looks like has sparked debate within Irish educational bodies and so, as mentioned in the introductory chapter (Section 1.1), the NCSE are currently reviewing special education provision in Ireland, posing the question of

whether special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex special educational needs or whether greater inclusion in mainstream classes offers a better way forward?

(NCSE 2019, p.4)

According to Ainscow *et al.* (2019, p.675), ‘moving in an inclusive direction continues to involve struggles to find the most appropriate ways of moving forward’. This is particularly relevant within the current landscape, as Ireland, along with many other European countries are now considering an appropriate future direction for educating students in special schools and classes, in order to meet the responsibilities and obligations of the UNCRPD, which maintain that having parallel mainstream and special education systems does not encompass inclusion. The ‘full inclusion’ approach sees inclusive education being understood as educating all students together, irrespective of their need or ability, in a common learning environment in their local schools. A fully inclusive system, which has evolved over the past thirty years, has been adopted in the jurisdiction of New Brunswick (NB) Canada, which now sees NB with no special schools or classes, but rather all students, including those with the most profound disabilities, being educated alongside their peers within a mainstream setting<sup>15</sup>. Further support for a ‘total inclusion’ or ‘full inclusion’ approach is evident in Italy (Rix *et al.* 2013), which represents the ‘only national example of implementation of a nearly fully inclusive education system’ (Anastasiou *et al.* 2015, p.429). Research data, presented in Ianes’ *et al.* (2020, p.259) work, shows the positive impact of this policy on the ‘quality of life for persons with disabilities, on teachers’ attitudes, and on the variety of teaching and learning methods for all students’. However, the everyday reality of such inclusive systems is complicated and complex, as findings from Giangreco *et al.* (2012) and Ianes *et al.* (2014) show that this full inclusion approach has, for the most part, only led to partial participation, with students with disabilities often being ‘pulled out’ of the

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<sup>15</sup> Withdrawal of students at varying times throughout the school day for specific and intense support is permitted once outlined in a Pupil Learning Plan, however, this must also detail a plan for re-integration (NCSE 2019).

mainstream classroom to receive supports or services, and in some cases, small groups of students with disabilities being taught for varying lengths of time in separate classrooms within the school, where there are no students without disabilities present, or in spaces separate from the school, leading to the creation of informal special classes/units. This indicates a gap between policy/legislation and actual policy in practice in such education systems (Norwich 2015). Mitchell (2015b) presents criteria and indicators, which, he claims, may be useful for planning inclusive education and for evaluating its quality. He maintains that inclusion is a multi-faceted concept which extends beyond the mere placement of students with SEN in general education settings yet advocates a full inclusion approach whereby ‘all learners with special education needs are educated in age-appropriate classes in their neighbourhood schools, regardless of their ability’ (Mitchell 2015b, p.14). While research shows little evidence that students with SEN achieve greater academic and social outcomes in special schools (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 2006a; Shevlin and Banks 2021), a fully inclusive education system remains contested in the literature, with Kauffman and Badar (2016) arguing that a logical sequence must prevail when deciding upon special education provision, in that one must focus on getting the instruction right, before deciding where it’s best offered. This coheres with the view of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) (2020b, p.17), who believe that ‘the individual needs of each pupil [must] be the over-riding consideration in deciding on what the appropriate placement is for that pupil’. The student and their needs must remain central to the decision-making process of special education provision to ensure that ‘inclusion is by the choice of the pupils and their parents and not by compulsion’ (Hodkinson 2010, p.61). It is interesting to acknowledge that within this changing inclusive landscape in Ireland, the INTO (2021) are currently demanding that the existing system retain the continuum of support and diversity of provision, as described in Section 2.4.1 above, as they believe that ‘even with full resourcing there will still be a minority of pupils for whom a special school or special class setting will be the appropriate placement (INTO 2020b, p.17). Therefore, while much remains to be seen in terms of how the NB model may influence future practices in Ireland, as we await a final policy advice report from the NCSE, it can be suggested that it is ‘unlikely that a major overhaul of current provision will take place in the immediate future despite the pressures exerted by signing up to the provisions of the UNCRPD’ (Shevlin and Banks 2021, p.10). The following section will describe the model of support allocation used in the UK and

will detail how this is mirrored in the current system of special education provision and support allocation in Ireland.

#### ***2.4.1.2 Mirroring Practices in the UK***

International models of allocation have influenced and framed continua of provision and services in Ireland. A trend can be seen in terms of revision and redevelopment of both international and national models in the past number of years, to reflect the changing make-up of schools and society today. These revised models aim to facilitate for greater diversity in education (UNESCO 2017) and adhere to the global inclusive movement (Anderson *et al.* 2007; Norwich 2008; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Tomlinson 2012; Chitiyo 2017; Garrote *et al.* 2017). The Irish allocation system underwent change as recently as 2017 with the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a), which warrants an entire section for discussion (see Section 3.3). However just prior to this, in 2015, the UK saw a transformation of their system with the revision of the SEN Code of Practice (2001). The pre-existing model of allocation in the UK involved two key components; needs identified within schools (also funded by schools), plus Local Authorities' 'statements of special educational needs'. In line with this model, externally funded Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDA) were carried out with students to identify their specific learning needs. Warnock *et al.* (2010, p.2) maintain that this model of allocation was flawed in that it was a 'complex and often lengthy process' and caused much disagreement and dissatisfaction among parents, schools and Local Authorities as it resulted in 'profoundly unequal resource allocation'. In 2014, the Children and Families Act introduced a variety of changes in relation to young people with SEN, which strongly influenced the redevelopment of the allocation model in the UK, therefore, these changes are reflected in the current Code of Practice (Department for Education (DfE) 2015). Allocation in the UK remained a two-fold process, however, students who would have traditionally had 'statements of special educational needs' were transferred onto Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, and a co-ordinated process of assessment (EHC Needs Assessment) replaced the LDAs. Within schools, students' needs are collaboratively identified and addressed and a 'graduated approach' to providing support to students is implemented. This mirrors the 'staged approach' to SEN provision in Irish schools (further discussed in Section 3.2), emphasising the influence of international practices on national models, not only in the corresponding trends of the revision of allocation models in recent years,

but also within in-school identification and assessment practices. This pattern continues to be seen in terms of external assessment services. LDAs and ‘statements of special educational needs’ in the UK (as discussed above) bear a resemblance to Ireland’s current practice of the Irish Health Service Executive’s (HSE) Assessment of Need and ‘Service Statements’, which will be detailed below.

The Disability Act (2005) and the EPSEN Act (2004) provide a framework to plan for and deliver specialist support services to children with SEN. These policies enable provision to be made for the assessment of children under the age of five who may have a disability, which is carried out by the Local Assessment Officer through the HSE. An Assessment of Need is conducted in accordance with specific standards adopted by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). These standards are intended to ensure that each assessment is carried out in a ‘consistent manner in order to identify the needs of the person being assessed, accurately and efficiently’ (Department of Health and Children and Department of Education and Science 2007, p.5). This assessment aims to decipher children’s needs, in terms of health and education, which arise from their disability and to decide what supports and services they require to meet such needs. Findings from this assessment are issued in an Assessment Report, which then, forms the basis of a ‘Service Statement’. Upon starting primary school, the student’s ‘Service Statement’ is used to provide up-to-date and accurate accounts of the student’s specific needs to the SENO and, therefore, can assist in directing provision to meet the student’s needs within the school.

Currently in Ireland, services are provided for children who have, or are suspected to have, a disability and/or developmental delay by the HSE, or voluntary organisations funded by the HSE<sup>16</sup>. Children’s disability services are provided to children with ‘non-complex’ needs through Primary Care Services and those with ‘complex needs’ through Children’s Disability Network Teams. The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay (HSE 2019b) provides national criteria for access to such services to facilitate and ensure consistency and clarity throughout the process. Procedures for determining access to these services are in accordance with a national programme called “Progressing Disability Services for

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<sup>16</sup> According to the HSE website (HSE 2019a), these services include a variety of interventions to support health and physical development, such as, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, social work, etc.

Children & Young People”, which aims to ensure equitable and fair deployment of services throughout Ireland by basing access to services on children’s *needs* rather than on their diagnosis. This represents a major shift and is in line with the current movement away from labelling seen in educational policies, as discussed in Section 2.4.4. It also reflects the aims of the current SETAM (DES 2017a) to support inclusion in Irish primary schools. The SETAM specifically refers to these national criteria (HSE 2019b) as those which are used to allocate resources under the ‘complex needs’ component for all schools from September 2019 (see Section 3.3.4). The following section will discuss current practices for identifying students who require additional teaching support in schools by further detailing the HSE’s (2019b) definition of ‘complex needs’ and the criteria used under the SETAM to identify students in the complex needs category. The NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) will then be outlined, which is provided in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b) to assist teachers in identifying SEN and appropriately responding to such needs.

#### **2.4.2 Identification of Students’ Needs in Irish Primary Schools**

In accordance with the SETAM (DES 2017a), students no longer require a formal diagnosis in order to receive support in Irish primary schools, which reflects the current move away from labelling of students with SEN as discussed below in Section 2.4.4. This is also in line with the HSE’s procedures for determining access to services for children with disabilities in Ireland which is described as ‘needs led rather than diagnosis led’ (HSE 2019b, p.3). This section will discuss the current practices used to identify students’ needs in Irish primary schools, firstly describing the HSE’s (2019b) criteria which determine if a child is considered to have complex needs and therefore, has access to Children’s Disability Network Team services, followed by an outline of the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) used by practitioners to identify students’ SEN in schools and appropriately respond to such needs.

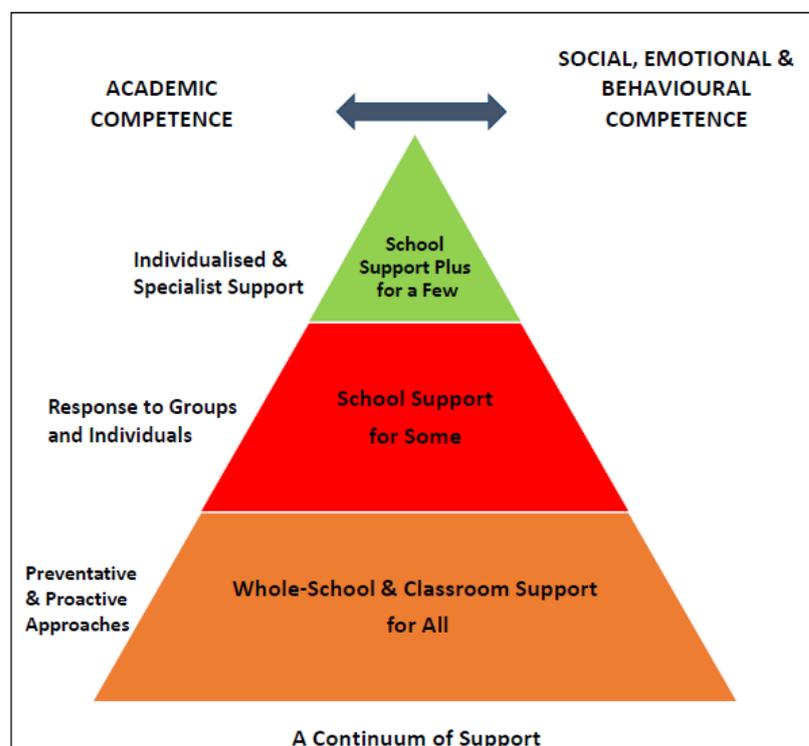
In line with current educational policy (DES 2017a), under the SETAM, a needs-based profile is created for each school which is used to inform the national SET allocation process. As outlined in Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), and more recently in Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), the number of students with complex needs enrolled in schools forms one component of the school’s educational profile and so it is imperative that there is clear guidance for practitioners on how to identify students in the complex needs category. Further discussion of this allocation process to schools, including the

school educational profile and the baseline component, both of which comprise the School Profile, can be found in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.4. Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), which was published to advise schools of updated criteria for school profile allocations for September 2019, identifies new entrants for the complex needs category as those who qualify to avail of services from the HSE Children’s Disability Network Teams. As mentioned in the above discussion, this decision-making process and qualification criteria is outlined in the National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay (HSE 2019b). The HSE define complex needs as ‘one or more impairments which contribute to a range of significant functional difficulties that require the services and support of an interdisciplinary disability team’ (HSE 2019b, p.13). These Children’s Disability Network Teams cater for children with a wide range of needs and disabilities including, but not limited to, ‘intellectual disability, physical disability, sensory disability and autism’ (HSE 2019b, p.15), and, as outlined in Circular 007/2019; it is now students who are identified as having these needs and who qualify for availing of these services that are considered to have ‘complex needs’ under the SETAM. The age of the child, the geographical area in which the child lives and the needs of the child, are the criteria considered for access to Children’s Disability Network Team services. It is evident that the current model for support allocation in schools, i.e., the SETAM (DES 2017a), is in line with the HSE’s procedures for determining access to Children’s Disability Network Teams as this access is based on the child’s ‘functioning capacity across a range of domains, as opposed to being based on formal a diagnosis of disability’ (Circular 007/2019). Additionally, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) states that, under the SETAM, students in need of additional teaching support should be identified by schools in accordance with the NEPS CoS Guidelines (DES 2007a), as well as the Guidelines (DES 2017b) which accompany the Circular. The CoS will be discussed in detail below to provide an understanding of how students’ needs are currently identified in primary schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a).

#### ***2.4.2.1 The NEPS Continuum of Support (DES 2007a)***

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) developed guidelines on the Continuum of Support (CoS) framework (DES 2007a), which is applied in Irish primary schools to identify students with SEN and to determine the supports and services

required to meet their needs. This three-tiered model was introduced to all schools in Ireland in 2007 and is further embraced by the current Guidelines (DES 2017b) which accompany Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a). This framework enables flexibility and autonomy in schools when identifying and responding to the needs of students, therefore, facilitating early identification and intervention. Coexisting with the SETAM, this framework is also underpinned by the principle that students with the greatest level of need should be allocated the greatest level of support. The CoS recognises needs as being on a continuum ‘ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term’, rather than being classified into discrete categories (DES 2017b, p.6). Similarly, the SETAM appreciates that students, albeit having the same diagnosis, or, with or without a diagnosis, may require different levels of support, and so, this model encompasses a system of support which provides a continuum of provision that ranges from ‘differentiated arrangements to more inclusive ones’ (Warnock *et al.* 2010, p.7), i.e., ranging from ‘individualised and specialist support’, to responding to ‘groups and individuals’, to ‘preventative and proactive approaches’ (DES 2007a).

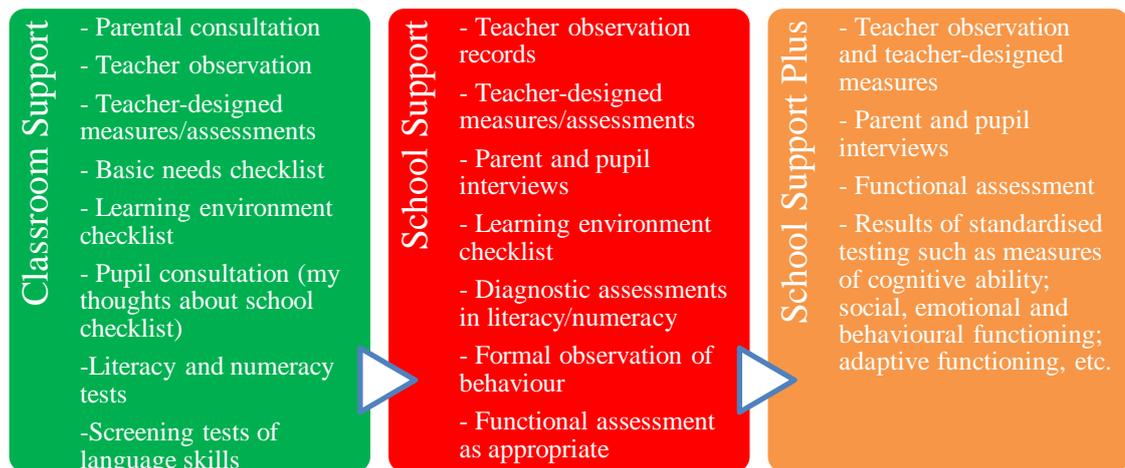


**Figure 2. 6: NEPS Continuum of Support (DES 2007a) (taken from DES 2017b, p.8)**

As illustrated in the above diagram, the majority of students can be accommodated for in the classroom setting, with the CT differentiating the instruction and programme of learning to respond to the varying needs and abilities within the class. However, the CoS is used by teachers as a problem-solving approach to the identification, assessment, intervention and review of SEN for students who do not ‘respond appropriately’ to this differentiated learning programme (DES 2017b, p.9). This three-tiered system is reflective of the staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning (see Section 3.2 and Figure 3.1 for a description of the staged approach) as outlined in previous circulars [Circular 24/03 and Circular 02/05], which paved the way for this new model of SET allocation (DES 2017a). The first stage within the CoS; Classroom Support, is the initial response to students who may have emerging needs and may require additional or different classroom-based learning approaches than their peers (DES 2007a). Concerns, at this stage, may be expressed by the CT or the parent, who then work together, and with the student, to engage in a problem-solving approach to gather information based on the child’s needs and design a Classroom Support Plan. ‘Specific and manageable’ actions (DES 2007b, p.15), agreed by the teacher and parents are put in place for a fixed period and are subject to review (DES 2017b). Following these classroom-based interventions, if a student is not adequately progressing or their needs are not being fully met, School Support may be required. This stage involves the SET in the collaborative problem-solving process and entails more systematic gathering of information (DES 2007a). Targets are set and additional interventions and suitable teaching arrangements involving the SET, such as team-teaching, small group or individual tuition, may be decided upon. These actions are included in the School Support Plan, which again, is subject to review. The final stage within the continuum, School Support Plus, is required if a student’s needs are complex and persistent and if concerns remain following the two previous stages of support. This stage often involves external personnel (i.e., professionals from support agencies outside of the school) to offer specialist expertise to further clarify the problem (Rose *et al.* 2015). However, similar to the first two stages, parental permission and involvement remains pertinent to this stage. The School Support Plus Plan, which is drawn up at this stage, is likely to be ‘more detailed and individualised, and to include longer term planning and consultation’ (DES 2017b, p.10). Use of the CoS ensures interventions are responsive to student’s immediate

needs and supports are incremental in that they respond to student’s changing needs over their time in primary school.

While adopting the CoS, teachers use a variety of strategies to gather information as part of the problem-solving approach and identification process. The figure below presents a range of these strategies as outlined in the DES Guidelines (DES 2017b).



**Figure 2. 7: Strategies and Resources which can be used to Inform each Stage of the Continuum of Support (adapted from DES 2017b, p.9)**

The CoS not only facilitates the identification of needs, but also, places an emphasis on continuous monitoring and review of students’ outcomes, which will be explored in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.3, within a discussion of the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b).

Throughout the beginning of this section, models of special education provision were discussed. Comparisons between allocation models in the UK and Ireland highlighted the impact international provision and practices have had on national models, which then led to a discussion of current practices used in Irish primary schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a) to identify students’ needs. Complexity arises within this area of identification and special education provision (Banks *et al.* 2012) as authors, policymakers and educators struggle with the notion of difference and sameness. Minow (1990), Dyson (2001), Norwich (2008), Warnock *et al.* (2010), Norwich (2014) and many

others describe the contradictions and dilemmas associated with difference and the ‘intention to treat all learners as essentially the same and an equal and opposite intention to treat them as different’ (Dyson 2001, p.25). These dilemmas, with specific reference to their relevance in the field of special education, will be explored in the subsequent section.

### **2.4.3 Dilemmas of Difference**

The term ‘dilemmas of difference’ was devised by Martha Minow in 1990 and is the fundamental principle underlying much of Brahm Norwich’s (2008) work. This concept recognises the ongoing conflict of how we respond to elements of difference and sameness (Warnock *et al.* 2010). Both Minow and Norwich claim that there are consequences attached to the dilemma of treating people differently or the same, which in relation to special education, the results of either option can range from stigmatisation to denial of opportunities. Norwich (2008) conducted an international, comparative study to explore special education provision in the USA, the UK and the Netherlands, which focused on practitioners’ perspectives of three key dilemmas of difference: identification, curriculum and placement. These dilemmas consider the questions of ‘whether to identify children as having a disability/difficulty relevant to education or not’, ‘whether to provide a common curriculum to all children or not’ and ‘to what extent children with more severe difficulties/disabilities will learn in ordinary or general schools and classes or not’ (Norwich 2008, p.2). These dilemmas pose a contradiction for policymakers and educators, as our move towards inclusion encourages all students to be educated in common schools, to the greatest degree possible, respecting a ‘sameness’ in all students, yet, simultaneously, it is acknowledged that all students learn in unique ways, with some students requiring a more individualised approach than others. This complex notion of whether to treat students the same or different, and to what extent, underpins inclusive [or indeed non-inclusive] practices in schools. Dyson (2001, p.25) attempts to explain this concept in relation to the choice that educators have between alternatives which are unfavourable (Norwich 2008) by stating

the more their educational responses emphasise what learners have in common, the more they tend to overlook what separates them; and the more they emphasise what separates and distinguishes each individual learner, the more they tend to overlook what learners have in common.

(Dyson 2001, p.25)

In order to address the differences and needs of students with SEN, they no longer remain in the domain of neutrality, they are classified as different, and so, although the term ‘special educational needs’ can be seen as stigmatising (Hornby 2011), to overlook this difference, and without this label, students may risk deprivation of the appropriate education required to meet their needs (Rix *et al.* 2013; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015; Shaw 2017). Norwich (2009, p.448) reiterates this paradox of whether to recognise difference or not, noting that ‘either option has some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection or denial of opportunities’.

Although all three of Norwich’s (2008) dilemmas of difference are recognised as having an influence on special education provision, the identification dilemma is seen as pertinent to this study, as the current SETAM (DES 2017a) no longer requires students to have a formal diagnosis in order for them to receive support in schools. This is a noteworthy move for special education provision in Ireland as it eliminates the labels previously assigned to students with SEN under the RTH Model (DES 2005). The international and national movement away from labelling students with SEN will be discussed below.

#### **2.4.4 Moving Away from Labelling**

There is much historical, comparative and current confusion as to how to define those in need of special educational attention.

(Tomlinson 2012, p.273)

In previous practices, including the pre-existing system for providing for low incidence (LI) SEN in Ireland (DES 2005) (further explained below), students needed a formal diagnosis to receive support in schools (Desforjes and Lindsey 2010). Models such as this are heavily dependent on the labelling of students, which, as Norwich (2008) points out, can lead to stigmatisation and devaluation of students, with the knock-on effect of lower expectations. Criticisms of the use of labels as an application of medical model psychology, whereby ‘the deficit or problem is assumed to be within the child, and therefore, no amount of teaching is going to change anything’ (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b, p.125), is found within the literature. According to Shyman (2016, p.368), the ‘framework of social science regarding disability from the beginning of the 20th century has been conceptualized almost entirely within the medical model’. The medical model relates to viewing the child as having a deficiency (Clough and Corbett 2000; Ainscow 2007) or disability, which is seen as an internal feature of the person or an ‘intrinsic state of being’

(Connor 2013, p.497). Shyman (2016, p.368) argues that if the ‘locus of the disability lies within the person’; external, counteractive treatment is needed to achieve normality. This view of disability locates blame within the individual and reflects the earlier discussion of integration models which required students to adapt to the existing norms and practices of the school structures, rather than the education systems adapting and transforming to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities (see Section 2.3.1). Alternatively, the biopsychosocial model gives ‘due weight to both within-person factors as well as a broad range of environmental factors that provide support and cause stress to the individual’ (Desforges and Lindsey 2010, p.3). This model rejects the notion that disability is the consequence of a disease, but rather conceptualises disability as the result of complex and dynamic interactions between biological, psychological, and social factors (Hollenweger 2014). Therefore, adopting this view within education systems results in a diluted focus on diagnosing and labelling students with SEN, which is now evident in Ireland under the SETAM (Howe and Griffin 2020) and mirrors the international movement away from labelling. This will be discussed in relation to Irish special education policy below.

As previously mentioned, allocation systems in Ireland in the past required students with LI disabilities to obtain a diagnosis of disability, and thus, were based on a diagnostic/medical model. However, research has highlighted numerous shortcomings associated with a diagnostic approach to resource allocation (DES 2016b). Egan (2013, p.66) presents some of these limitations, claiming that ‘categorising children according to disability...can develop negative attitudes towards the learner’ and labelling students can ‘consume the identity of the individual and in doing so can stigmatise the child’. This concurs with the views of Norwich (2008) and Sheffield and Morgan (2017) who recognise the controversial nature and longstanding debate of labelling within extant psychological literature. There has been a significant movement away from labelling students with SEN, which was firstly evident in Ireland under the GAM (DES 2005). In accordance with European trends (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) 2009), the GAM introduced a policy-shift which eradicated the labelling of the majority of students (i.e., those with high incidence (HI) disabilities) with SEN in order to access additional support. This was significant in 2005, as it reflected a particular Context of Influence and a distinct shift in paradigm, which was in-keeping with reports such as the EADSNE Report on the *Financing of Special Education: A*

*Seventeen-country Study of the Relationship between Financing of Special Education and Inclusion* (Meijer 1999) and the succeeding EADSNE Report entitled *Special Education Across Europe Trends in Provision in Eighteen European Countries* (Meijer 2003), which suggested a move away from categorisation of students in order to secure additional resources or support (Egan 2013). As influenced by the aforementioned movements throughout Europe, the GAM intended to provide additional teaching support to cater for students with needs other than the ‘complex and enduring needs’ (DES 2005, p.6) for whom the school received a specific individual allocation of resource teaching hours under the RTH Model. This general allocation of resources enabled the school to provide support using the staged approach (see Section 3.2), without needing an official diagnosis, to students with mild or transient learning difficulties or to students, who in the past, were entitled to access to the Learning Support Teacher. Therefore, the GAM was, in one sense, careless of identification (Norwich 2008). However, categorisation and labelling of students still remained within this system, just to a lesser extent. In accordance with the then existing DES policy on assessment and identification of need, those with more complex and enduring needs, classified as LI disabilities in Circular 02/05 (DES 2005), still required ‘a formal diagnosis of disability and educational need by specified professionals to qualify for support other than under the general allocation model’ (NCSE 2006b, p.46). This prerequisite of a diagnosis of disability prior to access to additional support was in line with three other countries (Australia, USA, and Canada), studied in Desforges & Lindsay’s (2010) international review of practices and procedures, which reinforces a medical model of resource allocation. LI disability allocations were based on disability categories (see Figure 2.8 below), rather than on students’ assessed needs, which gained much criticism, as it did not provide a true indication of the support required for individual students (NCSE 2013). However, according to a review undertaken by the NCSE (2013), this practice was simultaneously considered as one of the strengths of the system as

Following the diagnosis of disability, it is clear to parents, schools and professionals what additional time will be given to the school to support a child with a low incidence disability. This cannot be misinterpreted or open to degrees of interpretation or variance.

(NCSE 2013, p.85)

Therefore, although the NCSE recommended a change to the system under the proposed new model, in that the allocation of resources should be in line with students’ needs rather

than being based on disability category, some concern was anticipated regarding the dissatisfaction of parents upon changes to the level of support their child would receive (NCSE 2013). The assessment categories and professional reports required under the RTH Model (DES 2005) are summarised by Desforges and Lindsay (2010) in the below table, taken from Rix *et al.* (2013, p.61):

Category of low incidence disability	Professional report required
Physical disability	Medical doctor or occupational therapist. Psychologist report may be required.
Hearing impairment	Audiologist report, verified by visiting teacher of the pupil with a hearing impairment. Psychologist report may be required.
Visual impairment	Ophthalmologist report, verified by visiting teacher of the pupil with a hearing impairment. Psychologist report may be required.
Emotional disturbance	Psychiatrist or psychologist report.
Severe emotional disturbance	Psychiatrist or psychologist report.
Autistic spectrum disorders	Multidisciplinary team or psychologist report.
Specific speech and language disorder	Speech and language therapist and psychologist report.
Assessed syndrome in conjunction with one of the above disabilities	Psychologist or other specialist report.
Multiple disabilities	Appropriate professional reports confirming two or more from the above list of disabilities.
Moderate general learning disability	Psychologist report
Severe/profound learning disability	Psychologist report

**Figure 2. 8: Professionals Required for Determining Disability Categories (Rix *et al.* 2013, p.61)**

Allocation systems in Ireland would continue to follow trends seen in Europe to eliminate the necessity for labelling, categorisation and diagnosis of *all* students, as advocated for under the SETAM (DES 2017a). This harmonizes with practices seen in England, New Zealand, South Africa and Germany, whereby a diagnosis of disability is not required before sanctioning additional resources to students with SEN (Desforges and Lindsey 2010). The SETAM now focuses on the individual learning needs of students and the identification of need within the socio-cultural context of the school, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability (HSE 2019b; DES 2017a; DES 2019a), when allocating additional teaching resources. This presents as a positive move

for Irish educational policy as Winter *et al.*'s (cited in NCSE 2006b) review of national and international resource allocation models highlighted a number of issues associated with a resource allocation model closely tied to assessment. Commenting on Winter *et al.*'s review, Kinsella (2014, p.39) suggest that a categorisation system, similar to that under the RTH Model in Ireland (DES 2005), may have been misleading in suggesting that 'all children within an assessed disability category may have common rather than unique needs', leading to the 'misdirected or inappropriate allocation of particular resources for individual children'. Research suggests that the categorisation and labelling of students can have negative outcomes, leading to stigmatisation (Sheffield and Morgan 2017), lower expectations (NCSE 2006b; Norwich 2008; Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Kenny *et al.* 2020) and potentially damaging a student's self-concept and level of attainment (Kinsella *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, a study conducted by Boomhead (2019) found that parents of children labelled with SEN experience stigma and differential treatment. In the past, labelling has also been described as an 'admission ticket' to SEN provision (Zuriff 1996, p.403) and allocation models, based solely on assessment, have led to the over-identification of SEN within schools to access resources (Kinsella *et al.* 2014). The NCSE (2013) raised this issue in terms of the previous allocation model in Ireland (DES 2005), stating that a 'real risk' was posed in terms of unnecessarily labelling or diagnosing students as having SEN for the purpose of gaining access to resource hours/allocation (NCSE 2013; DES 2017a). This concern was portrayed in the NCSE's review of special education supports in Irish primary schools, in which health professionals reported feeling

pressurised to undertake assessments for the allocation of educational resources when such assessments are not indicated as required for health or social reasons. In addition, they report that they are sometimes pressurised to make a specific diagnosis even when the evidence may be insufficiently robust for a definitive diagnosis or to use a specific wording just to ensure that educational resources are sanctioned.

(NSCE 2013, p.47)

In light of this, access to resources without a diagnosis or label is welcomed under the SETAM, as firstly, it reduces the need for professional assessments, and also, helps to focus the assessment process, preventing diagnoses being made for the purpose of resource allocation alone (NCSE 2014b). The eradication of the requirement for a label also promotes teacher agency under the SETAM (DES 2017a), whereby decisions can be made at a school-level regarding students who require additional teaching support and the extent of support that can be provided to them. This will be further explored in the

following section, leading onto a discussion surrounding how prepared teachers feel when implementing and enacting new policies at a local level, highlighting factors such as CPD and ITE which may contribute to teacher efficacy and confidence when implementing inclusive policies and practices.

## **2.5 Teacher Agency/Autonomy and Responsibility**

While inclusion is advocated, respected, and ultimately mandated by Irish educational policy and legislation (Education Act 1998; EPSEN Act 2004; UNCRPD), studies continue to illustrate that the ‘goals of inclusive education cannot be met if policies do not translate into inclusive practice’ (Plows and Whitburn 2017, p.70). The enactment of such policies creates classrooms that are made up of students with ‘increasingly diverse learning needs’ (Chitiyo 2017, p.57), which can pose challenges for teachers (Paliokosta and Blanford 2010; Tomlinson 2012; Westwood 2013). The complexity involved with inclusive teaching and learning sees a fundamental obligation on the state to provide an effective model which supports and enables school staff to include and cater for students with SEN in the mainstream school. The SETAM (DES 2017a) is the Irish education system’s response to further inclusive education and aims to offer greater autonomy to schools on how to ‘manage and deploy additional teaching support’ (DES 2017a, p.2). However, according to the EASNIE (2017, p.22), this presents a challenge for schools to ensure that ‘having received an allocation of resources from the State, the pupils who are in greatest need of additional support at any given time can actually receive that support’. Implementation of this policy, in turn, places greater responsibility on teachers to identify, assess and prioritise students’ needs. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the dilemma of greater teacher autonomy versus increased responsibility within the Context of Practice.

According to the literature, the notion of autonomy ‘emphasises foremost freedom from control’ (Erss 2018, p.244) and can be understood as an ‘absence of regulation’ (Priestly *et al.* 2015). While teachers implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) are offered greater autonomy in terms of the identification of students’ needs and the deployment of SET resources, they are still working within the realm of structural constraint and therefore, are not ‘free’ from all ‘control’ (Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020). In-keeping with the study’s theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle (Ball 1994) recognises that although actors are agentive within contexts which involve action (see Figure 3.9), all

contexts are bound by structures and therefore, involve compromise. Bound by the policy structure of the SETAM, it could be argued that the position of the teacher in this instance may relate more directly to having increased teacher agency rather than autonomy, as agency ‘focuses more on the actual potential of teachers of developing the capacity to act within the limitations of their profession’ (Erss 2018, p.244). This is underpinned by the ecological view of agency which maintains that ‘actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment’ (Priestly, *et al.* 2015), so that the achievement of agency will ‘always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural ‘factors’ as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations’ (Biesta and Tedder 2007, p.137). Interestingly, the Teaching Council’s recently published ‘*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*’ uses the term agency, rather than autonomy, and defines it as

...teachers’ understanding of their status as autonomous professionals teaching in community contexts (community of practice; school community). It also refers to their capacity to act on this understanding in intentional, responsible and innovative ways that reflect and enhance their relationships with peers, students, parents and the wider community.

(Teaching Council 2020a, p.3)

It is clear from the above definition of agency, that both terms, i.e., agency and autonomy, are sometimes used interchangeably. While this study recognises that one does not necessarily equate to the other (Priestly *et al.* 2015; Simpson *et al.* 2018), as highlighted in the above discussion, it acknowledges that Circular 0013/2017, the policy text of the SETAM, does not claim that teachers have autonomy over the amount of resources allocated to their school, but rather, that this model ‘will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school’ (DES 2017a, p.2). Therefore, this study uses teacher agency as an umbrella term which encapsulates the autonomous role of teachers to work within the structural constraint of the SETAM policy and the availability of resources which that facilitates (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Erss 2018), based on each school’s educational profile. However, recognising the overlap and similarities between both concepts (Erss 2018), the term autonomy is also used interchangeably throughout this thesis, as the researcher felt its inclusion was important due to its use in the official policy document of the SETAM [Circular 0013/2017], the tendency of the use of the term ‘autonomy’ in DoE documents

[see *Advancing School Autonomy in the Irish School System* (DES 2015)], and its increasing relevance in current educational policy.

This study seeks to explore teacher agency and the responsibility associated with such, within the ‘unique situation’ of the SETAM in Context of Practice (Ball 1994), to understand how teachers ‘enact practice and engage with policy’ (Priestley *et al.* 2015, p.1). The findings of the study will, therefore, contribute to the Policy Cycle (Ball 1994) acting as a feedback loop (see Figure 1.3 and Figure 3.9) from the micro level back to the macro level (Lall 2012) by enabling those who frame policies to ‘more fully understand the implications of those policies for those who enact practice’ (Priestley *et al.* 2015, p.8). Pyhältö *et al.* (2014, p.307) believe that the ‘conditions created by the implementation of educational change’ [i.e., the situation] ‘affects teachers’ capacity to serve as professional agents’. Considering this, the SETAM brought about a significant policy change in that students with SEN no longer need an official diagnosis to access SET support in schools. As principals and teachers now identify those in need of support and prioritise and deploy resources to meet such students’ needs, this new situation facilitates a more agentic role for teachers. However, professional agency is regulated by the demands and constraints of such situations (Pyhältö *et al.* 2014). Therefore, as schools are given an allocation for special educational support teaching needs, based on that school’s educational profile (see Section 3.3.4), teacher agency is dependent on the availability of resources to work within this structural constraint (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Ball *et al.* 2012; Erss 2018; Giudici 2020). The ‘demands’ associated with this newfound teacher ‘autonomy’ then places greater responsibility on teachers to select and prioritise those in greatest need of support. Therefore, although autonomy can foster and develop teacher professionalism (Erss 2018) as teachers feel empowered with more freedom and control over decision-making, according to Lawson (2004), such autonomy can sometimes be used as a disguise for increased teacher workload and additional responsibilities.

Within this era of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg 2011) the emerging accountability agenda is becoming increasingly evident in Irish education policy (Conway and Murphy 2013; Egan 2013; INTO 2014). Conway and Murphy (2013, p.11) describe this as a ‘rising tide’, which has resulted from the ‘interrelated influences of the European higher education space, education legislation and professional self-regulation policies (i.e., Teaching Council)’. While such accountability is generally concerned with school improvement related to standardised student achievement tests,

this trend is visible across other areas of education policy also, including special education policies in Ireland, such as the SETAM (DES 2017a). As mentioned above, because this model enables teachers to act with greater autonomy, it also increases their responsibility to justify their decisions and actions. According to O’ Donnell (2014), this ‘professional responsibility’ views teachers as trusted and committed professionals to act in the interests of others (Sullivan 2005). However, O’ Donnell (2014, p.14) also acknowledges that responsibility is a complex concept in real life contexts as ‘dilemmas arise between individual and collective concerns and between those of external stakeholders’. Removing the need for an official diagnosis, as a prerequisite to accessing support in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a), sees a shift in responsibility from outside agencies, such as NEPS or private educational psychologists, to the teachers themselves to identify and prioritise students in need of support. Schools were given guidance on how to engage in this identification process and how to use, organise and deploy SET resources for students with SEN through the issuing of *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES 2017b) (see Section 3.3.3). However, it is interesting to consider what practical supports, in terms of ITE and CPD, if any, teachers have received to respond to these changes and to take on the associated roles and responsibilities involved with the SETAM, as according to Ekins *et al.* (2016, p.239), there is often a focus on teachers’ lack of specialist SEN knowledge, and an emphasis on ‘the need for specialist SEN pedagogies as the only way to meet the needs of pupils with complex SEN’, which acts as an obstacle to implementing inclusive education. This led the researcher to explore how prepared teachers feel when implementing new policies and the autonomy/responsibility associated with such, and to examine the support, in terms of CPD, available to them when enacting policies at a local level.

### **2.5.1 Continuing Professional Development**

The dynamic nature of education sees many aspects of the classroom continually developing and changing to meet policy standards and curricular demands. As systems become more inclusive, teachers face new challenges by responding to a greater diversity of student needs (UNESCO 2017), with Rix *et al.* (2009, p.86) maintaining that teachers ‘still do not see themselves as having the skills, expertise or resources’ to effectively provide for students with SEN. According to Ekins *et al.* (2016) teachers’ confidence to

meet the diverse needs of their students is crucial in developing inclusive approaches to education. This exemplifies the importance of and sustained need for continuing professional development (CPD) for school staff, in all areas, including the field of SEN, which is identified as a key finding in a number of Irish studies (NSCE 2013; Rix *et al.* 2013; DES 2016b; INTO 2020b). Engagement with CPD is essential for improving teaching practices (Ofsted) 2006b; de Vries *et al.* 2014), maximising the potential of resources and boosting teacher confidence (Armitage *et al.* 2012), which is significant, as according to the INTO (2020b, p.16), ‘teachers are to the fore in making inclusion a reality’ in schools. This supports the view of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2005, p.9), who identify the quality of teachers and their teaching as ‘the most important factors in student outcomes’.

According to the Review of the Pilot of the SETAM (DES 2016b, p.9), schools involved in the pilot scheme (see Section 3.3.2) were provided with a ‘comprehensive suite of supports and guidance to enable them to implement the model as intended by the Department’. These included five support meetings whereby schools received support from personnel from specialist services such as NEPS, the Special Education Support Service (SESS<sup>17</sup>), the NCSE, the Special Education Section of the DES and the Inspectorate. School visits from NEPS and the SESS were also available on request and a variety of presentations and workshops were offered to teachers on a range of topics in relation to the implementation of the SETAM. Findings of this pilot showed that all teachers were appreciative of the ‘supports they received on the training days to help with the identification of educational needs and the NEPS Continuum of Support’ (DES 2016b, p.16). These efforts intended to prepare teachers for the initial implementation of this new model and offer them ongoing support throughout the timeframe of the pilot. Therefore, it can be suggested that the teachers involved in the pilot of the new model may have felt relatively well-prepared and confident when implementing this new policy, as schools reported that they were highly satisfied with the ‘manner in which teachers’ professional development in SEN was supported during the pilot’ (DES 2016b, p.27). However, Dempsey (2017, p.89) highlighted reservations held by parents regarding the ‘capacity of the NCSE Support Service, NEPS and allied services from the HSE to

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<sup>17</sup> In 2017, the SESS transferred from the DES to the NCSE and joined with the services already being provided to form a new NCSE Support Service. Therefore, the NCSE now has responsibility for providing CPD and support for teachers in the area of SEN to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in relation to SEN provision, which was formally provided through the SESS (NCSE 2017).

scaffold the level of supports’ that schools would require to ‘ensure successful outcomes for children’ once the SETAM would be introduced to all schools in Ireland, forecasting that the extent of support offered to schools engaging in the pilot scheme was unlikely to be achievable at a national level (Howe and Griffin 2020). This study sought to investigate if teachers felt adequately prepared and supported to implement the SETAM, following the national roll-out of the model by examining levels of CPD offered to teachers and exploring teacher confidence in implementing inclusive practices, in general, which may be influenced by their ITE experiences, as discussed below.

### **2.5.2 Initial Teacher Education**

Initial teacher education (ITE) lays the foundation for teacher confidence in implementing inclusive classroom practices as set out in policy. Efforts have been made in recent years to better prepare teachers for inclusive practices in increasingly diverse schools with ‘more inclusive education subject content’ becoming apparent within ITE programmes (Woodcock and Woolfson 2019, p.233). This is evident within the Irish context as the Teaching Council’s (2011; 2017) ‘Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers’ introduced changes to all ITE programmes in Ireland from 2012 onwards, which aimed to support the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (see Section 2.6), as well as bringing about other improvements, including the extension of the length of ITE programmes<sup>18</sup> and the mandatory inclusion of modules on inclusive education and differentiation (NCSE 2013; Hick *et al.* 2018; Hick *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, according to ‘*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*’ (Teaching Council 2020a), inclusive education is now included as one of the core elements of ITE programmes. While it is recognised within the literature that there is a dearth of research related to inclusive ITE (Hick *et al.* 2019), as there is a ‘developing, but still quite limited, research base documenting how teachers working in inclusive settings are being – or should be – prepared for their work’ (EADSNE 2012, p.35), the NCSE recently commissioned a study to examine the impact of these changes to ITE programmes in Ireland, and such findings are presented in a Phase 1 and 2 Report (Hick *et al.* 2018) and a Final Report (Hick *et al.* 2019). The Final Report acknowledged that, in general, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) believed that their ITE courses were valuable

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<sup>18</sup> From the academic year 2012/13 onwards, ITE programmes changed from a three-year programme to a four-year programme (OECD 2013).

in helping them to understand and implement inclusive practices, however, they reported feeling less well prepared for ‘dealing with challenging behaviours, time demands for differentiation, working with SNAs, with external professionals, and working collaboratively with parents’ (Hick *et al.* 2019, p.137). As these difficulties reflect some key aspects of teachers’ roles in relation to inclusive teaching, concerns remain as to whether this preparation is adequate, with many teachers continuing to feel ‘unprepared and lacking in confidence in responding to a wide range of learning differences’ (Florian and Camedda 2020, p.6). Significantly, Hick *et al.* (2019) report that NQTs believed that the school placement experience was the most important factor in terms of preparation for inclusive teaching and those who undertook special education placements (i.e., in a special school, special class or in a SET role) during their ITE felt better prepared to respond to the diversity of needs found in schools today. Although ‘mandatory placement in a special education setting’ was recommended by the NCSE (2013, p.159), according to the Teaching Council’s ‘*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*’ (2020a, p.18), ‘over the course of all his/her placements, a student teacher at primary level shall be exposed to a range of class levels and, where feasible, to multi-class teaching situations’. Therefore, while a variety of school and class contexts and educational needs should ‘ideally’ (Hick *et al.* 2019, p.i) be included in school placement during ITE, it is still not compulsory to complete school placement in a SET role, special class or special school setting, as the Teaching Council’s view of a ‘truly inclusive approach to professional practice recognises that teachers encounter a diverse range of needs in the course of their teaching, regardless of setting’ (Teaching Council 2020a, p.4). However, literature suggests that low levels of teacher confidence, attributed to lack of ITE (Florian 2008; Florian and Camedda 2020) and practical experience working with students with SEN (Richards 2010) can hinder practitioners’ ability to effectively implement inclusive policies. Therefore, limited ITE can result in teachers feeling unprepared and ill-equipped to teach students with SEN and to meet the challenges of inclusion in today’s classrooms (Ofsted 2008; Sharma *et al.* 2008; Recchia and Puig 2011; Shevlin *et al.* 2013a). The enactment of new policies, such as the SETAM, at a local level are often intended to bring about a change in practice, which may challenge teachers with new tasks in which they may not feel confident to implement. One such change, as advocated by the SETAM policy, involves greater use of in-class support to respond to the needs of students with SEN, as opposed to ‘primarily one to one teaching’ or withdrawal methods (DES 2017a,

p.18), which in the past were the most dominant model of support in practice (DES 2003; Egan 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015). The following section emphasises the importance of collaboration to achieve effective inclusive practice in schools and explores how such collaboration may be implemented in Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994).

## **2.6 Models of Support in Practice**

The SETAM places an emphasis on collaborative practice, with Circular 0013/2017 encouraging the use of ‘team-teaching’ and ‘small group teaching’ as effective models of providing additional teaching support to students, stating that ‘configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom’ (DES 2017a, p.18). This reflects the notable movement towards collaborative practice in current educational policies, such as the DES *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young People 2011-2020*<sup>19</sup>. This strategy recognises the importance of ‘mainstream and specialist teachers work[ing] collaboratively with one another and with parents in drawing up, implementing and reviewing focussed programmes in literacy and numeracy for pupils with learning needs’ (DES 2011b, p.66). This section discusses the importance of collaboration to successfully implement inclusive practices, as advocated for in the SETAM (DES 2017a). The benefits and challenges of co-teaching are then explored, followed by an exploration of co-teaching models (Friend and Bursuck 2012), before highlighting the need for some, albeit limited, withdrawal practices to intensively address specific or complex needs.

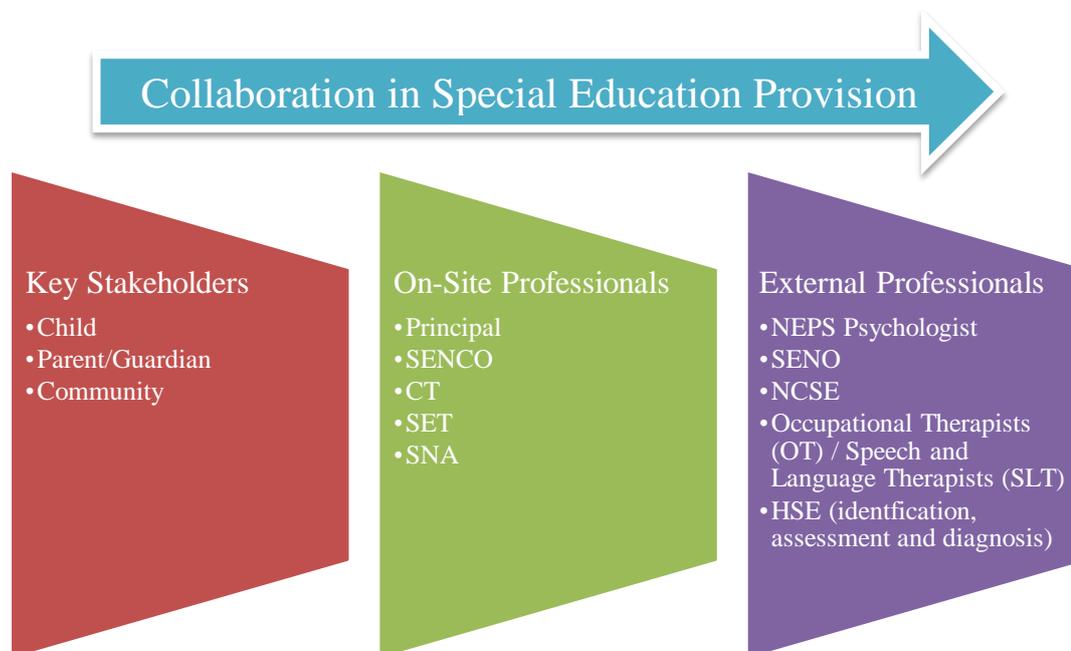
### **2.6.1 Collaboration**

There is no doubt that teaching is complex; therefore, in order to ensure the smooth-running of schools, enrichen the learning experience for students and to make sense of that complexity, many educators, including school leaders, teachers and other staff ‘crave meaningful, collaborative experiences’ (Sutton and Shouse 2016, p.70). Successful classroom leaders understand and believe in the value of collaborative thinking, planning and decision making (Triegaart 2018) and recognise that in order to

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<sup>19</sup> The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was launched in 2011 as a response to the decline of Irish students’ performance in reading and maths in the decade since 2000, as indicated by the results of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 tests (Hislop 2011).

make best use of resources, expertise must be shared and developed. The same applies when it comes to collaboration with regard to inclusive education in schools. Special education provision is most effective when it becomes integral to the work of the school, therefore, involving collaboration between many on-site and external professionals, as illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 2. 9: Collaboration in Special Education Provision in Schools**

In order for special education provision, which facilitates inclusion, to be successful in schools, ‘explicit recognition of the complementary roles of all involved’ (Beveridge 1999, p.128) is required. Lack of ITE, expertise and practical experience working with students with SEN (Richards 2010) are noted in the literature as just some of the challenges teachers encounter, which can act as barriers to effective inclusion in schools. Collaborative teaching, when organised and implemented effectively, can be used as a tool to combat this dilemma. Ekins (2015) describes the benefits of collaboration and partnerships between schools, where teachers with specialist skills are deployed across a number of local cluster schools to share knowledge and further develop inclusive education practices. Similarly, this technique can be adopted within schools, whereby a teacher who may have specific skills or training in an area of SEN collaborates with the CT/SET to meet and address students’ needs. This notion is reflected in one of the six key

principles of the SETAM, as it states that students with the greatest levels of need should have access to the greatest level of support, by teachers with the *most relevant expertise* (DES 2017b). Research suggests that inclusion is more likely to be achieved when there is a collaborative culture within the school (UNESCO 2008; Ainscow and Miles 2009), which is facilitated and encouraged by a whole-school approach. An increase in collaboration between general and special educators is evident in the past number of years (Pratt *et al.* 2017) as collaboration is a ‘vehicle through which legislative expectations’ (Friend *et al.* 2010, p.10), such as the standards and mandates set out in the NCLB Act (2002) and IDEA (2004) (see Section 1.2.1), can be met (Friend 2008). Collaboration is advocated in many special education policies, including the SETAM (DES 2017a) and the complementary Guidelines (DES 2017b), which will be further elaborated on below.

*Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES 2017b) describes and proposes an abundance of opportunities for collaboration within the application of the SETAM in practice. Collaboration between a range of individuals, as illustrated in Figure 2.9 above, is necessary for the successful implementation of the CoS and problem-solving process (see Figure 3.5) to identify needs, plan for students with SEN and monitor and record their outcomes. Furthermore, the SETAM places an emphasis on ‘team-teaching’ and ‘small group teaching’ as beneficial models of additional teaching support. However, individualised teaching is also listed as a suitable model, dependent on the specific needs of the student or if intensive teaching of key skills is required (DES 2017a), which is discussed in Section 2.6.4 below. In relation to in-class support and collaboration within inclusive education, a key term which frequently arises in the literature is ‘co-teaching’. Friend *et al.* (2010) discuss the conceptual confusion and interchangeable use of terms such as co-teaching, collaboration and team-teaching. Collaboration has inexplicitly been an integral aspect of special education for many years, as teachers build and maintain working relationships with parents and other professionals to make appropriate educational decisions for students with SEN (Friend *et al.* 2010; Mulholland and Connor 2016). However, in more recent years, the concept of co-teaching has emerged, which can be seen as an extension of said collaboration, in that, not only are partnerships being formed for the purpose of decision making, but also for joint delivery of instruction. Although research suggests that there are many different definitions and interpretations

of co-teaching (Beninghof 2020), for the purpose of this study, co-teaching will be defined in accordance with Friend *et al.* (2010) as

the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs.

(Friend *et al.* 2010, p.11)

Successful co-teaching is a co-ordinated process between two professionals which requires time spent planning and organising lessons, delivering instruction and reflecting upon and evaluating outcomes (Pratt *et al.* 2017; Casserly and Padden 2018; Beninghof 2020). Fluijt *et al.* (2016, p.190) place an emphasis on co-teachers as reflective practitioners, maintaining that ‘team-reflection’ develops a ‘shared vision’ between both facilitators. This corresponds with Ekins (2015) who claims that successful collaboration needs to be underpinned by the principles of mutual respect and trust (Mulholland and Connor 2016), shared accountability and shared understanding of the knowledge, skills and expertise of each co-teacher.

Meta-analyses of the available research (Scruggs *et al.* 2007) indicate that co-teaching may be effective and may have positive impacts on students (Chitiyo 2017; Beninghof 2020). However, Beninghof (2020) states that there has been limited research conducted in relation to co-teaching with special educators, and a gap in the literature is acknowledged as the research evidence-base of the practice of co-teaching is still emerging (Chitiyo 2017). Murphy (2016) also claims that measuring the impact of co-teaching and identifying specific achievement outcomes (Friend *et al.* 2010) can be problematic, due to the many other factors which may influence students’ attitudes and attainment which may lead to skewed or inaccurate results. The following section will highlight some of the benefits and challenges found in the literature in relation to co-teaching in practice.

### **2.6.2 Benefits and Challenges of Co-Teaching**

The dominant way of thinking across the literature is that co-teaching can be beneficial for students (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Villa *et al.* 2013; Fluijt *et al.* 2016; Chitiyo 2017; Hick *et al.* 2018; Beninghof 2020). Roycroft (2018) discusses benefits of co-teaching underpinned by the core aspects of inclusion, according to the Education Act

(Government of Ireland 1998). Co-teaching allows students with SEN to *access* the curriculum as part of the general education setting, which is advocated for in the NCLB Act (2002). While remaining in the mainstream classroom, greater *participation* in activities is achieved due to a lower teacher-to-pupil ratio (Johnson and Brumback 2013), ensuring that the individual needs of the students can be attended to. This increased individual attention (Murphy 2016) and greater access to teachers may enable the mainstream classroom to be the LRE (IDEA 2004) for some students with diverse learning needs. As a result of this, students with SEN *benefit* from socialising with their peers and the inclusive learning environment fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness in the student (Roycroft 2018). Following the review of available research and literature, it emerged that although there are many benefits of co-teaching and while it demonstrates good practice to meet the needs of students with SEN in the general education classroom, it can be challenging for co-educators (Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017). Challenges associated with co-teaching approaches are discussed below.

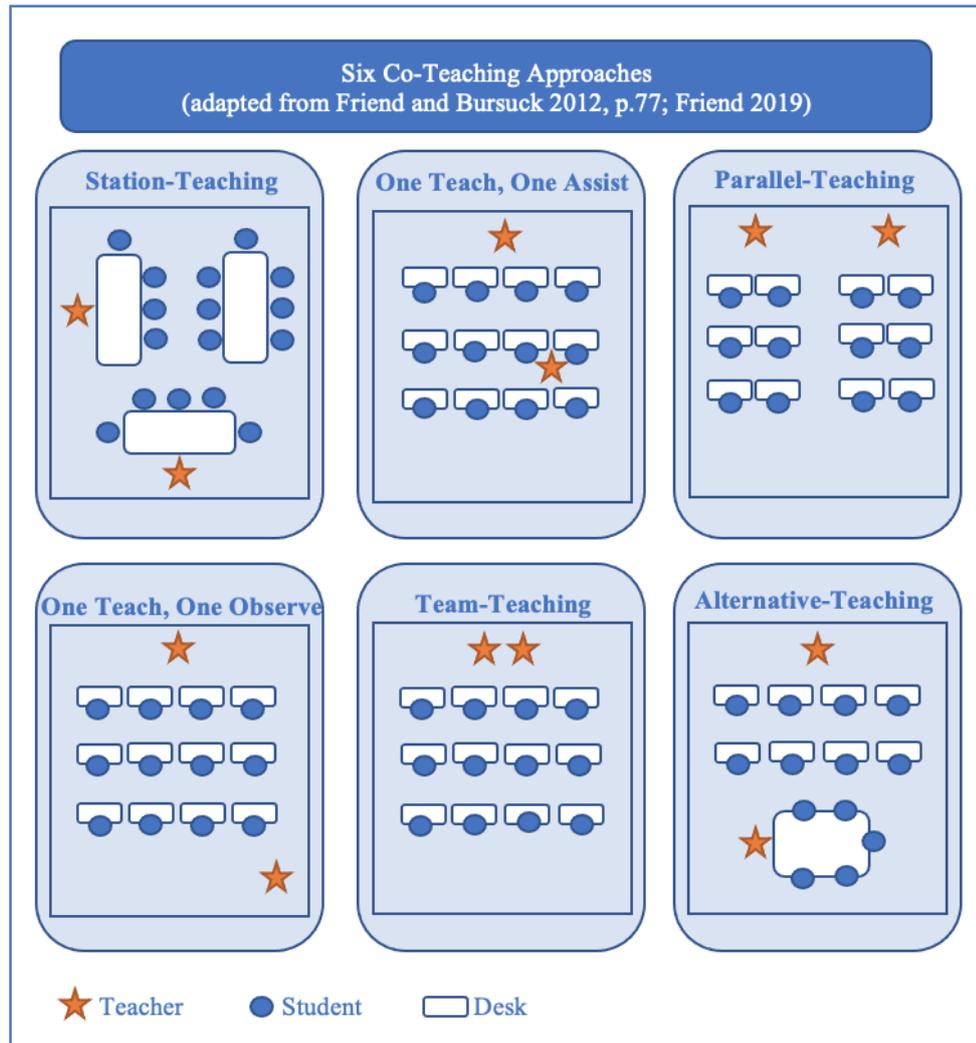
According to the literature, time is regarded as one of the most important resources needed for co-teaching, as common planning time is a vital and integral component required for its success (Friend *et al.* 2010; Murawski and Scott 2017). However, due to the ever-growing demands placed on teachers (Chitiyo 2017) and overcrowded curricula (Morgan and NicCraith 2015), planning time is not always feasible, with teachers reporting that they lack sufficient collaborative planning time in their schedules (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Ware *et al.* 2011; Mulholland and Connor 2016; Pratt *et al.* 2017). This may act as a significant barrier to co-teaching (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Mastropieri and Scruggs 2017), however, according to Pratt *et al.* (2017, p.244), research has shown several ways 'in which co-teachers are making co-planning practical and effective within the normal constraints of their teaching schedules'. They discuss three general principles to achieve this, as evident within the literature, which include (a) using online interactive means of communication outside typical school hours, (b) respecting and making use of the individual expertise of each co-teacher, and (c) sharing the workload fairly by dividing and conquering (Pratt *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, Chitiyo (2017) conducted a study which focused on specific barriers and challenges which hinder the implementation and practice of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. A reluctance by some teachers to engage with co-teaching approaches emerged as a significant challenge, as Chitiyo (2017, p.62) maintains that 'some teachers consider their classrooms as their 'turf' and having an additional

teacher might be considered as an invasion of their professional space'. This correlates with findings from many others (e.g., Mastropieri *et al.* 2005; Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Friend 2008; Friend *et al.* 2010; Friend and Bursuck 2012; Carty and Farrell 2018) who emphasise the importance of ensuring that co-teaching is a voluntary practice that is not forced upon teachers and highlight the advantages of providing co-teachers with choices in relation to whom they would feel most comfortable working alongside. Such considerations may help to ensure positive co-teacher working relationships and teacher compatibility, which are crucial factors in the successful implementation of co-teaching approaches.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) conclude that although there is a generally positive attitude towards co-teaching in the field, the most common model in practice still remains is that of a general educator teaching the class in a traditional manner, while the SET takes on a secondary, supportive role (i.e., one teach, one assist) (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Egan 2013). With this in mind, there is still work to be done and challenges which need facing in relation to co-teaching. The one teach, one assist model, along with five other widely accepted models of co-teaching (Friend and Bursuck 2012) will be explored and briefly described in the following section.

### **2.6.3 Co-Teaching Models**

Experts, in the field of co-teaching, discuss a range of co-teaching formats and arrangements (Honigsfeld and Dove 2019), which can be used interchangeably at the discretion of the co-teachers to respond to the instructional needs of students (Chitiyo 2017). According to the literature, practitioners use four (Villa *et al.* 2013), five (Murawski 2009) or six approaches (Friend *et al.* 2010), and variations of such, to collaboratively plan and deliver instruction. Due to their credibility in the existing literature, Friend and Bursuck's (2009; 2012) six co-teaching models have become some of the most generally accepted models of co-teaching (Carty and Farrell 2018) and thus, the essence of co-teaching and its practice within this study is based on these models. The figure below illustrates this study's adapted version of such models.



**Figure 2. 10: Six Co-Teaching Approaches (adapted from Friend and Bursuck 2012, p.77; Friend 2019)**

Within these models, which are widely reported in the literature (Carty and Farrell 2018), the roles of the teachers are fluid, and both teachers contribute and actively engage in the delivery and instruction [with the exception of one teach, one observe approach]. Station-teaching sees the class being divided into a number of groups, dependent on the number of teachers available to assist with each station. In the case of two teachers being present, a three-group rotation occurs, with one independent station. Although this is a hugely popular model of co-teaching, which effectively facilitates differentiation, large class sizes (Johnson and Brumback 2013; INTO 2020a), leading to overcrowding of stations and high noise levels, can pose problems (Gurger and Uzuner 2011). As briefly

mentioned above, the one teach, one assist approach is reported in the literature as the most dominant co-teaching model used in practice (Egan 2013; Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017; Carty and Farrell 2018) and involves one teacher leading whole-class instruction, while the other, usually the SET, circulates providing individual assistance and task-specific support to students and helping with routines or administrative tasks (Johnson and Brumback 2013; Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017). For parallel-teaching to occur, the class must be divided in two heterogeneous groups, with each co-teacher presenting and delivering the same material to their half of the class. One teach, one observe can be a useful methodology to collect and record academic, behavioural or social data on specific student(s) while one teacher delivers whole-class instruction (Friend *et al.* 2010). This can be particularly helpful when identifying and assessing students' needs and monitoring and recording their progress, which is of central importance and relevance in today's classrooms under the SETAM (DES 2017a). The team-teaching model, also referred to as 'teaming', is where two teachers present new material together by leading whole-class instruction. This combined instruction allows for questioning and debate between teachers providing rich discussions and clarity for students (Friend *et al.* 2010). This model also facilitates multiple means of explanation and problem-solving techniques and broadens the thought process by offering dual perspectives on topics. Finally, alternative-teaching is an effective model when trying to achieve individual or small group instruction such as pre-teaching, re-teaching or to carry out individualised assessments. This approach is beneficial in that it can meet the specific needs of students while remaining in the classroom. It can also be used to facilitate groups for 'gifted enrichment activities' or 'special interests', and so, according to Dieker and Hines (2018, p.3), the interchangeable selection of students being taught in these small group settings, can 'reduce the "class within a class" stigma of pulling students with special needs to the back of the room'.

Inclusion in education, although a complex (Nilholm 2020) and elusive concept, strives to respect and cater for the needs of all students. Inclusion today, maintains a general perspective, led by legislation, to respond to SEN within the mainstream classroom, as much as possible (DES 2003; DES 2017a; NCSE 2019). Therefore, the SETAM encourages more use of in-class support, with the use of individualised teaching being limited to intensive teaching of skills or to cater for more specific needs (DES

2017a). However, much literature points to the value and necessity of the use of such withdrawal methods, which will be discussed in the section below.

#### **2.6.4 One-to-One and Small Group Teaching**

While the SETAM (DES 2017a), as the current special education policy to support inclusion in practice in Irish primary schools, reflects a movement towards greater use of in-class supports to respond to the diverse needs of students in classrooms today, literature continues to suggest merit for one-to-one and small group teaching (Murphy 2011; NEPS 2019). This is particularly relevant for students struggling in reading (Swanson and Hoskyn 1998; Scammacca *et al.* 2007; Vaughn *et al.* 2012; Brooks 2016; NEPS 2019) and maths (Vaughn *et al.* 2012) and those with more complex needs. Circular 0013/2107 (DES 2017a, p.16) recognises that students with significant SEN, such as ‘significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs’, require ‘highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are tailored to their needs’. This is further supported by Anderson *et al.* (2017, p.42), who claims that because students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are ‘very diverse’ and ‘experience idiosyncratic responses to supports’, they ‘ideally’ need supports which are ‘individualised, ubiquitous, and continually monitored’. Although individualised and small group teaching is typically associated with withdrawal practices (NEPS 2019), Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a, p.18) states that ‘configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom’. However, when using models of in-class support, such as the co-teaching approaches described in the previous section, to address such needs, it is important to note that the size of the small group impacts the effectiveness of the intervention or support being provided. Variations in the size of effective teaching groups can be found in the literature (Singleton 2009; Vaughn *et al.* 2012), yet NEPS (2019, p.24) maintain that ‘there is good agreement that groups of more than five are less effective’. This may pose problems and limit the use of some co-teaching configurations within the Irish context, as ‘almost one in five of our primary school children are in supersized classes of 30 or more’ (INTO 2020a). Furthermore, in order to address literacy difficulties, teach specific skills and improve student outcomes, short, intensive bursts of structured, specialist tuition is favourable (Rose 2009; NEPS 2019). Scammacca *et al.* (2007) promote daily or near daily intervention sessions, which should be brief and

regular (Education Endowment Foundation 2017), supporting Rose's (2009, p.14) concept of 'little and often'. Considering this, withdrawing students from the mainstream classroom to provide targeted, explicit teaching of key skills, may 'continue to be the appropriate model for many students' (NEPS 2019, p.25) and thus, is permitted under the SETAM 'where necessary' (DES 2017a, p.18). However, as discussed above, the SETAM encourages the provision of support for small groups of students and use of in-class supports whenever possible, reflecting the movement away from the predominant use of withdrawal methods and one-to-one tuition evidenced in special education policies in Ireland over the past number of years, as discussed in Section 3.2 in the following chapter. This research will explore if the aims of the SETAM are being accomplished in practice, investigating if the daily practice of Irish primary school teachers has changed since the introduction of the SETAM, by exploring if students' needs are being met within the classroom setting more, perhaps through 'team-teaching', early intervention support or 'small group teaching', as set out in Circular 0013/2017.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Contemporary discourse maintains that inclusion is a complex concept, which is 'much harder to implement in practice than it is to read or write about in theory' (Westwood 2013, p.6; Westwood 2018). A variety of perceptions of inclusion, as both a result of and a facilitator of such complexity, were discussed within this chapter to convey the evolution of special education which has occurred throughout the years. As inclusive education is recognised as a global priority (UNESCO 2016), it is imperative to analyse current practices which aim to achieve it. This study sets out to unearth inclusive education in practice in the Irish context, as mandated by recent legislation (DES 2017a), therefore, this chapter revealed the interlinking continua which currently constitute special education delivery in Ireland and how international models and practices have directed this provision of education for students with SEN. 'Full inclusion', as influenced by the model of inclusion currently adopted in NB, Canada was then discussed as a recently proposed future direction for education provision in Ireland, before detailing the model of support allocation used in the UK and how this is mirrored by current practices in Ireland. The process for identifying students' needs in Irish primary schools was detailed, with particular emphasis on the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a), as advocated for under the SETAM (DES 2017a). The complexities involved with identification of SEN were

then highlighted through a discussion of Norwich's (2008) dilemmas of difference, which led to an exploration of the movement away from labelling as evidenced in current educational policy. Such policy, which shifts away from placing an emphasis on diagnosing or labelling students with SEN, has resulted in greater teacher agency to identify students in need of support and allocate SET resources accordingly, which was discussed in Section 2.5. According to the literature (Day 2007; Mainardes 2010; Egan 2013; Rose *et al.* 2017; Schulte 2018; Giudici 2020), implementation of practices, as directed by policy, may not always come to realisation in the intended or desired way. Therefore, this chapter examined teachers' level of confidence when implementing new special education policies, considering CPD and ITE as factors which influence such, and examined models of support used in practice which aim to achieve inclusion. This study sets out to examine whether change, in terms of collaborative practice and models of support for students with SEN within the Context of Practice, has occurred as a result of the introduction of the SETAM, and aims to reveal what co-teaching models are used most frequently, and which are most effective, to meet students' needs, under the SETAM. According to Ball *et al.* (2012), analysis must explore the overall and the localised outcomes of policy, therefore, by unveiling the lived experience of teachers who are implementing these complex, inclusive practices to effectively apply the SETAM on the ground, this research hopes to get a better sense of how this special education policy is realised on a local level.

The following chapter provides an overview of previous allocation models used in Ireland, unveiling the Context of Influence (Ball 1994) for the development of the current SET allocation model in use today, i.e., the SETAM. The SETAM (DES 2017a) is then described in great detail, examining each component of the model as outlined in Circular 0013/2017, which introduced the SETAM to schools, and as outlined in Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), which notified schools of the changes brought about to profiled allocations following the review of the model after its first two years of implementation. The Guidelines (DES 2017a), which accompanied Circular 0013/2017a are also described, before leading onto an in-depth discussion of the study's theoretical framework; Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: National Context**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

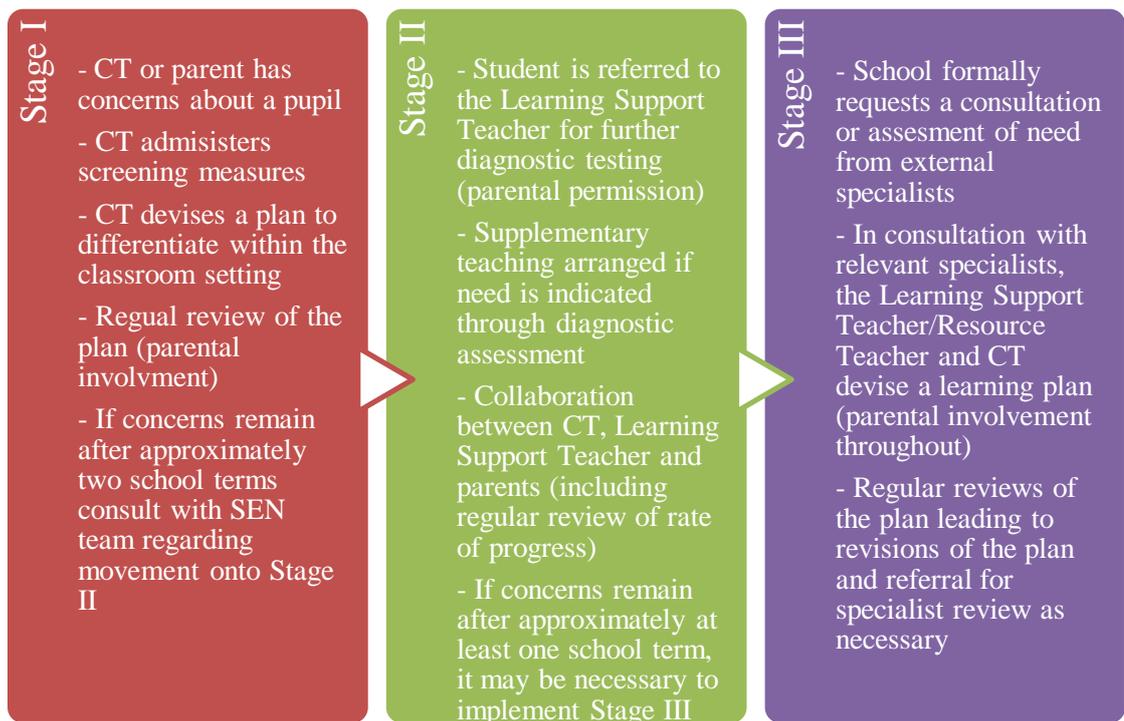
This chapter aims to provide an in-depth description of the SETAM (DES 2017a), as the current funding model to support inclusion in practice, which is the main focus of this study. As mentioned in Chapter One, the SETAM was introduced to schools in September 2017, through the issuing of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and an accompanying Guidelines document (DES 2017b), as a revised process for allocating SET resources to Irish primary schools. A number of allocation models preceded this, which are discussed in the first section of this chapter, tracing back to 1999 with the introduction of an automatic response to need being espoused by Government and leading up to a detailed description of the General Allocation Model (GAM), English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support Scheme and the NCSE Resource Teaching Hour (RTH) Model (DES 2005) which acted as the Context of Influence (see Figure 1.2) for the development of the existing SETAM (DES 2017a). Following this, a number of studies (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b) are analysed to provide a rationale for the proposal of a new national allocation system (i.e., the SETAM), before detailing the key principles underpinning this policy and the suggested three-step process to operationalise the SETAM, as set out in the policy Guidelines (DES 2017b). The SETAM provides a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to schools, based on each school's educational profile. Therefore, Section 3.3.4 details the main components of school profiles, to shed light on how supports are distributed based on the profiled educational need of each school. Policy analysis holds much importance within the current study, which seeks to explore the practicalities of this relatively new SET allocation policy in Irish primary schools (DES 2017a). Therefore, the theoretical framework of Ball's (1994) Policy as Cycle was adopted for this study and its theory is outlined within this review. Bowe *et al.*'s (1992) and Ball's (1994) Policy Contexts are discussed, with a particular emphasis on the Context of Practice.

#### **3.2 An Overview of Past Allocation Models in Ireland**

The original system for allocating teaching resources in Ireland was introduced in 1999 (DES 1999). This system was based on a RTH Model, whereby resource teachers

were deployed to a school, or a cluster of schools, to assist with providing an ‘appropriate’ education to students, assessed by relevant professionals as having disabilities. This model involved each student being given a ‘weighting’ which was determined by the ‘nature and degree of disability’ (DES 1999, p.2). These weightings were then used to determine eligibility for teaching posts, as Circular 08/99 provided pupil-teacher-ratios for each particular disability, in line with the pupil-teacher-ratios as recommended in the SERC Report (1993). However, this system was revised in 2002 and again in 2003, as advised in Circular 08/02 (DES 2002) and Circular 24/03 (DES 2003).

The DES policy document, Circular 24/03 (DES 2003), is worth noting as it was developed following Inspectorate and NEPS reviews of the previous allocation systems, which showed that there had been ‘misapplication of the terms of the circulars’ (DES 2003, p.1). This circular raised concerns about the over-reliance on withdrawal as a form of support for those with SEN, stating that ‘using resource hours for individual tuition only’ had developed as a prominent practice in recent years (DES 2003, p.2). Similar to the perspective of Will (1986) (as mentioned in Section 1.2.1), the DES was now promoting the practice of additional support being received in the mainstream classroom. Almost two decades previous to the publication of Circular 24/03 (DES 2003), Madeline Will (1986) called for a restructuring of special education provision in the USA by merging general and special education programmes and funding with the aim to develop more inclusive environments and practices (Winzer and Mazurek 2000). Will argued that not only was the ‘pull-out’ approach costly and often ineffective in meeting the educational needs of students, it also caused stigmatisation due to the classifying and labelling of students (Pfeiffer and Reddy 1999). Circular 24/03 concurs with this notion, affirming that support should be provided for students with SEN within the mainstream classroom, in so far as is possible, or within small groups, with an ‘overriding principle’ that the resources be ‘deployed in the manner that best meets the needs of the pupils with special needs in the school’ (DES 2003, p.3). This introduced a new concept of flexibility in terms of resource allocation (Egan 2013), which had not previously been seen in schools and recommended a staged approach to assessment, identification and review. This staged approach is a collaborative process and adopts a whole-school approach which reflects a central theme of the Learning Support Guidelines (DES 2000) and emphasises the necessity of parental involvement throughout (EPSN Act 2004).



**Figure 3. 1: Staged Approach to Special Educational Needs (adapted from DES Circular 24/03)**

This circular (DES 2003, p.4) also outlined a proposed strategy to develop a revised weighted system of resource allocation which would ‘involve an annual allocation being made to schools based on predicted incidence of special educational needs within different size school populations’, which would remove the need for individual applications for additional teaching resources for students. This proposal resulted in the development of the GAM (DES 2005), which will be discussed in detail below.

Special Education Circular 02/05 (DES 2005) was issued to schools in 2005 regarding the ‘Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools’ and provided guidance on the newly introduced GAM. This aim of this model was to ‘make possible the development of truly inclusive schools’ (DES 2005, p.3), which is consistent with the global inclusive movement (see Section 2.1). This system saw a general allocation of resources provided to schools to cater for the immediate needs of students who required learning support and those with HI disabilities (discussed below). Co-existing with this allocation, individual resource

applications would continue to be made to respond to the needs of those with LI disabilities. The level of resources provided to schools under the general allocation, in 2005, were based on a several factors, including gender, socio-economic disadvantage and school size. Differing pupil teacher ratios applied to boys' schools, girls' schools, mixed schools and designated disadvantaged schools. These ratios reflected the international evidence that higher incidences of SEN are evident in boys (Banks and McCoy 2011; NCSE 2014b; Mitchell 2015a). In line with such, boys' schools would present with the greatest need, therefore, boys' schools were allocated their first additional teaching post at a lower enrolment number than mixed schools and mixed schools were allocated their first additional teaching post at a lower enrolment number than all girls' schools (DES 2005).

As mentioned above, this model saw the categorisation of disabilities into two main groupings; high incidence (HI) disabilities and low incidence (LI) disabilities, which broadly determined the provision available to the students (Rix *et al.* 2013). According to Circular 02/05, HI disabilities include borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability, while LI disabilities and the associated resource teaching hours available per week for each disability are listed in Appendix 1 of Circular 02/05 as:

Low Incidence Disabilities	Hours of resource teaching support available to school per week
Physical Disability	3
Hearing Impairment	4
Visual Impairment	3.5
Emotional Disturbance	3.5
Severe Emotional Disturbance	5
Moderate General Learning Disability	3.5
Severe / Profound General Learning Disability	5
Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorders	5
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	4
Assessed syndrome in conjunction with one of the above low incidence disabilities	3 to 5, taking into account the pupil's special educational needs including level of general learning disability
Multiple Disabilities	5

**Figure 3. 2: Categories of Low Incidence Disabilities and the Level of Resource Teaching Support Available to Schools in Respect of Each Category<sup>20</sup> (DES 2005, p.17)**

The GAM was implemented to ensure that schools were able to facilitate for and provide additional teaching support to students with SEN arising from HI disabilities ‘without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils’ (DES 2005, p.4). A substantial backlog of resource applications to the DES highlighted the need for this revised system (Egan 2013). However, individual resource applications under the RTH Model remained for students with needs arising from LI disabilities, as these needs were less common and, according to the DES, were ‘not found in every school’ (DES 2005, p.2). These LI disabilities were considered to be at Stage III of the staged approach as outlined in Figure 3.1. This staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning set out in Circular 24/03 (DES 2003) would continue to be used for allocating additional teaching resources to identified students under the GAM. The co-existence of the GAM and the RTH Model saw SEN teams consisting of Learning Support Teachers/Resource Teachers (who were allocated under the GAM) and Resource Teachers (who were allocated on behalf of individual students under the RTH Model). In the years that followed, revisions were made to the GAM under DES Circular 0017/2011

<sup>20</sup> These allocations were reduced by 10% in 2011 (NCSE 2012) and a further 5% in 2012 (Kinsella *et al.* 2014).

(DES 2011a) and DES Circular 0007/2012 (DES 2012)<sup>21</sup>. Although the general consensus from the Review of the Primary Schools' GAM (DES 2010) was that the GAM had been successfully embedded in schools and appeared to be achieving its goals, a number of studies carried out subsequent to this review provided a rationale for the development of a new allocation system. These findings paved the way for the SETAM, as outlined in Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), which is the focus of this current research and will be discussed in depth below.

### **3.3 The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES 2017a)**

The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) is a revised allocation process for special education support in primary schools. This model has replaced the GAM, EAL support scheme, and the NCSE RTH allocation process (DES 2005). Similar to the GAM, this new model aims to 'facilitate the development of truly inclusive schools' (DES 2017b, p.5). The SETAM, however, intends on creating these inclusive schools through a new system by providing a 'single unified allocation' for additional teaching support, based on each school's educational profile (DES 2017a, p.6). This section will describe the rationale behind the proposal of a new allocation system in Ireland and discuss the key steps involved in the development and implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a).

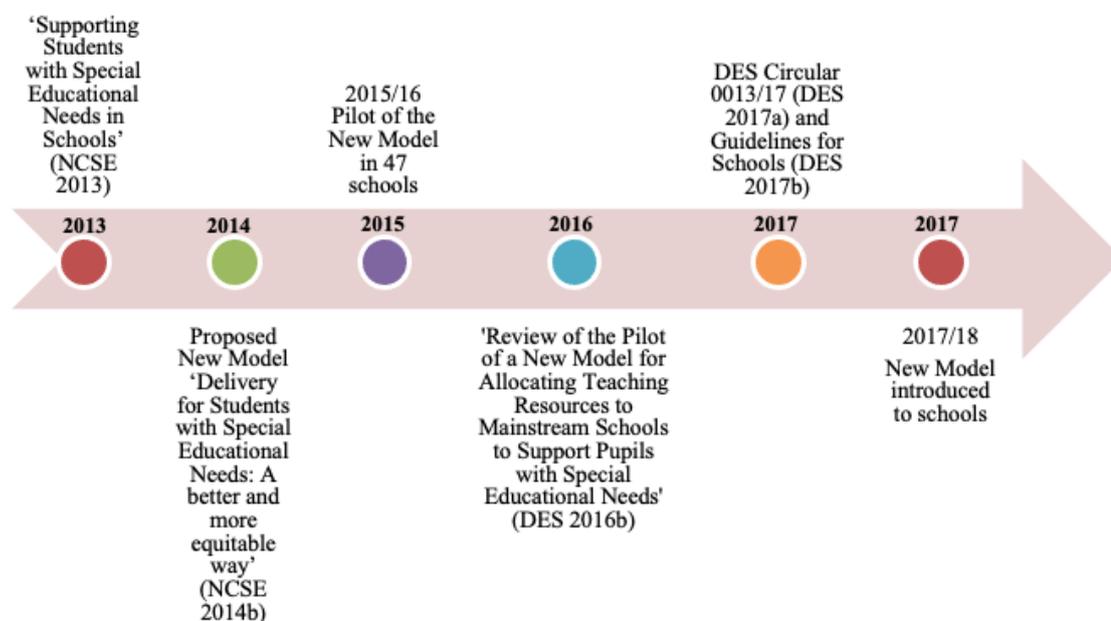
#### **3.3.1 Rationale for the Proposal of a New System of Allocation in Ireland**

Numerous reviews, reports and findings have led to the development of the SETAM (DES 2017a). These documents firstly highlighted a need for change within the existing 'inequitable' allocation model (NCSE 2014b, p.3) which subsequently resulted in a new model being proposed and piloted. A number of factors within the Context of Influence (Ball 1994), including these reviews, reports and documents, as well as the increasing diversity in schools (Tomlinson 2012; Ring *et al.* 2018) and the national movement towards more inclusive schooling (Griffin and Shevlin 2011; McCoy *et al.* 2016), contributed to this new policy being initiated and key concepts being established

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<sup>21</sup> Circular 0017/2011 (DES 2011a) discontinued the allocation of Resource Teachers for Traveller posts; thereby students from the Travelling Community would now receive support under the GAM. Circular 0007/2012 (DES 2012) saw the expansion of the GAM to include a single and simplified general provision for EAL support. It also saw a revision to the teacher allocation process as allocations under the GAM, from the 2012/13 school year, were based on the number of classroom teaching posts in each school in the previous school year (Egan 2013; NCSE 2013).

(Bowe *et al.* 1992; Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). This led to the production of Circular 0013/2017 within the Context of Policy Text Production. Below, each of the key steps involved in designing this new model are illustrated on a timeline to convey the clear and structured process behind the development of the SETAM.



**Figure 3. 3: Timeline of Policy Documents Leading to the Development of Circular 0013/17 (DES 2017a)**

The NSCE undertook a ‘comprehensive, strategic review of special education supports’ (NCSE 2014b, p.3) in Irish primary schools, and published their findings in May 2013. This paper, entitled *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools* (NCSE 2013), outlined a number of factors which indicated a need for change in the national allocation system of special education supports in schools, as the existing system (i.e., the co-existing GAM, EAL scheme and RTH Model) was described as ‘inequitable at best and potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage’ (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b, p.3; DES 2016b; DES 2017a). Within the previous system (DES 2005), the allocation of resource teaching hours required some students (those with needs arising from LI disabilities) to undergo an assessment as part of a formal diagnosis and application procedure prior to receiving support in schools, facilitating a ‘medical model’ or ‘deficit model’ of support (NCSE 2013, p.46) (see

Section 2.4.4). As a result of these pre-conditions to accessing teaching resources, students ‘could experience delays in accessing support’ (DES 2017a, p.5) within schools as gaining a formal diagnosis of disability is not always timely, nor is it always possible. There are a variety of factors, including a limit on the number of professional assessments that schools can access each year, lengthy waiting-lists (NCSE 2013) and high costs associated with private professional assessments (DES, NCSE and NEPS 2017) which can interfere with, or limit access to, such assessments and therefore, deprive students of necessary supports or resources. The policy advice paper acknowledged this limitation and stated that all students should have ‘immediate and timely access to the additional educational resources they require’ (NCSE 2013, p.49). Research continues to identify the benefit of early identification and intervention when supporting students with SEN (NCSE 2013; Dfe 2015; Rose *et al.* 2017), however, as access to professionals who can make diagnoses is ‘not readily available to all students’ (NCSE 2014b, p.3) the pre-existing allocation model (DES 2005) was deemed unjust. The paper also stated that a ‘real risk’ was posed in terms of unnecessarily ‘labelling’ or diagnosing students as having SEN for the sole purpose of gaining access to resource hours/allocation (NCSE 2013; DES 2017a) (see Section 2.4.4). In respect of these factors, the need for a more equitable system was portrayed in this policy advice paper (NCSE 2013), which would not require students to have a formal diagnosis to receive support and, therefore, should not discriminate or disadvantage any student. The NCSE’s examination of special education supports in Irish schools also identified that support allocation was based on categories of disabilities rather than on actual needs (see Figure 3.2 for disability categories). This is another example of one of the shortcomings of the previous system (DES 2005), as it did not recognise the wide spectrum of ability and disability within each category of SEN (DES 2017a). Research has shown that SEN can affect everyone differently and to different degrees (Fast 2004), as the ‘complexity of individual pupil needs is too wide ranging to be captured by a single descriptor’, label or category (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b, p.125). Therefore, this system was inequitable as it provided the same level of support to students according to the category of their disability and not according to their learning needs.

Following this policy advice paper, a need for change was recognised, and so, the NCSE established a Working Group who developed a proposal for a new model, informed by current and relevant research (NCSE 2014b). This was outlined in the Report *Delivery*

*for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way* (NCSE 2014b). The aim of this proposed ‘new model’ was to bring about a fairer and more equitable system of support allocation in Ireland. This proposal contained a pivotal recommendation to replace the existing allocation model with a new model which would address the inadequacies as outlined above, by creating a needs-based profile for each school. Under the SETAM, supports would be allocated on the basis of the school’s educational needs, outlined in the educational profile of the school. Resources would then be distributed through in-school decision making to the students with the greatest needs (DES 2016b), offering teachers greater autonomy and facilitating the underlying principle of the SETAM, in that, students with the greatest needs are allocated the greatest support, regardless of labels, diagnoses or categories of disability. Upon recommendation of this NCSE Working Group Report (2014b), Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) stated that allocations provided from September 2017 would initially remain in place for two years, following which, revised profiled allocations would be made to schools from September 2019. Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a) was then issued to advise schools of the criteria which applied to the re-profiling of schools from September 2019. Again, this circular stated that these allocations would be effective for a period of two years, after which, revised profiled allocations would be considered for schools from September 2021 (DES 2019a). However, as mentioned in Section 1.1, recent communication from the DoE [Circular 0019/2012] stated that ‘in order to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations will be maintained for schools for the 2021/22 school year’ (DoE 2021b, p.10). Section 3.3.4 will detail each of the components of the school profiles, firstly as they were outlined in Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and then providing an account of the allocation adjustments which were made at the re-profiling stage, as described in Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a). The proposed ‘new model’, as outlined in this NCSE Report (2014), came to fruition as a pilot scheme in the following academic year, which is described below.

### **3.3.2 Piloting the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model**

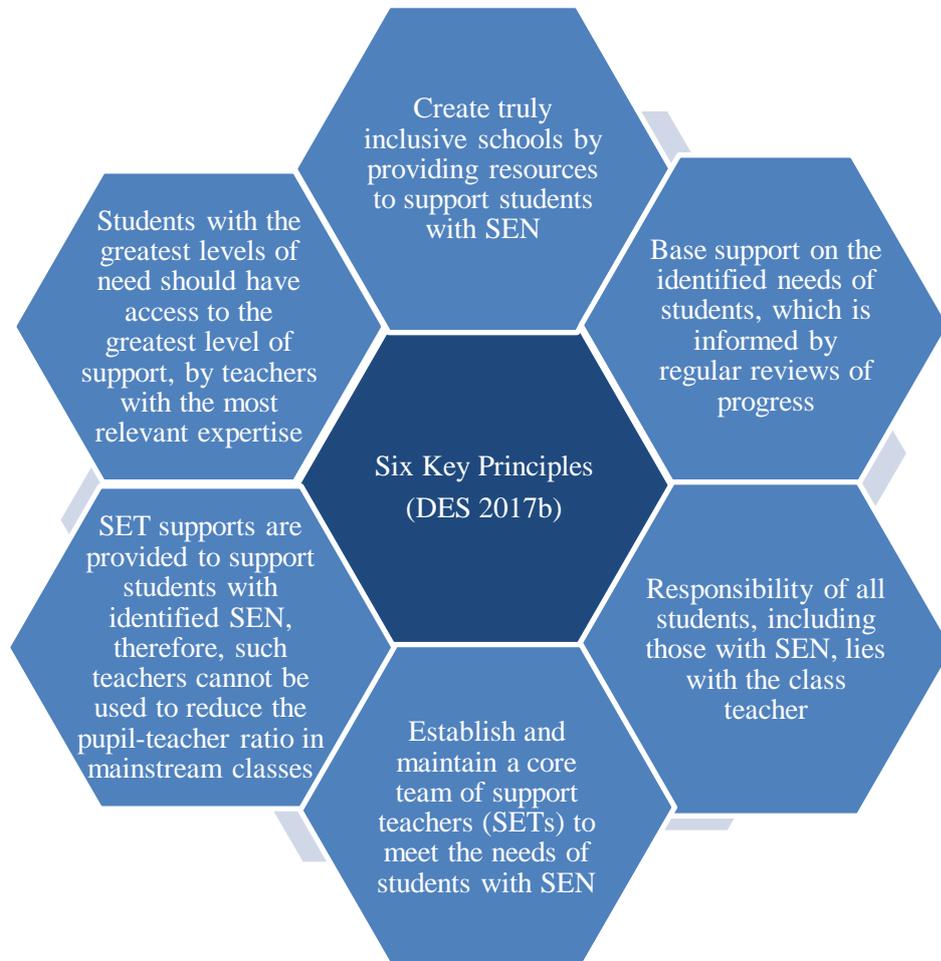
A pilot of this Special Education Teacher Allocation Model was conducted in the academic year 2015/2016 in a total of forty-seven schools (primary and post-primary). This pilot aimed to examine the effectiveness of the SETAM in a variety of different types

and sizes of schools in order to gauge the practicalities and application of the model (DES 2016b). The inspectorate then published a *Review of the Pilot of a New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources to Mainstream Schools to Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs* in 2016, which yielded an overall positive response (DES 2016b; DES, NCSE and NEPS 2017) from participating schools. According to the findings of the review, almost all (>90%) participants agreed that the SETAM provided their school with autonomy to use their resources to ‘meet students’ needs in a timely manner’ (DES 2016b, p.12) and welcomed the flexibility associated with such. This conveys that schools were satisfied that, under this new model, they could provide an immediate response to students’ needs. Findings also showed that most schools’ awareness of the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) and diagnostic and screening assessments were developed and extended throughout participation in the pilot, which resulted in improved identification of students’ needs. The model proved to facilitate early identification and intervention, due to the eradication of the requirement of a ‘label’ or diagnosis of disability in order for the students in their schools to receive SET support. Additionally, almost all schools described improvement in their planning for students, collaboration between classroom and support teachers, use of in-class supports, tracking of students’ progress and an overall positive impact on the teaching and learning in schools throughout this piloting process. However, not all schools reported positive engagement with the pilot, with some schools, usually those who were not granted additional teaching resources through the Department’s calculation of their school profiles, reporting minimal change in their planning and co-ordination of resources and ultimately, reported a lack of impact of the SETAM pilot implementation (DES 2016b). The benefits and challenges of the SETAM pilot study, as highlighted in this review, influenced and guided the development of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), the accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b).

This section described the benefits and challenges of the SETAM, as highlighted in the review of the pilot (DES 2016b), which influenced and guided the development of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and the accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b). This guidance document, which was provided to schools to assist teachers with the implementation of the SETAM is described in the subsequent section, detailing the six key principles which underpin the SETAM and outlining the three-step process to identification, intervention and monitoring of students’ outcomes under the SETAM as set out in these Guidelines.

### 3.3.3 The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model Guidelines (DES 2017b)

*Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES 2017b) is an accompanying document to Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) which aims to support schools when implementing the SETAM. These Guidelines were developed by NEPS, the Inspectorate and the Special Education Section of the DES to provide direction for schools on the use, organisation and deployment of resources for students with SEN. Six key principles are outlined in these Guidelines to support schools in deploying resources effectively (EASNIE 2017) and to encourage a whole-school approach to special education provision, which are presented in the figure below:

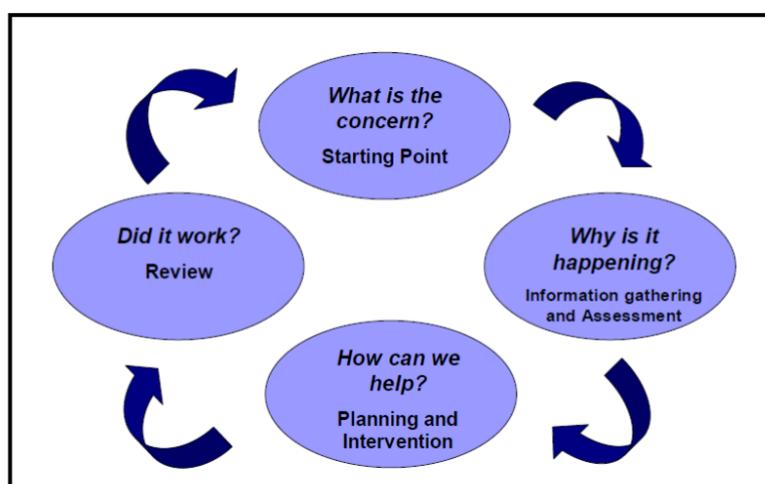


**Figure 3. 4: Key Principles Outlined in DES Guidelines (DES 2017b) to Support Schools in Deploying Resources Effectively (EASNIE 2017)**

The Guidelines also present a **three-step process** to supporting students with SEN. This process aims to guide the ‘identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes’ (DES 2017b, p.6) for students with SEN. Teachers are encouraged to engage with this process to operationalise the SETAM, therefore, the three-step process as discussed below, directed the development of study’s main research questions (see Section 1.3.2).

### Step 1: How can we identify needs?

The first step describes the NEPS Continuum of Support (CoS) (DES 2007a), which is an effective process for identifying students’ SEN (see Section 2.4.2 for a detailed description of how students’ needs are identified in Irish primary schools using the CoS). A problem-solving model of assessment and intervention, which aims to provide direction to schools on how to ‘gather and analyse data’, as well as how to ‘plan and review the progress of individual pupils’ (DES 2017b, p.6) is also presented within the Guidelines and is illustrated below.



**Figure 3. 5: The Problem-Solving Process within the Continuum of Support Framework (taken from DES 2017b, p.7)**

This ongoing cycle of ‘assessment, target setting, intervention and review’ (DES 2017a, p.28) can be used at all stages of this three-step process. Figure 2.7 (Section 2.4.2.1) provides a list of strategies and resources which can be used to collect evidence and identify students’ needs at each stage of the CoS, which informs the plans written up at

these three stages. Step 3, below, speaks further to the use of such plans which comprise the Student Support File.

### Step 2: How can we meet needs?

Following the successful identification of students' needs, this second step emphasises the importance of effective teaching and learning strategies, early intervention and prevention programmes and informed target-setting to meet those needs. A variety of effective teaching methodologies and approaches to facilitate differentiation and support the inclusion of all students are outlined in the Guidelines. The role of both the CT and the SET are briefly described in relation to these methodologies. The SETAM (DES 2017a) and the accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) recommend that some resources provided to schools should be used for early intervention programmes, due to the strong, international evidence-base behind such practices. A number of programmes are described in the Guidelines, such as *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development* programme, whereby resources are deployed into junior classes in the form of station-teaching. The SETAM encourages use of resources for in-class support which mirrors international trends of moving away from withdrawal services (see Section 3.2). Models of support used in practice to facilitate this in-class support are described in detail in section 2.6, where collaboration, the benefits and challenges of co-teaching, and Friend and Bursuck's (2012) co-teaching approaches are discussed.

### Step 3: How can we monitor and record outcomes for pupils with special educational needs?

The Guidelines describe the importance of overseeing a whole-school approach to monitoring and recording of progress. In order to determine the student's current level of performance, teachers use a variety of assessments including teacher-designed tests, checklists, samples of work, observation, etc., which should lead to the establishment of specific targets to be achieved within a defined timeframe, followed by monitoring and recording of the student's progress. Monitoring students' progress is an essential component within the implementation steps of the SETAM (DES 2017a), which should encompass a range of activities carried out by the CT and/or SET to ensure the school has a clear understanding of the quality of the teaching and learning that has taken place (Baldwin 2018). In order to effectively monitor students' progress, the aforementioned

assessment strategies, as well as the strategies outlined in Figure 2.7 can be used. Forms of assessment of learning (AoL), such as standardised assessments, are necessary to gather appropriate information on students' outcomes and provide a summary of what the student has achieved at fixed points, such as following an intervention, at the end of an agreed timeframe of support, or at the end of an academic year (NCCA 2007; DES 2011b). Assessment for learning (AfL) is used more frequently and informally to provide feedback (NCCA 2007) which informs current and future teaching (DES 2011b; Bonner and Chen 2019), and therefore, should lead to adaptations and adjustments within the support plans. Monitoring of student progress also includes consultation between all key stakeholders. Meetings involving relevant personnel are organised towards the beginning of the school year to design an IEP (or School Support Plus Plan) for students who are not benefiting from the regular education programme provided by the school (see Section 2.4.2). These plans are used to guide the desired teaching and learning over a set period of time. As targets and learning outcomes are developed collaboratively, involving the school, the parents and the students (where appropriate), the IEP/School Support Plus Plan can be used to monitor students' progress by regularly reviewing if priority learning needs have been met or are continuing to be of focus. A formal review of the IEP/School Support Plus Plan, in consultation with the parents, is usually conducted at the beginning of the second school term, whereby it is established if the student is achieving the specified goals laid out in the plan and to make further recommendations to adapt or amend the plan to enable the student to achieve targets which may not have been reached (NCSE 2006a).

Recording pupil progress is also an essential aspect involved in the 'ongoing cycle of assessment, target setting, intervention and review' (DES 2017a, p.22) under the SETAM. The Student Support File is outlined within the Guidelines as an effective tool to plan interventions and to track a student's pathway through the CoS, by facilitating teachers in 'documenting progress and needs over time and assists them in providing an appropriate level of support to pupils, in line with their level of need' (DES 2017b, p.10). According to the DES Review of the Pilot of the SETAM, the use of Student Support Files increased in many of the participating schools throughout the pilot year, and the assessment information within these files was being used as a basis for 'planning decisions, to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions and to gauge progress in relation to targets set for students' (DES 2016b, p.23). All information specific to each

individual student is stored in this one document, including a log of actions, behavioural contracts, reviews and any documentation from external agencies such as psychological reports, speech and language assessments, etc. The Student Support File also includes a range of support plans, including the Classroom Support Plan, School Support Plan and/or School Support Plus Plan (see Section 2.4.2). It is important to note that, generally, under the SETAM, IEPs have transitioned to School Support Plus Plans, yet the use of the term IEP still remains common practice in some schools. While the Guidelines (DES 2007a; DES 2017b) suggest the use of the aforementioned plans when planning for and documenting the progress of students with SEN under the CoS, the sole use of these templates is not compulsory, as

Many different types of support plans can be included in the support file. A support plan can take the form of a general plan for support, a behavioural plan or contract, an individual profile and learning programme, an individual educational plan or a personalised pupil plan. The support plan format suggested in this document is just one example of formats, and schools may wish to modify and adapt, as appropriate.

(DES 2017b, p.11).

These documents not only facilitate planning but also enable effective monitoring and record-keeping. CTs may also keep more informal records such as samples of students' work within the Student Support File. This plethora of information is useful in providing a complete overview of the strengths, abilities and needs of the student, which facilitates a more seamless progression if students are being supported by new teachers in following academic years and is a useful resource for students' transition into secondary school. It is also valuable for monitoring where exactly each student is placed on the Continuum and if they have, or need to, move up or down the Continuum throughout their years in primary school.

This section detailed the main aspects of the DES Guidelines, which accompanied Circular 0013/2017. The key principles which underpin this new model were firstly described, followed by an outline of the three-step process to assist with the identification of needs, the deployment of resources and the monitoring and recording of student outcomes. These Guidelines provide direction for teachers to effectively implement the SETAM on the ground, using the resources they have been allocated. The following section describes the allocation process of the SETAM, i.e., how schools are distributed supports based on the profiled educational need of the school.

### **3.3.4 School Profiles**

The SETAM (DES 2017a) aims to provide a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to schools, based on that school's educational profile. Therefore, a needs-based profile is created for each school which consists of two key components; the baseline component and the school's educational profile component (DES 2014; DES 2017a).

#### ***3.3.4.1 Baseline Component***

The baseline component refers to an allocation of teaching resources provided to every mainstream school to support 'inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention', which is based on enrolment numbers (DES 2017a, p.6). This allocation represents 20% of the national allowance of SET posts for each academic year. These posts are redistributed, equally and proportionately, to individual schools, based on their overall enrolment numbers from the previous academic year (i.e., the most current Primary Online Database (POD) enrolment data available). This component of the new system facilitates inclusion at a whole-school level as it ensures each school has sufficient SET resources to support all needs currently in the school and any needs of students who may enrol in the school for the duration of the school's profile. This reflects one of the underlying principles of this new model in that all students are welcomed and entitled to enrol in their local school (NCSE 2014b; DES 2017a; DES 2017b). It was made explicit upon introduction of this new model (in Circular 0013/2017 and again in Circular 007/2019) that schools should not misinterpret this baseline allocation as their whole allocation, but rather, schools must consider both the baseline allocation *and* the allocation received under the educational profile in order to gain a complete overview of their school's SET allocation under the SETAM (DES 2017a; DES 2019a). This educational profile, as the second component which makes up the school profile, will be discussed below.

#### ***3.3.4.2 School's Educational Profile Component***

Three elements comprise the educational profile of each school, therefore it is these factors which are taken into consideration for the allocation of resources deployed to schools.

1. 'The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled in the school.
2. The learning support needs of pupils as evidenced by standardised test results.
3. The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.'

(DES 2017a, p.6)

The consideration of these three elements shows a progression between the SETAM and the previous model (DES 2005), as it attempts to recognise some of the realities and complexities within the Context of Practice. Moving away from a system which was somewhat based on a medical model of support (see Section 2.4.4), the school's educational profile, under the SETAM, takes into account a variety of factors which may result in students requiring additional teaching support. Each of these factors are discussed individually below.

### *Complex Needs*

A brief description of what 'complex special educational needs' referred to was outlined in the NCSE (2014b) report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way*. Although not specifically defined, as had been recommended in the DES review of the pilot study (DES 2016b), students with complex needs are described in the report as requiring 'highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are significantly different to what is being provided to their peers' (NCSE 2014b, p. 6). A small number of examples are then provided, stating that complex needs may arise from any one or more of the following:

- 'Very significant difficulties in physical and/or sensory functioning.
- Very significant difficulties in cognitive and adaptive functioning.
- Very significant difficulties in social communication and social interaction, combined with rigid and repetitive patterns of behaviour'.

(NCSE 2014b, p.6)

According to this report, in order to identify students with these complex needs, the 'development of clear and agreed protocols operated with an appropriate level of oversight, by the relevant State agencies (NEPS, HSE and NCSE) and the development of clear descriptors for use by NEPS psychologists and health professionals' (NCSE

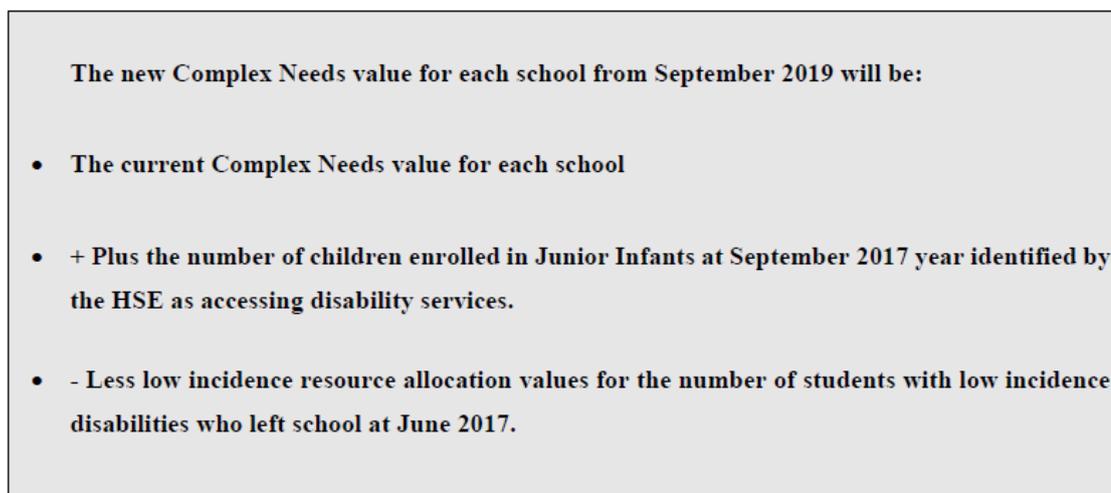
2014b, p.6) would be required. Additionally, recommendations within the DES review of the pilot stated that the ‘Department should establish and publish an agreed definition for complex special educational needs as this is a key constituent of the school profile’ (DES 2016b, p.34). However, upon the introduction and implementation of the SETAM in schools in 2017, the notion of ‘complex needs’ had still not been clearly defined and the proposed development of protocols and descriptors had not occurred. Therefore, the NCSE’s ‘Low Incidence’ allocations from the preceding 2016/17 year were used to establish the complex needs component for the 2017/18 academic year (DES 2017a). Intentions to adjust the criteria for this component for future re-profiling of schools were set out in Circular 0013/2017, as it noted that this model would ‘take account of the decision making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children’s Disability Network Teams’ for future identification of students with complex needs (DES 2017a, p.8; DES 2019a).

This intention came to fruition two years later with the re-profiling of schools for September 2019. According to Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a) the HSE’s procedures for determining access to the Children’s Disability Network Teams, as outlined in the National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay (HSE 2019b), would now be considered to identify new entrants in the complex needs category. Therefore, it can also be suggested that schools may now abide by the definition of ‘complex needs’ which is provided in this policy as

one or more impairments which contribute to a range of significant functional difficulties that require the services and support of an interdisciplinary disability team  
(HSE 2019b, p.13)

In addition to this, a revision of the complex needs component was presented in Circular 007/2019, which would come into effect for the re-profiling of schools from September 2019. The adjustments involved in this revision meant that for each year, as the model is updated, children who were accessing, or qualified for access to, the Children’s Disability Network Team services, who enrolled in Junior Infants in each school year from 2017/18 onwards would be supported under the ‘complex needs’ allocation. Furthermore, students with, what were previously described as LI disabilities (under the RTH Model) would be supported under the school’s overall profiled allocation. Students within the new ‘complex needs’ data set are a sub-set of the cohort with LI disabilities who would

previously have qualified for resourse teaching hours, as they have been identified by the HSE as having ‘the greatest level of functioning need’ (DES 2019a, p.8). The new complex needs value for each school is being implemented on a staged basis with the ‘junior infant entrants in any given school year identified as the new complex needs data set, replacing the previous year’s 6th class low incidence allocation leavers’ (DES 2019a, p.9), as is illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 3. 6: The Revised Complex Needs Value (DES 2019a, p. 10)**

In accordance with the staged approach to the revision of the complex needs value, as set out in Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), one year’s complex needs student data was adjusted for the review of the SETAM in 2019, which involved the Junior Infant enrolments for the 2017/18 school year. An additional value of 3.5 hours is given to the school’s allocation per child identified as having complex needs. As this allocation is intended to build the overall school profile, students in the ‘complex needs’ category are not necessarily entitled to these specific hours, as they would have been under the previous NCSE RTH Model (DES 2005). Rather, these hours are provided to the school to deploy as they see fit, based on each child’s learning needs, and therefore, matching the greatest level of need within the school with the greatest level of support, in accordance with the Guidelines (DES 2017b). ‘Low incidence’ values were maintained for all other students for whom allocations were previously provided in the complex needs category and would continue to be maintained until such students leave the school (DES 2019a). Hours allocated under the RTH Model for students with LI disabilities in sixth

class for the previous 2016/17 school year were then deducted, resulting in the new complex needs value for the 2019/20 school year.

Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a) also made reference to students who may have emerging complex needs throughout their school life or students with complex needs who may transfer from one school to another, stating that the overall SET allocation (baseline component and school's educational profile) is intended to adequately resource the school to cater for such emerging needs. This system, according to the Circular, allows for a certain amount of movement throughout the school as it is projected that those entering the school with emerging or additional needs would be broadly balanced by those leaving the school. Considering this, apart from exceptional circumstances whereby a school profile changes significantly<sup>22</sup>, 'adjustments will not be made to the overall school profile over the course of the model to account for normal pupil movement or where some pupils have been assessed as having additional needs' (DES 2019a, p.12).

### ***Standardised Test Results***

Standardised tests results are included in building the school's educational profile to indicate the overall student educational achievement in schools. As recommended by the NCSE Working Group (2014), this data provides a broad and objective basis for distinguishing the differences in educational attainment between schools and ensures that the allocation provided to schools is based not only on enrolment numbers, but also on the learning-needs of the school, as identified by literacy and numeracy scores (DES 2017a).

In order to calculate the standardised test value for the introduction of the SETAM in September 2017, an aggregate of primary school Maths and English standardised test results over 2013/14 and 2014/15 was used. Data of students performing at or below a STen score of 4 in these tests were included in this value. The percentage of students who were exempted from completing the standardised tests, or those who attained a STen score of 1 were assigned the highest weighting when developing the school's educational profile. Graduated weightings were then given for the percentage of students who achieved a STen score of 2, 3, and 4 (DES 2017a). For the re-profiling of schools from

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<sup>22</sup> In such exceptional circumstances, a review process is available to consider these changes to the school profile which could not have been anticipated, and to make adjustments to allocations for schools where necessary (DES 2019a).

September 2019, an aggregate of four years' standardised test results data [2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17] were used to develop the values for primary schools. This provides an accurate account of a school's education profile over a period of time and ensures that 'schools are not penalised for improving performances generally, or over a shorter period of time' (DES 2019a, p.14). The allocations given to schools for this component of the educational profile are, therefore, aimed to reflect and cater for the 'actual level' of learning needs within each school (DES 2017a, p.10).

This new model has replaced the GAM/EAL and NCSE allocations, whereby a general provision for EAL support was provided, giving schools flexibility and control over the deployment of their resources to cater for language needs and learning needs as were required within each school (DES 2012). Under the SETAM, schools will continue to provide support to students with EAL needs through resources secured in their profiled allocation, as the standardised test scores reflect literacy difficulties in schools, and the social context survey (discussed in the following section) took EAL needs into account. Although schools are not generally provided with additional resources for students with specific EAL needs, schools with high concentrations of students with EAL can apply for 'Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Pupils that require Language Support' (DES 2017a, p.13).

### ***Social Context: Disadvantage***

According to an ERSI study on the prevalence of SEN, conducted by Banks and McCoy (2011), students (particularly boys) from working-class backgrounds are more likely to be identified as having SEN, than their middle-class counterparts. This finding, along with patterns of high SEN concentrations found in DEIS schools (particularly Urban Band 1 DEIS schools), highlighted the potential inadequacy of failing to consider social class within the previous SET funding model (DES 2005). Therefore, the NCSE Working Group (2014) recommended that under the SETAM, a school's social context should be considered when developing the school's educational profile, as the 'socioeconomic status of pupils is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs' (DES 2017a, p.11). The inclusion of such under the SETAM, therefore, addresses some of the shortcomings of the previous allocation model (DES 2005). In order to calculate schools' social contexts in terms of disadvantage, for the introduction of the SETAM in 2017, a social context survey was conducted in 2014.

For the revised profiled allocation in September 2019, data from the POD and Central Statistics Office (CSO) data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas, as represented in the Haase Pratschke Index of Deprivation (HP Index), was used to update the disadvantage component of the social context element of the school's educational profile. The HP Index is a 'method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area' which comprises variables such as 'demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates' to indicate the level of 'concentrated disadvantage' within the student population of schools (DES 2019a, p.15). According to Egan (2013, p.245) the use of the HP Index is useful in 'ensuring that policy interventions and investments are targeted towards the areas of greatest need'. At the time of her study, which critically examined and analysed the GAM (DES 2005), Egan recommended the use of the HP Index at a national level to identify the social needs of students, arguing that it was 'arbitrary to resource schools based on the number of classroom teachers, without consideration of diversity of school population and its needs' (Egan 2013, p.248). The inclusion of the HP Index for the revised profiles in 2019, therefore, may suggest that the current model (DES 2017a) has built upon the shortcomings of the GAM, which acted as the Context of Influence for its development, emphasising the cyclical notion of Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle.

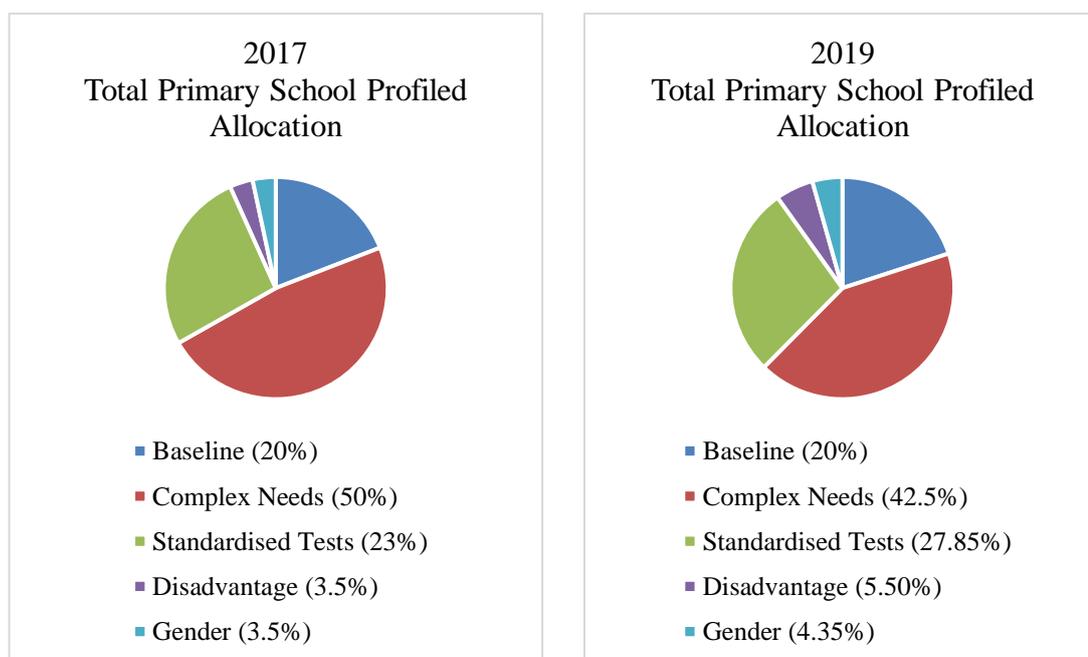
#### ***Social Context: Gender***

According to international evidence there is a higher incidence of SEN among boys (Banks and McCoy 2011), with the overall male to female ratio in special education between 2:1 and 3:1 (Mitchell 2015a). Therefore, the NCSE Working Group Report (2014b, p.42), asserted that 'gender is an important factor in determining the educational profile of a school for the purpose of allocating additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs'. Gender was a feature which influenced the allocations provided under the previous GAM, as differing allocation ratios applied for boys, girls, mixed, and disadvantaged schools (DES 2005). In line with the Working Group's (NCSE 2014b) recommendation, gender is recognised as a vital component which must be taken into consideration when providing resources to schools and so it is factored into the 'social context' element of the school's education profile component under the SETAM.

Gender differentials are accounted for as a small, additional weighting is given to schools based on the number of boys attending each school.

#### ***3.3.4.3 Total Primary School Profiled Allocation (2017 v 2019)***

Additional teaching supports under the SETAM remained in place initially for a two-year period (2017/18 and 2018/19), as recommended in the NCSE Working Group Report (2014). The SETAM was then reviewed for September 2019 and will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis, to ensure it is a responsive model which will reflect the ‘changes in the enrolments and profiles of schools’ (DES 2019a, p.3). In line with this, revised profiled allocations were again due to be considered for schools from September 2021, however, this has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations. Therefore, the existing SET allocations, as notified to schools in 2019 (DES 2019a; DES 2019c) will be maintained for the 2021/22 academic year (DoE 2021b), with re-profiled allocations now due to be made from September 2022. The latest review for 2019 saw adjustments to the School Profiles, as discussed within the baseline component and school’s educational profile component above. Changes which occurred as a result of this re-profiling of schools were described throughout these discussions and are clearly illustrated below:



**Figure 3. 7: Total Primary School Profiled Allocation Before and After the Review of the SETAM**

*Data Source: Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a)*

As illustrated in the above diagram, some changes have occurred, on the re-profiling of school allocations, to the percentage of allocations assigned to each component. 20% of the total allocation continues to be assigned to the baseline component. While this figure remains unchanged, an increase/decrease in percentages of the allocation assigned to other elements, such as those within the school’s educational profile component, is evident. The complex needs allocations have been reduced from 50% of the total profiled allocation in 2017 to 42.5% in 2019. This reflects the new complex needs value (as discussed above) and allowed for the redistribution of the allocation to other categories. Standardised test results increased from 23% to 27.85% of the total allocation for primary schools, while 5.5% of the allocation was assigned to disadvantage in 2019 in comparison to 3.5% in 2017. 4.35% of the overall allocation is now designated for gender, after increasing from 3.5% in the 2017 allocations.

Adjustments to allocations within the re-profiling of schools for September 2019 took place on a graduated basis to facilitate a smooth transition from the previous allocations to this profiled model. As stated in Circular 007/2019, most schools (70%) saw no change to their allocations, as they maintained their existing allocation. Where

adjustments did occur, some schools had a ‘retained element’, which is ‘the portion of the allocation which is over and above what the profile indicates should be allocated for the school’ (DES 2019a, p.1). When this was the case, schools received the full allocation as indicated by their profile and also retained 80% of this ‘retained element’. 20% of the retained element was then distributed elsewhere, i.e., to schools who required additional resources as indicated by their profiles. However, this reduction only applied to schools who had a retained element to their allocation of greater than 10 hours. Required reductions of 10 hours or less were considered too minor to be applied as a 20% reduction of such would result in reductions of 2 hours or less per school, therefore, to minimise disruption in schools, small loses (such as this) were not applied. Similarly, small gains were not applied as upwards adjustments within the re-profiling of schools abided by the same criteria as the downwards adjustments (described above). Therefore, increases were also capped to 20% for schools which were due to gain in excess of 10 hours (DES 2019a).

This section aimed to provide a complete overview of the SETAM (2017a) to date. Firstly, a rationale for proposing this new model was offered, based on relevant DES and NCSE publications. Following this, the benefits and challenges associated with the SETAM, according to the findings of a pilot study (DES 2016b), were highlighted. The DES Guidelines (2017b), which were provided to schools to assist with the implementation of this model, were then outlined. The latter end of this section intended to explain how additional special education teaching resources are allocated to Irish primary schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Each component of the school profile was described in detail including any changes which occurred as a result of the re-profiled allocations, as set out in Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a). While these policy documents were thoroughly examined to obtain such information, discourse analysis, as per the theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), was also conducted to reveal the values and assumptions underpinning the development of the policies. Therefore, as this study concerns itself with policy analysis, the following section presents Ball’s (1994) Policy Cycle as the over-arching conceptual framework of the study, detailing the contexts of policymaking, found in his work, with particular attention given to the Context of Practice, as this study aims to examine the SETAM within this Context, i.e., in Irish primary schools.

### **3.4 Theoretical Framework: Policy Analysis**

The SETAM, as described in the previous sections, was introduced to provide a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs in Irish primary schools, based on that school's educational profile (DES 2017a). This research intended to delve into fundamental concepts of this policy document, with specific recognition of the changes and comparisons between the SETAM and the pre-existing allocation model (DES 2005). It also set out to examine and analyse how the key stakeholders have implemented and negotiated these policy changes within the Context of Practice and to explore the effectiveness of this policy in terms of the education and inclusion of students (Egan 2013). This section will explore the process involved in linking national policies to localised policies and practices within the context of schools and classrooms through a discussion of Policy as Cycle, developed by Stephen Ball, Richard Bowe and Anne Gold (Bowe *et al.* 1992). This theoretical framework, which recognises the complexity of policy within implementation sites, underpins the analysis of the SETAM throughout this study. While largely concerned with the Context of Practice, this study considers the full cycle to firstly, unearth how teachers are implementing the SETAM on the ground, offering an insight into the perspectives and experiences of the key stakeholders of the implementation process, and then, by identifying areas of success and potential areas for improvement within this system, the findings of this study hope to inform and contribute to the overall cycle as it evolves into the future.

#### **3.4.1 Policy Cycle**

Throughout Chapters One and Two, international and national policies were outlined in order to convey the historical background in relation to special education and inclusion in Ireland, to highlight the impact international policies had on framing the Irish education system's stance towards inclusion, and to provide a context for the study being undertaken. Although a surge in the development of special education policy is evident internationally and in Ireland within recent decades (Banks and McCoy 2011; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015), it is important to explore how much of the policy intent is actually enacted on the ground, as Egan (2013, p.42) states that 'depending on policy to change practice has a long history of failure'. According to her work, which is also underpinned by Ball's (1994) theoretical framework, policies can be 'enacted' or re-enacted in the Context of Practice. This gap between policy

development and policy implementation in schools is documented within the literature (Mainardes 2010; Rose *et al.* 2017; Schulte 2018; Giudici 2020), and is reiterated by Day (2007, p.21) who asserts that ‘change as a result of research, policy and legislation can be slow and is often resisted’.

It is imperative to examine policy formation with regard to the relationship between the State and those who implement policies on the ground (i.e., teachers in schools). The extent to which the State determines the policymaking process is a key factor as it results in the scope available to teachers to re-interpret the policy text in practice (Lall 2012). Dale (1989) advocated a State-centred approach to policy formation, which is consistent with a State-controlled approach, as they both view the State as the primary actor, holding a central, dominating position in the policymaking process with minimal influence from others (Lall 2012). Two models used to study implementation within educational policy arise in the literature: the top-down model and the bottom-up model (Matland 1995). The former reflects the State-controlled and State-centred approach and encompasses the ‘hierarchical nature’ of policy formation (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006, p.687). In accordance with an *external* top-down model, workings within the school are intended to reflect ‘external authorities’ demands’ (Gornitzka *et al.* 2005, p.357) and therefore, often start with a governmental policy decision. Many educationalists, including Bowe *et al.* (1992), disapprove of this top-down approach, which is noted as ‘fairly ineffective’ (Veugelers *et al.* 2005, p.36) for educational reform. *Internal* top-down models are similar in nature but reflect the ambitions of the school rather than those from outside establishments. Lack of teacher participation involved in top-down approaches is a factor which contributes to dissatisfaction towards policy implementation in schools (Mainardres 2010). Promoters of the bottom-up model contend that policy needs to be viewed from the perspective of those at the micro-level in which it directly impacts and those delivering the services on the ground (i.e., students and teachers), to gain a more realistic understanding of its implementation (Matland 1995). This is further discussed below with reference to the Policy as Cycle approach (Ball 1994).

Ball’s (1990; 1994) position on policymaking is in contrast to that of Dale (1989) as he deployed a Policy Cycle perspective which ‘shifted the research attention from State level analysis to individual practitioner’s consideration’ (Chun-Lok and Wing-Yan 2010, p.20). Bowe *et al.* (1992) promote a continuous Policy Cycle which is underpinned by

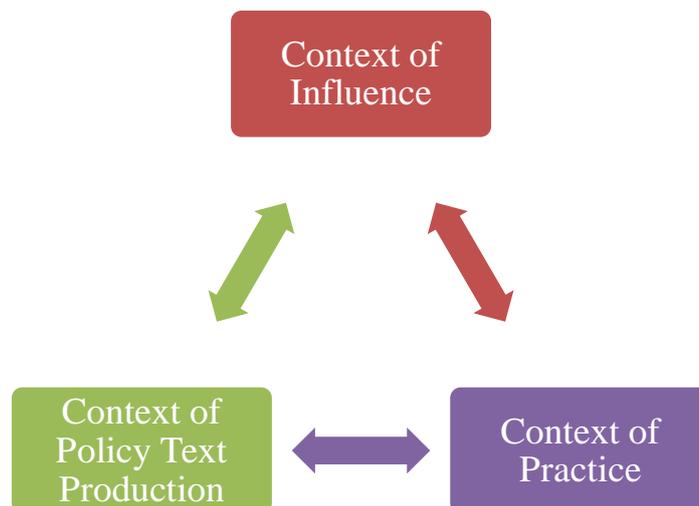
the involvement of practitioners in the generation and implementation of policy. While they criticise the linear, macro-based analysis of the State-controlled approach which ‘silences’ the voice of key stakeholders in the policy implementation process (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006; Lall 2012), it can then be suggested that the Policy Cycle approach gives a voice to the teachers, parents and students in which the policy impacts. Ball (1993) agrees with Ozga’s (1990, p.359) plea to ‘bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people’s perception and experiences’. Within the Policy Cycle; *Bowe et al.* (1992) reject policy as a top-down linear approach from its origin of development to its implementation or practice (Looney 2001; Mainardes 2010; Egan 2013). This concurs with the view of McSpadden McNeil and Coppola (2006, p.687) who claim that the top-down model, whereby policy flows from State agencies down to schools, families and ultimately the key stakeholders; students, results in an ‘unequal power relationship between those who design and legislate the policy and those who are to carry it out or be impacted by it’. The work of Stephen Ball and his colleagues propose a conceptual framework of Policy as Cycle; an approach which acknowledges the complexity of educational policy (Giudici 2020) as an ongoing process (Chun-Lok and Wing-Yan 2010), rather than a product, and argues that policy consists of interlinking dimensions instead of the aforementioned linear model or top-down approach (Mainardes 2010; Giudici 2020). Ball’s analytical framework of Policy Cycle will be further discussed below, with reference to the three policy contexts outlined in his early work (*Bowe et al.* 1992) and the further two contexts suggested in his later work (Ball 1994).

### **3.4.2 Contexts of Policymaking**

The conceptual framework developed by Ball (1990) and *Bowe et al.* (1992) views policy as a cycle, implying that policies are created and recreated in different contexts (Lall 2012; Egan 2013). Their work specifies three key policy contexts in which policies are remade and reworked, with each competing context involving public and private arenas of action, compromise and ad hocery (*Bowe et al.* 1992; Goodwyn and Findlay 2009; Lall 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016).

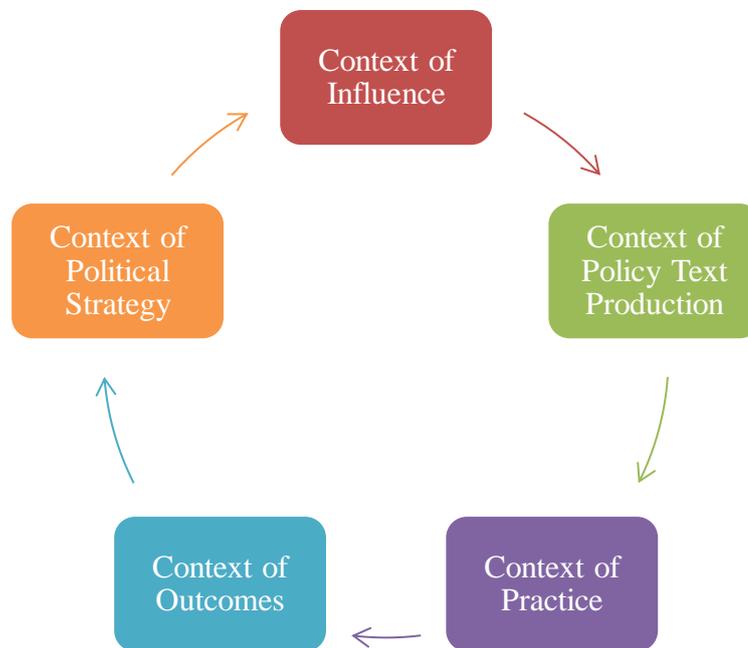
The first of these contexts is the Context of Influence, which is where interest groups struggle over the construction of policy discourses (Lall 2012), policy is initiated

(Bowe *et al.* 1992) and key concepts are established (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). Leading on from this, texts, such as official policy documents and legal texts which represent and embody the policies, are created within the Context of Policy Text Production. Informal documents which help to make sense (Bowe *et al.* 1992), explain or provide guidance on the policies are also produced at this stage. Interpretation and re-interpretation are key processes within this context as authors cannot control the meanings of their texts (Ball 1993; Lall 2012), therefore, these texts must be read and understood in relation to the time and site of their production and with regard to one another or other relevant texts (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Aubrey and Durmaz 2012). The third context, the Context of Practice, is the main focus of this study as it is where policy is subject to interpretation and recreation as it is recontextualised (Egan 2013). Therefore, the effects and consequences produced by the policy may not identically reflect the original policy intent (Mainardes 2010; Giudici 2020). The agency within the Context of Practice is powerful as the differences between policy implementation and its actual enactment in this context contribute to policy development. This is not the end of the process as policy cyclically returns (Aubrey and Durmaz 2012) to the first context – the Context of Influence, whereby the cycle will begin once again. Thus, according to this theoretical framework, educational policy is a dynamic concept rather than a static notion which leads to the cycle as illustrated in Ball’s study with Bowe and Gold (Bowe *et al.* 1992):



**Figure 3. 8: The Policy Cycle: Contexts of Policymaking (Bowe *et al.* 1992)**

Ball (1994) later extended this framework as he recognised the need for a link between the Context of Practice and the Context of Influence. He added two further contexts to act as a feedback loop from the micro level back to the macro level (Lall 2012). The Context of Outcomes identifies the impact of policies on existing social inequalities. Analysis within this context relates to issues of justice, equality and individual freedom (Ball 1994; Lall 2012; Egan 2013). The subsequent and final context, the Context of Political Strategy, involves the identification of political activities which may effectively tackle the inequalities recognised in the preceding Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994; Mainardes 2010). This context acts as the feedback loop into the Context of Influence (Lall 2012) leading to a continuous Policy Cycle.



**Figure 3. 9: The Continuous Policy Cycle (Ball 1994)**

This study considers the full Policy Cycle, as outlined in the above diagram; however, the main focus of the study is on the Context of Practice where policy is being implemented. Many others have adopted Ball’s (1994) theoretical framework in more recent years, including Looney (2001), Mainardes (2010), Lall (2012), Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2013) and Egan (2013). Looney (2001) and Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2013) discuss the involvement of practitioners in the policymaking process. Cochran-Smith and colleagues (2013, p.8) present a ‘politics of policy’ framework, whereby they argue that ‘policies

governing teacher education are not developed and enacted at a single level by a single agency, but at multiple levels'. This suggests the 'interconnected roles of those developing and implementing policy' (Reagan *et al.* 2016, p.4). Looney (2001, p.157) further explores this concept, with its underlying assumption that practitioners are included in the policymaking process, describing it as a multi-layered process, with each layer 'requiring its own analysis and each analysis having to take account of the other layers in the process'. In light of this, Looney maintains that upon implementation of policy, there is always interpretation, therefore, in the Context of Practice, practitioners develop their own understandings of policy and decide on the most appropriate way to enact such policy within their own practice. As a result of this process the 'simplicity of the linear is replaced by the complexity of the cyclical' (Looney 2001, p.157), which is further discussed in the following section with specific reference to analysis underpinning the SETAM (DES 2017a) throughout this study.

#### **3.4.2.1 The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in the Context of Practice**

Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle was adopted as the overarching analytical framework for this research. Within the Context of Practice many personnel are involved in the policy generation and implementation process, with interconnected roles. As recognised by Bowe *et al.* (1992), the policy process is complex in that it is not simply received, accepted and precisely implemented by schools, but rather interpreted, remade and reworked by those in charge of implementation on the ground (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006; Aubrey and Durmaz 2012) as

Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of the policy. Policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests which make up any arena differ. The simple point is that policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc. Furthermore, yet again, interpretation is a matter of struggle. Different interpretations will be in contest, as they relate to different interests, one or other interpretation will predominate, although deviant or minority readings may be important.

(Bowe *et al.* 1992, p.22)

The original intent of policy may not be reflected in its effects (Mainardes 2010; Rose *et al.* 2017; Giudici 2020), due to the intentional or unintentional practices of those who interpret and ultimately implement the policy, as elucidated by Bowe *et al.* (1992) above,

which will be discussed below in relation to analysis of the SETAM (DES 2017a), as the main focus of this study.

The Context of Practice, as specified by Bowe *et al.* (1992), underpinned the analysis of the implementation process of the SETAM (DES 2017a) throughout this study. In September 2017, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) was issued to all teachers in Ireland to advise schools of the revised SET allocation process, which would replace the pre-existing GAM, EAL scheme and NCSE RTH Model (DES 2005). As a policy text, and in accordance with Ball's Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Looney 2001; Lall 2012; Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2013; Egan 2013), this document was open to interpretation by school principals, teachers and staff who would construct their own meaning of the policy based on their understanding, histories, experiences and interests (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006; Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020) as they set about its implementation. Guidelines, which accompanied this policy document, were available to schools and provided direction on the 'use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs' (DES 2017b, p.3). Although these policy texts offered information and guidance on this new policy, those charged with implementation (Aubrey and Durmaz 2012) of the SETAM in the Context of Practice still had to negotiate the changes involved with this new policy. Thus, in accordance with Ball's Policy Cycle, teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, find themselves involved in the making or shaping of policy (Watson and Michael 2016). Therefore, it was critical to unveil the workings of the SETAM in practice and offer an insight into the perspectives and experiences of the key stakeholders of the implementation process, which, in turn, may inform the Context of Outcomes, the Context of Political Strategy and the overall cycle as it evolves into the future.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In order to reflect the complexities involved with implementing inclusion on the ground, in-depth analysis was necessary for this study. Underpinned by the study's theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992), the Context of Influence and Context of Policy Text Production of the SETAM were examined throughout this chapter. Previous allocation models in Ireland that preceded and influenced the development of the SETAM were reviewed and a number of studies (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b), which provided a rationale for the development of a new national allocation

system and therefore, paved the way for the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a), were analysed. Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), its accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) and Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), were then studied as the crucial texts produced in line with this new policy.

This chapter aimed to present Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle as the over-arching theoretical framework adopted for this study. This framework views policy as a cyclical notion involving multiple levels and agencies (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2013). Appreciating the complex nature of policy generation and implementation, Ball and his colleagues view policy as a process rather than a product, which is remade and reworked in a variety of contexts (Reagan *et al.* 2016), rather than something which is imposed onto people (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). The full cycle, describing all five contexts of policymaking outlined in Ball's (1994) work, was presented throughout this chapter. As this study is concerned with how the SETAM, as a special education policy, is being applied in schools, the teacher is at the core of the examination. This theoretical framework acknowledges the role of the teacher in the making and shaping of policy (Watson and Michael 2016) and so, this study seeks to analyse the SETAM from the perspective of this key stakeholder, in the Context of Practice, firstly, to reveal how they are 'making' this policy happen on the ground, by highlighting effective practice, and secondly, to identify areas which may be ineffective in practice to 'shape' or influence the future development of inclusive policies.

This study contributes to the extant literature surrounding policy analysis and inclusive education. Through examination of this under-studied, but critically important, aspect of the Irish education system, findings of this research will contribute to filling an identified gap in the existing literature. In-depth analysis of the implementation sites of the SETAM, i.e., mainstream primary schools, was carried out to extend our understanding of current special education policy. Chapter Four outlines the methodological approaches adopted to achieve this and provides a rationale for choosing such methods.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

A comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to inclusion and special education policies, both internationally and nationally, was offered in the previous chapters. Throughout this chapter, the research questions which directed the study are firstly presented. A review of the methodological literature was carried out to determine the theoretical paradigm and research design which would best address these questions. The researcher deciphered that an amalgam of pragmatic and constructivist paradigms was necessary to achieve the desired purpose of this study (Mertens 2015), thus, the complimentary use of such, along with their epistemological and ontological implications, are discussed. Following this, a rationale describing the appropriateness of the mixed-methods research design is provided. Online surveys, which included some open-ended, qualitative-based questions, along with semi-structured interviews, are described as the data collection instruments. The subsequent section illustrates the sample of the study, including details of the implementation sites which were examined. The process of quantitative data analysis involving the use of Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is then described, followed by a description of the qualitative data analysis process, whereby NVivo 12 was used for transcription and coding. Section 4.8 outlines the ethical considerations involved in educational research and provides a description of the steps undertaken by the researcher to adhere to ethical guidelines (Farquhar 2012) within this study. Finally, efforts to enhance the overall validity, reliability and reflexivity of this work, while also acknowledging the limitations of the study, are presented.

#### **4.2 Research Questions**

This study set out to examine the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools by unveiling how teachers on the ground are working with, and adjusting to, the changes associated with the implementation of this model. The study centred on how policy affects the key stakeholders of its implementation in the Context of Practice, which is reflected in the study's main research question:

- ❖ How are teachers implementing the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in schools?

Steps recommended within the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b) directed this study's three key research questions, which aim to answer the main question presented above.

1. How are students' needs identified under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?
2. How are special education teaching resources allocated to effectively meet students' needs under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?
3. How are students' outcomes monitored and recorded under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model?

#### **4.2.1 Embedded Questions**

The following, more specific, embedded questions assisted the researcher in further exploring the research topic:

- What do teachers consider the benefits/challenges of the SETAM?
- Has practice changed since the introduction of the SETAM, if so, how?
- Was this policy change a top-down or bottom-up approach?
- What supports (including ITE and CPD) have been given to teachers in relation to the implementation of the SETAM?
- What models of support are most frequently used under the SETAM?
- What systems are in place in schools to effectively monitor, evaluate and record students' outcomes?

The paradigm which guided the current research and underpinned the research design, with its epistemological and ontological implications, will be discussed in the following section, providing a rationale for the methods used to obtain the desired knowledge and understandings (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

### 4.3 Paradigm

The concept of ‘paradigm’ was first used by Thomas Kuhn (1962) to mean a ‘philosophical way of thinking’ (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017, p.26) and continues to be used in educational research to describe a ‘way of looking at the world’ (Mertens 2015). A paradigm is composed of a set of beliefs, assumptions and principles that shape how a researcher sees the world (Lather 1986). It guides and directs thinking and research action, not only in terms of the methods chosen, but in ‘ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways’ (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p.105; Mertens 2015), which is discussed in relation to the current study in Section 4.3.1. Prior to engaging in research, one must decipher their own philosophical orientation as defined by a paradigm as it is through this conceptual lens which the methodological aspects of the research will be examined (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). In the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) three questions are identified that help define a paradigm:

1. The ontological question asks, “What is the nature of reality?”
2. The epistemological question asks, “What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known?”
3. The methodological question asks, “How can the knower go about obtaining the desired knowledge and understandings?”

The choice of a paradigm, underpinned by the ‘worldview’ of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Creswell 2014) determines the intent, motivation and expectations for the research (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006) and significantly influences all decision-making throughout the research process, i.e., ‘what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results of the study should be interpreted’ (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017, p.26).

A pragmatic paradigm was firstly adopted for this study to facilitate a mixed-methods design that included concurrent collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide an in-depth analysis (Mertens 2015) of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools. Online surveys and semi-structured interviews were utilised (discussed in Section 4.5), as according to many scholars, including Johnson *et al.* (2007), Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), a mixed-methods approach combines the strengths and offsets the weaknesses of stand-alone methods. This ‘fusion

of approaches' (Denscombe 2008, p.273), enabled by a pragmatic paradigm, was necessary for this study as it ensured that in a quantitative manner; the study could reach a larger sample, while in a qualitative manner; the voice of participants could be heard in a meaningful context. This combination aimed to provide a more complete understanding of the research topic (Mertens 2015).

#### **4.3.1 Epistemology and Ontology**

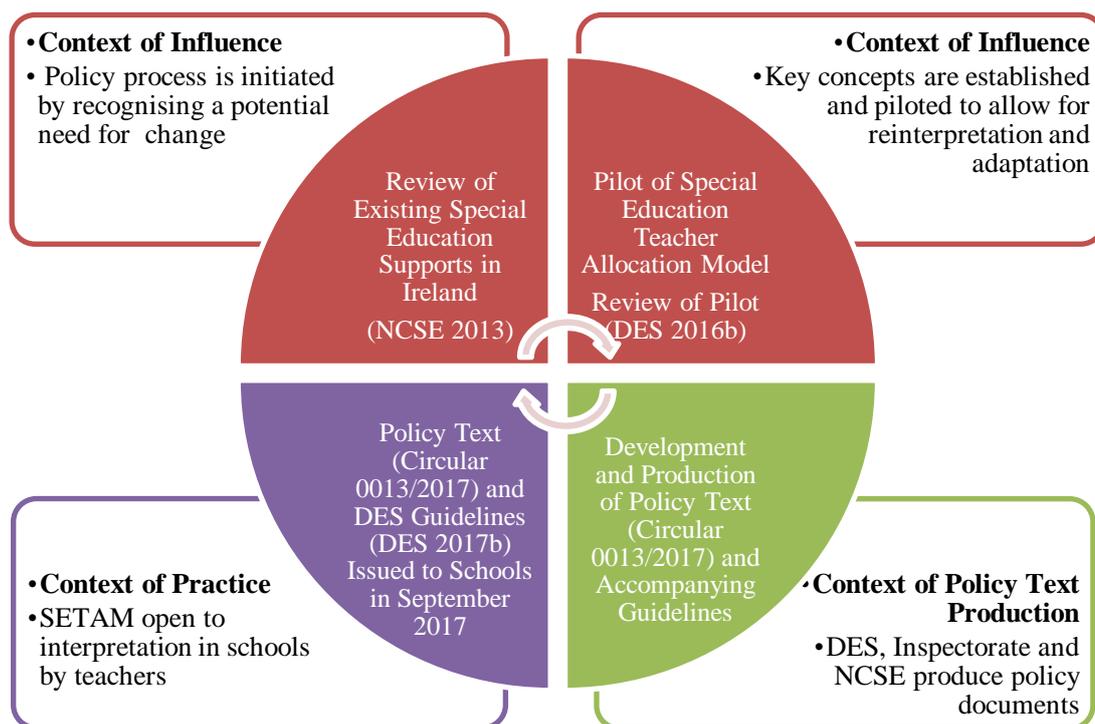
While acknowledging the epistemological stance of a pragmatic paradigm as best fit for the current research by providing scope to the researcher to engage with methods which are deemed appropriate to achieve purpose (Mertens 2015), a constructivist approach was also adopted by the researcher. Constructivism sees the researcher attempt to 'understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it' (Costantino 2008, p.119), which reflects a central aim of this study; to gain an insight into the workings of the SETAM in the Context of Practice and understand the lived experience of teachers. Considering this, the merge of both aforementioned paradigms, resulting in pragmatic constructivism, was an appropriate choice. According to Haas and Haas (2002, p.575), pragmatic constructivism 'provides the explanatory lens' through which this research may be understood, as well as 'the methodological guidelines by which such a process may be pursued' (Haas and Haas 2002, p.575). Epistemologically, the researcher, as a teacher herself, does not claim to be 'distanced' or independent from the research but rather based the criterion for judging the suitability of chosen methods, 'with their implied relationship between the researcher and the researched', on whether they would achieve the desired purpose of the study (Mertens 2015, p.27).

While the paradigm of pragmatic constructivism was adopted by the researcher, the theoretical domain of ontology which underpins the constructivist paradigm was more strongly adhered to for this study. Mertens (2015, p.14) claims that within this domain 'reality is socially constructed'. In keeping with this, concepts such as inclusion and inclusive policy can be viewed as 'socially constructed phenomena' which mean 'different things to different people' (Norwich 2014; Mertens 2015, p.14). This concurs with the aforementioned discussion which traces the varying perceptions of inclusion over time (Section 2.3.1) and recognises that, as individual interpretations of inclusion are formed by practitioners, inclusive education itself has come to mean many different things (Clough and Corbett 2000; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015). Ontologically, this

paradigm also lends itself to the theoretical framework of the study, Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), which identifies policy as a concept which is interpreted, remade and reworked in a number of contexts, and therefore, can also mean different things to different people. This research set out to ‘understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it’ (Mertens 2015, p.13), by investigating what this new policy means to the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools and examining how it is put into practice. The subsequent section presents this continuous Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Looney 2001; Lall 2012; Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2013; Egan 2013) and discusses how the SETAM was analysed through this theoretical lens in order to gain greater understanding of this policy as a process (Egan 2013).

#### **4.4 Theoretical Lens**

As mentioned above, the researcher adopted Ball’s (1994) ‘Policy Cycle’ as the overarching analytical framework for this research. Policy Cycle is underpinned by the involvement of practitioners in the development and implementation of policy (Aubrey and Durmaz 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016) by recognising it as a complex process involving multiple levels and agencies (Giudici 2020), rather than a product which is merely imposed onto people (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). Bowe *et al.* (1992) and Ball (1994) outline competing contexts in which policy is remade and reworked, with each context involving public and private arenas of action, compromise and ad hocery (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Goodwyn and Findlay 2009; Lall 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016). Chapter Three presented this framework in detail (Section 3.4) and examined various policy documents (Section 3.3) through a theoretical lens informed by the work of Stephen Ball and colleagues (Bowe *et al.* 1992), which contributed to the generation and implementation of the SETAM. These policies are incorporated into Ball’s (1994) trajectory model in the below figure, which illustrates how the SETAM (DES 2017a) is applied to each of the first three contexts: the Context of Influence, Context of Policy Text Production and the Context of Practice.



**Figure 4. 1: Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992) applied to the SETAM**

As outlined in the above figure, following a review of the special education supports available to Irish primary schools in 2013, the SETAM was initiated (Bowe *et al.* 1992) and the basic principles of such were established (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). The findings of this review (NCSE 2013) recognised a need for change within the existing system of resource allocation and so, interest groups, including the NCSE and the DES, began constructing policy discourses (Lall 2012) within the Context of Influence. This led to the proposal of a new allocation model (NCSE 2014b) which was piloted in forty-seven primary and post-primary schools in 2015/16. The Inspectorate then conducted a review of this pilot scheme (DES 2016b), which informed and influenced the agencies involved in the generation of the SETAM. The Context of Policy Text Production then saw the development of Circular 0013/2017, which embodied this new policy, and its accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b), which provided direction to schools on how to implement this policy in schools. The final context included in the above figure illustrates the SETAM in Context of Practice, which is the main focus of this study. At this stage, policy documents had been issued to schools and teachers were now interpreting this new policy (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006), based on their own experiences and

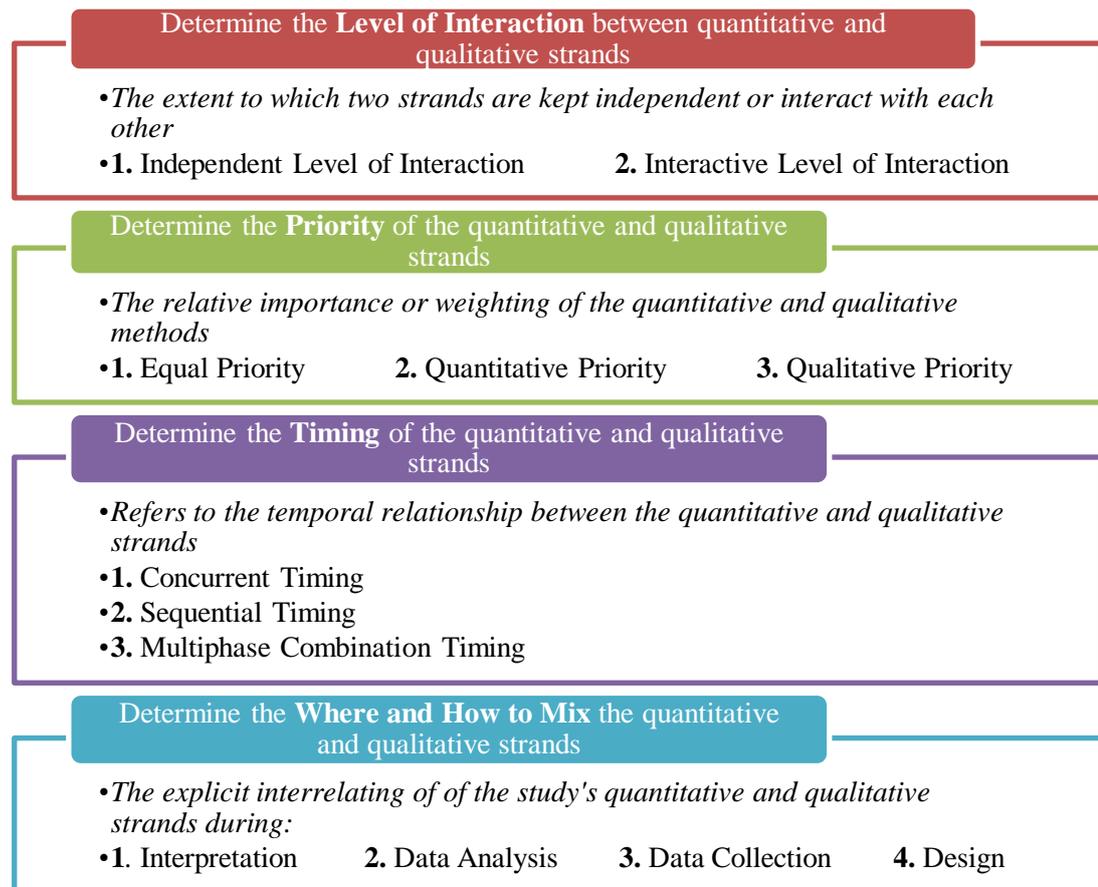
values, in order to implement it in schools. This study seeks to examine how teachers are implementing the SETAM to support inclusion in the Context of Practice, and therefore, observe how they contribute to the development of policy as it is interpreted and recreated upon enactment in a variety of Contexts of Practice. The findings of this study will, therefore, contribute to the cyclical notion of Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle, as through identification of successful aspects, and indeed aspects which may require adaptation, of the SETAM, our understanding of current special education policy will be enhanced. This may contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle (Ball 1994) by informing the Context of Influence for the revision of withstanding policies and the development of future policies. This examination, guided by the aforementioned paradigm and theoretical framework, was facilitated by a mixed-methods approach, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.5 Research Design**

The research design of this study encompasses a mixed-methods approach which sees primarily qualitative data collection methods with supporting quantitative methods. Mixed-methods research has become increasingly popular in many disciplines including educational research (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009; Hesse-Bieber 2015). A mixed-methods design involves research which collects, analyses and interprets both quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Creswell 2015) to investigate the same underlying phenomenon in a study (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009). Mixed-methods, as a 'third methodological movement' (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003, p.697; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011, p.285) and relatively new research design, combines elements of quantitative and qualitative data (Johnson *et al.* 2007; Creswell 2015) to 'answer questions that could not be answered by one paradigm alone' (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009, p.266). Similarly, many others (Johnson *et al.* 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011; Hesse-Bieber 2015; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018) argue that the combined strengths of a mixed-methods design counterpoise the weaknesses of separate quantitative and qualitative methods. Although some criticisms of mixed-method research have been voiced, such as the view that due to the epistemological differences between the paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research it is inappropriate to mix both, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2011) contend that researchers should be free to choose

and combine the methodological tools which best suit the study and achieve purpose (Mertens 2015) in answering the research question.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), when choosing a mixed-method design the researcher must make four key decisions regarding the quantitative and qualitative strands<sup>23</sup>. These decisions are illustrated in the below figure, followed by a brief rationale of the choices made by the researcher when embarking upon this mixed-methods study.



**Figure 4. 2: Choosing a Mixed-Methods Design (adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark 2011)**

When choosing to adopt a mixed-method design for this study, the researcher felt it necessary to begin with determining the priority of the strands. Reflecting upon on the

<sup>23</sup> Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p.63) define a strand as a ‘component of a study that encompasses the basic process of conducting quantitative or qualitative research: posing a question, collecting data, analyzing data and interpreting results based on that data’.

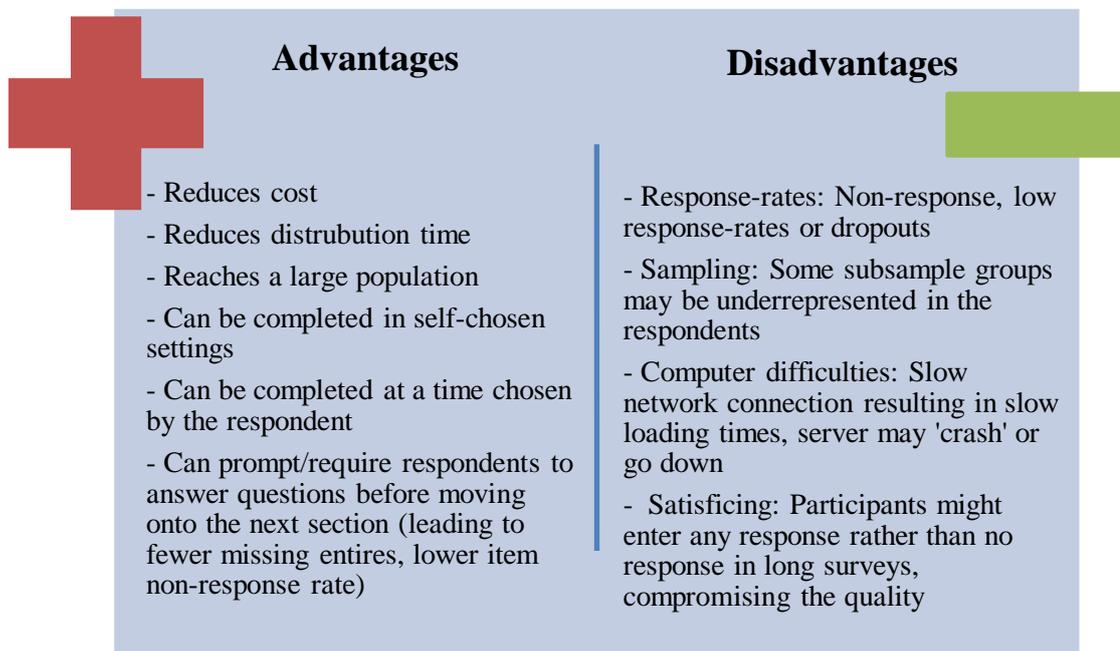
constructivist nature of the study, a qualitative priority was chosen. Following this decision, the extent to which both strands would interact with one another was contemplated. An interactive level of interaction was determined as most appropriate, as it provides scope to the researcher to mix quantitative and qualitative methods in a number of ways and allows interaction to occur at various points throughout the research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011), which are known as the points of interface, or points of integration (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009; Schoonenboom and Johnson 2017). This mixing was firstly evident within this study through the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative-based survey questions during the first phase of data collection. Connecting was then used as a mixing strategy which facilitated the sequential timing of the study. Although data collection was implemented in two distinct phases; interaction and mixing occurred as analysis of the first set of data helped to inform the collection of the second set. Therefore, analysis of the online surveys influenced the succeeding semi-structured interview schedule. A mixing strategy known as merging was used for analysis of the data collected in phase one as the online survey involved both closed and open-ended questions, as mentioned above, and therefore was not entirely quantitatively orientated. Firstly, Excel and SPSS were used as the analytic tools for quantitative questions, while NVivo 12 was subsequently used for analysis of the qualitative, open-ended survey questions. Combined analysis was then carried out to explicitly bring together these data, facilitating comparisons and interpretations (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Quantitative and qualitative strands were then mixed during interpretation, which followed all data collection and analysis. In doing this, results of both strands were compared and synthesised to enable the researcher to draw conclusions and inferences based on the combination of the data. The data collection instruments used throughout this study will be detailed in the following section.

#### **4.6 Data Collection Instruments**

Adhering to the mixed-method research design outlined above, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques was used. Throughout this study, the phases of data collection were sequential, therefore, the first phase informed the second phase (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Cohen *et al.* 2018). This section describes each of the data collection procedures.

#### **4.6.1 Surveys in Educational Research**

The practice of administering online surveys has seen huge growth since the late 1990s with its popularity due to factors such as low cost, faster response and flexible and quick access to a large sample with an unrestricted compass (Roberts and Allen 2015; Bryman 2016). Online surveys have become more advanced in recent years, as services and online tools, such as Google Forms and Survey Monkey, etc., facilitate the design and creation of surveys, offer free survey templates and can collate and present findings through a variety of charts, graphs and tables (Cohen *et al.* 2018). Online surveys are also efficient in that all information gathered can easily be downloaded onto data analysis programmes such as SPSS, Excel, etc. (Cohen *et al.* 2018). Web-based surveys are often combined with the traditional method of administering surveys in the form of an email. Combining both methods, which was the case for the current research, involves contacting potential participants by email and including a link which directs them to the web-based survey. These factors, along with the limitations associated with surveys (see Section 4.10) were taken into account by the researcher prior to deciding upon the use of online surveys as a methodological tool for the current study. Advantages and disadvantages of online surveys in comparison to paper-based surveys, according to Cohen *et al.* (2018) emerged from the review of the methodological literature and are briefly noted in the figure below.



**Figure 4. 3: Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Surveys (adapted from Cohen *et al.* 2018)**

In light of the reviewed methodological literature, the researcher believed that the advantages of an online survey outweighed those of paper-based surveys and was a better fit for the current study. The rationale for this data collection tool was based on the desired purpose of reaching a greater number of schools than could have been done using qualitative measures alone, whereby the findings of such could later inform and shape the semi-structured interview schedule. Therefore, while this study aimed to particularise and not generalise, the national, online survey could target a diverse cross-section of Irish primary schools in an efficient manner (Mertler 2018).

#### **4.6.2 Data Collection: Phase One**

##### **4.6.2.1 Online Survey**

The initial, quantitative data collection instrument involved a national, online survey. The online survey, used to obtain detailed data (Cohen *et al.* 2018) of how teachers are implementing the SETAM in the Context of Practice, was designed on

Google Forms and was firstly pre-piloted (Cohen *et al.* 2018) by the researcher with a small number of teacher colleagues, one of which acted as a critical friend throughout the research process. This involved a variety of topics relating to the survey questions being discussed and debated and was an integral part of the initial process for developing accessible and appropriate survey questions. The pilot survey was then distributed to a small sample (N=9) to identify any potential problems, prompt and direct any necessary re-drafting of questions and increase the likelihood of success for the subsequent national survey (Ruel *et al.* 2016). This pilot was administered to a diverse cross-section of the sample, which included teachers of differing ages with a variety of years of teaching experience. However, the researcher did ensure that pilot survey participants had a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience. This ensured that participants had adequate experience working with the previous co-existing allocation models in Ireland (i.e., the GAM, EAL support scheme, and the NCSE's RTH Model) and therefore, could provide information on similarities and differences between previous and existing practices. According to Cohen *et al.* (2018), question responses that rely on memory may result in incorrect or biased responses, as memory can be selective and deceptive. This emerged as a limitation during the piloting of the online survey as some pilot participants reported that they could not remember, or had to temporarily leave the survey to check, the numbers of students receiving support in schools (see Appendix 5 for feedback given by pilot participants in relation to the survey). As this issue was highlighted at an early stage, it was easily rectified by including a note at the beginning of the survey advising participants to gather information, based on specific questions that would be asked throughout, prior to commencing the survey.

Following these necessary adjustments and re-drafting of questions, and once ethical clearance through MIREC was granted (Appendix 6), the national survey (Appendix 7) was distributed to 300, randomly selected, schools via email for the attention of school principals. A link to the web-based survey on Google Forms was provided in the email following a Letter of Information (Appendix 8) which acted as the main body of the email. This provided principals with an overview of the study and asked them to forward the survey, as well as a copy of the Letter of Information, to the SENCO of the school, one CT and one SET in the school, with at least 5 years of teaching experience, as explained above in relation to the pilot survey. A Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 9) was then provided at the beginning of the survey. This gave a brief

description of what the study was about, who was undertaking it and what was involved for participants. It also outlined the option of participant withdrawal from the research at any time without consequence and provided information on participant privacy and confidentiality. Schools were initially asked to complete the survey within a specified timeframe of two weeks; however, this deadline was later extended due to the issuing of Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a) and Circular 0019/2019 (DES 2019c), which outlined the re-profiling of SET allocations and staffing arrangements, consecutively, in primary schools for the 2019/20 school year. As this was of relevance to the study, extending the survey deadline provided an opportunity to include a small number of questions exploring if and how schools would be impacted by these revised allocations. An electronic Informed Consent Form (Appendix 10) was also included at the beginning of the survey and was completed by all participants prior to starting the survey (see Section 4.8.1). The selection process and sampling methods used for this first phase of data collection will be discussed below.

#### ***4.6.2.2 Selecting the Survey Sample***

The sample of this study included principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs in primary schools throughout Ireland. Although it would be interesting to include all stakeholders, i.e., teachers, parents and students, within the sample, this would involve too great an extension of the study. Therefore, it was decided to examine the SETAM through the lens of one cohort (teachers) to obtain a focused and detailed account of their lived experiences (Mertens 2015). As the perspectives of parents and students would be relevant in highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with the SETAM, this would be an ideal gap for future exploration, and so, an opportunity for a follow-up study to examine the SETAM through this lens is identified.

Participants for the online survey were firstly selected through one main variety of probability sampling: stratified random sampling (Teddlie and Yu 2007). Initially, strata, or groups, of schools were selected from the population, i.e., all primary schools in Ireland. The researcher took two primary factors into account to ensure a diverse range of school cohorts had been considered within this study. Therefore, stratification was based on geographical location and socioeconomic status (Thompson 2012):

1. Rural / Urban Schools
2. DEIS / Non-DEIS Schools

After online consultation with a member of the DoE’s Statistics Section, a full list of all primary schools in Ireland, including their urban/rural status and economic status, i.e., DEIS/Non-DEIS, was provided to the researcher. Simple random sampling was then undertaken as formulas were applied to this list of schools, in Excel format, to randomly select 150 urban schools and 150 rural schools: a total of 300 schools (approximately 10% of Irish primary schools). An examination of the data showed that a total of 222 Non-DEIS schools (99 urban / 123 rural) and 78 DEIS schools (51 urban / 27 rural) had been randomly selected, therefore the researcher was satisfied that these figures would reflect a cross-section of school profiles. All types of primary schools were eligible for this random selection, including Boys’ Schools, Girls’ Schools, Mixed Schools, Gaelscoileanna<sup>24</sup> and Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht<sup>25</sup>, Catholic Schools, Church of Ireland Schools and Multi-denominational Schools. The list obtained from the DoE also provided the researcher with email addresses for each school which facilitated efficient distribution of the online surveys. The breakdown of survey respondents by role is illustrated in the below table:

<b>Roles</b>	<b>N=</b>
Principal (Administrative)	9
Principal (Teaching)	11
SENCO	11
CT	7
SET	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>

**Table 4. 1: Breakdown of Survey Sample by Role**

Participating schools represent Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994) implementing the SETAM throughout Ireland. These are detailed in the table below, providing a background to the contexts of the survey respondents:

<sup>24</sup> Gaeilscoileanna refer to Irish-medium schools, outside the Irish-speaking regions.

<sup>25</sup> Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht refer to Irish-medium schools within the Irish-speaking regions of Ireland.

School Details		%	N=	%	N=
Geographical Location	Rural	60%	28		
	Urban	40%	19		
	City			42%	8
	Large town			42%	8
	Small Town			16%	3
Socioeconomic Status	Non-DEIS	77%	36		
	DEIS	23%	11		
	DEIS Band 1 (Urban)			73%	8
	DEIS Band 2 (Urban)			9%	1
	DEIS (Rural)			18%	2
Gender	Mixed	85%	40		
	All Boys'	11%	5		
	All Girls'	4%	2		
Language Instruction	English	98%	46		
	Irish (Gaeilge)	2%	1		
Patronage	Catholic	92%	43		
	Church of Ireland	6%	3		
	Inter-Denominational	2%	1		

**Table 4. 2: School Profiles of Survey Sample**

The gender breakdown of survey respondents was 15% male (N=7) and 85% female (N=40) (see Section 4.10 which discusses limitations of this study and highlights the national male to female teacher ratio). Respondents' length of teaching experience varied, with 26% having 5-10 years of experience (N=12), 19% having 11-15 years of experience (N=9) and 55% having 15 or more years of teaching experience (N=26). The following section discusses the benefits of the mixed-methods research design of this study which involved the aforementioned national, online survey and subsequent, semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.6.3 Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methods**

According to Desimone and Le Floch (2004, p.2), nationally representative surveys offer the opportunity to 'examine large-scale patterns in education reform, and the ability to examine causal linkages on a representative sample of teachers'. However,

they also recognise that this method of data collection has downfalls in that surveys ‘cannot provide the depth of understanding that interview and observational techniques provide’. In agreement with this, the researcher believed it was appropriate for both quantitative and qualitative methods to be used (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011), as the two methodological approaches would complement one another, therefore enhancing the study and providing a more complete understanding of the research topic (Creswell 2014). The combination of both quantitative and qualitative-based questions within the online survey is described in Appendix 11, providing an overview of each six sections of the survey and a brief rationale for the inclusion of closed and open-ended questions throughout. Following on from this first phase of data collection, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to delve into topics which arose from survey findings in more detail, therefore casting further explanatory insight into survey data (Cohen *et al.* 2018). This was deemed vital in obtaining a well-rounded understanding of the research topic, in-keeping with the view of Hochschild (2009), who argues that the interview can do what surveys cannot, which is to explore issues in depth by finding out how people frame their views and why they hold such views. The interviews aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the interviewees (Kvale 1996; King and Horrocks 2010; Seitz 2016) who have been negotiating the policy changes within the Context of Practice since the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a). Therefore, qualitative, semi-structured interviews, as the primary data collection instrument, will be discussed below.

#### **4.6.4 Interviews in Educational Research**

Interviews are widely used data collection instruments (Cohen *et al.* 2018), which facilitate a naturalistic approach to qualitative research that seeks to understand a phenomenon in ‘context-specific settings’ (Golafshani 2003, p.600). Kvale (1996) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p.6) describe interviews as ‘purposeful conversations’ which obtain descriptions and experiences of the world of the participant in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomenon (Creswell 2014), which in relation to this study, is how teachers are enacting government policy (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools. According to Cohen *et al.* (2018) interviews are powerful and flexible data collection tools which enable multi-sensory channels, including verbal, non-verbal, seen, spoken and heard, to be used. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the qualitative data collection instrument of the current study to enable the researcher to organise and

control the order of the interview schedule while also allowing for spontaneity and create openings for narratives to unfold (Galetta 2013).

#### **4.6.5 Data Collection: Phase Two**

##### ***4.6.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews***

The qualitative data collection phase consisted of an in-depth examination of the SETAM in practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992). This was conducted in four contexts or sites, i.e., one Girls' School, one Boys' School, one Mixed School (non-DEIS) and one DEIS School (mixed), which identified themselves as practicing inclusive education, abiding by an SEN policy and implementing the SETAM at the time of data collection. Audio-taped, semi-structured interviews were carried out with principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs to delve into participants' understanding of and experience with the SETAM in the Context of Practice. By employing a sequential data collection approach (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009; Cohen *et al.* 2018), as outlined in previous sections, findings, which emerged from the online survey within the first data collection phase, informed the development of the interview questions. Engaging with this qualitative phase of data collection provided the researcher with an opportunity to further explore the research topic and better understand the phenomenon by obtaining rich, descriptive data and narratives about participants' experiences of implementing the SETAM, which would satisfy the validity and reliability demands of the study. This interview schedule was pre-piloted with a critical friend, who is a primary school teacher, whereby we discussed the proposed interview questions, reviewing their clarity, relevance and importance. Following on from this, the interview schedule was piloted with a colleague who works as a SET, again enhancing reflexivity and establishing the validity and reliability of the study. The pilot interview schedule was then revised, taking feedback offered by the pilot participants into consideration, in terms of the language and order of the questions (Appendix 12). A more natural flow which enabled a purposeful conversation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) was apparent once these issues were addressed and the interview schedule was re-drafted (Appendix 13). A total of seventeen semi-structured interviews were then carried out in specifically selected primary schools of varying status in the South-West of Ireland. As the interview questions sought to explore the models of support used in schools under the SETAM, it was anticipated that conversations would surround collaborative practice and co-teaching approaches. Research suggests that there

are many different definitions and interpretations of co-teaching (Beninghof 2020) and therefore, the researcher was aware of the interchangeable terms used in varying schools which could pose confusion with interview participants. To ensure that participants could differentiate between such, and to mitigate any discrepancies within responses to ensure data would later be comparable, at the beginning of each interview, participants were provided with a diagram and list of definitions of the co-teaching approaches (Friend and Bursuck 2012; Friend 2019) (Appendix 14), in accordance with this study's definition of co-teaching (see Section 2.6.1 and 2.6.3). All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and these audio-files were later imported into NVivo 12 for transcription (see Section 4.7.2.4).

#### ***4.6.5.2 Selecting the Interview Sample***

Consistent with the first data collection phase, the qualitative sample included principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs in primary schools throughout Ireland, which facilitated opportunities to triangulate findings at a later stage (see Figure 4.12 and Figure 4.13). Semi-structured interview participants were selected through a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Four to five interviews<sup>26</sup> were conducted in each school, with these specific cohorts of teachers being 'purposely sought out' (Procter *et al.* 2010, p.149). The researcher sourced schools within a specified radius, e.g., the Munster region, ensuring that all participants were 'easily accessible and willing to participate' (Teddlie and Yu 2007, p.78). Again, in line with phase one of data collection, five years of teaching experience remained a criterion for the selection of interviewees to ensure that participants could identify similarities and differences between previous and existing practices. The percentage of each cohort of the sample is outlined in the table below:

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<sup>26</sup> Four interviews were conducted in the Girls' School, Boys' School and Mixed School. Five interviews took place in the selected DEIS School as there was an assigned Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator who was a member of the SEN team.

<b>Roles</b>	<b>n=</b>	<b>%</b>
Principal (Administrative)	3	17%
Principal (Teaching)	1	6%
SENCO	4	24%
CT	4	24%
SET	4	24%
HSCL Coordinator	1	6%
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4. 3: Breakdown of Interview Sample by Role**

The following sub-section provides details on each of the schools where interviews took place. It describes school population, geographical location, pseudonyms of staff members interviewed, posts lost/gained with the introduction of the SETAM and the percentage of students receiving additional teaching support.

#### **4.6.5.3 Fieldwork**

Qualitative data collection took place in four mainstream schools in the Munster region. Letters of information were provided to each school (Appendix 15 and 16) and informed consent to participate in the study was requested from the principal of each school (Appendix 17), before teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in individual interviews. Ethical procedures undertaken, including the use of participant information sheets (Appendix 18) and informed consent forms (Appendix 19), are described in Section 4.8. Three of the schools were based in urban settings, while the other was a smaller school in a rural setting. The researcher took two primary factors [gender and socioeconomic status], into account when deciding upon schools to participate in interviews, to ensure a diverse range of school types had been accounted for. These factors were influenced by the components which comprise the ‘school’s educational profile’ (DES 2017a), as these are taken into consideration for the allocation of resources deployed to schools under the SETAM. Therefore, the schools included in the qualitative sample of this study included:

- All Girls’ School

- All Boys' School
- Mixed School (Non-DEIS)
- DEIS School (Mixed)

Participants who were interviewed within these Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994) included:

- Principals
- SEN Coordinators (SENCO)
- Class Teachers (CT)
- Special Education Teachers (SET)
- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator

Interviewing specific teacher cohorts facilitated the triangulation of findings at a later stage (see Figure 4.13) and contributed to the validity of the study. Originally, it was intended to interview one member of staff from the four cohorts, as listed above, however, as the selected DEIS school was participating in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (DES 2019b), the researcher thought it would be beneficial to interview their HSCL Coordinator, as she was a member of the SEN team and was significantly involved in the application of the SETAM within the school. The four sites in which the workings of the SETAM were examined are introduced below.

***School A: Girls' School***

The Girls' School was situated in an urban area, with a population of 222 students. There was an administrative principal, nine CTs and four SETs employed. However, due to insufficient space, one CT was acting as a SET. At the time of interviews, a plan was in place to build a new classroom onto the school. Pseudonyms are presented below to maintain the anonymity of interview participants:

<b>Girls' School Population</b>	222	
<b>% identified with SEN</b>	School Support	24%
	School Support Plus	5%
<b>Role</b>	<b>Teacher Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>No. of Years Teaching</b>
Administrative Principal	Joe	34
SENCO	Daniel	32
CT	Rachel	28
SET	Ciara	15

**Table 4. 4: School A: Girls' School**

The school gained one full time SET and one shared post (0.75 of a post) with the introduction of the SETAM in September 2017. This was not impacted with the re-profiling of schools under the SETAM for September 2019.

***School B: Boys' School***

The Boys' School was, again, situated in an urban area and had a population of 268 students. There was an administrative principal, eleven CTs and eight SETs employed in the school. The principal specified that the SETs were assigned as; six SEN teachers (one was a shared post, which was based in this school), one EAL teacher and one ASD teacher. Interview participants are presented below:

<b>Boys' School Population</b>	268	
<b>% identified with SEN</b>	School Support	30%
	School Support Plus	11%
<b>Role</b>	<b>Teacher Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>No. of Years Teaching</b>
Administrative Principal	Matthew	37
SENCO	Claire	19
CT	Lisa	11
SET	Ali	17

**Table 4. 5: School B: Boys' School**

The school had a slight increase in SET hours due to an increase in student numbers in 2019, therefore, an additional post was provided by the Department. The prevalence of SEN among boys (Banks and McCoy 2011; NCSE 2014b; Mitchell 2015a), was considered when determining the educational profile of schools. Therefore, the SETAM accounted for gender differentials when allocating resources to schools by giving a small, additional weighting based on the number of boys attending schools (see Section 3.3.4 for a description of the school profiles).

***School C: Mixed School (Non-DEIS)***

This school was located in a rural setting, with a total of 130 students attending. There were five CTs, which included the teaching principal. 2.48 SETs were employed, which consisted of 2 full time SETs, 0.4 of a post, which was added with the introduction of the SETAM in 2017, and 0.08 (1 hour 59 minutes per week) of a post, which was allocated with the re-profiling of schools under the SETAM in September 2019. This was due to enrolment increasing from approximately 120 students to 130 students between 2017 and 2019. The following teachers participated:

<b>Mixed School Population</b>	130	
<b>% identified with SEN</b>	School Support	22%
	School Support Plus	8%
<b>Role</b>	<b>Teacher Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>No. of Years Teaching</b>
Teaching Principal	Tom	30
SENCO*	Mary	38
CT	Emma	9
SET	Jack	8

**Table 4. 6: School C: Mixed School<sup>27</sup>**

The 0.48 SET post was divided between two teachers. One shared SET, who was based in a neighbouring school, taught in this school two days per week (0.4 post). The other post was shared with a different school and due to the minimal hours involved (1 hour 59 minutes per week), both schools agreed to ‘bank’ the hours over a number of weeks. The SET would then come to this school every four weeks or so for a lengthier period.

***School D: DEIS School (Mixed)***

This DEIS Band 1 school was situated in an urban area and had a total of 321 students enrolled. There was an administrative principal and an administrative vice-principal (funded by the school’s Board of Management). Interestingly, this school had more SETs [20] employed than CTs [16]. In addition to these posts, this school had an assigned HSCL Coordinator, who, along with the teachers listed below, was interviewed as part of this study:

<sup>27</sup> Although it is listed in Table 4.6 above that the SENCO and SET of the school were interviewed, it came to light during interviews that a SENCO had not been officially named in this school. The participant listed as the SENCO above was the more senior of the two full time SETs employed in the school, however both participants made it clear that they worked as an SEN team and that, in general, responsibility was shared between them.

<b>DEIS School Population</b>		321	
<b>% identified with SEN</b>		School Support	100%
		School Support Plus	100%
<b>Role</b>	<b>Teacher Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>No. of Years Teaching</b>	
Administrative Principal	Will	18	
SENCO	Brenda	36	
CT	Helen	15	
SET	Moira	18	
HSCL Coordinator	Ann	23	

**Table 4. 7: School D: DEIS School**

Prior to the SETAM, this school had ten SETs on a temporary basis, based on their RTH Model allocation (DES 2005). Under the SETAM, these became permanent posts, so although new posts were not gained, a significant number of posts were made permanent.

Policy analysis lies at the core of this research, therefore, in addition to the quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments, as detailed in the above sections, analysis of policy documents was also used to obtain data. Similarly, deconstruction of discourse was central to the overall process of investigation within this study. This analysis, which occurred explicitly and inexplicitly throughout the research, is described in the following section.

#### **4.6.6 Policy Analysis as a Data Collection Instrument**

As this study is based on a recently published Irish policy (DES 2017a), policy analysis was essential to collect appropriate data prior to, during and after both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. In doing this, policy analysis

helped to inform the succeeding data collection methods, aiding the design of surveys and contributing to interview preparation, as well as overall data analysis. This was portrayed clearly to the researcher in Yanow's (2007) assertion that

Documents can provide background information prior to designing the research project, for example prior to conducting interviews. They may corroborate observational and interview data, or they may refute them, in which case the researcher is 'armed' with evidence that can be used to clarify, or perhaps, to challenge what is being told, a role that the observational data may also play. (Yanow 2007, p.411)

Throughout this study, international and national policy documents were analysed, which have influenced Irish legislation today, as well as policies which have framed the Irish education system's stance on inclusion. The researcher engaged in discourse analysis of policies which preceded and shaped the development SETAM (DES 2017a) (see Section 3.3.1), as per the study's theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992). In particular, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), which outlines the SETAM, its accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) and Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a), which detailed the revised profiled allocations for schools under the SETAM, were examined and analysed from initiation of this research through to conclusion. Analysis of the language in such policies aimed to reveal the values and assumptions of policymakers by examining not only what was said, but also what remained unsaid, to discover what may be hidden in the document (Egan 2013). This analysis and deconstruction of discourse is further discussed in Section 4.7.3.

As both quantitative and qualitative measures to collect data throughout this research were described above, the following section will detail the analysis of such data. The approach adopted by the researcher, her use of software as analytical tools and the processes undertaken to analyse both strands sequentially is outlined below.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was mainly an inductive process throughout this study, as patterns, codes and themes emerged from the data. However, patterns were also developed deductively from the study's theoretical framework (Egan 2013). The thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006) to this inductive data analysis process is detailed in Section 4.7.2.1 and outlined in Table 4.9. Due to the sequential timing of data collection, analysis was carried out separately, with the quantitative strand preceding the qualitative.

Throughout this section, the steps involved with using Excel and SPSS to perform statistical analysis on the numerical data of the online surveys are firstly described, briefly followed by the procedures undertaken by the researcher to analyse the qualitative data obtained from open-ended survey questions using NVivo 12. Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview data, using NVivo 12, is then described in detail in Section 4.7.2, outlining the researcher's engagement with each of Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic coding analysis. Discourse analysis of policy documents directly related to the SETAM was undertaken throughout this research, which is described towards the latter end of this section.

#### **4.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data analysis is a 'powerful research form' (Cohen *et al.* 2018, p.725) which is often associated with large-scale, numerical research. Throughout this study, quantitative data analysis was necessary to achieve the desired purpose of the study (Mertens 2015), as online surveys were used to examine the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice over a larger sample than that of the qualitative sample. However, as these online surveys consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, and in keeping with the study's mixed-methods research design; merging (as described in Section 4.5) was used throughout the quantitative strand. This mixing strategy (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011) facilitated the use of two different data analysis techniques. Quantitative data, which consisted of closed survey questions [numerical data] were analysed with the use of Excel and SPSS. The below sections will discuss quantitative analysis software, and the steps undertaken by the researcher when engaging with such, to aid with analysis of survey data throughout the current study.

##### **4.7.1.1 Using Quantitative Data Analysis Software**

Quantitative analysis can be performed using software such as SPSS, which is a 'very popular general-purpose statistical estimation software' (Little 2013, p.529). Such software applies statistical formulae and carries out computations to perform numerical analysis (Cohen *et al.* 2018). Excel and SPSS<sup>28</sup> were chosen as the analytical tools to support the researcher's analysis and management of the quantitative data throughout this

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<sup>28</sup> The researcher attended an SPSS training session prior to engaging with the software and subsequently sought and arranged individualised SPSS support throughout the data analysis process.

study. Software such as SPSS proves valuable to researchers as there is a significant return on effort as it automatically yields statistics (Cohen *et al.* 2018), while also facilitating transparency and minimising researcher bias. Use of SPSS for quantitative data analysis throughout this study produced an audit trail, as all movements were logged through SPSS Outputs, which Egan (2013, p.131) argues is one of the ‘key criteria on which the trustworthiness and plausibility of a study can be established’. The following section details how survey data was sorted and organised to facilitate effective use of such software.

#### ***4.7.1.2 Sorting the Quantitative Data***

The researcher undertook a number of steps to sort and prepare the quantitative data for analysis. Survey data were gathered through a web-based survey, designed on Google Forms (see Section 4.6.2.1), which is an online tool that records and retains all responses. These responses were then downloaded as an Excel file, where sorting and preparing began. Each response was assigned an ID number to protect the anonymity of participants, which would later be imported into SPSS and remain with the data for the duration of the study. Further sorting of the data involved scanning through all responses to ensure there were no missing fields and renaming variables to abbreviated variable names in order for all data to be more appropriate to import into SPSS. Once data were imported from Excel into SPSS, the researcher checked variable names and abbreviations to ensure all conventions were followed correctly<sup>29</sup>. Following this, labels were given to all variables to facilitate easy identification (Pallant 2016). The majority of labels used in this data set were the actual survey questions used during data collection, as illustrated in the figure below.

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<sup>29</sup> There are a number of rules which must be abided by when naming variables in SPSS, such as each name must begin with a letter, names cannot include full stops, spaces or symbols, etc.

	Name	Type	Width	Decimals	Label	Values	Missing
2	ID_Number	String	33	0	ID Number assigned to each participant.	None	None
3	Role	Numeric	40	0	What is your current role in your school this academic year?	{1, Principal...	None
4	Gender	Numeric	6	0	Please select your gender.	{1, Male}...	None
5	ClassLevel	Numeric	30	0	Which class level do you currently teach?	{1, Administr...	None
6	YearsTeach...	Numeric	16	0	Please select the number of years you have been teaching.	{1, 5-10 yea...	None
7	TypeofSchool	Numeric	13	0	Please select which type of school you are currently teaching in.	{1, Girls' Sc...	None

Variable

Labels (survey questions)

**Figure 4. 4: Sorting and Preparing the Data in SPSS**

Next, all qualitative data were removed from the SPSS file, which included any open-ended and lengthy, word-based responses, as these would later be analysed using NVivo 12. This was necessary to provide a more concise spreadsheet whereby numeric values could be assigned to any shorter, word-based answers.

	DailyPractice
1	Yes
2	Unsure
3	No
4	No
5	Yes
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Unsure
9	Yes
10	No

	DailyPractice
1	1
2	3
3	2
4	2
5	1
6	1
7	1
8	3
9	1
10	2

Responses

Numeric Value

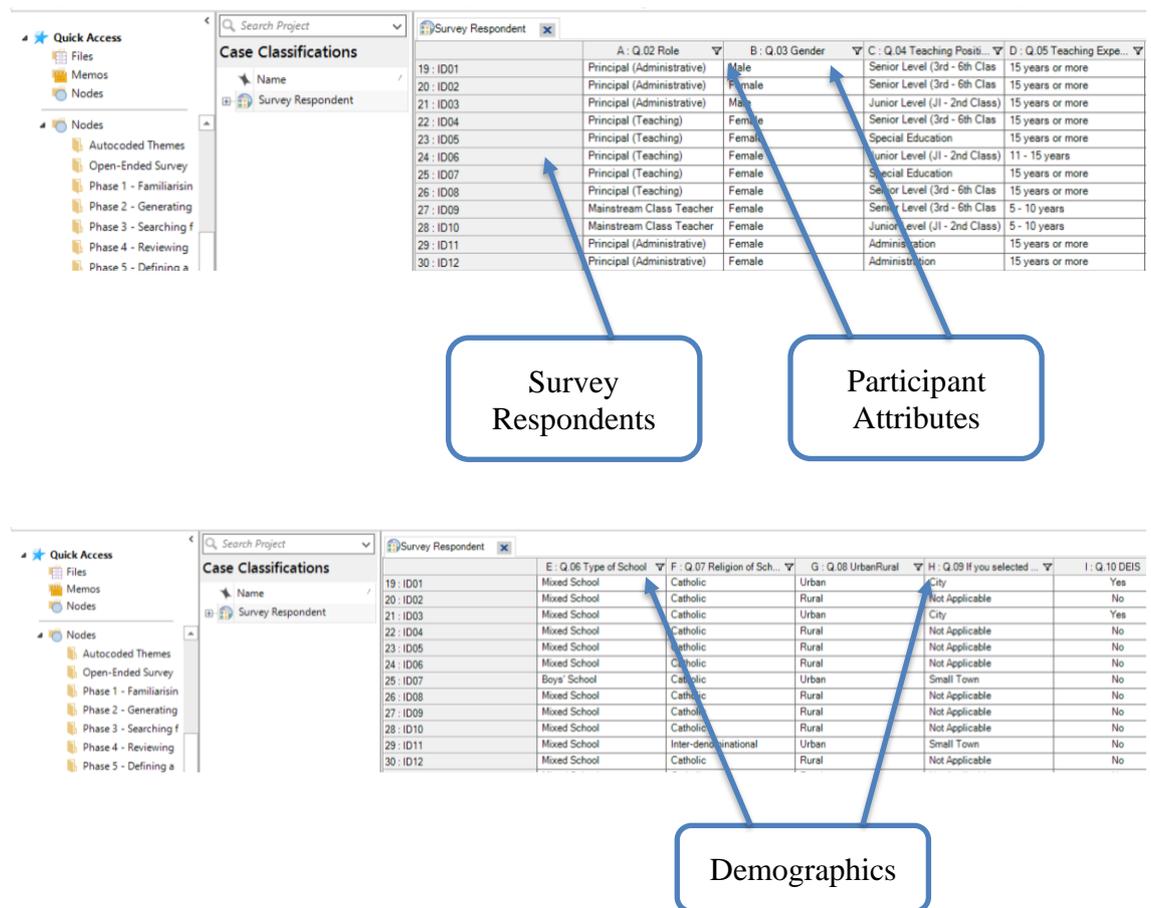
**Figure 4. 5: Numeric Values Assigned to Responses in SPSS**

A quantitative codebook (Appendix 20) was created to keep track of all variable names and values. Where possible, the researcher used logical codes and developed patterns to facilitate ease and order throughout the analysis, as evident in Table 4.8 below:

	<b>SPSS Variable</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Value (Coding Instructions)</b>
<b>Examples of individual values</b>	Role	What is your current role in your school?	1 = Principal (Administrative) 2 = Principal (Teaching) 3 = SENCO 4 = CT 5 = SET
	Gender	Please select your gender.	1 = Male 2 = Female
<b>Examples of recurring values</b>	DEIS	Does your school participate in the DEIS Action Plan?	1 = Yes 2 = No 3 = Unsure
	DailyPractice	Has the SETAM changed your daily practice?	
	WantCPD	Would you like to receive CPD on how best to identify needs?	
<b>Examples of slightly adapted recurring values</b>	ExperienceSETAM	How would you evaluate your entire experience of working with the SETAM?	1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent
	RateITE	How would you rate the ITE you received, if any, in relation to assessment and identification of pupil needs?	0 = None 1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

**Table 4. 8: Recurring Values for Variables throughout the Data**

As mentioned above, qualitative survey responses were separated from the quantitative, closed responses. Therefore, an Excel file containing solely qualitative responses could easily be imported into NVivo 12. Case classifications were created for each survey respondent, which includes their survey data and the demographics and attributes linked to each participant (e.g., gender, teaching position, type and location of school, etc.). These are shown in Figure 4.6 below:



**Figure 4. 6: Importing the Qualitative Survey Data into NVivo 12**

Once the researcher was satisfied that all qualitative survey data was imported and organised correctly, responses to open-ended questions could be examined and analysed, which is briefly described below.

### *Analyzing the Qualitative Survey Responses*

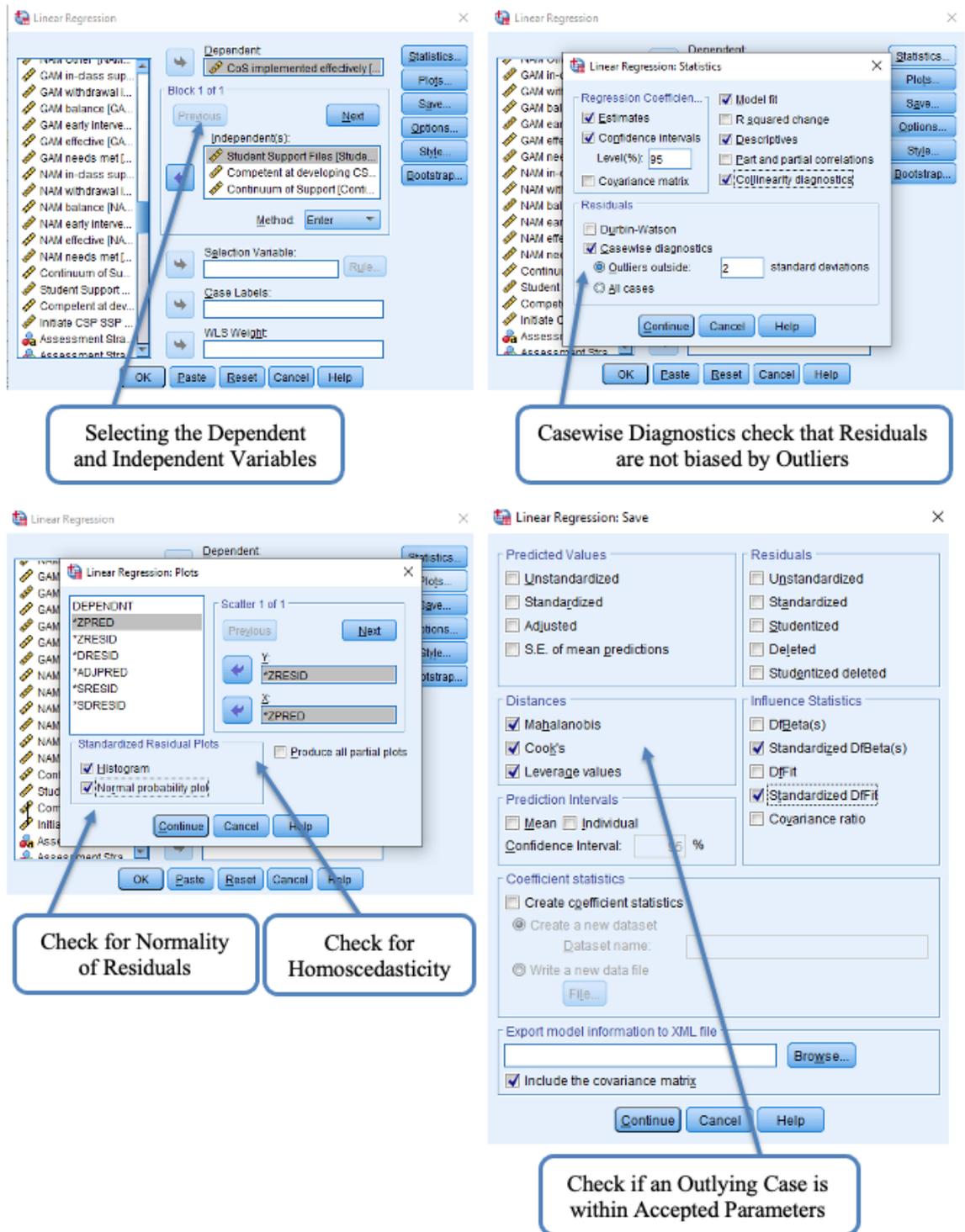
As open-ended survey responses were mainly used to support the numeric data and to inform the semi-structured interview schedule, analysis of qualitative survey data mainly concerned itself with Phase One and Two of Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis. Phase One relates to familiarising oneself with the data and so, after getting an initial sense of the data, by scanning survey responses throughout the data collection phase, responses were then re-read (Cohen *et al.* 2018) once all data had been collected. At this point, responses were examined in relation to the context in which they were written, i.e., the researcher was mindful of participant attributes and school demographics (see Figure 4.6) and in relation to one another (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Phase Two involved initial coding of the data in NVivo 12, whereby the researcher was assigning labels to pieces of the data, comparing and contrasting responses and making notes of emerging patterns and points of interest. This analysis enabled the researcher to include direct quotes from survey participants to consolidate quantitative findings (see Chapter Five) and, in accordance with the sequential design of this study, contributed to shaping the semi-structured interview schedule. The analysis of quantitative survey data is described below.

#### *4.7.1.3 Descriptive Statistic Analysis*

Once sorting and preparing of the quantitative survey data was complete, the researcher began the descriptive phase of data analysis. As this study was predominantly qualitative-based and adhered to a constructivist paradigm (see Section 4.3), Excel and SPSS were mainly used to obtain descriptive statistics from the online survey dataset. Visual representations of frequencies, percentages and general patterns which emerged from the data were used to describe the characteristics and responses of the sample. A variety of graphical forms were then used to present this data (see Chapter Five) such as tables and bar charts. SPSS was also used to attain descriptive statistics such as measures of dispersal (standard deviation), measures of central tendency (means, modes, medians) and skewness and kurtosis, which were necessary to examine prior to carrying out statistical analyses, such multiple regressions, to ensure any of the 'assumptions' were not being violated (Pallant 2016). These inferential statistics will be discussed below, with images included to describe how these tests were carried out.

#### ***4.7.1.4 Inferential Statistic Analysis***

Throughout analysis of quantitative data, SPSS was used to obtain inferential statistics based on the survey data. Difference tests such as multiple linear regressions were used to investigate the relative contribution of independent variables in explaining the variance of dependent variables, such as the effective implementation of CoS (see Chapter Five, Table 5.1 for results). Figure 4.7 below shows how this analysis was performed, including how assumption tests were carried out by selecting extra checks as optional outputs during the running of the analysis.



**Figure 4. 7: Inferential Analysis of Quantitative Data Using SPSS**

These assumption tests produced outputs which provided valuable information regarding the multiple linear regression and if it was justifiable statistically, which are illustrated in Appendix 21. Analysis of open-ended survey responses and descriptive and inferential

statistical analysis of quantitative data led to the findings discussed in Chapter Five. Throughout this section, analysis of data obtained from the national, online survey, was discussed. The subsequent section outlines how the researcher used NVivo 12 to support her analysis of the solely qualitative-based data, gathered during semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis holds much importance within this study, as the researcher sought to obtain rich, descriptive data of the lived experience (Mertens 2015) of teachers implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice. A thematic analysis approach was adopted, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases to thematic analysis. This approach, using NVivo 12, is detailed in the below section, followed by a discussion on qualitative analysis software. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis are then described in relation to their application for the qualitative analytical process throughout this study.

##### **4.7.2.1 Thematic Analysis**

Inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis was applied as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the qualitative data throughout this study. Such analysis offers a 'flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.78). Although an inductive approach to this thematic data analysis was adhered to, the theoretical framework of the study; Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), existed and was acknowledged from the initial stages through to conclusion of the research. Therefore, simultaneous to this data-driven approach, whereby codes, categories and themes were derived inductively from the data, such patterns were also developed deductively from the study's theoretical framework (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Ball *et al.* 2012; Egan 2013), as according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.84) 'researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments'. In line with this and reflecting the epistemological and ontological stance of the paradigm which underpins this study, whereby the researcher acknowledges her position in the research, a flexible, constructivist, thematic analytic process was employed to analyse qualitative data within this study.

Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (Table 4.9) the researcher analysed data obtained from semi-structured interview data, while applying Braun and Clarke's checklist criteria for good thematic analysis (Appendix 22), to ensure a high standard of analysis and to produce credible and dependable results.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the Process</b>
<b>1. Familiarising yourself with your data</b>	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
<b>2. Generating initial codes</b>	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
<b>3. Searching for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
<b>4. Reviewing themes</b>	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
<b>5. Defining and naming themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
<b>6. Producing the report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

**Table 4. 9: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006)**

These six phases of thematic analysis were adhered to when analysing the qualitative data. This process is described in detail in Section 4.7.2.4, however, in order to aid such analysis, the researcher used NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software. Therefore, the below section will firstly detail the advantages and disadvantages of using such software.

#### 4.7.2.2 Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software

Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has seen major advances since the 1980s (Kelle 1996), originating as basic search and retrieval software which has now developed into a powerful, flexible and established tool to assist with the analysis of data (Woods *et al.* 2016; Cohen *et al.* 2018). A range of software is available to researchers, including ATLAS.ti, MAXqda, NVivo, ETHNOGRAPH, etc. The use of such software has become increasingly popular within qualitative research (Kelle 1996; Darmody and Byrne 2006), however, controversy is evident within the extant literature surrounding the appropriateness of engaging with CAQDAS (Scott and Morrison 2006), with many early criticisms proposing that it distances or separates researchers from their data (see Appendix 23 for an extended discussion). However, use of such software, according to many qualitative researchers, is appropriate when the intent of the technology is to follow or serve the research rather than to lead or drive the research (Jackson and Bazeley 2019). In accordance with such, the research design and methodology of this study were determined before considering which software tool to use and how it would be used (Jackson and Bazeley 2019).

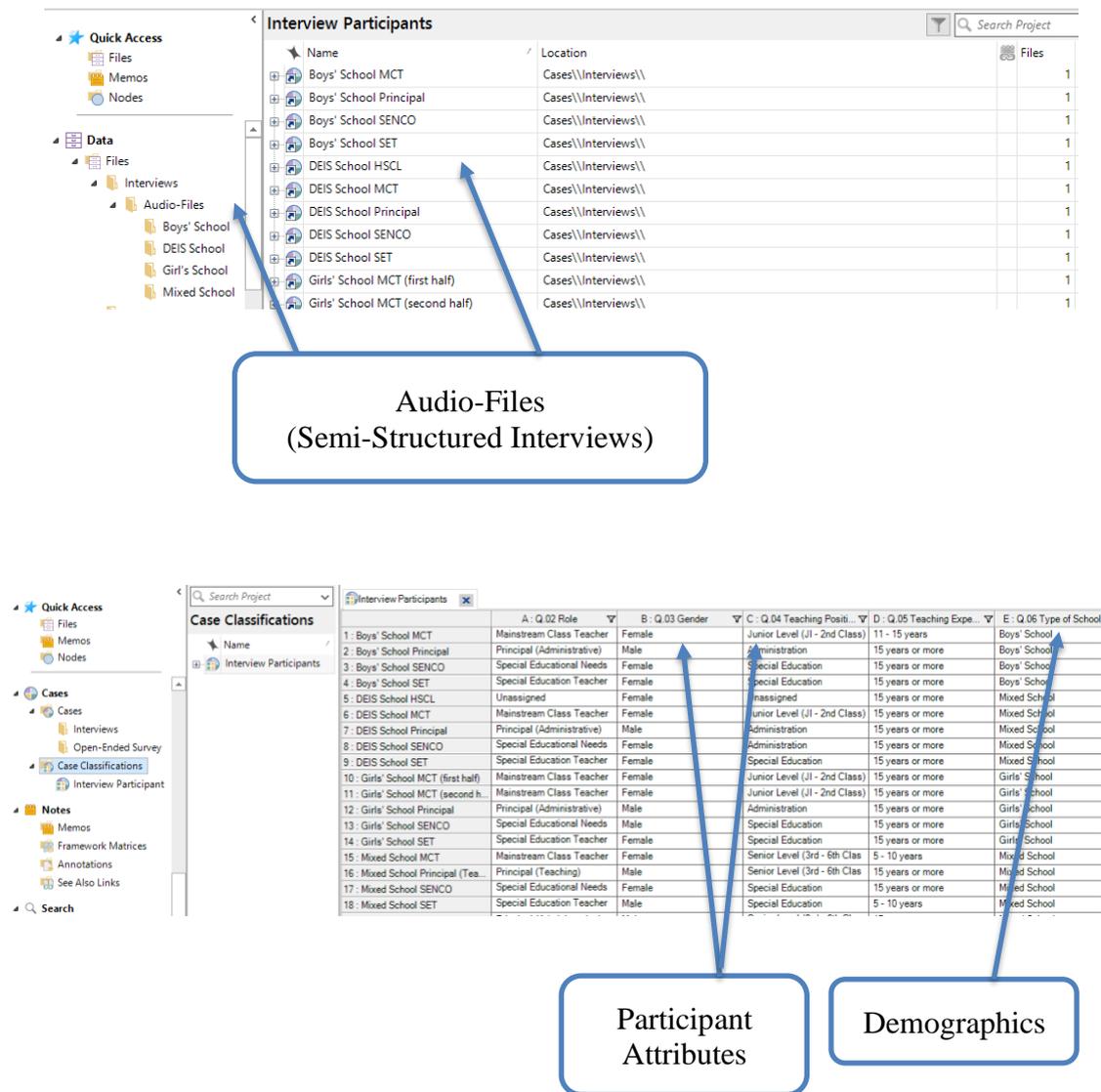
Throughout this study, NVivo 12 was chosen to support the researcher in her analysis of the qualitative data, as its features, which facilitate data storage, management, organisation, coding and retrieval, were fit for purpose within this current study. It is vital to clarify that this software was used primarily to aid the researcher in her own analysis of the data, as Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.650) explain that ‘software does not analyse material; humans do’. Patton (2015, p.530) also comments on the role of software as useful, but not essential, by stating that it can ‘offer leaps in productivity’ for those who use it but ‘is not a requisite for qualitative analysis’. Throughout data analysis, the researcher recognised NVivo 12 as a tool for efficiency (Egan 2013) which would assist with the analysis, all the while acknowledging that ‘the real analytical work takes place in your head’ (Patton 2015, p.530). Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.654) further stress the importance of researcher involvement throughout the analysis process, stating that CAQDAS does not, and should not, eliminate the ‘human touch’ throughout the analysis process, as the researcher still holds primary responsibility to ‘decide and generate the codes, to verify and interpret the data’. Therefore, although NVivo 12 was used as a data analysis tool throughout this study, the researcher immersed herself in the data (Robson 2011) in order

to become familiar with it, understand it and interpret it and so she remained in control of the analysis throughout the entire process (Zamawe 2015).

CAQDAS, such as NVivo 12, is also an effective ‘tool for transparency’ (Egan 2013, p.128). Throughout this study, NVivo 12 was used to log thought processes, data movements and coding patterns, therefore, creating a transparent and comprehensive audit trail. Additionally, Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019) maintain that use of such software may reduce bias within qualitative research, as when using CAQDAS, personal opinions and viewpoints do not impact how the data is analysed. This was evident in the current study as NVivo 12 aided the researcher to identify and deduct themes from the raw data and so, any preconceptions, assumptions or expectations which the researcher may have held did not influence the development of themes. Similarly, the researcher was unable to dismiss or ignore themes which emerged from the data. Such measures are necessary to achieve trustworthiness within a study and to produce valid and reliable results. The following section describes the sorting of the qualitative data before detailing each step of the data analysis process using NVivo 12, in accordance with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

#### ***4.7.2.3 Sorting the Qualitative Data***

All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and audio-files were imported directly into NVivo 12 for transcription. Case classifications were created which held demographic and attribute information linked to each interview participant (see Figure 4.8 below). Participant names were masked, and pseudonyms were assigned to each file to avoid the inclusion of identifiable information (Creswell and Poth 2018). Transcribing took place immediately, or as soon as possible, after each interview and once completed, the original audio-files were deleted. These actions were in accordance with the ethical steps undertaken by the researcher to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant (see Section 4.8.2).



**Figure 4. 8: Importing the Interview Data into NVivo 12**

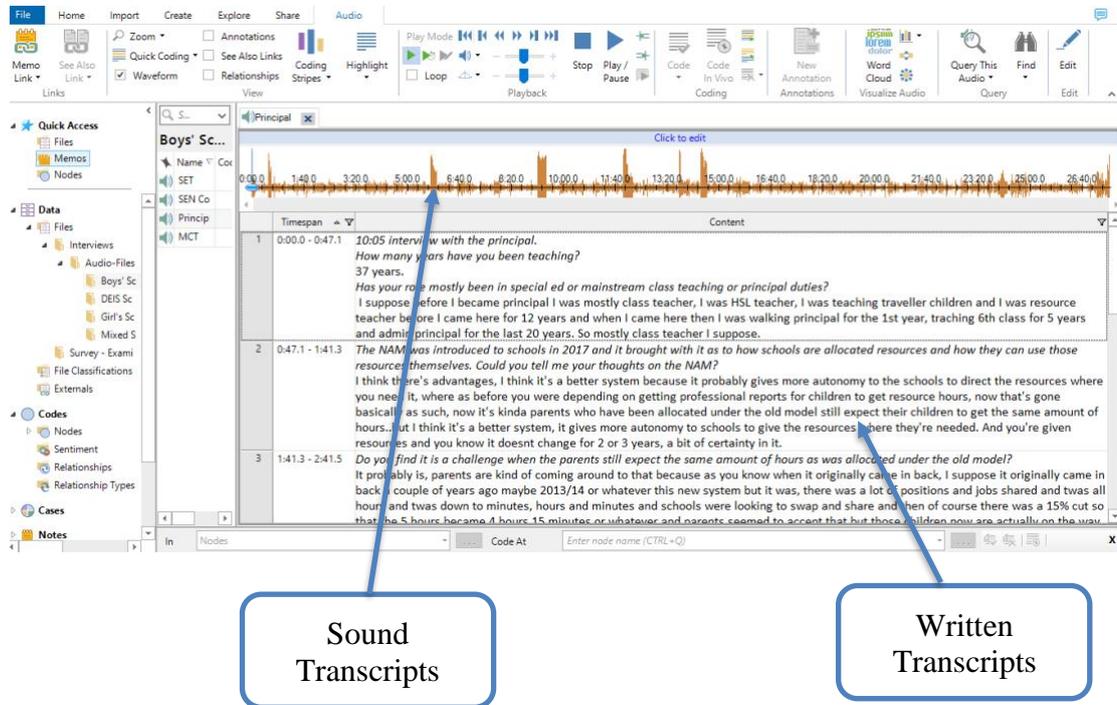
Following these steps, the researcher proceeded onto Phase One of Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis, as detailed below.

#### 4.7.2.4 Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006)

The steps undertaken by the researcher to engage with each phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, throughout this study, are described below. However, it is essential to note that this was a recursive process, rather than a linear process and so, the researcher moved back and forth throughout the phases as needed (Braun and Clarke 2006).

### Phase One: Familiarising Yourself with Your Data

Transcription of audio-files into NVivo 12 was the first step undertaken by the researcher to familiarise herself with the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews (see Figure 4.9).



**Figure 4. 9: Transcription into NVivo 12**

All interviews were manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher, which allowed her to become fully immersed in the data (Robson 2011) and become familiar with the data, while continuous checking (Braun and Clarke 2006), proofreading and editing ensured an error free passage. Manual transcription, therefore, contributed to the trustworthiness of the data, as it is recognised that computerised transcription methods (e.g., voice recognition software) can negatively impact transcript comprehensibility due to accuracy and punctuation errors (Johnson 2011; Eaton *et al.* 2019). Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.518) discuss the interactional aspects of the interview; the communication between the interviewer and interviewee. Non-verbal communication is expressed through facial and body gestures (a pause, a slight shift in their seat, facial expressions which portray confusion, anger, boredom, interest, etc.). Throughout the seventeen interviews

conducted; the researcher was engaging in ‘active listening’ when observing and noticing these gestures, which creates a more complete picture of the interview and facilitates a more accurate interpretation of what the interviewee means. Any observations (tone, emphasis, pauses, mood, facial and body expressions) were noted in the transcription phase (Appendix 24) in an effort to record the interview as a social encounter rather than merely a record of data (Cohen *et al.* 2018). This ‘active listening’ contributes to deconstructing the participant narrative in order to interpret not only what was said in the interview, but also what was unsaid (Egan 2013). Annotating was also a valuable process which the researcher engaged with throughout the analysis, as it facilitated the inclusion of important context such as field notes and observations, coding assumptions and even researcher thoughts and ideas so that later, when writing analytical memos, those contextual factors would not be lost when interpreting meaning within coded content (Appendix 25).

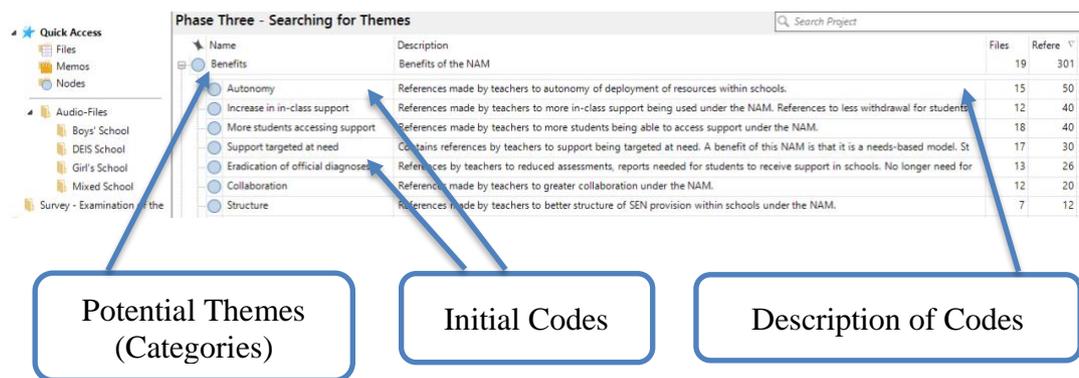
#### ***Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes***

Initial coding involved reading interview transcripts carefully in order to systematically assign labels to pieces of the data which described and categorised the text. Memoing was also an integral part of this phase, as the researcher documented thought processes and made notes regarding items to re-read, statements of particular interest and specific aspects of the data which should be returned to (Saldana 2013) (Appendix 26). The use of NVivo 12 fostered these ‘reflexive moments’ (Woods *et al.* 2016, p.393) as it’s features enable the creation of memos with attached segments of the data. The researcher recognised the importance of memo-keeping throughout all stages of this research, in line with Birks’ *et al.* (2008) functions of memos in qualitative research (Appendix 27). Reading and re-reading of the data and assigning and re-assigning codes (Cohen *et al.* 2018) was undertaken to ensure equal attention was given to the entire data set during this phase (Braun and Clarke 2006). A total of 251 initial codes were generated during Phase Two (Appendix 28). Once the researcher was satisfied that she had saturated the open coding, she progressed onto Phase Three.

#### ***Phase Three: Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)***

The previous phase initially detected frequencies and patterns within the data (Cohen *et al.* 2018) to construct codes. The purpose of Phase Three was to group and

classify these emergent codes into potential themes, which were organised as initial categories of codes. The researcher examined all existing codes and searched for those with shared concepts or ideas which could be collated within an over-arching theme by developing an initial thematic map (Appendix 29). Headings were then created for each of these potential themes in NVivo, with the initial codes from Phase Two, which relate to these potential themes, being displayed underneath.



**Figure 4. 10: Developing Potential Themes (Categories) in NVivo 12**

A total of 23 potential themes (categories) were identified during this phase (Appendix 30). It is important to note that the researcher continued to write memos during this phase as she was aware that some of these codes and potential themes ‘may go on to form main themes, whereas others may form sub-themes, and others still may be discarded’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.90). Therefore, these memos provided freedom to the researcher to jot down her thoughts based on possible themes at this time, which at a later stage, could be useful for reviewing, confirming or discarding such themes (Birks *et al.* 2008; Saldana 2013).

***Phase Four: Reviewing Themes (Coding On)***

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), Phase Four involves two levels of analysis. The researcher engaged in level one by reviewing all coded data extracts to consider if they form a coherent pattern. Refinement of themes involved a rigorous process of omitting themes, merging themes and separating larger themes into two, which is illustrated in the developed thematic map (Appendix 31). The researcher then re-read her entire data to consider how accurately the emerging themes reflected the meanings

evident in the data set as a whole and to re-code any additional data within themes that may have been missed in earlier coding stages, which Braun and Clarke describe as level two analysis of this phase. Phase Four further refined the potential themes (categories) from 23 to 19 (Appendix 32), which informed the final themes developed in Phase Five.

#### ***Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes***

The researcher was interpreting the data and theorising from the data at this phase, ensuring that each theme tells a ‘story’, which contributes to the ‘overall story’ of the data related to the research questions of the study (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.92). Sub-themes were identified and were useful to provide structure to large, complex themes, as shown in the final thematic map (Appendix 33). This phase also involved data reduction, which is noted as a key element of qualitative analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994; Cohen *et al.* 2018). The researcher ensured that the quality, integrity and validity of the data were retained and respected during this reduction process by re-reading interview transcriptions, examining memos taken in earlier phases and reflecting over the data collection phase thus far, to examine the essence of the data of each emerging theme and to ensure findings were rooted in the data (Appendix 34). 3 themes supported by 11 sub-themes were identified at Phase Five (Appendix 35). Names were given to these themes and sub-themes during this phase, which reflect the headings and sub-headings presented in Chapter Six.

#### ***Phase Six: Producing the Report***

The final phase involved the write-up of these qualitative findings, which are presented under the named themes in Chapter Six. Raw data (i.e., direct quotes from interview participants) are ‘embedded within an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.93) of this data, to back up claims and arguments made throughout.

### **4.7.3 Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a method of examining and analysing language, by exploring the meanings produced by language use and communication, the contexts of such meanings and the practices caused by these meanings (Lähdesmäki *et al.* 2010). In keeping with the ontological stance of this study’s paradigm, which views reality is a

social construction (Mertens 2015), discourse analysis must consider the social contexts in which texts are set (Cohen *et al.* 2018) in order to fully understand and interpret the reality of the produced document. This is directly linked to the Contexts of Influence and Policy Text Production within this study's theoretical framework; Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Such analysis seeks to examine language (Gee 2014) on a deeper level to connect what is being said in the text to the society and the social context in which it was written. Throughout this study, discourse analysis of policy documents involved examining what was said, what was not said and what was hidden in the document (Egan 2013; Denscombe 2014) to discover patterns and hidden rules of how language was used (or similarly, was not used) in order to gain new interpretations, insights and meanings from the data (Hewitt 2009).

As briefly mentioned in Section 4.6.6, policy documents were examined and deconstructed throughout this research process as a method of data collection, to provide a policy context for the study and to inform quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures. Firstly, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) was analysed in detail, as this document outlines the SETAM which is the focus of this current study. The accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) were examined in conjunction with this Circular, followed by analysis of Circular 007/2019 (DES 2019a) which set out the revised profiled allocations of the SETAM. The context in which these texts were produced was considered, which is described in Section 3.3.1 by providing a rationale for the proposal of a new allocation system. In addition to the reviews (NCSE 2013), reports (NCSE 2014b) and pilot study (DES 2016b) which influenced policymakers in developing a new allocation model, the social context in which this policy was written was also analysed. Adhering to the global movement towards inclusive schooling, increasing diversity was evident in Irish schools at the time of text production of the SETAM. The previous model for supporting students with SEN in Irish primary schools (DES 2005) required some children (i.e., those with LI disabilities, see Section 3.2 for further detail) to obtain an official diagnosis of disability to receive support, resulting in a huge demand for educational assessments, which the State could not solely accommodate for. Schools were allocated a limited number of NEPS assessments per year, which often could not meet the demand on the ground (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Rose *et al.* 2015). An alternative option saw parents paying for private professional assessments which was flawed in that not only were there lengthy waiting-lists (NCSE 2013) and high costs associated with such (DES,

NCSE and NEPS 2017), but it also ‘potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage’ (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b, p.3; DES 2016b; DES 2017a). In line with European trends (EADSNE 2009), the SETAM enabled Ireland to move away from a medical model of support and towards eradicating the need to label or diagnose students for them to receive support in schools. This, while it may have been of benefit to students (which this study seeks to find out), was also the State’s response to issues concerning limited available NEPS assessments, the backlog of private assessments and unnecessarily diagnosing students as having SEN for the purpose of gaining access to resource hours/allocation (NCSE 2013; DES 2017a) (see Section 2.4.4). Discourse analysis, which examined the social context of these policy documents, was carried out to connect the language of the texts to the underlying values and assumptions of the policymakers, seeking to identify influential factors in the development of this new model of allocation in Irish primary schools. Therefore, in line with the study’s theoretical framework, the researcher engaged in discourse analysis to reflect upon and question the policymaking processes (Hewitt 2009) of the SETAM from the Context of Influence to the Context of Practice, which this study seeks to explore.

The following section details the steps undertaken by the researcher to adhere to appropriate ethical standards from this study’s initiation to completion.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

Within educational research, ethics refer to the ‘moral deliberation, choice and accountability’ on behalf of the researcher throughout a study (Miller *et al.* 2012, p.14). Ethical considerations guide the researcher’s behaviour in terms of what they ‘ought’ and ‘ought not’ to do (Cohen *et al.* 2018) and ensures that researchers are aware and sensitive to ‘complex and sometimes unexpected ethical concerns that may arise’ (Brooks *et al.* 2014, p.3). There are two schools of thought when it comes to ethics in research. Hammerseley and Triantanou (2012) maintain that scholars often assume that ethics is primarily concerned with the treatment of research participants. This is in contrast with the alternative view, in which they promote themselves, which sees the focus of ethics as the quality of the research and knowledge produced. Brooks *et al.* (2014, p.5) believe that these two ethical concerns should ‘not be seen as mutually exclusive’ but rather, both should be considered and used to inform all decisions and actions throughout the research process. *Compliance* and *integrity* are terms which have come to underpin ‘goodness’ in

research (Preissle *et al.* 2015) and describe the aforementioned schools of thought. These terms will be discussed below, with reference to the steps taken by the researcher to abide by high ethical standards throughout this study.

As this study relates to the practice of teachers implementing special education policies at a local level, the involvement of human participants was essential. Thus, to achieve compliance, ethical considerations were at the forefront of this study. Compliance refers to adhering to a variety of ethical principles, such as those outlined in the Belmont Report (Department of Health Education and Welfare (DHEW) 1979) when working with human participants in educational research. The report outlined three basic ethical principles which are set out in much of the literature (Polit and Beck 2010; Brooks *et al.* 2014; Preissle *et al.* 2015). These include the principle of respect for persons, the principle of beneficence (and non-maleficence) and the principle of justice. It is widely accepted that the values of these principles are practiced or applied by receiving informed consent, assessment and balancing of risk and benefit, and selection of participants (Brooks *et al.* 2014; Preissle *et al.* 2015). The researcher abided by the first principle by ensuring participant autonomy was maintained throughout the study, by providing research participants with information about what would be involved in the study and by receiving informed consent from all wishing to participate, as described in Section 4.8.1 below. The second principle, which encompasses a motive of doing good and avoiding harm (Brooks *et al.* 2014) was adhered to as the researcher described potential risks and benefits of the study to all participants in the Participant Information Sheets (Appendix 9 and 18). As potential risks include an invasion of privacy (as well as other types of possible physical, mental, emotional, social or economic harm in some cases) (Brooks *et al.* 2014; Preissle *et al.* 2015), information including actions taken by the researcher to uphold confidentiality and data storage procedures (see Sections 4.8.2 and 4.8.3) were provided to the participants. Finally, concerns relating to the principle of justice were addressed by engaging with a random sampling technique for selection of survey participants, which aimed to represent a diverse cross-section of primary school teachers in Ireland. These principles were adhered to throughout all stages of the research, and ethical approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC)<sup>30</sup> was granted for this study (Appendix 6).

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<sup>30</sup> MIREC approval was granted on the 21st of January 2019 ensuring that any risk involved in the study was minimised and benefit was maximised.

Although a number of steps were taken to adhere to the procedural ethics, which achieve compliance within research, as discussed above, Preissle *et al.* (2015, p.144) argue that ‘research ethics involves much more than how scholars treat those they study’. Research integrity is concerned with the *quality* of the research and aims to ‘produce conclusions that reach a relatively high threshold in terms of likely validity and makes a worthwhile contribution to collective knowledge’ (Hammersley and Triantanou 2012, p.134). Considerations of situational ethics, such as these, are extremely important in order to enhance and maintain the value of the research being undertaken (Miller *et al.* 2012). Actions which were carried out by the researcher, such as member-checks, leaving an audit trail and piloting both the quantitative and qualitative data collections tools, to address the situational ethics, and to enhance the integrity and establish the reliability and validity of this study are described in Section 4.9.

#### **4.8.1 Informed Consent**

The first phase of data collection involved an online survey, whereby responses were anonymised before being saved onto a personal, encrypted laptop. The researcher included an electronic Informed Consent Form (Appendix 10) which was completed by all participants prior to starting the survey. This involved participants ticking a number of boxes, confirming that they had read and understood all details of the study as described in the electronic Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 9), which was provided at the beginning of the survey (Roberts and Allen 2015). This gave a brief description of what the study was about, who was undertaking it and what was involved for participants. It also outlined the option of participant withdrawal from the research at any time without consequence (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011) and provided information on participant privacy and confidentiality.

In relation to the subsequent, qualitative phase of data collection, the researcher carried out a number of steps to ensure informed consent was freely given by all participants. Firstly, a Letter of Information was sent to the principal of each school (Appendix 15). This document provided the principal with an overview of the study, which also outlined the option of participant withdrawal from the research at any time without consequence. It described potential risks and benefits of the study and provided information on participants’ autonomy, privacy and confidentiality (Howe and Moses 1999; Martella *et al.* 2013) (further discussed in Section 4.8.2 below). Once the school

agreed to participate in the study, a Letter of Information was emailed to the school for the attention of the Board of Management (Appendix 16), outlining the purpose of the study, what would be involved and stating the agreed date and times that the interviews would take place. Principals then received a Principal Informed Consent Form (Appendix 17) which the principal signed on behalf of the school and Board of Management. Teachers in the school participating in the semi-structured interviews received a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 18). After reading said document, they freely gave their consent by providing their signature on individual Participant Informed Consent Forms (Appendix 19). The research was also introduced to participants at the beginning of each interview, in which time they had the opportunity to reiterate their informed consent or indeed withdraw from the study without consequence (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011; Martella *et al.* 2013).

#### **4.8.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld at all times throughout this study as an ID number was generated for each participant response to the online survey and a pseudonym was assigned to each interview participant. It was this ID number or pseudonym, rather than the participant's name, which was held with their data to maintain their anonymity (Creswell and Poth 2018). Participant anonymity and overall confidentiality were assured to all participants as the researcher and her supervisor were the only people with access to participant information, which was explained to all participants in Participant Information Sheets.

#### **4.8.3 Storage of Data**

Data was stored on a personal laptop, secured with a password. The researcher had custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop was not granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor. Audio recordings from interviews were transferred onto NVivo 12, which is password-protected, for transcription on this laptop and the original recording was deleted from the recording device immediately after transcription. All data and research records of this study are anonymised and therefore, in accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy (Mary Immaculate College 2019), may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher on a personal, encrypted laptop.

## **4.9 Reliability and Validity**

The importance of reliability and validity to enhance the value and integrity of research is portrayed by Morse *et al.* (2002, p.13) who argue that they are ‘appropriate concepts for attaining rigor’. Reliability and validity measures associated with qualitative research were adhered to throughout this study, as both data collection instruments were, in some way, underpinned by constructivism. Validity within qualitative research is concerned with the accuracy of the researcher’s account which represents realities of the social phenomena according to the participants (Creswell and Miller 2000) and the degree to which the researcher’s conjectures leads to an ‘understanding in terms of credible inferences’ about the research topic (Maxwell 1992; Collins 2015, p.246). Steps taken by the researcher to establish the reliability and validity of this mixed-methods study are outlined below.

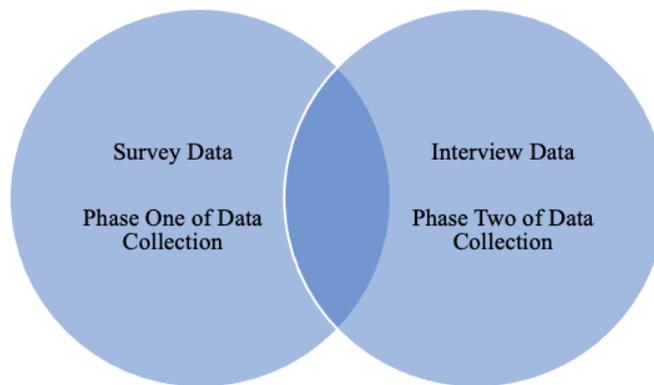
### **4.9.1 Particularisation**

Generalisation holds much importance in determining validity in quantitative research, as it is widely acknowledged as a major quality-standard. However, as ‘the goal of most qualitative studies is to provide a rich, contextualised understanding of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases’ (Polit and Beck 2010, p.1452), generalisation is more debatable in qualitative research. The current study employed a mixed-methods approach which aimed to uncover particularisations, rather than generalisations (Neilsen 2009), whereby the emphasis was on uniqueness (Stake 1995) and understanding (Mac Naughton *et al.* 2010) of Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994), i.e., Irish primary schools implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a). Therefore, this study sought to gather rich, thick descriptions (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Cohen *et al.* 2018) in context-specific settings which could be applied to different cases or settings (Polit and Beck 2010).

### **4.9.2 Triangulation**

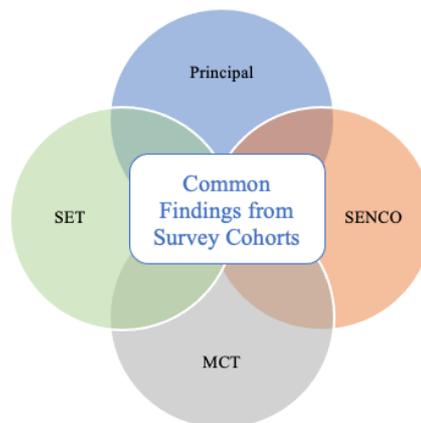
Richards (2015) maintains that the use of multiple methods can yield rigorous analysis of the data and represent a validity measure in itself, methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation, including the use of a national, online survey and semi-structured interviews to establish validity in the current study, is used in

research with the belief that ‘the convergence of multiple methods upon a single conclusion better supports that conclusion than just one of those methods arriving at the conclusion’ (Heesen *et al.* 2019, p.3068).



**Figure 4. 11: Methodological Triangulation**

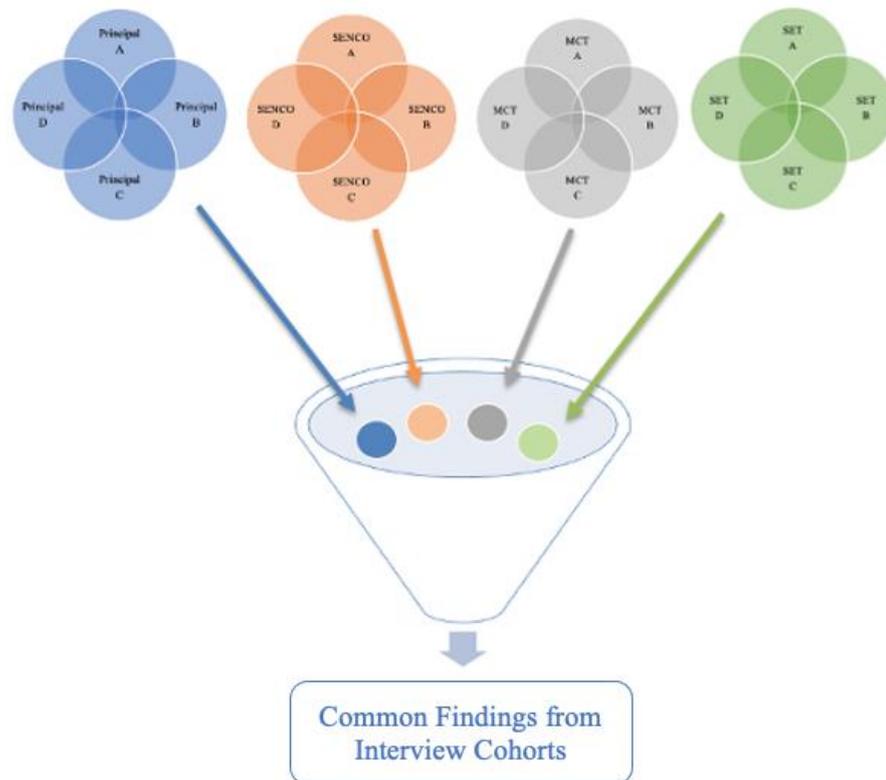
Additionally, the variety of data sources<sup>31</sup> included in both the quantitative and qualitative sample, provided a range of data triangulation opportunities (see Figure 4.12 and 4.13), which enabled the researcher to ‘search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information’ (Creswell and Miller 2000, p.126). This process involved the identification of commonalities between participant data, which aimed to produce a more accurate and comprehensive representation of the object of study (Silverman 2015) that would encompass valuable comparisons and contrasts.



**Figure 4. 12: Data Triangulation between Survey Cohorts**

<sup>31</sup> Data sources included primary school principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs.

The figure below illustrates data triangulation between participant cohorts from the four Contexts of Practice in which semi-structured interviews were conducted. The letters A, B, C and D refer to the type of school each participant was teaching in (see Section 4.6.5.3), i.e., ‘Principal A’ signifies the principal who was interviewed in the Girls’ School.



**Figure 4. 13: Data Triangulation between Interview Cohorts**

Use of software such as Excel and SPSS for quantitative data management and analysis and NVivo 12 for qualitative data management and analysis facilitated accurate identification of common data from each cohort and provided rich analytical and triangulation opportunities. Once data was clustered and final data ascertained from each cohort, similarities and differences between [for example] principals’ experiences of the SETAM (DES 2017a) and SETs experiences of the SETAM could be compared, leading to credible and dependable findings, as presented in Chapters Five and Six, and establishing the reliability and validity of the study.

### **4.9.3 Reflexivity**

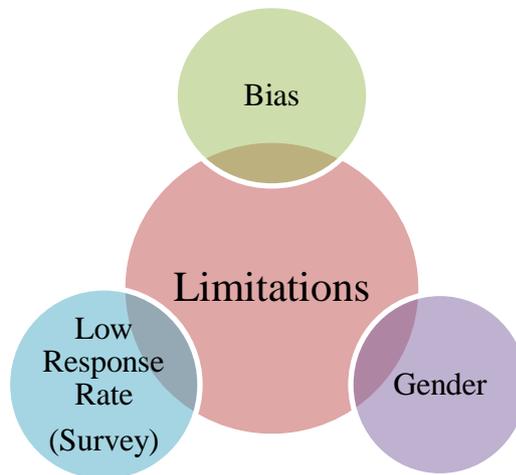
In order to achieve validity throughout this study, the researcher strived to set aside her own values and beliefs to prevent any bias which may occur. Therefore, Chapter One (Section 1.4.1) contains a biographical statement which positions the researcher within the study and discloses her beliefs and biases (Creswell and Miller 2000) towards inclusion. Such reflexivity is in line with the epistemological stance of the paradigm which underpins this study (Section 4.3.1). A research diary was used to record thoughts and observations following each interview (Appendix 36), which allowed for careful monitoring of bias (Creswell and Miller 2000) to limit personal influence during data analysis. This research diary was also used to record beliefs, thoughts and insights throughout the entire research journey (Appendix 37), which Waddington (2013, p.144) claims is an 'important tool' to achieve reflexivity in practice by 'affording a deeper understanding of the role and impact of the researcher in their research encounters and endeavours'. Additionally, the researcher strived to achieve trustworthiness by establishing an audit trail, as all research decisions and activities were clearly documented throughout the study. This audit trail is evident throughout this account as rationales, which explain and justify each stage of the research process, are described and embedded within discussions. The use of software, such as SPSS and NVivo 12, as tools for transparency by creating an audit trail of analytic processes (Woods *et al.* 2016), were described in Section 4.7.1.1 and 4.7.2.2. Appendices which illustrate rigour were also included to achieve auditability.

### **4.9.4 Member-Checking**

Member-checks were carried out as validity checks to ensure trustworthiness within the data and to reduce the potential for researcher bias by actively involving the participant in verifying the accuracy of descriptions, interpretations or results (Birt *et al.* 2016). Narrative accuracy checks were carried out during interviews to clarify and confirm the researcher's understandings of responses. The researcher consistently used the phrase 'would I be correct in saying...?' to systematically check (Creswell and Miller 2000) the narrative account and to provide participants with an opportunity to make claims or clarifications based on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the interview conversation, which, according to many leaders in the field, including Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell and Miller (2000), adds credibility to the study.

#### 4.10 Limitations

Efforts made to establish a valid and reliable study were outlined in the above sections, however, it is acknowledged that limitations still remain. These limitations are briefly noted in Figure 4.14 and are further discussed below.



**Figure 4. 14: Limitations of the Study**

Researcher bias was acknowledged as a possible limitation to the current study. As a primary school teacher, and in keeping with the epistemological stance of the study, from the outset, the researcher did not claim to be ‘distanced’ or independent from the research. The potential impacts of the researcher’s personal experiences, particularly in relation to the topic of inclusion, were recognised, however, measures taken by the researcher to minimise this bias were evident throughout the study, as discussed in Section 4.9. Additionally, as a recently qualified teacher, the researcher had no experience working with pre-existing models of allocation (i.e., the GAM (DES 2005) or any others which preceded it), which minimised potential bias by facilitating a very objective stance towards the examination of the SETAM (DES 2017a).

Unequal gender representation within the sample was also recognised as a limitation throughout this study. As a random sampling technique was adhered to for the first data collection phase, the researcher could not control or predict who would complete the online surveys, once they had been distributed to schools via email. A gender imbalance in survey responses was evident, with a significantly higher female response-

rate (85%). However, this figure is representative of the national male to female teacher ratio, as in 2017, men accounted for 14% of teachers at primary level in Ireland, while women accounted for 86% (CSO 2020). Similarly, the qualitative sample was also predominantly female based (female n=11; male n=6), which may highlight the ‘significant decline’ of male teachers in Irish primary schools as reported by O’Keeffe (2014). While this limitation is recognised, gender was not a focus of the overall study, but rather the intended sample was principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs. In light of this, the researcher maintains that although a relatively small male representation was offered in this study, it did not affect the overall validity or reliability of claims or findings.

Although online surveys typically have a lower response-rate than paper-based surveys (Lodico *et al.* 2010; Cohen *et al.* 2018), with rates ‘as low as 10%’ in some cases (Dowling and Brown 2010, p.76), the low response-rate to the national, online survey is recognised as a limitation of this study. Cohen *et al.* (2018) list a number of reasons why there may be a very low or zero response-rate to a survey, including the pressure of competing activities on the time of the respondent and the survey not reaching the intended participants. The latter provides a predicted reason for this low response-rate, as surveys were sent to school email addresses whereby the principal was asked to forward them onto other relevant staff in his/her school. At an early stage, the majority of survey responses were from principals, which led the researcher to believe that all surveys may not have reached the intended SENCOs, CTs and SETs. In the case of distributing surveys via email, as was done for this study, another reason for low response-rates is the possibility of the email being opened by the wrong person (for example the school secretary) who may fail to pass it on to those who it was intended for. Efforts were made to increase this low response-rate, including sending reminder emails to unresponsive schools and extending the survey deadline. Although these measures failed to significantly increase the response-rate, this survey data lends itself to particularisation and not generalisation. Considering this, the quantitative measures were primarily used for gaining descriptive data to inform the interview schedule, in conjunction with research literature analysed, while the semi-structured interviews gathered the key, rich, data. Therefore, this low response-rate, although recognised as a limitation, did not significantly impact the overall findings of the study.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the methodological choices made throughout this study in order to obtain the desired knowledge and understandings (Guba and Lincoln 1994) of the research topic. The chosen paradigm, along with its ontological, epistemological and methodological implications, was described. The theoretical framework of the study, as detailed in Chapter Three, was reiterated within this chapter, with a focus on the SETAM within each of the first three contexts of the Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992). Following this, the study's mixed-methods research design was described, which led to an outline of the instruments used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, along with a rationale describing their appropriateness. Data analysis was underpinned by the chosen paradigm and influenced by the theoretical framework of the study. Throughout this chapter, the quantitative data analysis process, using Excel and SPSS and the subsequent, qualitative data analysis process, using NVivo 12, were described, while also discussing the discourse analysis which took place throughout all stages of this study. The researcher recognised the need to produce valid and reliable data and so she remained reflexive throughout this process. Measures undertaken to enhance the reliability, validity and reflexivity of the study, as well as ethical considerations which were adhered to throughout all stages of the research were outlined, before briefly noting the limitations associated with the study. In summary, this chapter aimed to outline the researcher's decisions, behaviours and actions involved in this study to attain the desired data from the field. Chapter Five will present the findings which emerged from the analysis of survey data and discuss how such findings informed the development of the semi-structured interview schedule for the qualitative data collection phase.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION PHASE ONE: SURVEY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter One introduced this study as a mixed-methods research design which aimed to unearth the lived experience (Mertens 2015) of Irish primary school teachers, implementing the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a) within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). Chapter Two provided a policy context to this study and traced the trajectory towards inclusion, as we know it today, highlighting the influence of international practices on current, national policies and practices. The SETAM policy and its features, as outlined in Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and the accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b), were then discussed in-depth in Chapter Three. These Guidelines (DES 2017b) aimed to provide schools with direction on the ‘use, organisation and deployment’ of SET resources for students with SEN (DES 2017b, p.3) and called upon teachers to engage with a three-step process to operationalise the SETAM (DES 2017a) and to document:

‘Step 1: How can we identify needs?’

Step 2: How can we meet needs?’

Step 3: How can we monitor and record outcomes for pupils?’

(DES 2017b, p.3)

These steps directed the study’s key research questions to examine how teachers are implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adapted ‘Step 2: How can we meet needs?’, narrowing the focus to examine how SET resources are deployed within schools to effectively meet students’ needs. The study’s three primary research questions are presented below:

1. How are students’ needs identified under the SETAM?
2. How are special education teaching resources allocated to effectively meet students’ needs under the SETAM?
3. How are students’ outcomes monitored and recorded under the SETAM?

In accordance with the study's theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle (Ball 1994), the SETAM (DES 2017a) is recognised as a complex process, rather than a product which is merely imposed onto people (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). The study sought to gain an insight into how this policy was unfolding on the ground, by examining how teachers, as the key stakeholders in policy implementation in schools, 'enact practice and engage with policy' (Priestley *et al.* 2015, p.1). Therefore, Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), was outlined in Chapter Three. The methodological approaches which guided this study were described in Chapter Four and the epistemological and ontological stance of the researcher was acknowledged. Adhering to pragmatic constructivism, this paradigm provided scope to the researcher to engage with a mixed-methods research design in order to achieve the desired purpose (Mertens 2015) of the study, while also guiding the thinking and actions of the researcher in a constructivist manner, to delve into the lives of teachers working in the field under the policy structure of the SETAM to 'understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it' (Costantino 2008, p.119). Chapter Four also detailed the study's research participants, in both phase one and phase two of data collection. School profiles, which provide demographics and a background context to the respondents of the national, online survey, were outlined in Table 4.2.

This chapter presents research findings and analyses obtained from the online, national survey. As discussed in Chapter Four, this survey included a combination of both closed and open-ended questions and therefore, was not entirely quantitatively orientated, but rather, aimed to harvest quantitative and qualitative data. This chapter discusses these findings in relation to the conceptual framework of the continuous Policy Cycle (Ball 1994) as illustrated in Figure 3.9 and the research literature presented in Chapters Two and Three. These survey findings, which have recently been published (Curtin and Egan 2021), shed light on how teachers implement the SETAM (DES 2017a) in mainstream primary schools and will be presented below under each step of the 'three-step process', as outlined in the Guidelines (DES 2017b), which directed the development of this study's research questions.

## **5.2 Step 1: How can we identify needs?**

The SETAM (DES 2017a) introduced a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs in schools, based on each school's educational profile (see Section 3.3.4). Replacing the GAM, EAL support scheme and the NCSE RTH Model

(DES 2005), the SETAM encompasses a needs-based model, whereby schools have greater autonomy to identify and provide for the learning needs of their students. The eradication of the need for students (with LI disabilities) to obtain a diagnosis of disability prior to accessing supports in schools is one of the most prominent developments of the SETAM, which now enables all students' needs to be identified and catered for within the school. According to survey data, a variety of strategies and assessments are used for the identification of students' needs in the area of maths, language, and social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs (see Appendix 38). Such assessments can be kept in the Student Support File to facilitate planning and effective monitoring of student progress (see Section 3.3.3 and Section 6.3 for further information on Student Support Files). However, two central themes emerged from the data in relation to this first step, 'how can we identify needs?'. The first theme relates to the increased autonomy offered to teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a) to firstly, identify students' needs and then, allocate additional teaching support accordingly. The second theme discusses schools' use of the Continuum of Support (CoS) (DES 2007a) to assist teachers with the identification of students' needs and highlights how limited CPD in this area may impact the successful implementation of the SETAM. These are discussed in-depth below, with a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as some open-ended responses, included to corroborate such findings.

### **5.2.1 Greater Autonomy for Schools: “A Double-Edged Sword”**

According to Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a, p.2), the SETAM aimed to provide 'a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school'. The current study suggests that this aim has come to fruition on implementation of the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), as teachers' satisfaction with the increased levels of autonomy offered to them to identify students' needs and allocate support is reflected in the survey data. 62% of participants (N=29) expressed that they have had a 'good' overall experience working with this model, in general. A number of benefits of the SETAM (DES 2017a) emerged from the national, online survey, which may have contributed to this overall positive response. The overriding benefit, as reported by 40% of participants (N=19), involved “*schools' autonomy and using resources where they are most needed*” (ID No.11), “*schools deciding who needs the support and how much*” (ID No.3), and “*the principal having*

***the discretion with regard to allocation***” (ID No.4). However, it is significant that 15% of survey respondents (N=7) spoke to the same notion of autonomy and control over the identification of students in need of support and the allocation of resources to support them as a challenge of the SETAM, as is elucidated in the quotes below.

*“Huge pressure on individual teachers to allocate the correct amount of time.”*  
ID No.26

*“Deciding on who gets the help/how much.”*  
ID No.36

***“The principal having discretion and full responsibility for this allocation.”***  
ID No.4

It is interesting to note that participant No.4 (see quotes in bold) used almost identical wording for their response to both survey questions regarding the benefits and the challenges of the SETAM yet added that the principal having *“full responsibility”* is a limitation of the needs-based system. Analysis of the data unearthed the dilemma teachers face when acting agentively within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), as greater autonomy leads to greater responsibility. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), teacher agency is regulated by the demands and constraints of situations (Pyhältö *et al.* 2014), which is concurrent with the study’s theoretical framework, which recognises that all contexts are bound by structure and involve compromise (Ball 1994). Therefore, the demands associated with this newfound teacher autonomy places greater responsibility on teachers to identify and prioritise those in greatest need of support, as teachers remain bound by the structure of this special education policy, which sees schools being provided with a certain allocation of SET resources, in accordance with their educational profile (see Section 3.3.4). This leads to greater challenges in terms of decision-making and timetabling, as schools are now responsible for such duties, yet their agency remains dependent on the availability of resources allocated to them (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Ball *et al.* 2012; Erss 2018; Giudici 2020). The interplay of teacher autonomy/responsibility in practice, and the dilemmatic nature of such, sparked researcher interest and influenced the interview schedule for the second phase of data collection (see Figure 5.4). This theme subsequently emerged as a significant finding from the qualitative data, which is presented in Chapter Six, Section 6.2. The following section explores how teachers are identifying students’ needs in schools under the

SETAM, according to survey participants, and how confident they feel to engage with such processes.

### **5.2.2 Limited Continuous Professional Development Impacts the Identification of Students' Needs**

The identification of students' needs is an integral aspect of the SETAM (DES 2017a), as teachers on the ground are now agentive in identifying students who require SET support and deciding on the extent of the support given to students, based on their identified need. The NEPS CoS (DES 2007a), described in Section 2.4.2.1, is outlined in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b) to assist teachers in this identification process. Participant responses show that all schools involved in this survey engage with the CoS to identify students' needs under the SETAM (DES 2017a), with 89% of teachers agreeing (N=30), or strongly agreeing (N=12), that this framework was being implemented effectively in their school at the time of data collection.

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the effective implementation of the CoS based on three independent variables [Teachers Develop Student Support Files, Teachers Feel Competent at Developing Classroom Support Plans/School Support Plans and All Teachers are Familiar with the CoS]. This model illustrated the relative contribution of each of these independent variables in explaining the variance of effective implementation of the CoS. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics were in the ranges of 1.050 – 1.163 and .860 –.953 respectively, indicating that multicollinearity was not present (Field 2018). This was confirmed by investigation of variance proportions against each eigenvalue, with each variable having highest variance loading on unique eigenvalues. Mahalanobis distance, centred leverage values, examination of standardised residuals by case, standardised DFBeta and standardised DFFit indicated that 2-3 cases may have exerted undue influence on parameters of the model, however, Cook's distance indicated that all cases were within acceptable limits (Stevens 2009; Field 2018). Normality of residuals and homoscedasticity was confirmed by inspection of histograms and P-P plots (see Appendix 21 for results of all assumption tests).

Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Overall Model					15.04	3,43	<.001*	.512
Teachers Develop Student Support Files	1.73	.090	.198	.089				
Teachers Feel Competent at Developing Support Plans	3.30	.002*	.361	.098				
All Teachers are Familiar with Continuum of Support	3.87	<.001*	.444	.102				

Note: \**p* < .05

**Table 5. 1: Results of a Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support (DES 2007a) Model in Schools (N=47)**

A statistically significant model fit was found ( $F(3,43) = 15.04, p < .05$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .512. Familiarity with the CoS and teacher competency at developing Support Plans were both significant predictors of its effective implementation ( $p = <.002 / p = .001$ ). The remaining variable, which explored the development of Student Support Files, did not contribute to implementation of the CoS. As discussed in Section 5.2.1, the SETAM (DES 2017a) offers greater autonomy to teachers to identify students in need of additional teaching support, and to deploy their school’s SET resources accordingly, without students needing to undergo a professional assessment to obtain a diagnosis of disability, which holds major implications for the Context of Outcomes for students (Ball 1994). Therefore, this model enables earlier identification, intervention and support for students with SEN as they can receive immediate access to resources without waiting on professional reports, or a diagnosis of disability, which in the past, were seen as ‘the means of opening the door to support and resources’ (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.385). Additionally, 87% of survey respondents (N=41) claimed that more students, without an official diagnosis, are now receiving support in their schools. These benefits resulted from the transition to a needs-based model whereby “*more autonomy [was] given to the school to identify pupils presenting with SEN, and to prioritise and implement supports and interventions*” (ID No.23). It is, therefore, imperative that an effective framework is in place to guide the identification process and that teachers feel confident in their ability to

engage with such. Survey results show that the CoS is being effectively used to assist teachers with the identification of students' needs, as illustrated in Table 5.1 above. However, results also show that many teachers still feel inadequately prepared to identify some SEN, as a substantial 94% of participants (N=44) expressed interest in receiving CPD on how best to identify students' needs in practice. Similarly, 53% of survey respondents reported feeling 'very underprepared' (N=11) or 'underprepared' (N=14) to implement the SETAM into their practice on its introduction in September 2017. This is cause for some concern as according to Ekins *et al.* (2016), a crucial factor in developing inclusive approaches to education is teachers' confidence to meet the diverse needs of their students (see Section 2.5.1). This demonstrates the importance of, and need for, CPD for school staff in all areas, including SEN, which is identified as a key finding in a number of Irish studies (NCSE 2013; Rix *et al.* 2013; DES 2016b). As discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.3.2), a pilot of the current allocation model was conducted in the academic year 2015/2016 in forty-seven schools (primary and post-primary). Following this, the inspectorate published a *Review of the Pilot of a New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources to Mainstream Schools to Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs* (DES 2016b). According to this review, schools involved in the pilot scheme were provided with a 'comprehensive suite of supports and guidance to enable them to implement the model as intended by the Department' (DES 2016b, p.9) and findings showed that all teachers were appreciative of the 'supports they received on the training days to help with the identification of educational needs and the NEPS Continuum of Support' (DES 2016b, p.16). However, data suggest that the same cannot be said for the national roll-out of this model as survey findings revealed that only 40% of teachers (N=19) received CPD with the introduction of the SETAM in relation to assessment and identification of students' needs (Curtin and Egan 2021). This coheres with parental concerns, voiced by Dempsey (2017), that the external support offered to schools during the pilot would not be feasible to replicate across all schools in Ireland (Howe and Griffin 2020). Findings from this study indicate that limited supports and professional development were accessed by teachers, who, now under this new model, were faced with greater autonomy and responsibility than ever to identify those in need of additional teaching support. This sheds light on the workings of the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), and so, it can be suggested that although the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) is being implemented in schools to assist teachers with identifying needs,

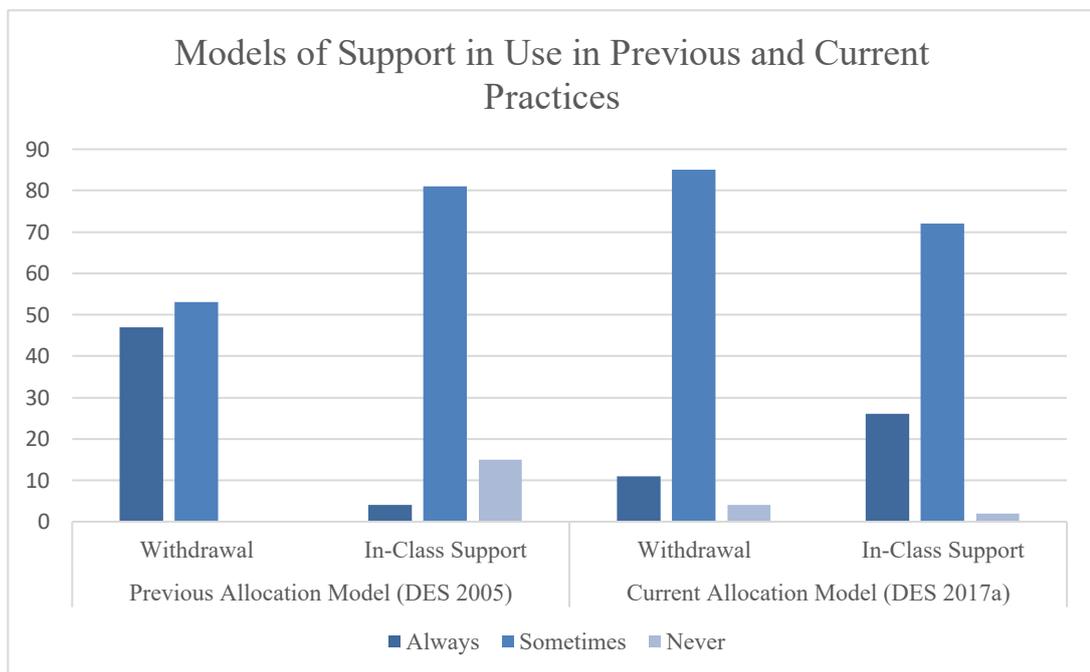
in general, the identification of students' needs remains a concern for teachers in the Context of Practice, due to limited CPD. Therefore, greater CPD and support for the identification of the 'increasingly diverse learning needs' (Chitiyo 2017, p.57) that make up the classrooms of today may be needed for the successful implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in schools, and in turn, the effective education and inclusion of all students, including those with SEN. These survey findings informed the interview schedule for the second phase of data collection and so, prompted the researcher to delve further into school's use of the CoS (DES 2007a). Analysis of such purposeful conversations (Kvale 1996; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) led to interesting findings regarding teachers' use of the framework, particularly Stage One, Classroom Support. Questions surrounding CPD and ITE were also explored during semi-structured interviews, following consideration of survey data. Such qualitative findings are presented in Chapter Six (Section 6.3). The subsequent theme which emerged from analysis of the survey data involved schools' use of SET resources to meet the needs of students with SEN, and so, related to Step 2 of the three-step process. This will be discussed below.

### **5.3 Step 2: How can we meet needs?**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter (see Section 5.1), Step 2 of the three-step process to guide teachers in supporting students with SEN (DES 2017b) has been adapted for this study to focus on how schools deploy their allocated SET resources to effectively meet students' needs under the SETAM (DES 2017a). In accordance with this model, it is no longer a requirement, for any student, to undergo a professional assessment to obtain a diagnosis of disability in order to access supports in schools. Therefore, school-based decisions can now be made, and changed, when necessary, to ensure those with the greatest needs 'have access to the greatest level of support' (DES 2017b, p.5). The survey aimed to gain an insight into how teachers are negotiating the SETAM policy to use their SET resources effectively to meet students' needs in Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). Results showed that a change in practice has occurred in terms of schools' use of their human resources to cater for the needs of students with SEN, with greater use of in-class supports and a more collaborative approach between the CT and the SET now evident in practice.

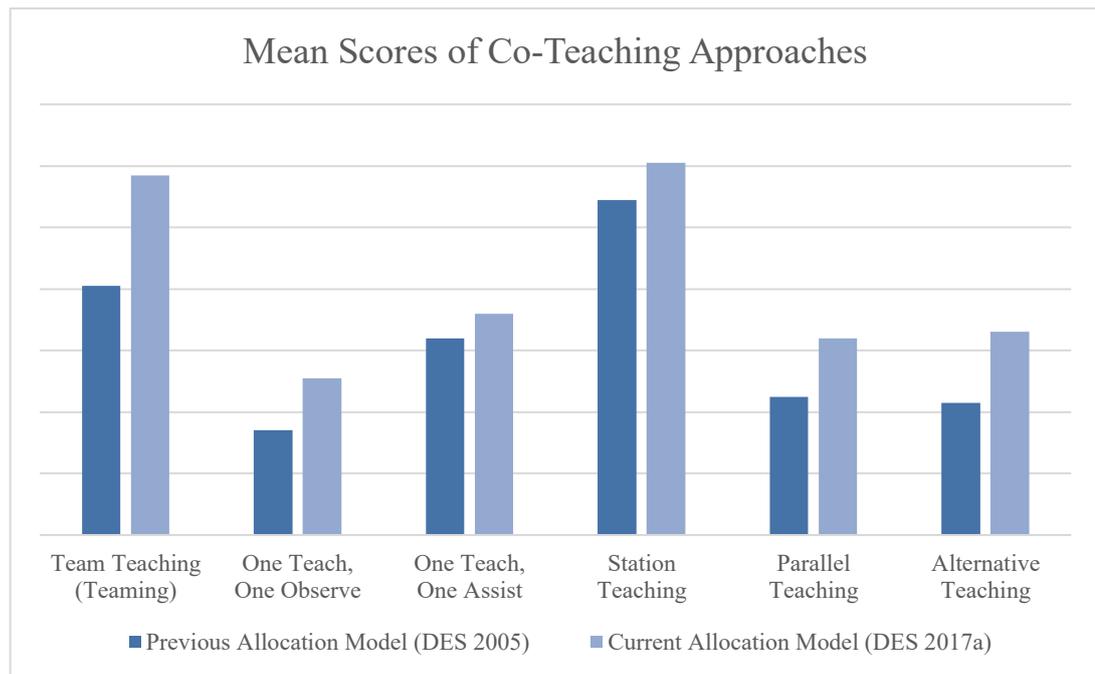
### 5.3.1 Increased Collaborative Practice and In-Class Support

As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6), a movement towards greater collaborative practice and in-class support is increasingly evident in current educational policies, including the SETAM (DES 2017a), which advocates the use of ‘team-teaching’ and ‘small group teaching’ as appropriate ways to respond to students’ individual needs while remaining in the ‘collective setting of the classroom’ (DES 2017a, p.18). Providing in-class support prompts a change in practice for many teachers and impacts the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students, as withdrawal of students with SEN was, in the past, the dominant model of support in practice (DES 2003; Egan 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015). Survey findings show that greater collaboration is evident under the SETAM, with 60% of participants (N=28) reporting that the introduction of this model brought about adjustments in their daily practice, involving “*more in-class support*” (ID No.6) and “*more station-teaching and team-teaching with [the] SET*” (ID No.41). Responses on a Likert Scale showed a comparison between the frequency of the use of withdrawal and in-class support as models of support under the previous allocation model (DES 2005) and the current SETAM (DES 2017a), which is shown in Figure 5.1 below.



**Figure 5. 1: Use of Withdrawal and In-Class Support Methods under the Previous Allocation Model (DES 2005) and the Current SETAM (DES 2017a)**

As illustrated above, the use of individualised teaching in the form of withdrawal from classroom-based learning has decreased since the introduction of the SETAM. 47% of participants (N=22) claimed that they ‘always’ withdrew students with SEN under the previous allocation model (DES 2005), in comparison to just 11% (N=5) under the current SETAM (DES 2017a). However, findings show that although there is a move towards supporting students with SEN within the mainstream classroom, withdrawal is still very much present in schools, with a notable 85% of participants (N=40) indicating that withdrawal is still ‘sometimes’ being used as a model of support in practice. This is in line with Circular 0013/2017, which recognises that ‘where necessary’, individualised teaching, in the form of withdrawal, may be used to ‘address specific learning needs’ (DES 2017a, p.18). This coheres with Friend and Bursuck (2012, p.76) who maintain that in-class support or co-teaching approaches are ‘not the answer for every student with a disability or for every classroom in an inclusive school’. As set out in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.3), the literature discusses multiple co-teaching formats and approaches (Murawski 2009; Friend and Bursuck 2012; Villa *et al.* 2013) to collaboratively plan and deliver instruction. Survey participants reported on their use of the six co-teaching approaches, as outlined by Friend and Bursuck (2012) (see Figure 2.10). Participants selected how often these co-teaching approaches were used in their classroom under the previous and current teacher allocation models. Results indicate the most regularly used forms of in-class support under the SETAM (DES 2017a) and therefore, provide an insight into how SET supports are allocated within schools to meet the needs of students with SEN. The graph below shows these responses [in light blue] and compares the frequency of the use of such co-teaching approaches to their use under the previous allocation model (DES 2005) [in dark blue].



**Figure 5. 2: Co-Teaching Approaches in Use under the Previous (DES 2005) and Current (DES 2017a) Teacher Allocation Models**

As is illustrated in Figure 5.2, there has been an increase in the use of all co-teaching approaches since the introduction of the SETAM (Curtin and Egan 2021). Station-teaching and team-teaching (teaming) were reported as the most frequently used approaches under the current allocation model, followed by the one teach, one assist approach. These findings contrast to existing literature which maintains that the one teach, one assist approach is the most dominant co-teaching model used in practice (Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017; Carty and Farrell 2018). As detailed in Chapter Two, Section 2.6.3, this approach involves one teacher leading the whole-class instruction, while the other, usually the SET, circulates providing individual assistance to students and helping with routines or administrative tasks (Johnson and Brumback 2013; Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017). The movement towards greater use of station-teaching and team-teaching conveys a more collaborative environment in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a) as teachers are working together to plan and deliver instruction. As discussed further in Chapter Six, Section 6.4.1, such co-teaching approaches are often used to facilitate initiatives in the

areas of literacy and numeracy, i.e., Literacy Lift-Off<sup>32</sup>/Maths Lift-Off, therefore, this increase may have been impacted by the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES 2011b), which aimed to raise literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people over the period of 2011-2020. The autonomy and flexibility provided to teachers under this model to decide on the level of support required for each student and to deploy their SET resources accordingly, through a variety of in-class supports and withdrawal methods where necessary, sees 40% of participants agreeing (N=19), and a further 36% strongly agreeing (N=17), that the SETAM (DES 2017a) is an effective model in meeting students' identified needs, which is significant. The third, and final, step outlined in the Guidelines (DES 2017b) is discussed below, shedding light on assessment practices used by teachers implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools, according to survey participants.

#### **5.4 Step 3: How can we monitor and record outcomes for pupils?**

This study aimed to problematise the SETAM (DES 2017a) and give a voice to experienced practitioners in the field who are applying this revised system in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). Monitoring and reviewing interventions and student progress is a key aspect of this model, as Circular 0013/2017 states that the identification and planning process for students with SEN, in line with the CoS, should include 'regular reviews of learning targets as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target setting, intervention and review' (DES 2017a, p.28). This ongoing cycle is presented as a Problem-Solving Process in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b, p.6) which aims to provide direction to schools on how to 'gather and analyse data', as well as how to 'plan and review the progress of individual pupils' (see Figure 3.5). Findings from the national survey show that 85% of participating teachers (N=40) follow this Problem-Solving Process, in accordance with the CoS (DES 2007a), to identify and assess students' SEN and monitor their progress. As the SETAM (DES 2017a) was introduced relatively recently, in September 2017, schools and teachers were still adjusting their practices to meet the demands of the SETAM at the time of data collection. The significance and

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<sup>32</sup> Literacy Lift-Off is a within class programme, delivered through a station-teaching or small group teaching approach. Students spend approximately 10-12 minutes at each station, which may focus on familiar reading, letter/word work, writing, and reading of 'new' (unfamiliar) texts. Typically, Literacy Lift-Off is delivered in blocks for 40-50 minutes per day, 4 to 5 days per week, for a period of 8 to 12 weeks (NEPS 2019).

impact of this research was evident from an early stage, as a survey question regarding the use of this Problem-Solving Process prompted discussion and deliberation in participating schools regarding their own practice and application of the SETAM. In particular, one school commented that they had edited and updated their assessment policy, based on this survey question, to include the Problem-Solving Process as illustrated in Figure 3.5. Additionally, a number of assessment methods were identified as being used in practice to monitor and report on students' outcomes. Teacher observation and teacher-designed tests and tasks emerged as the most commonly used assessment methods when reviewing students' progress, which is significant. The section below will explore the vital role of the teacher in assessment practices and elaborate further on the value of teacher observation in the monitoring and recording of students' outcomes.

#### **5.4.1 The Teacher as a Vital Assessment Tool**

Assessment in education is placed at the heart of teaching and learning, as it builds a picture of a child's learning over time by providing information not only on *what* the child learns but also *how* the child learns (NCCA 2007). The national, online survey sought to examine how teachers carry out assessment under the SETAM (DES 2017a) to implement the final step of the three-step process, and so, participants had the option of selecting multiple assessment methods, which they use to monitor and report on student progress, from a pre-determined list. 92% of survey respondents (N=43) chose teacher observation and 92% (N=43) chose teacher-designed tasks and tests, therefore, highlighting that the majority of teachers working under the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994) use these assessment methods to monitor the progress of their students. Interestingly, only 2% of participants (N=1) selected standardised and diagnostic testing, perhaps due to the summative nature of such assessments of learning (AoL) (see Section 3.3.3 for further information on AoL and AfL). This data suggest that assessments which are used more frequently and informally, such as teacher observation and teacher-designed tests, are more beneficial when monitoring the progress of students with SEN, as assessment goes far beyond just testing, it involves the 'daily interactions between the teacher and each child that include moment-by-moment conversations, observations and actions' (NCCA 2007, p.7). It is noteworthy that such methods hold the teacher as a vital assessment tool, which correlates with subsequent qualitative findings

whereby interview participants regarded teachers' professional judgement, particularly that of the CT, as one of the most frequently used and valuable forms of assessment (see Section 6.2.2.3). Such findings highlight the central role of the teacher in the monitoring of students' outcomes, as according to the NCCA (2007, p.46), 'observations made by the teacher in the classroom provide some of the most immediate and accurate information about a child's learning'. Therefore, it can be concluded that, the majority of schools working under the SETAM policy (DES 2017a) are currently engaging in the Problem-Solving Process, as outlined in the CoS (DES 2007a), whereby teachers use teacher observation and teacher-designed tests and tasks, most frequently, to monitor and review students' progress and to discover 'did it work?' by investigating the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions put in place to support students with SEN in schools.

The following section explores a further finding, which emerged from survey data, regarding teacher voice, and highlights the relevance of Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle in relation to this study, and wider educational policy analysis. A significant number of respondents, unprompted, spoke to the importance of linking the bigger worlds of policy, in particular, the national bodies who initiate and develop policies, to the smaller worlds of policy, i.e., the contexts where such policies are enacted on the ground, by listening to and consulting with those who carry out such policy [teachers] and who are impacted by it [students and teachers] (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006).

### **5.5 “Listen to Teachers, They Know What They are Talking About”: The Voice of the Teacher in Policy Formation**

As outlined in Chapter Three (Section 3.4.1), this study adopts the theoretical framework of Policy as Cycle (Ball 1990; Ball 1994). The continuous cycle emphasises the role of teachers, not only in the implementation of policy, but also in the in the generation (Bowe *et al.* 1992) and the making and shaping of policy (Watson and Michael 2016). A significant finding which emerged from the national, online survey brings the relevance of Policy as Cycle to the fore, as participants strongly conveyed their desire for their voices, as the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools, to be heard. Open-ended responses to survey questions (see Figure 5.3 below) convey that the Irish education system's approach to policy could make better use of the Policy Cycle framework (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), whereby the perspectives of those

at the micro-level in which policy directly impacts and who are delivering the services on the ground (i.e., teachers working in the Context of Practice) are taken into consideration to gain a more realistic understanding of policy implementation (Matland 1995), which may then inform future policy decisions. Teachers overwhelmingly expressed an interest for their experiences and perspectives to be included within the Context of Influence, and to have a more active role, which would impact the Context of Policy Text Production (Ball 1994), for future reviews of this teacher allocation model, as the following quote exemplifies:

*“Ask the relevant people who are deciding the allocated hours to sit down with principals and SETs to **get a grasp of how the people who will be dealing with SET in our schools feel** and use the advice from bodies such as the IPPN<sup>33</sup> in any consultations.”*

ID No.43.

This has particular importance for the Context of Outcomes and the Context of Political Strategy (Ball 1994), which act as feedback loops from the micro level back to the macro level (Lall 2012), thus creating a continuous policy cycle (see Section 3.4.2) and enabling those who frame policies to ‘more fully understand the implications of those policies for those who enact practice’ (Priestley *et al.* 2015, p.8). A further selection of participant’s open-ended responses is presented in Figure 5.3 below, as, when asked what advice teachers would give to the Minister for Education for the review<sup>34</sup> of this SET allocation model, the dominant reaction centred around teachers wanting the Department of Education and policymakers to *listen to*, *talk to* and *consult with* teachers on the ground, which is significant.

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<sup>33</sup> The Irish Primary Principal’s Network (IPPN) is the professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools.

<sup>34</sup> Under the SETAM, allocations to schools remain in place for two years, following which, revised profile allocations are considered. The model was firstly reviewed in 2019, and while revised profiled allocations were again due to be considered for schools from September 2021 (DES 2017a; DES 2019a), it has now been decided that existing allocations will be maintained for the 2021/22 academic year in order to minimise disruption for schools (DoE 2021b).



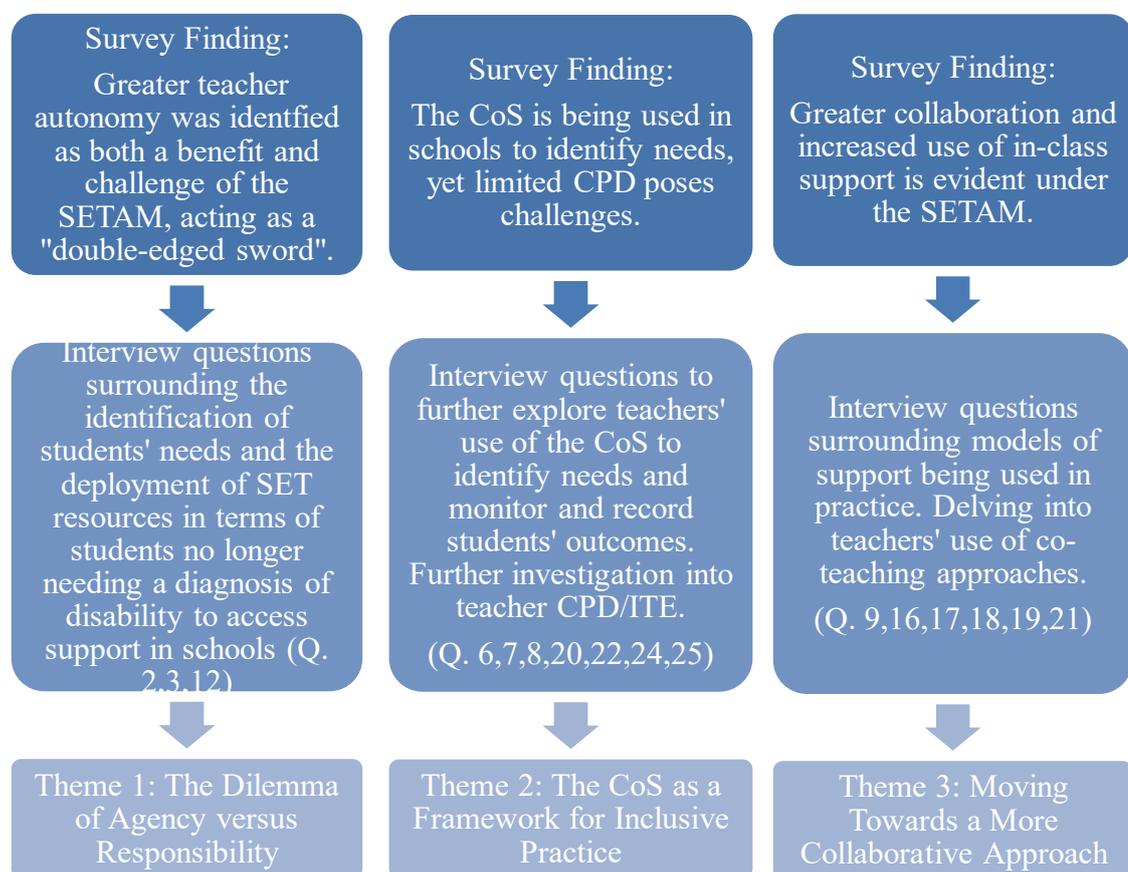
**Figure 5. 3: Data Showing the Importance of the Voice of the Teacher**

Such data convey the relevance of this research, which portrays the authentic voice of the key stakeholders of policy implementation in schools and acknowledges the importance of policy analysis which explicitly links the ‘bigger worlds’ of global and national policy contexts to the ‘smaller worlds’ of policies and practices within schools and classrooms. By identifying aspects of this model, which are successful in practice, and highlighting areas that teachers find challenging and may be in need of review, these research findings hope to enhance our understanding of current inclusive education policy, by listening to the voices of those working with children in the Context of Practice

(Ball 1994). Such empirical data may inform the DoE, the NCSE and the NCCA, and the field generally, nationally and internationally, in the evolution of inclusive education policy and practice.

### 5.6 A Sequential Design: Survey Findings Influencing the Interview Schedule

As discussed above, due to the sequential design of this study, findings from the first phase of data collection, the national, online survey, informed the development of the interview schedule for the subsequent data collection phase. The figure below represents how survey findings influenced the semi-structured interview questions which then, following thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), led to the qualitative findings of this study (see Chapter Six).



**Figure 5. 4: Flowchart Representing How Phase One Findings Informed Phase Two Findings**

Following analysis of data obtained in phase one, the researcher developed an interview schedule (Appendix 13) which would cast further explanatory insight into topics which arose from survey findings (Cohen *et al.* 2018), as outlined in the figure above.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the findings from the national, online survey which aimed to unearth the workings of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994) and offer an insight into the perspectives and experiences of the key stakeholders of the implementation process. Findings, which emerged from data analysis using Excel, SPSS and Nvivo 12, were presented under three prominent headings, reflecting the ‘three-step process’, as outlined in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b). Results suggest that teachers now have more autonomy and responsibility over the identification and assessment of students’ needs, due to the transition to a needs-based model under the SETAM. While this was perceived as a benefit of the SETAM, participants also considered it to be a challenge of the current system, leading to the discovery of a dilemma in practice for teachers negotiating this model to support inclusion in the Context of Practice, which is further explored in Theme One of this study’s qualitative findings (see Section 6.2). Furthermore, in relation to how teachers are identifying students’ needs, findings show that schools are effectively engaging with the CoS (DES 2007a), however, limited CPD poses challenges for some teachers and so, greater support and CPD may need to be offered to teachers in this area. Subsequently, findings showed an increase in collaboration and use of in-class support under the SETAM (DES 2017a), with station-teaching and team-teaching being identified as the most frequently used co-teaching approaches to meet the needs of students with SEN. The final finding, relating to Step 3, which examined how teachers monitor and record students’ outcomes, highlighted schools’ engagement with the Problem-Solving Process, as outlined in the CoS (DES 2017b), and identified the key role of the teacher in the assessment and review process. Teacher observation and teacher-designed tests and tasks emerged as the most frequently used assessment methods to monitor and report on student progress. A further finding relating to teacher voice was then discussed in Section 5.5, which encompasses one of the key objectives of this study; to give a voice to teachers, as the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools, to understand how they have interpreted and implemented the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992) and to

examine the implications of their views for policy direction and practice in the classroom. Throughout this chapter the influence of these survey findings on the qualitative data collection phase and semi-structured interview schedule was portrayed and Section 5.6 illustrated a flowchart to further explain this sequential research design process.

Chapter Six presents such qualitative findings from phase two of data collection, which are critically analysed and discussed under three primary themes. Following rigorous engagement with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (see Section 4.7.2.4), and the use of NVivo 12 to assist the researcher with such analysis, these themes emerged from the raw data. Therefore, excerpts of interview conversations and direct quotes from participants are included to form the basis of all themes and consolidate the claims made in each to gain an insight into the perspectives and experiences of teachers implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION PHASE TWO: INTERVIEWS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This study set out to examine how teachers interpret and implement policy (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Semi-structured interviews (n=17) were undertaken with principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs<sup>35</sup> to enhance our understanding of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) in practice; to explore how teachers are negotiating the changes brought about with Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and to gain an insight into teachers' perceptions of the workings of this model on the ground. The previous chapter presented findings from phase one of data collection, the online, national survey, which aimed to inform and shape the interview schedule for the subsequent, qualitative data collection phase, as illustrated in Figure 5.4. While this data provided valuable 'snapshots' into teachers' experiences of the SETAM, in order to gain greater insight into this policy model, and how it is unfolding on the ground, it was necessary to go into Contexts of Practice, namely various primary schools as outlined fully in Chapter Four (Section 4.6.5.3). This concurs with the methodological literature discussed in Chapter Four, which promotes the combined strengths of a mixed-methods design (Johnson *et al.* 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011; Hesse-Bieber 2015; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). In-depth analysis of the data and emerging themes considered Ball's (1994) extended version of the continuous policy cycle (see Figure 3.9) as findings have implications for students in the Context of Outcomes and suggests the potential for rethinking in future context(s).

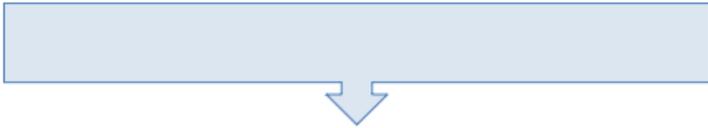
The researcher engaged in thematic coding analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to unveil the 'everyday world of policy' in Irish primary schools, to examine how schools 'do' policy, how policy texts become 'live', and how they get 'enacted (or not)' in schools (Ball *et al.* 2012, p.1). Section 4.7.2 provided a detailed account of this qualitative data analysis process, which led to the rise of the three key themes presented in this chapter. Table 6.1 presents the defined and named themes [3] and sub-themes [11] developed in Phase Five of the data analysis process (Braun and Clarke 2006), which were informed by 251 codes at Phase Three, reduced to 167 codes at Phase Four and re-coded to 19

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<sup>35</sup> One interview was also carried out with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator of the DEIS school.

potential themes (categories). Appendices 28, 30, 32 and 35 expand on Table 6.1 by providing a paper trail of all coding using NVivo 12.

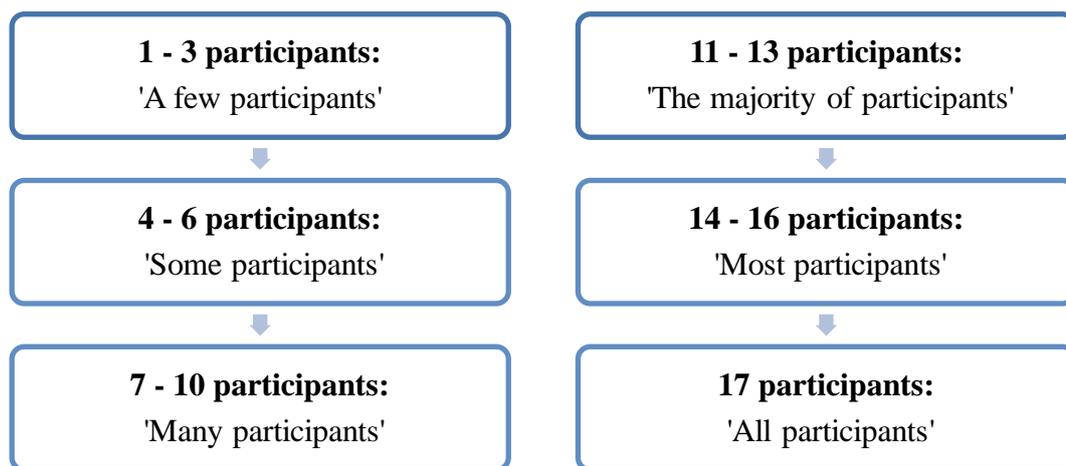
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Interview Coded</b>	<b>Citations Coded</b>
Agency	17	87
Responsibility	17	95
Approaches to Monitoring and Recording Students' Outcomes	15	36
Challenges Involved with Implementing the Classroom Support Stage	14	26
CPD	15	52
ITE	17	36
Greater Collaboration and In-Class Support	17	70
The Remaining Need for Withdrawal	17	47
Models of In-Class Support in Practice	17	85
Benefits of In-Class Support	13	30
Challenges of In-Class Support	17	67



<b>Themes</b>	
<b>Theme 1:</b>	The Dilemma of Agency versus Responsibility
<b>Theme 2:</b>	The Continuum of Support as a Framework for Inclusive Practice
<b>Theme 3:</b>	A Move Towards a More Collaborative Approach

**Table 6. 1: Defined and Named Sub-Themes and Themes**

These themes are presented as the main headings of the next three sections of this chapter, whereby findings are discursively discussed within the context of the research literature presented in Chapters Two and Three and are interconnected with Ball’s (1994) Policy Cycle, as the study’s theoretical framework. Interview excerpts and direct quotes from participants are provided within this chapter to evidence that all themes derived from inductive analysis of the raw data. The following key is provided as a qualitative indicator of participant’s viewpoints.



**Figure 6. 1: Key showing Descriptor of Participant Responses**

The phrases, shown above, can be used to highlight the breath of agreement between participants throughout this findings chapter. The reoccurring essence of these responses validated its truthfulness. The first warranted finding will explore the dilemmas faced by teachers striving to bring the SETAM policy (DES 2017a) to life (Ball *et al.* 2012) within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). It unveils the notion of increased teacher agency as a ‘double-edged sword’, as while teachers welcome greater control over the management and organisation of their SET resources in schools, they simultaneously report greater responsibility and accountability as a challenge of the SETAM.

## **6.2 Theme 1: The Dilemma of Agency Versus Responsibility**

In accordance with the study’s theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle, (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), the SETAM (DES 2017a), as a relatively new special education policy in schools, is recognised as a complex process, rather than a product which is

merely imposed onto people (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). This study sought to gather data from participants to shed light on this ‘complex process’, to gain an insight into how teachers, as the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools, were enacting this policy in terms of the identification of students’ needs, the deployment of SET resources to meet students’ needs and the monitoring and recording of students’ outcomes (see Section 1.3.2). A significant theme, which emerged from the data, was the notion of teacher agency versus increased responsibility and the dilemmatic nature of such within the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). This was firstly indicated by survey findings which showed an overlap between the benefits and challenges of the SETAM as reported by survey participants (see Section 5.2.1). There are one hundred and eighty-two references to this agency versus responsibility dilemma in the data coded and analysed, with eighty-seven references being made to agency and ninety-five references being made to responsibility, across all seventeen interviews (see Table 6.1 above and Appendix 35). The SETAM provides greater autonomy for teachers in how to ‘manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school’ (DES 2017a, p.2) as they are now agentic in identifying students who require SET support and deciding on the extent of the support given to students, basing their judgement on the principle that those with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support (DES 2017b). However, as discussed in Chapter Two (see Section 2.5), such professional agency is regulated by the demands and constraints of the situation (Pyhältö *et al.* 2014). Recognising that all contexts, including the Context of Practice, which is the main focus of this study, are bound by structure and involve compromise (Ball 1994), the demands associated with this newfound autonomy places greater responsibility on teachers to select and prioritise those in greatest need of support and to allocate the school’s SET resources accordingly. This dilemma of practice was articulated by Tom, the principal of the Mixed School

*“I think that it [the SETAM] was a good move in that it gave autonomy to the school, I mean it has pluses and minuses. I suppose we’re able to make more decisions in-house and see what children would best benefit and so on. Previously, the decision was made for you, so you just worked with that and so that responsibility as such wasn’t there. It just brought extra responsibility, but it brought more opportunity too and you could have a better say yourself as to who was deserving of the help.”*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

This perspective occurred throughout much of the data, conveying that the workings of the SETAM in practice, to implement an inclusive education, is a highly complex arena. This dilemma of practice will be discussed in depth throughout this section, firstly highlighting the benefits associated with the greater levels of teacher agency offered by the SETAM (DES 2017a), before discussing the challenges, as noted by participants, involved with the increased responsibility and workload for teachers.

### **6.2.1 Agency**

According to Priestly *et al.* (2015, p.8) teacher agency may be ‘shaped and enhanced by policy that specifies goals and processes, enhancing the capability of teachers to...make decisions and frame future actions’. This finding argues that under the SETAM, schools are more autonomous in their decision-making regarding the use of their SET resources to support students with SEN. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), interchangeable use of the terms ‘agency’ and ‘autonomy’ are presented in this thesis. However, it is interesting to note that some participants (n=4) used the word ‘autonomy’ throughout semi-structured interviews, yet there was no mention of the word ‘agency’. This may convey the influence of policy texts on those in which the policy impacts, as Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) and the accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b) make reference to greater levels of ‘autonomy’ for schools under this model. Pyhältö *et al.* (2014, p.307) maintain that the ‘conditions created by the implementation of educational change affects teachers’ capacity to serve as professional agents’. Analysis of the SETAM policy text (DES 2017a) highlights a significant change in practice for teachers implementing this model on the ground. The eradication of the need for students to obtain a diagnosis prior to accessing additional teaching support in schools, which now applies to *all* students under the SETAM (DES 2017a), facilitates a more agentic role for teachers. This change offers increased teacher autonomy for the identification of students’ needs and the organisation and deployment of schools’ SET resources to meet such needs. This section explores the qualitative findings which emerged from semi-structured interviews with teachers who are implementing this model in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). By unearthing their lived experience, this study aims to understand how teachers ‘enact practice and engage with policy’ (Priestley *et al.* 2015, p.1). Throughout this section, a range of benefits associated with the increased teacher agency brought about under the SETAM will be discussed.

The SETAM (DES 2017a) saw a complete policy-shift away from labelling students in order to access additional teaching supports in schools. Influenced by European trends (EADSNE 2009), this practice was firstly evident in the special education policy landscape in Ireland under the GAM (DES 2005), whereby a general allocation of resources was provided to the school to support students with HI disabilities, without needing an official diagnosis prior to receiving such support (see Section 3.2). The SETAM now presents an extension of such a general allocation (Egan 2013), as under this needs-based model (DES 2017a), no student requires a professional assessment, to obtain an official diagnosis, prior to accessing support, which “*gives more autonomy to the schools to direct the resources where you need it*” (Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School). As a result of this increased teacher autonomy, to make in-school decisions regarding the organisation and deployment of SET resources, many participants (n=9) expressed their belief that the SETAM (DES 2017a) is a better system than the previous GAM and RTH Model (DES 2005), which is articulated in the narrative below

*“I suppose I’m in a position where I can compare and I can contrast the two models, absolutely no comparison! I think this school...our kids are flying with this new model. It’s probably been the best thing that has happened to us...it **has** been the best thing that has happened to us. I just see the frustration of olden times was you weren’t getting to a group of kids who had huge needs and this in type of situation [i.e., DEIS setting] it was the majority of your class. So, this specialised resource hours and the specialised resource teachers were only there for one or two kids out of a cohort of 29 who equally had diverse needs...So, the new allocation model has broadened the criterion for special ed. to include everybody and that’s what we wanted here and that’s what you want for every child.”*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

Moira strongly conveys her satisfaction with the SETAM, claiming that practices under the previous model (DES 2005) led to frustration among teachers who recognised that many students in the class may have required support, yet the teachers themselves did not have the scope to act agentively to provide such support without the student having a diagnosis of disability. Ali, another SET in a different school, shared this perspective and highlighted the benefit of the freedom offered to teachers under the SETAM to provide support to students, in comparison to the restrictive nature of previous practices whereby students with LI disabilities had to be allocated ‘resource hours’ in order to be eligible to access individualised support (see Section 3.2)

*“I definitely think that the new model is better. It means that...children...that have the highest needs can be given the most amount of time and that you can focus on them but yet, it gives us that kind of freedom to take out children that wouldn’t necessarily in the old model have what you’d call these resource hours, that we can take them out, give them time as well.”*

Ali, SET, Boys’ School.

The SETAM, it seems, facilitates teachers as more agentic professionals within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), as, although they remain working within the realm of structural constraint (Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020), in that the school is allocated a certain amount of resources based on the school’s educational profile (see Section 3.3.4), the model *“definitely gives you huge freedom as a staff to look at your kids and to see what kids actually really do need the support and to give them the support”* (Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School). Brenda’s quote emphasises how this needs-based model has given professional responsibility (Sullivan 2005; O’ Donnell 2014) to teachers to identify students in need of support and appropriately allocate resources to them. This is a result of the transition from a partially medical model or deficit model of resource allocation (NCSE 2013), as seen under the RTH Model (DES 2005), to the current needs-based model [SETAM]. Will, the principal of the DEIS School, spoke of this transition

*“I think it’s [the SETAM] definitely more, I suppose, it’s more needs driven from our perspective, with the old model it was very much based on, as you know, on the diagnoses and we were kinda chasing the diagnoses and parents were chasing diagnoses.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

This is reflective of many other participants’ responses, as illustrated in the section below, which portray teachers’ satisfaction with the move away from labelling brought about under the SETAM, enabling them to be more agentic in practice and presenting a fairer model of support for students as resources can be directed to those with the greatest level of need.

#### **6.2.1.1 A Fairer and More Equitable Way**

A review of special education supports in Irish primary schools was conducted in 2013 by the NCSE, who then provided policy advice in their report *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools* (NCSE 2013). This report determined that aspects of the then-existing model of support (DES 2005) were potentially inequitable for

a number of reasons (see Section 3.3.1). Following this, the NCSE Working Group developed a proposal for a new model, which aimed to bring about a fairer and more equitable system of support allocation in Ireland (NCSE 2014b) (see Section 3.3.2). This section will detail how the SETAM (DES 2017a) appears to have achieved this aim, by addressing some of the inadequacies as concluded in the NCSE policy advice report (NCSE 2013). Excerpts from interview participants will convey how the increased agency and flexibility given to teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a), due to the eradication of the need to acquire an official diagnosis prior to accessing additional teaching support, has led to reduced pressure on teachers and parents to label students and offers all students in need of support an opportunity to fairly access it. A total of twenty references were made to this fairer approach to allocating additional teaching support to students, over thirteen interviews from participants in each of the four schools.

As mentioned in the preceding section, the SETAM (DES 2017a) followed trends seen in Europe (Meijer 1999; Meijer 2003; EADSNE 2009) to move away from labelling students to secure additional resources or support in schools (Egan 2013). In many interview discussions, participants compared the SETAM to the previous funding model (DES 2005), highlighting the positive changes which have occurred, mainly due to this transition from a categorisation system<sup>36</sup> to a needs-based model. In an earlier quote (see Section 6.2.1), Will described the old model (i.e., the GAM and RTH Model) as being “*very much based...on the diagnoses*”. This medical model of resource allocation led schools and parents to be “*chasing diagnoses*” to secure additional teaching support for students with SEN. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.4), a review of the special education teaching supports in schools (NCSE 2013) found that students may have been at risk of being unnecessarily diagnosed as having SEN for the sole intent of gaining access to resource hours in schools. Will’s use of the word “*chasing*” implies that firstly, assessments which would lead to diagnoses may not always have been easily accessible to schools and students (discussed further below and in Section 6.2.1.2) but also, that schools felt pressurised by the distinct relationship between a ‘formal assessment and diagnosis of SEN and the possibility of gaining additional support’ for students in schools (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.385). Teachers from two different schools highlighted their content

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<sup>36</sup> The GAM (DES 2005) categorised disabilities into two main groupings: high incidence (HI) disabilities and low incidence (LI) disabilities. Students with needs arising from LI disabilities were required to undergo an assessment as part of a formal diagnosis and application procedure, under the RTH Model, prior to receiving support in schools. Please see Section 3.2 (Chapter Three) for further detail.

with the change brought about under the SETAM, conveying that it is a fairer model of support as they no longer have to worry about securing that “*piece of paper*” before supporting the students in front of them

*“I think it's all positive because everyone is getting a better chance to be seen now than under the old model...you don't need the piece of paper.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls’ School.

*“I find it gives me an opportunity to...whereas before you needed a diagnosis as such, whereas now if you feel like somebody needs some help in the class it's much easier now and it's more available to them.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys’ School.

By referring to the diagnosis as a “*piece of paper*” (Ciara, SET, Girls’ School), it may imply that, in some cases, teachers believe that sending students for assessments was merely a means to an end to secure resources, regardless of whether diagnosing or labelling that child would benefit them in any other way, confirming concerns expressed in the aforementioned NCSE review (NCSE 2013). This identification dilemma, of ‘whether to identify children as having a disability/difficulty relevant to education or not’ (Norwich 2008, p.2) is found in much of the literature (Minow 1990; Dyson 2001; Norwich 2008; Warnock *et al.* 2010; Norwich 2014) and is discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3). These extracts reinforce a significant finding, in that, the SETAM (DES 2017a) has led to a welcomed, increased autonomy for teachers, enabling them to use their professional judgement to identify students in need of support and to provide them with such support without being restricted to act until after a diagnosis of disability is attained. As a result of this, a fairer model of support for all students is presented under the SETAM, as all students have an equal opportunity to access resources in schools, regardless of labels/diagnoses.

It emerged from the interview data that a number of factors can hinder a students’ prospect of accessing a diagnosis, which may have led to students being denied adequate support in previous practices (DES 2005). One such factor relates to parental reluctance to have their children assessed, which is illustrated in this narrative from Helen, the CT in the DEIS School

*“Well, I guess with the previous model it was, you know, in order to get support, you had to have a specific diagnosis and I guess, something that I have seen in the last couple of years is that you can have some parents who are reticent about*

*getting a diagnosis for their child. They may not want to go to an educational psychologist to get a particular diagnosis but...and I can understand all the different things around that, but you know, the child still requires the support and requires help and I guess with this model you can be flexible, you can have autonomy over how you're using the hours, obviously 100% it's the greatest need gets the greatest level of support..."*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

Literature pertaining to the formal assessment of students' needs argues that categorising children according to disabilities and labelling students can lead to stigmatisation (Norwich 2008; Egan 2013; Sheffield and Morgan 2017) and lower expectations for students (NCSE 2006b; Norwich 2008; Banks *et al.* 2012; Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Kenny *et al.* 2020). For this reason, parents may have been reluctant to seek formal assessments for their children as they may have feared that the diagnosis and the associated label would 'consume the identity' (Egan 2013, p.66) of their child as a learner. According to Hall (2012, p.103) identity is 'occasioned in the everyday'. For many students accessing support under the previous RTH Model (DES 2005), their 'everyday' involved being withdrawn from classroom-based learning for additional teaching support and so, it could be argued that the number of hours allocated to them may have defined their identity in school. Additionally, in a study which examined the influence of the nature of children's disabilities on societal reactions experienced by their parents, Broomhead (2019) found that parents of children labelled with SEN also experience stigma. Differential treatment, in the form of 'blame and pressure' towards parents of children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and 'pity, sympathy or (what they deemed to be) patronising attitudes' towards parents of children with other types of SEN was reported in Broomhead's (2019, p.129) study. While this may offer some explanation for parents' hesitancy to get their child formally assessed, under the previous allocation system (DES 2005) students with LI disabilities could not access support in schools without undergoing professional assessments. However, as recognised by Helen in the above quote, whether a student is labelled as having SEN or not (Norwich 2008) "*the child still requires the support*". Data from this study suggest that the SETAM (DES 2017a) provides a fairer model of support for students, as it "*takes the pressure off parents to have to get their report or get an assessment*" (Emma, CT, Mixed School) by giving autonomy to teachers to offer support to the students who require it.

While the aforementioned dilemma surrounding the labelling of students and accessing formal assessments was concerned with parents who may have been hesitant to engage with the process due to factors such as stigmatisation (Norwich 2008; Egan 2013; Sheffield and Morgan 2017), the SETAM (DES 2017a) also presents as a more equitable model for parents, who in the past, may have wanted to get their child assessed but were unable to afford the high costs (DES, NCSE and NEPS 2017) associated with such assessments. According to the NCSE's (2013) review of special education supports in schools, the previous model of resource allocation in Ireland (DES 2005) was deemed 'inequitable at best and potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage' (NCSE 2013; NCSE 2014b, p.3; DES 2016b; DES 2017a) due to the fact that some students were still required to undergo an assessment as part of a formal diagnosis and application procedure prior to receiving support in schools. While schools can access a limited number of assessments through NEPS each year, the demand for such assessments often outweighs the allocation given to schools (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Rose *et al.* 2015) and therefore, students may be placed on lengthy waiting lists to be assessed by a psychologist. The alternative process of obtaining an assessment, which has been described by parents as being 'far from straightforward' (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.385), involves parents funding private professional assessments for their children. This leads to an inequitable situation where 'parents who can afford to pay for assessments can accelerate a process, where others have to wait for longer periods' (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.389). This issue was noted by the majority of participants (n=13), who all believed that the current model (DES 2017a), in which teachers have the agentive capacity to allocate resources to those in need, is a fairer and more equitable system

*"...before, I think the old system was quite rigid and it was just these children because they had reports and maybe their parents had the where-with-all to get a professional report privately or whatever. Whereas now, I think we have the freedom here to give and share it out as best we can on a needs-basis."*

Matthew, Principal, Boys' School.

*"...You know yourself, sometimes if parents can go privately, you'll have a report faster whereas if a child is on a waiting list it might take a long, long time so I suppose it's fairer that way."*

Rachel, CT, Girls' School.

As access to assessments was more readily available to parents who could afford to pay

for the service (Rose *et al.* 2017), the previous RTH Model (DES 2005) facilitated an unequal system of support for some students. Daniel, the SENCO in the Girls' School spoke to this argument, claiming that the SETAM is a fairer model of support as "*it has given children that might have been disadvantaged back in the old system an advantage.*" In light of this, it can be contended that the needs-based model, as seen under the SETAM (DES 2017a), is a better and more equitable system than previous models of resource allocation (DES 2005). As discussed throughout this section, there are a variety of factors which were problematic under the previous model (DES 2005), such as lack of teacher autonomy to support students they identified as having a need, parents' hesitancy to formally assess and label their children, and some parents' inability to pay for private assessments, that could result in students being denied much needed supports in schools. The data from this study, it could be argued, suggest that the SETAM has made significant progress in overcoming these barriers, by presenting a model which gives an equal opportunity to all students to access support by removing the need for a diagnosis of disability and in turn, facilitates a more inclusive education. Additionally, by providing schools with autonomy to select and prioritise students in need of support, this model leads to quicker and earlier identification, hence resulting in earlier intervention and support for students with SEN. This finding will be discussed in the following section.

#### **6.2.1.2 Earlier Identification, Intervention and Support**

This section will discuss how the transition from a partially medical model of support (DES 2005) to the current, needs-based model (DES 2017a) and the agency teachers now have to manage and deploy additional teaching resources in schools, has led to a system which enables earlier identification, intervention and support for students with SEN as they can receive immediate access to resources they require without waiting on professional reports, which in the past, were seen as 'the means of opening the door to support and resources' (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.385).

According to Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools), a four-year longitudinal study of SEN provision across the Republic of Ireland (Rose *et al.* 2015; Rose and Shevlin 2020), the 'length of time from initial referral to professional services before obtaining the necessary diagnosis and report that was necessary to enable the school to apply for additional support' (Rose *et al.* 2017, p.385) was a significant limitation associated with the previous allocation model (DES 2005). As a result, students

‘could experience delays in accessing support’ (DES 2017a, p.5) as teachers did not have the agency to provide support to students without the pre-condition of students having an official diagnosis of disability. Data from this study suggest that teachers working in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) are pleased that, under the current model (DES 2017a), they now have more freedom and flexibility to identify students in need of support at an earlier stage and provide support to those students in a timely manner, as is evidenced in the below extracts from two colleagues in the Girls’ School

*“It’s just more flexible, we’re not waiting on a speech and language therapist for reporting or an occupational therapist or outside psychologists or anything, it just means we can identify those with the need quicker and actually intervene quicker and maybe get them out of support quicker.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls’ School.

*“I think at least children can get help straight away if they need it rather than having to wait for all of these reports, so at least we have that freedom that a child isn’t left waiting and waiting.”*

Rachel, CT, Girls’ School.

Participants conveyed the importance of being able to respond to students’ needs quickly, which is facilitated by the changes brought about under the SETAM, enabling teachers to act agentively to *“intervene or give an intervention where it’s needed, when it’s needed”* (Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School). This holds major implications for the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students and coheres with literature surrounding the benefits of early identification and intervention for students with SEN (NCSE 2013; Dfe 2015; Rose *et al.* 2017). Findings show that teachers working under the SETAM can now provide students with ‘immediate and timely access to the additional educational resources they require’ (NCSE 2013, p.49), which was stated as an objective for future allocation models in the NCSE’s (2013) review of special education teaching supports in Irish primary schools. This alleviates the frustration and helplessness felt by teachers in previous practices when presented with a student who required additional support but did not have an *“official assessment”* and therefore, could not be afforded the appropriate resources, which is portrayed in the below narrative from Claire, the SENCO in the Boys’ School

*“I think a huge thing for us is that you’re not waiting on the official assessment. If a boy is sitting in front of you and you can see that there are needs that have to*

*be addressed, you can allocate them the support that they need within the theory that the greatest level of need gets the greatest level of support. So, you're not waiting for the report, for the resource hours as with the old system, so that's a huge benefit. You're not waiting on the paperwork to come through, you're not explaining to parents 'look we can take him unofficially, I can pop him in with this group, but it's not really official yet.' You can look at the boys that are in front of you and you can say this is the support that we have available to provide to the school and this is how we're going to carve it up."*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

This direct quote reveals much about the notion of teacher agency, highlighting the contrast between the previous (DES 2005) and current (DES 2017a) allocation models. It is clear from this extract that teachers felt restricted in their capacity to act agentively under the RTH Model (DES 2005), as even when teachers recognised that a student required additional support, according to this policy (DES 2005), they could not offer them individualised support unless an official diagnosis was obtained. However, many interview participants discussed how they resorted to unofficially 'taking students out' [for support] even before the SETAM was introduced, as Claire admits in the narrative above. The following section will elaborate on this finding, arguing that the SETAM (DES 2017a) may have been a bottom-up approach to policy, in that teachers were already agentively engaging in practices to provide support to students without diagnoses, and so the policy change brought about by the SETAM may have been reflective of this.

### **6.2.1.3 The SETAM as a Bottom-Up Approach**

The move away from labelling, towards a needs-based model, as seen under the SETAM (DES 2017a), means that schools can now officially deploy additional teaching resources based on the underlying principle that those with the greatest needs should have access the greatest level of support, regardless of labels/diagnoses. However, it emerged from the data that even in previous practices, prior to the SETAM being implemented in schools, many teachers felt that they "*were always working that way*" (Moirá, SET, DEIS School) and that they "*always looked after the ones who needed it the most*" (Ciara, SET, Girls' School). Twenty-seven references were coded to the sub-category of the SETAM as a bottom-up approach to policy in terms of teachers maintaining an attitude of "*if a child needs help let's see if we can provide it, rather than being very strict*" (Tom, Principal, Mixed School). These references came from all four participating schools and were made by a total of sixteen teachers. Participants held a strong view that they had

always strived to support students in need, regardless of whether the student was ‘officially’ allocated the time or not under the previous model (DES 2005), bringing Norwich’s (2008, p.2) dilemmas of difference to the fore (see Section 2.4.3) and highlighting the complexities involved with the identification of SEN within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994)

Researcher: *“The SETAM is based on the principle that the students with the greatest level of need get the greatest amount of support. Would this have been in place in your school prior to the new model or have you seen this develop since?”*

Matthew: *“Well, it was unofficially, we used often take children without reports...we'd include them maybe in a group, so if there was a group of 2 or 3 going out, we might add them. It was very ad hoc, it was ad hoc, but in fairness we would never have denied a child if they...I suppose they would have been denied one-to-one, but we tried our best to include them in groups as best we could unofficially. So, we often had children getting unofficial help, it wouldn't be timetabled properly, but now I think with this new model there's away with all that cloak and dagger having to do all that and now it's much more transparent.”*

Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School.

According to Matthew’s quote above, although students’ needs were catered for in the past, as teachers unofficially supported students without diagnoses despite policy directive, the SETAM (DES 2017a) now provides a more transparent system where teachers feel comfortable to act agentively and can bring students *“into a group legitimately”* (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School) for support, as this practice is now justified by policy. Matthew’s colleague, Ali, also expressed feelings of relief that current policy now officially allows schools to have autonomy over the selection of students who can access support, as she describes a situation in the past where teachers were *“afraid”* to take students out for support if they did not have the appropriate paperwork that was required under the RTH Model (DES 2005)

*“...because we had to stick with this 'have they hours?', we always felt that we couldn't take out some students that needed something, they definitely needed it **and you'd be trying to take them out on the QT, do you know what I mean, unofficially, but then you'd be afraid**, you know, so definitely this [new model] has given you more freedom to definitely take out the ones we were missing that needed it and that were kind of falling through the loop really.”*

Ali, SET, Boys’ School.

Following discussions with participants from a variety of schools during these

semi-structured interviews, there is no doubt that schools were unofficially engaging in practices to support students without diagnoses long before the SETAM was introduced. It could, therefore, be suggested that for the development of current policy (DES 2017a) policymakers, in the Context of Influence, acknowledged what was being done on the ground and thus, wrote it into this new policy within the Context of Policy Text Production (Ball 1990; Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), indicating a bottom-up approach. Daniel's quote below also supports this view as he notes that the current model is reflective of teachers' wishes to bring about changes in policy for the past number of years

*“I found it interesting that they moved away from the diagnosis model, we had been actually asking for that for many years. You know sometimes you may not get as many assessments that may you have required; you could be limited by size of school and that and you were assessing then specifically for needs. Now I'm not saying that they weren't catered for up to that, but to get more specific hours or individual time you were looking for more and more assessments. I'm glad that has changed, you know that the schools can come together and look for the children with the greatest need and give them the greatest support from a very early stage, so you can do it straight away in Junior Infants rather than having to wait for assessments and that.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

All of the interview participants (n=17) agreed that, when deploying additional teaching resources within their schools, teachers adhere to the principle of those with the greatest levels of need should have access to the greatest level of support. In order to do so, many teachers reported that the flexibility offered to them under the SETAM (DES 2017a) is a vital component, as supports can be introduced, modified or withdrawn throughout the year dependent on the specific needs presenting to them at that time. This finding will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

### **6.2.1.3 Flexibility**

As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.4) and Chapter Three (Section 3.2), the previous model of support allocation (DES 2005) was criticised for basing LI disability allocations on disability categories (see Figure 3.2), rather than on the individual learning needs of students. It was argued that such systems may not have provided a true indication of the support required for individual students (NCSE 2013), as although two students may have the same diagnosis, their needs may present very differently and so, one may

require more or less support than the other (Banks *et al.* 2012). Because of this, the categorisation system, under the previous model, may have led to the ‘misdirected or inappropriate allocation of particular resources for individual children’ (Kinsella *et al.* 2014), and therefore, supports may not always have been steered towards those with the greatest level of need. This section will explore how the SETAM (DES 2017a), which recognises that within every category of disability, there is a wide spectrum of abilities and disabilities (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; DES 2017a), is being enacted by teachers on the ground, discussing what changes have come about, due to the increased flexibility and autonomy offered to teachers, that enable them to offer the greatest support to those with the greatest need.

Under the SETAM (DES 2017a), not only do schools now have the discretion to select and prioritise students in need of additional teaching support, but they also have autonomy over the amount of support that can be offered to students throughout the year. This is in contrast to practices seen under the previous model (DES 2005), whereby once a student was diagnosed as having a certain LI disability, they were entitled to a specific number of hours with the Resource Teacher per week (see Figure 3.2). Therefore, the flexibility schools now have to vary the level of support being provided to students and to share out the SET resources amongst a number of students who require additional support emerged as a significant benefit of this model and holds significant implications for the Context of Outcomes for students (Ball 1994). Some interview participants (n=5) noted that under the categorisation system of the previous model (DES 2005) “*occasionally a child would have been given an amount of hours and they possibly didn’t need all those amount of hours*” (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School), therefore implying, that the greatest level of support may not always have been directed to those with the greatest need. This policy (DES 2005) offered no flexibility to vary the amount of support being provided to the student, regardless of their actual learning (dis)abilities. The following quotes speak to this point

*“You could have a child who's diagnosed with ASD in Junior Infants who was getting the same allocation for the same amount of time, you've the same thing for 8 years and there wasn't a huge amount of variety.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

*“I suppose it gives more leeway, we'll say children with autism that would be in the older end of the school, a lot of the time they don’t need the same support so*

*it's great then to be able to dish those hours around to where we see there's more of a need, for children that wouldn't have an assessment done but we know they need that extra support."*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

Jack's narrative above conveys the perspective of many of the interview participants; that being able to "*dish those hours around to where we see there's more of a need*" is a noteworthy benefit of the SETAM and such autonomy and flexibility ensures that "*children that have the highest needs can be given the most amount of time and that you can focus on them*" (Ali, SET, Boys' School). Lisa, the CT in the Boys' School, agreed that this flexibility is a positive change brought about under the new model and reiterates the earlier findings that the SETAM is a fairer and more equitable system (Section 6.2.1.1) and facilitates earlier intervention and support (Section 6.2.1.2) for students with additional needs

*"Certain children would have been allocated a certain amount of hours that possibly they didn't need, which I probably shouldn't be saying, but am...it was very unequal because then there was a child that was waiting for an assessment for possibly 2 years or 3 years, more, and they needed it [additional teaching support]. So now, you can help that child so it's a good thing."*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

Due to this flexibility, Daniel, the SENCO in the Girls' School, reported that they are "*definitely reaching more [students]*" and the support being provided is "*revolving more within the school year*", correlating with survey data, whereby 87% of survey respondents (N=41) stated that, under the SETAM, more students are receiving support in their schools. Participants also expressed their satisfaction that they can now vary the length of interventions provided to each student throughout the school year as "*they might just need a short time, or they might need a long time, but it definitely just provides more flexibility for us*" (Ciarra, SET, Girls' School). As a needs-based model, the SETAM, allows teachers to review and evaluate the support being given to students based on the student's progress, using the Student Support File (see Section 3.3.3 and Section 6.3.1), and offers them the autonomy and flexibility to modify the allocation of SET support accordingly. This emerged as a benefit of the SETAM, as participants welcomed being able to provide short bursts of support to students who require it, and vary this support as the year progresses, further supporting extant research on struggling readers, in particular, which recognises that 'the duration of an intervention is not necessarily associated with

positive outcomes' (NEPS 2019, p.26). According to Vaughn *et al.* (2012) and Brooks (2016), intensive interventions of relatively short duration can be highly effective and efficient. This study argues that the agency given to schools under the SETAM allows them to be flexible with the deployment and timetabling of SET resources, as is articulated in the following extracts

*"I think it does give you the opportunity to be flexible and you know, some require support for a short amount of time and because of that it might have given them the boost they need to kind of continue on in the class and to reach expected targets and goals and all of these things and to fulfil their potential."*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

*"I see it working too where children may not go out for help all the time but if there are certain parts of the maths that they find hard they will actually come and say, "when they're going out for maths could I go too today?". So, I think that works well, rather than making a decision that this child needs help...just because you're getting help at the beginning of the year, that isn't necessarily going to continue for the whole year or that there won't be an opportunity for children who may not qualify at all under all the criteria and still finds long multiplication hard. They're generally...they might be a 7 or an 8 out of 10 in the Sigma T and you come to long multiplication and they're struggling with it despite all the extra help that they're getting [in class] and that little bit of extra help in the small setting can improve them"*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

Brooks (2016) highlights the need to carefully monitor and review the effects of supports and interventions that last longer than one term, conveying the importance of monitoring and recording students' outcomes under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Reviewing the supports being provided in schools is an essential element of this needs-based model and is a key step in the problem-solving framework (see Figure 3.5). Reviewing interventions and monitoring students' progress enables teachers to decide whether supports should be extended, reduced, or withdrawn (DES 2017b), as discussed by Daniel in the below quote

*"I think the reviews are probably a bigger part of it now than would have been previous, trying to get as many peoples input into reviews, being specific about our targets and our plans, reviewing those...Do we continue? Do we move on? You know, not to have children perpetually in certain areas if you can just target areas. I think it's good for the children's own self-esteem that they're able to move in and out."*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

Monitoring and recording students' outcomes, using the Student Support File (see Section 6.3.1), facilitates fluidity and flexibility within schools' allocation of special education resources, as students can "*move in and out*" (Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School) of withdrawal settings and back into the mainstream classroom once they have reached their target or made sufficient progress. This ensures that while ongoing support may be necessary for some, others can be offered transient support. Therefore, this study suggests that the flexibility given to teachers to organise, manage and deploy SET resources under the SETAM (DES 2017a) enables them to provide the greatest level of support to students with the greatest need (DES 2017b).

This section outlined the benefits associated with the increased agency offered to teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Data yielded from the semi-structured interviews argues that the eradication of the labelling of students with SEN, which resulted in schools having more autonomy and flexibility over the use and deployment of SET resources, has led to a fairer and more equitable system of support allocation, whereby supports can be offered to a wider range of students. This also facilitates earlier identification, intervention, and support for students with SEN in Irish primary schools. Although this increased teacher agency was welcomed by all participants (n=17) and was noted as the most significant benefit of the new model, interestingly, the responsibility associated with such is also regarded as one of the most challenging factors of the SETAM implementation, according to teacher participants. This brings a dilemma in practice to the fore - the notion of teacher agency versus increased responsibility. The following section will discuss the responsibilities involved with the SETAM implementation in schools, firstly outlining the challenges associated with decision-making, before exploring the relationship between schools and outside agencies in terms of identifying and supporting students with SEN, and finally, highlighting the overwhelming emphasis on planning and paperwork under this SET allocation model, as noted by teachers on the ground.

### **6.2.2 Responsibility**

The previous section outlined the benefits associated with the SETAM in relation to greater levels of agency provided to teachers. Analysis of the data showed that the autonomy and flexibility associated with the use, management, and organisation of special education teaching supports in schools was welcomed by teacher participants as

it led to a fairer and more equitable model which facilitated earlier intervention and support for students. However, the very same notion of autonomy was simultaneously, and largely, noted as a challenge of the model, due to the added responsibility associated with such. According to the study's theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), contexts in which policies are remade and reworked involve public and private arenas of action, compromise and ad hocery (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Lall 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016). Therefore, this framework recognises that although actors are agentive within contexts which involve action (see Figure 3.9), which, in the instance of this study, is the Context of Practice, all contexts are bound by structures and involve compromise. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), the achievement of agency results from 'the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural 'factors' as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations' (Biesta and Tedder 2007, p.137). Pyhältö *et al.* (2014) concurs with this notion that professional agency is regulated by the demands and constraints of the situation. The 'unique situation' of the current study sees schools being given an allocation for special educational support teaching needs, based on that school's educational profile (see Section 3.3.4), and therefore, teacher agency to organise and deploy additional teaching support to students with SEN is dependent on the availability of resources to work with within this structural constraint (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Ball *et al.* 2012; Erss 2018; Giudici 2020). The 'demands' associated with this situation places greater responsibility on teachers to select and prioritise those in greatest need of support, all the while being constrained by the structure of the SETAM policy (DES 2017a). This section will elaborate on this finding, exploring the challenges involved with the increased responsibility for teachers such as, decision-making related to the management and timetabling of SET resources in schools, pressure felt by teachers to identify and meet a variety of specific special educational needs in schools without having the specialist skills to do so, and the responsibilities associated with rises in workload and administrative obligations under this new model.

#### ***6.2.2.1 "You're always playing God" – Increased Decision-Making as a Challenge of the SETAM***

The policy changes implemented with the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) saw teachers experiencing increased levels of professional responsibility regarding the decision-making involved with SEN provision in schools. Overall, fifty-

one reference throughout fifteen interviews were made to this increased decision-making and accountability for teachers under this model (Appendix 32), which emerged as a significant challenge of the SETAM (DES 2017a). Under the previous model (DES 2005), a report stating a student's diagnosis was required from external professionals such as educational psychologists, occupational therapists (OT), speech and language therapists (SLT), etc. Schools were then able to apply for resource hours to cater for the needs of these students under the NCSE RTH Model (see Figure 3.2 for the categories of low incidence disabilities and the level of resource teaching support available to schools in respect of each category, as outlined in Circular 02/05). This is no longer the case, as the SETAM (DES 2017a) provides a single, unified allocation to schools, based on each school's educational profile, to cater for the needs of all students with SEN. Therefore, a shift in responsibility is evident under this model whereby 'the role of decision-making at the school level becomes paramount' (Kenny *et al.* 2020, p.13) to the successful implementation of the SETAM on the ground. This, in turn, has resulted in greater teacher accountability in terms of identifying students in need of support and deploying the schools' SET resources accordingly, as teachers now feel like they have to "*justify why they [students] got support or didn't get support and what type of support we're giving, so that can be a challenge in itself.*" (Rachel, CT, Girls' School). As discussed in Chapter Two (see Section 2.5), an emerging accountability agenda is becoming increasingly evident in Irish education policy (Conway and Murphy 2013; Egan 2013; INTO 2014), which is reflected in the current finding, as under this model (DES 2017a), schools are now at the root of the decision-making in relation to the deployment of additional teaching support and so, teachers feel increased responsibility to justify their decisions and actions, as is highlighted in the following direct quotes from interview participants

*"Now we're more mindful to be able to answer why a certain child gets more time than another child. That's down to the fact as well that we're allocating the hours."*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

*"...it's up to us now to provide the support regardless of the paperwork, it really does bring it home to you that you have to watch each child very carefully, you are responsible for picking up on these things. You're responsible for bringing that to the attention of the parents."*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

*"I suppose there's more responsibility in that you've to make the correct decisions."*

*You know, so you have to be able to back up your decisions and stand by them, know why you've chosen...because we were told I suppose exactly what to do, and now we have that freedom, so we have to be able to justify our choices."*

Rachel, CT, Girls' School.

These quotes convey that the policy changes brought about with the SETAM (DES 2017a), have resulted in increased pressure and responsibility being felt by teachers when deciding upon the varying levels of support to be allocated to students with SEN in their schools. Tom, the teaching-principal of the Mixed School, describes the complexities involved with such decision-making, particularly in terms of students who may not have hugely significant needs, but still require a level of support, the "middle children", as Tom refers to them

*"...being conscious that is every child who needs support is getting it and always being aware that there are children who would benefit from help if they could only get it. The middle ground...so there are the children who will get on very well without help and they're going to progress regardless, then you've got the children who have got a high level of need and they're almost automatically under any system they're going to get help, but then you've got the middle children that when you give support to them it's of benefit to them and then if for some reason, if there's pressure of time and you withdraw the support, that they may fall away again. So look, it's trying to as best you can meet the needs of every child, while being conscious that it's impossible to do the right thing all the time."*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

This extract offers an insight into the responsibility and accountability felt by principals and teachers under this model (DES 2017a) to "do the right thing" to ensure resources are deployed as effectively as possible within schools, conveying the dilemmatic nature of the social arena of the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). A number of factors contribute to this challenge of decision-making under the SETAM (DES 2017a), including limited time and resources available to schools to meet the needs of all of their students, and pressure from parents whose children were previously allocated 'resource hours' under the RTH Model (DES 2005) who may still expect that same level of support under this new needs-based system of allocation. These challenges will be discussed in detail below.

### ***Deploying Special Education Teaching Resources***

The decision-making involved with the deployment of special education teaching resources in schools, emerged as one of the most challenging aspects of the SETAM (DES

2017a), according to teachers on the ground. The deployment of SET resources firstly involves identifying students in need of additional support and then deciding, as a staff, how much support can be offered to each student. In the past, this decision-making was partially the responsibility of external professionals, as educational/clinical psychologists, OTs or SLTs would diagnose students with LI disabilities, who were then allocated a specific number of ‘hours’ under the RTH Model (DES 2005). Therefore, while the transition to a model (DES 2017a) which gives school staff the agency to deploy such resources has resulted in a number of benefits (see Section 6.2.1), it also poses some challenges for those making the decisions on the ground. While the majority of interview participants (n=10) believed that their school was adequately staffed to facilitate inclusion and meet the needs of students with SEN at the time of interviews, a consensus emerged that due to the huge levels of need presenting in mainstream schools today, schools could never have enough time (i.e., SET time) and schools “*could always do with more staff*” (Ciara, SET, Girls’ School). Therefore, although the schools interviewed appreciate and acknowledge their current level of SET allocation, they still encounter challenges when trying to deploy the resources they have, as the following quotes exemplify

*“You're constantly having to decide, there's a responsibility first of all on making sure that children's needs are addressed and there's only limited amount of time so you're trying to do your best for every child and you're trying to carve up the time.”*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

*“There's so much need, you know, we've a lot of children who'd have EAL and a lot of children who might have other difficulties in their backgrounds...so there are a lot of issues to deal with and to factor in, so no matter how much flexibility we have, it's still hard to give the help to everyone who needs it.”*

Rachel, CT, Girls’ School.

*“You're always playing God because you never have quite enough resources that you'd like to have, you never quite have enough staff, you never quite have enough time, you know things like that.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

These interview conversations demonstrated that teachers, acting within the Context of Practice, encounter struggle and compromise (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Lall 2012; Reagan *et al.* 2016) when deciding upon and deploying additional teaching support to students with SEN. They are forced to make difficult decisions regarding how much or

how little time they can offer students, as their agency is dependent on the availability of resources allocated to their school within the policy structure of the SETAM (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Ball *et al.* 2012; Erss 2018; Giudici 2020). Therefore, data yielded from this study show that due to limited special education teaching resources, SETs are under significant pressure to cater for the levels of need within their schools. The following extracts are from colleagues within the Mixed School, who emphasised how “*stretched*” the special education timetables are

*“...the SET team spreads themselves as thin as they can to catch everybody who needs help...Like I don't envy them the job of coming up with their timetables...I mean Mary and Jack [SEN team in the school] are seeing everybody who has any kind of need, but they're worn out doing it, there isn't enough support available for them like.”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

*“I think if there was more time, if we had more special education teaching time nobody would be at a disadvantage...I find sometimes I have a few children and you're hitting on things, but you are under a bit of pressure, so you need another class with that child really or that child needs more in-class support. We never have enough, I don't ever remember having an abundance of time, ever. There's always pressure.”*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

In the quote above, Mary (SENCO, Mixed School) notes that while limited special education teaching time has always caused concern and so, may not be a challenge solely specific to the SETAM (DES 2017a), it does continue to put pressure on teachers when devising timetables and deploying the schools' SET resources. Decision-making with regards to allocating SET time to students, is also made more challenging due to pressure placed on teachers from parents of students with SEN. This finding will be elaborated on in the below section.

### ***Pressure from Parents***

While the previous practice of allocating supports based on categories of disability (see Figure 3.2) did not recognise the wide-ranging complexity of individual student needs within each SEN (NCSE 2013; Shevlin *et al.* 2013b), it did provide stability and comfort for parents who were assured that their child (with a diagnosed LI disability) would receive a set amount of support time each week, which could not be ‘misinterpreted

or open to degrees of interpretation or variance’ (NCSE 2013, p.85). Interview participants spoke to this, highlighting that some parents of students who had been allocated support under the old model (DES 2005) “*still expect their children to get the same amount of hours*” (Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School) under the SETAM (DES 2017a). This misconception, or perhaps lack of understanding, of the changes brought about under the SETAM, places increased pressure on schools, as they now have the responsibility to deploy the SET resources to those with the greatest level of need, as is conveyed in the below quotes

*“... I think a lot of parents who had their children under the old model still think they get their 3.5 hours a week or whatever and they're like 'but he's not getting that' so it's kind of hard for people to understand. In a sense when a child was allocated hours, I'm talking specifically Resource [hours] now rather than Learning Support, and if they had their autism, you knew they had their 3.5 [hours]...and it was set in stone. I think the new model puts a lot of pressure on the SET team to allocate the time and they have to decide who needs most...”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

*“Initially...you would have parents who were with the old system, and they might have another child coming into the school and they would have been thinking that the old system was still in place, whereas it has moved on and I don't think the parents were aware of that so then they'd get a shock then when we say they're not entitled to the hours anymore.”*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

While this dilemma was referred to a total of sixteen times by teachers in varying schools (Appendix 32), it was most frequently discussed by teachers in the mixed school. Ten out of the sixteen references came from the four teachers in the mixed school, and so, it can be suggested that the responsibility associated with the organisation and deployment of resources was made more challenging due to pressure from parents within this setting. The mixed school was a relatively small school, located in a rural setting, who only gained a minor allocation of SET posts<sup>37</sup> under the SETAM (DES 2017a). In the previous section, direct quotes from teachers in this school emphasised the limited SET resources available to them which resulted in SETs feeling pressure to meet the needs of all students with SEN within their “*stretched*” timetables (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School). This, in turn, leads to greater pressure from parents when teachers are sharing out the same, or

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<sup>37</sup> The Mixed School gained 0.4 of a post with the introduction of the SETAM in 2017, and 0.08 (1 hour 59 minutes per week) of a post with the re-profiling of schools under the SETAM in September 2019.

just slightly increased, resources between a greater number of students. Emma, the CT in the Mixed School, discussed this challenge in relation to the first year of IEP<sup>38</sup> meetings following the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in 2017

*“...the IEP meetings were tricky that year as we tried to explain to parents...and I don't know, I think the word was out there, it was quite well publicised that this change was coming but I don't know that parents understood specifically how it impacted on them. So, I think the IEPs that year were just 'look I know he's not getting what he used to' because while our allocation stayed the same there were more children meeting the requirements for support.”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

Reflecting on notes and observations recorded in the research diary, following interviews in this school (Appendix 36), the researcher considered if the socio-economic status of these families may have contributed to the increased pressure from parents felt by teachers when allocating resources. It could be suggested that some of these parents may have been able to afford private assessments under the previous model (DES 2005), and so, may have had more readily access to the ‘entitlement’ of a set number of hours of support for their child. Therefore, while data from this study argue that the SETAM brought about a fairer and more equitable way, as discussed in Section 6.2.1.2, *“the changeover was hard from the parents’ point of view”* (Mary SENCO, Mixed School) who now, had less security, in one sense, over the level of support being provided to their children in school. Mary spoke of her apprehension in relation to this change, stating that *“the only thing that I was weary of...was the parents’ reaction because a lot of the responsibility comes back to us as to how we're going to deploy these things”* (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School). Tom, the principal of the same school, reiterated this feeling, stating that *“pressure comes from parents too”*, particularly those who *“would have been used to the older model”*. He also emphasised the increased accountability associated with the responsibility of deciding how SET supports are deployed in their school, as he stated that parents are

*“...going to be asking questions 'why isn't he being taken out as often and is he getting his due time' and so on. So, I suppose you're more answerable to parents.”*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

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<sup>38</sup>As discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.3, under the SETAM, IEPs are now called School Support Plus Plans. However, both terms are used throughout this thesis as it became apparent during interview conversations that many teachers continue to call these plans ‘IEPs’.

Therefore, it can be suggested that parental pressure acts as a contributing factor to the challenge of in-school decision-making and allocation of resources for students with SEN under the SETAM.

This section presented the claim that the policy changes brought about with the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) saw teachers experiencing increased levels of professional responsibility regarding the decision-making involved with SEN provision in schools. Limited special education teaching resources and pressure from parents emerged as significant challenges teachers face when deploying resources to students with SEN in schools and ensuring those with the greatest level of need access the greatest level of support, in accordance with the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b). Arguments presented throughout this section, supported by extracts and quotes from interview participants, portray the dilemma of agency versus increased responsibility. The following section explores further responsibilities faced by teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a), focusing on the pressure felt by teachers to identify and respond to a range of specific SEN in schools, without having the specialist knowledge or skills to do so. This leads to a discussion on the importance of maintaining links and relationships with external agencies and professionals and the need to continue to formally assess some students in order to inform practices and interventions, to ensure students' needs are being adequately catered for in our schools.

#### ***6.2.2.2 “We are not Experts” – Greater Expectancy leads to Greater Responsibility***

It is widely acknowledged within the literature that inclusion is a complex notion (Topping and Maloney 2005; Acedo *et al.* 2009; Armstrong *et al.* 2010; Lipsky and Gartner 2012; Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015), which can be difficult to implement in practice (Westwood 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015). Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3 and 2.4.4) highlighted the complexity within the area of identification and special education provision when creating inclusive schools, by presenting Norwich's (2008) 'dilemmas of difference'. The three key dilemmas, outlined in his work, consider if children should be identified as having a disability/difficulty relevant to education or not, if a common curriculum should be provided to all children or not, and if, or to what extent, children with more severe difficulties/disabilities will learn in ordinary or general schools and classes (Norwich 2008, p.2). The SETAM (DES 2017a) policy maintains that it is no longer necessary to label students as having a disability relevant to education, as this

teacher allocation model has eradicated the requirement to professionally assess and diagnose students prior to them being able to access support in schools, being the first model in the Irish education system's history which does not include an allocation somewhat based on a medical/deficit model (NCSE 2013). This change mirrored European trends (EADSNE 2009) and the international movement away from labelling, as seen in England, New Zealand, South Africa and Germany (Desforges and Lindsey 2010). While the participants of this study were in favour of the move to this needs-based model (DES 2017a) and could identify a range of benefits associated with the agency given to teachers under this model (see Section 6.2.1), challenges associated with the increased responsibility now placed on teachers to cater for the complex and wide-ranging needs of students, perhaps without having input from external professionals, as students no longer *need* to be formally assessed, emerged from the data. Fifteen references were coded to this challenge, coming from participants in each of the four schools. Five of the references were made by SETs, four by the HSCL Coordinator in the DEIS School, three by SENCOs and three by CTs. This section will explore this finding, which firstly highlights the pressure felt by teachers to effectively respond to the increasing number of students with SEN being educated in mainstream schools (Tomlinson 2012; McCoy *et al.* 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018; Rose *et al.* 2017), while feeling that they may not have the specialist knowledge, support (Mulholland and Connor 2016) or appropriate resources to do so (Rix *et al.* 2009). A perceived transfer of responsibility from outside agencies back onto schools themselves to provide support and services for students with SEN, as well as an emerging misconception among parents regarding the importance and necessity of professional assessments and reports for students with SEN in schools will then be discussed.

Throughout interview discussions, teachers' frustration with the increased levels of responsibility placed on them under the SETAM (DES 2017a) was conveyed. While teachers welcome the increased autonomy and flexibility regarding the use of their school's SET resources to meet the needs of students with SEN, participants feel that there is now an expectancy placed on them to be able to adequately respond to *all* of the diverse needs of students which present in the mainstream classrooms of today without having the relevant expertise or resources (Rix *et al.* 2009; Florian and Camedda 2020). The feeling that teachers are expected to act as psychologists, occupational therapists

(OTs) and/or speech and language therapists (SLTs) emerged as a recurring point of contention for many interview participants (n=8), as is illustrated in the below extract

*“What I do find is, and it's probably a small disadvantage of the new model, as teachers you're expected to meet all the needs, you're expected to meet occupational therapy needs, speech and language needs, and I do think that is very unfair on teachers because at the end of the day; we're not speech and language therapists and we're not occupational therapists and I think that has come in more and more and I do think a teacher can help with occupational therapy and can help with speech and language but when it comes down to the specifics we do need resources and support and guidance around that.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

Under the SETAM (DES 2017a), teachers may now be supporting a student without the guidance of a report which would have, in the past, been provided to the school following a professional assessment, and would have outlined the child's specific needs and provided the teacher with activities and strategies to cater for such needs. Brenda highlights the lack of guidance and support given to teachers around managing specific needs, claiming that they do not have the specialist knowledge or skills required, as they are not “*trained*” in these areas. Moira, the SET in the same school, reiterates Brenda's point made above and argues that even when teachers are given activities to work on with students from external professionals such as OTs, school often do not have the space or adequate resources to engage with these activities effectively

*“I'm not an OT, I'm not a speech and language therapist, I'm not a behavioural therapist...I'm a primary school teacher, working as a SET, but I'm willing to learn. And I suppose there is that line always between the professional and the SET, you know you could be given...a menu of activities to do but fundamentally in my role as a SET there are limitations to that. There are even environmental limitations here because we don't have a discrete place for occupational therapy, we're lucky if we can grab somewhere. We have materials but we're very lucky if we get the chance to get a room here. And we don't have a sensory room so there are strict limitations on what we can do. So, I suppose we're always trying to strike a balance there.*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

Ciara, the SET in the Girls' School, again reinforces the point that teachers are not experts in every field, they do not have the specialist skills of OTs or SLTs and so, challenges occur not only when providing the students with the correct supports, as mentioned by Brenda and Moira above, but also when identifying students' needs

*“Well, we're not trained psychologists, we're not trained occupational therapists, we're not trained speech and language therapists, so you know, to identify the need can sometimes maybe pose problems because we're not quite sure what we're looking for but we know that there's something up... We do rely on a lot of experience of our CTs and our special ed. team, you know, you can sometimes recognise similar things in a child that maybe you worked with before and then I suppose a challenge is; do we refer them on or do we just manage it ourselves? So, more often than not, to be safe, because like I said we're not trained in all the areas, we would refer them if we felt the need to and that can be a challenge.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

Ciara's statement above brings Norwich's (2008) identification dilemma to the fore as she highlights the challenge teachers face of whether to refer students, who they recognise as having a special educational need, for a formal assessment or whether to “*manage it*” within the school themselves. The SETAM (DES 2017a) gives schools the autonomy to provide supports to students without being formally assessed, however, as the above extracts show, this can pose further problems for teachers who may not feel able to identify the exact needs of the students and, without information from the outside professional, may then have little guidance or support on how best to support such needs. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), Ekins *et al.* (2016, p.239) maintain that there is often a focus on teachers' lack of specialist SEN knowledge, and an emphasis on ‘the need for specialist SEN pedagogies as the only way to meet the needs of pupils with complex SEN’, which can act as a barrier to implementing inclusive learning environments. The data yielded from the semi-structured interviews, presented above, suggest that teachers do not feel equipped to adequately support some students' needs in our schools, particularly occupational therapy needs and speech and language needs. Teachers believe that greater pressure and expectation is now placed on them to support a wide range of particular needs within schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a). However, it is important to note that these teachers were not claiming that they did not want to, or were not willing to, support students in their school to the best of their ability, but rather, they argued that greater supports should be integrated into schools to help with such needs. Brenda, the SENCO in the DEIS School, offered an alternative for creating inclusive schools that she believes could effectively meet the needs of all students

*Brenda: “I definitely think having an on-site speech therapist or an on-site OT is very important. And now I mean I know that would cost loads, but you definitely*

*could have a speech therapist between 5 schools...*”

Researcher: *“A cluster of schools?”*

Brenda: *“Yeah, a cluster of schools. Or an occupational therapist in a cluster again or access to an occupational therapist, even if they could come once a month or that you could upskill yourself and find out more, you know. But I do sense teachers' frustrations at times around having to do that. Especially... language we might manage, but speech is a very difficult one. And occupational therapy can be quite difficult as well, we do need more guidance and resources around those areas.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

As clearly emphasised by participants, some students with particular disabilities, like all students, present with individualised and specific needs and so, may require ongoing access to therapeutic and health services<sup>39</sup>. In Rose *et al.*'s (2015, p.18) Project IRIS study of SEN provision across the Republic of Ireland, it was reported that there were ‘examples of sustained co-operative practice between health and education professionals’, however, the ‘uneven nature of provision throughout the country, limited access and long waiting lists’ were highlighted as serious concerns. Brenda’s suggestion, above, of the integration of therapeutic services into schools is currently being piloted through the School Inclusion Model (SIM) and In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project (DES 2020b), as detailed in Chapter One (see Section 1.1). This project involves SLTs, OTs and educational psychologists working in schools to provide specialist and targeted supports to students and to build schools’ capacity to include and provide adequate supports for such students (Kenny *et al.* 2020). This step towards a reform of our current special education system (DoE 2021c) was strongly supported by Ann, who declared that *“every school in Ireland should have a psychologist, a speech therapist and an occupational therapist, or at least shared between a cluster of schools”* (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School). Professional ‘support, training and guidance for school/pre-school staff and parents’ in supporting children’s therapy and developmental needs (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.8) is also provided under this project, which may be a significant development in overcoming the challenges mentioned above in relation to teachers feeling unprepared and unsupported to meet all of the specific needs of students within schools. This feeling was reiterated by Moira, the SET in the DEIS School, who stressed that

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<sup>39</sup> Therapeutic and health services may include, but not be limited to, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, clinical psychology and child and adolescent mental health teams.

*“It’s a challenge to meet all those as an individual SET...I feel that I would need more upskilling in the sensory, OT and maybe some language areas. I feel that the model has expanded so much, which is great, but I would feel that maybe extra CPD along the way would be good.”*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

The SETAM (DES 2017a), it could be argued, represents an expansion of a general model of allocation to schools, as forecast by Egan (2013), in that it now enables schools to respond to the needs of all students, regardless of labels or diagnoses. Because of this, some students who require additional teaching support may not have any prior or current interaction with outside professionals or health services, and so, as recognised by Moira above, teachers would benefit greatly from CPD to upskill in specialist areas. The type of service provision, facilitated by the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, is further supported by Anaby *et al.* (2018), who maintain that

by emphasising capacity building in the context of a strong educator–therapist partnership, children with special needs may be more quickly identified, and school staff, involved in the child’s immediate environment, better equipped to effectively address their challenges.

Anaby *et al.* (2018, p.16)

An evaluation of the first year of the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, commissioned by the NCSE, found that teachers acquired information and strategies from working with the in-school therapists which enabled them to better identify needs and develop more positive interactions with students (Lynch *et al.* 2020). The ‘regularity of contact’ between in-school therapists and teachers (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.99), provides excellent opportunities for individualised CPD which is grounded within schools’ own Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). Will, the principal of the DEIS School gives an example of how this form of CPD, between an OT and his staff, has worked well in their school

*“...we work quite closely with the early intervention team, with psychologists, OTs, speech therapists so...I’ll give you an example; last year we felt there was a need there, from an OT perspective...we were in a position where we identified an OT that came in and worked with us in a private capacity and supported teachers and supported kids and I suppose upskilled us and I suppose dispelled maybe the fears that were there because a lot of it was actually, to be honest with you Louise, from the teachers’ perspectives, a lot of affirmation, like ‘you actually do know what you’re doing, ye are making the right calls’...and that particular OT was back here again a couple of weeks ago and almost did like little workshops...it’s just kind-of reassuring teachers that ‘lads ye’re actually doing the right thing here’.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

Will's example conveys that having on-site professionals is an effective way to overcome the challenges faced by teachers as discussed above, by providing opportunities for collaboration between school staff and therapeutic services. Therefore, the professional 'training' and 'guidance' provided under the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project by on-site therapists is a welcome initiative, which develops greater collaboration and linkages between therapists, parents and teachers (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Data from this study show that more communication and stronger relationships between these three stakeholders may be necessary, as it emerged that some schools feel as though all of the responsibility is now being placed back onto them by the outside agencies to respond to students' needs, and a misconception is emerging amongst some parents around the importance of professional assessments and reports. The agency given to teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a) enables them to support all students in schools without the precursor of an official assessment or diagnosis of disability, however, it also results, in some situations, in schools feeling that health and therapeutic services are placing complete responsibility on schools to cater for students needs under the SETAM, rather than providing services themselves. This was of particular concern to teachers in the DEIS school, who have extensive dealings with such outside agencies

*"I'm the HSCL Coordinator and I support parents a lot in trying to access services for their children and I've noted that there seems to be a tendency to refer to the new model from the services to say 'shur the school can help your child anyway' and delay assessments or if you're looking for feedback or reports to identify priority learning needs it seems to take longer and they're saying 'shur work away under the new model now you can support the child'.*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

*"The only thing that I've seen recently is, I'd have a lot of links with outside agencies and...there's a little bit of a tendency to kind of move into 'what supports can you provide in the school?', as opposed to you know [supports being provided through external agencies] ...it's like 'can this be incorporated into the allocation model? Can the children receive these supports in school as opposed to [receiving supports from the external agencies]?' Even recently, in the last two months, as opposed to offering blocks of sessions there was a little bit of a move to 'can this be incorporated into the school?' and I do think that you would like to see that those sessions were still taking place."*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

These extracts, from two colleagues in the DEIS School, highlight a challenge they now find themselves facing as some outside agencies defer assessments and reduce the supports being offered as they believe students can be supported under the SETAM within schools. The notion that students no longer require specialist support from external agencies could be described as a detrimental fallacy, as in reality, many students, with particular disabilities and complex medical conditions will continue to require ongoing access to therapeutic and health services (Rose *et al.* 2015) in addition to the support they can receive under the SETAM in schools, and in such cases ‘few would contest the need for psychological and medical expertise in diagnosis and intervention’ (Egan 2013, p.89). As perceived by Helen above, the transfer of responsibility from these outside agencies back onto the schools themselves may be as a result of the long waiting lists due to shortage of resources within these services (HSE 2009; Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; Rose *et al.* 2015). However, these participants agreed that while schools will continue to provide as much support as possible to their students, they worry that the SETAM may lead to an “*over-reliance on teachers*” as “*you still need your experts in the background guiding and facilitating but working together*” (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School).

There seems to be an emerging misconception among parents that because their child can now be supported in school without a diagnosis of disability, under the SETAM (DES 2017a), there is “*no point*” sending them for formal assessments to an outside agency. However, as noted throughout this section, the importance of maintaining interactions with outside agencies and the value of the content of professional reports still remains paramount for teachers who are supporting students with specific and complex needs. In the extract below, Claire, the SENCO in the Boys’ School, gives an example of first-hand experiences she has had with parents, which conveys this misconception around the value of assessing students’ needs

*“...now that we can provide the support anyway maybe **parents feel ‘I don’t need to go for an assessment, he’s going to get the support anyway’**, because I’ve heard parents already saying, ‘oh don’t bother getting him assessed, don’t bother paying the money for that, it makes no difference now’. I think if you flip that and if that’s the understanding with parents that ‘I don’t need an assessment anymore, schools can just give him the help anyway’, if parents aren’t going to go and do it then it’s up to us to suggest to parents ‘no, I really think you should’, so then the dynamic has changed slightly. Whereas the conversation among parents before could have been ‘I need to get this piece of paper if my child is going to get the extra help’. Even just recently a parent said to me, ‘I don’t know*

*will I bother with the assessment so', because Matthew [school principal] had said 'it doesn't make any difference really he's on School Support Plus, he's getting the max out of us that he can get', which in the parent's head was 'there's no point in assessment'. Obviously, there is because we need to understand the issues, we need to understand the needs.*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

As the above extract exemplifies, teachers are now concerned that because assessments are no longer the route to accessing supports, as was the case for students with LI disabilities under the previous model (DES 2005), parents may be reluctant or unwilling to have their child assessed. If this continues to be the case, it may pose problems for teachers as some students may still benefit from being assessed, not for the purpose of labelling, but rather to inform the relevant personnel (i.e., teachers and parents) of how to effectively respond to the student's specific and individualised needs. This is reflected in Circular 0013/2017, as it states that 'medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a child's needs, the nature of difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions' (DES 2017a, p.14). Egan (2013, p. 89) concurs with this notion, stating that 'advice from such professionals is most useful to teachers, students and their families'. The importance of the information gained from carrying out such assessments and contained within the associated reports is conveyed in the below quote

*"I think where a child needed a report before, the child still needs a report because we need to know how to help them. Like the report I suppose was always seen as the route to getting hours...but also the information in the report was what we needed to teach them so like I still think the report is necessary for those children...The same child still needs the same help that he needed. I mean we still need the report, I'm not saying children need a label, but we do need to know what their specific needs are, and that information is often in the report."*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

In light of such findings, data from this study supports the implementation of the In-School Demonstration Project under the SIM (DES 2020b) on a national level, which may foster a more collaborative and holistic approach to the successful education and inclusion of students by integrating specialist therapists into schools to assist with, provide guidance on and support teachers in identifying and meeting students' needs. However, the dilemma of whether to identify students as having a disability/difficulty relevant to education or not (Norwich 2008) may have particular relevance in terms of

these students accessing supports later in life, dependent on the societal changes that may, or may not, occur in the future. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3), although labelling students can be seen as stigmatising (Hornby 2011), to overlook differences and without diagnoses, students may risk deprivation of the appropriate education or supports required to meet their needs (Norwich 2014; Hornby 2015; Shaw 2017). The SETAM (DES 2017a) is the first model in the history of special education provision in Ireland whereby a diagnosis of disability is not necessary for any student to access support in schools. Continuity in this model of allocation is also evident in secondary schools across Ireland, as a revised allocation process for SETs to mainstream post primary schools from the 2017/18 school year was outlined in Circular 0014/2017 (DES 2017c). Similar to the needs-based model in primary schools, students in second-level education now receive additional teaching support based on their identified learning needs, rather than primarily on diagnosis of disability. However, such continuity is not evident in third-level education in Ireland, as providing evidence of disability is an integral part of determining the appropriate supports available to students with disabilities at third-level and is also a requirement when applying for the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) scheme<sup>40</sup>. An ‘Evidence of Disability Form’ is required by higher education institutions (HEIs) to ‘provide verification of the applicant’s disability’ and is used by DARE to ‘help assess an applicant’s eligibility’ for the scheme. This form must be signed by an appropriate professional or a report from the professional must be submitted as the evidence of disability documentation (DARE 2020). This highlights the complexity involved with the identification of students’ needs (Norwich 2008; Tomlinson 2012) within our education system, as issues could arise for students with SEN when accessing third-level education, if they were not diagnosed as having SEN throughout their journey through primary and secondary school.

In summary, this section aimed to explore the increased responsibility felt by teachers under the SETAM (DES 2017a) to meet the wide variety of specific and complex needs of students in schools. Extracts from interviews illustrate that some teachers believe that they do not have the specialist skills or resources to fully support students with

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<sup>40</sup> The DARE scheme is a third-level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second-level education. These students may not be able to meet the points for their preferred course due to the impact of their disability. Participating HEIs have a number of reserved places to offer eligible DARE applicants at lower or reduced Leaving Certificate points (DARE 2020).

occupational needs or speech and language needs, yet they feel a certain expectancy to be able to cater for all of these needs within the school context under the SETAM. Further challenges were also highlighted, including teachers' perceptions that outside agencies may be placing all responsibility back onto schools to incorporate support for students under the SETAM (DES 2017a), rather than offering services to students themselves. The complexity involved in the identification of students with SEN was also highlighted, as a parental misconception around the importance of professional assessments and reports for students with SEN emerged from the data, followed by a discussion regarding the impact of the assessment and diagnosis of students, or indeed the lack of such, on students' ability to access entry to, and supports within, third-level education. The following section will detail the increased workload and levels of paperwork associated with the responsibilities of the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) within the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994).

#### **6.2.2.3 Increased Workload and Paperwork Requirements**

Data yielded from the qualitative, semi-structured interviews demonstrated that the responsibilities involved with implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) on the ground have resulted in an increased workload for teachers. Twenty-nine references were made by fourteen participants to the SETAM requiring greater organisation and coordination within schools and thus, resulting in an increased workload in terms of planning and paperwork for teachers. It emerged from interview discussions with participants in the Girls' School that their SENCO, Daniel, has experienced a significant increase in his workload under this model. While this school benefitted from extra resources<sup>41</sup> under the SETAM (DES 2017a), Daniel maintained that the organisation and coordination of these additional SET resources has been a challenge

*"I mean it has brought along with it a lot more organising structures for the school, a lot more in-depth testing and coordinating with parents and teachers to get support plans up in place and setting targets and moving on and reviews...It has been a challenge, not difficult, but a challenge to disseminate that information, even among the SETs because we had moved from a two person situation up to this year and now we have just under five [SETs], so even coordinating, getting everybody singing off the same hymn sheet, making sure*

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<sup>41</sup> The Girls' School gained one full time SET and one shared SET post (0.75 of a post) with the introduction of the SETAM in September 2017. One CT also acts as a SET due to insufficient classroom space in the school.

*everybody knows this is the process, letting teachers know their roles and then trying to combine everything together has been a challenge. You know, even just arranging meetings, arranging timetables, there's more to do. Arranging the variety that the new system allows that you can have in-class support, organising small group support, cooperating with teachers, organising timetables to accommodate that has been a challenge as well."*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

Claire, the SENCO of the Boys' School, also reported having increased organisational duties under the SETAM (DES 2017a), stating that *"we have started to reinvent the wheel, which has meant huge work"*. Claire's role as SENCO commenced in September 2019. She explained that her school had *"never fully made the transition from the old model into the new model"* after its introduction in 2017, *"so it's only now since September [2019] that we've really tackled it."* She described the huge undertaking involved with *"reorganising the entire system of how we record the progress of the boys"* to engage with the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) and stressed how *"intense"* the level of paperwork required under this model was for her and her SEN team

*"The volume of paperwork is huge. Within the team this year, for the last couple of months, September, October, I have been saying to them it will never be as difficult as it is now because as we're working, and as we're trying to plan, and as we're trying to record, we're actually reinventing the templates. Even something small like we went from fortnightly planning to weekly planning for the new model, even that in itself was a body of work to have to re-do every template for literacy, numeracy, language, behaviour, social skills, each had to be re-modelled for a weekly plan. So, the paperwork is difficult at the moment because I suppose we're re-doing it, we're getting to grips with what we're putting together but I've been trying to explain to people 'look, nothing will be as hard as the position that we're in at the moment'."*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

Claire's colleague Ali agreed, saying

*"I've found we've been flat out since September; I mean flat out with paperwork...we had to formulate everything this year, that's why I'm going 'oh my God' because I'm demented from paperwork this year, but I do feel it won't be half as bad next September."*

Ali, SET, Boys' School.

This increased workload in terms of the planning and paperwork involved with identifying students' needs and monitoring and recording students' outcomes, as part of

the problem-solving approach (see Figure 3.5) and NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) (see Section 2.4.2.1), was noted as one of the most prominent challenges of the SETAM by all of the participating schools. The majority of teachers (n=12) noted that they were not satisfied with the “*enormous amount of paperwork*” (Lisa, CT, Boys’ School) required under the SETAM, stating that there is “*huge documentation! There's actually probably an overload*” (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School). The pressure on teachers to meet the demands of the paperwork required and the time-consuming nature of such is described below by Will, the principal of the DEIS School

*“A lot of teachers, even in terms of school support plans, IEPs, call 'em what you want, school support plus plans...there's a lot of teachers who, **they are weighed down by a lot of paperwork**, just trying to keep their ducks in a row with regards to the paperwork and there's so much paperwork now and very often it's at the detriment of the people who are sitting in front of you, kids, you know.*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

The extract above conveys the overwhelming levels of paperwork required from teachers when implementing the SETAM on the ground. The paperwork involved with planning for students under the CoS has increased for CTs and SETs as more students are now being supported under this model, who each need to be planned for appropriately

*“We've more pupil support plans now. So maybe CTs and resource teachers might feel they're filling out a little bit more paperwork, that could be an add-on to cover all these extra children that are now encompassed in the new model.”*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

The CT in the Girls’ School agreed that under this model teachers are required to engage with more paperwork. She also refers to adapting the planning and documentation set out in the SETAM Guidelines (2017b) to suit the needs of those within her Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994)

*“Well, there's more paperwork. There is, yeah, everything has to be documented. I suppose it's just getting used to it and finding a format that suit us because I don't know, I mean there are guidelines and directives but at the end of the day we still have to tailor it to what is most useful for us.*

Rachel, CT, Girls’ School.

We see Ball's (1994) Policy as Cycle helpful here in terms of analysis, as teachers on the ground interpret (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006) and recreate policy as it is recontextualised (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Egan 2013). As described in the above quote, teachers construct their own meaning of policy based on their understanding, experiences, and interests (Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020) and therefore, enact such policy in different ways in each individual context (i.e., each classroom/school) to find a format to suit them. This conveys that all school contexts are different and unique, which holds implications for the type of CPD provided to schools to guide and assist them with such paperwork involved with the implementation of the SETAM, as discussed in Section 6.3.2.1 and Section 7.3. It also emerged that engaging with Stage One of the CoS, and the paperwork involved with the Classroom Support Plan, is resulting in an increased workload for CTs, as is recognised in the below quote

*“Prior really you just had your general learning plan or your IEP, whereas now, yes IEPs are still there but they have been adjusted and the new one for CTs [i.e., the Classroom Support Plan], there would be a lot more paperwork than would have been before.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

The Classroom Support Plan and its implementation will be further elaborated on in Theme Two (see Section 6.3.2), as the data, which emerged from interview participants surrounding this Stage of the CoS, warrants a full section.

Contrary to the increased planning and paperwork for teachers (SENCOs, CTs and SETs) under this model, as described above, principals from two differing schools acknowledged that the SETAM (DES 2017a) provided some administrative relief to schools as principals no longer have to engage with the *“tedious paperwork every year applying for kids”* (Will, Principal, DEIS School). The removal of the categorisation system, as seen under the RTH Model (DES 2005), ensures that schools no longer have to ‘source assessments or make applications annually to the NCSE in order to ensure the provision of additional teaching supports in their school’ (DES 2017a, p.14). Because of this, it could be suggested that there is less paperwork for principals under this model than there was under the previous model. However, both of these principals also recognised the increased workload for SENCOs within their schools. According to the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland 2004, p.21), the principal may ‘delegate’ duties such as the SENCO to ‘such teacher in the school as the principal considers appropriate’, which is

also reiterated in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017a). However, principals, in many Contexts of Practice, are also acting as the SENCO, depending on the school context, which may suggest that the administrative burden may not have been reduced for all principals under this model. The following extracts convey this notion and highlight the increased workload involved for the SENCO under this model

*“Anyway, the new model I think definitely it's made life easier, there's less paperwork for me as principal...there might be a bit more paperwork for the people involved like the coordinator, I think their workload has increased alright because they're keeping all the records. Especially with the new CoS, there's probably a lot more paperwork in that sense. But for administration it's certainly a lot easier, I mean you're not ringing psychologists in a hurry...Certainly, it's less paperwork for me now than there was under the old model.”*

Joe, Principal, Girls' School.

Researcher: *“Do you think a SENCO is an important role in schools?”*

*Will: “Oh, it's massive yeah, absolutely massive. Even from a special ed perspective the amount of paperwork that's required with the SNA allocations, keeping all the care needs forms, the pupil review forms, there's a huge amount of paperwork required, it's literally a full-time job in a school like this.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

Although the SETAM was successful in reducing the administrative burden on schools in terms of no longer needing to submit individual applications for additional teaching support for students with LI disabilities (NCSE 2014b; DES 2017a), participants expressed concern that due to the overwhelming amount of paperwork required from teachers under this model, teaching time is being reduced, as SETs, in particular, are spending more and more time administering assessments and documenting results in order to create a *“paper trail”*

*“Look the reality is, there's a huge amount of paperwork, it's all about creating a paper trail...the amount of paperwork is crazy, it's absolutely crazy...The levels of paperwork that are required now are taking a huge amount from the teaching time. So no for me it would be a concern, that we're becoming so focused on the paperwork that we're forgetting about what our central, or what our core function is.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

*“The teaching time is being lessened because we're supposed to be planning more and doing all these pre-tests more and then do the post-tests more. I mean already, Literacy Lift-Off, for example, is an 8-week initiative in this school but because of*

*the new model with pre-tests we're going to have to take a week out of that at the start for pre-testing and a week at the end for post-testing. So now it's going to be 6 weeks, so you've lost 2 weeks teaching there just for planning."*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

Ciara's quote conveys that more pressure is being put on schools to document their planning and assessment procedures, leading to increased administrative obligations and less teaching time for students, which was identified as a concern by schools when this model was proposed back in 2014 (Byrne 2017). As teachers now determine who can access supports and to what extent, they rely on a variety of assessment strategies (Appendix 38) to identify those in need of additional teaching support and to monitor their progress. However, according to the majority of interview participants (n=13), teachers' professional judgement, "*teachers' eyes and teachers' observations*" (Moirá, SET, DEIS School), particularly in terms of the CT, are regarded as the most frequently used and valuable forms of assessment for the identification of students' needs and the monitoring and reviewing of students' outcomes

*"I think teacher observation is massive for children in the special educational needs setting because they sometimes can't...they might have anxiety or they're not showing their full capabilities in a test."*

Lisa, MCT, Boys' School.

This is in line with the study's survey findings, as 92% (N=43) of survey participants reported using 'teacher observation' as an assessment method to monitor and record students' progress (see Section 5.4.1). The increased need for testing and paperwork to show accountability for decision-making under the SETAM, as highlighted in the above arguments, may imply that teacher observation alone is not viewed as a credible method of assessment. This was reflected in interview conversations where teachers felt the need to justify their use of teacher observation as an assessment tool, as illustrated by Mary, who, when stating that they would often use teacher observation to gauge the progress of students with SEN and the effectiveness of interventions in their school, commented saying "*I know it sounds like a cop-out but it isn't*" (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School). This feeling was mutual between teachers as Matthew, the principal of the Boys' School, believed that teachers' professional judgement is often undervalued, as there can sometimes be a focus on test scores and written assessments

*“I put a huge stock then on teacher observation. Whatever about the test results, no matter what I would still say to the teacher, do you think, if you didn't see his scores, would you have flagged him? So, I think teacher observation is hugely underestimated. I think teachers and people don't put enough stock on teacher observation and teacher professional opinion as opposed to scores. I know scores are very important but after a month or two you'll know who's struggling, so I think that's very important as well.”*

Matthew, Principal, Boys' School.

This, again, highlights a dilemma for teachers who want their professional judgement to be respected, yet as discussed throughout this theme, may not want full responsibility over the identification of needs and deployment of resources. It is interesting to consider if the increased responsibility and autonomy given to teachers under this new model, and the move away from diagnosing students, will see teachers' professional opinion being valued more in the future. However, while discussing collaborative practice (see Theme Three, Section 6.4) with Ciara, the SET in the Girls' School, she described the problematic nature of using teacher observation and informal discussions as a method of reviewing in-class supports and interventions without documenting the evidence, revealing a dilemma in practice

*“We would do that [review in-class supports] informally, it's always done informally at the end of the class, you're on your way out the door you might say 'oh that was great that really worked today and so and so was flying it', that's not enough anymore. You can understand why, if a parent came in and asked you 'well show me how is she improving', we don't have anything. So, I can totally understand why we have to do it...It's being done it's just it was never put down on paper.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

This conveys that while teacher observation can be a hugely valuable tool for assessment and review, the recording and documenting of such observations and discussions is of central importance. It is, therefore, significant, that within the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b, p.9), ‘teacher observation records’ is listed as one of many assessment methods which can inform a students' Classroom Support Plan, School Support Plan or School Support Plus Plan. The use of the word ‘records’ further consolidates Ciara's point above, implying that recording and documenting such observations is a vital component of properly implementing the CoS, under the SETAM (DES 2017a). While data suggest that the tracking and recording of students' progress in terms of test results, at a whole-school

level, is being carried out effectively under the SETAM using the framework set out in the Student Support File and databases such as Aladdin (see Section 6.3.1), teacher observations to monitor students' outcomes and to review interventions are not always being documented appropriately in schools, particularly at the Classroom Support Stage of the CoS. This finding is further detailed in Section 6.3.2. It is also important to note that while the majority of participants (n=12) considered the levels of paperwork and increased administrative obligations a challenge of the SETAM, many participants (n=8), unprompted, made it clear that they believe this planning and paperwork is important, necessary and they can see the benefits of it, as is clearly elucidated by Tom, a teaching principal in the Mixed School

*"I think that paperwork has, I won't say it has destroyed education, but it is certainly one of the biggest headaches, and there is a need for it...it's very necessary because if you don't have proper planning and recording then it's hard to monitor progress and so on."*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

Many others supported this view, emphasising that although the paperwork involved with the SETAM (DES 2017a) can be time-consuming, teachers are committed to engaging with it as they recognise the importance of planning for students with SEN and recording their progress throughout their journey through primary school

*"Yeah, I think it's important that it's in place because it's in place to form a long-term plan and it's important that parents know exactly what's happening and that they can have their input and that's all written down so that it's followed. The planning side of it, I think, is very important and the assessments and things that go along with the teaching, it all has its part, it all has its role to play."*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

*"I guess, you know, I can really see the benefits of it [paperwork], so, you know, there is a lot of planning with it but I can see the benefits from it so I think, when you can see the benefits from it, you're going to proceed with it. You know what I mean, there is a lot of it, but I can 100% see the benefits from it."*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

It can, therefore, be concluded that while teachers experience a greater workload in terms of increased administrative obligations when implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) on the ground, many believe that the planning and paperwork associated with this model is necessary and important. This section explored the responsibilities and

associated increased workload of teachers working under the SETAM within the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) and findings showed that although the eradication of the NCSE RTH Model application procedure (DES 2005) reduced the administrative obligations for some principals, some SENCOs encounter increased responsibilities in terms of paperwork and coordination and organisational activities. The findings from this study suggest that teachers are now engaging with increased levels of paperwork when assessing and identifying students in need of additional support, planning for students with SEN and reviewing their outcomes under the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a).

In summary, this theme unveiled a dilemma for teachers implementing the SETAM in schools, whereby they appreciate and welcome the increased agency to identify students in need of additional teaching support and the flexibility to allocate SET resources accordingly, without the prerequisite of the student needing a diagnosis of disability, yet identify the responsibilities associated with such practices as a significant challenge of this model. The benefits resulting from the transition to the needs-based model were outlined, which hold major implications for the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students. Following that, the challenges involved with the increased responsibility placed on teachers under the SETAM were discussed. Such findings shed light on the workings of this model in the Context of Practice, which aim to unearth the voice of the teacher in policy implementation and thus, may contribute to the evolving policy cycle. Data which emerged from semi-structured interviews surrounding the implementation of CoS in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a) will be discussed in the following section, with a central focus on the first level of support; Classroom Support.

### **6.3 Theme 2: The Continuum of Support as a Framework for Inclusive Practice**

According to the SETAM policy (DES 2017a, p.20) ‘the effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs requires a whole-school approach’. This involves developing an inclusive ethos and culture within schools, characterised by positive learning environments whereby all students feel a sense of belonging, and an emphasis on the active participation and engagement of all students prevails (DES 2017b). The six principles of the SETAM (Figure 3.4) aim to inform a whole-school approach to provision

for students with SEN, and the NEPS Continuum of Support (CoS) framework (DES 2007a) is outlined in the SETAM Guidelines (DES 2017b) to facilitate this process. The CoS encompasses a model of assessment and intervention to support students, whose needs can range from mild to severe, and transient to long term (DES 2007a). Section 2.4.2.1 in Chapter Two provides an account of the three stages of the CoS and their associated Support Plans. Monitoring and recording students' outcomes is an integral part of all three Stages of the CoS, encouraging teachers to engage in a problem-solving process (see Figure 3.5), and to reflect on 'did it [the support/intervention] work?' (NEPS 2007a; DES 2017b). The use of the Student Support File and whole-school approaches to monitoring and recording students' outcomes will be discussed below. Following this, Section 6.3.2 unveils the challenges associated with the use of Classroom Support Plans that emerged from the data and highlights the importance of the role of the CT at Stage One of the CoS. Findings related to CPD and ITE for teachers, or lack thereof, will then be explored to examine teachers' levels of preparedness to enact new policies on the ground, which, this study argues, may act as contributing factors to the challenges experienced by CTs, in particular, in implementing the SETAM.

### **6.3.1 Approaches to Monitoring and Recording Students' Outcomes**

The graduated approach of the CoS emphasises the importance of continuous monitoring and reviewing of students' progress, and recording of students' outcomes, to ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the learning that has taken place (Baldwin 2018) and to advise future planning for students with SEN. A range of assessments, observation records and Support Plans can be kept within the Student Support File and used to inform all stakeholders, i.e., students, parents and teachers, if progression onto the next stage of the CoS is necessary. Monitoring and reviewing progress and recording students' outcomes is essential to determine the level of support required for each student, which is increasingly relevant under the current needs-based model (DES 2017a), as schools now have greater autonomy and flexibility to modify the allocation of SET support to students throughout the year accordingly (see Section 6.2.1.4) as described in the quote below

*“Reviews are massive, I guess having your targeted intervention in place and then reviewing regularly so that you can decide whether you are going to continue with the current level of support, give more or less, discontinue it...”*

This study suggests that teachers are effectively monitoring and recording students' outcomes under the SETAM using the School Support Plan (Stage Two) and School Support Plus Plan (Stage Three) within the Student Support File. However, evidence suggests a lack of monitoring and recording at Stage One using the Classroom Support Plan, as revealed in the quote below

Jack: *"...we have the School Support for some and the School Support Plus for a few, we've them officially documented."*

Researcher: *"And as far as you are aware the Classroom Support Plans are not being put down on paper?"*

Jack: *"No, we'll say for children with autism now in Junior Infants or Senior Infants or 1<sup>st</sup> Class we would have them put in place for those but not so much for the children that wouldn't be showing up with, we'll say, major SEN."*

Jack, SET, Mixed School

This has cause for some concern as CTs are the starting point of the CoS process and need to monitor and review students' progress and response to differentiated methods and classroom-based interventions put in place, prior to involving the SET at the School Support Stage, as described below by Lisa

*"So, a plan has to be set in place for each child and you have to have aims and then I try to go 6-8 weeks and see how they get on...then if I feel like it needs to go further then I will move on [to School Support]."*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

While it is clear that Lisa is aware of her roles and responsibilities to initiate classroom-based interventions and document the outcomes of such in a Classroom Support Plan, before progressing the student onto the School Support Stage, it emerged from the data that the same cannot be said for all CTs, which is further discussed in Section 6.3.2 below. Most interview participants (n=14), however, discussed their schools' use of the Student Support File, in general, when planning for students with SEN, monitoring students' progress and recording outcomes, by *"using pre and post-assessments, the log of actions, support checklists, Support Plans, reviews, that type of thing"* (Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School). This concurs with 87% of survey participants (N=41) and is in line with

recommendations from NEPS (2019), as Student Support Files are recognised as effective tools to track a student’s pathway through the CoS, by facilitating the documentation of ‘progress and needs over time’ (DES 2017b, p.10). Support Plans at all three Stages, which are stored within the Student Support File, are drawn up and signed by the CT, parent(s)/guardian(s) and SET (if applicable). They detail a plan of action to provide additional support to a student with SEN, which is implemented for an agreed period of time. In addition to the Support Plans, participants discussed a variety of documents stored within Student Support Files, including “*all their results and stuff, all their tests and there’ll be samples of their work*” (Joe, Principal, Girls’ School), as well as “*all the different aspects, the different nuances in terms of the kids’ ongoing improvements*” (Will, Principal, DEIS School). According to the *Student Support File Guidelines*, which were first made available in 2014 (DoE 2021d), Support Plans are then reviewed on an ongoing basis. A specific document for reviewing outcomes with parents and students, called a Support Review Record, is included in the Student Support File template, provided by the Department (DES 2017b), which, according to Jack, has led to increased reviews and greater parental involvement, now under the SETAM (DES 2017a).

*“...because of the new template, there’s a review at the back of those, so we go through those even for the Learning Support children now with parents as well. So, I think that helps us in that sense it’s probably bringing in parents that bit more into the whole circle...”*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

It is important to note that “*Learning Support children*”, as referenced above, are students who are now included at the School Support Stage under the SETAM, as Circular 0013/2017 brought about a change in practice in that there is no longer a ‘distinction between Learning Support and Resourcing Teaching Posts’, with these provisions now being ‘merged into a single Special Education Teacher post’ (DES 2017a, p.19). Although the use of some language associated with the old model (DES 2005), such as “*Learning Support*”, was evident throughout interviews<sup>42</sup>, all participating schools had followed policy directive by developing a core SEN team where responsibilities of

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<sup>42</sup> Terms such as “resource/resource teacher” (25), “resource hours” (6) and “learning support” (19) were mentioned a total of 50 times by participants. These figures represent participants’ use of these terms to speak to practices under the current model (DES 2017a). Instances where participants were referring to the previous teacher allocation model (DES 2005), or past experiences, have been omitted from this count.

traditional Learning Support and Resource Teachers' roles had merged, which was also the case for 89% of survey respondents (N=42).

Jack mentioned above that reviews are now taking place for students accessing School Support, which would not have been done previously in his school. This indicates an increase in the monitoring and recording of students' outcomes under the SETAM, as, in the past, Jack's school only conducted reviews for students who had IEPs (which are now called School Support Plus Plans). This review process, which informs the adaptation of Support Plans, is recognised as a key driver of effective practice (DES 2017b). According to many interview participants (n=8), generally, Student Support Files for students at Stage Two and Three of the CoS, are formally reviewed twice a year, through meetings with parents. Daniel, the SENCO in the Girls' School, described this process, stating that *"we'd have met them [parents] in September, review in January and then [review] again in June"* to *"get parents' input and see how their child has been progressing throughout the year"*. This consolidates survey findings which showed that 83% of participants (N=39) formally plan the review of Student Support Files. However, it also emerged that the monitoring and recording of students' outcomes is being carried out informally and more regularly in schools, as teachers noted that IEPs are *"ongoing"* (Maira, SET, DEIS School), *"working documents"* (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School) that are reviewed and revisited regularly. Brenda reiterated this point by saying

*"Yeah, like I always say to people, your IEP...should be an active document. I'd love now to see an IEP with a scribble in it...now I don't mean a scribble but a comment, rather than 'I've the IEP done now, and I'll put it into my file, my beautiful file'. I think it's something that should be looked at on and off all the time to make sure you're on track and to see has a target been met and do we need to pick a new target, different things like that, rather than being formally looked at."*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

According to some participants (n=4), the use of Student Support Files, under the SETAM (DES 2017a), has facilitated a more structured and organised system of monitoring and recording students' outcomes in schools. Claire, the SENCO in the Boys' School, described the Student Support File as a way of keeping a record of each student's *"story"* in a *"file that shows a history of his time in the school, from the perspective of special ed."* (Claire, SENCO, Boys' School). Each of the four schools had systems in place to record students' outcomes, some of which had been introduced as a result of the SETAM,

and others which had been in place prior to its introduction. The Boys' School had recently introduced a colour-coded folder system to manage and record Support Plans, which comprise the Student Support File, as described below

*“Up to now it was each teacher had their own system but what I've asked the special ed. team to do now is that we have little yellow folders for Classroom Support, we have red for School Support, and we have green lever-arch files for School Support Plus. We have a standard front page, with the triangle of the Continuum... We've spent a lot of time...organising them in such a way that there's a uniformity across the folders so...if you open any file, you'll roughly see the same format. So, you've got your cover page, you've got your log of actions, our current task is putting together a tracker for results that will bring a child from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Class and then other than that your sections go from all of your formal assessments and reports at the back, information from our Infant feeder-school and then 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Class.”*

Claire, SENCO, Boy's School.

The three other schools discussed their use of Aladdin<sup>43</sup> as a management system to track students' results from a range of standardised tests, diagnostic assessments, termly tests and teacher-designed tests (see Appendix 38), which enables teachers to monitor students' progress “*at the touch of a button*”, so that “*you can literally see year on year where kids are at, where they're slipping, particular areas where they're struggling at Maths, English, the whole lot, it's great*” (Will, Principal, DEIS School).

*“I track everybody in the school from a standardised testing point of view...that would be their records from Junior Infants all the way up to whatever class they're in and also [that] would be maintained on Aladdin so if at any time you were looking for a child's history you can go on that and track them. Now teachers are also being encouraged to put their tests on Aladdin, so their termly tests in Maths or in English, put those tests up to support or to give a wider picture on those. We'd also be putting up Junior Infants' and Senior Infants' Jolly Phonics testing report, like, do they know all their sounds or whatever, that's the way we would track as well.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

*“We use a lot of the formal assessment type things and because we use Aladdin now that's all on file, so Jack is a great man for tracking the data. We would always input all of the results from the let's say the Sigma-T, so we're tracking in terms of Maths, are we falling down in problem-solving or this, that or the other? So, we'd be quite data orientated.”*

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<sup>43</sup> Aladdin is an Irish owned and run online Management Information System/Student Information System specifically designed to simplify administration in primary schools (Aladdin Schools 2021).

Overall, it can be suggested that the SETAM (DES 2017a) has facilitated better monitoring and recording of student's outcomes at a whole-school level as it *"definitely got us to take a step back and reflect on what we're doing and how we can improve things"* (Will, Principal, DEIS School). It was conveyed that schools appreciate the *"clear framework"* provided by the SETAM on how to identify students' needs, meet students' needs and monitor and record students' outcomes, to help teachers to ensure that they are *"hitting those three areas"* as *"it is so important because they do all have a knock-on effect on each other"* (Helen, CT, DEIS School). While the above discussion highlights schools' use of various tracking systems and the use of the Student Support File to monitor and record students' outcomes, discussions with teachers unveiled a significant finding that Stage One of the CoS, and the associated documentation, is an area of ambiguity for teachers, which may act as a barrier to the effective implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a). This finding, along with the roles and responsibilities of the CT in implementing the CoS, will be discussed below.

### **6.3.2 Challenges Involved with Implementing the Classroom Support Stage**

The NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) presents a range of assessment and intervention processes which acknowledge the 'central role of the class teacher supported as appropriate by the school's special education personnel and by agencies external to the school' (DES 2007a, p.1). The first Stage of the CoS, 'whole-school & classroom support for all' involves preventative and proactive approaches which intend to meet the needs of the majority of students, within the mainstream classroom. This section explores the roles and responsibilities of the CT, under the SETAM policy (DES 2017a), in ensuring all students, including those with SEN, receive an appropriate (Government of Ireland 1998) and inclusive education. It focuses on the practices and documentation required in Stage One (Classroom Support) of the CoS (DES 2007a) and unveils the challenges that emerged within some schools to enact such practices. Across fourteen interviews, twenty-six references were coded to this finding, with eleven references specifically being made to the difficulties surrounding the effective implementation of the Classroom Support Stage. These references came from three of the four participating schools. Out of these eleven references, five were made by SENCOs, four by principals, and two by SETs.

Interestingly, only one of these references was made by a CT, who was the teaching principal in his school. This may point to the lack of awareness of CTs regarding some of the practices required under this first stage of the CoS, which is discussed below.

Inclusion, as advocated for under the SETAM (DES 2017a), must begin in the mainstream classroom, as studies show that a sense of belonging is a necessary factor in the successful learning and general well-being of the student (Warnock *et al.* 2010; Day and Prunty 2015). The importance of the CT is clearly outlined in the policy text of the SETAM, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), with a paragraph dedicated to emphasising their responsibility to educate *all* students, including those with SEN. The circular references the Education Act of 1998 (see Section 1.2.1), as the first piece of legislation relating to education in the State, which placed an emphasis on education for *all* (Government of Ireland 1998)

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of pupils in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all pupils in his/her class, including any pupil with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.

(DES 2017a, p.16-17)

This highlights the primary responsibility of the CT with regards to the education and inclusion of students with SEN in schools, which is reflected in the key principles that guide the implementation process of the SETAM (see Figure 3.4) and is reiterated a number of times throughout the Circular's accompanying Guidelines (DES 2017b). This policy directive, that CTs have 'primary responsibility for the learning and well-being of all students in their class' (DES 2017b, p.47) was acknowledged by some participants (n=4) throughout the semi-structured interviews

*"I guess as the CT, you know, the book stops with you essentially, you'd have the primary responsibility for the children in your class."*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

*"...we always say the CT has overall responsibility."*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

This responsibility was particularly evident in the area of identifying students' needs, whereby many participants (n=8) spoke to the essential role of the CT, firstly, in identifying students in need of support through classroom-based observations, and then,

bringing this concern to the attention of the relevant personnel (i.e., SET/SENCO/principal)

*“...it’s the CT’s responsibility really, firstly, to alert the SEN team that somebody needs to be looked at or assessed. My first thing always was to talk to the two lads [SETs in the school] and to say, ‘look I’ve a concern about this, come and have a look’ and they’re brilliant, they’ll come and sit in on the class, or they’ll take the class [for] a day and watch and then we’ll talk to the parents and go from there.”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

While it was clear that this process was in practice in the participating schools, issues regarding the responsibility of the CT in terms of fully implementing Stage One of the CoS, following this initial identification phase, emerged from some interview conversations

*“I suppose that’s always been, not a huge problem, but it’s always been a problem for the class teacher, that you’re continually reminding the CT that these children are their responsibility, not [the responsibility of] the SET. Especially when it comes to Stage One interventions and that you know.”*

Joe, Principal, Girls’ School.

As highlighted by Joe, his school are facing challenges in terms of CTs not recognising, or not carrying out, their responsibilities which go beyond the initial identification of students’ needs. These responsibilities include putting classroom-based interventions and differentiated methods in place and monitoring and recording students’ outcomes, within the mainstream classroom, prior to involving the SET. In the past, withdrawing students with SEN from the mainstream classroom to work with the Learning Support or Resource Teacher in the ‘resource room’ was the most dominant form of support used in schools (DES 2003; Egan 2013), which echoes the study’s survey findings, whereby 47% of participants (N=22) reported that they ‘always’ withdrew students with SEN under the previous teacher allocation model (DES 2005) (see Section 5.3.1). This ‘pull-out’ approach was highly criticised by Will (1986), who deemed that such practices inadvertently created barriers to the successful inclusion of students with SEN and could lead to stigmatisation (see Section 1.2.1 for further discussion of Will and her subsequent educational reform movement; the Regular Education Initiative). Some interview participants (n=5) spoke of how such withdrawal methods led to an environment whereby CTs would ‘send out’ students with SEN to the Learning Support/Resource Teacher

without putting classroom-based interventions in place first, or collaborating with the support teacher, therefore, perceiving students with SEN to be ‘within the support teacher remit rather than a whole-school responsibility’ (Rose and Shevlin 2020, p.52), which led to a ‘leave them at the door’ attitude being established. According to UNESCO (2017, p.33), ‘inclusion that depends on practices imported from special education tend to foster new and more subtle forms of segregation, albeit in mainstream settings’, which tends to encapsulate the methods described by participants that occurred in the past. It is significant that some teachers acknowledged a clear movement away from such attitudes and highlighted an increase in collaboration between CTs and SETs and greater use of in-class supports for students (see Section 5.3.1 and Section 6.4)

*“Like it would have been very old school before in that someone just knocks on the door and the child goes out. No, definitely like you need to collaborate, you can’t just put it [support for students with SEN] off in a box like, it can’t be sealed off, it has to become part of the class as well.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys’ School.

*“When I did Learning Support initially you withdrew your kids, you hardly spoke to the CT, you did but you hardly did...whereas now it’s a way more collaborative.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

However, discussions with other participants, particularly those in the Girls’ School, unveiled that some CTs have not engaged with the transition away from the ‘leave them at the door attitude’, and still expect SETs to take full responsibility for students with SEN, perhaps sometimes without putting appropriate interventions in place within the classroom first, or without monitoring or recording students’ outcomes following such interventions

*“...you have to just keep reminding people that **the chat at the door is no longer good enough** for ‘I think she needs to go’ [out for support with the SET]. You have to come with something, **you have to have shown that you have a Classroom Plan in place** and that you have already met your teachers and you have tried this and have that to present to your SET, that you’d work together with it before moving on.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School.

*“I suppose it’s just keeping in mind the teachers...you know it’s very easy for the [class] teacher to go up to the Learning Support Teacher and say ‘listen, that*

*child there is struggling, can you do something?', and that's not the way it works, as you know. It's just to keep reminding people that you've to go by guidelines."*

Joe, Principal, Girls' School.

Joe's reference to having to remind CTs to "go by the guidelines" shows the difficult transition his school is facing under the SETAM, to successfully implement the Classroom Support Stage of the CoS (DES 2007a). However, a more significant concern, identified by many participants (n=7) relates to CTs failing to write up the Classroom Support Plan, following any preventative or proactive approaches which may have been put in place to respond to students' needs at a whole-school or classroom level. While this appeared to be a significant issue in the Girls' School, as portrayed by Joe's frustration in the interview excerpt below, this challenge was not individual to the Girls' School alone. Unprompted, eight references were made to the lack of paperwork, i.e., Classroom Support Plans, being drawn up at Stage One of the CoS in schools. This emerged as a noteworthy challenge of the practical application of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in three of the four participating schools. It was not, however, an evident issue within the DEIS School

Joe: *"The CT is the biggest challenge... again, I go back to what I mentioned earlier on, even though we'd be dogmatic about going through the CoS, I suppose sometimes the SET will get annoyed that teachers expect them just to... 'listen, there's something wrong with this child, can you do something' ...and then we've got to go back and say 'listen, you've got to do your own intervention, you need to talk to the parents, I can't get involved until that's done'. It is a challenge and again that's why we're getting somebody in to talk to the staff just to remind them, because we're sick of reminding them."*

Researcher: *"And so, would I be correct in saying that's Stage One where ye would encounter difficulty, so Classroom Support?"*

Joe: *"Yes, that's Stage One, classroom intervention, first that they do their intervention, and they have the paperwork to prove it. So, because I lay down a rule there maybe a year ago, two years ago, I would have said it at a staff meeting that none of the SETs are going to go near anyone unless you have the paperwork done as CTs."*

Researcher: *"And what paperwork do you require?"*

Joe: *"Well, just proof that they've done the intervention, just show me what you've done."*

Joe, Principal, Girls' School.

In Joe’s school, it is clear that he, as principal, is making an effort to implement all stages of the CoS effectively under the SETAM (DES 2017a) but has encountered some difficulty at the Classroom Support Stage. He mentions that all CTs need to have their paperwork in order prior to asking SETs to provide any additional support to students in their class, a “rule” introduced by him a year or two ago, suggesting that this was a change in practice brought about with the introduction of the SETAM in his school. However, it is important to acknowledge that some students may initially require support at Stage Two or Stage Three, dependent on their level of need, as set out in the NEPS CoS Guidelines (DES 2007a)

While most pupils’ initial needs should be met through classroom-based interventions, a small number of pupils may arrive at school with difficulties that are more significant, or which are immediately recognised. In such cases, it may be more appropriate to begin with a School Support or School Support Plus Plan. Most of the pupils to whom this applies will be new to the school. However, it may also apply for some pupils following an event which impacts significantly on them in school.

(DES 2007a, p.6)

These Guidelines were developed by NEPS in 2007, therefore, it can be assumed that most teachers were, at least, familiar with the three stages of support long before the SETAM policy was introduced to schools, ten years later, in 2017. However, it emerged from interview data that Stage One, Classroom Support, and the relevant practices and documentation associated with such, are of greater focus now under the current SET allocation model (DES 2017a), which, in turn, has revealed challenges associated with its implementation. According to the NEPS CoS Guidelines (DES 2007a), a Classroom Support Plan, in its most basic terms, involves CTs ‘keeping a simple written record of what has been done’ (DES 2007a, p.14). Data from this study suggest that teachers may not always record evidence to show that classroom-based interventions and supports have been put in place prior to students accessing supports at the School Support level, i.e., from the SET. Following interview discussions, it must be acknowledged that most teachers are differentiating lessons and adapting teaching methodologies to cater for the needs of students with SEN within the mainstream classroom. However, while these differentiation methods may be included in teachers’ short-term planning and/or *Cuntas Míósúil*<sup>44</sup>, the actual recording of targeted interventions and supports for students at the

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<sup>44</sup> A *Cuntas Míósúil* is a monthly progress record. In accordance with Rule 126 of the ‘Rules for National Schools’ (1965, p.74), at the end of every month, teachers are required to provide a written summary of ‘the portion of the curriculum dealt with during the month’.

Classroom Support Stage, are often not documented in a Classroom Support Plan. Therefore, data suggest that this is an area of the SETAM (DES 2017a) which may not be adequately implemented in schools

Researcher: *“You said there’s more paperwork, so what would be the new additional paperwork in comparison to a couple of years ago, that you would be doing now?”*

Rachel: *“Am...I suppose a couple of years ago you could recommend to the SEN team that a child would be, something like we’ll say a group for Maths or English that they could get that support just based on their Sigma-T result or whatever, whereas now it’s not just based on that...**you have to show that you’ve given in-class support in advance of that, which teachers are doing anyway but it’s just that you’ve to write down all these things.** Whereas obviously a teacher is going to have tried their best within the class, they’re not going to just say ‘here, take this child’ **but now you have to have all that documented.**”*

Rachel, CT, Girls’ School.

This echoes the previous discussion regarding teacher observation (see Section 6.2.2.3) and coheres with survey findings (see Section 5.4.1), which recognised that although CTs’ professional judgement is one of the most frequently used and valuable forms of assessment for the identification of students’ needs and the monitoring and reviewing of students’ progress, the lack of documentation or record-keeping associated with such is a limitation involved with this practice. The current finding presents a similar challenge in terms of the Classroom Support Stage of the CoS (DES 2007a), whereby CTs are

*“...doing all the work, but they wouldn’t always have it written down on the plan...they are doing the work, they are differentiating, they are finding different ways around things, but it wouldn’t always be on a plan so we’re trying to get them to put it on a plan”.*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School)

Failing to record classroom-based interventions in a Classroom Support Plan and to review how these have impacted on students’ outcomes is an aspect of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in which some of the participating schools recognised needed further development

*“It’s not CTs’ fault but it’s something they would have fallen down on, myself included when I was in the classroom, that we just didn’t do the Classroom Support bit, we didn’t write it up, we might have done the intervention, but it didn’t go on any piece of paper. So that’s something we’re working on now to get the classroom teacher to actually get it down in writing into the child’s file, profile*

*and then move onto the SET.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls’ School.

*“What we should be using a bit more is the Classroom Support...I suppose it’s CTs are using that on their own and **maybe they’re not writing it down at the moment** but maybe to have it more official **we should be writing that down”**.*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

Ciara’s quote above sheds light on a potential lack of awareness by CTs of the requirements at Stage One of the CoS, indicating that the challenges surrounding the effective implementation of this Stage may be resulting from a lack of CPD for teachers. This was further evidenced during interviews with principals and SENCO’s, in particular, who conveyed the difficulties they face to ensure that CTs are adequately informed of how to implement Stage One, which may, again, highlight a lack of knowledge on CTs’ behalf, perhaps due to limited CPD on the introduction of this model into schools

*“...the challenge is getting it rolled out in all classes so that everybody is certain of their roles, certain that they’re all on the same page, that we’re not coming for the chat at the door...the evidence, the proof or the paperwork, whatever you want to call it, should be in place at each level as we go along and be in the Support File.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School.

*“My challenge at the moment, I think for myself, I think the special ed. team are on-board and we’re all on the same page, but **I don’t think our CTs have fully got there yet as regards understanding the new model**. I had a lady from the PDST<sup>45</sup> come in for our Croke Park<sup>46</sup> day on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August and she did the whistle-stop tour of the new continuum for the whole staff, just to start us all off on the right foot...we had that input **but I know myself we probably need to come back to it with the staff as a whole** to say you’ve got three levels of support that we can be providing, obviously greatest level of need greatest level of support but **not to forget those boys that we could start picking up now with Classroom Support**.”*

Claire, SENCO, Boys’ School.

As mentioned by Claire above, further CPD support may be needed in order for CTs to

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<sup>45</sup> The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas (PDST 2021).

<sup>46</sup> Croke Park Agreement Hours are 36 additional hours per year worked by primary school teachers. These hours are to provide for certain essential activities such as staff meetings, school planning and CPD to take place without reducing class contact/tuition time (DES 2016a).

fully understand and engage with the CoS process. This was reiterated by Joe, who aimed to overcome this challenge by “*getting somebody in to talk to the staff just to remind them, because we’re sick of reminding them*” (Joe, Principal, Girls’ School). Tom, the teaching principal in the Mixed School, recognised his own limitations in implementing Stage One of the CoS, conveying that this stage is certainly an aspect in need of further development

Researcher: “*Is there any aspect of the new model that you’d like to receive CPD on?*”

Tom: “*Am...em...I suppose yeah, eh...you see I’d like maybe more help in my role as a teacher. I’ve always found that this has been a conflict for me professionally, because when you’re a teaching principal, in all aspects of school life then you’re torn between trying to be the CT and being the principal as well and maybe in my teaching role I think that there are, I could be better prepared. I would have seen my responsibility first and foremost, my whole school responsibilities for making sure that every child was assigned help if they needed it and so on, so maybe I could do with extra help with working under the new model with the children in my class, my teacher’s role.*”

Researcher: “*So that would be looking at Stage One of the CoS which is the Classroom Support?*”

Tom: “*Classroom Support yes, yeah, yeah.*”

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

Tom’s admission that he could be better prepared to implement the Classroom Support Stage may suggest that some CTs did not receive adequate preparation or CPD in relation to the SETAM and its associated practices involving the CoS (DES 2007a) on its introduction in September 2017. Therefore, it could be suggested that this may have impacted CTs’ ability to effectively implement Stage One, which has led to the challenges as described throughout this section. Such findings hold implications for the Context of Influence (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) for future policy action, as this study argues that greater supports may be needed on the introduction of new policies, in order for teachers, working in the Context of Practice, to effectively implement practices as set out in those policies. This will be further explored in the following section, as limited CPD related to the SETAM, and SEN more generally, for CTs in particular is examined.

### **6.3.2.1 The Need for Continuing Professional Development on SEN for All Teachers**

The introduction of new policies brings with it new tasks and responsibilities for the key stakeholders in the implementation of such policies at a local level. As discussed in Chapter One (Section 1.3), the SETAM (DES 2017a) was introduced to schools at a time of notable curricular reform, as a new Primary Language Curriculum (DES 2019e) had recently been rolled-out to schools and a proposed new Primary Maths Curriculum (DES 2019d) was on the horizon. Following concern expressed by the IPPN (2018) regarding the pace of change within the primary education sector, the researcher considered how supported and prepared teachers felt when trying to achieve such policy change within the Context of Practice. Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2, presents findings from the first phase of data collection, which showed that 53% of survey respondents reported feeling ‘very underprepared’ (N=11) or ‘underprepared’ (N=14) to implement the SETAM on its introduction in September 2017. Similarly, many interview participants (n=8) described feeling unprepared and under-supported to implement this model and its associated practices and felt that they “*probably could have done with more support starting out in 2017 alright*” (Jack, SET, Mixed School). The interview excerpt below highlights teachers’ apprehensions surrounding the continuous change as directed by policy within schools

Researcher: “*When this model was introduced did you feel prepared to implement it and the practices that would come with it?*”

Tom: “*Am... I’m not sure, to be honest, I think of all the changes that are made, I think that they’re introduced without, we’re expected to implement change without an adequate level of preparation, that’s across the education system in general like, any kind of curriculum review or any new programmes that are introduced. You’re not adequately prepared, in general. Do I feel adequately prepared? No, I don’t, and I don’t think I probably am as au fait as I should be with the model being honest about it so maybe more training, yeah, would be of benefit.*”

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

This section explores the CPD offered to teachers on the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) and the topic of CPD related to inclusive education more generally, stemming from data coded to a total of fifty-two references over fifteen interviews (Appendix 35). It sheds light on the limited CPD offered to CTs in the area of SEN and how this, in turn, may have led to the difficulties schools are currently facing regarding

the implementation of Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a) under the SETAM (DES 2017a), as discussed in the previous section.

Survey respondents illustrated limited CPD in the area of identifying students' needs as a challenge of the SETAM (Section 5.2.2). A DES review of the pilot study of the SETAM (see Section 2.5.1 and Section 3.3.2) stated that participating schools were provided with a 'comprehensive suite of supports and guidance to enable them to implement the model as intended by the Department' (DES 2016b, p.9), which included support meetings and school visits from specialist services such as NEPS, the NCSE, the Special Education Section of the DoE and the Inspectorate. However, survey data revealed that similar supports were not provided for all schools upon the roll-out of the SETAM nationally (Dempsey 2017; Howe and Griffin 2020), with just over half (57%) of participating teachers (N=27) receiving CPD in relation to the SETAM. Qualitative findings cohered with those of the quantitative strand, and emphasised limited CPD as a significant concern, as the majority of interview participants (n=11) reported that they received no CPD, provided by the specialist services as described above, directly related to the SETAM upon its introduction

*"I'm trying to remember was there specific...I can't remember if there was specific CPD for the introduction of the new model, I don't think there was, I think that maybe you just had to read the circular..."*

Matthew, Principal, Boys' School.

*"I didn't receive any, no. I mean we got the circular, the email of the circular. It certainly wasn't discussed with other teachers or anything no. I certainly wasn't aware of any CPD, whether there was one or not department wise, I wasn't aware of it."*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

*"Not unless people went and did it off their own back, went looking for it, in the teacher centres or courses during the summer."*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls School.

The lack of CPD received by teachers is cause for some concern as the NCSE's Working Group Report, which proposed this 'new model', stated that 'continuing professional development for teachers is seen to be critical to the success of the new model and will need to be embedded from its introduction' (NCSE 2014b, p.25). However, as mentioned by Daniel above, many participants (n=8) spoke to engaging in self-initiated CPD and

doing “*an awful lot of independent research on it*” (Helen, CT, DEIS School), to better inform themselves of the workings and requirements of the SETAM. This CPD ranged from reading the Circular and the accompanying Guidelines, to attending courses in the evenings or during the summer

*“There’s definitely a good cohort of teachers here, off their own bat, attend evening CPD courses so I think the new model, everyone’s aware of it.”*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

*“I did a summer course myself, two summers in a row on special ed.”*

Claire, SENCO, Boys’ School.

*“I did a summer course last year, an online one it was really, really good. It was an INTO one and it was about the new circular and about the guidelines accompanying it and how basically to translate that into a policy and how to work it. Now it was really, really good, I found it absolutely excellent because I didn’t know where to go [initially].”*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

Engaging with such CPD shows teachers’ initiative, interest and motivation to effectively implement the SETAM and create inclusive learning environments. However, it can be suggested that while schools participating in the pilot of the SETAM were highly satisfied with the ‘manner in which teachers’ professional development in SEN was supported during the pilot’ (DES 2016b, p.27), the same level of CPD was not offered to all schools upon introduction of the SETAM, as forecast by Dempsey (2017), which, according to the data was unfortunate, and therefore, teachers had to seek support themselves in order to be able to effectively implement this model on the ground.

A discrepancy between the support available to CTs and those in SEN roles became apparent in this study and is reflected in CPD programmes funded by the DoE. The Post-Graduate Diploma Programme of Continuing Professional Development for Special Education Teachers aims to

provide substantial theoretical and practical continuing professional development for teachers working with students with special educational needs thereby, to contribute to the school’s overall capacity in this area

(DoE 2021a, p.2)

A contradiction is evident in teacher eligibility for this programme, as although CTs work with students with SEN every day, funding is only available ‘for teachers in the following

roles: Special Education Teacher (SET), Teacher in a Special School and Teacher in a Special Class' (DoE 2021a, p,2), and so, CTs cannot avail of this CPD. Similarly, inconsistencies emerged in this study in relation to the CPD offered to teachers in varying roles. Survey findings showed that 57% of participants (N=27) received some form of CPD in relation to the new model on its introduction, yet it is significant that 85% of those were principals (44%), SENCOs (30%) or SETs (11%), while just 15% were CTs. Qualitative findings also showed that the majority of participants who attended CPD on the new model, were principals or SENCOs<sup>47</sup>. According to interview participants, a meeting/information session on the SETAM was held for principals prior to its introduction into schools, which all four of the participating schools engaged with<sup>48</sup>. Data from this study suggest that while CTs often attend various forms of CPD on a variety of topics, CPD relating specifically to SEN and inclusive education are usually offered to principals or members of the SEN teams, as described by the following CTs

Researcher: *“When this model was introduced back in 2017, did you feel prepared to implement it?”*

Lisa: *“No, not at all. I feel from my point of view as a CT, that we didn't get any training in it at all, and it's only myself that I've looked it up and read stuff, that I had the interest in it, I'm that kind of a person but I wouldn't have known anything, nothing. Like even **there's training but it's never offered to us [CTs]** and I think that's unfair because obviously the special ed team and the mainstream teacher have to work together for things to work so **it seems to be just the special education team that have been offered the training, we haven't had anything.**”*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

*“I wasn't involved in anything [CPD] anyway...so I suppose it was learning as we go along and finding out from the principal and I suppose learning by experience...you see **it depends on what role you have in the school, so there are courses that are open to teachers in certain roles...if you're part of the SEN team you probably would have access to those courses but I wasn't no.**”*

Rachel, CT, Girls' School.

*“Well, I wouldn't have received any, I know Mary [the SENCO] went on some bit of a course and then she fed back to us what was going to happen. Now, I would tend to stay quite up to date with all the circulars anyway...so I was quite up to*

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<sup>47</sup> While each participating school in this study had a designated SENCO, separate from the principal, it is important to note that in many Contexts of Practice, principals also act as the SENCO.

<sup>48</sup> Three out of the four principals who were interviewed attended a meeting/information session on the introduction of the SETAM, while the vice principal, who was also the SENCO, of the DEIS school went in place of her principal.

*speed with what was going to happen, but I don't have any recollection of getting any personal CPD myself on it."*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

This lack of CPD for CTs, which goes against recommendations from a report commissioned by the NCSE (Ware *et al.* 2011, p.6) which states that 'all teachers, including class teachers in mainstream schools, should have access to CPD on special educational needs', was not only recognised by those in the role, but also by other members of staff, as Claire, the SENCO of the Boys' School, highlights below

*"I asked the PDST to send in somebody just for the special ed. team on assessment and target setting. She came in October, and I put in a request now for somebody from the NCSE to come in on behaviour support, again, for the special ed. team. So, I'm concentrating very much on the special ed. team at the moment but like I said I'm always aware in the back of my mind, are the CTs fully understanding this little triangle?"*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

According to the NCSE (2013) and the INTO (2020b), it is imperative that all teachers, including CTs, are supported with appropriate CPD opportunities to cater for greater diversity within classrooms, if the policy of inclusive education is to be 'successful' and 'progressed'. The global inclusive movement (Anderson *et al.* 2007; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Tomlinson 2012; Chitiyo 2017; Garrote *et al.* 2017), has had a significant impact upon the role of the CT (Forlin 2001; UNESCO 2017) over the past number of years, with many students with SEN now spending 'most of their school day in mainstream classes' (NSCE 2013, p.150). Therefore, this study argues that CTs should be more involved and have greater opportunities to avail of CPD relating to SEN and inclusive practice. This concurs with the views of Strieker *et al.* (2012, p.1048) who maintain that 'in order for teachers to be effective, and for students to be successful, classroom teachers need ongoing professional development'. Likewise, Ní Bhroin (2019) claims that effective CPD needs to be intensive and *ongoing*. As widely recognised in the literature, SEN can affect everyone differently and to different degrees due to the broad spectrum of ability and disability (Fast 2004; Banks *et al.* 2012; Shevlin *et al.* 2013b; DES 2017a), and so, a 'one size fits all' approach to CPD is inadequate. Therefore, this study argues that individualised, *sustained* support, that is grounded in, and tailored to, the unique culture of each school (Strieker *et al.* 2012) is necessary, as teachers understand and implement

policies, such as the SETAM (DES 2017a), based on their own their own histories, experiences and values, and based on the contexts which they find themselves in (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici 2020). Daniel, the SENCO in the Girls' School, provides an example of how this 'ongoing, on-site professional development' (Strieker *et al.* 2012, p.1048) is beneficial in practice, as he admits feeling overwhelmed initially when the SETAM was introduced, but then describes the interactions between himself, his principal Joe, and their schools' NEPS psychologist, who provided on-site CPD to them and better-prepared them for the implementation and day-today workings of this model in the Context of Practice

Researcher: *"When this model was introduced, did you feel prepared to implement it in your school?"*

Daniel: *"Initially, no. Because it kinda came in over the summer holidays...to my knowledge the first of it came through in the September when we came back. Now I have to say we printed up the documentation, looked at it and kinda sat back and said 'wow, where are we going to start here?' But in fairness our NEPS psychologist at the time was doing in-service around it, so within the first term, myself and Joe had an in-service with our psychologist, which outlined the main features of the way it was moving forward; how we can allocate time, using Support Files. And in that period of time, since then, she's been very good, worked closely with us on how we can implement and how we can support, and the type of information she was requiring if stuff needed to go ahead...I would have felt prepared from dealing with her about the type of information that we should hold in our files and give forward to her."*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

It is clear from the quote above that Daniel had a very positive experience working alongside his school's designated NEPS psychologist and emphasises how individualised support, within the context of the school (Strieker *et al.* 2012) and with regular interactions that provide opportunities to ask questions (Lynch 2020) and clarify concerns is an extremely valuable form of CPD.

It is important to note that teachers in the DEIS school, in particular, felt somewhat more prepared, than other interviewees, on the introduction of the SETAM, due to their engagement with on-site CPD. This school adopted a model whereby when a member of staff, usually the SENCO, would attend external CPD courses, they would then facilitate a staff meeting to disseminate this information and knowledge. The CT, SET and HSCL Coordinator described having attended staff meetings within the school in relation to the

SETAM and “*what it would entail, the different things that would be expected, just different aspects of it*” (Helen, CT, DEIS School)

*“Brenda would have delivered CPD on the new model and shown us all the extra links and all the extra resources we could access...we were familiar I think as a school and definitely we’d had a few staff meetings where we discussed it coming in because we were just wondering what the logistics would be and what the future would look like and staffing so we’d had a few discussing it. So then, when we were clear on what it was, we had the CPD...”*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

Moira: *“In-house, we’ve got a lot of support from Brenda and Will; documentation, dissemination of knowledge, whatever they went to, whatever they were told, they kept us up to date, and Ann as well. So, it’s been really in-house for me.*

Researcher: *“So would they have attended things and brought the information back?”*

Moira: *“Yes, yes, yes. Brenda would frequently attend things, Ann would as well. But for myself, no. And I suppose what has served me is...my needs as a SET and the needs of the school, being met through the staff meetings, the CPDs but that is all in-house.”*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

This form of on-site support could act as a solution to overcoming the lack of CPD offered to CTs as schools could facilitate in-house sessions, perhaps during Croke Park Hours<sup>49</sup>, to ensure information is disseminated to all staff and not limited to those in certain roles. On-site professional development may also be enhanced by adopting a framework similar to that evidenced in the pilot of the SETAM (DES 2016b, p.9), whereby school visits were available on request to teachers to ‘enable them to implement the model as intended by the Department’. Data from this study suggest that limited CPD for teachers on the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) has led to many teachers feeling unprepared to implement this new policy in September 2017. These findings argue that greater supports are necessary upon the introduction of new policies in schools to ensure that teachers feel confident and prepared to transition from previous models and implement new practices on the ground. Therefore, providing schools with more frequent contact with personnel

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<sup>49</sup> As mentioned in Section 6.3.2, Croke Park Hours are additional hours worked by primary school teachers each year to provide for activities such as staff meetings, school planning and CPD to take place without reducing tuition time (DES 2016a).

from specialist support services such as NEPS, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the NCSE, may facilitate opportunities for individualised CPD which is grounded within schools' own Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994) and better support teachers in the implementation of new policies in schools. Furthermore, a discrepancy in the CPD available for teachers sees supports specifically related SEN and inclusive practices often being offered to principals and those in SET roles, resulting in a lack of CPD for CTs. It can be suggested that this may have negatively impacted the implementation of Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a), as discussed in Section 6.3.2. This study argues that for effective inclusion to be successful, a whole-school approach is required (DES 2017a) and so, all teachers need to fully understand and be aware of their role in implementing each stage of the CoS (DES 2007a). With this in mind, greater CPD related to the paperwork and practices required under Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a) may be needed for CTs, in particular, for the successful implementation of this model (DES 2017a). Therefore, this study supports recommendations from the INTO (2020b, p.2), which state that 'all teachers' should have access to 'ongoing professional development and learning throughout their careers regarding special and inclusive education'. It could be suggested that regular, in-school support from specialist services may play a vital role in enhancing the CPD accessed by teachers by providing individualised, ongoing supports within each school's unique setting for all teachers working with students with SEN and implementing inclusive education policies. The following section will briefly explore initial teacher education (ITE) related to SEN and inclusive education, as this, too, contributes to teachers' ability and preparedness to implement inclusive classroom practices as set out in policy such as the SETAM (DES 2017a).

#### ***6.3.2.2 Initial Teacher Education on Inclusive Education***

As outlined in Chapter Two (Section 2.5.2), limited ITE (Florian 2008) and practical experience of working with students with SEN (Richards 2010) can result in low levels of teacher confidence and can hinder teachers' ability to effectively implement inclusive policies. The semi-structured interview schedule for this study included one question regarding ITE, which asked: "When you came out of college, did you feel prepared to identify and support students with SEN?". Responses overwhelmingly consisted of "no", "not at all", "not a clue", "not one bit", "not in the slightest",

“*absolutely not*”, etc., conveying that almost all participants (n=16) felt “*really insufficiently aware and prepared*” (Moirá, SET, DEIS School) of how to support students with SEN and create inclusive learning environments when embarking upon their careers as qualified primary school teachers. Overall, across the seventeen interviews, there were thirty-six references to ITE (see Table 6.1), most of which spoke to this lack of ITE on SEN

*“No, not at all. No...that wasn't something I felt prepared for, it's only when you're thrown into the deep end that you actually learn, you know.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

*“No, certainly not no. Very much something that you learn from experience really, we got very little training on it.”*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

Participants reported having very little engagement with modules relating to SEN during their ITE programmes, stating that they “*might have had maybe 1 or 2 lessons on special ed.*” (Matthew, Principal, Boys' School) or “*an afternoon, maybe a 2-hour lecture on special education*” (Ciara, SET Girls' School), reflecting findings of another Irish study by Ware *et al.* (2011). However, analysis of the demographics of the qualitative sample showed that most participants (n=14) had 15 or more years of teaching experience, with some participants (n=4) having completed their ITE over 30 years ago. Therefore, while it is obvious from the above extracts that the teacher participants of this study received significantly inadequate ITE in the area of SEN, it is acknowledged that ITE programmes have made developments in recent years in terms of preparing teachers for inclusive education (Hick *et al.* 2018; Woodcock and Woolfson 2019; Florian and Camedda 2020; Teaching Council 2020a). As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5.2), changes are evident within the Irish context as recently as 2012 with the publication of guidelines from the Teaching Council (Teaching Council 2011; 2017), which, for the first time, mandated inclusive education as a specific element within all ITE programmes (NCSE 2013). Further progress is evident as inclusive education is now included as one of the core elements of ITE programmes in Ireland, as set out in the ‘*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*’ (Teaching Council 2020a). As mentioned in the quotes above, many participants (n=8) reported that, regardless of ITE, the majority of their learning, in terms of how to identify and support students with SEN, happened on the ground once they

were employed in schools, which emphasises the importance of gaining practical experience, and argues that working with students with SEN is the most effective way to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge (Hick *et al.* 2018)

*“...it was definitely the first year, 2 years, 3 years in my first school was where I learned really what it was all about and really learned about special needs...”*

Ali, SET, Boys’ School.

*“I learned more here in a week than I did in the three years in [college]...I don’t mean that in a disrespectful way...but I think I learnt more given the context and what was going on here at the time, just the level of need.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

*“I suppose when I came out [of college] my first job was actually doing Learning Support and Resource Teaching between four schools. I was between four schools on a weekly basis, so...I learned a lot quickly. But coming out of school I wouldn’t think [I felt prepared] ...but experience on the job at the start and the support from other teachers I felt helped me along and that was the main help for me in order to do my job in SEN.”*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

The quotes above highlight the importance of gaining experience and working with students with SEN in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994) for the acquisition of the knowledge and skills required to create inclusive learning environments (Ware *et al.* 2011). Claire, the SENCO in the Boys’ School, admitted that when she first came out of college, she *“taught to the middle”*, explaining that *“if you were below the middle, I was hoping that somebody out there in special ed. was kind of picking up the slack and if you were an exceptionally able student, I had a file of early finishers stuff that they could dip into”* (Claire, SENCO, Boys’ School). This emphasises the need for more opportunities for teachers in ITE programmes to work specifically with students with SEN during their professional placements. This coheres with the NCSE’s (2018) review of ITE for inclusion in Ireland, which found that teachers in ITE programmes who gained experience working with students with SEN while on professional placement had ‘more positive attitudes to inclusion and greater confidence in their knowledge and skills’ (Hick *et al.* 2018, p.125). Undoubtedly, it is necessary for teachers to learn about the theory surrounding SEN and inclusion during their ITE programmes, however, it is not until one is situated within the inclusive classroom that one can understand the complex, untidy and often uneasy relationship between theory and practice (Hick *et al.* 2019). Recognising

that it is much more difficult to effectively implement inclusion than it is to write about it (Westwood 2018), the NCSE's (2013) report *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools* recommended mandatory placement in special education settings to be included in ITE programmes, offering these teachers the opportunity to gain practical, structured experience working with students with SEN, which may in turn, support inclusion by better preparing them for the diverse and specific SEN being catered for within the mainstream classrooms of today (Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Day and Prunty 2015; Rose *et al.* 2015). In the quote below, Emma, the CT in the Mixed School, explains why she believes NQTs are inadequately prepared to teach in SET roles

Researcher: *"When you came out of college, did you feel prepared to identify and support students with SEN?"*

Emma: *"No (laughing), no I didn't. There was a lot of things I didn't feel prepared to do when I came out of college. What I found then, and what I still find now, is that people coming out of college are...I was hired straight into an SEN role, and I think it's absolutely ludicrous that a newly qualified teacher would go straight into an SEN role...I really, genuinely, think that there should be a minimum length of time that a person should be teaching before they go into an SEN role because I think...if you don't know what a class is supposed to be able to do, how do you know what another child who has a need is supposed to be able to do? I think it's ludicrous so no, I wasn't a bit prepared."*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

Policy states that 'other than in exceptional circumstances, schools should deploy NQTs in a mainstream setting' to complete their induction process, known as *Droichead*<sup>50</sup> (Teaching Council 2020b, p.8). Therefore, teachers should, generally, have at least one year of experience working in a mainstream setting before taking on a SET role. However, the reality on the ground does not always reflect policy (Schulte 2018), as according to the Hick *et al.* (2019), over 50% of NQTs that participated in their study had 'been allocated to a resource or special class or equivalent role some or all of the time' (Hick *et al.* 2019, p.123). Therefore, teachers may feel ill-equipped to fulfil such roles due to limited ITE on SEN and inclusive education, as accentuated in the below quote

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<sup>50</sup> Droichead is an integrated professional induction framework, which includes both school-based induction and additional professional learning activities to meet the needs of NQTs as they begin their career. From September 2020 Droichead is the only route of induction for all primary NQTs (Teaching Council 2020b).

*“...we're not trained specifically for special ed...so maybe that's something as a recommendation, maybe if you want to be a teacher, do you want to be mainstream or do you want to special ed. and be trained properly just for special ed.? Because I think that would be of great benefit if your area of expertise was just special education then, you'd know more then.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

Ciara maintains that there should be separate ITE for CTs and SETs to ensure adequate training and expertise is acquired prior to teaching students with SEN. However, Florian and Camedda (2020, p.5) claim that ITE programmes which ‘emphasise differences between sectors and different kinds of learners’, and ‘perpetuate a belief that different forms of teacher education are needed to prepare teachers to work with different groups’, are ‘divisive rather than supportive in preparing teachers for inclusive education’. This supports the view of truly inclusive professional practice, as defined in the ‘*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*’ (Teaching Council 2020a, p.4), which recognises that ‘teachers encounter a diverse range of needs in the course of their teaching, regardless of setting’. Interestingly, many participants (n=7) reported undertaking additional studies, since their ITE, related to inclusive education, such as a Certificate in Remedial Education, a Postgraduate Diploma in SEN or Masters’ studies in SEN. As mentioned in the previous section (Section 6.3.2.1), many of these courses, funded by the DoE, are only available to SETs (DoE 2021a), therefore, further widening the gap between inclusive education related CPD offered to CTs and SETs. This study argues that, while it is important and necessary to upskill in certain areas and engage with CPD throughout one’s career, ITE courses should prepare teachers to teach *all* students regardless of their (dis)abilities within inclusive learning environments. It could be suggested that the aforementioned lack of CPD and ITE related to inclusive education may have been a contributing factor to the difficulties encountered by teachers surrounding Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a) (see Section 6.3.2).

In summary, this theme revealed teachers’ practices to effectively monitor and record students’ outcomes under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Effective use of Support Plans within the Student Support File, at Stage Two and Three of the CoS, to plan for, review and record students’ progress was identified, as well as whole-school tracking systems to monitor and record students’ outcomes from a variety of assessments. While the importance of the role of the CT in the successful inclusion of students with SEN was recognised, a challenge in practice emerged in terms of the development of Classroom

Support Plans. Failure to record evidence of classroom-based interventions and supports put in place during Stage One of the CoS, prior to involving the SET at the School Support Stage, was identified as an issue by many participants, and a perceived lack of awareness by CTs of the necessity to write-up Classroom Support Plans shed light on the need for greater CPD for CTs regarding these practices. This led to a discussion on the CPD offered to teachers on the introduction of the SETAM, as had been deemed ‘critical to the success of the new model’ (NCSE 2014b, p.25) when this model was proposed, which identified a significant lack of supports made available to teachers, leading to many teachers feeling unprepared to implement this model on the ground. A discrepancy between CPD offered to teachers depending on their role in schools also emerged, highlighting the need for greater involvement of CTs in CPD specifically related to SEN and inclusive education and perhaps provided some reasoning for the difficulties surrounding the implementation of Stage One of the CoS which emerged. Furthermore, data suggest that inadequate ITE related to SEN was accessed by nearly all (n=16) of the participants, with many noting that the practical experience they gained while working with students with SEN, once they had secured employment as qualified primary school teachers, was of greater value to them than any theoretical learning that took place during their ITE programmes. This emphasises the importance of providing teachers in ITE programmes with opportunities to teach students with SEN in a variety of settings during their professional placements, which aims to better prepare them to create and foster inclusive learning environments with increased confidence, and thus, may positively impact the development of truly inclusive schools (DES 2005; DES 2017b) in Ireland.

By unearthing the challenges of this model, faced by those working in the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), such as the difficulties schools are currently facing with regards to the effective implementation of Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a) under the SETAM policy, and the limited CPD and ITE on SEN and inclusive education for teachers, these findings contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle (Ball 1994). By portraying the voice of the teacher, who is negotiating this model on the ground, this study aims to inform educational bodies, acting in the Context of Influence, for the development of future policies. Consideration of areas of this model that teachers find challenging and may be in need of review, hopes to ensure that teachers are better prepared for the introduction of, or changes to, policies in schools and are provided with ongoing, sustained support within their Context of Practice. The following section presents the study’s final

qualitative theme, which focuses on collaborative practice under the SETAM, highlighting the increase which has come about in terms of in-class support and unveiling the benefits and challenges associated with co-teaching practices, as recognised by those in the field.

### **6.4 Theme 3: Moving Towards a More Collaborative Approach**

The increasing number of students with SEN being educated in mainstream schools (Tomlinson 2012; McCoy *et al.* 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018; Rose *et al.* 2017) requires teachers to ‘re-examine their practices and particularly their pedagogical approaches in meeting the learning needs of these pupils’ (Casserly and Padden 2018, p.556). In the Irish context, the SETAM (DES 2017a) advocates the use of ‘team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs’ (DES 2017a, p.18) in an attempt to respond to the changing landscape of the mainstream classroom. Chapter Five, Section 5.3.1, presented the study’s survey findings, which showed an increase in collaboration and in-class supports under the SETAM (DES 2017a). This theme elaborates on such findings and further explores the movement towards a more collaborative approach in schools, examining how schools are agentively deploying their SET resources to facilitate a range of inclusive models of support, while also shedding light on the remaining need for use of withdrawal practices to support some students with SEN.

#### **6.4.1 Greater Collaboration and In-Class Support**

According to the extant literature, inclusion is more likely to be achieved when a collaborative culture is fostered within the school (UNESCO 2008; Ainscow and Miles 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.1), an increase in collaboration between general and special educators is evident in the past number of years (Pratt *et al.* 2017), which coheres with data from semi-structured interviews. The SETAM (DES 2017a) has led to “*more interaction between SEN teachers and also between CTs*” (Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School) and “*a lot more collaboration between the teachers, parents, SETs [and] pupils themselves, which I guess you wouldn’t have seen so much previously*” (Helen, CT, DEIS School). The previous theme argued that in order for the SETAM policy (DES 2017a) to be implemented effectively, in accordance with the CoS (DES 2007a), a whole-school approach is required, thus, highlighting the importance of collaboration between

many on-site and external professionals (see Figure 2.9). The majority of participants (n=13) made reference to their increased use of in-class supports a total of twenty-seven times within the data (Appendix 32), conveying that this form of support has *“really taken off over the last number of years”* (Will, Principal DEIS School), which harmonises with survey findings showing that 60% of participants’ (N=28) daily practice has changed, to include greater in-class support, since the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a)

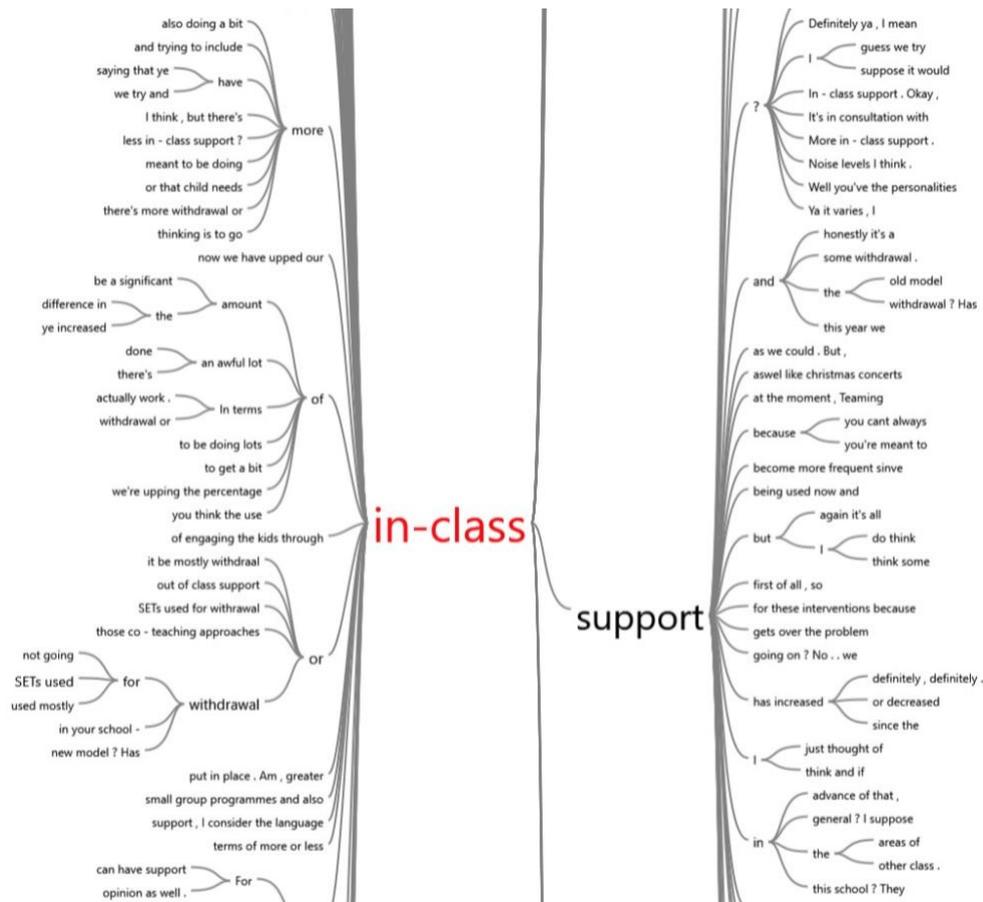
*“...the in-class support has increased definitely, definitely...It would have been done [before] but not to the degree that it's being done now.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys’ School.

*“Traditionally it was always 100% withdrawal...now they’re trying to shy away from that and trying to include more in-class support.”*

Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School.

Participants’ responses conveyed schools’ efforts of *“trying to work towards a model of being in-class”* (Jack, SET, Mixed School), with *“more in-class support being used now”* (Rachel, CT, Girls’ School) under the SETAM (DES 2017a) than under previous models (DES 2005). This move towards a more collaborative approach, by supporting students within the mainstream classroom, was also portrayed as the term “in-class support” was consistently heard (152 references) in the narratives of teachers. Figure 6.2 below shows an excerpt of a Word Tree created on NVivo 12, illustrating how frequently the word “support” followed “in-class” during interview discussions and emphasising the reoccurrence of such phrases throughout the data.



**Figure 6. 2: Word Tree Exported from NVivo 12 Showing the Frequency of the Use of “In-Class Support” within Interview Narratives**

Teachers consistent reference to now being able to provide students with “*help*” or “*support*” “*in the class*” and their school’s increased use of “*in-class support*” highlights the move towards more inclusive practice in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Supporting students with SEN within the collective setting of the classroom holds major implications for the Contexts of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students, as discussed in Section 6.4.4 below, but also for teachers, as it has led to greater collaboration in schools, which the following quote exemplifies

*“...the in-class [support] has led to a greater, almost, comradery...there's a strong sense of unity and support...sometimes the resource teachers, the SET, can operate very much in isolation, whereas I think, particularly with the in-class model, you have to collaborate, you have to work together, and it definitely works very, very well.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

While literature suggests that there can often be a policy-practice divide (Day 2007; Rose *et al.* 2017) in terms of policy development and policy implementation, these findings show that the intent of the SETAM, as set out in the policy text [Circular 0013/2017], regarding the provision of support for small groups, or the use of in-class support, ‘as opposed to primarily one to one teaching’ (DES 2017a, p.18), has been reflected on the ground. Some participants (n=5) spoke to increasing their use of in-class support as a result of this policy directive, as they “*know the Department are trying to further develop that*” (Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School), which reflects the “*move now in recent years towards in-class support*” (Tom, Principal, Mixed School)

*“I mean it is the number one thing they suggest for younger classes is the in-class support, so I think it's incumbent on us to do that.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School.

*“There is a little bit of pressure by inspectors, possibly, and by regulations so that you're meant to be doing more in-class [support]”.*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

While it is evident that the move towards greater collaboration and increased use of in-class support has been influenced by the regulations and expectations set out in current educational policy (DES 2017a), some participants reported that this transition towards the collaborative classroom began long before the SETAM was introduced, with many schools carrying out initiatives such as Literacy Lift-Off or Maths Lift-Off, which are facilitated through a station-teaching approach (see Section 2.6.3), as far back as ten years ago. Data suggest that this may have been as a result of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES 2011b, p.66) (see Section 2.6), as collaboration was being primarily used for the areas of literacy and numeracy to carry out these ‘focussed programmes’

*“We had a lot of practices already in practice, I mean we've been doing Literacy Lift-Off and our version, we call it Mighty Maths since, about 2011, 2010/2011.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School.

The notion that teachers were engaging with co-teaching approaches, particularly in the form of station-teaching, to support students with SEN and to facilitate an inclusive learning environment prior to the introduction of SETAM, was referenced to a total of

eighteen times by ten participants in varying roles, from all four schools (Appendix 32), implying that this policy directive, encouraging greater use of in-class supports rather than withdrawal methods (DES 2017a), may have been a bottom-up approach to policy (Matland 1995<sup>51</sup>). Therefore, the consideration of already existing practices by policymakers within the Context of Influence, may have impacted the Context of Policy Text Production for the development of the SETAM (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994).

Interestingly, it became apparent that the DEIS school had transitioned towards greater collaborative practice, and implemented co-teaching as their predominant model of support, many years before the other participating schools, with Will, the principal of this school, stating that

*“It [in-class support] had increased anyway Louise, it wasn't because of the new model, it was there anyway...that mindset, that shift in mindset was happening well before the new allocation came in, with regards to in-class support.”*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

This schools' implementation of such practices, prior to the introduction of the SETAM, was noted in the research diary (Appendix 36) following these interviews, as the researcher reflected on comments made by teachers, which provided an insight into why this may have been the case. Teachers in this school described a range of initiatives, projects and programmes that they had been involved in previously, whereby a *“huge amount of CPD was done around co-teaching approaches”* (Will, Principal, DEIS School), as reasoning for their earlier move towards greater use of in-class supports and co-teaching approaches, which may speak to the acknowledged power of CPD in schools. Due to the DEIS Band 1 status of this school, which Will described as an *“extraordinary context”* that needed *“an extraordinary response”*, they would have availed of 'enhanced staffing, additional financial resources, access to specialised initiatives in literacy and numeracy development, and targeted continuing professional development opportunities for teachers' (DES 2011b, p.63). It was clear that these teachers felt better prepared to implement the collaborative practices as directed by the SETAM (DES 2017a) following their engagement with such initiatives and a form of CPD that they termed 'showcasing', which involved a number of schools coming together to share good practice

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<sup>51</sup> The SETAM, as a bottom-up approach to policy development, was also discussed in Theme One (Section 6.2.1.2), in relation to teachers acting agentively by providing support to students without diagnoses in previous practices.

*“So, what would have happened is some of my teachers might go to another school and they'd model a lesson, or someone might come here, and we'd model team-teaching or station-teaching, so there was an awful lot of shared expertise and shared practice. So, that definitely helped us in our preparation for this new model. But to be fair, we were ready for it, we had the different methods of teaching already in place.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

Such findings hold implications for CPD in future Contexts of Practice, as models of good practice can be recommended (see Chapter Seven). Teachers in this school also maintained that the movement towards providing more in-class support may have evolved naturally due to the high level of need within their school, which is in accordance with the DES Inspectorate report on effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools (DES 2009, p.99), which noted that, due to the significant numbers of students at risk of experiencing serious learning difficulties in DEIS schools, ‘most of these schools have moved away from the practice of withdrawing pupils from the mainstream classroom for supplementary learning support’. Moira, the SET in this school, agreed with this, claiming that *“if you were to operate on a withdrawal basis you wouldn't get to a percentage of who you're supposed to help”* (Moira, SET, DEIS School), suggesting that in-class support may be a more effective and efficient approach to providing ‘differentiated learning activities to pupils in a more consistent, developmental manner’ (DES 2009, p.99) within these settings. The interview excerpt below, with Brenda, the school’s SENCO, speaks further to this point

Researcher: *“Would I be correct in saying ye moved away from that [withdrawal] because ye needed to support other children in the class regardless of whether they had a diagnosis or not?”*

Brenda: *“Yes absolutely we did, yes we did and that was exactly, you're spot on there. Like we saw that other kids needed the support, and this was a way of getting support to all the other kids while you were still supporting the kids who needed it most.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

Although the SETAM wasn’t solely responsible for bringing about greater collaboration in these schools, as *“the collaboration was already happening”*, it was acknowledged that the new model *“might have further refined it”* (Will, Principal, DEIS School) by allowing in-class support *“to come even further...to develop even further”* (Brenda,

SENCO, DEIS School). This section described the movement towards a more collaborative approach to inclusive education, as schools are increasingly using in-class supports to respond to the diverse needs of their students. However, it emerged from the data that withdrawal continues to be used in schools as a form of support for some students with SEN, which will be explored in the following section.

#### **6.4.2 The Remaining Need for Withdrawal in Inclusive Education**

Literature suggests that in-class support, in the form of co-teaching, when carefully implemented, is associated with improved student outcomes (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Friend and Bursuck 2012; Fluijt *et al.* 2016; Friend 2019). However, Friend and Bursuck (2012, p.76) also recognise that such practices may not be ‘the answer for every student with a disability or for every classroom in an inclusive school’, acknowledging that ‘co-teaching is only one option for meeting the needs of students’. Both quantitative and qualitative data from this study correlates with this claim, as although an increase in in-class support is evident, as discussed in the previous section, withdrawal, as a model of support, is still very much present in schools (Mulholland and Connor 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018; Rose and Shevlin 2020). It was noted by all interview participants (n=17) that SET resources are deployed to facilitate a variety of withdrawal and in-class supports to meet the needs of students with SEN in their schools, which is concurrent with the SETAM Guidelines which state that schools should ‘aim to strike a balance between in-class support, group and individual support’ (DES 2017b, p.18). While a combination of the use of such practices was also reported by survey participants (see Section 5.3.1), it is significant that, according to 85% of survey participants (N=40), withdrawal is still ‘sometimes’ being used as a model of support with the Context of Practice (Ball 1994). Egan’s (2013) study adopted the Policy as Cycle framework, which examined the GAM (DES 2005) as the national system of teacher allocation at the time of her study. This research evolves from that empirical work, adopting the same theoretical lens, to analyse how the GAM has acted as the Context of Influence (Ball 1994) for the teacher allocation model currently in practice (DES 2017a). Egan’s work established that withdrawal of students from the mainstream classroom was the predominant model of support in schools under the GAM policy, which is concurrent with findings from Rose and Shevlin (2020). Data from this study shows an increase in in-class supports provided to students, under the SETAM (DES 2017a), yet recognises

that, contrary to the recommendations of those such as Madeline Will (see Section 1.2.1 and Section 3.2), many participants (n=8) continue to use withdrawal methods as the most frequently used form of support for students with SEN in their schools

*“...it’s [withdrawal] still definitely by far, by a long shot, there’s more withdrawal.”*

Matthew, Principal, Boys’ School.

*“I suppose we’re spending maybe between 1/4 and 1/3 in class with in-class support and the rest out of class then in a small group setting or one-to-one.”*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

This data coheres with findings from another Irish study, which examined teachers’ views of co-teaching approaches in meeting the needs of students with SEN in multi-grade settings, as Casserly and Padden (2018, p.555) found that ‘the withdrawal of pupils for supplementary support remains the dominant approach’. This study argues that while a move towards a more collaborative approach to SEN provision is increasingly evident in schools, as encouraged by the SETAM, the need for withdrawal practices still remains in order to intensively address specific needs. Such findings add to a body of research, as discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.4), which suggest that individual tuition or small group teaching can be more effective for students with certain SEN, for example, struggling readers (Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998; Scammacca *et al.* 2007; Vaughn *et al.* 2012; NEPS 2019). The following quotes speak to this

*“We really did try to have as much in-class support as we could. But, I think, I suppose we found that a lot of the children who needed the specific support weren’t benefitting as much as the other children, like everybody benefited from it, but **the children with specific needs maybe weren’t getting the exact help they needed in class, so, there’s a bit of withdrawal happening still.** I mean there would be a significant amount of in-class but there’d still be a good bit of withdrawal.”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

*“...with particular things like if it was, perhaps a language issue and if it was causing the child difficulty within the class you know **there can be different things that sometimes it’s more appropriate to have a situation where there’s withdrawal.**”*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

*“...but **the children who are really, really struggling, there really isn’t much***

*point in co-teaching or team-teaching or something else in the classroom. We've big numbers, you've a noisy classroom, you're kinda fighting from quietness... it's really, really hard yet at the same time sometimes the inspectors would prefer you nearly to take a group, because it looks good, inside in a noisy classroom because you're in-class support and honestly, it's a way easier to take these 5 or 6 children out into a quiet room and teach them. So, there's a little bit of pressure on us that way."*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

Mary mentioned some of the practical challenges associated with in-class support (see Section 6.4.5 for further discussion), including the noise-level within busy classrooms which can interfere with the successful teaching and learning for students who are “*really, really struggling*”. Vaughn *et al.* (2012, p.26) claim that small group instruction is ‘one of the most practical methods for intensifying intervention for highly at-risk students’ which can ‘improve student outcomes’, while Scammacca *et al.* (2007) speak to the value of daily or near daily intervention sessions to provide targeted, intensive bursts of structured, specialist tuition (Rose 2009; NEPS 2019). This conveys the reminding need for some, albeit limited, withdrawal practices, either on an individual basis or through small group teaching, within this model to support inclusion in Irish primary schools. Therefore, this study further supports findings from NEPS (2019, p.25), who, following a review of the most effective interventions for struggling readers, argue that ‘it is likely that a withdrawal model will continue to be the appropriate model for many students’, and Murphy (2011), who acknowledges that ‘one-to-one and small group withdrawal’ still has a place in teachers’ responses to support learning. Thus, it can be suggested that the individual needs of each student should be forefront, and the ‘over-riding consideration’ (INTO 2020b, p.17), when deciding upon schools’ use of models of support in practice. The following section will discuss the variety of co-teaching approaches in practice in schools, before leading onto the benefits and challenges teachers face when implementing such models within the Context of Practice.

#### **6.4.3 Models of In-Class Support in Practice**

This study set out to examine the workings of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in the Context of Practice, according to those working on the ground. Recognising the move towards a more collaborative approach in schools, which emerged from analysis of survey data (see Section 5.3.1), semi-structured interviews sought to delve further into schools’ deployment of SET resources to meet the needs of students with SEN. As discussed in

Chapter Two, Section 2.6.3, research suggests that there are many different definitions and interpretations of co-teaching approaches (Beninghof 2020), with many authors presenting variations in the frameworks of co-teaching models (Honigsfeld and Dove 2019). Interview questions examined teachers' engagement with co-teaching approaches, more specifically, the six approaches as outlined by Friend and Bursuck (2012) (see Section 2.6.3). It is noteworthy that while 'team-teaching' and 'small group teaching' are referenced in the SETAM policy text [Circular 0013/2017] as appropriate models for 'engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom' (DES 2017a, p.18), there is no mention of the term 'co-teaching'. As discussed in Chapter Two, 'co-teaching' is a key term, which frequently arises in the literature in relation to in-class support and collaboration within special education, which can sometimes be referred to as team-teaching. For the purpose of this study, the term co-teaching is used in line with Friend *et al.*'s (2010) definition which centres around the partnership between the CT and SET to plan and deliver instruction together in order to meet the needs of a diverse group of students. Measures were put in place to avoid confusion regarding the interchangeable use of such terms during the semi-structured interviews, and to ensure that the terms used were consistent with those included in the online survey. As mentioned in Section 4.6.5.1, at the beginning of each semi-structured interview, participants were provided with a diagram and list of definitions of co-teaching approaches (Friend and Bursuck 2009; 2012), to ensure consistency and clarity within interview responses. Following the interviews, many participants, in three of the four participating schools, asked for a copy of this co-teaching information sheet (Appendix 14) for their personal use. The researcher was later informed that one school then used this information sheet as a basis for a staff-meeting whereby they discussed the various co-teaching approaches currently in use in their school and which approaches they believed would be beneficial to implement in the coming school-term, highlighting the impact of this research from an early stage.

Interview conversations explored which co-teaching approaches are used most frequently to facilitate in-class supports and interventions in schools. It emerged that all approaches were being used by teachers, but the extent to which some approaches were used in comparison to others varied. Importantly, many participants (n=8) conveyed that the co-teaching approaches used were case dependent and were selected based on the needs of each particular cohort of students, with teachers collaboratively planning "*how to utilise the personnel to best suit the needs in the class*" (Helen, CT, DEIS School). This

corresponds with Casserly and Padden (2018) who argue that the correct co-teaching approach for each individual context needs to be chosen in order to experience success. Ann and Emma illustrate this

*“...they can adapt what they want to do, there's great flexibility, it's not prescriptive. They don't have to do station-teaching every day. It's up to the team, following their meetings, to identify the priority needs and if its 6 weeks of stations or small groups of children or one-on-one, more targeted work. The big thing is it does not need to be the same throughout the year for the entire year...once the child is at the centre and we're meeting the child's needs.”*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

*“I suppose we tried to do as much as we can in-class where we can first, but we're always evaluating it so it's still on a case-by-case basis so that if it's not working... we kind of just try and **keep an eye all the time on the actual learning and making sure that anything we're putting in place is helping the people it's meant to help.**”*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

Under current policy (DES 2017a), schools have agency and flexibility regarding decisions around the co-teaching models they choose to operationalise, which, as highlighted in the above quotes, is a hugely positive and welcome aspect of the SETAM, as *“sometimes a different approach works on a different day”* (Lisa, CT, Boys' School). In accordance with survey findings, station-teaching emerged as the most popular co-teaching approach, with thirty-two references being made to its use by all interview participants (n=17), who described it as *“the big one”* (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School), the *“main one”* (Matthew, Principal, Boys' School) or the *“obvious one”* (Will, Principal, DEIS School) in place in all schools to meet students' needs

*“...we would have the station-teaching which would help so you'd have flexible grouping [and] you'd have similar ability so you're really able to target the specific areas that they need help with. You know, even down to suiting the different learning styles of the children so whether it's using manipulatives for the kinaesthetic learners, you know all of these different things.”*

Helen, CT, DEIS School.

*“I think it makes sense for us because we want to put a lot of the supports in the younger classes in class, you know the language supports, the literacy supports...you know targeting the intervention at an early stage, getting teachers working together within the classroom and then withdrawing really when you have to... I think a lot of the language initiatives can be done within the classroom,*

*a lot of the literacy initiatives can be done within station-teaching within the classroom...Getting that kind of model up and running in the school where that would be our first port of call for interventions and then move on out from there.”*  
Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School.

It emerged that station-teaching is mostly used for in-class initiatives such as Literacy Lift-Off or Maths Lift-Off, a practice which now appears to be embedded into schools, indicating the impact of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES 2011b) on collaborative practice over the past number of years. Other forms of Friend and Bursuck’s (2012) co-teaching models such as the one teach, one assist approach, parallel-teaching and team-teaching were also found to be commonly used in schools, with alternative-teaching and the one teach, one observe approach being less frequent models of support in practice under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6) (e.g., Scruggs and Mastropieri 2017; Carty and Farrell 2018) maintained that the one teach, one assist approach was the most commonly used co-teaching approach, which usually takes the form of the CT teaching the class as a whole-group, while the SET provides “*task specific support*” or helps with routines to “*organise their bag, their desk, that kind of thing*” (Ciara, SET, Girls’ School). Contrasting with such literature, this approach did not emerge as the most frequently used model within this study, however, the majority of participants (n=11) spoke to using the one teach, one assist model and so it can be suggested that it is a very commonly used co-teaching approach in schools. While some of the advantages associated with in-class support were briefly mentioned throughout this section, the benefits of co-teaching, which impact the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students, are outlined in the section below.

#### **6.4.4 “We’re all in, we’re all happy” - Benefits of In-Class Support**

The movement towards a more collaborative approach to meet students’ needs, as outlined in the previous sections, demonstrates schools’ belief in the benefits and value of in-class supports. While discussing this movement and the models of support used in practice under the SETAM (DES 2017a), some benefits associated with various co-teaching approaches were highlighted, providing a rationale to the increasing use of such methods in schools. The current section will, therefore, briefly discuss some further benefits of in-class supports, as noted by teachers, before leading onto a more detailed discussion of the challenges related to such practices. As the research evidence-base of

the practice of co-teaching is still emerging (Chitiyo 2017; Beninghof 2020), a gap in the literature is acknowledged, and so, by unveiling the benefits and challenges of in-class supports within the Context of Practice, these findings hope to contribute to the evolving policy cycle (Ball 1994) and inform future policy and practice.

The general consensus that emerged from the data is that the employment of inclusive teaching methods, which respond to the diverse needs of all students within the mainstream classroom, positively impacts the Context of Outcomes for students. This coheres with the extant literature, as discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.2), which emphasises the benefit of co-teaching approaches for students (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Villa *et al.* 2013; Fluijt *et al.* 2016; Chitiyo 2017; Beninghof 2020). Tom, the principal of the Mixed School, summarised these benefits for both students and staff, as illustrated in the below quote

*“I think that the challenges are far outweighed by the benefits [as] **when you're working with a smaller group everybody gets an opportunity to contribute**, you can **identify children who mightn't be understanding** or picking up, **every child has a chance to read and be heard**, you can **involve children more in questioning** and so on. And so, I think while there are challenges, of course there are, I think that if the teachers are prepared, if they work well together, if they're working obviously in cooperation with one another, there's a great sense anyway in this school of, **there's great cooperation between staff and working together and supporting each other** and so on and helping out each other and so **there's a great comradery**. So, when you have that atmosphere, you need that in a school, I think it transpires very well into any of these [co-teaching] models.*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

Throughout the thematic data analysis process (Braun and Clarke 2006), the benefits associated with in-class support discussed by participants during semi-structured interviews were coded into two main categories. These involve targeting the varied needs of students within the mainstream classroom, thus, creating a more inclusive learning environment and the wide variety of instructional options and teacher expertise offered due to the additional personnel in classrooms.

#### **6.4.4.1 Inclusive Learning Environments**

One of the main benefits of in-class support, according to those working on the ground, is that it provides teachers with the opportunity to target a variety of students' needs within a common setting so that the students are *“all benefitting...they're all*

*engaged, they're all taking part*” (Ali, SET, Boys’ School), cultivating an inclusive learning environment for all (Casserly and Padden 2018). Moira, the SET in the DEIS School, gave a concrete example of a how in-class support can cater for multiple student abilities, without singling out any students or emphasising their (dis)abilities, by describing a levelled-reading English lesson

*“I'm happy with the model that all pupils' needs are met, that's what I'd say. In a class, as I said, **you could range from a STEN of 1 to a STEN of 10 and once everybody is progressing, we're happy** ...So, this morning I would have done four different groups but I've catered for a level 2 reading book and I've catered for a level 17 reading book in the same room...I think that's the joy of the inclusion model...The level 2 is just as happy seeing me this morning, same room, as the level 17...**there's nobody being pulled out, there's nobody being ear-marked, there's nobody being set out for their learning needs. We're all in, we're all happy and we're all moving and they're learning and that's the main thing. So, I think that's the success of it as well.**”*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

Inclusive learning environments, which target the diverse needs of all students while allowing them to remain within their own classroom, alongside their peers, fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness (Roycroft 2018). This holds significant implications for the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students, as it overcomes the obstacles associated with the ‘pull-out’ approach, such as students missing out on in-class learning during their time spent in the ‘resource room’, because *“the tendency before was just 'off you go' and then you might be missing English or you might be missing Maths and that's not fair”* (Lisa, CT, Boys’ School). One school of thought within the literature (Lewis and Norwich 2005; Casserly and Padden 2018) is that many students with SEN do not require distinct teaching approaches or distinct pedagogic strategies from their peers without SEN. However, as discussed in Chapter Two and Section 6.4.2, research surrounding the most effective strategies to support struggling readers contradicts this and suggests merit for withdrawal of students, individually or in small groups, for targeted sessions of structured, specialist tuition to improve student outcomes (Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998; Scammacca *et al.* 2007; Vaughn *et al.* 2012; Brooks 2016; NEPS 2019). Similarly, Anderson *et al.* (2017, p.42) highlight the need for individualised supports for students with ASD, due to their ‘idiosyncratic responses to supports’, while Daly *et al.*

(2016) report on the use of a variety of ASD-specific teaching methodologies<sup>52</sup> in schools. Therefore, it may be suggested that co-teaching may enable many, but perhaps not all, students with SEN to have access to, participate in and benefit from (Government of Ireland 1998; Roycroft 2018) the same curriculum as their peers (Friend 2008; Friend 2019) within an inclusive learning environment, avoiding the stigma attached to withdrawal practices (Will 1986) whereby students would be “*ear-marked*” or “*set out for their learning needs*” as mentioned above by Moira

*“...the beauty of the in-class support [is it] gets over the problem of what they're missing when they come out and the stigma associated.”*

Matthew, Principal, Boys' School.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, having multiple professionals within the mainstream classroom, allowing for a range of interventions and activities to take place and bringing greater teacher expertise to the table, emerged as a noteworthy benefit of in-class support, which will be discussed below.

#### **6.4.4.2 Additional Personnel**

Data from this study suggest that advantages are associated with the greater number of personnel available in classrooms as offered by co-teaching approaches. According to some participants (n=6), these range from logistical gains such as having “*another body in the room to help me to get around*” (Lisa, MCT, Boys' School) when working with concrete materials, to the benefit of co-teachers' shared expertise and the variety of instructional opportunities that could not occur with just one teacher present in the room, which concurs with reach from Scruggs *et al.* (2007), Mulholland and Connor (2016) and Casserly and Padden (2018). Due to the large class sizes (Johnson and Brumback 2013; INTO 2020a) found in schools today, Ali, the SET in the Boys' School, recognised the challenges CTs face to appropriately meet all of the students' needs as an individual teacher, highlighting the benefit of having additional teachers in the classroom during in-class support

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<sup>52</sup> ASD-specific teaching methodologies used in primary schools, as reported in Daly *et al.*'s (2016) evaluation of education provision for students with ASD in Ireland, included the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication-handicapped Children (TEACCH), the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Social Stories (see Daly *et al.* 2016 for further detail).

*“...if you've more manpower inside in a room...definitely I think it's more beneficial than one teacher standing up at the top of the room...obviously most teachers differentiate as best they can, but if you've 30 or 32 in front of you, unfortunately, [even] if you're the best at differentiating and you're the best at having all the materials supplied, it's still not enough...”*

Ali, Boys' School, SET.

This is particularly relevant within the Irish context, as it is proven that Irish primary school teachers teach larger classes than their European counterparts, with John Boyle, the General Secretary of the INTO, claiming very recently in 2020, that ‘almost one in five of our primary school children are in supersized classes of 30 or more’ (INTO 2020a). Implementing methods of co-teaching is an effective way to combat such challenges, as that “*extra person in the room means the children get that extra bit of attention*” (Rachel, CT, Girls' School). This increased individual attention (Murphy 2016) and reduced teacher-to-pupil ratio (Johnson and Brumback 2013), allows for deliberate and focused differentiation, therefore, potentially enabling the mainstream classroom to be the LRE (see Section 1.2.1) for some students with SEN (Casserly and Padden 2018). Additionally, a few CTs spoke to the benefits of having extra teachers in their classroom, which enables them to engage in interventions, which encompass a station-teaching approach, and activities, such as nature walks or maths trails, which are “*far more achievable with the co-teacher*” (Helen, CT, DEIS School). Such findings may contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle by informing those working within the Context of Influence of schools' use of SET resources and successful collaboration in practice under the SETAM (DES 2017a). The need for additional personnel in classrooms to cater for large class sizes, or indeed the need to reduce student numbers in Irish classrooms, should also be considered for future policies concerned with allocation of SET resources, to ensure sufficient staffing is provided to schools to facilitate in-class support and co-teaching approaches.

Furthermore, the different areas of teacher expertise and the ‘wider range of instructional options’ (Mulholland and Connor 2016, p.1072) that come with having additional personnel in classrooms emerged as a benefit of in-class support. This is concurrent with literature, which welcomes educator's blended knowledge and skills and appreciates the value of each co-teacher's unique talents and perspectives (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Friend 2008; Casserly and Padden 2018). Claire, the SENCO in the Boys' School,

acknowledged that having more than one teacher in the room can facilitate multiple means of explanation and can be beneficial as teachers can offer dual perspectives on topics

*“It's working very well in some classrooms, the ones that are engaging with it. It's interesting because I heard the 6th class teacher and the SET talking last week, they realised in September/October that **they have two completely different ways of doing maths, the two teachers do.** So, you have one teacher at the top of the room has to draw a diagram and you have the other teacher is in their head manipulating the numbers, **which is great for the boys to see the two different approaches because the boys must be in the exact same position** where one has to draw the picture and he doesn't understand how the guy beside him can just do the numbers in his head.”*

Claire, SENCO, Boys' School.

Friend (2008) uses a Venn diagram, as a metaphor, to describe the overlapping similarities and distinct differences between teachers' expertise and instructional strategies. Similar to Claire in her quote above, Friend (2008, p.11) claims that it is these differences which are the 'strength of this service delivery approach', as instructional strategies can be offered from multiple perspectives, which could not occur if just one teacher were present. Claire's colleague, Ali, further reiterated that having multiple teachers in the room is beneficial for students, as there is *“another teacher to bounce off of...another voice, another way of teaching, a variety”*, while also claiming that, at the same time, teachers are *“learning from each other as well, so it's good for everyone”* (Ali, SET, Boy's School). However, differences between teachers can also be problematic within co-teaching practices. It is widely acknowledged that the relationship between co-teachers is of vital importance for its successful implementation (Mastropieri *et al.* 2005; Casserly and Padden 2018), therefore, teacher compatibility, along with other factors, which act as barriers to in-class support are discussed in the below section.

#### **6.4.5 “There has to be compromise and tensions do occur at times” - Challenges of In-Class Support**

While contemporary discourse maintains that co-teaching practices, when implemented effectively, have the potential to improve student outcomes and certainly facilitate a more inclusive approach to SEN provision in schools, it is recognised that due to the complex nature of co-teaching, it is more difficult to achieve in practice than one would assume on first consideration (Friend 2008; Casserly and Padden 2018). This section explores some of the challenges that hinder teachers' use of in-class supports and

co-teaching approaches, under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Data which emerged from semi-structured interview data in relation to such challenges are three-fold. Much research points to the importance of the teacher and the quality of their teaching in realising inclusion and impacting on student outcomes (OECD 2005; Egan 2013; INTO 2020b), therefore, the following section will examine the important role of teacher compatibility and professional partnerships for the successful implementation of in-class support in schools. Following that, the practical challenges associated with co-teaching, such as limited space and high noise-levels will be highlighted, before finally, discussing the limited time available for teachers to collaboratively plan and review co-taught lessons and interventions.

#### **6.4.5.1 Teacher Compatibility**

The greatest challenge associated with in-class support, according to interview participants, emerged as the working relationship between co-teachers. The majority of participants (n=11) discussed a reluctance, by some colleagues, to engage with co-teaching approaches and mentioned difficulties surrounding co-teacher compatibility, in general, as barriers, which negatively impact the use of such practices in schools. This replicates findings by many experts in the field of co-teaching, who argue that the relationship between co-teachers is a ‘major critical component influencing the success or failure of the inclusion of students with disabilities’ (Mastropieri *et al.* 2005, p.268), and recognise that co-teaching partnerships ‘require more than a casual agreement to work together in the classroom’ (Friend 2008, p.17). As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6), successful co-teaching requires collaboration between two professionals who plan, organise and deliver lessons together (Pratt *et al.* 2016; Beninghof 2020). Positive, professional relationships between co-teachers, is therefore, a fundamental aspect to the realisation of effective co-teaching, which Ekins (2015) argues, needs to be underpinned by shared respect and accountability, and a mutual understanding of each other’s skills and expertise. This, however, is not always the case in practice (Casserly and Padden 2018), as participants of this study acknowledged differing personalities and conflicts which arise regarding decision-making as challenges of implementing models of in-class support within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994)

Researcher: *“Are there any challenges associated with in-class support or co-teaching approaches?”*

Lisa: *“Oh yes, definitely (laughs). Well, first of all you have to get on with the person that's coming in because sometimes there can be clash of, eh, personalities, which is in every walk of life. That would be the main challenge, but you have to learn how to work together and both of you have to be committed, you know it's not good enough for someone to just rock on and say, 'ok I'm here', you need people to collaborate together for things to work.*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

*“...Station-teaching or your parallel-teaching or whatever, all of that is a challenge for teachers because some people will get on better with others, some teachers will get on better in different settings so you're also matching teachers' abilities and teachers' personalities.*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

*“Well, it's a team approach so I suppose you're hoping everyone will pull their weight and you're hoping people will pull together. There has to be a little bit of give and take and as a team, you've got to listen to everybody's opinion and there can be conflict at times because at the end of the day the CT has the call but you as a support teacher may feel well the call you're making really isn't the right call and you might be the one with actually more teaching experience and who's to say who's right and [who's] wrong? So, I suppose there has to be compromise and tensions do occur at times.”*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

As highlighted in the above quotes, schools face the challenge of matching co-teachers who will complement one another, both in terms of their personalities and their expertise and abilities. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.2), providing co-teachers with choices, in relation to their participation in co-teaching practices, and the colleague(s) in which they will be working alongside, holds major implications for the compatibility of co-teachers (Friend 2008; Murphy 2011; Friend and Bursuck 2012; Carty and Farrell 2018). Daniel, the SENCO in the Girls' School, speaks to this

*“...this year we are formally inserting bodies into classrooms as in-class support in the areas of maths and numeracy. Now, we didn't impose it on teachers, we just said at a meeting that there will be teachers available if you would like help in any certain area, put your name down and we'll move in.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

According to Friend (2008), by seeking voluntary participants for new co-teaching programmes, similar to what Daniel described above, a positive foundation for co-

teaching can be created, and positive working relationships can be fostered. This coheres with Mastropieri *et al.*'s (2005, p.261) study which found that teachers who volunteered for co-teaching practices 'tended to report more positive perceptions than did teachers who were assigned to co-teaching'. Additionally, Rachel, the CT in the Girls' School, highlighted the importance of co-teacher compatibility and having choices with regards to co-teachers, as she explained that she was willing to "try" co-teaching with a colleague that she has known for a long time, implying that she may not have been keen to engage in in-class support with other teachers whom she may not have felt as comfortable working alongside

*"Well, I suppose it's that you work well with the teacher you're co-teaching with. So, I'm very lucky the teacher I have for in-class support is someone I know well, and I've worked with for a long time, so, I'd have no problem. But I suppose it could be a challenge if you had two very different teaching styles, if there was kind of a clash that way, I don't know, I haven't tried it, but **I was happy to try it with this teacher because we work well together and we both know each other's styles and that, so it works well.**"*

Rachel, CT, Girls' School.

While providing choice is acknowledged as an effective strategy to promote positive co-teacher working relationships, it is recognised within the literature that co-teaching is not suited to every teacher (Casserly and Padden 2018) and if teachers are not in support of the practice, it will not be successfully implemented (Chitiyo 2017). This study supports that claim, as a reluctance to engage with co-teaching practices, due to some teachers feeling "uncomfortable with having a second person in the room" (Matthew, Principal, Boys' School) was highlighted as a significant challenge by many participants (n=8)

*"Well, you've the personalities of teachers that get on, and I don't mean get on personally, but I mean that are able or feel secure working with somebody else while they're in the classroom. I think that's still an issue with some. Some teachers couldn't care less who was there in the classroom or what they're doing, you're doing that, I'm doing this, get over it, but there are issues that **some people...might feel that somebody is in to watch them or to see if they're doing it right.** So, there's a bit of that to get over as well.*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

Chitiyo (2017, p.62) speaks to a dilemma which can occur when some teachers consider their classrooms as their 'turf', wanting to keep their professional domain to themselves, who feel that having another teacher in the room may be an invasion of their space, or

they may feel as though the other teacher is watching or judging them. This leads to the prospect of co-teaching feeling “*threatening*” (Claire, SENCO, Boys’ School) for some teachers, which then makes it more difficult for others, who are interested and willing to engage in in-class support, to approach the topic as, “*if you know that the teacher isn’t really on-board, it’s very difficult to come back and suggest it multiple times*” (Claire, SENCO, Boys’ School). Interestingly, according to a few participants (n=3), older teachers are often more uncomfortable with the concept of co-teaching than younger teachers, who noted that “*the younger teachers are more open to the support and help*”, and stated that, “*coming out of college, they’re more willing to take on projects*” (Daniel, SENCO, Girls’ School) such as interventions which involve in-class support or co-teaching approaches

*“...there are some teachers that don’t like anyone in their room other than themselves...that’s the biggest challenge with in-class support, I think, if the teachers aren’t comfortable working with their peers. Now, again with the younger teachers it’s not a problem because they’re used to that type of thing from college, and they’re used to...when they’re trained now, they do peer-work and that helps I suppose but definitely it’s harder for the older teachers. Not being ageist that’s the way it is, they’re less inclined to have people in their room. That would be the biggest challenge.”*

Joe, Principal, Girls’ School.

*“...the other challenge would be (begins to whisper) that some teachers may not want you always coming into their classroom, you know the way some might be set in their ways...I don’t think they want someone else watching...and they know obviously none of us would judge anything, but just some, some people embrace it but others...So, there can be sometimes a challenge there for maybe possibly a little bit older teachers ...that might just kinda go ‘oh I’m not too sure about that’, so that sometimes can be [a challenge] to break that down and just go ‘this is just, no one’s looking at your teaching, we’ll just work together.’”*

Ali, SET, Boy’s School.

As mentioned by Joe above, teachers in ITE programmes learn about co-teaching and engage in peer-work during their professional placements. In a recent study, conducted by Hick *et al.* (2018), 82% of participants reported having some involvement with team-teaching, or co-teaching as referred to within this study, while on placement. This may take the form of two student teachers, while on a partnered school placement, co-planning and co-teaching an integrated session or it may involve the student teacher co-teaching with the co-operating CT during initiatives such as Literacy Lift-Off, Maths stations, etc.

Therefore, it may be suggested that due to recently qualified teachers' experience of collaborative practice from an early stage in their teaching career, and greater exposure to peer-work during their ITE, they may be more likely to feel better-prepared to engage in co-teaching practices. On the contrary, teachers who have less experience with co-teaching, as mentioned above, may feel threatened by the idea of another teacher invading their professional space (Chitiyo 2017) and be more "*set in their ways*" (Ali, SET, Boys' School) in terms of teaching in a more traditional manner. Such data unveils the complexities involved with this service delivery option (Friend 2019), involving co-teachers' relationships and teachers' (un)willingness to engage with such practices. However, discussions with teachers in the DEIS school, who have been using a variety of in-class supports for a number of years and who have "*gotten an awful lot of CPD on the various co-teaching approaches*" (see Section 6.4.1), highlighted how "*teachers' mindsets*" and perspectives towards co-teaching practices have progressed with time and experience, resulting in a greater "*openness*" (Will, Principal, DEIS School) to this collaborative approach to SEN provision and support

*"I smile because it was so difficult in the beginning to get CTs to take in people, they wanted their own domain and now CTs are very, very used to station-teaching, they see the benefit in station-teaching."*

Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School.

*"It was very new at the beginning but we're doing it for over ten years. So, I suppose at the beginning you had one or two teachers who felt they were being watched, they would have said that later, it wasn't at the time. There was never ever an issue where somebody said 'no, I don't want to do it'...so we just all naturally evolved, we don't take any notice of anyone! You'd learn to be highly flexible, say it's grand to anyone to come and observe or come in."*

Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School.

While it was recognised that this shift in mindset towards teachers feeling comfortable with co-teaching approaches "*does take time*" (Will, Principal, DEIS School), it can be suggested that with greater exposure to, and CPD on, in-class support and collaborative practices, teachers may increasingly become more willing and enthusiastic to implement co-teaching within schools. This section discussed the importance of teacher compatibility, and the challenges associated with such. Further challenges in terms of the practicalities of implementing co-teaching in Irish classrooms is explored in the section below.

#### 6.4.5.2 Practical Challenges

As mentioned in Section 6.4.4.2 above, Irish teachers continue to face the challenge of trying to meet increasingly diverse students' needs within 'supersized classes' (INTO 2020a). While large class sizes may undoubtedly make it more difficult for the CT to ensure that effective differentiation occurs, large student numbers in small classrooms also emerged as a barrier to implementing co-teaching practices. Rachel, the CT in the Girls' School, described having "over 30" students in "absolutely tiny" classrooms, where "the children are jam-packed in" and "there's barely room to turn", which holds significant implications for the implementation of inclusive education and support from the SET, as set out in current policy (DES 2017a; DES 2017b). Many participants (n=7) spoke to practical challenges such as these large class sizes, lack of space and high noise-levels as factors which negatively impact teachers' use of co-teaching approaches

*"Parallel-teaching, I don't think, I'd say there's very little of that, because of noise and because our rooms are quite small, we don't have very big rooms with ensuite toilets, our rooms are quite small here, so I can't see how that would work very well."*

Matthew, Principal, Boys' School.

Researcher: *"What challenges, if any, are associated with in-class support?"*

*Ciara: "Noise levels, I think. Like our rooms aren't big, they're not modern, they're very old so it's a big thing for us is our space, so that's a massive challenge, I find it's very noisy when we do it. It would be nice if we could actually have a bigger classroom just to move the groups even wider apart. Telling kids to whisper is like talking to the wall, it just doesn't happen! You can have a voice over a voice, so my teaching voice might be loud, or the other teacher might be loud, you've got two instructions going on, kids do get confused. But I think it's down to space, that would be the major challenge in this school."*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

*"We have 32, 31, 29 [students in each class] and our rooms are small, you'll see that yourself if you look around. If you go into 6<sup>th</sup> class now there's 32 in 6<sup>th</sup>, there's hardly room for a person to go in there, you know, physically"*

Joe, Principal, Girls' School.

With Ireland having the largest class sizes in the European Union (EU) (INTO 2020a), data from this study poses the question of whether the physical size of our classrooms is

adequate. The most current Technical Guidance Document (TDG-022), found on the Department of Education website, indicates that the standard size of a classroom, provided as part of a new primary school building project, is 80 sq. metres, including a wet area, WCs and cloaks, storage and ICT areas (DES 2013b). However, these areas, proposed for regular classrooms, are guidelines for, and relate to, new accommodation only, therefore, there is no suggestion that smaller rooms, in existing buildings, need to be expanded to meet recommended room sizes in these guidelines, even in the context of a new building project. Considering this, it can be suggested that many teachers face practical challenges in terms of the limited physical space available to them within older school buildings, and while current educational policy (DES 2017a, p.18) advocates the use of in-class support in the form of ‘team-teaching’ or ‘small group teaching’ to collaboratively meet the needs of students with SEN within the mainstream classroom, no reference is made within these policy documents as to how these practices can be accommodated in space-restricted classrooms with large student numbers. Therefore, the current study argues that these findings may contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), by recognising and considering these challenges within the Context of Influence for the development of future policies. This may, in turn, influence the Context of Policy of Text Production whereby such issues could be addressed or, at least, teachers working in space-restricted classrooms could be provided with guidance on how best to overcome such difficulties, if a model of in-class support continues to be promoted within such policies.

Furthermore, some participants (n=5) noted that the increased noise-levels within these overcrowded classrooms, during co-taught lessons, can be distracting for students which echoes the research of Gurger and Uzuner (2011) and Carty and Farrell (2018), resulting in teachers “*fighting for attention in a noisy classroom*” (Mary, SENCO, Mixed School)

*“I’d have gone in teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> and the CT would have taught 1st over at this side of the room. We found that ok but it’s **that bit louder and it’s harder to keep the attention of the children, sometimes if there’s something more interesting at the other side of the room, they’re more inclined to look that way...**”*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

Tom supports this view

*“I suppose when there are two teachers working it's a **busier environment** and a lot of children that suits, [but] **sometimes for children with SEN concentration can be an issue** so that if there isn't the same order that you might have [during non-co-taught lessons], **they're easily distracted**. But generally speaking, I found now that children have adapted very well to it, and I mean at times inside we could have four stations, there could be three teachers all working in close proximity to each other, so children get used to it, **but some children, particularly those with sensory needs, of course they're going to find it, that busy environment, very hard.**”*

Tom, Principal, Mixed School.

This data highlights some of the practical challenges associated with the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a), specifically, providing students with in-class support, which conveys that although co-teaching can be beneficial for students (see Section 6.4.4), it may not be the most effective practice to meet the needs of every student with SEN (Friend and Bursuck 2012). The following section will explore some further complexities involved with co-teaching, with a particular focus on the lack of time available for co-teachers to plan and review lessons.

#### **6.4.5.3 Limited Time for Collaborative Planning and Review**

As argued in Section 6.4.5.1, successful co-teaching depends on dedicated, compatible teachers who work diligently together to achieve a shared goal (Friend 2008; Fluijt *et al.* 2016; Casserly and Padden 2018). However, in order for this collaborative vision to come to fruition, common planning and review time is necessary, as “*you can't just have somebody saying 'hey, I'm here', you need to have something planned, it needs to be structured because the time is precious*” (Lisa, CT, Boys' School). Although collaboration between school staff has increased with the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a) (see Section 6.4.1), data from this study suggest that there is a lack of sufficient collaborative time for planning and review in schools, which coincides with much literature discussed in Chapter Two (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Murphy 2011; Ware *et al.* 2011; Mulholland and Connor 2016; Pratt *et al.* 2016). This was identified by participants as a significant challenge associated with implementing in-class support with a total of sixty-nine references, over fourteen interviews (Appendix 32) speaking to the lack of formal, structured time available for planning and reviewing collaborative practice within working hours. The quotes below illustrate the challenges teachers face, within the

busy school schedule, to find time to plan and review co-teaching lessons and interventions

*“...planning together, finding the time for the two teachers is another challenge, you know you need to get together with the CT and see exactly what are we aiming for here, what's the plan? A lot of planning happens in the staffroom at breaktime. That's kinda what happens.”*

Ciara, SET, Girls' School.

*“...you kinda just come in in the morning, everyone is at their station, and it's just 'zoom' you're just on a train track then and you don't get time and next thing you're finished and next thing you're out and you're doing another job. **It's hard to find the time.** And the CT is compromised there as well because she's trying to teach maths so she can't be listening to me or Jack or anybody else suggesting can we sit down and have a chat about this to see what's working and what's not, it's hard. It really is hard.”*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

*“...so, if we feel it's getting a bit stale, we change it up or if we feel it's working well, and the children are benefitting from it we keep going with what we have. **But we don't sit down officially,** which we...I talk to Mary [the other SET in the school] on it alright but **with the CTs, they're so tied up with what they have to do, it's hard to get the time.** And it would be beneficial I would think because if you're sitting down and you're throwing out ideas that's when you think of what stations to use and it's important you feel when you go into station-teaching if its clicking properly or of its not clicking properly, sometimes you just get that feeling you know, and that's down to planning I would think as well and just down to having the time to do that which is kinda difficult for everyone to sit down.”*

Jack, SET, Mixed School.

Jack speaks to the potential benefits of collaboratively planning and reviewing interventions to monitor students' outcomes yet recognises that a lack of time makes such collaboration increasingly difficult. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.2), Murawski and Scott (2017) regard time as one of the most important resources needed for co-teaching and so, it is unsurprising that one of the main barriers to co-teaching, as found in Carty and Farrell's (2018, p.117) small-scale Irish study, was the 'demand on teachers' time arising from the need to co-plan'. This coheres with Chitiyo (2017), who claims that if co-teaching is perceived as being time-consuming, teachers may choose less demanding instructional delivery options, due to teachers' already demanding work schedules. Interestingly, Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), the policy document outlining the SETAM, states that schools' allocation of SET resources 'includes provision for the

conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs teaching hours provided to schools' (DES 2017a, p.21). The researcher was interested to explore what this 'co-ordination time' looked like in practice and how schools were interpreting this aspect of the SETAM policy (McSpadden McNeil and Coppola 2006; Ball 1994). A few participants (n=2) spoke to this section of the Circular (DES 2017a), conveying their confusion around the boundaries of this policy directive and how much agency teachers actually have with regards to this co-ordination time within the Context of Practice

*“That comes up...a nice little line in there 'you should take some time' but they're not saying how much time and they're not saying...all they're saying is that it shouldn't impact with the children's time, so we tend to use our Croke Park for planning, not ideal but we tend to do that. We tend not to use the word planning, 'collaborating' is the word that we're putting together just for relabelling, but we do try and make sure that before and after Literacy Lift-Off we get to touch base on what we want to do, what we're doing from that point of view.”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

As mentioned by Daniel, the Circular does not provide definitive guidance on what exactly this co-ordination time can entail or how much time schools should assign towards it, but rather it states that

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of pupils requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers providing this support. Co-ordination time, should however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the most teaching time that can be provided for pupils can be given to those pupils.

DES (2017a, p.21)

There is an obvious lack of clarity within this policy document, not only with regards to the amount of co-ordination time, which the SETAM Guidelines state should 'be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that teaching time is maximised' (DES 2017b, p.18), but also in relation to which members of staff can avail of this time for 'the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities' (DES 2017a, p.21). It remains unclear as to whether this time can be scheduled into all SETs timetables or whether the SENCO is responsible for carrying out these co-ordination activities which could suggest that this time should be assigned to them alone. This again brings the dilemma of teacher agency versus responsibility (see Section 6.2) to the fore, as although teachers welcomed the increased agency, provided to them under the SETAM to identify students' needs and allocate

resources accordingly, as Daniel's quote above exemplifies, teachers still like to have, and expect, clear structures in place and guidelines laid out for them which do not leave too much room for interpretation or fall within a "grey area", as Will describes below. This correlates with Erss (2018, p.253) who maintains that teachers find reassurance in boundaries and common rules and states that 'a lack of commonly agreed rules or vision can actually decrease teacher agency', suggesting that 'rules can be simultaneously constraining and enabling'

*"I suppose again, that's an interesting one, that's very much a **grey area**. I suppose there's an unwritten rule that for us, it's not there in black and white, but if teachers require it [planning time] and given the scale of what's there in terms of following up on calls, we would call it planning time say on a Friday afternoon but planning time could be following up on calls with speech therapists or following up with an OT or a psychologist...you know what I mean? It's not exactly your own plans so - It's a grey area. An interesting...Louise, [if] you talk to the inspectorate, they like to leave it a grey area because they can't give you a definitive answer either."*

Will, Principal, DEIS School.

Following these interviews, the researcher emailed the Inspectorate, asking for clarification on what exactly this 'co-ordination time' means *in practice* for all teaching staff (i.e., principals, SENCOs, SETs and CTs). The email questioned if this time applies to all of the aforementioned roles or if it is limited to just the principal/SENCO and if this time allows for collaborative planning or if it is limited to individual planning and/or co-ordination activities. Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop, responded to this query with a lengthy and detailed email (July 2020) (see Appendix 39), reiterating much of what is outlined in Circular 0013/2017 but also including that

Where teachers are working together to teach collaboratively, planning is similarly required by both teachers...It would not normally be considered necessary to provide...teachers with planning and coordination time from resources allocated to the school for SEN for their general planning activities.

The researcher's interpretation of this paragraph is that collaborative planning falls under 'general planning activities', as mentioned above, and thus, this time should not be used for CTs and SETs to engage in the planning or reviewing of co-teaching programmes or interventions. This was also the general consensus from participants, as only one school discussed trying to make sure "*there would be discrete time allocated to allow the CTs to meet with the special education team*", which was "*something that the inspectors*

*recommended here on a previous visit*” (Tom, Principal, Mixed School). However, Mary, the SENCO in this school, explained that even when time is assigned for such planning *“on the timetable”, “in practice, it doesn’t happen”*.

Throughout interview discussions, many participants (n=8) reported that SETs are usually assigned planning time within working hours, generally on a Friday evening, which is sometimes used to *“to do some of our own core planning on a week-to-week basis”* or may also be used *“to coordinate with the CTs”* for *“20 minutes to an hour there on a Friday if needs be”* (Daniel, SENCO, Girl’s School). Often, this time is also used to

*“...make phone calls to OTs and stuff like that because there's an awful lot of that kind of work that goes on as well and you're ringing parents and stuff and filling in forms so sometimes I do try to set aside and take three-quarters of an hour on a Friday to do that kind of stuff as well.”*

Mary, SENCO, Mixed School.

However, the availability of common planning time between CTs and SETs, or lack thereof, continues to negatively impact co-teaching practices (Mastropieri *et al.* 2005), as although SETs can set aside time for planning, *“in an ideal world, I don't know how they think this is an ideal world, you're supposed to be able to link with the CT who has a class at that stage”* (Moir, SET, DEIS School), which holds obvious limitations as *“that would be during teaching time for the CTs so it wouldn’t be ideal”* (Jack, SET, Mixed School). Similarly, informal discussions and time for planning and reviewing co-teaching lessons between SETs and CTs is sometimes facilitated whereby *“a SET might step into the CT’s room and cover her...while the other SET and the CT plan”* (Ciara, SET, Girl’s School). However, this tends to be on a needs-basis and is not structured planning time built into the school schedule, but rather a brief meeting to informally plan for, or monitor and review a specific student’s outcomes, or to review an intervention at the end of a term

Daniel: *“We do cover for each other when a CT and a SET need to have a meeting so I would step into another class for 20 minutes/half an hour when those teachers meet to discuss either an individual child or a programme or whatever.”*

Researcher: *“Would that be on a needs-basis?”*

Daniel: *“A needs-basis, but it could also be on a review-basis like at the end of a term or whatever.”*

Researcher: *“So, would I be correct in saying that it wouldn't be, let's say, formally set out every fortnight that they'd [the SETs] meet with the CT?”*

Daniel: *“Not formally no, the beginning/end of Literacy Lift-Off, beginning taking a child that might need intervention or group intervention, so you have a chat with them [the CT]...”*

Daniel, SENCO, Girls' School.

It emerged that scheduled planning time within working hours does not extend to CTs, with three out of the four CTs reporting that *“there wouldn't be specific time, no”*, acknowledging that *“I do not know how you could possibly, if someone was able to fit that in it would be wonderful! But, no”* (Helen, CT, DEIS School). Therefore, the majority of participants (n=13) discussed using Croke Park Hours or staff meetings, which take place after school, to collaboratively plan and review in-class support and co-teaching sessions with their colleagues

*“...the only time would be really, after school and we could put that as Croke Park Hours or something but no, not during the school day really as such.”*

Lisa, CT, Boys' School.

*“We tend to do it in our Croke Park Hours...If we didn't have that we wouldn't find time. And it's at the discretion of teachers after school like so I have to say everyone here is very good, we normally bang heads after school, yeah.”*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

Teachers held positive attitudes towards using Croke Park Hours to facilitate this planning, as they recognised that *“if the Croke Park Hour wasn't there, you'd have a huge issue to find time for everyone to meet so one supports the other”* (Moira, SET, DEIS School). While much opportunity for other scheduled planning sessions does not occur, many teachers (n=9) stressed that informal planning *“happens in the staffroom at breaktime”* (Ciara, SET, Girls' School), or teachers *“meet after school...staying back among their own little groups planning together”* (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School). This correlates with findings from Ware *et al.* (2011, p.129) who states that much collaborative planning in schools is informal, ‘having to occur in snatched moments, as there may be no time set aside for collaboration’. This, again, highlights the limited planning time available to teachers (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Pratt *et al.* 2017) and provides an insight into the reality of the Context of Practice, which sees teachers taking

every opportunity to collaboratively discuss the progress of their students and to plan and review interventions informally throughout the day

*I suppose we would find because of the small staff we're quite reflective, we'd be saying 'how did that go now this morning, did they get it?' and we'd be like 'oh do you know I was talking at them but I don't think they got it' and sometimes things happen then that it gets cut short and you'd be like 'I only had a few minutes with my last group' so then we'd look at 'right, we'll cut literacy out of this and use stations for maths instead and we'll do this instead'."*

Emma, CT, Mixed School.

*"...we're constantly discussing pupils, we're listening to each other engaging with the pupils, if I'm running one programme that would suit your pupil, if I'm running a speech and language and if you're doing social communication, I might put a child with a priority learning need in your group, so I think we're really working at a very good level."*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

While Pratt *et al.* (2017) speak to the necessity for, and benefit of, this daily planning which occurs naturally, they maintain that this should be the final stage of co-planning, which occurs after 'unit planning' and 'biweekly planning' phases. Unit planning can be conducted through an initial meeting between co-teachers, which may require time outside of the school day, whereby they discuss the long-term goals and learning targets of the co-teaching programme. The succeeding biweekly planning may involve regular conversations during lunch or via email yet should not take up excessive amounts of time outside of school hours 'because co-teachers will have an idea of what students need and the days in which instruction will need to be provided' following on from their initial meeting (Pratt *et al.* 2017, p.246). Therefore, although teachers are "*all the time planning informally or planning you know 5 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes in the evening*" (Brenda, SENCO, DEIS School), this unplanned time to collaborate during transitions between lessons may not be sufficient if teachers have not engaged in the previous planning phases. Furthermore, UNESCO (2017, p.34) declare that in order for co-teaching to be effective, 'teachers require additional time for joint planning and collaboration', which is in line with Ware *et al.* (2011) who recommend that time needs to be set aside for collaborative planning and co-ordination and built into the school week to enable teachers to meet the greater level of planning needed for arrangements such as co-teaching. This study supports such a recommendation and argues that in order for truly effective collaborative practice to occur, enabling co-teaching to reach its full potential,

CTs and SETs need structured, designated time to plan and review co-teaching programmes.

This section explored the movement towards a more collaborative approach to responding to the needs of all students, including those with SEN, in schools today. Leading on from survey findings, which showed increased use of in-class supports to provide for students with SEN within the mainstream classroom under the SETAM (DES 2017a), this theme presented rich qualitative data which further delved into the workings of collaborative practice within schools. Through an examination of models of support currently used in practice, this study suggests that the need for some, albeit limited, withdrawal practices remain, however, the use of in-class supports are increasingly being used in schools, with station-teaching being the most commonly used co-teaching approach. The discussion of this final, qualitative theme then came to a close by unearthing the benefits and challenges of co-teaching practices, according to teachers working on the ground. By shedding light on effective collaborative practice currently in place and the barriers that hinder teachers' use of co-teaching approaches, these findings hope to reveal the Context of Practice (Ball 1994) by portraying the voice of the teacher, which may in turn contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle.

## **6.5 Scholarly Significance to the Field**

Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994) was adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. Detailed in Chapter One, to provide a context for the research, and again in Chapter Three, this framework views policy as a complex, cyclical notion, which involves multiple levels and agencies (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2013). Findings set out in this chapter hold implications for future practice and contribute to theory, by unveiling the Context of Practice of the SETAM, according to those who are implementing the policy on the ground. In the previous chapter (Section 5.5.), survey findings highlighted the importance of teacher voice in educational policy and revealed that teachers want to be consulted prior to the introduction of, or changes being made to, policies in schools, which is concurrent with Egan (2013, p.259) who maintains that 'teachers are key stakeholders and want to inform policy decisions'. This study supports the view of McSpadden McNeil and Coppola (2006, p.688) who claim that 'policymakers rarely, in fact, experience the daily realities of the recipients', and so, this research 'takes account of people's perception and experiences' (Ozga 1990, p.359) with the aim to link

the ‘bigger worlds’ of national policy contexts to the ‘smaller worlds’ of policies and practices within schools and classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out to further reveal this authentic teacher voice, in order to contribute to theory. By unveiling aspects of the SETAM which are deemed to be successful in practice, according to those enacting this policy at a local level, and by identifying areas which teachers find challenging, and so, may be in need of review, the findings of this study aim to impact the Context of Influence and Context of Policy Text Production of future policies. Therefore, the findings of this study may shape the future review of this special education policy, or may frame the formation of future policies, leading to positive implications for future Contexts of Practice within schools. In doing so, the involvement of the teacher in, not only the implementation of policy, but also the generation of policy is enhanced, which underpins the theoretical framework of Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Figure 6.3 below provides a synopsis of how the findings of this study may contribute to the Context of Influence, which then feeds into subsequent contexts within the Policy Cycle (Ball 1994), as discussed within the conclusions and recommendations of this study in the following chapter.

### Findings Contributing to the Context of Influence

Greater teacher agency under the SETAM has led to increased expectancy and responsibility placed on teachers to meet a wide range of complex needs, while feeling that they may not have the expertise, supports or resources to do so.

Needs-based system is a positive move for Irish education policy at primary level and continuity is seen at secondary level; however, a discrepancy is evident within third-level education requirements.

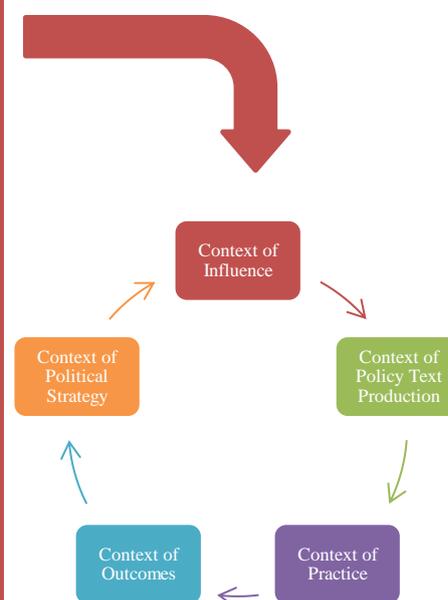
Difficulties surrounding the effective implementation of Stage One of the Continuum of Support, in particular, the write-up of Classroom Support Plans to effectively monitor and record students' outcomes at the classroom level.

Limited ITE and CPD for teachers has resulted in some teachers feeling unprepared to implement practices required under the SETAM.

Withdrawal practices continue to be used in schools for the intensive teaching of specific skills.

Limited space in classrooms effects the implementation of in-class supports.

Teachers are experiencing a lack of sufficient time to collaboratively plan and review inclusive practices to meet the needs of students with SEN.



**Figure 6. 3: Contribution to the Evolving Policy Cycle (a)**

The findings illustrated in the figure above represent the voices of those implementing the SETAM on the ground. The INTO (2020c) believes that ‘real engagement with stakeholders must be the bedrock of all policy formation’, a view which is supported by this study. Therefore, such empirical data may contribute to theory by influencing contexts of the Policy Cycle, to inform future special education policy formation. The paragraphs below will further explain Figure 6.3, reiterating the main findings of this study and their scholarly significance.

This study argues that while schools welcome the increased agency brought about under the SETAM, to identify students in need of additional teaching support and deploy their allocated SET resources accordingly, teachers may need to be better supported in order to feel confident in carrying out such responsibilities. A greater expectancy was perceived by teachers, under this model, to identify and meet a variety of complex and specific SEN within the mainstream school, with teachers feeling as though they need to take on the role of psychologists, OTs and SLTs, without having the specialist skills or resources to do so. In light of these findings, recommendations can be made to contribute to the evolving Policy Cycle, which may, in turn, shape future Contexts of Practice. These are set out in Chapter Seven (see Figure 7.1). Additionally, a discrepancy between the requirements to access supports at the three levels of education in Ireland is evident, as the needs-based system implemented under the SETAM (DES 2017a) in primary and secondary schools does not extend to third-level education. Providing evidence of disability still remains a requirement to access supports in HEIs and to apply for the DARE scheme. This study found that the move towards a needs-based system yields many positive outcomes for students (Ball 1994) and appears to be an effective model to support inclusion in mainstream primary schools, which may, therefore, feed into future Contexts of Influence regarding third-level inclusive education policy in Ireland, as further discussed in Chapter Seven.

The findings of this study shed light on whole-school and classroom-based practices to monitor and record students' outcomes. While effective use of Student Support Files at Stage Two and Three of the CoS were identified, difficulties emerged regarding the effective implementation of the Classroom Support Stage. Data indicate that a perceived lack of awareness by CTs of the requirements of this stage, may have resulted from limited CPD on SEN for CTs, and a discrepancy in the availability of CPD for teachers in varying roles in schools emerged. It could be suggested that the success of the pilot of the SETAM (DES 2016b, p.9) was closely related to the 'comprehensive suite of supports and guidance' offered to schools throughout the timeframe of the pilot, which provided teachers with ongoing CPD and regular contact with specialist services such as NEPS, the SESS, the NCSE, the Special Education Section of the DES and the Inspectorate. As identified by the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, such levels of CPD were not provided to all teachers upon the national roll-out of this model, as forecast by Dempsey (2017), resulting in many teachers feeling unprepared to

implement the requirements as set out in the SETAM policy at the time of its introduction. Challenges arising from limited CPD, particularly those surrounding the implementation of Stage One of the CoS and the absence of Classroom Support Plans, may need be taken into consideration for the review of this policy, or for the development of future inclusive education policies. Recommendations to overcome such challenges, as outlined in Chapter Seven, may lead to a more successful policy landscape within future Contexts of Practice.

A move towards a more collaborative approach to supporting students with SEN in schools was identified within this study. Teachers' perceptions were explored to provide an insight into the 'rationale for the provision of models of support delivery, and the impact of these upon student experiences' (Rose and Shevlin 2020, p.51). While greater collaboration between CTs and SETs to support students within the collective setting of the mainstream classroom, through a variety of co-teaching approaches, was evident under the SETAM, this study found that many teachers believe that withdrawal practices are still necessary to target students' individualised needs or teach specific skills in an intensive one-to-one or small group setting. The value of, and need for, this model of support, albeit in limited circumstances, was identified throughout this research and is acknowledged in the policy text of the SETAM (DES 2017a). This study supports the view of the INTO (2020b, p.17), who maintain that 'the individual needs of each pupil' should be the 'over-riding consideration in deciding on what the appropriate placement is for that pupil', or in this case, in deciding on the appropriate model of support used to meet the needs of that student within the mainstream school. This perspective on special education provision may hold implications for the Context of Influence, to ensure that policy formation is centred around the student and promotes the underlying principle that meeting the individual needs of each student remains the primary consideration in all actions and decision-making when striving to develop truly inclusive schools (DES 2005; DES 2017b).

Successful aspects of the implementation of the SETAM in the Context of Practice, such as the increasing use of in-class supports in schools were highlighted. Findings showed that teachers use a variety of co-teaching approaches to respond to the diverse needs of students in classrooms today, which yield many benefits and positively impact the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students. This study also unveiled noteworthy challenges involved with the implementation of in-class supports in schools

under the SETAM, including issues surrounding teacher compatibility and willingness to undertake co-teaching models, practical challenges such as space and noise-levels, and a lack of time for teachers for collaborative planning and review. Such empirical data may contribute to the field and add to the limited, yet emerging, research-base on co-teaching practices (Chitiyo 2017; Beninghof 2020). Recommendations to overcome such challenges, which may influence the Context of Policy Text Production and thus, the Context of Practice, are presented in Chapter Seven and illustrated in Figure 7.1.

In accordance with Ball's Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), this research views policy as a process rather than a product, which is remade and reworked in a variety of contexts (Reagan *et al.* 2016, p.4), rather than something which is imposed onto people (Goodwyn and Findlay 2009). The findings presented in Figure 6.3 illustrate the workings of the SETAM within the Context of Practice, contributing to theory, by informing the evolving Policy Cycle (Ball 1994), which is further elaborated upon in Figure 7.1.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the study's qualitative findings, uncovered from thematic analysis of rich, semi-structured interview data, to reveal the workings of a special education policy to support inclusion in practice (DES 2017a), according to teachers in the field. As outlined in Chapter Five, Section 5.5, teachers want their voices to be heard and their experiences of how policy is 'happening' on the ground to be considered when policymakers engage in the Context of Influence and the Context of Policy Text Production (Ball 1994) for policies which directly impact those at the coalface of such policies. Three major themes were presented and discussed in this chapter, which aimed to reveal the day-to-day processes of the SETAM (DES 2017a), which impact the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students. These findings may, therefore, contribute to the evolving policy cycle, enabling the voice of the teacher to be better represented in future policy decisions or reforms.

The first theme discussed the notion of teacher agency versus increased responsibility and the dilemmatic nature of such within the Context of Practice. Advantages associated with greater teacher autonomy and flexibility with regards to the implementation of the SETAM policy and the implications of such for students were described. However, while the transition to a needs-based model which yields a more

agentic role for teachers emerged as a welcome approach to SEN provision, the associated responsibility simultaneously arose as one of the main challenges of this model, which is significant as it poses a dilemma in practice. In accordance with Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle, all contexts which involve action are bound by structure and involve compromise, and so, challenges surrounding schools' increased accountability in terms of decision-making to identify students in need of support and deploy their allocated SET resources accordingly were unearthed. Further responsibilities, such as greater expectancy on teachers to meet a wide variety of specific needs, and the increase in workload for teachers under the SETAM, were discussed.

The second theme delved into schools' whole-school and classroom-based practices using the CoS. Approaches used to monitor and record students' outcomes, particularly schools' use of the Student Support File were discussed, followed by an examination of the essential role of the CT in the implementation of the CoS (DES 2007a), under the SETAM. This unveiled challenges evident within some schools surrounding the practices and documentation required at Stage One (Classroom Support) of the CoS (DES 2007a). CPD and ITE offered to CTs, particularly in the area of SEN and inclusive education was then examined, which sheds light upon the need for greater supports and practical experience working with students with SEN for the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

The final theme relates to the increase in collaboration evident in schools since the introduction of the SETAM (DES 2017a). It builds upon arguments made within the presentation and discussion of phase one findings of this study, which highlight greater use of in-class supports, yet recognises the remaining need for withdrawal practices for the intensive teaching of skills for some students with more complex needs. Schools' deployment of SET resources to effectively meet the needs of students were revealed throughout this section, identifying the most frequently used co-teaching approaches and the benefits of such. Barriers that hinder the use of co-teaching approaches, experienced by teachers within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), were then described, reflecting upon the importance of teacher compatibility for the success of co-teaching practices, highlighting a number of practical challenges associated with co-teaching and emphasising the lack of co-planning time for teachers within already demanding work schedules (Chitiyo 2017; Pratt *et al.* 2017). Following discussion and analysis of the

themes presented in this chapter, conclusions and recommendations can be drawn, which are discussed in relation to this study's theoretical stance, in the final chapter below.

To conclude, this study, by portraying the voice of the teacher within the conceptual framework of the Policy Cycle (Ball 1994), contributes to an international body of policy analysis on inclusive education. It describes special education policymaking as a complex process, underpinned by the involvement of the teacher in its generation and implementation (Bowe *et al.* 1992) and acknowledges the importance of policy analysis which explicitly links the 'bigger worlds' of global and national policy contexts to the 'smaller worlds' of policies and practices within schools and classrooms. Such empirical data, uncovered by identifying the reality of the SETAM in practice, according to those on the ground, may enhance understandings of policy in practice and inform future policy action and developments in Ireland and beyond.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the main conclusions of this study, arising from the findings discussed in the previous chapter, to unveil what has been learned in terms of the implementation of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), to highlight the relevance of this research within the current inclusive education landscape and to convey how the study contributes to theory, policy and practice. The aim of this study was to examine the SETAM (DES 2017a) as a revised funding model to allocate SET resources to mainstream primary schools to facilitate and support inclusion. Chapter One provided a policy context to the study, tracing the evolution of special education policy, both internationally and nationally, and provided a rationale for this research. Chapter Two discussed the extant literature surrounding inclusion, focusing on the varying perceptions of inclusion that have emerged throughout the years, examining international allocation models which have influenced the current model and exploring Norwich's (2008) 'dilemmas of difference' to shed light on the complexity of identifying SEN, which is particularly relevant as the SETAM is the first policy in Ireland to completely remove the requirement of a diagnosis of disability in order for students to access supports in schools. In light of the transition to this needs-based model, teachers are given more agency to identify those in need of support and allocate their SET resources accordingly. Therefore, Chapter Two also discussed the notion of increased responsibility associated with increased autonomy in schools, which led to an exploration of the CPD and ITE offered to teachers upon the introduction of new policies to equip them to take on new responsibilities appropriately. The SETAM (DES 2017a) is then described in detail in Chapter Three. Firstly, previous national allocation models (DES 2003; DES 2005) and studies conducted by the DES (2016b) and the NCSE (2013; 2014b), which acted as the Context of Influence (Ball 1994) and the foundation for the development of the SETAM, were examined, followed by an analysis of Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), as the policy text, and an examination of the Guidelines (DES 2017b), which accompanied the Circular. The main components of the model were then explained in detail before leading onto a discussion of this study's theoretical framework, Ball's Policy Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Ball's (1994) contexts of policymaking

were illustrated and discussed, with particular emphasis on the Context of Practice, as the main focus of this study. The current chapter summarises the empirical responses to this study's research questions, regarding the implementation of the SETAM within such Contexts of Practice. The investigation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) employed the use of a mixed-methods approach, as outlined in Chapter Four. A sequential research design saw findings from the national, online survey informing the semi-structured interview schedule. Qualitative data were collected in four implementation sites (Bowe *et al.* 1992) of the SETAM policy, i.e., a Girls' School, a Boys' School, a Mixed School (non-DEIS) and a DEIS School (mixed), whereby a total of seventeen semi-structured interviews with principals, SENCOs, CTs and SETs were conducted.

The relevance of this research was firstly outlined in the Chapter One and is reiterated at this final stage of the thesis (see Section 7.5 below). 'Inclusive education' in Ireland is currently under review (NCSE 2019), as discussion and debate regarding the educational provision of students with SEN, particularly those attending special schools and classes, is ongoing, with Howe and Griffin (2020) and Shevlin and Banks (2021) describing the current landscape as being at a crossroads of inclusive education. Recognising the absence of any published research on the workings of the SETAM in practice and appreciating the importance of examining the application of the SETAM (DES 2017a), as the current funding model to facilitate inclusive education in mainstream schools, prior to considering a 'full inclusion' approach (NCSE 2019), the significance of this study is clear. This chapter draws conclusions from the study's main findings, which aim to contribute to the evidence-base, by exploring the gap in the research, to unveil teachers' perspectives and experiences of negotiating the SETAM (DES 2017a) policy within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), as an under-studied, but critically important, aspect of the Irish education system. As this study investigated a phenomenon situated in 'one particular situational context' (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.174), particularisations, rather than generalisations, are uncovered to construct 'low-level theory that is applicable to immediate situations' (Creswell 2013, p.290), such as these Contexts of Practice. The following section provides a synopsis of the first major theme which arose from the findings of this study and highlights recommendations and implications for policy and practice.

## 7.2 The Dilemmatic Agency/Responsibility Interplay

In accordance with this study's theoretical framework, Policy as Cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), findings from this study highlighted that Contexts of Practice, in which educational policies are implemented, and may be recreated as they are recontextualised (Egan 2013), are complex arenas that require in-depth exploration. This study revealed a dilemma of practice associated with the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) on the ground, as while the increased agency offered to teachers was perceived as a benefit of the SETAM, the associated responsibility simultaneously arose as one of the main challenges of this model, which is significant. This overlap was firstly indicated by survey findings (Section 5.2.1), prompting the researcher to further explore the notion of teacher agency as a 'double-edged sword' during the qualitative data collection phase. This study found that the transition towards a system which focuses on the individual learning needs of students and the identification of need within the socio-cultural context of the school, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability (HSE 2019b; DES 2017a; DES 2019a), was welcomed by teachers and holds positive implications for the Context of Outcomes (Ball 1994) for students. The SETAM offers schools greater autonomy to identify students in need of support and deploy their allocated SET resources accordingly, which has provided a fairer and more equitable system and facilitates earlier identification, intervention and support. Teachers highlighted a variety of benefits involved with having the agentic capacity to make decisions at a school-level, without being restricted by the necessity for students to have a diagnosis of disability prior to accessing supports in schools, as was required under previous practices (DES 2005). Benefits included all students now having an equal opportunity to access resources in schools, which can be provided in a timely and efficient manner to ensure students with the greatest level of needs have access to the greatest level of supports (DES 2017b). Interestingly, this study found that the SETAM may have been a bottom-up approach to policy, as the majority of teachers spoke to having always strived to provide adequate, additional teaching support to students in need, prior to the introduction of the SETAM, regardless of whether they had a diagnosis, or had been officially allocated 'hours' under the previous RTH Model (DES 2005). Therefore, policymakers, when working within the Context of Influence and the Context of Policy Text Production, may have taken on board, perspectives and practice observed on the ground to develop a system, under the SETAM, which recognises teachers as professional

agents who are best positioned to identify the students most in need of support within their own Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). As a result of this, the SETAM now offers flexibility to schools to review and evaluate the supports being given to students to decide whether such supports should be extended, reduced, or withdrawn throughout the school year (DES 2017b). This study concludes that the introduction of a needs-based system under the SETAM, which sees a movement away from a medical model of support that emphasises the labelling and diagnosing of students' needs, has resulted in many benefits for students, as outlined above, and appears to be an effective model to support inclusion in Irish primary schools. A similar needs-based model was introduced to secondary schools in Ireland in 2017 (DES 2017c), offering continuity between both systems. However, providing evidence of disability still remains essential when determining the appropriate supports available to students with disabilities at third-level education in Ireland and is also a requirement when applying for the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) scheme (as discussed in Section 6.2.2.2). This highlights the complexity involved with identification of students' needs (Norwich 2008; Tomlinson 2012) in education systems and reflects Norwich's (2008) dilemma of whether students should be identified as having a disability relevant to education or not, maintaining that 'either option has some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection or denial of opportunities' (Norwich 2009, p.448). Therefore, it could be recommended that in order for a needs-based model to work successfully, all levels of education need to be in alignment with one another to ensure that no student is disadvantaged at a later stage of their education, due to the movement away from labelling SEN in primary and secondary schools.

While a more agentic role for teachers yields many positive outcomes and was perceived as a benefit of the SETAM, data from this study suggest that this has led to greater responsibility being placed on teachers. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), teacher agency is dependent on the availability of resources to work within the structural constraints of unique Contexts of Practice (Biesta and Tedder 2007; Ball *et al.* 2012; Pyhältö *et al.* 2014; Erss 2018; Giudici 2020). This study found that teachers, acting within the Context of Practice, encounter struggle and compromise (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994; Goodwyn and Findlay 2009; Lall 2012; Egan 2013; Reagan *et al.* 2016) when making decisions regarding the organisation and deployment of SET resources, as they are constrained by the availability of resources allocated to their school, based on their

school's education profile (see Section 3.3.4) under the SETAM. Due to the greater autonomy offered to schools under this needs-based model, teachers reported feeling increased levels of responsibility and accountability for their decisions, reflecting the emerging accountability agenda evident in Irish educational policy (Conway and Murphy 2013; Egan 2013; INTO 2014). Greater levels of autonomy provided to schools sees a shift in responsibility regarding the identification of students in need of support, and the identification of their specific needs, from outside agencies back onto the teachers themselves, therefore, 'the role of decision-making at the school level becomes paramount' (Kenny *et al.* 2020, p.13) to the successful implementation of the SETAM on the ground. The study's survey findings indicated that limited CPD was accessed by teachers in the area of identification of students' needs on the introduction of this policy. This coheres with interview findings that revealed teachers' perceptions of being inadequately equipped with the knowledge, expertise or supports to identify and cater for some of the complex, specific and 'increasingly diverse learning needs' (Chitiyo 2017, p.57) of students. This study found that due to the increased teacher agency under the SETAM, greater expectations are placed on teachers, who now feel as though they have to take on the role of the educational psychologist, the OT, the SLT, etc., all at once. Therefore, while acknowledging that the movement away from labelling holds many positive implications for students, participants believe that the relevant professionals and outside agencies are still essential in ensuring that students' needs can be appropriately catered for within the mainstream school. Data suggest that some teachers feel inadequately supported to meet these diverse needs without the input from such agencies or without the valid information that would have been provided in reports following professional assessments. Therefore, as outlined in Figure 7.1 in Section 7.5 below, this study recommends that greater collaboration between schools and therapeutic services, as evidenced in the recently piloted In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project (Lynch *et al.* 2020) under the SIM (DES 2020b), may be needed to ensure that teachers can successfully implement the SETAM to its highest potential and facilitate effective, inclusive learning environments for all. Teachers in this study suggested that having a group of on-site professionals delivering CPD to a cluster of schools on a regular basis would be beneficial in building their capacity to best support students with particular or complex needs by providing guidance, support and opportunities to upskill within their own Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). This is supported by findings from the NCSE's

evaluation of the demonstration project which showed that teachers gained information and developed strategies from working with the in-school therapists, which enabled them to better identify needs and develop more positive interactions with students (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, Howe and Griffin (2020, p.51) believe that educational psychologists need to be recognised as ‘key personnel within a capacity-building model whereby they can serve to empower schools within a process of mutual reflection and learning’. As teachers can now act agentively regarding SEN identification and provision in schools, this study argues that teachers need to be better supported in such action, which may be facilitated by the national roll-out of the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, which was recently described by the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion as ‘an important reform of our special education system that will see therapy supports provided in school settings’ (DoE 2021c). The findings of this study may contribute to the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project as data suggest that this would be a welcome initiative, with one interview participant exclaiming that *“bringing speech therapists and OTs into the schools and us all working together in the classroom together - that would be my ultimate life goal to see that”* (Ann, HSCL Coordinator, DEIS School). According to Anaby *et al.* (2018), capacity-building initiatives in schools, whereby there are strong partnerships between educators and therapists, can lead to earlier identification of students with SEN and result in school personnel, who are involved in the student’s immediate environment, feeling better equipped to effectively address the student’s challenges and needs. Therefore, it could be suggested that an integrated system of therapeutic, health and education services, such as that provided by the In-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project (Lynch *et al.* 2020), may foster a more collaborative culture in schools, which sees teachers feeling more supported and better prepared to effectively meet the needs of all students, including those with specific and complex needs, within the mainstream school, under the SETAM. Thus, the current study argues that a capacity-building model, embedded within the context of the SETAM, may progress inclusive education in Ireland and enhance the development of truly inclusive schools (DES 2005; DES 2017b).

Findings from this study suggest that the responsibilities involved with implementing the SETAM (DES 2017a) on the ground have resulted in an increased workload for teachers, both in terms of organisational duties and paperwork requirements. Principals acknowledged that the move towards this needs-based system eliminated the

*“tedious paperwork every year applying for kids”* (Will, Principal, DEIS School) under the RTH Model (DES 2005) and so, offered them some administrative relief. However, an increased workload for teachers in terms of the planning and paperwork involved with identifying students’ needs and monitoring and recording students’ outcomes, as part of the NEPS CoS problem-solving approach (see Figure 3.5) was noted as one of the most prominent challenges of the SETAM. This study suggests that the levels of paperwork associated with the effective implementation of this policy may need to be considered in order to ensure that SET teaching time is not lessened due to an over-emphasis on administering assessments and recording results. This links to another significant finding whereby teacher observation emerged as one of the most frequently used and beneficial forms of assessment, according to both quantitative and qualitative data, yet it became apparent that the recording and documentation of such observations is not always carried out in schools. This is further discussed in Section 7.3 below in relation to the implementation of Stage One of the CoS (DES 2007a). It is important to note that while paperwork was identified as being *“one of the biggest headaches”* (Tom, Principal, Mixed School) involved with the SETAM, the importance and necessity of engaging with such, to properly plan for students with SEN and to monitor and review their progress, was conveyed by many participants.

In summary, the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools has led to a dilemma in practice for teachers, whereby they welcome the increased autonomy to manage their schools SET resources and recognise the advantages of the changes brought about by this policy for the Context of Outcomes for students, yet they experience challenges with the increased responsibility placed on teachers. By analysing the agency/responsibility interplay in unique Contexts of Practice, this study presented a variety of benefits and challenges associated with the SETAM which may enhance understandings of current inclusive policy in practice. Implications for future policy and practice were also highlighted, which may inform the Context of Outcomes, the Context of Political Strategy and the overall policy cycle (Ball 1994) as it evolves into the future.

### **7.3 The Need for Ongoing Professional Development Opportunities within Unique Contexts of Practice**

The importance of a whole-school approach to inclusion is set out in current inclusive education policy (DES 2017a; DES 2017b). This study examined the Context

of Practice to shed light on whole-school and classroom-based practices used to implement the SETAM. Interesting data regarding the monitoring and recording of students' outcomes was unearthed and a need for greater supports for teachers was identified. Findings from the national survey concluded that the Problem-Solving Process, outlined in the NEPS CoS Guidelines (DES 2007a), to identify and assess students' SEN and monitor their progress, is being used by the majority of teachers. It emerged that Student Support Files are being used to document students' progress and needs in schools and to map their pathway through the CoS, which enables schools to easily trace a students' history in terms of special education provision during their time in primary school. This study concluded that such use of Student Support Files has led to a more organised and structured approach to the monitoring and recording of students' outcomes in schools. According to both quantitative and qualitative findings, formal reviews of Student Support Files are taking place in schools, for students accessing School Support and School Support Plus. Through the use of the Support Review Record, within the template provided by the Department (DES 2017b), reviews have become more central to the monitoring of student progress, than under previous practices. Additionally, this study found that online databases, such as Aladdin, are being used as efficient and effective methods of recording students' results and tracking their progress, at a whole-school level. As mentioned in the previous section, teacher observation was noted by interview participants as a beneficial assessment method to monitor students' outcomes and inform future planning, however teacher observations, at the Classroom Support Stage, are often not recorded or documented in a Classroom Support Plan, which is significant. This emerged as a challenge associated with the implementation of the SETAM, with data highlighting a perceived lack of awareness or understanding of the practices and paperwork required at this Stage by CTs, in particular. It could be concluded that the majority of CTs recognised their role as having primary responsibility for all students in their class (Government of Ireland 1998) and were engaging in classroom-based interventions to differentiate for students identified to be at Stage One of the CoS, yet, importantly, they may not always have documented such efforts or recorded students' outcomes resulting from such interventions. Data may also suggest, however, that not all schools engage with Stage One, Classroom Support, and may still perceive students with SEN as the responsibility of the SET (Rose and Shevlin 2020). This was highlighted by one school who may not have implemented, nor recorded, classroom-based interventions

prior to involving the SET at the School Support Stage. The lack of paperwork, i.e., Classroom Support Plans, being drawn up by CTs, emerged as a noteworthy issue of the practical application of the SETAM and so, may need to be acknowledged within future Contexts of Influence, as previously outlined in Figure 6.3.

Data from this study suggest that such difficulties surrounding the implementation of Stage One of the CoS, may be as a result of the limited CPD accessed by CTs on the introduction of the SETAM and on SEN, more generally. It can be concluded that many teachers did not feel adequately prepared to implement this model on its introduction, due to a lack of CPD, as discussed in Chapter Six and illustrated in Figure 6.3. The NCSE Working Group who proposed this new model (NCSE 2014b, p.25), deemed CPD for teachers, embedded from the introduction of this model, to be ‘critical to the success’ of the SETAM, and so, a ‘comprehensive suite of supports and guidance’ (DES 2016b, p.9) was provided during the pilot of the SETAM. Data from this study suggest that such supports were not accessed by the majority of participants in September 2017, and so, it could be argued that greater CPD may need to be offered to all teachers on the introduction of new policies in schools, to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement the inclusive practices and requirements as set out by policy, such as the SETAM. It may be suggested that consistent, on-site professional development opportunities (Strieker *et al.* 2012) could enhance policy implementation, and thus, inclusive education, by providing teachers with the necessary opportunities to reflect on their own practices, seek clarification on the challenges they are experiencing with documentation and planning or address any concerns they may have. While schools can request visits from support services such as the NCSE, as was also evident during the pilot of the SETAM (DES 2016b), it could be recommended that more regular, scheduled in-school support from services such as the NCSE, the PDST and the Special Education Section of the DoE, may facilitate the roll-out of such on-site CPD, by providing individualised and sustained support to teachers, within their own Contexts of Practice. This approach recognises that CPD on the introduction of policies alone may not suffice and supports the view of Strieker *et al.* (2012) and Ní Bhroin (2019) who advocate ongoing, sustained support for teachers. In accordance with Bowe *et al.* (1992), this study appreciates, and has demonstrated, that teachers do not confront policy texts naïvely, but rather they interpret (Looney 2001) policy based on their own histories, experiences, purposes and interests within their unique Contexts of Practice (Ball *et al.* 2012; Giudici

2020). Therefore, as the implementation of policy texts vary in schools, this study argues that individualised, ongoing CPD, that is grounded in, and can be applied to, the unique context and culture of each school, is required in order for teachers to really feel supported in their enactment of inclusive policies and practices. Regular, in-school support from the aforementioned specialist services may better enable teachers to overcome the challenges they are currently experiencing with the implementation of the SETAM, in particular, the difficulties faced by CTs in the development of Classroom Support Plans at Stage One of the CoS.

Furthermore, a discrepancy emerged regarding CPD on inclusive pedagogies and special education offered to teachers in varying roles in schools. The study found that CPD in this regard is often confined to SEN personnel in schools, thus depriving teachers in other roles, such as CTs, of opportunities for learning and development. This gap is further widened by CPD programmes funded by the DoE (DoE 2021a), which are, often, not made available to CTs, as detailed in Section 6.3.2.1. Policy in Ireland and the global movement towards inclusive education, now sees many students with SEN spending most of their school day within the mainstream classroom (NCSE 2013), which has had a significant impact on the role of the CT (Forlin 2001; UNESCO 2017), highlighting the importance of, and need to, provide all teachers with ongoing CPD on SEN. This concurs with Ware *et al.* (2011, p.6) who maintains that ‘all teachers, including class teachers in mainstream schools, should have access to CPD on special educational needs’. While it is recognised that it is not feasible for all members of staff to attend every CPD opportunity available, it could be recommended that schools assign a certain number of Croke Park Hours each year to facilitate the delivery of in-house CPD sessions, as noted in Figure 7.1, to ensure that all members of staff have access to ongoing CPD on SEN and inclusive practices throughout their careers (INTO 2020b). This may entail one or more members of staff attending external CPD courses and then relaying the information back to all teachers during these assigned slots. Such in-house dissemination of knowledge may ensure that CTs, as well as all other teachers, are fully informed and regularly reminded of up-to-date guidance and best practice on how to implement inclusive education policy to ensure all students, including those with SEN, receive an appropriate education (Government of Ireland 1998).

While the specific challenges experienced by teachers in the implementation of the SETAM may be attributed to limited and varying amounts of CPD accessed by

teachers, a significant lack of ITE on SEN and inclusive education, as reported by participants, may hinder teachers' ability to effectively implement inclusive policies, more generally. Although strides have been made within the Irish context in recent years to better prepare teachers for inclusive education (Teaching Council 2011; 2017; Hick *et al.* 2018; Teaching Council 2020a), data showing that almost all teachers in this study felt insufficiently aware and prepared to identify and support students with SEN following their ITE, may hold implications for *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*' (Teaching Council 2020a). This study recommends that students in ITE programmes may benefit from having greater and more focused opportunities to gain practical experience working with and planning for students with SEN, in a variety of settings, during their professional placements. It could be suggested that this practical experience may enhance inclusive education and enable teachers to better implement inclusive education policy, by increasing teacher confidence in their knowledge and skills when working with students with SEN in schools (Hick *et al.* 2018).

It can be concluded that while the NEPS CoS (DES 2007a) is being implemented in schools and effective monitoring and recording of students' outcomes is largely evident through the use of Student Support Files and online databases, the implementation of Stage One of the CoS, particularly concerning the write-up of Classroom Support Plans, continues to be a challenge for some teachers. Limited CPD for teachers on the introduction of policies, and a lack of CPD on SEN for CTs, in general, was also highlighted and may act as a contributing factor to the challenges surrounding Stage One, as mentioned above. In light of such findings, as discussed in Chapter Six and illustrated in Figure 6.3, this study argues that it is necessary for teachers to access greater supports and more extensive CPD upon the introduction of policies in schools and throughout their implementation, similar to those experienced by schools involved in the pilot of the SETAM (DES 2016b), to better prepare teachers, in all roles, to carry out the practices and paperwork requirements as set out in policies, such as the SETAM. A lack of ITE for teachers on SEN and inclusive education was identified, leading to teachers feeling unprepared to identify and meet the needs of students with SEN in schools, which emphasises the importance of providing teachers in ITE programmes with opportunities to gain practical experience working with students with SEN during professional placements.

## 7.4 Inclusive Pedagogies for an Inclusive Education

The ever-evolving landscape of inclusive education in schools requires teachers to re-examine and adapt their teaching practices to respond to the changing profile of mainstream classrooms (Casserly and Padden 2018), which are increasingly made up of students with diverse needs (NCSE 2013; Rose *et al.* 2017). This study concludes that a more collaborative approach to supporting students with SEN is evident in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a), which positively impacts the Context of Outcomes for students (Ball 1994). Quantitative and qualitative data highlighted changes in teachers' daily practice to include more in-class support, since the introduction of this model, which is significant. However, it was recognised that teachers were engaging with co-teaching approaches, primarily in the form of station-teaching in the areas of literacy and numeracy, prior to the introduction of the SETAM, conveying the impact of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES 2011b) over the past number of years. Furthermore, it emerged that the DEIS school had moved towards a more collaborative approach and had adopted in-class support as their dominant model of support many years before other participating schools, due to the wide range of initiatives, pilot programmes and CPD that has been available to them. This schools' earlier transition away from withdrawing students on a one-to-one basis was also due to the high level of need in classrooms, which teachers maintained was more effectively and efficiently catered for through the use of in-class supports (DES 2009), which is significant. However, evidence from data and the literature suggest that withdrawal from classroom-based activity may be warranted for short, intensive support and intervention, as this model of support was found to still be very much present in schools (Mulholland and Connor 2016; Rose and Shevlin 2020). Many participants reported that withdrawal continues to be the most frequently used model of support, concurring with findings from Egan (2013) and Casserly and Padden (2018). A withdrawal approach was found to be more appropriate for students with specific needs, language difficulties or those who are "*really, really struggling*" (Mary SENCO, Mixed School), which supports extant literature advocating the use of one-to-one or small group tuition for struggling readers (Swanson and Hoskyn 1998; Scammacca *et al.* 2007; Vaughn *et al.* 2012; Brooks 2016; NEPS 2019) or students with complex needs who require individualised supports (Anderson *et al.* 2017). Therefore, while the use of in-class supports and withdrawal practices both emerged as beneficial models of support used in Contexts of Practice under the SETAM, this study

argues that students' individual needs should be the primary and 'over-riding consideration' (INTO 2020b, p.17) when deciding on what the most appropriate form of support is for those students, which may hold implications for future Contexts of Influence (see Section 6.5). This was further emphasised with regards to the use, and selection, of co-teaching approaches in schools, as many teachers noted that the unique cohort of students and their particular needs remain central to the decision-making process. While this study found that a variety of co-teaching approaches (Friend and Bursuck 2012; Friend 2019) are being used to support students with SEN within the collective setting of the mainstream classroom (DES 2017a), findings overwhelmingly point to station-teaching as the most commonly used approach, again highlighting the impact of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES 2011b), as station-teaching is used to facilitate initiatives such as Literacy Lift-Off, which now appears to be common-practice in schools. This study suggests that the use of such in-class supports yields positive outcomes for students by creating inclusive learning environments, which can, oftentimes, target students' individual needs while remaining in their own classrooms, alongside their peers, thus, enabling them to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness (Roycroft 2018) and avoiding the stigma attached with 'pull-out' services (Will 1986). Furthermore, the additional teachers needed in classrooms to engage with co-teaching approaches was found to have many associated benefits, such as being able to offer increased individual attention (Murphy 2016) to students, being able to provide a wider range of instructional opportunities (Mulholland and Connor 2016) and being able to utilise co-teachers' blended knowledge and expertise (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Friend 2008).

Findings surrounding schools' use of in-class supports, as detailed in Chapter Six, also revealed a number of challenges encountered by teachers. This study recommends that, where possible, teachers should be provided with choices regarding their use of co-teaching practices and the colleagues they work alongside (Friend 2008; Murphy 2011; Friend and Bursuck 2012; Carty and Farrell 2018) to ensure positive working relationships between co-teachers. The study identified that teachers with less experience of co-teaching methods were more reluctant to engage with such practices, suggesting that in order for such collaborative practice to progress, greater exposure to, and CPD on, co-teaching is needed for all teachers. CPD which enables teachers to share their expertise and to observe and model initiatives or interventions in practice within their own school

or within a cluster of schools, similar to the ‘showcasing’ programme as described by teachers in the DEIS School in Section 6.4.1, were recognised as good models of practice, and thus, hold implications for CPD in future Contexts of Practice (see Figure 7.1). It could be recommended, that CPD which involves teachers coming together to share best practice, should form a central element of CPD programmes in schools, where teachers learn from one another through collaboration and reflection within their own Contexts of Practice. This may not only better prepare teachers to engage with co-teaching approaches, but also, enable them to upskill in many other areas of education. Additionally, difficulties teachers face when implementing in-class support, as identified within this study, associated with limited space and large class sizes (INTO 2020a) are significant, and may require consideration within the Context of Influence and Context of Policy Text Production (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Adequate space in classrooms is vital for the logistics of in-class support to be carried out successfully, as additional personnel coming into the classroom and varied seating arrangements need to be accommodated for. As set out in Figure 7.1, policies which advocate the use of ‘team-teaching’ (DES 2017a, p.17), or other forms of in-class support, may need to consider this reality faced by teachers in the Context of Practice and offer realistic guidance within future policy texts [i.e., Context of Policy Text Production] on how to overcome such challenges. Furthermore, this study argues that specific time needs to be designated for collaborative planning and the review of co-teaching practices. Participants recognised the benefits of collaboratively planning and reviewing interventions to monitor students’ outcomes, to reflect on the quality of what has been taught and learned (Baldwin 2018) and to inform future planning of such collaborative supports. However, findings show that a lack of time for CTs and SETs makes such collaboration increasingly difficult in schools, which requires consideration within future Contexts of Influence (see Figure 6.3). This study concludes that limited time for structured, collaborative planning has resulted in teachers informally planning co-teaching sessions in ‘snatched moments’ (Ware *et al.* 2011) throughout the day. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.2), Pratt *et al.* (2017, p.244) describe three principles, seen across the literature, to enable teachers to practically and effectively co-plan within the ‘normal constraints of their teaching schedules’ and they propose a co-teaching planning framework to facilitate such planning. It could be recommended that such frameworks, which advocate regular, scheduled planning slots for teachers and provide co-planning templates (see Murawski

(2010) and Pratt *et al.* (2017) for examples of such templates) may be useful to provide a more structured approach to collaborative planning in future Contexts of Practice. This study argues that if inclusive education policy, which promotes a more collaborative approach to SEN provision with the aim of supporting students within the mainstream classroom in so far as is possible, is to be further enhanced and progressed, time needs to be ‘set aside for planning and co-ordination within the school week’ (Ware *et al.* 2011, p.44). It could be suggested that this time could be facilitated, in some scenarios, by the principal conducting assemblies on an agreed, regular basis with the junior and senior sections of the schools, which would then free up CTs to meet with SETs to engage in collaborative planning and review of in-class supports (DES 2009). This may enable teachers to more effectively implement arrangements such as co-teaching, under the SETAM policy.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Circular 0013/2017 has made some progress in recognising that ‘time should be built into the school week to enable teachers to collaborate in relation to provision for pupils with SEN’ (Ware *et al.* 2011, p.5), as this policy document states that schools’ SET allocation can be used for the ‘conducting of planning and co-ordination activities’ (DES 2017a, p.21). However, this study argues that further refinement and clarity is needed on how much time should be used for such activities, who can avail of this time and what exactly the time can be used for, as at the moment, this policy directive is considered a ‘grey area’ by some teachers. This holds implications for the Context of Policy Text Production as, it could be suggested that discrete guidance on the use of such time is a necessary addition to future policy texts.

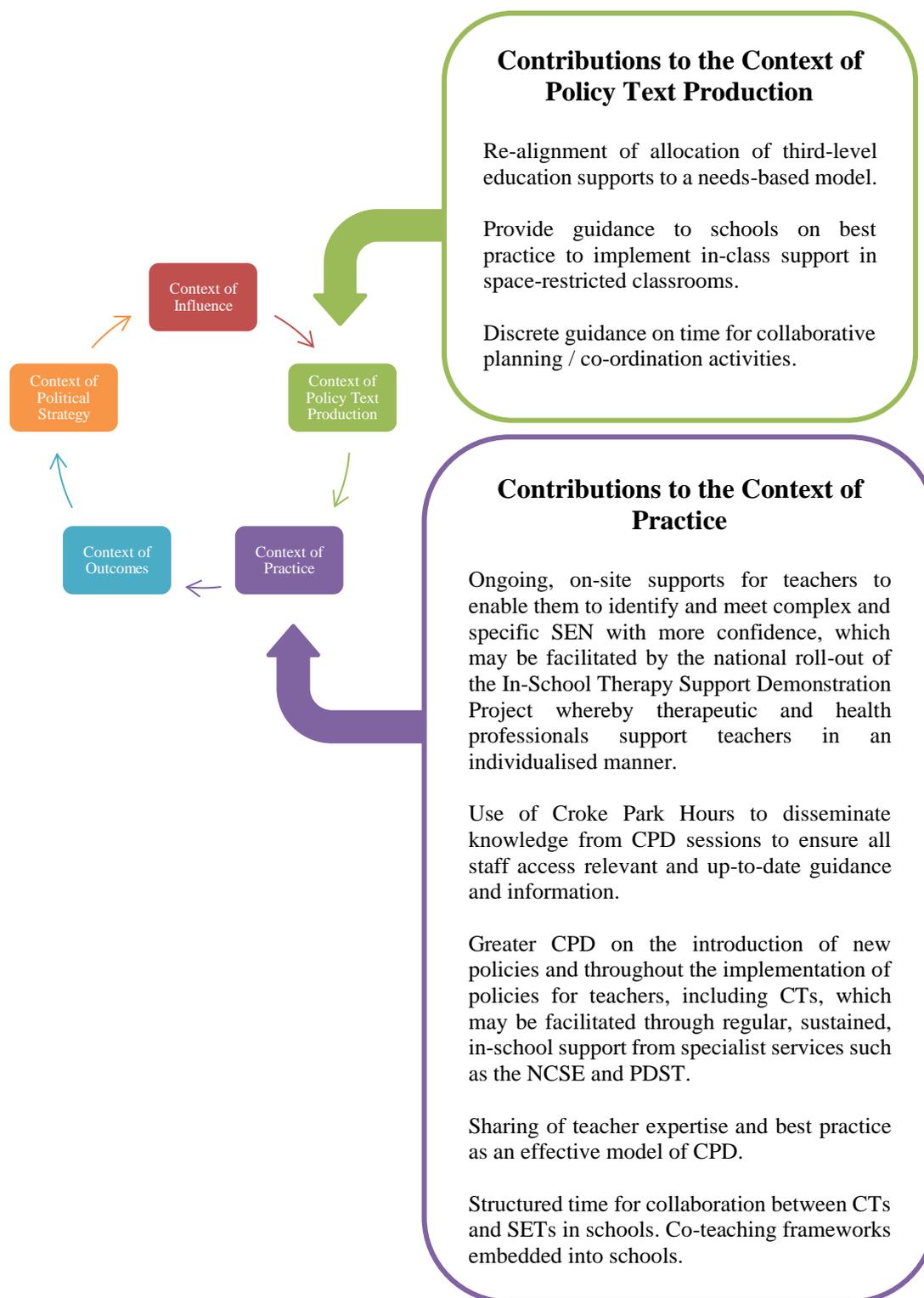
To summarise, increased collaboration and greater use of in-class supports to meet students’ needs are evident in schools under the SETAM (DES 2017a). The agency and flexibility offered to schools to manage and deploy their allocated SET resources under the SETAM has led to a more collaborative approach to SEN provision, with teachers engaging in a variety of co-teaching approaches (Friend and Bursuck 2012; Friend 2012), as opposed to primarily supporting students with SEN through one-to-one teaching, which reflects the aims set out in current inclusive policy (DES 2017a). While it can be concluded that many benefits are associated with such co-teaching practices (Scruggs *et al.* 2007; Villa *et al.* 2013; Fluijt *et al.* 2016; Chitiyo 2017; Beninghof 2020), withdrawal of students in small groups or for individualised, intensive teaching continues to hold merit (Murphy 2011) and may, indeed, continue to remain an appropriate model of

support for some students (NCSE 2019). Furthermore, benefits and challenges of in-class support, according to teachers on the ground, were outlined in this study, to reveal the implementation of inclusive practices under the SETAM within Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). Such findings prompted a number of recommendations and implications for future policy and practice, as illustrated in Figure 7.1 below, conveying this study's contribution to theory and scholarly significance to the field.

## **7.5 Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice**

This study provides an evidence base, rooted in the voices of teachers, of how current inclusive education policy is 'being done' in our primary schools. It offers a window into unique Contexts of Practice, to construct 'low-level theory' (Creswell 2013, p.290) and to uncover particularisations, rather than generalisations (Neilsen 2009), which may be useful in understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Stake 1995; Mac Naughton *et al.* 2010). Therefore, by unveiling the views of those at the very heart of policy implementation in schools, findings may be applicable to specific and immediate situations (policy contexts) to further inform policymaking within the crucial area of inclusion in Ireland. The importance of teacher voice in policy formation to explicitly link the micro and macro levels of policy (Ball 1994; Lall 2012) was conveyed in Chapter Five, Section 5.5. Egan's (2013, p.240) study contended that there was an 'absence of feedback mechanisms, whereby practitioners can provide data or information on the progress and impacts of particular policies'. Survey findings from phase one of this study reiterate this point, which showed that teachers are still seeking greater involvement in the consultation process prior to the development of new policies, or changes to existing policies, in schools, to ensure that the views of those delivering the services on the ground (i.e., teachers working in the Context of Practice) are reflected in such policies. The need for continuous engagement and consultation between all key stakeholders to inform policy decisions was recently highlighted by the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan, who vowed to 'consult with those who are closest to' important issues regarding special and inclusive education, to 'ensure that we are concentrating our efforts on the key issues that will make the most difference and have an impact on the education and the lives of our children with special educational needs' (DES 2020a). In accordance with Ball's (1994) continuous policy cycle, a feedback loop is expected, as one policy context informs the next (Egan 2013).

Throughout this chapter, conclusions and recommendations from this study were drawn, which, it could be argued, provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of the SETAM as a funding model within the Context of Outcomes and Context of Political Strategy which may contribute to future Contexts of Influence (Figure 6.3) and thus, may inform and shape future Contexts of Policy Text Production and Contexts of Practice (Figure 7.1). The figure below provides a synopsis of the main recommendations described in earlier sections of this chapter, based on empirical data presented in Chapters Five and Six, which may contribute to the evolving policy cycle (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994), highlighting this study's contribution to theory, policy and practice.



**Figure 7. 1: Contribution to the Evolving Policy Cycle (b)**

This study argues for a view of policy that is cyclical and constantly evolving, taking the perspectives and experiences of those at the coalface of policy into consideration so that each context informs the next (Ball 1994). This study acknowledges that it is critical to

listen to the voices of teachers implementing this policy on the ground and to analyse their inner perceptions of how it impacts students in the Context of Outcomes, in order to inform future policy and practice. In doing so, teachers, as the key stakeholders of policy implementation in schools, become vital actors in the making and shaping of policy (Watson and Michael 2016), which is in line with Ball's theoretical framework (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Findings from this study, which unveiled aspects of the SETAM in need of refinement or further development were illustrated in Figure 6.3, as potential contributors to the Context of Influence. Figure 7.1 above, further elaborates on such findings, proposing recommendations and possible actions for the Context of Policy Text Production and the Context of Practice. It could be suggested that such actions may enhance the successful implementation of the SETAM and, therefore, result in a more effective inclusive education landscape in Irish primary schools.

Although there is much national and international discourse surrounding inclusive policies, literature evaluating the SETAM (DES 2017a) and its impact in schools is limited, with no data published on the workings of this model in the Context of Practice, to date (Shevlin and Banks 2021). Available data related to the proposal and development of the SETAM are primarily found in work commissioned by the NCSE and DoE prior to the national roll-out of the SETAM in schools (NCSE 2013; Rix *et al.* 2013; NCSE 2014b; DES 2016b). While such research was widely cited in this thesis, the current study's relevance is clear, to provide a timely response to the need for research nationally. Therefore, empirical data on the current SETAM to support inclusion in schools, as an under-studied, yet critically important aspect of our education system is offered. Such data holds significance as it may influence future policy action in Ireland and beyond, which is important, as policy directs special education practice and impacts on provision in schools, which ultimately affects the experiences and outcomes for students and teachers (Shevlin *et al.* 2013b). This is particularly relevant, considering the changing landscape of inclusion in Ireland at present, with provision for students with SEN currently under review (NCSE 2019). Ireland has recently been described as being at a crossroads of inclusive education (Howe and Griffin 2020; Shevlin and Banks 2021), with debates surrounding 'whether special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex special educational needs or whether greater inclusion in mainstream classes offers a better way forward' (NCSE 2019, p.4). This study argues that it is essential to examine what is

currently happening on the ground, by unveiling the perspectives and experiences of teachers, to evaluate the effectiveness of the current funding model prior to considering a ‘full inclusion’ approach, for the future of special education provision in Ireland. The findings of this small but in-depth study may, therefore, be useful in shedding light on the current model in place to facilitate inclusion and provide support to students with SEN in Irish primary schools in order to determine the best path forward for inclusive support and to inform future decisions with regards to special and inclusive policy and provision. Taking into account the limitations of the current study, suggestions for further research can be made, which are presented in the following section.

### **7.5.1 Implications for Further Research**

This study examined current special education policy (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools to allocate special education teaching resources and to support inclusion in practice. Explored through the lens of teachers, implementing the SETAM within the Context of Practice (Ball 1994), this study shed light on how students’ needs are identified under this model, how SET resources are allocated in schools to effectively meet students’ needs under this model and how students’ outcomes are monitored and recorded under this model. While interesting and valuable data emerged, which aims to contribute to theory, policy and practice, as argued in the previous section, limitations of this study are also acknowledged. Therefore, findings of this study present opportunities for further enquiry and future research.

Given the small-scale nature and short time frame of the current study, longitudinal research to examine the sustained implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) in Irish primary schools may be beneficial. This may facilitate a coherent evaluation of the SETAM as it evolves, taking into consideration the scheduled re-profiling of schools’ allocations after each two/three-year period, and exploring how changes to schools’ allocations over time influence teachers’ perspectives of the model and their implementation of it. Such studies may also need to take into greater account the current proposal of a ‘full inclusion’ approach to special education provision in Ireland (NCSE 2019). Data on teachers’ and parents’ perspectives of the ‘major overhaul of current provision’ (Shevlin and Banks 2021, p.10) that would need to take place in order for a total inclusion model to come to fruition, may hold significant implications for policy reform in the coming years.

This study unearthed interesting data regarding schools' use of the Student Support File (DES 2007a; DES 2017b) to plan for students with SEN and monitor and record their needs, progress and outcomes under the SETAM (DES 2017a). As discussed in Section 6.3.2, in some schools, teachers perceived a lack of Classroom Support Plans being drawn up at Stage One of the CoS, which acted as a barrier to the successful implementation of the SETAM in schools. Due to time constraints, practical challenges regarding school closures in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the overall scope of the study, discourse analysis of schools' plans was not conducted for the current research. Therefore, it may be suggested that analysis of school plans, at each of the three Stages of the CoS (i.e., Classroom Support Plans, School Support Plans and School Support Plus Plans), may be justified within future research, to highlight the most effective use of such plans within Contexts of Practice (Ball 1994). This may inform 'best practice' in terms of the planning and paperwork required under the SETAM.

Finally, an examination of the voice of the student and the voice of the parent was outside the remit of the current study. Therefore, a future study consisting of a larger sample, including these valuable stakeholders, may provide a more comprehensive collection of experiences and enable the researcher to present various perspectives of the workings of the SETAM in schools. Such research may further enhance our understanding of the impact of this special education policy on students' outcomes and thus, may provide important input into ongoing policy formation, as according to Hodkinson (2010, p.61), 'if educational policy is to achieve an inclusive consciousness, it must ensure that the views of children, their families and educational professionals are listened to'. The following concluding section brings this thesis to a close.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This study examined the SETAM, as a revised, needs-based system for allocating special educational support teaching needs in schools. A pragmatic paradigm, underpinned by constructivism, was adopted to gain an insight into, and better understand, the phenomenon of this special education policy to support inclusion in schools from the perspective of those experiencing it (Costantino 2008). Therefore, a mixed-methods research design, involving a national, online survey and semi-structured interviews, was deemed best fit to achieve the desired purpose of this study (Mertens 2015). By exploring the perspectives and experiences of principals, SEN coordinators,

class teachers and special education teachers, this study unveiled how these key stakeholders, in the implementation of government policy in schools, have interpreted and implemented the SETAM in the Context of Practice (Bowe *et al.* 1992; Ball 1994). Considering the lack of published data on the workings of this model in practice, this study provides a timely response to the need for research nationally. This study argues that evaluating current practice on a micro level is vital to inform those at the macro level of policymaking about what is happening on the ground. This study identified areas of success within the SETAM and potential areas for improvement, according to those at the coalface of policy implementation in schools. Thus, the findings of this study represent the authentic voice of the teacher, which this study contends is essential in creating a well-informed, evolving policy cycle (Ball 1994) and may provide an important evidence base to underpin and inform the development of new and improved policies and approaches for the inclusion and education of students with SEN in Irish primary schools.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1

#### Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a)

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Rannog Oideachais Speisialta  
Cor na Madadh  
Átha Luain  
Contae na hIarmhí



Department of Education and Skills  
Special Education Section  
Cornamaddy  
Athlone  
Co. Westmeath

**Circular No 0013/2017**

#### **Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation**

##### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of the revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream primary schools from the 2017/18 school year.

This revised allocation process will replace the General Allocation Model and English as Additional Language Support (GAM/EAL) scheme, whereby a general allocation of resources had previously been allocated to primary schools annually.

It will also replace the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils who had been assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities, in accordance with DES Circular 02/2005.

**The new Special Education Teaching allocation will provide a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school's educational profile.**

This single allocation is being made to allow schools to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who require such support in their schools.

Schools will deploy resources based on each pupil's individual learning needs.

The manner in which the profiled allocations have been developed for each school is set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this Circular.

The new allocation model will ensure that schools will have greater certainty as to the resources that will be available to them to provide additional teaching to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, on an ongoing basis. This will allow schools to better plan and timetable for this provision. The earlier allocation process will also allow schools to plan in advance of the school year.

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability.

In order to support schools in how they should identify and provide for the learning needs of pupils, this Circular is being accompanied by *Guidelines for Schools* on the organisation, deployment and use of special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs.

The *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* has been developed by the National Educational Psychological Services, the Inspectorate and Special Education Section.

## **2. Support for the Introduction of the New Allocation Model**

Significant additional resources are being made available to provide extra Special Education Teaching posts for allocation to schools from September 2017, in order to support the introduction of this model.

These additional resources will assist schools to transition from the existing allocation system that has been in place in recent years, to the new profiled allocation model, with minimal disruption.

**The additional provision which is being made to support the new model will ensure that no school will receive an allocation of special education teaching resources, arising from the introduction of the new allocation model, which is less than the combined allocation the school received under their GAM/EAL and NCSE allocations for the 2016/17 school year.**

These resources will ensure that all schools can continue to meet the special educational and learning support needs of all children in their school.

**Schools which are due to receive increased allocations from September 2017, under the revised model, which is based on their school profiles, will receive additional allocations from September 2017 and retain these allocations until the next re profiling takes place.**

**Schools which would have nominally been due to receive reduced allocations from September 2017, under the revised allocation process, based on their school profiles, will maintain their existing 2016/17 school year allocations and retain these allocations for the course of the model, until the next profiling takes place.**

**The additional resources being provided to support this model means that no school will lose special educational teaching resources, on the introduction of this model, while extra resources will be placed in schools where the profile indicates that needs are greatest.**

**Any future adjustments to the allocations for schools will take place on a graduated basis, which will take account of changes to school enrolments, and the pupil population, including the number of pupils in the complex needs category, since the initial allocations were developed.**

### **3. Revision of Profiles**

In recommending the introduction of a new model for allocating additional teaching supports to schools the NCSE Working Group Report (2014) recommended that the additional teaching supports would be left in place initially for a two year period.

The allocations which are being made will therefore initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations will be due to be made to schools from September 2019.

### **4. Background**

The current system for allocating additional teaching resources to schools, based on valid applications for additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs, in mainstream primary schools, was originally implemented in 1999 (*Circular 08/99*).

This system allocated varying levels of resource teaching hours to schools to support individual pupils with assessed special educational needs. The scheme was reviewed and revised in 2002 and 2003 through *Circulars 08/02* and *24/03*. Under the terms of these circulars, pupils with assessed learning disabilities in ordinary classes in mainstream primary schools were allocated resource teaching support in accordance with the level of support applicable for that category of disability.

*Special Education Circular 02/05* introduced a General Allocation Model for all mainstream primary schools. This provided a generalised system of allocation of supports, for pupils with learning support needs, and for pupils with certain categories of high incidence special educational needs, as defined by *Circular 02/05*. Schools who had enrolled pupils with Low Incidence special educational needs (as defined by *Circular 02/05*), continued to receive such allocations from the NCSE in addition to their GAM allocations.

From the 2012/13 school year onwards, the General Allocation Model was expanded to also include a general provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support as set out in DES Circular 007/2012. Schools with high concentrations of pupils requiring EAL support also received additional teaching allocations to make provision for such concentrated needs and this provision will remain in place. General Allocation Model/EAL allocations were, since the 2012/13 school year, subsequently updated annually for schools each year as part of the staffing arrangements for primary schools for each school year.

The new allocation model will provide allocations based on the profiled needs of each school, which will replace the existing system of a GAM/EAL allocation for schools along with NCSE allocated Low Incidence allocations, where relevant.

This Circular therefore replaces DES Circulars SP Ed 02/05, 08/99, 24/03, and 08/02. It also replaces Circulars 30/2011 which made further adjustments to the scheme and DES Circular 07/2012, which introduced revised arrangements of the General Allocation Model as part of the Primary School Staffing arrangements for the 2012/13 school year, and subsequent annual Primary School Staffing Arrangement Circulars thereafter, the most recent of which was 07/ 2016.

## 5. National Council for Special Education Policy Advice

The National Council for Special Education has a statutory function, under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, to provide the Minister for Education and Skills with policy advice in relation to the education of children and others with disabilities or special educational needs.

The NCSE provided policy advice in 2013 entitled ‘Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Schools’ [http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Supporting\\_14\\_05\\_13\\_web.pdf](http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Supporting_14_05_13_web.pdf) This policy advice concluded that elements of the existing model for allocating Special Needs resource teaching supports were potentially inequitable.

In particular, the NCSE reported that:

- The existing allocation system was inequitable, as some children could experience delays in accessing support because of delays in accessing assessments which are required for the allocation of Resource Teaching hours.
- The General Allocation Model, which is used to allocate Learning Support teachers, is inequitable as it takes little account of the differing needs of different schools, as allocations are made on the basis of the number of mainstream teachers in each school.
- There is a real risk that children are being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for medical reasons.
- There is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need. The current system allocates the same level of support for pupils within certain categories of special educational needs even though one pupil may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability.

Following the publication of this policy advice, the NCSE established a Working Group to develop proposals for a new model based on the policy advice. In 2014, the Working Group published its Report: *Delivery for Students with Special; Educational Needs: A Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs (2014)* [http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Allocating\\_resources\\_1\\_5\\_14\\_Web\\_accessible\\_version\\_FINAL.pdf](http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Allocating_resources_1_5_14_Web_accessible_version_FINAL.pdf)

This report recommended that the current Special Needs Teacher allocation model should be replaced by a new model to allocate supports on the basis of the profiled educational needs of schools.

It proposed that the allocation of additional teaching supports to schools be, in future, based on a school's educational profile, comprised of two components:

- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention, and
- A school educational profile component, which takes into account:
  - The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.
  - The learning support needs of pupils as evidenced by standardised test results.
  - The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.

The combination of a baseline allocation based on school enrolments and a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need, whether future or predicted, and pupil mixture in each school.

The allocations, which are being provided for schools from September 2017, are based on the profiled allocations for each school, which are calculated as follows:

#### **6. Baseline component provided to every mainstream primary school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties, and early intervention**

The Working Group recommended that a baseline allocation of teaching resources to all mainstream schools, allocated in line with overall enrolment numbers, should be a core component of the new model.

This baseline allocation will ensure that all schools have a minimum allocation of teaching resources to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention. The baseline component will support schools in having whole school policies and practices in place to minimise the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. The baseline is provided in addition to the resources calculated under the other elements used in establishing the school's educational profile.

The baseline allocation will also ensure that schools can continue to enrol and support pupils with additional needs over the course of time that the profile remains in place and pending any review of the schools profile.

**The Baseline allocation of each school profile is made up of 20% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts in the system allocated to schools for the 2016/17 school year, redistributed on an equal basis, proportionately, between all schools, based on each school's enrolment numbers for the 2015/16 school year, which is the most complete recent enrolment data available.**

It should be noted that the baseline allocation under the new model cannot be compared to the general allocation received under the old system. This is an entirely new and different model, and not simply an adjustment of the old model. For a complete overview of their additional teaching allocation under the new model, schools must consider their baseline allocation, alongside the allocation they receive under the educational profile component, which gives them their total allocation.

**The baseline also does not represent 20% of your individual school's allocation from last year, but 20% of the total Learning Support and Resource Teaching allocations, distributed equally between schools, according to school enrolment numbers.**

## **7. School Educational Profile.**

### **7.1 The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.**

For the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE 'Low Incidence' allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new model for each school.

These allocations include the additional allocations for Resource Teaching support made to schools in 2015 and 2016 to support pupils with Down syndrome who were in the mild general learning difficulty range and not previously included in the Low Incidence allocations.

**This means that on the introduction of the new allocation model and until allocations are reviewed, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, which is less than**

**the allocation they had received to support pupils with Low Incidence special educational needs during the 2016/17 school year.**

**This also means that no allocation for pupils made by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.**

**Whereas schools will have greater discretion as to how they can distribute resources under the new model, based on the individual needs of pupils, no reduction in allocations have been made to schools in respect of any pupils who were previously in receipt of a Low Incidence special needs allocation in that school.**

A model for the identification of pupils with complex needs in future is being devised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)

This model will take account of the decision making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams.

For the purposes of the introduction of the new allocation model from September 2017, the existing 2016/17 school year NCSE 'Low Incidence' allocations are being maintained to provide for the complex needs component of schools profiles.

For the next re-profiling of the model, the Complex Needs category will be the existing low incidence allocations for schools, less any leavers included in this category, plus additional allocations for any new complex needs category pupils, over the period of time since the first school profiles were developed, to the point of the next re-profiling of the model. In this context, the requirement for schools to advise school leavers to the NCSE will remain a feature of the revised arrangements.

## **7.2 Standardised Test Results**

The NCSE working group report considered that standardised test data provides a broad and objective basis to establish differences between schools in levels of relative overall pupils educational achievement.

The report recommended that standardised test results should be used in building the educational profile of schools, as they link directly to the educational achievement of pupils in schools.

The use of standardised test scores will ensure that the school's educational profile includes pupils with low achievement in literacy and numeracy including those pupils whose special educational needs affect their learning achievement levels.

**The use of standardised test data means that the school profile considers not just the number of pupils in the school, but also the learning needs of the pupils in that school, as evidenced by attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.**

The Working Group recommended that for the purposes of devising a school's educational profile, standardised test result data for Mathematics and for English, and/or Irish, should be used to represent pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy.

In 2014 and 2015 all primary school pupils in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class completed tests in English and Maths.<sup>1</sup>

Schools have been profiled according to test results for pupils achieving at or below STen 4 in national standardised tests in English and Maths.

In developing the school's educational profile, the highest weighting has been assigned for the percentage of pupils who register a STen score of 1, or who were exempted from the test, with graduated weightings then being given for the percentage of pupils who register a STen score of 2, 3, and 4.

**The number of pupils in the lower standardised test grades indicates the extent of learning needs in the school. The allocation which is being made to the school recognises this.**

The learning needs which are indicated by lower standardised test score may arise for a number of reasons. For example a school may have large numbers of pupils who have special educational needs, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, or pupils who do not have English as a first language.

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<sup>1</sup> Junior or Infant schools who do not have 2<sup>nd</sup> class pupils have therefore not completed 2<sup>nd</sup> class standardised tests. For such Junior or Infant schools, the 2<sup>nd</sup> class standardised test scores from pupils in their associated or feeder school have been used to apply a standardised test value for these schools.

The previous generalised allocation model, based primarily on school size, did not take account of the learning needs of pupils, or of the profile of pupils in the school. It was for this reason that the NCSE recommended that a profiled allocation be made for schools, which included consideration of standardised test scores.

The allocations which are being made to schools for the standardised test score component therefore reflects the actual level of learning needs in each school.

In calculating this element of schools' educational profile, in order to ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performance in the short term, an aggregate of primary school standardised test results over 2013/14 and 2014/15 has been used for the first phase of the introduction of the new allocation model.

For future re-profiling of the model, updated data will be used to create an aggregate of the school's learning support needs, which will ensure that an accurate picture of a school's profile over a period of time is developed and that schools are also not penalised for improvements or fluctuations in schools performance over a short time.

In order to further ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performance generally, no resources provided to schools under the current model will be removed from the school on the introduction of the new model.

The use of standardised test data means that the school profile considers the learning needs pupils are performing at a level represented in the bottom 16% of the pupil population, as evidenced by national attainment data.

In this context, schools with strong performance on standardised tests should have no concerns on the impact of this on their profiles. In calculating values for this component, no consideration is given to scores above Standard Ten scores 1 to 4. Effectively, values are only accorded to the 16% of pupils who would ordinarily fall within, or are on the margins of, the learning support needs category.

### **Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools**

In many Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, Irish may be the first language of pupils attending the school. Some such schools also provide additional teaching support for pupil literacy through Irish.

Accordingly, for Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, the standardised test scores in both Irish and English have been used to calculate the element of the school profile relevant to pupil attainment in literacy.

In Irish language schools the support provided for pupils by schools to assist with pupils literacy development may be conducted in Irish or English, or a combination of both, as considered necessary by the school.

### **7.3 Social Context: Disadvantage**

The NCSE Working Group noted that a school's social context can contribute strongly to the level of learning needs that pupils have in a school.

The Working Group noted that drawing on 'Growing Up in Ireland' data, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) analysed how the prevalence of special educational needs varies across social class and income groups. They found that the percentage of pupils reported by teachers to have special educational needs was significantly greater for those in schools serving disadvantaged areas.

On the basis of available research, the Working Group concluded that the use of a school's social context is valid in the development of a school's educational profile, as the socioeconomic status of pupils is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs.

The profiled allocation for schools therefore contains an allocation to take account of social context. This has been calculated by conducting a social context survey of primary schools in 2014. Future reviews will take account of updated data and will be guided by the best available information sources at the time of the review.

Though recognising that all schools would not be able to have specific detail regarding all of the questions asked in relation to their pupil populations, schools were asked to provide their best possible estimates in relation to the questions in the survey, in order to ensure that as accurate as possible a social context allocation component of any revised allocation model could be developed for each school.

The data which schools were requested to return as part of the survey was non-personal, anonymised data. Schools were not asked to return data in relation to the social circumstances of individual pupils.

#### **7.4 Social Context: Gender**

The Working Group report noted that international evidence clearly shows that there is a higher incidence of special educational needs among boys. It states that ‘gender is an important factor in determining the educational profile of a school for the purpose of allocating additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs’.

Gender had previously been taken account of as a feature of the General Allocation Model. Under the GAM, differing allocation ratios applied for boys, girls, mixed, and disadvantaged schools as set out in DES Circular 02/05.

The new allocation model takes account of gender differentials by giving a small weighting for gender based on the number of boys attending each school. The weighting for each school will therefore take account of the gender profile i.e. number of boys attending.

#### **7.5 English Additional Language Support (EAL)**

The General Allocation Model for primary schools, since 2012/13, has contained an element of provision for all schools to be able to provide additional teaching support for literacy issues arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.

The new allocation model retains and reflects this provision and provides that all schools will have a basic allocation to assist pupils who have learning and literacy difficulties, including those arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.

The standardised test scores on which part of the profile is based will reflect where pupils have literacy problems. The social context survey for primary schools also took some account of EAL needs in schools.

The profiled allocation for schools therefore takes account of EAL needs in schools.

## **7.6 Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Pupils that require Language Support (EAL)**

Where schools can demonstrate that they have high concentrations of pupils requiring EAL they can continue to apply for **Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Pupils that require Language Support (EAL)** in accordance with the procedures set out in the primary school staffing schedule for the 2017/18 school year.

## **8. Total Profiled Allocation**

The total profiled allocation which is being made to each school is designed to ensure that all schools have a set level of special education teaching support in order to provide additional teaching support for all pupils in their school, including those who may enrol in future, who have identified needs.

Pupils under the new allocation model will be identified by schools for additional teaching support in accordance with the Continuum of Support Guidelines, and the Guidelines which accompany this Circular. Teachers and School Principals will use their professional judgement in applying the principles and practices set out in the Continuum of Support Guidelines: [https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps\\_special\\_needs\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf)

The inclusion of a baseline allocation as part of the overall profiled allocation is also designed to ensure that schools can continue to enrol pupils who have additional learning needs.

**Details of how the total profile allocation is applied for the total primary school sector is detailed in Appendix 1.**

## **9. Enrolment of Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

The significant additional resources which have been provided to assist the introduction of this new model have ensured that all schools, whose school profiles indicated significant additional needs for September 2017, will receive additional allocations.

Schools, who would have been due to receive reduced allocations, based on their school profiles, have had these losses protected to ensure that they receive allocations equivalent to their 2016/17 special educational needs allocations. These additional allocations are being provided on the basis that no child will be refused enrolment on the grounds that they do not have sufficient teaching resources to meet that child's needs.

**In circumstances where schools refuse to enrol children, on the basis of their special educational teaching needs, and notwithstanding any other legislative provisions currently in place, or forthcoming, the Department of Education and Skills reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teaching Support Allocations made to schools who do not enrol such pupils.**

#### **10. Medical and Professional Assessments**

Medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a child's needs, the nature of difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions. Such assessment, or diagnosis of a particular condition will no longer be necessary for pupils to access educational teaching resources in schools, nor will there be a requirement for schools to submit assessments annually in order to apply for additional teaching resources.

**This will create a very significant administrative saving for schools who will no longer have to source assessments or make applications annually to the NCSE in order to ensure the provision of additional teaching supports in their school.**

**It will end delays in allocations. Pupils will no longer experience delays in receiving reports which could, in the past, deny a child access to necessary learning supports.**

Schools will maintain their full school profiles, pending review of the profiles, regardless of whether some pupils with assessments of special educational needs either leave or enter the school over the period for which the profiled allocation remains in place.

**It is expected that the number of leavers in each school, who had previously been in receipt of learning support or resource teaching support, will be broadly balanced by any new entrants that have enrolled over the same period.**

**School profiles will remain constant over this period recognising normal pupil movement over the life of the model.**

**Profiles will not be updated over the course of the initial two years of the model to take account of new enrolments or the newly diagnosed needs of pupils attending the school, other than as noted in Section 11 in relation to appeals.**

**Any differentials in the school profile will be accounted for at the next review of school profiles.**

The school may allocate additional teaching support to pupils where it has identified learning needs using school based assessment, the NEPS Continuum of Support and the Guidelines provided to schools. Schools can also draw on professional reports where available.

Under the new model, a child should receive additional teaching support based on their identified learning needs, rather than primarily on diagnosis of disability

## **11. Appeal Process**

The NCSE will be notifying schools of the allocations in March 2017 by letter and website publication. Details of an appeal process will be set out as part of this notification.

## **12. Identification of Pupils for Support**

The Guidelines which accompany this circular set out the manner in which schools should identify pupils for additional teaching support in schools.

In summary, in identifying pupils for support, schools should take into account the following:

- Standardised tests can be used to screen and identify pupils' performance in reading and mathematics. Those pupils performing below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile should be prioritised for support in literacy and numeracy.

- Pupils who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching from a resource or learning support teacher and who continue to experience significant learning difficulties.
- Pupils who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2010). This will be evidenced through school-based assessment of attainment, and behavioural, social and emotional functioning and ongoing monitoring of learning outcomes. Schools should also take into account needs set out in professional reports, where available.
- Pupils with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, or co-ordination or attention control difficulties. Pupils who have specific learning disabilities.
- Pupils with significant Special Educational Needs. For example, pupils with significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs. These pupils need additional teaching support because they require highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are tailored to their needs.
- Schools should also carefully consider the needs of other pupils who may present with a range of learning whose interaction may present a significant barrier to the pupils' learning and ability to access the curriculum.
- Pupils who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those pupils who need additional English Additional language Support.

**The intensity of additional support that is provided for pupils with low achievement and pupils with special educational needs should be based on their needs and should be provided differentially through the continuum of support process.**

### **13. The Role of the Classroom Teacher**

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of pupils in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all pupils in his/her

class, including any pupil with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each pupil is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all pupils feel equal and valued.

In line with Continuum of Support Guidelines, the class teacher may gather information through formal and informal means, with a view to informing interventions. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to pupils with additional needs including differentiating the curriculum as appropriate. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school's NEPS psychologist and the local Special Educational Needs Organiser.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for a pupil within the class as a result of concerns about a pupil's progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers and the development of a programme of differentiated instruction for that pupil.

#### **14. Additional Teaching Support**

Many children require additional teaching support in schools. In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Educational Needs Teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs.

The classroom teacher, in consultation with the Special Education Teacher as required, will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit the needs of individual pupils. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the child's needs, and deciding which additional teaching supports are required. Parents should normally be consulted as part of this process.

## **15. Type of Teaching provided**

Additional Teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways. The special education teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw pupils in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

**The range of teaching supports should include team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs.**

Individualised learning needs can be addressed in a variety of ways and should not be solely equated with withdrawal from class for one-to-one or group tuition. Configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom. As necessary, this can be combined with withdrawal for intensive teaching of specific skills, based on level of need.

The provision of support for small groups of pupils, or use of in class support teaching for a number of pupils, as opposed to primarily one to one teaching, also means that qualifying pupils will often be able to receive more support than they otherwise would have done.

## **16. Single Allocation**

**The new Special Educational Post is a combined post which allows schools to provide for all of their special education teaching needs from within this single allocation.**

The distinction between what were previously Learning Support Posts, or Learning Support/Resource Teaching/EAL posts under GAM, and NCSE allocated Resource Teaching Posts will no longer apply from September 2017.

**Schools will now have a combined, single special educational needs teaching allocation.**

**This will reduce the amount of inter school post sharing, or clustering. It will further reduce the administrative burden on schools and the amount of travelling time between schools.**

As such, the stipulation contained in DES Circular 07/2012 (and subsequent annual staffing arrangement Circulars) that schools are not permitted to combine GAM/EAL and NCSE approved resource hours together into full-time posts, **will no longer apply.**

### **17. Rounding**

For schools who are receiving an additional allocation under the new allocation process, allocations are rounded to units of 2.5 hours, in order to simplify allocations for schools.

Schools who are not receiving additional allocations will maintain their existing 2016/17 allocations.

### **18. Status of Posts**

All full-time Special Education Teaching (S.E.T.) posts, both full-time in one school and base posts for

S.E.T. clusters are permanent posts.

Part-time hours remaining in a school that are not clustered can only be filled in a temporary capacity.

### **19. Registration Requirements for Special Education Teaching Posts**

As set out in Section 16 above, under the New Allocation Model, there will no longer be a distinction between Learning Support and Resourcing Teaching Posts. These provisions are being merged into a single Special Education Teacher post.

In recognition that under the previous allocation model differing qualification criteria existed, for the introduction of the new allocation model, and to ensure continuity of provision, fully registered teachers or teachers previously probated in a restricted setting may be appointed to the post of Special Education Teachers.

Schools should make all effort to ensure that where possible fully registered teachers or teachers previously probated in a restricted setting are appointed. Such teachers may hold Teaching

Council registration under Route 1 Primary (formerly Regulation 2 Primary) or Route 4 Other (formerly Regulation 3 Montessori & Other Categories).

It is important to ensure that pupils with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise, and who can provide continuity of support. Therefore, if it is not possible to fill the post of Special Education Teacher with a fully registered teacher, or a teacher previously probated in a restricted setting, teachers with outstanding conditions, may be appointed where they are deemed to be the most appropriately qualified. In these circumstances, the acquired professional development and expertise of teachers, including where teachers have attained recognised qualifications in special education, should be taken into account.

## **20. Filling of Posts**

Special Education Teaching posts should be filled in accordance with the published staffing and redeployment arrangements which will be set out in the Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2017/18 school year.

## **21. Deployment of Teachers within the School**

In addition to the qualification requirements noted in Section 19 above, the acquired professional development and expertise of teachers, including where teachers have attained recognised qualifications in special education, should be taken into account by the principal when allocating teaching responsibilities, in order to ensure that pupils with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise, and who can provide continuity of support.

## **22. Utilisation of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs**

The effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs requires a whole-school approach which enables schools to meet the diverse needs of their pupil population in an efficient and timely manner.

Resources to support pupils should be deployed in accordance with the Guidelines being provided to accompany this Circular.

**Schools should ensure that the additional Special Educational Needs Teaching supports are used in their entirety to support pupils identified with special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy needs such as English Additional Language Support.**

**The additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching, or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes, or to provide additional subjects for pupils who do not have special educational needs.**

**In cases where there is misuse of Special Educational Needs Teaching resources and where these resources are being used for purposes other than intended, as set out in this Circular, the Department reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teaching Supports which have been made to those schools.**

### **23. Coordination Activities**

The allocation includes provision for the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs teaching hours provided to schools, for children. The effective use of resources will be dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensures continuity and avoids undue fragmentation of provision.

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of pupils requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers providing this support. Co-ordination time, should however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the most teaching time that can be provided for pupils can be given to those pupils.

### **24. Educational Planning**

Educational planning is an essential element of a whole-school approach to meeting pupils' needs. Educational plans should be differentiated in line with a pupils' needs. A pupils support plan should include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs in line with the Continuum of Support process. Individualised support plans for pupils should be developed through a collaborative process involving relevant teachers, parents/guardians, the pupils themselves and outside professionals, as necessary. The individualised planning process should

include regular reviews of learning targets as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target setting, intervention and review.

Guidelines for schools on educational planning and monitoring of outcomes and the manner in which they should conduct educational planning, through the Student Support File, are contained in the Guidelines for primary Schools: Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools.

## **25. Supports for Schools**

Additional support and guidance will be available for school management and staff from Department agencies and services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the DES Inspectorate.

If you have any queries with regards to this Circular please contact [special\\_education@education.gov.ie](mailto:special_education@education.gov.ie)

This circular can be accessed on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

**Jim Mulkerrins**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Special Education Unit**

**7<sup>th</sup> March, 2017**

## APPENDIX 2

### Policy Table

Policy Context underpinning Inclusive Education as outlined in a Policy Table:

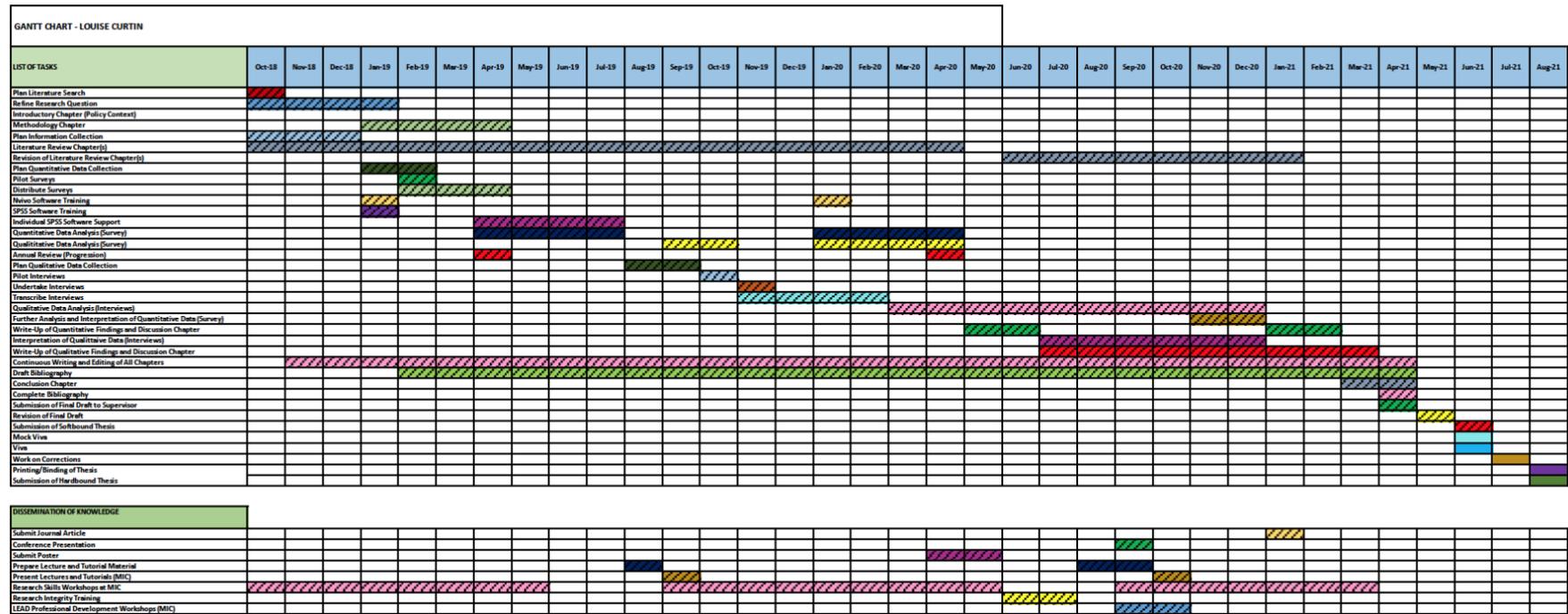
<b>Policy</b>	<b>Brief Summary of Policy</b>
Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (1975)	USA: Move from segregated provision to inclusive education – introduction of the least restrictive environment (LRE)
Warnock Report (1978)	UK: Ended the practice of identifying the child according to the category of disability – introduced the term ‘special educational need’
Madeline Will (1986) Keynote address at the Wingspread Conference on The Education of Special Needs Students: Research Findings and Implications for Policy and Practice	Emphasised the over-dependence on ‘pull-out services’ leading to stigmatisation of students with SEN. Spearheaded the Regular Education Initiative (REI)
Regular Education Initiative (REI) (1986)	Special education initiative which proposed an integrated system for all learners. Focused on sharing instruction and responsibility between general and special education teachers in the mainstream classroom
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990)	EAHCA revised and renamed IDEA in 1990 (later reauthorized in 2004 - IDEIA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act)
Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (1993)	Continuum of provision Seven principles
Salamanca Statement (1994)	Rights of all children to inclusion and outlines terms of access to education
The White Paper on Education Charting Our Education Future (1995)	Outlined policy directions and set out a framework for the development of education into the next century, to reflect a rapidly changing and evolving society. This Paper supported the Continuum of Provision recommended in the SERC Report and detailed it as one of the main objectives for future practice to cater for students with SEN in the primary sector
Education Act (1998)	Irish legislation – right to an appropriate education
Equal Status Act (2000)	Promotes equality of opportunity for all citizens. Prohibits discrimination.

	Students with SEN should be educated in mainstream if possible
Children Act (2001)	'It is desirable to allow the education etc. of children to proceed without interruption'
Circular Sp. Ed 24/03 (DES 2003)	Introduced the Staged Approach and Continuum of Provision
Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004)	Appropriate education, meaningful participation to the level of capacity, involvement of parents IEP – not fully implemented
National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (2005)	Inclusive Education Framework SENO: Coordinate and advise schools in the provision of Special Ed. Services
Circular 02/05 (DES 2005)	General Allocation Model – High Incidence needs / Low Incidence Needs 'Inclusive' schools (rationale for GAM)
Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a)	Introduced a 'single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school's educational profile' – replaced the GAM and NCSE RTH Model

# APPENDIX 3

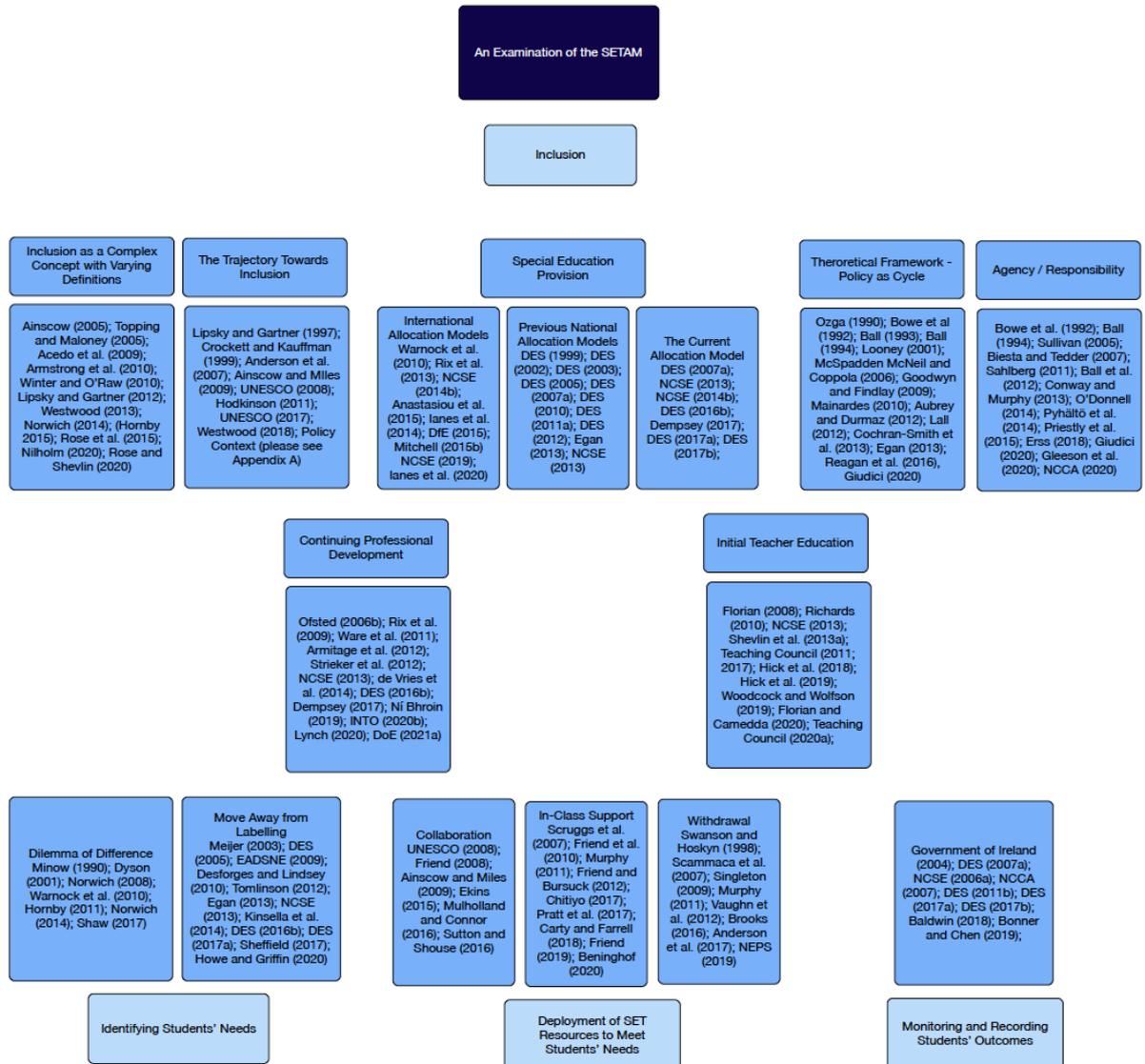
## Gantt Chart

Gantt Chart used for planning the research process and highlighting targets and milestones reached:



# APPENDIX 4

## Literature Map



## APPENDIX 5

### Feedback from Pilot Participants (Survey)

An email was sent to pilot participants following their engagement with the survey to obtain feedback which would identify any potential problems, prompt and direct any necessary re-drafting of questions and increase the likelihood of success for the subsequent national survey.

#### **Email sent to pilot participants:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for filling out my pilot survey on the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model. I would be grateful if you could answer any/all of the below questions in relation to my survey which will help me to edit/adjust questions before the national survey is sent out.

1. How long did this survey take you to complete?
2. Are there any topics/questions which have not been included in this survey that you think would be beneficial to my study?
3. Are there any topics/questions in this survey which you think are repetitive?
4. Are there any questions in this survey that you found confusing or difficult to answer?
5. Is there any other feedback you would like to give me?

Sincere thanks,  
Louise Curtin.

#### **Responses:**

*“Survey was fine not too taxing after a day at school...the only thing I would say is that you may need to give people notice of needing figures for amount of kids on Continuum of Support as not everyone would have access to this. I was fortunate to have it as I’m in SEN, but others may not.”*

Pilot Participant 1

*“The survey took about 20 mins. I found I had to ask principal / SETs for current numbers as I am no longer in SEN. I would not be fully aware of numbers from other class levels without going to ask class teachers.”*

Pilot Participant 2

*“The survey took me 25 minutes - while questions were appropriate, I didn’t know the answers to some of the questions - being a class teacher I didn’t know off-hand how many children had support teaching, etc. and I had to find out. I thought it was reasonable, simple to do and I liked the image at the end regarding circular nature of assessment - I even put that into our assessment policy!*

Pilot Participant 3

*“Great job, the survey is very comprehensive. I got caught on two questions no.17 and no.29, I wasn’t sure of the answers...and 39/39 were very similar.”*

Pilot Participant 4

## APPENDIX 6

### MIREC Approval



## Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

### MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NUMBER:

A18-052

#### 1. PROJECT TITLE

An Examination of the New Allocation Model of Support (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools.

#### 2. APPLICANT

Name:	Louise Curtin
Department / Centre / Other:	Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

#### 3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

#### 4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

**A18-052 - Louise Curtin - *An Examination of the New Allocation Model of Support (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools.***

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. However, I suggest the following: 3.4 and Appendix 1: The Principal should be asked to forward a copy of the Information Letter, as well as the questionnaire, to the relevant participants.

#### 5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Áine Lawlor
Signature:	
Date:	21 <sup>st</sup> January 2019

## APPENDIX 7

### National Survey

#### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools



#### Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. It is important that you read and understand the purpose of this research and what the study involves.

##### What is the project about?

This study aims to examine the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017). I am conducting a national survey which will include principals, special educational needs (SEN) coordinators (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), mainstream class teachers and special education teachers (SETs), in a large number of randomly selected schools, who have been working with and adjusting to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model.

##### Who is undertaking the project?

My name is Louise Curtin, and I am a Doctoral student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. This study will form part of my thesis.

##### What is involved for participants?

Participants will complete an online survey, which should take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. There will be a variety of questions including multiple-choice questions, rating to what extent you agree/disagree with statements and providing short written answers to questions. Please gather information about the number of students in your school who receive(d) School Support and/or School Support Plus this year under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (i.e., 2018/2019) and in previous years under the General Allocation Model (i.e. 2016/2017) before beginning the survey, as you will need to provide this information throughout.

##### Right to withdraw

Involvement in this study is voluntary. However, if you do agree to participate; your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

##### Confidentiality

All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. An ID number will be generated for each participant, and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

Data will be stored on a personal, encrypted laptop. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Record Retention Schedule, all data and

research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

### **Informed Consent Form**

By electronically ticking the boxes below, I confirm that: \*

*Check all that apply.*

- I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving my participation, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason and without consequence
- I am aware that all participant data will be kept confidential

### **Section 1: School Profile**

This section is aimed to gather general details about your school

- 1.** Please select the role which is most appropriate to your professional position in this academic year: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Principal (Administrative)
- Principal (Teaching)
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinator
- Mainstream Class Teacher
- Special Education Teacher (SET)

- 2.** Please select your gender: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Female
- Male
- Other:

- 3.** In what area of the school do you teach? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Administration
- Junior Level (JI - 2nd Class)
- Senior Level (3rd - 6th Class)
- Special Education

- 4.** Please select the number of years you have been teaching: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 5 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 15 years or more

- 5.** Please select which type of school you are currently teaching in: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Girls' School
- Boys' School
- Mixed School

**6.** Please select which type of school you are currently teaching in: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Catholic
- Church of Ireland
- Multi-denominational
- Other:

**7.** Please select which type of school you are currently teaching in: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Rural
- Urban

**7.1** If you selected 'urban' on the previous question, please specify if your school is in a:

*Mark only one oval.*

- City
- Large Town
- Small Town

**8.** Are you teaching in a school which participates in the DEIS Action Plan? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**8.1** If you selected 'yes' above, please select the DEIS classification of your school:

*Mark only one oval.*

- DEIS Band 1
- DEIS Band 2
- Rural DEIS

**9.** If you selected Principal (Teaching) or Mainstream Class Teacher in Section 1 - Question 1 above; please select how many students are in your class:

*Mark only one oval.*

- 0-15 students
- 16-30 students
- 31 students or more

**10.** Please state the total number of students enrolled in your school this current academic year (i.e. 2018/2019): \*

**11.** Please state the number of students receiving School Support/School Support Plus under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model: \*

**12.** How many students receiving support come from a lower socio-economic status background, (i.e. avail of financial support to buy books)? \*

- 13.** Please state the total number of students enrolled in your school in the academic year of 2016/2017: \*
- 14.** Please state the number of students receiving School Support/School Support Plus under the General Allocation Model and Resource Teaching Hours Allocation Process (i.e. 2016/2017): \*
- 15.** Please state the total number of teaching staff in your school in this current academic year (i.e. 2018/2019):
- 16.** Please state the total number of teaching staff in your school in the academic year of 2016/2017: \*
- 17.** Has the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model impacted on the number of teachers employed in your school? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes - gained posts
- Yes - lost posts
- No

**17.1** If you answered 'yes' above, how many posts were gained/lost?

- 18.** Did any student(s) with special educational needs (SEN) enroll in your school in this academic school year? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**18.1** Were these students' needs considered in terms of the support your school was allocated under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**18.2** Please describe if/how this has impacted on your school:

- 19.** Did any student(s) with SEN leave your school in this academic year? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**19.1** Was this considered in terms of the support your school was allocated under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**19.2** Please describe if/how this has impacted on your school:

- 20.** Do you feel your school is adequately staffed to facilitate inclusion and meet the needs of all students? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**20.1** If you selected 'no' above, please explain:

**21.** Who coordinates SEN provision in your school? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Principal
- SEN Coordinator (if principal is not SEN Coordinator)
- Mainstream Class Teacher
- Special Education Teacher (SET)

**22.** In your school, have you developed a core SEN team where responsibilities of traditional learning support and resource teachers' roles have merged? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**23.** In your school, is SEN provision well-coordinated and roles and responsibilities clearly articulated? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

## **Section 2: Teacher Understanding and Confidence of Educational Policy**

This section will briefly explore your understanding of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017)

**24.** How prepared did you feel implementing the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model into your practice when it was introduced in September 2017? (1-Very under-prepared, 2-Under-prepared, 3-Unsure, 4-Prepared, 5-Very-prepared) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very under-prepared	<input type="radio"/>	Very well-prepared				

**24.1** Are you familiar with the DES Guidelines that accompany Circular 0013/2017 on the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**24.2** If you selected 'yes' on the above question, please explain if and how you find these guidelines useful:

**25.** Do you believe that policy change and implementation in your school is most often

a: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Top-down approach
- Bottom-up approach
- Unsure

**26.** Which approach do you think is most effective? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Top-down approach
- Bottom-up approach
- Unsure

**27.** What do you think influenced the development and implementation of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

**28.** Since the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model, how often have you: \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Discussed the New Allocation Model with other staff in your school?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussed the New Allocation Model in a formal manner with school staff (e.g. on the agenda for staff meetings/Croke Park hours)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looked for support/guidance in relation to the New Allocation Model?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been given support/guidance in relation to the New Allocation Model from one of your own staff members?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been given support/guidance in relation to the New Allocation Model from external professionals?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been actively involved in the New Allocation Model implementation within your class/school?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**29.** Within your school, please indicate the quality of the interactions you have had in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model with: \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
School Principal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mainstream Class Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SETs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30. How would you evaluate your entire experience of working with the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model over the past year(s)? (1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good,

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

4-Excellent) \*

- 30.1 Please explain the rating you gave for the above question: \*

31. What do you consider to be the benefits of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

32. What do you consider to be the challenges of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

33. In your opinion, as a school community, what are your key strengths in relation to SEN provision? \*

34. In your opinion, as a school community, what aspects of your SEN provision could you improve upon? \*

35. Has DES Circular 0019/2019, issued on 25th February 2019, had any impact on your school's teaching allocation for September 2019? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes - increased allocation
- Yes - reduced allocation
- No - allocation remained the same
- Unsure

- 35.1. Please explain your answer to the above question: \*

**35.2** Is this allocation appropriate to meet the expected needs in your school for the coming academic year (i.e. 2019/2020)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**35.3** What, if any, are your concerns in relation to this special education teacher allocation process? \*

**36.** This Model is due to be reviewed in the near future; if you were to offer the Minister of Education advice, what would that be? \*

### **Section 3: Models of Support in Practice and Meeting Learner's Needs**

This section aims to gather information on daily practices used to support students with SEN

**37.** Has the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model changed your daily practice? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**37.1** If you selected 'yes' above, please comment on how the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model has changed your daily practice:

**38.** In your experience, within your school, how would you rate collaboration between SET and Mainstream Class Teachers? (1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4		
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

**39.** In your experience, within your school, how would you rate collaborative planning between SET and Mainstream Class Teachers? (1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4		
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

40. **Prior to** the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model; please select the appropriate column to indicate how often these models of support were implemented in your classroom: \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Withdrawal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In-class Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team-teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One teach-One observe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One teach-One assist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Station Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parallel Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alternative Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

41. **Under the** Special Education Teacher Allocation Model; please select the appropriate column to indicate how often these models of support are implemented in your classroom: \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Withdrawal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In-class Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team-teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One teach-One observe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One teach-One assist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Station Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parallel Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alternative Teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

42. Please select the column that best represents your opinion about each of the statements in relation to your practice in **previous years** under the General Allocation Model and Resource Teaching Hour Model: \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The deployment of SETs for in-class support/co-teaching worked effectively in our school under the GAM	<input type="radio"/>				
The withdrawal of pupils for special education was informed by assessment and specifically addressed identified priority learning needs	<input type="radio"/>				
The balance between in-class support/ co-teaching and withdrawal worked in terms of meeting the needs of identified pupils	<input type="radio"/>				
SETs were successfully deployed to focus on implementing early intervention programmes across the school	<input type="radio"/>				
Our previous model of additional support for learners with SEN was effective in meeting pupils' identified needs	<input type="radio"/>				
Generally speaking, the needs of pupils with SEN were met in our school	<input type="radio"/>				

43. Please select the column that best represents your opinion about each of the statements in relation to your **current practice** under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model: \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The deployment of SETs for in-class support/co-teaching worked effectively in our school under the GAM	<input type="radio"/>				
The withdrawal of pupils for special education was informed by assessment and specifically addressed identified priority learning needs	<input type="radio"/>				
The balance between in-class support/ co-teaching and withdrawal worked in terms of meeting the needs of identified pupils	<input type="radio"/>				
SETs were successfully deployed to focus on implementing early intervention programmes across the school	<input type="radio"/>				
Our previous model of additional support for learners with SEN was effective in meeting pupils' identified needs	<input type="radio"/>				
Generally speaking, the needs of pupils with SEN were met in our school	<input type="radio"/>				

## Section 4: Identifying Pupils' Needs

This section will explore current practices in your school for identification of needs

44. Please select the column that best represents your opinion about each of the statements. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
All teachers in our school are familiar with the Continuum of Support model	<input type="radio"/>				
The Continuum of Support model is implemented effectively in our school	<input type="radio"/>				
In our school teachers develop Student Support Files	<input type="radio"/>				
I feel competent at developing Classroom Support Plans / School Support Plans	<input type="radio"/>				
In our school class teachers know when to initiate Classroom Support Plans / Student Support Plans	<input type="radio"/>				

45. What type of assessments help you with screening and identification of pupils' needs in the area of Maths? \*

45.1 What type of assessments help you with screening and identification of Language needs? \*

45.2 What type of assessments help you with screening and identification of social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs? \*

46. Under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model, schools are given greater autonomy to identify the needs of pupils with SEN. What strategies do you most often use to identify these needs? \*

Check all that apply.

- Pupil consultation
- Parent/ Guardian Consultation
- Learning Environment Checklist (Department of Education and Science 2007)
- Basic Needs Checklist
- Classroom Support Checklist
- My Thoughts About School Checklist
- Language Skills Screening Test
- Teacher Observation
- Teacher Designed Tasks and Tests
- Standardised Testing (e.g. Micra-T, Sigma-T, Drumcondra Tests)
- Diagnostic Standardised Tests (e.g. NARA, YARC, DRA)

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

47. Under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model; do more students in your school receive support without an official diagnosis? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**48.** What are 'complex needs' defined as, by your school, when identifying pupils' needs? \*

**49.** The Continuum of Support (NEPS 2007) is a useful tool to help with decision making and deciding priorities for NEPS involvement (i.e. which student should be chosen as priority for the NEPS yearly assessment). Has this aspect of the Continuum of Support proved useful? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**49.1** Why/why not? \*

**50.** What continuing professional development (CPD), if any, did you receive with the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? \*

**50.1** How would you rate the CPD you received in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model, if any? (0-None, 1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>None</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Excellent</b>				

**51.** What continuing professional development (CPD), if any, did you receive with the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in relation to assessment and identifying pupil needs? \*

**51.1** How would you rate the CPD you received in relation to assessment and identifying pupil needs, if any? (0-None, 1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>None</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Excellent</b>				

**52.** What initial teacher education (ITE), if any, did you receive on assessment and how to identify the needs of students effectively? \*

**52.1** How would you rate the ITE you received in relation to assessment and identifying pupil needs, if any? (0-None, 1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent) \*

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	
None	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent				

**53.** Would you like to receive continuing professional development (CPD) on how best to identify needs? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**53.1** If you selected 'yes', please state which form of support you think would be most beneficial:

Check all that apply.

- NCSE support
- NEPS support
- Online course
- In-service day
- Summer course

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

**54.** When identifying needs, do you work collaboratively with other school staff? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**54.1** If you selected 'yes', please select which members of staff you would collaborate most with:

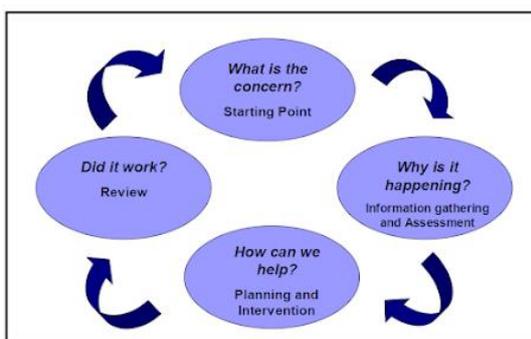
Check all that apply.

- Principal
- SEN Coordinator (if principal is not SEN Coordinator)
- Mainstream Class Teacher
- SET

## Section 5: Monitoring and Recording Pupils' Outcomes

This final section will explore how we monitor, evaluate and report on learners' priority learning needs

**55.** In your opinion, do teachers in your school follow the assessment process outlined below (DES Guidelines for Primary Schools 2017, p.7)? \*



Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**56.** Which of the following assessment methods do you use to monitor and report on student progress? (Please select all that apply) \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Continuous assessment
- Monthly tracking
- Teacher designed tests and tasks
- Teacher observation
- School report
- Student Support File

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

**57.** Student Support Files are subject to a review after an agreed period of time. In your school does the staff formally plan the review? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**57.1** How often are Student Support Files looked at? (0-Never, 1-Sometimes, 2-Often, 3-Very Often) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

0	1	2	3	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Often

**58.** The Student Support File allows teachers to monitor the student's progress overtime. Do you find this useful when planning for students with SEN? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**59.** Are there clear systems in place in your school which allow teachers to assess the effectiveness of interventions that are used and measure pupil progress towards priority targets? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**59.1** If you selected 'yes' above, please name these systems:

**60.** Are there are clear systems in place in your school which allow teachers to communicate progress to staff, pupils themselves, parents and external professionals? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**60.1** If you selected 'yes' above, please name these systems: \*

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**

## APPENDIX 8

### Letter of Information (Survey)

This Letter of Information was sent via email to school principals. A link to the web-based survey was included within the email. Principals were asked to forward the survey link and a copy of the Letter of Information to members of their staff, as specified below. A Participant Information Sheet and an electronic Informed Consent Form were provided as the opening pages of the survey (please see Appendix \_\_ and \_\_).



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Principal Letter of Information

Dear Principal,

My name is Louise Curtin, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

My study aims to examine the perspectives and experiences of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017) in the Context of Practice, i.e., in primary schools.

I am conducting a national survey which will include principals, special educational needs (SEN) coordinators (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), class teachers and special education teachers (SETs), in a large number of randomly selected schools, who have been working with and adjusting to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model.

**Link to survey:** Please complete and return survey by [date]

*Link to survey redacted*

**I would appreciate if you would complete this survey yourself and if you could forward the survey link and a copy of this Letter of Information to the SEN coordinator of your school (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), one class teacher (with a minimum of five years of teaching experience) and one special education teacher (with a minimum of five years of teaching experience) in your school.**

**Please gather information about the number of students in your school who receive(d) School Support and/or School Support Plus this year under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (i.e., 2018/2019) and in previous years under the General Allocation Model**

**and Resource Teaching Hours Model (i.e. 2016/2017) before beginning the survey, as you will need to provide this information throughout.**

The objective of the study is to give a voice to the key stakeholders in the implementation of government policy in schools (i.e. principals, SEN coordinators, class teachers and SETs) in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model. It is anticipated that this study will investigate the practicalities of this new system and unveil how schools are negotiating this change.

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Irish primary schools' staff in relation to the workings of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES Circular 0013/2017) to support inclusion in practice, (b) may highlight best practice for including and supporting students with SEN, while also identifying potential areas of concern as recognised by Irish teachers in the field, (c) may enhance my own understanding of educational policy and have positive implications on my continuing professional development and d) may inform current and future educational policy.

The data from this study will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis; individual participant data will not be shown. Direct quotes from open-ended responses may be used; however, these will remain anonymous by use of an ID number. These excerpts will be combined with those from other participants.

#### **Right to withdraw**

If involvement in this study is agreed; participants' anonymity is assured and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

#### **Confidentiality**

- All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. An ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.
- When storing data; survey responses will be anonymised by assigning an ID number to each participant's data before being saved onto a personal, encrypted laptop. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

#### **Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Louise Curtin  
[Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie)

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

Approval Number: **A18-052**

**If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:**

Dr Margaret Egan  
Project Supervisor  
Faculty Member of the Department of Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education  
Mary Immaculate College  
South Circular Road  
Limerick  
Telephone: 061-204337  
E-mail: [margaret.egan@mic.ul.ie](mailto:margaret.egan@mic.ul.ie)

Mary Collins  
MIREC Administrator  
Research and Graduate School  
Mary Immaculate College  
South Circular Road  
Limerick  
Telephone: 061-204980  
E-mail: [mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

## APPENDIX 9

### Participant Information Sheet (Survey)

This Participant Information Sheet was provided as the opening page of the web-based survey. It gave a brief description of what the study was about, who was undertaking it and what was involved for participants. It also outlined the option of participant withdrawal from the research at any time without consequence and provided information on participant privacy and confidentiality.

#### Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. It is important that you read and understand the purpose of this research and what the study involves.

#### What is the project about?

This study aims to examine the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the New Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017). I am conducting a national survey which will include principals, special educational needs (SEN) coordinators (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), mainstream class teachers and special education teachers (SETs), in a large number of randomly selected schools, who have been working with and adjusting to the New Allocation Model.

#### Who is undertaking the project?

My name is Louise Curtin and I am a Doctoral student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. This study will form part of my thesis.

#### What is involved for participants?

Participants will complete an online survey, which should take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. There will be a variety of questions including; multiple-choice questions, rating to what extent you agree/disagree with statements and providing short written answers to questions. Please gather information about the number of students in your school who receive(d) School Support and/or School Support Plus this year under the New Allocation Model (i.e. 2018/2019) and in previous years under the General Allocation Model (i.e. 2016/2017) before beginning the survey, as you will need to provide this information throughout.

#### Right to withdraw

Involvement in this study is voluntary. However, if you do agree to participate; your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

#### Confidentiality

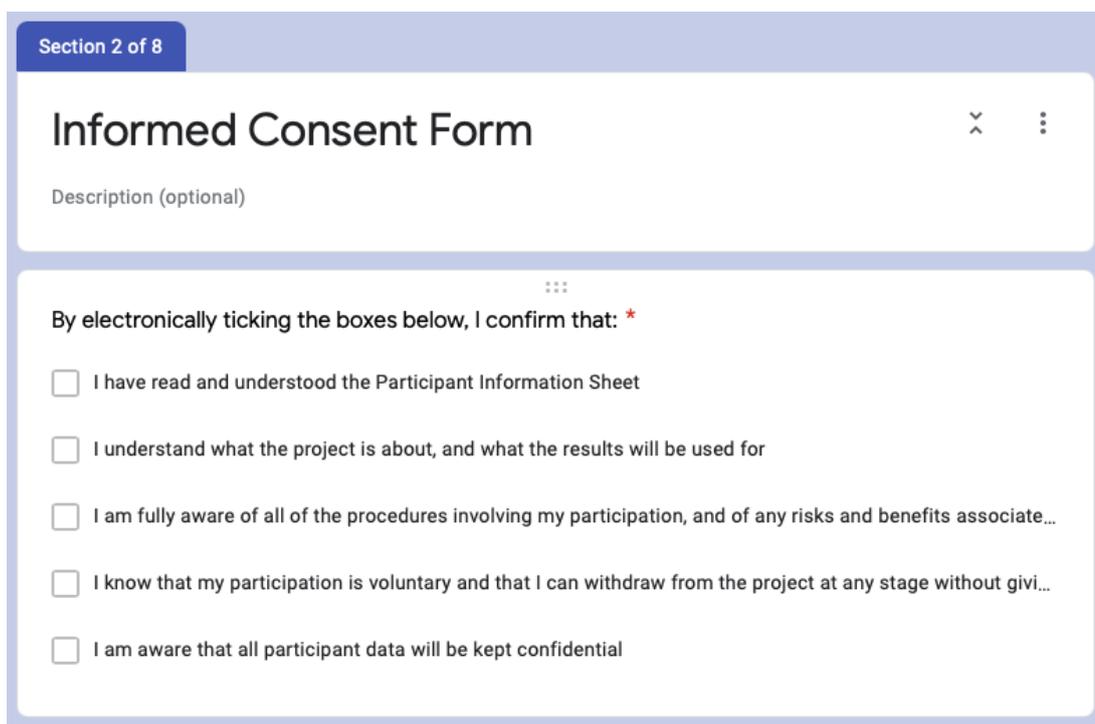
All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. An ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity. Data will be stored on a personal, encrypted laptop. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Record Retention Schedule, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

## APPENDIX 10

### Informed Consent Form (Survey)

This electronic Informed Consent Form was included in the opening pages of the survey to ensure that all participants gave their informed consent prior to engaging with the online survey.



The screenshot shows a digital form interface. At the top left, a blue tab reads "Section 2 of 8". The main title "Informed Consent Form" is centered at the top, with a close button (X) and a menu button (three dots) to its right. Below the title is a placeholder for a "Description (optional)". A separator line with three dots in the center follows. The main content area contains a mandatory statement: "By electronically ticking the boxes below, I confirm that: \*". Below this are five checklist items, each with an unchecked checkbox:

- I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving my participation, and of any risks and benefits associate...
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without givi...
- I am aware that all participant data will be kept confidential

## **APPENDIX 11**

### **Combination of Closed and Open-Ended Questions (Survey)**

The online survey schedule was categorised into six sections. The first section was largely quantitative and collected participant demographic information (i.e., participants' gender, current professional position, the number of students enrolled in the school and number of students receiving support, etc.). The remaining sections, while still of a quantitative nature in that they consisted of multiple-choice questions and Likert scales, etc., also included a variety of open-ended questions and therefore, explored the research topic in a more qualitative manner. Treiman (2009, p.3) describes the need for including open-ended questions in questionnaires to accommodate 'possible responses' which may be 'too varied or complex to be conveniently listed on a questionnaire', therefore, requiring a narrative response. This type of question is also beneficial as unexpected areas of interest relevant to the research topic, which may not have been anticipated by the researcher, may be identified by survey participants. The second section of the survey was influenced by this notion proposed by Treiman (2009) and therefore, open-ended questions were used with the aim to explore participants' perspectives and experiences of the SETAM (DES 2017a), gain an insight into how prepared and confident teachers felt implementing this model in the Context of Practice, highlight the benefits and challenges of this policy in practice, and identify the support received/sought in relation to the new model. Section three hoped to gather information on daily practices, more specifically models of support, used by respondents to meet the needs of students with SEN and discover if these had changed upon introduction of the SETAM. Section four and five were related to identification, assessment and monitoring and recording of students' outcomes. Some of the questions within these sections were guided by questionnaires run in the academic context of Mary Immaculate College and aimed to explore participants' experiences with, and levels of, ITE and CPD on a variety of identification and assessment strategies and methods.

## APPENDIX 12

### Pilot Interview Schedule

This interview schedule emerged from the analysis of phase one of data collection (national, online survey) throughout this study. Questions were pre-piloted with a critical friend, before the interview schedule was piloted with an experienced SET. Original questions and the order of such are shown below in black. Changes made following such pilots are included in red in the below schedule, with some justifications of changes also included in blue.

#### General Information

Principals will be invited to complete proforma with general details to comprise a profile of each school

#### Section One: Introduction

1. You have been teaching in this school for a number of years, can you tell me a little bit about your experience teaching students with special educational needs?  
*How many years have you been teaching?* More direct question.  
*Throughout these years, has your role been mostly in mainstream teaching or special education teaching?* Prompts, such as this, were added to the revised schedule following the pilots, which can be seen in italics. The purpose of these prompts was to remind the interviewer to ask these questions IF they had not already been answered in the main question.
2. *The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model was introduced in 2017 and brought with it some changes as to how schools are allocated special education teachers and how schools themselves can use such resources to meet the needs of students with SEN. Tell me your thoughts on the SETAM?*  
*What do you consider to be the benefits of the SETAM?*  
*Under the SETAM, students no longer require a formal diagnosis in order to receive support...has this been an improvement?*  
*What do you consider to be the challenges of the SETAM?*
3. *Is this a better system than applying for individual resource hours under the previous model?*  
*Do you believe more children are being given support under the SETAM?*
4. Do you believe your school is adequately staffed to facilitate inclusion and meet the needs of all students? Moved further down in the order of questions to facilitate discussion of the SETAM prior to this (see questions added in red above).
5. ~~Tell me your thoughts on the SETAM?~~  
~~What do you consider to be the benefits of the SETAM?~~
6. ~~Is this a better system than applying for individual resource hours under the RTH Model?~~

Omitted –  
see changes  
to questions  
above

#### Section Two: Teacher Understanding and Confidence of Educational Policy

7. The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model was introduced in 2017 and brought with it some changes as to how schools are allocated special education teachers and how schools themselves can allocate resources for students with SEN. Did you feel

prepared to implement this new model of support in your school? Moved to start of interview.

*\*When the SETAM was introduced, did you feel prepared to implement it in your school? Asked as a main question in Section Two rather than a prompt.*

~~Can you tell me what you thought your role would be in the implementation of the SETAM?~~

8. What supports, in terms of CPD, did you receive on the introduction of the SETAM, in particular ~~to prepare you for assessing and identifying pupil needs?~~ More straightforward question.

Have you received any CPD which has supported you to implement the SETAM in the past two years since its introduction? *Have you received any CPD in the past two years, since then?* Question changed to a prompt. If so, have you found this upskilling beneficial to your practice? ~~Removed double questioning.~~

9. What area of the SETAM would you like to receive CPD on and what type of CPD do you think would be most beneficial?
10. What initial teacher education (ITE), if any, did you receive on assessment and how to identify the needs of students effectively? Changed question (see red below) as survey responses indicated that many participants could not remember what ITE they received.
11. Did you feel prepared to support students with SEN coming out of college? Changed question slightly (see red below).

*When you came out of college, did you feel prepared to identify and support students with SEN?*

12. In your school, was this policy change a top-down approach, whereby school practices were adapted to meet government demands, or was it bottom-up approach, where you felt as though your school was implementing some of these practices even before the SETAM was introduced? The SETAM is based on the principle that the students with the greatest level of need should get the greatest level of support... Was your school already working in this way before the SETAM? Or how has the SETAM facilitated this? Worded the question more clearly and added a prompt rather than double questioning (see red below).

*In your school, were new practices put in place to meet the demands of the new model, or do you feel like teachers were implementing some of these practices even before the new model was introduced?*

*The new model states that students with the greatest level of need should get the greatest level of support... Was your school already working in this way before the new model?*

### **Section Three: Identifying Student's Needs?**

13. ~~Under the SETAM, students no longer require a formal diagnosis in order to receive support... has this been an improvement?~~ Omitted question as it had been asked above in revised schedule.
14. ~~Are more students accessing support under the SETAM? Do you believe more children are being given support under the SETAM? (i.e. with small group/in-class support).~~ Omitted question as it had been asked above in revised schedule.
15. Can you describe your role as principal/special education coordinator (SENCO)/mainstream class teacher (MCT)/special education teacher (SET)/home-school community liaison officer (HSL) in the process of identifying students who require additional teaching support in your school?

*What assessment strategies do you use when identifying pupil needs?* Added prompt.

16. ~~In your school, what are the steps involved to identify students at each stage of the Continuum of Support?~~ Omitted question as it resulted in repetition of answers to previous question.
17. ~~Up to what STEN and percentile are you targeting for classroom support / school support. At what STEN score is a student in your classroom identified as needing additional teaching support?~~
18. Responsibility now lies with the principal and teachers of the school to identify students in need of support. Has this posed any challenges for you?
19. ~~What assessment strategies do you use when identifying needs of pupils who require additional teaching support?~~ Asked as prompt above.
20. Do you think that some pupils are at a disadvantage as a result of the SETAM? Can you give me an example?

#### **Section Four: How are SETs deployed to meet students' needs?**

21. ~~Under the SETAM, schools have greater autonomy in organizing and deploying resources for students who require additional teaching support. In your school, who coordinates SEN provision? Shortened question to make it more straightforward.~~  
*In your school, who coordinates SEN provision?*
22. ~~Has the structure of your SET team changed under the SETAM? In your school, have you developed a core SEN team where responsibilities of traditional learning support and resource teachers' roles have merged? Question omitted; one-word answers forecasted.~~  
~~*If your school has secured a full time SET post rather than shared LS/R teachers can you describe the advantage/disadvantage of this?*~~ Prompt omitted.
23. Do you think an SEN coordinator is an important role in schools? Do you think it should be considered a paid post of responsibility? Double question omitted.  
*Can you give me some examples of their duties?* Prompt added.
24. ~~How are SETs allocated for students at each stage of the Continuum of Support? How is SET deployment decided upon? (e.g. interventions/withdrawal/in-class support).~~  
Question revised and prompts added (see red below).  
*In your school, are SETs used for withdrawal or in-class support or a variety of both?*  
*Which model of support is most frequently used in your school?*  
*Can you describe if this has this changed since the introduction of the new model?*
25. ~~Which model of support is most frequently used in your school, i.e. withdrawal or in-class support? Are SET's used for withdrawal or in-class support or a variety of both?~~  
Merged with the previous question (see red above). Can you describe if this has this changed since the introduction of the new model? Used as prompt in the above question.  
*What interventions are in place to meet the needs of students with SEN in your school?*
26. What co-teaching approaches are used most frequently in your school to facilitate in-class support?
27. ~~Which co-teaching approaches do you find most beneficial for including students with SEN in the mainstream classroom? Question omitted as it was forecasted that participants would be using the approaches they find most beneficial and therefore would have listed them in their answers to the previous question.~~

28. ~~Do you feel more early intervention programs are being implemented in your school since the introduction of the SETAM? If so, what programmes are currently in your school?~~ Question omitted as question added (see red above) regarding interventions.
29. What challenges, if any, are associated with in-class support/co-teaching approaches?
30. ~~In your school, are teachers allocated specific planning times within working hours? If so, does this facilitate collaborative planning between MCTs and SETs?~~ Question moved down to Section Five and prompt added rather than double questioning.

### Section Five: Monitoring and Reviewing Student Outcomes

31. ~~In surveys that I distributed to schools within first phase of data collection, many teachers were unsatisfied with the amount of paperwork involved in the SETAM.~~ Opening sentence omitted as I felt it was a leading question. Could you tell me a little bit about how you plan for students with SEN in your school, including what paperwork is involved for you.  
*Do all students who are identified as needing support have a Student Support File? Are Classroom Support Plans, School Support Plans and School Support Plus Plans used in this school? Do you have a school template that you follow? Are you satisfied with the amount of paperwork associated with planning under the new model?* Prompts added.
32. ~~In your school, are teachers allocated specific planning time within working hours?~~ Question moved to here as order was more suitable, led on from previous question.  
*If so, does this facilitate collaborative planning between MCTs and SETs? Has collaborative planning improved since the introduction of the SETAM?* Prompts added.
33. ~~In your school, what is your planning based on? The Continuum of Support?~~ Do you use the Continuum of Support Framework to guide your planning? Question reworded.  
*If yes, how does this help you? If no, what do you base your planning on?* Prompts added.
34. ~~Do you feel confident using the Continuum of Support / Student Support File?~~ Question omitted.
35. Can you tell me a little bit about parental involvement in the planning for students with SEN in your school?
36. What approaches are used in your school for tracking and recording the ongoing progress of individual pupils?
37. In your school, how do you record and review pupil progress?  
*How often do you review the Student Support Files? Are these formal/informal reviews?* Prompt added.
38. In your school, how do you review the programmes and interventions that are in place?

## APPENDIX 13

### Interview Schedule

Each principal completed a proforma with general details to comprise a profile of each school prior to the semi-structured interviews. The (revised) interview schedule was then used to guide the researcher during interviews with principals, SENCOs, class teachers and SETs.

#### Principal Proforma

##### School Profile

<b>School Name:</b>	
<b>Administrative / Teaching Principal:</b>	
<b>No. of Pupils:</b>	
<b>No. of Mainstream Class Teachers</b>	
<b>No. of Special Education Teachers</b>	
<b>Additional Information (e.g. Shared SET, etc.)</b>	
<p>Has your school gained/lost teaching posts since the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in 2017? Please state how many more/less teachers:</p> <p>Was the number of teaching staff in your school impacted this year with the re-profiling of schools under the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? Please explain:</p>	<p>Gained <input type="checkbox"/>                      Lost <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>How many students in your school are receiving additional teaching support? Has this number increased/decreased since the introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model? Please explain:</p>	<p>School Support: _____ School Support Plus: _____</p> <p>Increased <input type="checkbox"/>                      Decreased <input type="checkbox"/></p>

### Interview Schedule

#### Section One: Introduction

1. How many years have you been teaching?  
*Throughout these years, has your role been mostly in mainstream teaching or special education teaching?*
2. The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model was introduced in 2017 and brought with it some changes as to how schools are allocated special education teachers and

how schools themselves can use such resources to meet the needs of students with SEN.  
Tell me your thoughts on the SETAM?

*What do you consider to be the benefits of the SETAM?*

*Under the SETAM, students no longer require a formal diagnosis in order to receive support...has this been an improvement?*

*What do you consider to be the challenges of the SETAM?*

3. Is this a better system than applying for individual resource hours under the previous model?

*Do you believe more children are being given support under the SETAM?*

4. Do you believe your school is adequately staffed to facilitate inclusion and meet the needs of all students?

### **Section Two: Teacher Understanding and Confidence of Educational Policy**

5. When this model was introduced, did you feel prepared to implement it in your school?

*What did you think your role would be in applying the new model in your school?*

6. What supports, in terms of CPD, did you receive on the introduction of the SETAM?

*Have you received any CPD in the past two years, since then?*

7. What area of the new model would you like to receive CPD on and what type of CPD do you think would be most beneficial?

8. When you came out of college, did you feel prepared to identify and support students with SEN?

9. In your school, were new practices put in place to meet the demands of the new model, or do you feel like teachers were implementing some of these practices even before the new model was introduced?

*The new model states that students with the greatest level of need should get the greatest level of support...Was your school already working in this way before the new model?*

### **Section Three: Identifying Student's Needs**

10. Can you describe your role as principal/SENCo/MCT/SET in the process of identifying students who require additional teaching support in your school?

*What assessment strategies do you use when identifying pupil needs?*

11. At what STEN or percentile is a student in your school identified as needing additional teaching support?

12. Responsibility now lies with the principal and teachers of the school to identify students in need of support. Has this posed any challenges for you?

13. Do you think that some pupils are at a disadvantage as a result of the new model? Can you give me an example?

### **Section Four: How are SETs deployed to meet students' needs?**

14. In your school, who coordinates SEN provision?

15. Do you think an SEN coordinator is an important role in schools?

*Can you give me some examples of their duties?*

16. In your school, are SETs used for withdrawal or in-class support or a variety of both?

*Which model of support is most frequently used in your school?*

*Can you describe if this has changed since the introduction of the new model?*

17. What interventions are in place to meet the needs of students with SEN in your school?
18. What co-teaching approaches are used most frequently in your school to facilitate in-class support or the interventions you just mentioned?
19. What challenges, if any, are associated with in-class support/co-teaching approaches?

### **Section Five: Monitoring and Reviewing Student Outcomes**

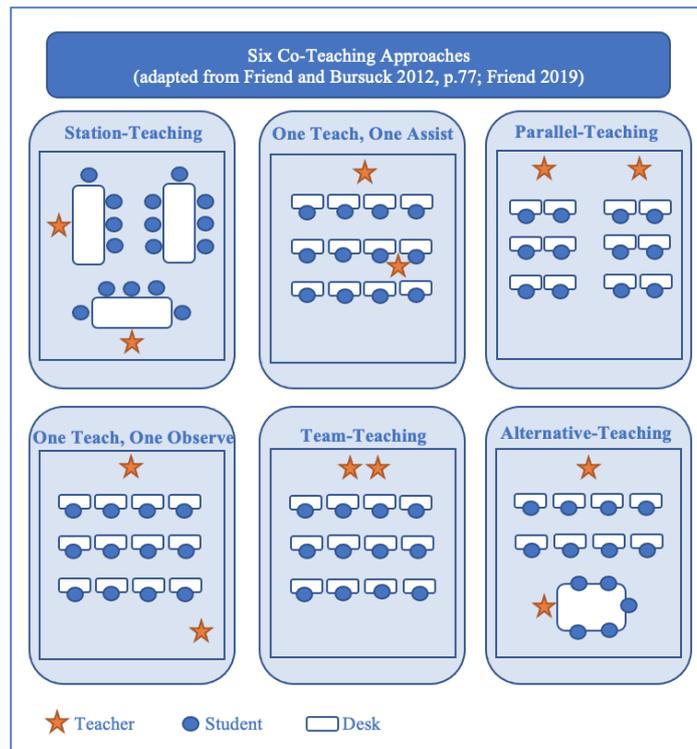
20. Could you tell me a little bit about how you plan for students with SEN in your school?  
*Do all students who are identified as needing support have a Student Support File?*  
*Are CSP, SSP and SSPP used in this school? Do you have a school template that you follow?*  
*Are you satisfied with the amount of paperwork associated with planning under the new model?*
21. In your school, are teachers allocated specific planning time within working hours?  
*If so, does this facilitate collaborative planning between MCTs and SETs?*  
  
*Has collaborative planning improved since the introduction of the SETAM?*
22. Do you use the Continuum of Support Framework to guide your planning?  
*If yes, how does this help you?*  
*If no, what do you base your planning on?*
23. Can you tell me a little bit about parental involvement in the planning for students with SEN in your school?
24. What approaches are used in your school for tracking the progress of pupils?
25. In your school, how do you review student outcomes?  
*How often do you review the Student Support Files? Formal/informal reviews?*
26. In your school, how do you review the interventions that are in place?

Is there anything you would like to add, that we have not already discussed, in relation to the new model or inclusion in your school?

Would you like to revisit or clarify anything we have discussed? I may return to you in the future to seek further information or clarification, if you are agreeable?

## APPENDIX 14

### Co-Teaching Approaches (Adapted from Friend and Bursuck 2012; Friend 2019)



- **Station-Teaching:** class is divided into groups, dependent on the number of teachers available to assist with each station. In the case of two teachers being present, a three-group rotation would occur with one independent station.
- **One Teach, One Assist:** one teacher leads whole-class instruction, while the other, usually the SET, circulates providing individual assistance to students, task-specific support and helping with routines or administrative tasks.
- **Parallel-Teaching:** class is divided into two mixed-ability groups, with each co-teacher presenting and delivering the same material to their half of the class.
- **One Teach, One Observe:** one teacher delivers whole-class instruction while another collects and records academic, behavioural or social data on specific student(s).
- **Team-Teaching** [also known as Teaming]: two teachers present new material together by leading combined, whole-class instruction.
- **Alternative-Teaching:** one co-teacher teaches the majority of the class, while the other co-teacher offers individual or small group instruction while remaining in the mainstream classroom.

## APPENDIX 15

### Principal Letter of Information (Interview)

This Letter of Information was sent to the principal of each school outlining the steps involved in the interview process of this research. This document provided the principal with an overview of the study, which also outlined the option of participant withdrawal from the research at any time without consequence.



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Letter of Information (Principal)

Dear Principal,

My name is Louise Curtin, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

#### **What is the project about?**

This study aims to examine the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017). The perspectives and experiences of principals, SEN coordinators (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), mainstream class teachers and Special Education Teachers (SETs) who have been working with and adjusting to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model will be explored.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

The objective of the study is to give a voice to the key stakeholders of policy implementation in schools (i.e. principals, SEN coordinators, mainstream class teachers and SETs) in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model. It is hoped that this study will unveil the successes and challenges of this new system and uncover how schools are negotiating this change.

#### **What are the benefits of this research?**

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the perspectives of Irish primary schools' staff in relation to the workings of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES 2017) to support inclusion in practice, (b) may highlight best practice for including and supporting students with SEN, while also identifying potential areas of concern as recognised by Irish teachers in the field, and (c) may enhance my own understanding of educational policy and have positive implications on my own teaching.

#### **Exactly what is involved for the participants (time, location, etc.?)**

- Within your school, the study will consist of 4 semi-structured **interviews** at the time and venue of the participant's choice. These interviews will be with the principal of the school, the SEN coordinator, one mainstream class teacher and one SET (all of whom

have a **minimum of 5 years of teaching experience**). The participant will offer insights of their understanding and experiences regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES Circular 0013/2017). The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.

**Right to withdraw**

If participant involvement in this study is agreed; their anonymity is assured, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from this study will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the dissertation; individual participant data will not be shown. Direct quotes from interviews will be used; however, this will remain anonymous by use of a pseudonym. These excerpts will be combined with those from other participants.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

- All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. A pseudonym will be generated for each participant, and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.
- When storing data; interviews will be transcribed onto and stored in a personal laptop which is secured with a password. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Louise Curtin  
Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

Approval Number: **A18-052**

**If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:**

**Mary Collins  
MIREC Administrator  
Research and Graduate School  
Mary Immaculate College  
South Circular Road  
Limerick  
Telephone: 061-204980  
E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie**

## APPENDIX 16

### Board of Management Letter of Information (Interview)

Once schools agreed to participate in the study, this Letter of Information was emailed to the school for the attention of the Board of Management, outlining the purpose of the study, what would be involved and stating the agreed date and times that the interviews would take place.



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Letter of Information (Board of Management)

Dear Chairperson,

My name is Louise Curtin, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

This study aims to examine the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills Circular 0013/2017). The perspectives and experiences of principals, SEN coordinators (in the instance where the SEN coordinator is not the school principal), mainstream class teachers and Special Education Teachers (SETs) who have been working with and adjusting to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model will be explored.

The objective of the study is to give a voice to the key stakeholders of policy implementation in schools (i.e. principals, SEN coordinators, mainstream class teachers and SETs) in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model. It is hoped that this study will unveil the successes and challenges of this new system and uncover how schools are negotiating this change.

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the perspectives of Irish primary schools' staff in relation to the workings of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES Circular 0013/2017) to support inclusion in practice, (b) may highlight best practice for including and supporting students with SEN, while also identifying potential areas of concern as recognised by Irish teachers in the field, and (c) may enhance my own understanding of educational policy and have positive implications on my own teaching.

As previously agreed, this study will consist of four 25-minute semi-structured **interviews** in your school on [date] at [time], where teachers will offer insights of their understanding and experiences regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES 2017). The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.

#### **Right to withdraw**

The anonymity of teacher participants from your school is assured, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from these interviews will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the dissertation; individual participant data will not be shown. Direct quotes from interviews will be used; however, this will remain anonymous by use of a pseudonym. These excerpts will be combined with those from other participants.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

- All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. A pseudonym will be generated for each participant, and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.
- When storing data; interviews will be transcribed onto and stored in a personal laptop which is secured with a password. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Louise Curtin

Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie

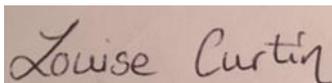
This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

Approval Number: **A18-052**

**If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:**

**Mary Collins  
MIREC Administrator  
Research and Graduate School  
Mary Immaculate College  
South Circular Road  
Limerick  
Telephone: 061-204980  
E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie**

Signed:



## APPENDIX 17

### Principal Informed Consent Form (Interview)

This Informed Consent Form was signed by principals, who wished to participate in the study, on behalf of the school and the Board of Management.



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Informed Consent Form (Principal)

Dear Principal,

As outlined in the **Information Sheet** the current study will investigate the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills 2017).

Details of interviews involved are outlined in the Information Sheet. This should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

The participant's anonymity is assured, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor.

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form:

- I have read and understood the **Information Sheet**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of all the procedures involving the participant, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I am aware that the interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.
- I know that participant involvement is voluntary and that I, and any of my staff, can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving a reason and without consequence.
- I am aware that all participant data will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED): \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Principal

Researcher:

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## APPENDIX 18

### Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

This Information Sheet was provided to each participant prior to their involvement with the semi-structured interviews.



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Information Sheet (Participant)

Dear Participant,

My name is Louise Curtin, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

#### **What is the project about?**

This study aims to examine the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills 2017). The study will explore the perspectives and experiences of principals, SEN coordinators (in the instance where the school principal is not the SEN coordinator), mainstream class teachers and special education teachers (SETs) who have been working with and adjusting to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

The objective of the study is to give a voice to the key stakeholders of policy implementation in schools (i.e., principals, SEN coordinators, mainstream class teachers and SETs) in relation to the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model. It is hoped that this study will unveil the successes and challenges of this new system and uncover how schools are negotiating this change.

#### **What are the benefits of this research?**

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the perspectives of Irish primary schools' staff in relation to the workings of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES 2017) to support inclusion in practice, (b) may highlight best practice for including and supporting students with SEN, while also identifying potential areas of concern as recognised by Irish teachers in the field, and (c) may enhance my own understanding of educational policy and have positive implications on my own teaching.

#### **Exactly what is involved for the participants (time, location, etc.?)**

- Within your school, the study will consist of approximately 4 semi-structured **interviews**, commencing at [time] on [date] in your school. These interviews will be with the principal of the school, the SEN coordinator (if the school principal is not the SEN coordinator), one mainstream class teacher and one SET (all of whom have a **minimum of 5 years of**

**teaching experience**). The participant will offer insights of their understanding and experiences regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (DES 2017). The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.

**Right to withdraw**

If participant involvement in this study is agreed; their anonymity is assured, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from this study will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the dissertation; individual participant data will not be shown. Direct quotes from interviews will be used; however, this will remain anonymous by use of a pseudonym. These excerpts will be combined with those from other participants.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

- All information will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor. A pseudonym will be generated for each participant, and it is this rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.
- When storing data; interviews will be transcribed onto and stored in a personal laptop which is secured with a password. The researcher will have custody of this personal laptop and access to data on this laptop will not be granted to any person other than the researcher's supervisor.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Louise Curtin  
Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).  
Approval Number: **A18-052**

**If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:**

**Mary Collins  
MIREC Administrator  
Research and Graduate School  
Mary Immaculate College  
South Circular Road  
Limerick  
Telephone: 061-204980  
E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie**

## APPENDIX 19

### Participant Informed Consent Form (Interview)

This Informed Consent Form was signed by all participants prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews.



### An Examination of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Circular 0013/2017) in Irish Primary Schools

#### Informed Consent Form (Participant)

Dear Participant,

As outlined in the **Information Sheet**, the current study will investigate the perspectives of school staff, in Irish primary schools, regarding the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (Department of Education and Skills 2017).

Details of interviews involved are outlined in the Information Sheet. This should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party other than my research supervisor.

In accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Data Protection Policy, all data and research records of this study will be anonymised and retained indefinitely on a personal, encrypted laptop.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form:

- I have read and understood the **Information Sheet**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of all the procedures involving the participant, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I am aware that the interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason and without consequence.
- I am aware that my data will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED): \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal  
Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 20

### Quantitative Codebook

This Codebook was used to keep track of all variable names and numerical values assigned to data in SPSS.

<b>Role:</b> Principal (administrative) = 1 Principal (teaching) = 2 SENCO = 3 CT = 4 SET = 5	<b>Class Level:</b> Administration = 1 Junior Level (JI – 1 <sup>st</sup> Class) = 2 Senior Level (3 <sup>rd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> Class) = 3 SEN = 4
<b>Gender:</b> Male = 1 Female = 2	<b>Years Teaching:</b> 5-10 years = 1 11-15 years = 2 15 years or more = 3
<b>Type of School:</b> All Girls = 1 All Boys = 2 Mixed = 3	<b>Religion:</b> Catholic = 1 Church of Ireland = 2 Multi-denominational = 3 Other = 4
<b>Other Religion:</b> Inter-denominational = 1	<b>No. of Students in Class:</b> 0-15 = 1 16-30 = 2 31 or more = 3
<b>Location:</b> Rural = 1 Urban = 2	<b>Urban Area:</b> City = 1 Large Town = 2 Small Town = 3
<b>DEIS:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2	<b>DEIS Classification:</b> Urban Band 1 = 1 Urban Band 2 = 2 Rural = 3
<b>SETAM Impacted No. of Teachers:</b> Yes – gained = 1 Yes – lost = 2 No = 3	<b>Adequately Staffed:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3
<b>Students with SEN Enrolled 2018/19:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3	<b>Were their Needs Considered in Allocation:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3
<b>Students with SEN Leave 2018/19:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3	<b>Were their Needs Considered in Allocation:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3
<b>Core SEN Team:</b> Yes = 1	<b>Who Coordinates SEN:</b> Principal = 1

No = 2 Unsure = 3	SENCO = 2 CT = 3 SET = 4
<b>Well Coordinated:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3	<b>Familiar with DES Guidelines:</b> Yes = 1 No = 2 Unsure = 3
<b>Prepared to Implement SETAM:</b> Very under prepared = 1 Under prepared = 2 Unsure = 3 Prepared = 4 Very prepared = 5	<b>Policy Change:</b> Top-Down = 1 Bottom-Up = 2 Unsure = 3
<b>Likert Scales:</b> Never = 0 Sometimes = 1 Often = 2 Very often = 3	<b>Likert Scales:</b> Never = 0 Sometimes = 1 Always = 2
<b>Likert Scales:</b> Poor = 1 Fair = 2 Good = 3 Excellent = 4	<b>Likert Scales:</b> Strongly disagree = 1 Disagree = 2 Undecided = 3 Agree = 4 Strongly agree = 5
<b>Assessment Strategies to Identify Needs:</b> Pupil consultation = 1 Parent consultation = 2 Learning Environment Checklist = 3 Basic Needs Checklist = 4 Classroom Support Checklist = 5 My Thoughts About School = 6 Language Skills Screening Test = 7 Teacher Observation = 8 Teacher Designed tests and Tasks = 9 Standardised Tests = 10 Diagnostic Standardised Tests = 11 Other = 12	<b>Form of CPD/Support:</b> NCSE = 1 NEPS = 2 Online Course = 3 In-Service Day = 4 Summer Course = 5 Other = 6
<b>Assessments to Monitor and Record Progress:</b> Continuous Assessment = 1 Monthly Tracking = 2 Teacher Designed tests and Tasks = 3 Teacher Observation = 4 School Report = 5 Student Support File = 6 Other = 7	

## APPENDIX 21

### Assumption Tests (SPSS)

**Table 1**

*Results of the Assumption Test for Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance for the Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework in Schools (n=47)*

Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework	<i>VIF</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>
Overall Model		
Teachers Develop Student Support Files	1.143	.875
Competent at developing Student Support Plans / School Support Plans	1.050	.953
All teachers are Familiar with Continuum of Support	1.163	.860

**Table 2**

*Results of the Assumption Test for Multicollinearity for the Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework in Schools (n=47)*

Dimension	<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>Variance Proportions</i>		
		<i>Teachers Develop Student Support Files</i>	<i>Competent at developing Student Support Plans / School Support Plans</i>	<i>All teachers are Familiar with Continuum of Support</i>
1	.046	.61	.39	.01
2	.035	.31	.13	.85
3	.018	.07	.47	.13

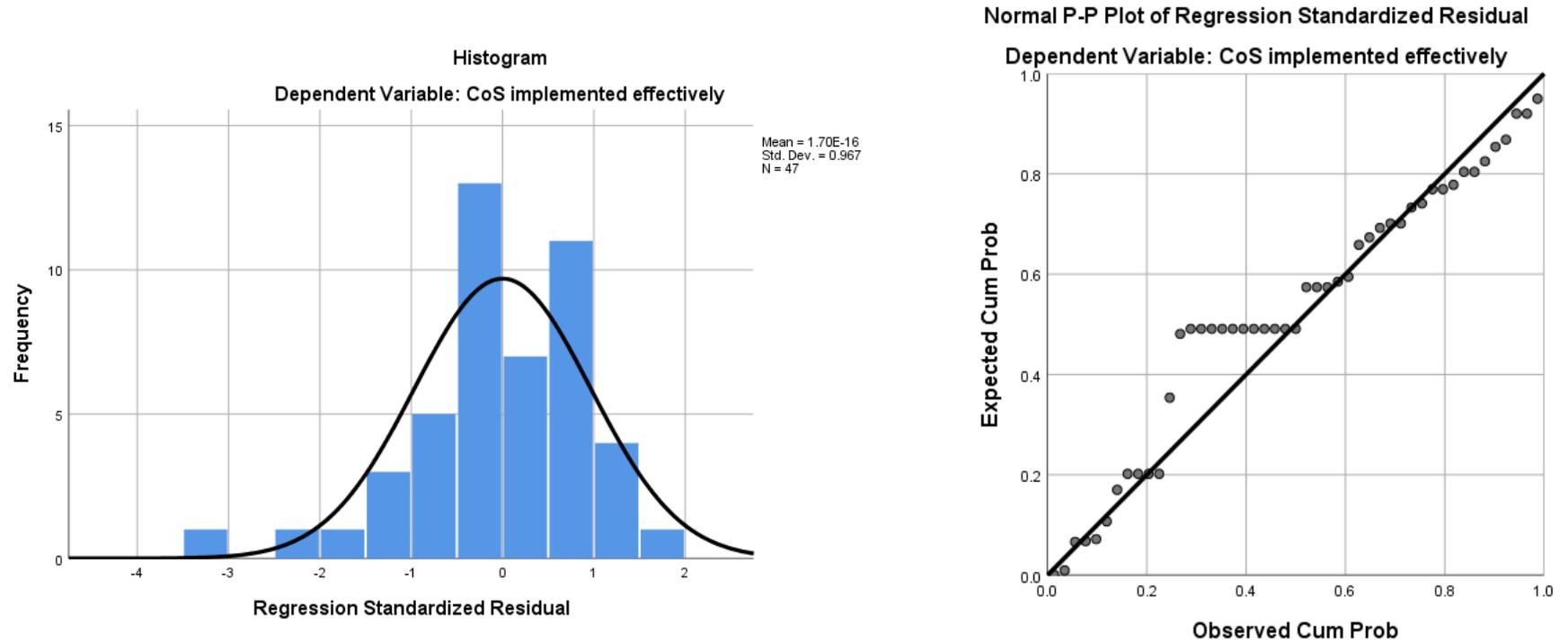
**Table 3**

*Results of the Assumption Test for Standardised Residuals by Case for the Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework in Schools (n=47)*

<i>Case Number</i>	<i>Std. Residual</i>	<i>Predicted Value</i>	<i>Residual</i>
25	-2.354	3.39	-1.392
31	-3.196	4.89	-1.890

**Figure 1**

*Results of the Assumption Check for Normality of Residuals for the Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework in Schools (n=47)*



**Table 4**

*Results of the Assumption Test for Influential Cases for the Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Effective Implementation of the Continuum of Support Framework in Schools (n=47)*

	<i>Mahalanobis Distance</i>	<i>Cook's Distance</i>	<i>Centred Leverage Value</i>	<i>Standardised DFFit</i>	<i>Standardised DFBeta Intercept</i>	<i>Standardised DFBeta Teachers Develop Student Support Files</i>	<i>Standardised DFBeta Competent at developing Student Support Plans / School Support Plans</i>	<i>Standardised DFBeta All teachers are Familiar with Continuum of Support</i>
1	1.92681	.00977	.04189	.19673	-.06419	.06924	-.06080	.11185
2	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
3	1.90691	.00497	.04145	.13984	.07735	.00454	-.11339	.02522
4	2.01223	.00065	.04374	.05039	-.03538	.01452	.01755	.02302
5	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
6	8.81179	.01432	.19156	.23714	.08523	-.01693	-.20409	.12579
7	1.92681	.00977	.04189	.19673	-.06419	.06924	-.06080	.11185
8	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
9	13.75252	.38583	.29897	-1.27740	-.87211	.25568	1.17937	-.33179
10	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
11	1.02960	.02360	.02238	.31125	-.01824	.21526	-.07478	-.04504
12	1.21987	.00076	.02652	.05450	.02375	-.03943	-.00573	.01689
13	1.53574	.01121	.03339	.21120	-.09871	.11702	.10505	-.05117
14	1.90691	.00497	.04145	.13984	.07735	.00454	-.11339	.02522
15	1.53574	.01066	.03339	-.20589	.09623	-.11407	-.10241	.04989
16	2.01223	.00065	.04374	.05039	-.03538	.01452	.01755	.02302
17	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043

18	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
19	1.53574	.01066	.03339	-.20589	.09623	-.11407	-.10241	.04989
20	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
21	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
22	7.50798	.07701	.16322	.55743	.16515	.33301	.00614	-.48861
23	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
24	1.53574	.01066	.03339	-.20589	.09623	-.11407	-.10241	.04989
25	6.34126	.31177	.13785	-1.19939	-.41418	.18355	-.59662	.91681
26	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
27	.07120	.00000	.00155	-.00343	-.00094	.00016	.00083	-.00043
28	2.04255	.00380	.04440	.12212	-.05969	-.03710	.04881	.07885
29	5.60694	.00011	.12189	-.02077	-.00286	.01781	-.00862	-.00496
30	5.54705	.01862	.12059	.27114	.08765	-.19324	.13287	-.05961
31	2.01223	.18990	.04374	-.99730	.70019	-.28743	-.34740	-.45557
32	1.92681	.01639	.04189	-.25593	.08350	-.09008	.07909	-.14551
33	2.01223	.00065	.04374	.05039	-.03538	.01452	.01755	.02302
34	6.54485	.03431	.14228	.36913	.07666	.08241	.16870	-.32303
35	11.17817	.00564	.24300	.14851	.03056	-.13746	.04932	.04025
36	5.60694	.13172	.12189	.74521	.10243	-.63906	.30942	.17790
37	2.04255	.02901	.04440	-.34333	.16782	.10429	-.13722	-.22168
38	4.98891	.00602	.10845	-.15369	-.07724	-.04491	-.00782	.13975
39	14.17045	.39182	.30805	-1.28591	-1.23768	.24970	.58255	.78387
40	1.53574	.01066	.03339	-.20589	.09623	-.11407	-.10241	.04989
41	2.01223	.04209	.04374	-.41742	.29307	-.12030	-.14540	-.19068
42	.78573	.01298	.01708	.22867	-.06481	-.02545	.15166	-.00894
43	1.02960	.02360	.02238	.31125	-.01824	.21526	-.07478	-.04504
44	1.15126	.00533	.02503	.14500	.07497	.03316	-.00615	-.10402

45	1.53574	.01121	.03339	.21120	-.09871	.11702	.10505	-.05117
46	4.51340	.03362	.09812	.36666	.16398	.22869	-.20080	-.18777
47	4.47562	.00964	.09730	.19467	.08426	-.17498	-.00531	.06600

## APPENDIX 22

### 15 Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis (adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006)

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed / interpreted, made sense of / rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other / the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written Report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done / i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

## APPENDIX 23

### **The ‘Dark Side’ of CAQDAS: Misconceptions within the Literature regarding the use of CAQDAS in Qualitative Research**

Controversy is evident within the extant literature surrounding the appropriateness of engaging with CAQDAS (Scott and Morrison 2006), with many early criticisms proposing that it distances or separates researchers from their data. In a recent article, Jackson, Paulus and Woolf (2018) trace the history of this distancing/separation argument back to two key pieces of work (Agar 1991; Seidel 1991). The purpose of this article was, however, to highlight citation errors throughout the literature (e.g., Welsh 2002; Ozkan 2004), which appear to denounce qualitative data analysis software. Jackson and colleagues (2018) argue that while many works raised concerns and outlined potential problems regarding the use of software, they often, simultaneously, held positive perspectives towards it (e.g., Hinchliffe *et al.* 1997; Barry 1998). Jackson *et al.* (2018) maintain that this is sometimes unclear from the use of citations throughout the literature, which may convey a generally negative consensus toward CAQDAS. One such example, as described within the article, refers to the work of Seidel (1991) who is often cited as describing the distancing of the researcher from the data as the ‘dark side’ of CAQDAS. However, he also maintained a supportive stance towards the use of such technology stating that ‘the computer can have positive effects on qualitative methods and data analysis’ (Seidel 1991, p.107). This sheds light on the misconceptions regarding the appropriate use of CAQDAS found within the literature.

## APPENDIX 24

### Active Listening during Transcription

Excerpts from interview transcriptions are provided below, which include observational notes taken by the researcher during interviews, highlighting participants' tone, mood, facial expressions or gestures. These were noted by the researcher to gain a more complete picture of the interview and facilitate a more accurate interpretation of what the interviewee 'meant', rather than merely what they 'said' (Egan 2013; Cohen *et al.* 2018).

#### Example 1:

Researcher: *"Are there any challenges associated with in-class support or the co-teaching approaches?"*

Lisa: *"Oh yes, definitely (laughs). Well, first of all you have to get on with the person that's coming in because sometimes there can be clash of, eh...(pause), personalities, which is in every walk of life. That would be the main challenge, but you have to learn how to work together and both of you have to be committed, you know it's not good enough for someone to just rock on and say 'ok I'm here', you need people to collaborate together for things to work. And obviously there's teething problems but that normally works itself out because you could have two different styles, teaching wise, with the teacher as well and you know you have to find a happy medium there somewhere as well."*

Lisa, MCT, Boys' School.

\*The participant's use of gestures, language and tone during her response to this question implies that she has experienced this type of challenge in relation to co-teaching in the past. Through active listening, the researcher got the impression that the interviewee would prefer not to go into any further detail or give specifics of her experience where a clash of personalities occurred but made it very clear that this is a real challenge that teachers face when implementing in-class support or co-teaching approaches in schools.

#### Example 2:

Researcher: *"Are you satisfied with the amount of paperwork associated with the SETAM?"*

Ali: *"Ammm...ah, (pause), (eyes widened) maybe it's because this year it's the first year...I think that the problem this year is it is our first year in this school that we're actually, and it's all to do with setting up the folders, so I'm not saying it's the paperwork, so that's I suppose that's a different thing. I've found we've been flat out since September; I mean flat out with paperwork. And we've got our new format of the IEP, so we're implementing all that now, so because you're asking me now, I'm going 'Oh my god I think the paperwork is unreal' but in the long run, no, it's all necessary I feel. Next year, let's just say [if] I was in 5th class or whatever class you're in, you have a good basis coming, you've the Passover [which] is going to be much better if you know what I mean. Whereas they were*

*still in the old IEP system last year...so we had a mountain to climb in September this year."*

Ali, SET, Boys' School.

\*The participant's **hesitation** and **language** at the beginning of her response, followed by her **facial expression** which saw her eyes widening, immediately conveyed her clear dissatisfaction with the amount of paperwork required. It was obvious to the researcher, through engaging in active listening, that this participant was about to describe the huge volume of paperwork she was carrying out under the SETAM.

### **Example 3:**

Researcher: *"Are you satisfied with the amount of paperwork associated with the SETAM?"*

Ali: *"...the other challenge would be (**begins to whisper**) that some teachers may not want you always coming into their classroom, you know the way some might be set in their ways..."*

Ali, SET, Boys' School

\*The participant begins to whisper when speaking about challenges involving her colleagues in relation to implementing co-teaching approaches. As the interview took place in a room, with a closed door, we were not in earshot of any other members of staff, and so, this **gesture** may have been used to emphasise that this was a sensitive topic amongst some staff in her school.

### **Example 4:**

Researcher: *"Under the SETAM students no longer require a formal assessment or diagnosis to access support. Has this been an improvement in your opinion?"*

Emma: *I **suppose...eh, yeah**, I mean I suppose it takes the pressure off parents to have to get their report or get an assessment and that there's help available whether they need it or not, but I genuinely think that those children probably got help anyway in schools if they needed it. I think where a child needed a report before, the child still needs a report because we need to know how to help them. Like the report I suppose was always seen as the route to getting hours if they got it but also the information in the report was what we needed to teach them so like I still think the report is necessary for those children. Yeah, great, they're going to come into school, and you'll look at a child and say, 'right ok, he could possibly be on the spectrum, we're going to help him with this, that and the other', in other years he needed the report to access that and maybe parents were more aware of that and all their ducks were in a row. They mightn't be now but the same child still needs the same help that he needed, I mean we still need the report, I'm not saying children need a label but we do need to know what their specific needs are and that information is often in the report, so from that point of view I think that yeah, I don't know that that's a huge help that they don't need a report, I still think you need it so at least when they had the report they were guaranteed a certain number of hours. **That's just my take on it."***

\*The participant's **language** and **tone** when responding to the question above conveys her dissatisfaction or perhaps uninterest in the changes which have come about under the SETAM. After acknowledging some benefits associated with the eradication of labelling students with SEN under this model, she also explained that while technically a professional report was no longer required, she felt that teachers still need the report to adequately respond to the student's needs and so, feelings of annoyance, perhaps, were conveyed as she believed this change brought about by policy did not translate into practice well as it did not have much bearing on her own practice.

### **Example 5:**

Researcher: *"In your school, are teachers allocated specific planning time within working hours?"*

Moira: *"Mmmhmm...(nodding)"*

Researcher: *"So, [is that for] mainstream class teachers and SETs or?"*

Moira: *"Just SETs, the last class on Friday we can have for planning. So, in an ideal world, I don't know how they think this is an ideal world, you're supposed to be able to link with the class teacher who has a class at that stage. So, at this stage we tend to do it in our Croke Park hours and as I said we have a mandatory hour a month. If we didn't have that we wouldn't find time. And it's at the discretion of teachers after school like so I have to say everyone here is very good, we normally bang heads after school, yeah."*

Moira, SET, DEIS School.

\*The participant's use of a nodding **gesture** conveyed that she was answering 'yes' to my question. This highlights the importance of taking these observational notes during interviews, as otherwise the researcher may have been unsure what "mmmhmm" meant when listening back to the audio clips.

## APPENDIX 25

### Example of the Role of Integrated Annotations (NVivo 12)

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 interface. At the top, there is a timeline with a 'Click to edit' button. Below the timeline is a table of transcript segments. The 'Annotations' pane at the bottom shows two items:

Item	Content
4	All of these responses [identification of pupils' needs] will have to be merged with Language, Maths, SCEB Assessments
5	New code added at this point [planning - CoS to guide planning] so go back over interviews already coded (B.S) and check for references to be coded to this.

Example of an annotation to integrate contextual factors such as coding assumptions, field notes and observations and researcher's thoughts and ideas during the encoding process

## APPENDIX 26

### Example of the Role of Analytical Memos (NVivo 12)

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 interface. On the left, a tree view shows the project structure under 'Phase 5 - Defining and Naming Themes (Data Reduction-Consolidation) Interviews'. The selected theme is 'Theme 1 - The Dilemma of Agency vs Responsibility', which has 17 files and 182 references. Below it, a table lists sub-themes and their associated files and references.

Name	Files	References
Theme 1 - The Dilemma of Agency vs Responsibility	17	182
Agency	17	87
Responsibility	17	95
Theme 2 - The Continuum of Support as a Framework for Inclusive Practice	17	150
Approaches to Monitoring and Reviewing Students' Outcomes	15	36
Challenges Involved with the Implementation of the Classroom Support Stage	14	26
CPD	15	52
ITE	17	36
Theme 3 - Moving Towards a More Collaborative Approach	17	299
Benefits of In-Class Support	13	30
Inclusive Learning Environment	9	12
Increased Manpower in Classrooms	6	14
Challenges of In-Class Support	17	67
Collaborative Planning	13	42
Practical Challenges	7	8
Teacher Compatibility	11	17
Greater Collaboration and In-Class Support	17	70
Bottom-Up Approach to Co-Teaching	10	18
Increase in Collaboration	5	5
Increase in In-Class Support	13	27
Variety of In-Class and Withdrawal	17	20
Models of In-Class Support in Practice	17	85
Alternative Teaching	5	5
Case Dependent	8	15
One-Teach One-Assist	11	16
One-Teach One-Observe	1	2
Parallel Teaching	7	7
Station-Teaching	17	32
Team-Teaching	6	8

The right pane shows the content of 'Theme 1: The Dilemma of Agency vs Responsibility'. The text discusses the theoretical framework of the study, the National Agency Model (NAM), and the challenges of its implementation in schools. It highlights the tension between teacher agency and increased responsibility, and how this dilemma was articulated by Tom, the principal of the Mixed School.

*"I think that it [the NAM] was a good move in that it gave autonomy to the school, I*

**Analytical memos were used to conduct a systematic review of the thematic framework developed in phase 5 to analyse, report, and ask questions of data. Memos were used to reduce the data from a series of codes to a series of documents explaining outcomes of analysis of codes. Later, memos themselves were reduced through editing out overlapping and less important content to cohere findings into a cohesive findings chapter.**

## APPENDIX 27

### Functions of Memoing in Qualitative Research

(adapted from Birks *et al.* 2008)

**M** – Mapping research activities (creating an audit trail by documenting decisions which guide the actions of the researcher throughout all phases of the research)

**E** – Extracting meaning from the data (moving from the concrete to the conceptual by noting the researcher's interpretations of the data – examining, comparing and challenging such interpretations)

**M** – Maintaining momentum (recording the perspective of the researcher throughout the evolutionary journey of the study, by noting reflexive thought processes)

**O** – Opening communication (an effective way to share ideas about the research between research teams)

## APPENDIX 28

### Qualitative Codebook – Phase Two (Generating Initial Codes)

Phase Two - Generating Initial Coding involved deconstructing the data from its original chronology into an initial set of non-hierarchical codes.

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Accelerated Reading	References made by teachers to using Accelerated Reading as an initiative to support students with SEN.	1	1
Acceptance from Parents	References made by teachers to parents accepting this new model and the possible change in allocation of hours for their child.	2	2
Accountability	References made by teachers to being more accountable for their decision making (allocating resources) under this new model, as they have to be able to justify their choice,	2	3
Administration		5	9
Aistear	References made by teachers to using in-class support (SETs) for Aistear. Benefits of such may also be listed here.	3	5
Allocation Remained the Same	References made by teachers to their SET allocation staying the same before and after the SETAM - this benefitted their school.	1	2
Alternative Teaching	References made by teachers to using the alternative teaching approach as a form of in-class support/co-teaching.	5	5
Assessment	References made by teachers to using more assessment materials.	1	2
Assessment CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD related to the assessment.	2	2
Autonomy	References made by teachers to autonomy of deployment of resources within schools.	15	52
Awareness	References made by teachers to being more aware of SEN provision in schools	3	6
BECK Inventories	References by teachers to using the BECK Inventories (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy - testing for levels of depression) as an SCEB assessment.	1	1
Behaviour Support CPD	References made by teachers to wanting/requesting CPD on behaviour support.	2	2

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Behavioural Checklists	References made by teachers to using behavioural checklists for identifying pupils' social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs.	2	4
Benefits of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to the benefits of in-class support or co-teaching.	13	29
Better Model	References made by teachers to the SETAM being a better model in general than the GAM.	8	14
Bottom-Up Approach	References made by teachers to engaging in practices even prior to the new model being introduced,	17	55
Building Bridges	References made by teachers to using Building Bridges as an intervention to support the needs of pupils' with SEN in their school.	2	3
Bullying of SETs	References made by teachers to abuse/bullying of SETs.	1	1
Case Dependent	References made by teachers to changing the co-teaching approaches based on the children's needs / change them dependent on the day, etc.	8	14
Certainty	References made by teachers to having more certainty under the SETAM as you are given resources for a set period of time.	3	5
Challenges of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to the challenges of in-class support or co-teaching.	19	40
Changes in Planning Documentation	References made by teachers to changes in planning since the introduction of SETAM	10	15
Circular	References made by teachers to the new model being communicated through Circular 0013/2017.	1	2
Class Size	References by teachers to class size being too big - which has a negative impact on the application of the model/supporting students' needs, etc.	3	6
Class Teachers' Roles	References made by class teachers to their role in identifying pupils' needs or references made by other staff in relation to the role of the class teacher.	7	11
Classroom Support Level CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD on how to implement the SETAM at the classroom support level.	2	5
Clear guidelines	References made by teachers to the DES Guidelines which accompany Circular 0013/2017 as being helpful.	2	3
Clusters	References made by teachers to valuable time for students with SEN to spend with SETs lost during travel time between schools for travelling SETs (shared/clustered).	4	11
Collaboration	References made by teachers to greater collaboration under the SETAM.	12	25
Collaboration between staff	References made by teachers to good collaboration between staff.	5	21
Communication	References made by teachers to the SETAM being a challenge in the sense of communicating to staff all that is going on in the school, new structures, practices, etc.	2	6

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Confusing	References made by teachers to finding the SETAM confusing on its introduction.	2	3
Continuum of Support	References made by teachers to their ability to use the CoS in an effective manner.	1	1
CoS	References made by teachers to using SETs within the CoS framework (Stage I, II, III)	1	1
CoS to Guide Planning	References made by teachers to using the CoS to guide their planning	7	7
Co-teaching approaches	References made by teachers to their use of co-teaching approaches in their school.	1	6
Co-teaching approaches	References made by teachers to wanting to improve on co-teaching approaches / in-class support.	2	4
Co-Teaching CPD	References made by teachers to wanting support/CPD in the area of co-teaching.	4	6
Could Never Have Enough	References made by teachers to always wanting more staff.	6	6
CPD	References made by teachers to more CPD required to help improve their SEN provision.	1	1
CPD knowledge disseminated	References made by teachers to staff who go to trainings days/CPD coming back and informing the other staff of what they learned...maybe in a Croke Park session or informally.	5	7
CPD knowledge NOT disseminated	References made by teachers to staff who go to trainings days/CPD and who DO NOT come back and inform the other staff of what they learned...maybe in a Croke Park session or informally.	2	2
CPD on SETAM	References made by teachers to CPD received within the past 2.5 years which is related to the SETAM .	8	14
CPD Received Intro	CPD received on introduction of the SETAM	1	1
CPD Received Since	References made by teachers to CPD received based on the SETAM within the past 2.5 years, since it has been implemented in schools.	0	0
Croke Park Collaborative Planning	References made by teachers to using Croke Park Hours to collaboratively plan.	10	21
Decision making	References made by teachers to difficult/too much decision making at the responsibility of principal or teachers. Too much pressure, etc.	8	24
Decrease in hours	References made by teachers to a decrease in staff (SETs), hours or posts due to SETAM.	1	5
DEIS Forward Thinking	References made by teachers to DEIS schools implementing co-teaching approaches and various interventions long before other schools and before the SETAM.	6	14
Demand for CPD	References made by teachers who expressed an interest in receiving CPD.	4	6
Department Push for In-Class	References by teachers to knowing that the DES want more in-class support given by SETs in schools.	6	9

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Department-Government	References made by teachers praising the department of education and skills/government.	2	2
Developed Further	References made by teachers to interventions they would like to see used more in their school, developed further, get training on, etc.	2	2
Diagnostic Assessments	References made by teachers to using Diagnostic Assessments for identification of pupils' needs in the area of Language.	7	82
Differentiation	References made by teachers to using differentiation as an intervention / how they plan for students with SEN.	4	8
Difficult Transition	References made by teachers to not making/or finding it hard to make the transition from the GAM to the SETAM.	7	13
Disadvantage Directly Related to SETAM	References made by teachers to pupils at a disadvantage because of the SETAM directly.	9	14
Disadvantages of the System	References made by teachers to pupils being at a disadvantage NOT as a direct result of the SETAM but because of the education system in general.	6	10
EAL Support	References made by teachers to EAL Support as an intervention to meet the needs of pupils with SEN in their school.	1	1
Early intervention	References made by teachers to early intervention programmes being used under the SETAM.	6	8
Eradication of official diagnoses	References by teachers to reduced assessments, reports needed for students to receive support in schools. No longer need for an official diagnosis.	13	28
Experience	References made by teachers to having a different experience (of some sort) to other teachers (e.g. SET different experience to MCT, or vice versa)	5	6
Expertise of SENCO	References made by teachers to the SENCO having interest/expertise/experience in SEN.	4	7
External agencies	References made by teachers to needing to improve links with outside agencies.	1	1
Face-to-Face	References made by teachers to waiting CPD in the form of face-to-face instruction.	3	3
Facilitating	References made by principals to facilitating others in the school to identify pupils' needs	3	6
First Steps	References made by teachers to using First Steps as an intervention to support the needs of pupils' with SEN in their school.	1	2
Flexibility	References made by teachers to being able to allocate support in blocks throughout the year, e.g. stop giving support before end of year, start giving support throughout the year.	4	7

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Formal Assessments	References made by teachers to using formal assessments (standardised/diagnostic, etc.)to track and record pupils progress.	14	22
Formally Planned Interventions	References made by teachers to formally planning interventions.	4	4
Forms of CPD	References made by teachers of what forms of CPD would be beneficial.	3	4
Friends for Life	References made by teachers to doing Friends for Life as an intervention to support students with SEN	3	5
Full-time posts	References made to full-time SETs based in schools as opposed to travelling resource teachers.	1	5
General CPD	References made by teachers to CPD they received in general throughout the past 2.5 years (not necessarily directly related to SETAM)	7	14
General CPD Since ITE	References made by teachers to seeking/receiving CPD in relation to special education since their ITE.	1	1
Girls at a Disadvantage	References made by teachers to girls being at a disadvantage as a result of this new model.	1	1
Good Question	References made by teachers to saying 'good question' when asked if any pupils is at a disadvantage under this model.	3	3
Government	References made by teachers to government cuts	3	5
Grey Area	References made by teachers to a grey area in terms of schools being 'allowed' to assign planning time - discrepancies between circular and inspectors' advice.	2	2
Identification	References made by teachers to having to identify pupils' needs as a challenge of the SETAM.	5	7
Implementation of CoS	References made by SETs to CTs not fully implementing the CoS at the CS level.	9	14
Importance of SENCO	References made by teachers to why SENCOs play an important role in schools.	15	20
Improvement in Staffing (Past)	References made by teacher to an increase/improvement in SEN staffing since they first started teaching/in the past.	4	6
Inadequate Staffing	References made by teachers to having an inadequate number of staff to support inclusion and meet the needs of students in their school.	8	27
In-Class	References made by teachers to using SETs for in-class support.	8	14
In-Class Support	References made by teachers to in-class support as a new practice implemented in their school since the introduction of the new model.	4	6
Inclusion	References made by teachers to the SETAM promoting inclusion.	7	11

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Increase in in-class support	References made by teachers to more in-class support being used under the SETAM. References to less withdrawal for students with SEN.	12	41
Increase in Paperwork	References made by teachers to an increase in planning documentation (paperwork) since introduction of the SETAM.	8	9
Increased allocation	References made by teachers to additional teaching staff allocated to their school under the SETAM.	6	12
Increased Parental Involvement	References made by teachers to increased communication with parents and parental involvement because of the new model (in a positive light).	7	13
Increased Workload	References made by teachers to an increased workload as a result of the SETAM (additional staff = more organising, coordinating, disseminating of knowledge, etc.)	4	7
Incredible Years	References made by teachers to using the Incredible Years intervention to support the needs of pupils' with SEN in their school.	2	3
Informal Assessments	References made by teachers to having informal/self-made/individualised assessments to track and record pupils progress.	13	20
In-School Information	References made by teachers to receiving information about the SETAM from in-school personnel, perhaps from the principal or SENCO	4	5
In-Service	References made by teachers to people coming in to their school to talk to the full staff as a beneficial form of CPD.	3	3
Interventions Planned Collaboratively	References made by teachers to planning interventions collaboratively.	6	8
INTO	References made by teachers to getting information/CPD on the SETAM through the INTO.	1	1
IT	References made by teachers to teaching strategies for using IT as an intervention to support the needs of students with SEN.	1	1
ITE Received	Types of ITE received by teachers in college.	1	2
Lack of CPD (past)	References made by teachers to there being a lack of CPD in the past, perhaps after college or in the years after their ITE.	1	1
Lack of Creativity	References made by teachers to staff/teachers getting into a rut with their use of resources/interventions, etc. and not changing them around frequently.	1	1
Lack of external support	References made by teachers to lack of services/support from outside agencies.	8	12
Lack of funding	References made by teachers to lack of funding from DES.	1	1
Lack of Parental Involvement	References made by teachers to parents not being very involved with the school.	3	6
Lack of personnel	References made by teachers to a lack of personnel to implement the SETAM effectively.	6	7

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Lack of training	References made by teachers to limited or lack of training for the SETAM.	9	20
Learned on the Ground	References made by teachers to learning from experience in their first few years of teaching.	8	8
Less paperwork	Reference by teachers to less paperwork involved in applying for support for students (as was in RTH Model, GAM, etc.)	3	4
Linking with External Agencies CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD on how to work with external agencies to best support the needs of the pupils and/or parents.	2	2
Links with Outside Agencies	References made by teachers to having links / good collaboration / training from outside agencies.	4	17
LLO	References made by teachers to Literacy Lift Off as an intervention to meet the needs of pupils with SEN in their school.	13	18
Mata sa Rang	References made by teachers to Mata sa Rang as an intervention to meet the needs of pupils with SEN in their school.	1	3
Mata sa Rang CPD	References made by teachers expressing an interest in CPD on Mata sa Rang.	1	1
Maths Recovery	References made by teachers to using Maths Recovery as an intervention to support students with SEN.	4	4
Meeting with Parents	References made by teachers to meeting with parents when identifying pupil's needs.	12	19
Mindfulness	References made by teachers to having mindfulness sessions in place to support the SEB needs of students.	3	6
Misconception of Need for Assessment	References made by teachers to parents or external agencies thinking there is no need for getting a child assessed under the SETAM as the school can provide the support without a diagnosis.	2	2
Missing Out on Intensive Support	References made by teachers to some students (who would have had hours under the old model) may be missing out on the individualised, intensive support under this new model as in-class support increases and uses the SET time.	5	11
Misuse	References made by teachers to misuse of the application of the SETAM in schools.	3	5
Models of Support in Practice	Sub-Category showing withdrawal, in-class or variety...and most frequent types of co-teaching used in schools,	3	4
Monitoring and Review CPD	References made to teachers to wanting more CPD based on monitoring and reviewing student outcomes.	3	5
More Equitable	References made by teachers to this model being fairer in terms of all students able to access support regardless of wealth.	6	7

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
More students accessing support	References made by teachers to more students being able to access support under the SETAM.	18	42
Need for More In-Class Support	References made by teachers to wanting to implement more in-class support.	2	3
Need for Professional Reports	References made by teachers to needing to still receive the professional reports from outside agencies in order to know what work to do with the child in-school to meet specific needs.	5	6
Need to Maintain Parental Involvement	References made by teachers to parents needing to get the plans/reports from external agencies so that they have at-home recommendations and ideas of how to work with their child at home.	3	3
NEPS	References made by teachers to using NEPS CoS/resources for identifying pupils' social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs (e.g. My Thought About School, Basic Needs Checklist, etc.)	2	14
NEPS Assessment	References made by teachers to having to choose students for NEPS assessment as a challenge	1	1
New pupils	References made by teachers to SETAM not facilitating for new pupils with SEN who enter the school	5	14
No Collaborative Planning Time	References made by teachers to having no assigned time to plan collaboratively for SEN with other teachers.	5	8
No CPD	References made by teachers to having received no CPD on the introduction of the SETAM	12	30
No CPD received since on SETAM	References made by teachers to receiving no CPD related to the SETAM within the past 2.5 years that the model has been in place.	6	6
No improvements needed	References made by teachers to the belief that the system of SEN provision currently in their school is working fine and so no further improvements are necessary.	1	3
No Need for SENCO	References made by teachers to not needing a SENCO in their school and reasons for such.	3	3
No Planning Time	References made by teachers to having no assigned time to plan.	7	9
Non-DEIS School at a Disadvantage	References made by teachers to non-DEIS schools being at a disadvantage under this new model.	1	1
None	References made by teacher to no benefits involved in the SETAM or negative comments regarding the SETAM.	1	4
One-Teach One-Assist	References made by teachers to using the one-teach, one-assist model as a form of in-class support/co-teaching.	11	15

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
One-Teach One-Observe	References made to using the one-teach, one-observe model as a form of in-class support/co-teaching.	1	2
Online	References made by teachers to wanting online CPD (a beneficial form of CPD)	1	1
Paperwork	References made by teachers to too much paperwork involved in the SETAM.	14	43
Paperwork CPD	References made by teachers to expressing a want for CPD in the area of paperwork involved with the SETAM.	10	13
Parallel Teaching	References made by teachers to using the parallel teaching model as a form of in-class support/co-teaching.	7	7
Parental Consultation	References made by teachers to using parental consultation for identifying pupils' social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs.	1	3
Parental Interventions	References made by teachers to interventions within the school which involve parents of students.	2	2
Parental involvement	References made by teachers to wanting to improve parental involvement in their school.	1	2
Parental Trust in Teachers	References made by teachers to parents letting teachers decide on allocations, not being too invested in decision making.	1	1
Parents	References made by teachers to having to explain to parents about new allocations and help them to understand the model, or parents expecting the same amount of hours for their child as was allocated under the GAM.	8	23
PASS	References made by teachers to using PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School)	1	1
PDST	References made by teachers to receiving CPD from the PDST on the introduction of the SETAM	3	8
Personnel Attending CPD	References made by teachers to one cohort of staff attending CPD over the other / wanting more staff to attend CPD together, etc.	10	13
Planning	References made by teachers to being better able to plan under the SETAM.	3	8
Planning Guided by Communication with Parents	References made by teachers to meeting and speaking with parents in order to guide their planning/set targets/work on areas with students with SEN	1	1
Planning Guided by Professional Reports	References made by teachers to using professional reports to guide their planning for students with SEN	4	6
Planning Time	References made by teachers to having time to plan during working hours.	13	18
Pressure on SENCO	References made by teachers to feeling a lot of pressure/feelings of being overwhelmed when in the SENCO role (or perhaps other staff talking about the workload/pressures on SENCO).	5	8

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Principals	References made by teachers to just principals receiving CPD	3	6
Principals' Roles	Roles listed by principals in identifying pupil's needs.	6	10
Prioritising greatest need	References made by teachers to those who are of highest priority receive greatest level of support.	4	8
Professional Assessments	References made by teachers to getting children assessed as part of identifying pupils' needs.	9	13
Professional Reports	References made by teachers to using professional reports to identify pupils' language needs.	4	6
Reading Recovery	References made by teachers to using Reading Recovery as an intervention to support the needs of students with SEN.	3	4
Reading Recovery CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD in the area of Reading Recovery	2	2
Ready-Set-Go Maths	References made by teachers to using Ready-Set-Go Maths as an intervention to support the needs of students with SEN.	1	3
Recording Systems	References made by teachers to systems they have set up in their school to record the progress of students with SEN.	9	16
Relationships	References made by teachers to having good relationships with parents and pupils.	2	5
Reprofiling	References made by teachers to uncertainty regarding school profiles.	1	1
Research-Based Interventions CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD in research-based interventions which meet the needs of students in a variety of areas - not just academic.	4	6
Resources	References made by teachers to having a good standard of resources in their school.	1	1
Reversed Triangle of CoS	References made by teachers to viewing the CoS triangle upside-down for their school, i.e. the majority of needs are at SSP, then SS, then very little would only be on CS.	3	4
Review IEP	References made by teachers to reviewing IEPs	10	19
Review Interventions	References made by teachers to how they review the interventions that are in place in the school.	16	39
Review SSF	References made by teachers to reviewing the SSF.	9	11
Roots of Empathy	References made by teachers to using the Roots of Empathy programme (linked with Barnardo's - promoting empathy) to support the ESBC needs of students in their school.	1	1
School Profiles	References made by teachers to discrepancies within the school's educational profile components.	2	3

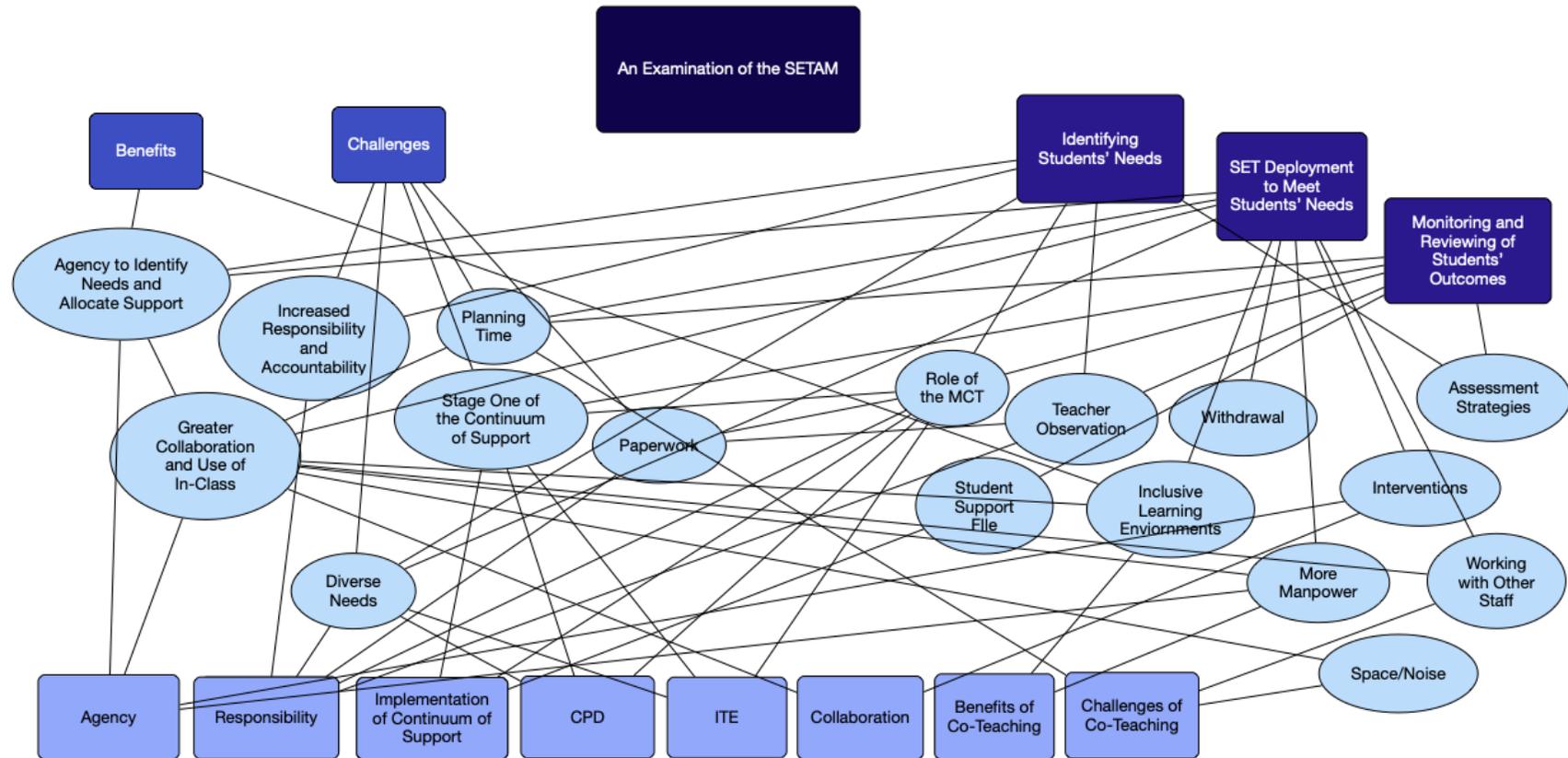
Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
SDQ	References made by teachers to using strengths and difficulty questionnaires for assessing the SEBC skills of students.	3	3
SEB Group	References made by teachers to having social, emotional, behavioural groups as interventions (with SET).	3	5
Self-Assessment	References made by teachers to using child self-assessment for identifying pupils' social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs.	1	3
Self-Initiated	References made by teachers to CPD on the SETAM which was initiated by themselves	10	15
SEN Coordinator	References made by teachers to wanting an SEN coordinator role in their school.	1	1
SENCO Duties	References made by teachers to the duties carried out by SENCOs	15	22
SESS or NCSE	References made by teachers to CPD from the SESS or the NCSE on the introduction of the SETAM	1	10
SET	References made by teachers to their SET as being one of the main strengths of their school in terms of SEN provision.	1	7
SETs	References made by teachers to the SET being an intervention/resource to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.	1	1
Sharing Experience	References made by teachers to wanting CPD in the form of hearing other teachers/professionals experiences.	4	5
Space	References made by teachers to lack of space.	6	9
Specific Strategies CPD	References made by teachers to needing more guidance/training when dealing with complex needs - i.e. perhaps those previously identified/assessed by an outside agency.	4	7
SSF	References made to SSF for pupils with SEN.	15	21
Staff commitment	References made by teachers to committed and hard-working staff	4	14
Staff expertise	References made by teachers to well-trained staff.	2	10
Staff Meeting Collaborative Planning	References made by teachers to having time to plan collaboratively during staff meetings.	3	3
Standardised test scores	References made by teachers to a decrease (or feared decrease in the future) in hours due to improved standardised test scores.	1	1
Standardised Tests	References made by teachers to using standardised tests to identify pupil's language needs.	2	27
Station-Teaching	References made by teachers to using SETs for station-teaching as a form of in-class support.	15	26

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
STen	References made by teachers to STen scores or percentiles as how they identify pupils in need of additional teaching support.	15	30
Strands	References made by teachers to deploying SETs in strands, i.e. specific SETs for each class grouping, or for the junior or senior end of the school, etc.	7	15
Strategies	References made by teachers to teaching specific strategies as an intervention for those with SEN	1	2
Structure	References made by teachers to better structure of SEN provision within schools under the SETAM.	7	15
Structure and coordination	References made by teachers to having a well-structured, coordinated or organised system for SEN provision.	1	3
Support does not meet demand	References made by teachers to support allocated to school insufficient to meet the demand/needs of pupils with SEN	8	33
Support targeted at need	Contains references by teachers to support being targeted at need. A benefit of this SETAM is that it is a needs-based model. Students with needs are given support.	17	38
Talk Boost	References made by teachers to using Talk Boost as an intervention to support the needs of students with SEN in their school.	4	5
Target-Setting CPD	References made by teachers to wanting CPD on target-setting.	3	4
Teacher Designed Tasks and Tests - Checklists	References made by teachers to using teacher-made tests and tasks or checklists or self-made checklists to identify pupil's needs.	4	8
Teacher Designed Tests and Tasks	References made by teachers to using teacher designed tasks and tests to identify pupil's language needs.	3	22
Teacher Observation	References made by teachers to using teacher observation to identify pupil's language needs.	2	9
Teacher reluctance	References made by teachers to needing to remind and encourage staff to use the CoS within the SETAM.	6	11
Team Effort for SENCO	References made by teachers that more than one person is involved in the co-ordination of SEN in the school (not just the SEN coordinator).	5	11
Team-Teaching	References made by teachers to using the team-teaching model as a form of in-class support/co-teaching.	6	10
Termly Assessments	References made by teachers to using termly tests to identify pupils' needs in the area of Maths	1	2
Therapies	References made by teachers to art therapy, play therapy, creative therapy, etc. being used as interventions within their school to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.	2	5
Time	References made by teachers to lack of time	9	29

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (251 codes developed at Phase 2)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Time to Talk	References made by teachers to using time to talk as a language intervention	1	1
Timetabling	References made by teachers to timetabling issues.	5	10
Too Much Involvement	References made by teachers to having to involve parents too much/often throughout the school year.	2	2
Tracking the Progress	References made by teachers as to how they track and record the progress of pupils with SEN.	0	0
Uncertainty	References made by teachers to feeling uncertainty surrounding the monitor and review stage	3	6
Uncertainty of posts	References made by teachers to SETs not having security in their posts due to a two-year review timeframe.	3	5
Unofficial Collaborative Planning	References made by teachers to not having assigned planning time within working hours but informally planning SEN with other members of staff during school hours.	8	11
Unprepared	References made by teachers to not feeling prepared to implement this model on its introduction.	8	10
Variety of In-class support and Withdrawal	References made by teachers to deploying SETs for both in-class support and withdrawal.	16	17
Weaving Wellbeing	References made by teachers to using Weaving Wellbeing as an intervention to meet the needs of students with SEN	2	5
Well Prepared	References made by teachers to feeling prepared to implement this model on its introduction.	8	8
Willing to change	References made by teachers to a positive approach to change/keep up to date with new/recent policies/initiatives, etc.	4	4
Withdrawal	References made by teachers to using SET's for withdrawal.	12	17

# APPENDIX 29

## Initial Thematic Map



## APPENDIX 30

### Qualitative Codebook – Phase Three (Searching for Themes)

Phase Three – Searching for Themes involved merging, renaming, distilling and clustering related codes into broader categories of codes to reconstruct the data into a framework that makes sense to further the analysis.

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (251 Phase 2 initial codes organised into 23 categories of codes)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Adequate Staffing	References made by teachers to their current staffing being adequate to support inclusion and meet the needs of pupils in their school.	14	34
Benefits	Benefits of the SETAM	17	219
Challenges	Challenges associated with the SETAM	18	199
CoS Planning Documentation	References made by teachers to using the CoS plans or templates (CSP, SSP, SSPP).	17	67
CPD	Category containing all references to CPD	16	64
Discrepancy between MCT and SET	References made by teachers to aspects of the new model being different for MCTs and SETs	10	21
Identifying Pupil's Needs	References made by teachers as to how they identify pupils' needs under the SETAM.	18	172
Interventions	References made by teachers to interventions in place in the school to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.	17	114
ITE	Category containing all ITE related nodes.	17	29
Language Assessments	Assessments used for screening and identification of Language needs under the SETAM.	7	22
Maths Assessment Strategies	Assessment strategies used by teachers when identifying pupils' needs in relation to the area of Maths	5	9
Monitoring and Reviewing Pupil's Outcomes	References made by teachers to how they monitor and review pupils' outcomes under the SETAM.	17	198
SETAM Preparation	Category consisting of whether teachers felt prepared or not to implement this new model when it was being introduced.	15	18
Necessary Paperwork	References made by teachers which convey that the required paperwork under the SETAM is necessary, helpful, etc.	8	8

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (251 Phase 2 initial codes organised into 23 categories of codes)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
New Practices	References made by teachers to implementing new practices with the introduction of the new model.	18	85
Parental Involvement	Category consisting of references to parents	11	21
Planning	Category which consists of planning time granted to teachers within working hours, collaborative planning, etc.	16	43
Pupils at a Disadvantage	References made by teachers to reasons why pupils may be at a disadvantage under this new model.	15	29
Responsibility of the Class Teacher	References made by teachers to any of the responsibilities of the class teacher.	15	29
SCEB Assessments	Assessments to screen and identify social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs under the SETAM.	3	7
School Strengths SEN Provision	Areas in which schools believe they are succeeding in SEN provision	8	20
SET Deployment	References made by teachers to how SETs are used/assigned within the school under the SETAM	16	50
Suggestions	References made by teachers to suggesting improvements/strategies/interventions to the model or teaching in general. Any suggestions offered.	3	6

# APPENDIX 31

## Developed Thematic Map



## APPENDIX 32

### Qualitative Codebook – Phase Four (Reviewing Themes)

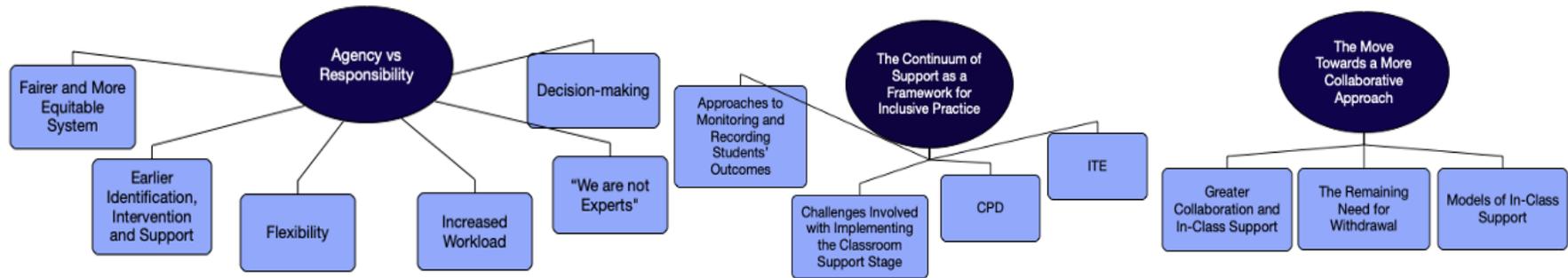
Phase Four – Reviewing Themes involved breaking down the now reorganised categories into sub-categories to better understand the meanings embedded therein.

Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (23 categories further refined into 19 categories)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Agency	Part of an overarching theme called 'Agency v Responsibility. 'Agency' will hold all codes and categories which explore teachers having more power, control, autonomy and flexibility under this new model. When comparing to the overarching theme it will form the discussion that with this increase in agency, also comes increased responsibility and so will discuss this dilemma.	15	53
Benefits of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to the benefits of in-class support or co-teaching.	13	56
Challenges of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to the challenges of in-class support or co-teaching.	17	107
Collaboration	References made by teachers to greater collaboration under the SETAM.	11	18
Collaborative Planning Time	References made by teachers to having a lack of time to formally plan and review collaborative practice during working hours.	14	69
Continuum of Support	References to the implementation of the CoS in schools - particularly Level 1 (Classroom Support)	16	65
Co-Teaching CPD	References made by teachers to wanting support/CPD in the area of co-teaching.	3	5
CPD	References made by teachers to one cohort of staff receiving CPD and others not being offered it.	17	71
Early intervention	References made by teachers to early intervention programmes being used under the SETAM.	5	5
In-Class Support	References made by teachers to using SETs for in-class support.	16	52
Increase in In-Class Support	References made by teachers to more in-class support being used under the SETAM. References to less withdrawal for students with SEN.	13	27
Increased Collaborative Planning	References made by teachers to increased Collaborative planning under the SETAM	5	5

Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (23 categories further refined into 19 categories)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Interventions	References made by teachers to interventions in place in the school to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.	16	114
Interventions Planned Collaboratively	References made by teachers to planning interventions collaboratively.	8	12
ITE	Category containing all ITE related nodes.	17	38
Lack of CPD for MCTs	References made to MCT getting less CPD - which may influence the theme of CT not implementing Stage 1 of CoS	13	23
Monitoring and Reviewing Students' Outcomes	References made by teachers to how they monitor and review students' outcomes under the SETAM.	16	108
SETAM Preparation	Category consisting of whether teachers felt prepared or not to implement this new model when it was being introduced.	15	18
Responsibility	Part of an overarching theme called 'Agency v Responsibility. 'Responsibility' will hold all codes and categories which explore teachers having more increased responsibilities, duties, pressures and the possible reasons for such under this new model. When comparing to the overarching theme it will form the discussion that with an increase in agency given to teachers, also comes increased responsibility and so will discuss this dilemma.	17	126

## APPENDIX 33

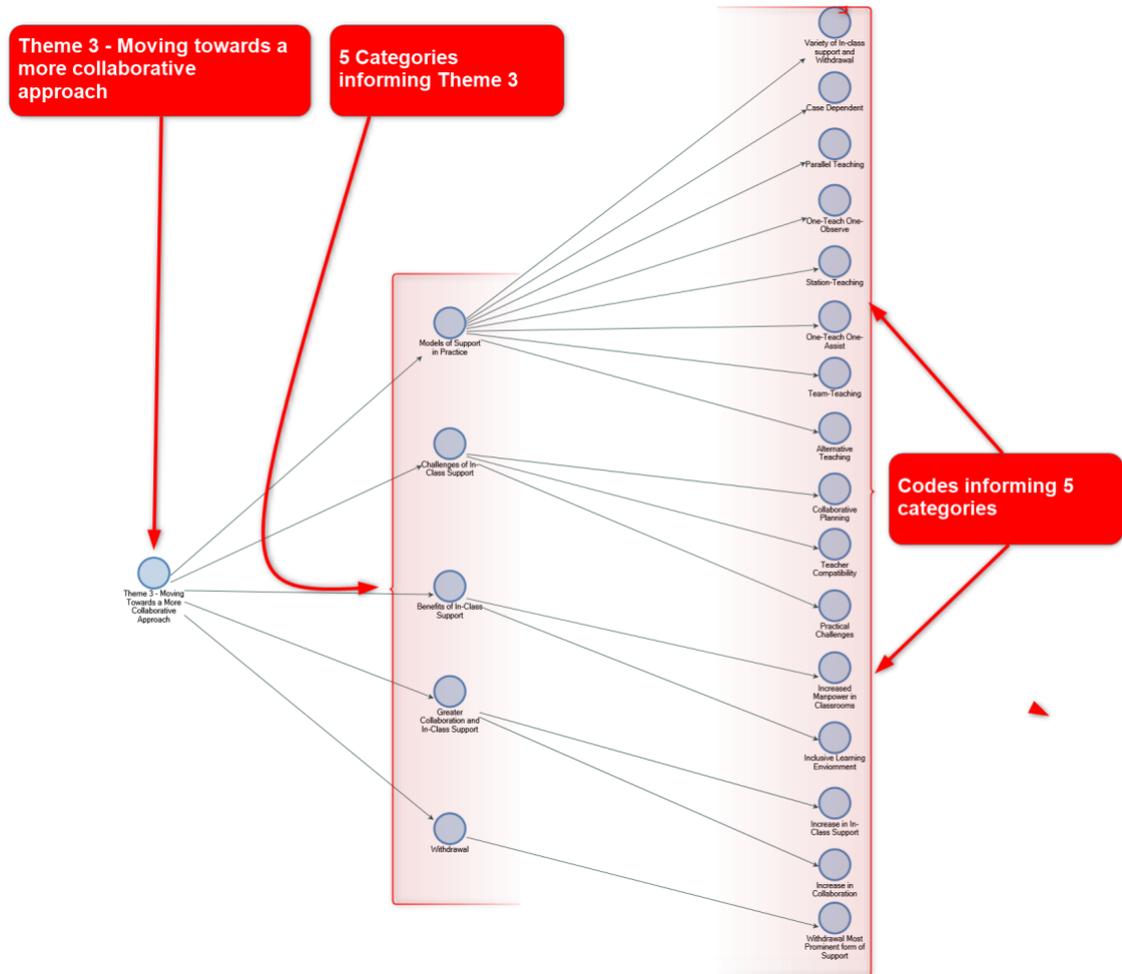
### Final Thematic Map



# APPENDIX 34

## Example of Flow from Codes to Categories to Themes

Example of process of conceptually mapping codes to categories to themes for Theme 3 – Moving Towards a More Collaborative Approach



## APPENDIX 35

### Qualitative Codebook – Phase Five (Defining and Naming Themes)

Phase Five – Defining and Naming Themes involved conceptually mapping and collapsing categories into a broader thematic framework.

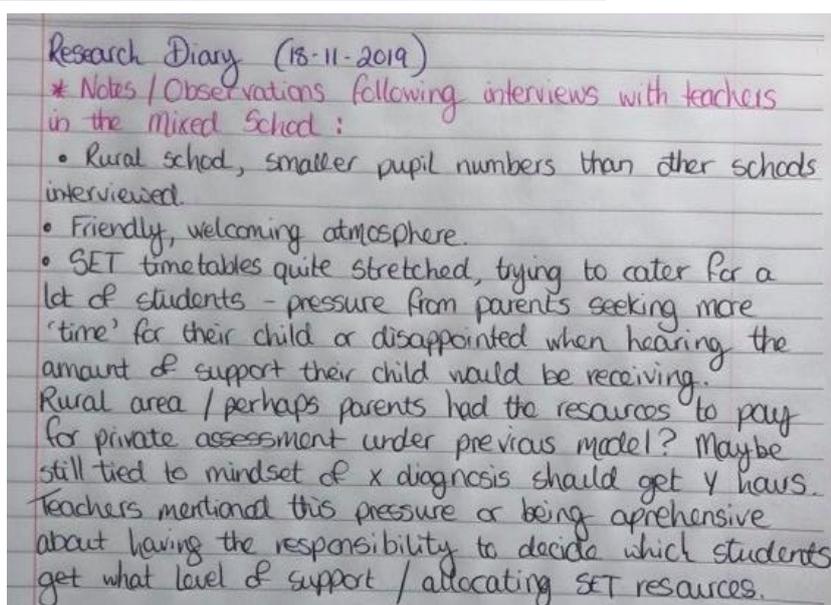
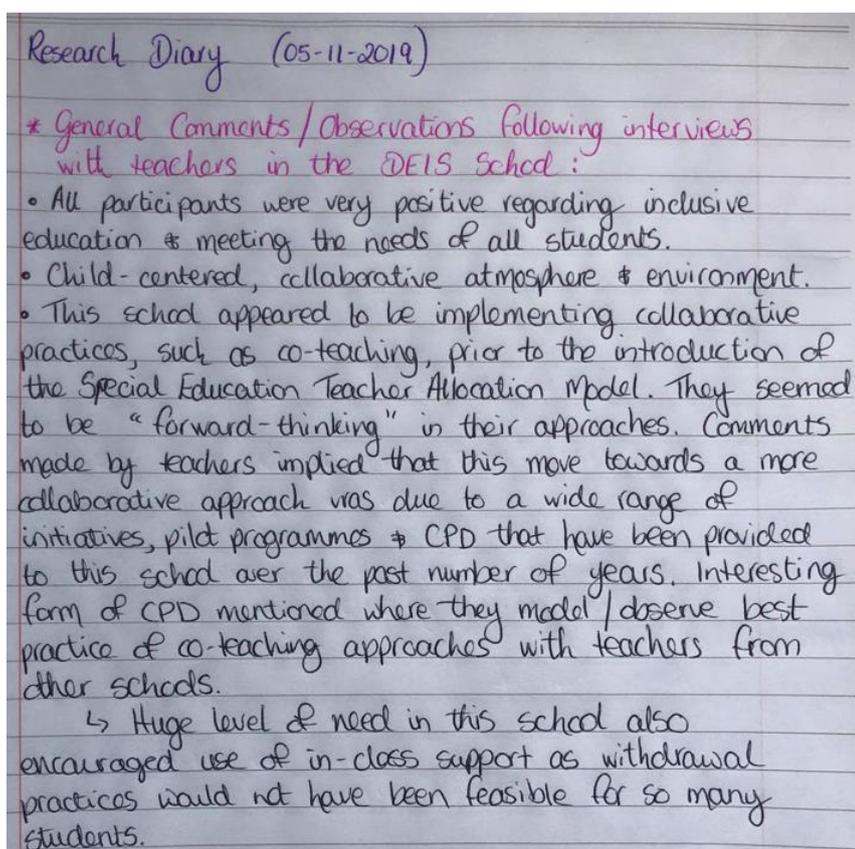
Phase 5 - Defining and Naming Themes (3 themes supported by 11 subthemes were identified at Phase 5)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
<b>Theme 1 - The Dilemma of Agency v Responsibility</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>182</b>
Agency	Part of an overarching theme called 'Agency v Responsibility'. 'Agency' will hold all codes and categories which explore teachers having more power, control, autonomy and flexibility under this new model. When comparing to the overarching theme it will form the discussion that with this increase in agency, also comes increased responsibility and so will discuss this dilemma.	17	87
Responsibility	Part of an overarching theme called 'Agency v Responsibility'. 'Responsibility' will hold all codes and categories which explore teachers having more increased responsibilities, duties, pressures and the possible reasons for such under this new model. When comparing to the overarching theme it will form the discussion that with an increase in agency given to teachers, also comes increased responsibility and so will discuss this dilemma.	17	95
<b>Theme 2 - The Continuum of Support as a Framework for Inclusive Practice</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>150</b>
Approaches to Monitoring and Reviewing Students' Outcomes	References made by teachers to their use of SSF to monitor and review student progress and interventions,	15	36

Phase 5 - Defining and Naming Themes (3 themes supported by 11 subthemes were identified at Phase 5)	Code Definitions for Coding Consistency (Rules for Inclusion)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Challenges Involved with the Implementation of the Classroom Support Stage	SSF or IEPs being working documents which are regularly monitored and reviewed References made by teachers to CTs having primary responsibility but Classroom Support Stage of CoS process not being implemented as effectively as other stages - failure to write up Classroom Support Plans	14	26
CPD	References made by teachers to one cohort of staff receiving CPD and others not being offered it.	15	52
ITE	Category containing all ITE related nodes.	17	36
<b>Theme 3 - Moving Towards a More Collaborative Approach</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>299</b>
Benefits of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to the benefits of in-class support or co-teaching.	13	30
Challenges of In-Class Support	References made by teachers to challenges of co-teaching approaches.	17	67
Greater Collaboration and In-Class Support	References made by teachers to more collaboration between teachers and more use of in-class support to respond to the needs of students with SEN, under the SETAM.	17	70
Models of In-Class Support in Practice	References to using a variety of in-class and withdrawal, co-teaching approaches being case dependent and most frequent types of co-teaching used in schools,	17	85
The Remaining Need for Withdrawal	References made by teachers to using SET's for withdrawal.	17	47

## APPENDIX 36

### Research Diary (a)

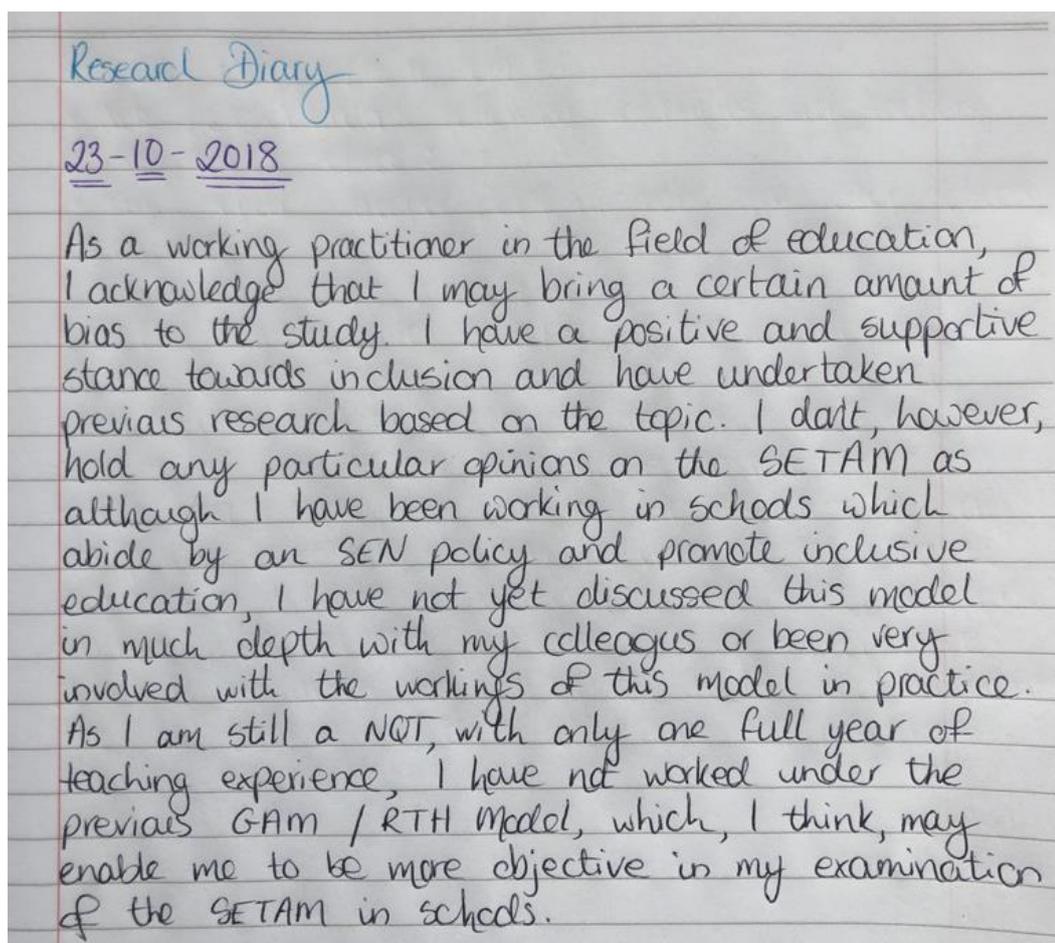
This section of the Research Diary was used to record notes and observations following interviews with participants. These comments were later reflected upon during data analysis.



## APPENDIX 37

### Research Diary (b)

This section of the Research Diary was used to document the researcher's beliefs, thoughts and insights throughout her research journey. The below excerpt sheds light on the researcher's own understanding of her bias towards the research topic from an early stage, deepening her understanding of her role and impact in the research process.



## APPENDIX 38

### Assessments used in Schools to Identify Students' Needs and Monitor Students' Progress

The below tables list a range of assessments mentioned by participants which are used for the screening and identification of students' needs and the monitoring of their progress in the areas of maths, language, and social, communication, emotional and behavioural needs.

<b>Maths Assessments</b>	
SIGMA-T	
Dromcondra	
CAT-4	(Cognitive Abilities Test)
WRAT-4	(Wide Range Achievement Test)
DTEN	(Drumcondra Tests of Early Numeracy)
Maths Recovery Screeners	
MaLT	(Maths Assessment for Teaching and Learning)
Maths Tracker	
Woodcock Johnson	

<b>Language Assessments</b>	
MICRA-T	
Dromcondra	
DTEL	(Dromcondra Test of Early Literacy)
CAT-4	(Cognitive Abilities Test)
WRAT-4	(Wide Range Achievement Test)
WIAT	(Wechsler Individual Achievement Test)
BIAP	(Belfield Infant Assessment Profile)
MIST	(Middle Infant Screening Test)
NRIT	(Non-Reading Intelligence Test)
DST-J	(Dyslexia Screening Test – Junior)
Schonell Reading and Spelling Test	
DRA	(Diagnostic Reading Analysis)
NARA	(Neale Analysis of Reading Ability)
VB-MAPP	(Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program)
BPVS3	(British Picture Vocabulary Scale)
Afasic Checklists	
Bracken Basic Concept Scale: Receptive & Expressive	

ACE	(Assessment of Comprehension and Expression)
Woodcock Johnson	
SNIP Literacy Programme	
TASS	(Trafford Assessment of Speech Sounds)
YARC	(York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension)
Jackson Phonics Skills Test	
SWST	(Single Word Spelling Test)
OWLS	(Oral and Written Language Scales)
SPAR	(Spelling and Reading Test)
CTOPP	(Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing)
Dyslexia Portfolio	
TOLD	(Test of Language Development)

<b>Social, Communication, Emotional and Behavioural Assessments</b>
NEPS Assessments: My Thoughts About School, Basic Needs Checklist, etc.
Teacher Observations
Pupil and Parent Consultations
A-B-C Monitoring Form
Checklists from Glynnis Hannel's Book ' <i>Identifying Children with Special Needs</i> '
BECK Inventories
Kathy Hoopman Books
PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School)
SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)

## APPENDIX 39

### Email Response from Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop

The below extract shows personal correspondence between the researcher and the Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop regarding Circular 0013/2017. After conducting interviews with teachers working on the ground, the researcher emailed the Inspectorate, seeking clarification on what exactly the ‘co-ordination time’, as specified in Circular 0013/2017 means *in practice* for all teaching staff. The researcher obtained permission to include this response as an appendix.

**An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna**  
Department of  
Education and Skills



Louise Curtin  
[Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Louise.Curtin@mic.ul.ie)

17 July 2020

Dear Ms Curtin,

Thank you for your interest in the current model of resource allocation for special education teaching and for your query about coordination time and what it means in practice in line with Circular 0013/2017. As you will be aware, in addition to Circular 13/2017, schools were provided with *Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* to assist them in structuring their supports.

The circular provides for a significant level of autonomy for schools with regard to the management of special education teaching (SET), including the use of a proportion of the allocated hours for planning and coordination activities.

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of pupils requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers providing this support. Those involved in co-ordination activities will likely be teachers with a high level of expertise and experience in the area of SEN and, as such, are also best placed to provide skillful interventions for those pupils with the greatest level of need. With this in mind Circular letter 0013/2017 stipulates that co-ordination time, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the time available for skillful teaching is maximized.

It is a requirement of schools that the needs of pupils are central to all decision-making, including any consideration of how a proportion of SET hours are to be used for planning and coordination. In this regard, it should be noted that there are various levels of planning and coordination that take place which can be considered core functions of senior management. These include, for example, the recruitment and deployment of teachers, the management of enrolment at the school and the coordination of teachers' work to ensure continuity of provision for all pupils. As such, these activities are not intended to require time from the SET allocation.

Similarly, in-school teams such as care teams, SSE teams, DEIS planning teams (where relevant) engage in aspects of planning for all students including students with additional needs. The class teacher too has primary responsibility for planning to progress and care for all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs in accordance with the Rules for National Schools. Where teachers are working together to teach

collaboratively, planning is similarly required by both teachers. SETs are also expected to plan work suited to the needs of their pupils. It would not normally be considered necessary to provide senior management, in-school teams or teachers with planning and coordination time from resources allocated to the school for SEN for their general planning activities.

Schools are also required to establish and maintain a skilled special education support team to guide provision (in schools where there is more than one SET). A teacher or small team of teachers, with experience and skills in planning for interventions and support for pupils with additional needs can be provided with dedicated time for planning and coordination activities that are considered to be supplementary to routine planning activities. Such activities might include:

- Co-ordination of the development of student support files- reviewing information received in relation to new pupils, identifying needs through diagnostic assessment, identifying appropriate interventions to address pupils' needs based on evidence and using the continuum of support framework. A pupil's support plan should include clear, learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs in line with the Continuum of Support framework
- Liaison with colleagues to provide guidance with regard to the setting of meaningful and measurable targets for learning, useful strategies for inclusion and to assist in collaborative troubleshooting where difficulties arise
- Liaison with previous pre-school or school settings
- Liaison with parents of students with additional needs
- Supporting management in planning for the effective use of the resources available
- Providing leadership to the school community and sharing expertise

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive. I do hope, however, that it provides the clarity you require on the issue of coordination of special education teaching resources in schools.

I wish you well in your studies.

Regards



Harold

Hislop Chief

Inspector

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