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An Evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

Department of Education and Skills

A Report by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLB (PwC)

March 2012

Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

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Glossary

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ATECI	Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland
CESC	Cork Education Support Centre
CSIE	Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education
CPD	Continuing professional development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education).
DES	Department of Education and Skills (formerly Department of Education and Science). This change occurred in May 2010 and all references in this report to the Department or DES should be read accordingly.
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EPSEN Act, 2004	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
EPV days	Extra Personal Vacation days
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GAM	General Allocation Model
ICDU	In-Career Development Unit
ICEP Europe	Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MGLD	Mild General Learning Disabilities
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NCSL	National College for School Leadership (formerly National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services). This change occurred on 1 June 2011.
NDA	National Disability Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQTs	Newly Qualified Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PPDS	Primary Professional Development Service
SCoTENS	Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South
SDPI	School Development Planning Initiative
SDPS	School Development Planning Support
SENCOs	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators. This term is commonly used in England for a teacher who is responsible for the co-ordination of special educational needs within a school.
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SLSS	Second Level Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TDA	Training and Development Agency for Schools
TEACCH	**T**reatment and **E**ducation of **A**utistic and related **C**ommunication-handicapped **CH**ildren
TES	Teacher Education Section
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WSE	Whole-School Evaluation

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Executive summary

Introduction

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Autumn 2010 to undertake an evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS). SESS was established by the Department in 2003 to address the then rather fragmented provision of continuing professional development (CPD) in the area of special education. The aims of SESS are to:

- Enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs.

- Design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel.

- Consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

The aims of this evaluation are linked to the aims of SESS, i.e. it is intended to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisational structure of SESS in the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs.

- Establish the impact of the CPD being provided by SESS on a number of key dimensions including the accessibility of programmes of CPD for teachers; the appropriateness of the content and process of CPD programmes for teachers; and the development of teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills.

- Identify the extent to which the aims of SESS are being achieved.

In order to locate this evaluation in context, this report also considers the policy context for special education in Ireland and some principles of effective CPD.

Methodology

The overall approach to this evaluation consisted of five key stages which are detailed below.

Stage 1: Review of current literature and project documentation

A review of current policy and practice was undertaken to locate this evaluation in the context within which SESS operates and to identify, where available, examples of CPD practice for teaching professionals internationally.

Stage 2: Stakeholder consultation

12 interviews were undertaken and 17 written submissions were received from stakeholders in the Irish education system or from others with an interest in special education. The purpose of these consultations was to explore the policy and contextual background to SESS in more detail and to develop an understanding of national-level perceptions of the support offered by SESS.

Stage 3: Focus groups

A focus group session brings together a small number of stakeholders (in this instance teachers and principals) for a structured group discussion about a particular subject (in this case SESS). Five focus group sessions were undertaken with a selection of participants at SESS events across Ireland; two in Dublin, one in the East Coast/Midlands, one in the Southwest and one in the West Coast. In total, almost 50 participants were engaged in this way. The focus group sessions were also used to gather qualitative evidence in relation to the impact of the programmes of CPD on teaching practice, whole-school practice and student outcomes.

Stage 4: Principal and teacher survey

A postal survey was conducted with the principals and teachers in 1,000 primary, post-primary and special schools broadly matched to the total population of schools in terms of geographical location. Each school principal was sent a pack containing four questionnaires. The principal was asked to complete one copy and distribute the remaining three copies to members of their teaching staff, preferably, teachers who had experience of SESS support or of teaching students with special educational needs. Irish-medium schools were sent an Irish language version of the questionnaire. The purpose of the survey was to understand teachers' experience of CPD in general; SESS and its activities and programmes; the impact of SESS activities and programmes on teachers' practice and the outcomes for students with special educational needs. In total, 1,495 completed questionnaires were received from 618 schools, representing a total response rate of 37% and a school response rate of 62%.

Stage 5: Analysis and reporting

The stakeholder interviews, written submissions and focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the content analysis approach.[1] The quantitative data was analysed using cross-tabulations (by phase, respondent type, location and medium). We also developed index scores for awareness and satisfaction and undertook cluster analysis to determine the main drivers of satisfaction. The results of this analysis formed the basis of two reports. The interim evaluation report, which contained the emerging findings from our desk-based research, and the final evaluation report, containing the findings from our desk-based and primary research. The final report was initially submitted to the Department in draft for discussion.

Special education: the policy context

Legislative and policy developments over the last decade, and most notably the passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in 2004 (EPSEN Act, 2004) suggest that the inclusion agenda is now firmly at the heart of education for students with special educational needs in Ireland. The Department has produced significant amounts of guidance to support schools and teachers in all settings to help ensure that all students, irrespective of their special educational needs, are educated in a setting which best meets their needs.

Over the last decade, this changing policy context combined with uncertainty over the full roll-out of the EPSEN Act has led to a significant period of adjustment in the Irish education system. Teachers increasingly work in more inclusive environments with students who have a very wide range of special educational needs, both in terms of their particular need(s) and the degree of severity of these needs. As a consequence, individual planning and programming are essential to meet the wide range of needs of all students and teachers increasingly need to adopt different teaching and working practices. Many of the more experienced teachers who have had to "learn on the job" may have had no previous formal CPD in special education. Likewise, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), particularly in mainstream schools, may find themselves lacking in confidence and experience in dealing with students despite some element of special education in their Initial Teacher Education programmes (ITE). What is more, while the expectations of teachers, parents and others will have been raised with the introduction of the EPSEN Act, in the future the amount of funding and resources available is likely to be constrained in line with the National Recovery Plan.

Some principles of effective CPD

On balance, there is a broadly consistent view in the international research reviewed that factors associated with the quality of teachers and teaching are among the most important influences on student learning. Given the international move towards greater inclusion and the increasing complexity of needs which teachers have to meet, the demand for effective CPD in the area of special education has increased dramatically, both for those who teach in mainstream settings and those who teach in special schools. This demand relates not only to development in relation to specific special educational needs, but also to new ways of working, whether these be new pedagogical approaches, team-working and collaboration with other specialists and supports, and/or increased interaction with parents.

The literature emphasises that effective CPD should be: self-reflective; evidence-based; collaborative; focused on student needs; integrated into the culture of the school; and an individual and collective responsibility of all

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[1] Content analysis involves the objective interpretation of meaning from qualitative data.

in the education system. There is some evidence of a potential tension between the needs of an individual school and of national priorities in terms of CPD provision. Other barriers to accessing effective CPD include time out of the classroom; access to funding for provision; and identifying CPD opportunities.

At a school-level, successful inclusion requires a "whole-school" approach; starting with the principal and involving the whole-school staff, parents and students. To continue to maintain and improve provision for students with special educational needs, schools should regularly engage in a process of self-evaluation. The organisation of CPD and embedding learning is also important at the school-level.

Individual-level characteristics and motivations can also impact on the effectiveness of CPD, particularly in the area of special education. These factors can include: attitudes towards inclusion; levels of experience of, and confidence in, working with students with special educational needs; appetite for qualifications, and individual perceptions of skills needs.

Approaches to CPD in participating schools

Given this range of factors which can influence the effectiveness of CPD, principals and teachers who participated in our survey were asked to describe the approach to CPD within their school communities. Encouragingly, there was a strong agreement that CPD is actively promoted and supported by the school management team, that it was integrated into teachers' personal development plans and that teachers have the opportunity to put their learning into practice in a supportive environment. However, there was a less strong response to the evaluation of CPD in schools, with almost a fifth disagreeing that the impact of CPD on learning and teaching is evaluated in their school.

The main ways in which teachers become aware of CPD opportunities are via the principal, email alerts from the provider and advertisements. The most frequently cited modes of CPD undertaken were attendance at external events (conferences and courses) and school-based workshops led by external providers. Participants reported that the main barriers to undertaking CPD in relation to teaching students with special educational needs were finding the time to undertake development activities and availability of substitution cover – both of which are beyond the direct control of SESS. However, a substantial proportion (43%) stated that a lack of awareness of the support available created a challenge to accessing CPD opportunities, suggesting that there is some room for improvement in the way CPD opportunities are communicated.

Special Education Support Service (SESS) organisational structure

Overall, stakeholders expressed the view that SESS has succeeded to some extent in co-ordinating and consolidating CPD on special education. However, some did think that more could be done to reduce duplication in the system with other state-funded providers. There was also a view that while the national model was working well, there could be scope for a more regional approach – resources permitting. Many focus group participants welcomed the understanding that SESS professional staff, as members of the teaching profession themselves, brought to the CPD. There were, however, some concerns from stakeholders about the limited level of resources, demands on professional staff and the recruitment and turnover of staff. SESS has received €2m to €3m in Departmental funding per year from 2007 to 2010. Since 2010 SESS has supplemented its income with fees from its online library (accounting for €4,380 in 2010). Overall expenditure is primarily driven by programme expenditure. The salaries of professional staff seconded to SESS on a full-time or part-time basis are paid by the Department directly. Staffing costs included in the SESS budget relate to administrative staff only and make up, on average, 7% of total expenditure for SESS.

Accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision

The prevalence of students with special educational needs in the classrooms of the teachers that participated in this evaluation is relatively high. Over the last two years, a third of teachers in primary and post-primary schools report that more than 20% of their students have a special educational need. Indeed, estimates in the literature suggest that, in Ireland, the prevalence rate is 18% (McKeown, 2006).

While demand will vary by teaching role, this finding demonstrates that there is a substantial audience for CPD relating to special education. The main special educational needs encountered by teachers are emotional

disturbance and/or behavioural problems followed by general and specific learning disabilities. In many cases, teachers stated that their students have more than one need. Evidence from stakeholders, the focus group participants and survey respondents suggests that demand for support to help meet the needs of these students is high.

Overall, awareness of SESS provision and support was high (particularly amongst special class teachers) with 82% aware or very aware of SESS. There is some room for improvement, however, with 12% of respondents to our survey stating that they were either not very aware or not at all aware of SESS. Our analysis has shown that awareness of SESS support tends to be lower amongst teachers in primary schools; teachers in Irish-medium schools; teachers in schools with lower proportions of students with special educational needs; class/subject teachers; and teachers of students with emotional or behavioural problems and general and specific learning disabilities.

In terms of respondent awareness of the various elements of support, the SESS website, courses and conferences rated highly. However, awareness tended to be lower for teacher exchanges, the online library and requests for funding support, suggesting that more could be done to promote these services.

As might be expected given the sample for this research, usage of SESS was reported to be high, particularly in relation to the website, seminars and conferences, in-school support and SESS designed and delivered courses. Teachers from special schools tended to report higher proportions of usage, which is most likely linked to the awareness issue, but may indicate that further examination of SESS promotional activity is required to encourage participation from mainstream schools.

Linked to the level of demand for SESS support, there were some concerns around waiting lists and, on the part of some participants, that CPD programmes are more geared towards resource and learning support teachers than classroom or subject teachers.

A large proportion of the respondents to our survey described SESS CPD and support to be very relevant to their teaching roles. This was particularly the case for seminars, courses and conferences and the SESS website. Participants particularly valued the expertise of course facilitators but some did question whether there could be greater personalisation of the course content. For example, it was suggested that separate sessions for teachers with different levels of experience of teaching students with a particular special educational need could be provided so that those with significant experience could explore the subject area in more depth. There were also some concerns around a perceived focus on Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and on more severe special educational needs.

Many participants welcomed the range of delivery modes, though a number did state that they preferred external, face-to-face events as this gave them the opportunity to interact with their peers. The findings demonstrate, however, that more could perhaps be done to promote the online library as around half of teachers disagreed (9%) or were non-committal (40%) in relation to the value of the library as a resource. This may be due, to some degree, to the relative recency of this initiative. Respondents were also largely positive about the in-school support provided by SESS where this had been accessed.

Overall, therefore, those who participated in this evaluation were aware of SESS CPD and support and were very positive in relation to the accessibility and appropriateness of this provision. Areas of concern tended to focus on access to, and the relevance of, the content to specific groups such as classroom or subject teachers in mainstream schools.

The impact of SESS on teachers, schools and students

The results from the qualitative and quantitative phases of this evaluation suggest that there is a general consensus that SESS CPD and support has enhanced teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to their students with special educational needs. A large majority of participating teachers described SESS seminars and conferences and the website as effective in enhancing their knowledge and skills. This was particularly the case for teachers in special classes. Numerous participants described SESS support in its various forms as a useful information source but it also appears that many teachers are, in the main, putting their learning into practice. Many were able to provide specific examples of the ways in which SESS support had informed their pedagogical approach.

Overall, a third of survey respondents strongly agreed that their involvement with SESS had informed their practice. This is important as the literature suggests that there is a risk that teachers may become too reliant on support and request help as a reflex action rather than reflecting on their learning and changing their practice. SESS states that it continues to develop processes to empower and enable schools and teachers to engage in self-reflection and evaluate their own CPD needs at an individual teacher and whole-school level. Nonetheless, the level of access to, and usage of, SESS services, and in particular, the in-school support, should continue to be monitored to help assess whether specific schools are contacting SESS on multiple occasions.

The majority of respondents (70%) stated that their involvement with SESS had a significant impact on their teaching practice and again this was particularly the case for primary teachers and teachers in special schools. Overall, 14% of respondents stated that the impact was not significant and this should also be monitored going forward. Respondents agreed, in the main, that the support provided by SESS had helped them in planning to meet the individualised needs of students (84%) and had increased their confidence in relation to teaching students with special educational needs (81%). Many teachers were also in a position to describe new techniques and ways of working.

We also considered the impact of SESS provision on whole-school practice. Around three quarters of respondents to the survey agreed with whole-school impacts deriving from SESS support such as: improvements in the knowledge and understanding of teachers; teaching practice becoming more focused on a range of student needs; and increased collaboration between teachers. There was also a view amongst stakeholders and survey respondents (62%), that schools had become more inclusive as a result of SESS support.

Overall, around six in ten respondents to the survey agreed that student achievement had improved and three quarters thought that students' interpersonal and social skills had improved. Again, special class teachers were more likely to agree that SESS support has contributed to improved student outcomes.

Overall satisfaction with SESS support was high, with eight in ten participants stating they were satisfied – this was particularly the case for teachers in special schools with 90% responding positively to this question. Special class teachers were, again, more satisfied than other teacher groups. The main areas where respondents wanted more support included more exposure to expert practitioners, more support with behavioural problems, and more opportunities to meet with peers from other schools. In terms of sustaining the benefits of SESS support, the vast majority (98%) thought this would happen to some or to a great extent, though a number of issues were identified by participating teachers including the increasingly complex environment in which teachers operate and the detrimental impact if funding was restricted in the future.

Summary and next steps

The final section of our report considers the extent to which SESS is meeting its aims, drawing on all the evidence gathered through the course of this evaluation.

To design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel

Overall, the findings from both the national stakeholder consultation and the qualitative and quantitative research with teachers were very positive about the calibre of the professional staff employed by SESS – particularly in relation to their experience as teachers of students with special educational needs. However, a number of issues did arise in terms of the SESS staffing model, including the time pressures on professional staff; the national structure; staff recruitment and turnover; and the collation and management of information relating to the uptake of SESS CPD and support by schools and individual teachers.

A large proportion of the respondents to our survey described SESS CPD and support to be very relevant to their teaching roles and effective in developing their knowledge and skills. This was particularly the case for seminars, courses and conferences and the SESS website. Participants particularly valued the skills and experience of SESS course facilitators and the mix of theory and practical examples. Some did question, however, whether there could be greater personalisation of the course content to allow more experienced teachers to omit the introductory stages of the learning. A number of areas were identified where it was thought that SESS could develop new provision, including: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and teaching special educational needs; behaviour management; in-school collaborative working; literacy,

numeracy and speech and language therapy; provision for NQTs; provision for parents; and provision for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).

To consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development and support

The second aim of SESS is to consolidate and co-ordinate CPD in the area of special education across Ireland. This aim derives from the recognition from the DES that 10 years ago, provision was rather fragmented across the system and that there was no real means of co-ordinating and prioritising CPD in an increasingly complex area.

The findings from the survey and the stakeholder consultation suggest that SESS has established itself well as the co-ordinating organisation for CPD in relation to special education but that more could perhaps be done to consolidate its position. Just under seven in ten respondents (67%) agreed, for example, that in the absence of SESS they would *not* have accessed a similar range of CPD, and around half (49%) agreed that the SESS website was their first port of call for information on CPD on special education. While these responses reflect substantial agreement, there is evidently some room for improvement. Many national stakeholders were positive about the extent to which SESS is meeting its aims of consolidating and co-ordinating provision for professional development and in many cases reported regular contact with SESS. However, other stakeholders were unaware of the responsibilities of SESS in this regard.

There is some evidence from the stakeholder consultations that duplication in the system has now been reduced – while the range of supports that is available has been maintained and expanded. There were some concerns from stakeholders however in relation to a perceived lack of clarity of roles in the system and the most appropriate balance between accredited and non-accredited courses. There is also some evidence in the literature that teachers in Ireland believe that special education receives insufficient attention in ITE. Given the ongoing work being undertaken by the Teaching Council on developing a more coherent continuum of teacher education, this may be one area where SESS could usefully input its expertise to a greater degree.

The vast majority of respondents thought that the benefits accruing from SESS support were sustainable in the longer term, which is also an indicator of the level of success achieved by SESS in consolidating and co-ordinating support. The main reasons given for this included increased teachers' skill levels throughout their teaching career and the reported impact on the achievement of students with special educational needs.

To enhance the quality of learning and teaching with particular reference to the education of students with special educational needs

The core aim of SESS is to enhance the quality of learning and teaching with particular reference to the education of students with special educational needs. In our survey, overall satisfaction with SESS support was high amongst the principals and teachers who responded (81%) to the evaluation. It is clear from the literature that teacher effectiveness is the main school-based factor impacting on student outcomes and that engaging teachers in high quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teacher effectiveness. In this context, the support provided by SESS has the potential to make a significant impact on outcomes for students with special educational needs. We explored the impacts of the support provided by SESS at a number of levels:

- **Teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills:** there was strong support for the view that SESS support had increased the skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence of teachers working with students with special educational needs.

- **Classroom practice:** the majority of respondents (70%) also reported that their involvement with SESS had a quite or very significant impact on their teaching practice and many were able to provide specific examples of new teaching strategies that they had implemented subsequent to receiving the support.

- **Whole-school practice:** SESS CPD and support also appears to have had an impact at the whole-school level in line with DES guidelines that there should be a whole-school approach to inclusion. There was a view amongst some focus group participants that SESS support had, at a general level, helped facilitate more inclusive environments by up-skilling teachers. In more specific terms, around three quarters agreed that

teaching practice in the school had become more focused on meeting a range of student needs; that teachers' understanding of special education issues had improved; and that collaborative working had increased.

- **Outcomes for students with special educational needs:** again, almost six in ten respondents agreed that student outcomes had improved as a consequence of SESS support, with similar proportions agreeing that academic achievement had improved, students are more enthusiastic about learning, students' interpersonal and social skills have improved and student behaviour in the school has improved. Again, while it should be noted that this is self-reported data, it is nonetheless encouraging that many teachers can perceive an impact on their students' outcomes.

Next steps

Overall and on balance, the findings from this evaluation would suggest that SESS is meeting its aims of developing and delivering a range of supports, consolidating and co-ordinating existing provision, and (as far as the data allows) enhancing learning and teaching by helping improve teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching practice in relation to special education. The findings have shown, however, that there are variations in the patterns of awareness and take-up by phase and teacher type. There are also small but substantial minorities of respondents who have stated, for example, that SESS provision has made little impact on their teaching practice.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction with SESS and the evident respect with which it is held (demonstrated, for example, in the responses to the open-ended questions to the survey), there are nonetheless a number of areas where SESS could be enhanced or expanded. These areas are presented in the table overleaf for further consideration by SESS and the Department. We have not attempted to prioritise these potential next steps as, in our view, given the current financial climate, these should be considered in the context of wider Departmental priorities and its views on the future direction of SESS. For example, while more special class, resource and learning support teachers tended to be aware of SESS than mainstream class or subject teachers, it may be that budgetary constraints will prompt the Department to conclude that support is best directed at these groups given the nature and level of their interaction with students with special educational needs.

Table A: Recommendations for further consideration

Theme	Next steps	Rationale
Efficiency and effectiveness of the SESS organisational structure	**Consideration of the SESS staffing model** • Extending secondment period. • Enabling recruitment of more full-time staff to assist succession planning (i.e. the identification and development of internal personnel with the potential to fill key roles within the organisation). **Consideration of SESS processes** • Consider commissioning one-off projects (i.e. development of existing database) to improve efficiencies. • Consider sustainability of design team membership and the potential to widen membership.	• Alleviate time pressures on staff. • Facilitate succession planning and sustainability. • Free up staff time to focus on front-line delivery. • Monitor patterns of access by schools to determine where support needs to be targeted or reduced.
Design and delivery of a range of professional development initiatives	**Awareness-raising** • Raise awareness of all forms of support - particularly online CPD and the online library. • Monitor different patterns of take-up and tailor communications to different school phases and teacher types. **Needs of the Irish-medium sector** • Explore in more detail the needs of the Irish-medium sector and consider targeted recruitment from this sector. **New forms of provision** • Consider developing provision for specific non-teaching groups, i.e. SNAs and parents. • Consider developing support materials for teachers in relation to working with SNAs, parents etc. • Consider demand for CPD in relation to ICT and teaching students with special educational needs; behaviour management; in-school collaborative working; literacy, numeracy and speech and language therapy; and provision for NQTs.	• Promote self-directed learning as a cost-effective mode of learning that doesn't require substitution cover. • Counteract the perception that SESS is targeted at special class or resource teachers rather than class or subject teachers and promote the concept that special education is the responsibility of all. • Assess the extent to which there is a demand for materials and support in the Irish language. • There was a clear demand for provision for SNAs from respondents and the aim of SESS refers to provision for school personnel – not just teaching staff. Support for parents would also help improve communication between the school and the family.
Consolidation and co-ordination of existing professional development and support	**Communication** • Communicate and promote the consolidation and co-ordination role of SESS. **Liaison** • Continue to enhance international linkages. • Feed best practice and new learning into the development of ITE. **Range of supports** • Maintain and promote a range of supports (directed and self-directed and in- and out-of-school). • Monitor the balance of accredited and non-accredited provision.	• Increase clarity around roles and responsibilities in the education sector. • Increase the level and quality of knowledge in relation to special education and students with special educational needs in the education sector.
Enhance the quality of learning and teaching	**Promote CPD culture in schools** • Review links with principals as gatekeepers to CPD. • Communicate importance of evaluation of CPD to principals. • Disseminate examples of good practice deriving from SESS interventions. **Monitor impact** • Continue to monitor the impact of SESS CPD and support on schools and teachers (by phase and teacher type).	• Widen access to SESS CPD and support. • Help ensure that learning is cascaded through the school. • Celebrate the success stories of CPD support.

1. Introduction and methodology

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader about the background to this evaluation. It sets out the aims of the research and the methodology used to complete it. This chapter is structured under the following headings:

- Introduction.
- Teacher Education in Ireland.
- Terms of Reference.
- Methodology.
- Conclusion.

Introduction

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Autumn 2010 to undertake an evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS). SESS was established by the Department in 2003 to address the then rather fragmented nature of continuing professional development (CPD) for special education and as a response to the acknowledged need to provide teachers with the requisite knowledge, understanding and skills to teach students with special educational needs. The establishment of SESS represented the further development of the Department's provision for CPD at that time, which included the funding of a range of post-graduate programmes in special education in a number of third-level institutions. The aims of SESS are to:

- Enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs.
- Design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and support for school personnel.
- Consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

Teacher Education in Ireland

The Department has been developing the current model of CPD provision for first and second level teachers in Ireland for over a decade. Its origins can be traced to 1994, when Ireland secured considerable investment from the EU (under the Human Resources Operational Programme and the Regional Development Fund) to support a programme of in-career development for teachers and the construction of a network of purpose-built Education Centres. The development of the Education Centre network in 1998, the inauguration of SESS (in 2003) and the formation of TES from the In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) in 2004 have all supported the delivery of in-career development programmes across the country. The first post-graduate programme in special education was established in St. Patrick's College in the 1960s and a post-graduate programme related to special education is now available in seven third-level institutions.

TES was formed to reflect the Department's view of teacher education as a continuum from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to induction to CPD. The remit of TES includes policy formulation, co-ordination, general direction and management of CPD for teachers and the financing of programmes, including, but not limited to, the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs. TES funds SESS and works in close collaboration with a nationwide network of Education Centres.

Special education in the teacher education continuum

Special education is addressed to varying degrees through the teacher education continuum. The content of ITE, for example, must have regard to the *Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009*, which means that it must include studies in the Foundation Disciplines of Education, which incorporates "Inclusion and Diversity – Meeting diverse needs". The Teaching Council has also drafted its strategy for the *Review and Accreditation of Programme of Initial Teacher Education*, which requires that a student teacher understands differences in students' backgrounds and identities and the way in which these differences can shape experience and impact on learning. He or she should also understand the concepts of equality and diversity, respect values and accommodate diversity when encountered. In particular, he or she should be able to recognise the individual potential of students and make preparation for those with special or exceptional needs and potential as guided by the class teacher (Lawlor and Sayles, 2010).

Research undertaken by Kearns and Shevlin (2006 cited in O'Gorman et al., 2009) found that the inclusion of modules related to special education in ITE programmes facilitated an understanding among Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) of the importance of inclusion in the classroom and the requirement to adapt their pedagogical approach to a range of student needs. However, ITE cannot be expected to cover the entire scope of teacher professional development in special education, which is likely to increase as the number of students with special educational needs attending mainstream settings continues to rise (O'Gorman et al., 2009).

> *"While there is some input on special education in ITE, relatively little time is available to provide prospective teachers with the comprehensive knowledge and skills to meet the needs of students with special educational needs".* (Inclusive Education in Action: Continuing Professional Development for Teachers in Ireland)

In accordance with the DES Circular 0058/2010, a new National Induction Programme for Teachers has been available since September 2010. This provision is available for all primary and post-primary NQTs via the Education Centre network (Teaching Council, 2011). Whilst it is not compulsory, participation in the induction programme is recommended by the Teaching Council to all NQTs (Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland (ATECI), 2011). The National Induction Programme aims to address the need identified in previous research undertaken by Killeavy and Murphy (2008 cited in O'Gorman et al., 2009) to include special education as one of the priority areas for teacher induction programmes. It is intended to build on the knowledge and skills developed during the ITE stage, and provide professional support and advice to NQTs. One of the support sessions specifically focuses on the inclusive classroom and students with special educational needs.

In addition to the CPD provided directly by SESS, there are a number of post-graduate programmes of CPD in special education provided by institutions and Education Centres located across Ireland. The combined *Post-Graduate Diploma Programme of CPD for Teachers involved in Learning Support and Special Education* is delivered in seven institutions which are located throughout the country (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). This professional qualification is aimed at teachers working with students with special educational needs and teachers working in mainstream settings with students who require learning support teaching. Teachers at primary and post-primary level and teachers in special schools are eligible to apply for these CPD programmes.

Post-graduate programmes in the learning and teaching of students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are provided in two third level institutions (DES, 2010b). One such programme, *the Post-Graduate Certificate/Diploma Programme of CPD in Special Educational Needs (ASD)* was developed in partnership with SESS and allows participants to continue to diploma level. Additionally, there are taught degrees at Masters Level and research-based Masters and Doctoral programmes at various institutions. Teachers undertaking Masters level qualifications do so at their own expense. A list of the programmes funded by TES is presented in Appendix A.

Online CPD on special education is available to teachers in Ireland through Hibernia College. In addition, the Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe (ICEP Europe) has successfully tendered for the delivery of online programmes of CPD in the area of special education.[2] SESS provides funding towards the cost of fees for the ICEP Europe programmes. In both cases programmes typically last 20 hours.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation are outlined below. These relate to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisational structure of SESS, the impact of SESS on the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs, and the extent to which SESS is achieving its aims.

Table 1.1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference	
The effectiveness and efficiency of the organisational structure of the Special Education Support Service	Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisational structure of SESS in the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs.
The impact of Special Education Support Service on key elements in the provision of CPD	Establish the impact of the CPD being provided by SESS on the following key elements: • Accessibility of programmes of CPD for teachers. • Appropriateness of the content and process of CPD programmes for teachers. • Development of teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills. • Effect on teachers' classroom practice. • Effect on whole-school practice. • Outcomes for students as they relate to accessing, participating and benefiting from an appropriate education.
Aims of Special Education Support Service	Identify the extent to which the following aims of SESS are being achieved: • To design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel. • To consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development and support. • To enhance the quality of learning and teaching with particular reference to the education of students with special educational needs.

Methodology

This section provides an overview of the methodology employed for this evaluation. The overall approach consisted of five key stages:

• Stage 1: Review of current literature and project documentation.
• Stage 2: Stakeholder consultation.
• Stage 3: Focus groups.
• Stage 4: Principal and teacher survey.
• Stage 5: Analysis and reporting.

Each stage is discussed in more detail overleaf.

A Project Advisory Committee was convened by the TES to provide support and advice to the research team. The Committee comprised members with experience and expertise in the area of special education and CPD. Details of the members of the Committee are provided in Appendix B. The role of the Project Advisory Committee was to provide guidance and direction for the research team. Attention was directed, at all times, to ensuring that the integrity of the research process and the independence of the research team were preserved.

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[2] Invitations for providers to tender for these programmes are issued every three years.

Stage 1: Review of current literature and project documentation

An important first step in the evaluation was to consider the political and educational landscape in Ireland in relation to special education and to consider the main characteristics of effective professional development that are described in the literature. A review of current policy and practice was, therefore, undertaken to locate this evaluation in the context within which SESS operates and to identify, where available, examples of CPD practice for teaching professionals internationally. This desk research also informed the development of later stages of the methodology, in particular, Stage 4, the design of the principal and teacher survey.

Stage 2: Stakeholder consultation

During this stage, a range of national and regional stakeholders was consulted (see Table 1.2). This involved conducting 12 interviews and collecting 17 written submissions from stakeholders in education or with a specific interest in special education. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the policy and contextual background to SESS in more detail and to develop an understanding of its objectives and anticipated outcomes. The interviews also provided deep insight into the perceived effectiveness and efficiency of SESS at a strategic level and the extent to which it links appropriately with its partner organisations. The topic guide for the stakeholder interviews is provided in Appendix C.

Table 1.2: National and regional stakeholders consulted

Stakeholder interviews	Written stakeholder submissions
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland	Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland
Cork Education Support Centre (CESC)	Catholic Primary School Management Association
Inspectorate, DES	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta
Irish National Teachers Organisation	Disability Federation Ireland
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment	Down Syndrome Ireland
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	Féach
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	Irish School Heads Association
SESS personnel	Irish Vocational Education Association
Special Education Litigation Section	Joint Managerial Body, Secretariat
Special Education Section, DES	Mary Immaculate College (Limerick)
Teacher Education Section, DES	Middletown Centre for Autism
Teachers' Union of Ireland	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
	People with Disabilities in Ireland
	School of Education, University College Dublin
	St. Patrick's College (Dublin)
	University College Cork

Stage 3: Focus groups

Five focus group sessions were carried out with a selection of participants at SESS events across Ireland; two in Dublin, one in the East Coast/Midlands, one in the Southwest and one in the West Coast. Table 1.3 overleaf illustrates the number of participants in each session and their role within the school. In total, almost 50 teachers and principals were engaged through these groups.

Table 1.3: Focus group participation

Location	Number of participants	Role and school type
Dublin	18	17 primary and 1 post-primary principal.
Dublin	8	1 principal and 6 mainstream teachers from primary schools and 1 special class teacher from a special school.
East Coast/Midlands	8	3 resource teachers and 5 learning support teachers all from primary schools.
SouthWest	7	3 resource teachers, 3 learning support teachers and 1 teacher of students with behavioural difficulties, all from primary schools.
West Coast	8	Class teachers, resource teachers, and learning support teachers all from primary schools.

The purpose of these focus groups was to gain further insight on the extent to which the aims of SESS are being achieved. The focus group sessions were also used to gather qualitative evidence in relation to the impact of the programmes of CPD on teaching practice, whole-school practice and student outcomes. This qualitative research also explored any specific issues that might affect a teacher's ability to put this learning into practice. The topic guide for the focus groups can be found in Appendix D.

Stage 4: Principal and teacher survey
Overview

A postal survey was conducted with the principals and teachers of 1,000 primary, post-primary and special schools broadly matched to the total population of schools in terms of geographical location. Each school principal was sent a pack containing four questionnaires for completion. The principal was asked to complete one copy and distribute the remaining three copies to members of their teaching staff, preferably, teachers who had experience of SESS support or of teaching students with special educational needs. This approach is of course likely to lead to the self-selection of a group of respondents with greater levels of awareness of SESS provision than the teaching population in general. While it was recognised that this approach may skew findings on the level of awareness of SESS provision, it was considered necessary to achieve informed and insightful responses from participating teachers. The purpose of the survey was to understand teachers' first-hand experiences and perceptions of:

- CPD in general.
- SESS.
- SESS activities and programmes.
- The impact of SESS activities and programmes on their teaching practice, school wide practice and the consequent outcomes for students with special educational needs.

The principal and teacher survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix E. Irish-medium schools were sent an Irish language version of the questionnaire.

Profile of respondents

In total, 1,495 completed questionnaires were received from 618 schools, representing a total response rate of 37% and a school response rate of 62%. A targeted sampling technique was employed in order to achieve sufficient responses from each school phase to allow us to draw robust conclusions about any variation in response by phase. Therefore, we have weighted the responses received (using the weights shown in Table 1.4), in order to bring the characteristics of our target sample in line with the overall school population. This process makes the survey data more representative of the whole school population. We can, therefore, use the weighted responses to make robust generalisations about the whole school population and be confident that the responses received are representative of the views of the wider principal and teacher population in Ireland (with a margin of error of +/-3% at the 95% confidence level). The figures used throughout this report are based on the weighted base, but the unweighted base has also been included for reference. Please note that, throughout, percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 1.4: School response rate by phase and weightings applied

Type of school	Number of responses received	% of total responses	Total population of schools	% of total school population	Weightings applied	Number of responses after weighting
Primary school	812	54%	3,165	79%	1.4544	1,181
Post-primary school	474	32%	730	18%	0.5675	269
Special school	209	14%	130	3%	0.2153	45
Total	**1,495**	**100%**	**4,025**	**100%**		**1,495**

Table 1.5 shows the breakdown of respondents by job role. The question in relation to the role of respondents was a multiple response question so totals will not sum to 100%. For example, one respondent could have answered that they were a principal, a class teacher and a member of the school management team. Please note that this survey was targeted at teaching staff only and principals were discouraged from distributing the questionnaires to Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) or other non-teaching personnel.

Table 1.5: Role of respondents

Role of respondent	Primary	Post-primary	Special	Total
Class/subject teacher	37%	50%	27%	**39%**
Special class teacher	3%	11%	45%	**6%**
Learning support teacher	34%	37%	3%	**34%**
Resource teacher	28%	37%	5%	**29%**
Principal	27%	31%	33%	**28%**
Member of the In-School Management Team	26%	17%	28%	**24%**
Deputy/assistant principal	1%	2%	2%	**1%**
EAL teacher	0%	0%	0%	**0%**
Special educational needs co-ordinator	0%	1%	1%	**0%**
Other teacher	1%	2%	1%	**1%**

Weighted base: 1,482 (Note that not all respondents answered this question therefore the base is not equal to 1,495)
Unweighted base: 1,476

As illustrated in Table 1.6 below, over a quarter of all respondents (26%) were identified as Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schools, which is broadly in line with the number of DEIS schools in the total school population.

Table 1.6: Number of respondents from DEIS schools

DEIS status	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
DEIS school	25%	32%	14%	26%
Non DEIS school	75%	68%	86%	74%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,462
Unweighted base: 1,448

Table 1.7 below illustrates that 30% of all respondents described themselves as teaching in a school in the countryside, 35% in a village or small town, 17% in a medium/large town and 18% in a city. Please note that the location classification used was developed and agreed with the Project Advisory Committee as this is not a classification used by the DES. Profile information on a national basis is, therefore, not available for the whole school population.

Table 1.7: Location of school

Location	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
A city	15%	26%	43%	18%
A large town (population between 18,000 - 75,000)	9%	13%	15%	10%
A medium town (population between 10,000 - 18,000)	6%	13%	15%	7%
A small town (population between 4,500 - 10,000)	9%	23%	14%	12%
A village (population between 1,000 - 4,500)	24%	22%	6%	23%
The countryside	38%	3%	7%	30%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,445
Unweighted base: 1,440

The majority of special schools (78%) that responded to our survey had 75 or fewer students whereas post-primary schools, for the most part, had 301 or more students. The primary schools in which the respondents taught were more mixed in terms of size. Table 1.8 below illustrates the distribution of respondents by school size and phase.

Table 1.8: Number of students enrolled in the school of respondents

No. of students	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
1-75	28%	0%	78%	24%
76-150	25%	5%	22%	22%
151-300	30%	18%	1%	27%
301 or more	17%	77%	0%	27%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,483
Unweighted base: 1,484

Stage 5: Analysis and reporting

The stakeholder interviews, written submissions and focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the content analysis approach.[3] The quantitative data was analysed using cross-tabulations (by phase, respondent type, location and medium). We also developed index scores for awareness and satisfaction and undertook cluster analysis to determine the main drivers of satisfaction. The results of this analysis formed the basis of two reports: the interim evaluation report, which contained the emerging findings from our desk-based research; and the final evaluation report, containing the findings from our desk-based and primary research.

Limitations of this research

This methodology was designed to provide a robust evidence base to address the Terms of Reference for this evaluation and the findings presented in this report should, therefore, be viewed in that context. For example, while our review of literature has been extensive it is not meant to be exhaustive - its purpose, rather, has been to provide the reader with an overview of the current policy and practice within which SESS operates and to identify, where available, examples of good practice. Similarly, as noted above, in order to elicit informed and insightful responses to our survey it was agreed to target teachers who had experience of SESS support or of teaching students with special educational needs. However, this approach has the potential to skew somewhat

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[3] Content analysis involves the objective interpretation of meaning from qualitative data.

the findings on the level of awareness of SESS provision. These potential limitations of the approach have been acknowledged in the relevant sections throughout this report.

It should also be noted that our evaluation has been undertaken during a period of uncertainty in relation to the availability, and use, of public sector funding in the future. The findings of this research should therefore be considered within the wider economic context as this may have influenced the attitudes and opinions of those contributing to our evaluation. For example, through our focus group sessions we found evidence that some participants were concerned that funding for support services, such as SESS, would be significantly reduced in the future. It is possible that these concerns may have influenced their views on SESS to some extent. It is evidently not possible, however, to determine the extent of this influence on our findings.

Conclusion

The remainder of this report is structured under the following headings:

- Chapter 2: Special education: the policy context.
- Chapter 3: Some principles of effective CPD.
- Chapter 4: Approaches to CPD in participating schools.
- Chapter 5: Special Education Support Service (SESS) organisational structure.
- Chapter 6: Accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision.
- Chapter 7: The impact of SESS on teachers, schools and students.
- Chapter 8: Summary and next steps.

There are also eight appendices:

- Appendix A: Special education programmes funded by TES.
- Appendix B: Members of the Project Advisory Committee.
- Appendix C: Stakeholder topic guide.
- Appendix D: Focus group topic guide.
- Appendix E: Principal and teacher survey questionnaire.
- Appendix F: Illustrative drawings from focus group participants.
- Appendix G: Special education programmes in Ireland provided by other institutions.
- Appendix H: Bibliography.

2. *Special education: the policy context*

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter is to set this evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) within the context of special education policy in Ireland. It provides the reader with a description of the prevalence of students with special educational needs, the increasing complexity of needs which teachers encounter and the move towards increasing inclusion. This chapter also sets out the guidelines available for teaching staff and the specific support provided for the education of students with special educational needs.

The evidence presented in this chapter is based on our review of relevant literature and Departmental guidance and documentation. The Departmental publications suggest that the Department is providing a continuum of provision through mainstream and special schools and special classes and that the education of students with special educational needs is centred on the inclusion agenda.

This chapter describes how the policy of inclusion has been embedded in the education system through numerous pieces of legislation (e.g. the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act, 2004)) and the various factors which have led to a change in teaching and working practices (e.g. working in more inclusive environments and working with other adults in the classroom). We also describe how these changes have, in turn, resulted in a spectrum of experience in relation to teaching students with special educational needs. This encompasses: teachers who may have had experience of, but no formal continuing professional development (CPD) in special education; and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT), who have received some element of special education in their Initial Teacher Education (ITE), but have little or no experience in working with students with special educational needs.

Introduction

This section of the document reviews the special education policy context in Ireland. It is structured under the following headings:

- Prevalence of special educational needs in Ireland.
- Moving towards inclusion.
- Guidelines for teaching students with special educational needs.
- Specific support for students with special educational needs.
- Conclusion.

Prevalence of special educational needs in Ireland

The legislative and policy position in Ireland is that students with special educational needs should be educated alongside their peers who do not have such needs, provided this constitutes the most appropriate placement for the student and will meet their specific identified needs. In order to accommodate this, educational provision for students with special educational needs comprises a continuum, which includes special schools, special classes and mainstream classes.

According to data from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2009/2010, a total of 856,685 students were educated in 3,165 primary schools, 730 post-primary schools and 130 special schools across Ireland (DES, 2010a). In total, there are approximately 57,512 teachers in both the primary (31,709) and post-primary (25,803) school phases (DES, 2010a). For the purposes of allocating resources for special educational needs, students may be identified as having either low incidence or high incidence disabilities. High incidence disabilities include disabilities which occur relatively commonly in populations – for example, dyslexia and borderline/Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD). Low incidence disabilities, occur less commonly and can include any one of the following disabilities: physical disability, hearing/visual impairment, emotional disturbance, severe or profound general learning disability, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), specific speech and language disorders, assessed syndrome or multiple disabilities (DES, 2002a).

Estimating the precise number of students with special educational needs in Ireland is relatively complex. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned research in 2006 to determine the prevalence of students with special educational needs in Ireland. Their research estimated that at that time there were 190,300 students in Ireland who had special educational needs as defined by the EPSEN Act (2004). This equates to approximately 18% of all students (McKeown, 2006).

Moving towards inclusion

Education for students with special educational needs in Ireland has gone through significant changes over the last decade with a shift in emphasis from a medical/care model towards a more inclusive view of special education delivered, where possible, in integrated and mainstream settings. The main drivers for reform and change within the education sector include:

- The increasing preference of many parents who have children with special educational needs to have their child placed in a mainstream setting.

- National and international influences, e.g. the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994); the Council of Europe, Political Declaration (2003) and Action Plan (2006); and the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

- Legislative developments, e.g. the Education Act (1998); the Education (Welfare) Act (2000); and the EPSEN Act (2004).

The 1993 report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) played a significant part in the development of special education in Ireland (DES, 1993). In particular, it provided a definition of special educational needs and recognised the importance of the integration of students through schooling in a mainstream setting. The report described a range of 12 possible models of special educational service that should form the range of choices for children and parents. These models represent a continuum of provision as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Continuum of Provision of Special Educational Service – SERC Report
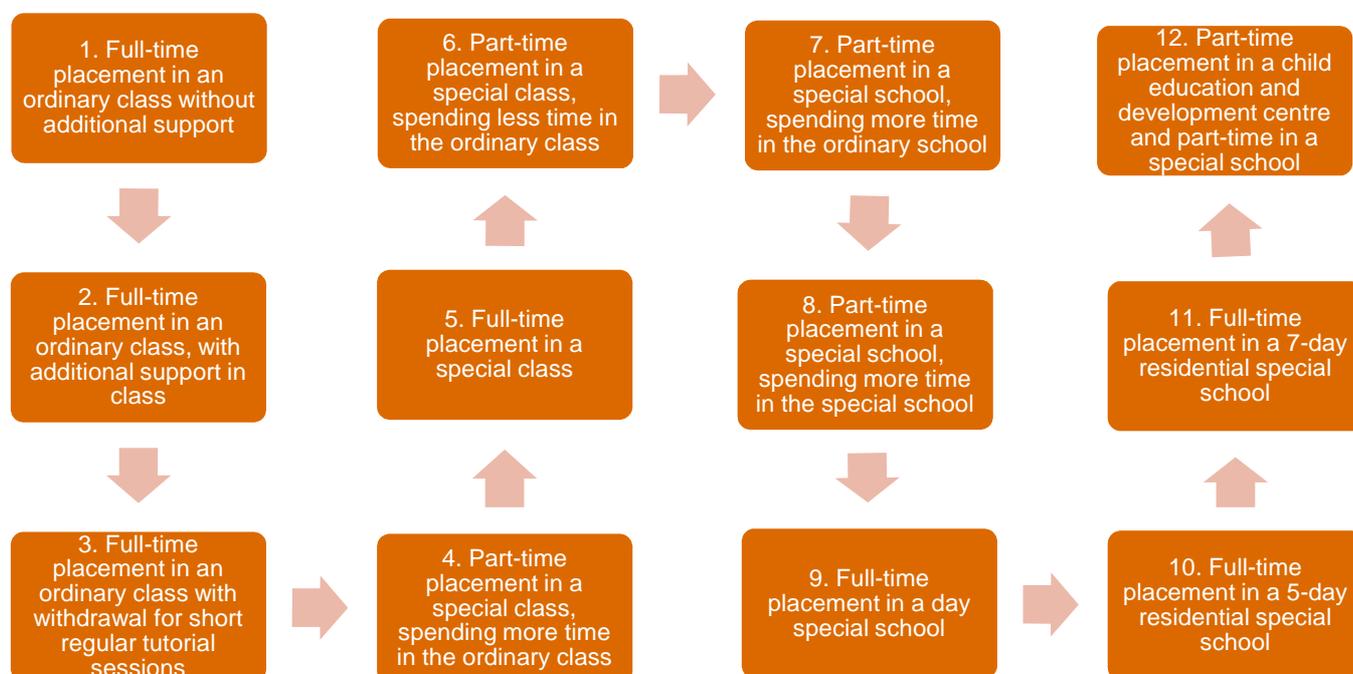
Source: DES (1993). *Report of the Special Education Review Committee.* Stationary Office, Dublin.

Another key recommendation of the report was that additional support should be provided to schools to assist with the integration of students with special educational needs into a mainstream setting (as cited in Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS), n.d.).

One of the outcomes for the SERC report was the introduction of seven principles which continue to provide a basis for DES policy and practice in relation to the education of students with special educational needs to date (INTO, 2003). These are:

- That all children, including those with special educational needs, have a right to an appropriate education.

- That the needs of the individual student should be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the provision of special education for that student.

- That the parents of children with special educational needs are entitled and should be enabled to play an active part in the decision-making process.

- That a continuum of services should be provided for students with special educational needs ranging from full-time education in mainstream classes with additional support as may be necessary, to full-time education in special schools.

- That, except where individual circumstances make this impracticable, appropriate education for all students with special educational needs should be provided in mainstream schools.

- That only in the most exceptional circumstances should it be necessary for a student to live away from home in order to avail of an appropriate education.

- That the state should provide adequate resources to ensure that students with special educational needs can have an education appropriate to those needs.

In 1998 the ministerial announcement by the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin, pledged to provide resources to meet the educational needs of students with special educational needs irrespective of their location or general learning disability. This led to a major shift in special education provision (DES, 1998). Indeed several significant legislative developments, in the years which followed, have facilitated the participation of students with special educational needs in mainstream education where appropriate. These are detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Legislation promoting inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream settings

Legislation	Key provisions
Education Act (1998)	• This Act places a statutory duty on the Minister for Education and Skills to ensure that appropriate education and support services are available to everyone, including every person with a disability or other special educational needs. • It states that schools must use their resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for.
Education (Welfare) Act (2000)	• This Act legislates that every child in the State is entitled to a certain minimum education, and regulates the education of children in places other than recognised schools (National Disability Authority (NDA), 2004).
Equal Status Act (2000)	• This Act requires that schools do not discriminate in terms of admission, access, participation or expulsion. • It encourages the development of an inclusive school environment.
EPSEN Act (2004)	• This Act gives children with special educational needs the right to be educated in an inclusive environment, unless this is inconsistent with either the best interests of the child or effective provision for other children.
Disability Act (2005)	• This Act was designed to advance and underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society by supporting the provision of disability specific services and improving access to mainstream public services.

Whilst each of the pieces of legislation detailed above is important in its own right, the key piece of legislation that continues to underpin special education provision in Ireland is the EPSEN Act, 2004. Under the EPSEN Act, students with special educational needs will be educated "*in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs,*" (EPSEN Act 2004, S.2, p.7) unless this is inconsistent either with the best interests of the student, or with the effective provision for the other students. The purpose of the EPSEN Act was to:

> "*Make further provision, having regard to the common good and in a manner that is informed by best international practice, for the education of people with special educational needs, to provide that the education of people with such needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives, to provide for the greater involvement of parents of children with special educational needs in the education of their children, for those purposes to establish a body to be known as the national council for special education and to define its functions, to confer certain functions on health boards in relation to the education of people with special educational needs, to enable certain decisions made in relation to the education of people with such needs to be the subject of an appeal to an appeals board and to provide for related matters*". (EPSEN Act 2004, p.20)

It was originally envisaged that the various components of the EPSEN Act (2004) would be rolled out over a five-year period from 2005. While the current fiscal position does not allow for the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, the Government made a commitment in the 2009 Renewed Programme for Government (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011) to develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a costed multi-annual plan to implement some priority aspects of the EPSEN Act (2004), focusing on measurable, practical progress in education and health services for students with special educational needs.

The Department produced approximately 40 circulars on special education between 1990 and 2011, which gives some indication of the level of attention devoted to this area. Consistent with the shift in policy direction discussed above, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of the education of students with special educational needs as a key responsibility for all teaching staff (in both mainstream and special education

settings) and not just special schools or special class teachers. Teachers in mainstream settings play a key role in inclusion: they have a responsibility to ensure that all students, including those with special educational needs, are provided with a supportive learning environment.

In *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* the DES Inspectorate suggested that mainstream teachers should be empowered to contribute to school development planning for students with special educational needs and be equipped to facilitate the achievement of targets that are set out in students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs), where these are in place (DES, 2007a).

Guidelines for teaching students with special educational needs

The role of the class teacher is central in identifying and planning for the needs of all students in the classroom. Due to the wide range of special educational needs (both in terms of the area of need and the degree of severity), it is important that these teachers are fully equipped to correctly identify those needs and provide the appropriate support required via individual planning and programming. It is also important that teachers have appropriate CPD opportunities available to assist them in developing and evaluating specific strategies and interventions to meet those needs. A series of guidelines to help foster inclusion has, therefore, been published. These documents include:

- Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006).
- Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines (DES, 2007a).
- Special Educational Needs - A Continuum of Support - Resource Pack for Teachers (DES, 2007b).
- Special Educational Needs - A Continuum of Support - Guidelines for Teachers (DES, 2007c).
- A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools - Resource Pack for Teachers (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2010a).
- A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools - Guidelines for Teachers (NEPS, 2010b).

These guidelines are designed to assist schools in providing appropriate education and support for students with special educational needs and provide best practice guidance in relation to school planning and guidance within the current legislative framework. The guidelines advocate a whole-school approach to inclusion, with advice provided on the role of each staff member in the school and how they can be effectively deployed to support an inclusive environment. This includes accessing CPD opportunities, studying the extensive literature in the area of special education, developing models of good practice with the support of school-planning support services[4] and SESS as well as the formation of special education support teams to develop shared and co-operative practices among subject teachers, resource teachers and learning-support teachers.

Specific support for students with special educational needs

There are 130 special schools in Ireland. Technically, these schools are categorised as primary schools which cater exclusively for students aged between four and eighteen years of age, with one or more special educational need.

The 1993 SERC report discussed earlier highlighted the need for a continuum of services for students with special educational needs which included supported and unsupported inclusion in a mainstream school, part-time placements involving mainstream schools and special schools/classes and full-time placement in special schools. However, according to Ware et al. (2009) evidence from the SERC report suggested that there is a perception that students attending special schools are presenting with increasingly serious needs and that special schools sometimes feel isolated due to the policy of inclusion. Norwich (2008 as cited in Ware et al. 2009), stated that the future of the sector lies in special and mainstream schools working towards commonality in terms of a range of aspects of schooling, including identification of need, curriculum, teaching, placement and participation.

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[4] School Development Planning Support (SDPS) for primary schools – which was absorbed into Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) and then became Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST); and School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) for post-primary schools -which is currently operating under PDST.

Significant investment has been made in increasing the numbers of teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to support schools in providing an inclusive environment for all students, irrespective of their particular needs. In 1997, for example, there were approximately 300 SNAs in schools in Ireland. This number increased to approximately 6,000 in 2006. In 2011, a cap of 10,575 (Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)) was placed on the number of SNAs as part of the National Recovery Plan. There is some evidence (Ware et al., 2009) that this increase in the number of SNAs has created issues in that many teachers are not used to working with other adults in the classroom. This may be challenging on a number of dimensions, particularly in terms of teachers' management experience and potential discomfort at being observed in their professional role (Ware et al., 2009). In 2011 the DES conducted a value for money review of the SNA Scheme. Conclusions from this review are presented in the table below.

- *"The SNA Scheme could achieve its objectives and the associated level of output with fewer inputs and thereby achieve greater value for money...*
- *The SNA Scheme is effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities.*
- *The effectiveness of the SNA Scheme has been compromised by the inappropriate expansion of the role and the identified over-allocation of SNA posts...*
- *The SNA Scheme continues to be relevant to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities.*
- *The role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative, pedaogogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties....*
- *The role of the SNA should be managed with reference to relevant Departmental Circulars.*
- *SNA training programmes should be based on the role of the SNA as envisaged in Departmental Circulars.*
- *The findings suggest that schools require guidelines to assist them in the management and utilisation of SNA support...*
- *The SNA Scheme has continued relevance for students with disabilities who have additional care needs.*
- *The possibility of the SNA Scheme achieving greater administrative efficiencies should be considered by the DES.*
- *The Steering Committee recognises the views of some focus group participants that there may be students who do not have care needs under the SNA scheme, but who may require some form of additional support in the classroom".* (DES, 2011, p.11-18)

More specifically in relation to allocating funding to schools, the General Allocation Model (GAM) provides additional teaching resources to assist primary schools in making appropriate provision for the following (DES, 2005b):

- Students eligible for learning support teaching, where eligibility for learning-support teaching is prioritised to students whose achievement is at or below the tenth percentile on standardised reading and mathematics tests.

- Students with learning difficulties, which includes students with mild speech and language difficulties, students with mild social or emotional difficulties and students with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified special educational needs such as dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

- Students who have special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities.

Through the GAM, the allocation of teaching resources is intended to ensure that schools can provide additional teaching support to students with learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without the requirement for the school to make applications on behalf of individual students. The GAM allocation includes additional teaching time that was previously allocated for learning support teaching as well as an allocation of additional teaching time for students with high incidence disabilities and students with learning difficulties (see, for example, DES, 2005a, 2005c and 2006).

There is no GAM in the post-primary sector. Instead, resource teaching hours are allocated to support individual students. The allocation may consist of part-time resource teacher hours, whole-time teacher equivalents and/or teacher posts. The number of additional teacher hours allocated to a post-primary school depends on the number of students assessed as having special educational needs and on the level of their needs.

Schools (both primary and post-primary) are also encouraged to develop Special Education Support Teams either in individual schools or across clusters of schools. These teams usually consist of learning support teachers, resource teachers and class teachers. Resource teachers are allocated to schools on a formulaic basis for students with low incidence special educational needs. For example, a student with a physical disability may be eligible to have three hours of resource teaching support assigned to the school per week whereas a student with multiple disabilities may be eligible to have five hours assigned per week (DES, 2002b).

For students with low incidence disabilities at primary level and both low and high incidence disabilities at post-primary level, applications for resources must be made through the assigned Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). SENOs are employed by the NCSE and are principally involved in resourcing schools to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. Every year, the NCSE issues guidelines prior to schools completing an application (for example, for additional teaching hours). The school principal then makes an application for additional support following a professional assessment of the student's needs through the SENO. The SENO also provides information, advice and guidance to schools.

Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the policy context within which this evaluation of SESS is taking place. The material presented in this section suggests that the Department is providing a continuum of provision through mainstream and special schools and special classes and the education of students with special educational needs is centred on the inclusion agenda.

This has been embedded through numerous pieces of legislation, the most important of which is the EPSEN Act (2004). The Department has produced significant amounts of guidance to support schools and teachers in all settings in order to:

- Help ensure that all students, irrespective of their special educational needs, are educated in a setting which best meets their needs.

- To assist teachers in providing for students with a range of needs.

In spite of these significant policy changes over the last decade there has been some uncertainty over the full roll-out of the EPSEN Act with, for example, IEPs which are not yet mandated by legislation. Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that a high proportion of such plans are in place. This in itself is an indication of the adjustment that the Irish education system has experienced.

Teachers will increasingly work in more inclusive environments, with other adults in the classroom, and consequently, have to adopt different teaching and working practices. Currently in the education system, there exists a spectrum of experience in relation to teaching students with special educational needs. Many of the more experienced teachers who have had to "learn on the job" may have had no previous formal CPD in the learning and teaching of students with special educational needs. On the other hand, NQTs, particularly in mainstream schools, may find themselves unconfident and inexperienced in dealing with students despite receiving some training in special education in their ITE.

Furthermore, while the expectations of teachers, parents and others will have been raised with the introduction of the EPSEN Act, in the future the amount of funding and resources available are likely to be constrained in line with the National Recovery Plan.

3. Some principles of effective CPD

Chapter summary

This chapter sets out of some of the principles of effective continuing professional development (CPD) for teaching professionals. It highlights the importance of teacher CPD in improving the learning and teaching of all students. In this chapter we also describe the characteristics which make teacher CPD effective. This is followed by a discussion of the importance of evaluating the impact of CPD on teaching practice, whole-school practice and student outcomes. This chapter also includes an overview of national policies on teacher CPD and a consideration of the factors which could influence the impact of CPD at the levels of the whole-school and the individual teacher.

The literature reflects a general consensus that factors associated with the quality of teachers and teaching are the most important school-based influences on student learning. It emphasises that effective CPD should be: self-reflective; evidence-based; collaborative; focused on student needs; integrated into the culture of the school; and an individual and collective responsibility of all in the education system.

At a national level, this chapter outlines the intention of the Teaching Council to move towards a mandatory CPD system as a condition of teacher registration. The Council has also identified inclusion-related CPD as a priority.

At a school level, the literature suggests that inclusion requires a "whole-school" approach and that the organisation of CPD and embedding learning is also important. To continue to maintain and improve provision for students with special educational needs, the literature states that schools should regularly engage in a process of self-evaluation.

The review also identified individual-level characteristics and motivations which can impact on the effectiveness of CPD in the area of special education. These include attitudes towards inclusion; levels of experience of, and confidence in, working with students with special educational needs; appetite for qualifications; and individual perceptions of skills needs.

Introduction

This section of the evaluation report presents a thematic analysis of good practice in relation to the CPD of teaching professionals in order to inform this evaluation. It recognises that there are a range of factors, at the national, school and individual teacher levels, which will affect the extent to which the quality of learning and teaching of students with special educational needs can be enhanced – some of which may be beyond the direct control of Special Education Support Service (SESS).

It should also be noted that, given the scale of the literature on effective professional development, and, indeed, the many forms that professional development can take, this section is an overview of the main recurring themes and is not meant to be exhaustive. The aim of this chapter, rather, is to place the current evaluation in the context of good practice in relation to CPD in schools.

Where appropriate, we have included selected international examples of good practice but it should be noted that these examples are inevitably located in a set of educational, social and economic contexts that are unique to that jurisdiction and that care should therefore be taken in assessing the extent to which these are applicable to the Irish education system. This section is structured under the following headings:

- The importance of CPD.
- Some characteristics of effective CPD.
- Evaluating CPD.
- National policy on CPD.
- School-level approaches to special education and CPD.

- CPD at an individual level.
- Conclusion.

The importance of CPD

It is well accepted in the international literature that teacher quality is the most important school-based factor in determining attainment and outcomes for all students.

> *"Student learning is influenced by many factors, including: students' skills, expectations, motivation and behaviour; family resources, attitudes and support; peer group skills, attitudes and behaviour; school organisation, resources and climate; curriculum structure and content; and teacher skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices... of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors to do with teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning. In particular, the broad consensus is that "teacher quality" is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement".* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2005, p.2)

The 2005 *Blueprint for Government Schools,* published by the Victorian Government in Australia, for example, is intended to place teacher quality at the very centre of learning. This document is based on research that highlights the quality of teachers as a key determinant of variation in student achievement. It states that, in order to be effective, teachers need a deep understanding of their subject area, knowledge of how students learn specific subject matter and a range of strategies and practices that support student learning. The research also affirms that engaging teachers in high quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teacher effectiveness (Department for Education and Training, 2005).

At the same time, the context in which teachers are operating is changing considerably. This is recognised explicitly in the Teaching Council of Ireland's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* which was published in 2011. The Council notes the inclusion of students with disabilities or special educational needs as one of the factors driving these changes.

> *"The Council is also mindful of the evolving and dynamic context for teaching whereby new understandings and insights have emerged in a range of areas including pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, human learning, early childhood education and teacher education. In parallel, teachers have found themselves facing a range of new challenges and opportunities in the classroom in recent years. The inclusion of children with disabilities and/or special educational needs into mainstream schools, the increase in the numbers of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the changes in an increasingly diverse society, changing family structures and the emergence of new societal and economic problems are contributing to the complexity of teaching in 21st century Ireland".* (Teaching Council, 2011, p.6)

Internationally, as in Ireland, there has been a movement towards inclusion with students with special educational needs being increasingly educated in mainstream settings. Key policy accords that have facilitated this shift include the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994); the Council of Europe, Political Declaration (2003) and Action Plan (2006); and the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). It is widely recognised that, in order to facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream education, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, understanding and skills to teach students with a wide variety of needs and abilities. This marks a move towards the concept that all teachers are teachers of students with special educational needs.

> *"Recently the move to more inclusive systems worldwide where all pupils are educated and welcomed in the mainstream has placed increased demands on all those involved. The preparation and ongoing CPD of teachers with responsibilities for special educational needs is of paramount importance in ensuring that students have access to the best possible education that meets their needs. The growing impetus of inclusion necessitates that all teachers, primary and secondary, have the skills necessary to address the needs of a range of diverse learners on a daily basis successfully. This requires not only input at a preservice level, but also CPD aimed at strengthening the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers as they progress through their careers".* (O'Gorman et al., 2009, p.5)

The European Commission's report on the implementation of the *Education and Training 2010* work programme sets out the importance of a highly skilled teaching profession (European Commission, 2004). This is supported by research undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003), which found that CPD of all education personnel is required for the development of a more inclusive education system. This report recommended that teacher education should:

- *"Design long-term training plans that take into account all the actors involved and the different models needed to meet different needs.*

- *Implement training activities directed to both mainstream teachers and specialists so that they share the same approach and are enabled to work in partnership.*

- *Include the relationship between theory and practice and opportunities for reflection in all training actions.*

- *Start from the needs felt by the teachers themselves.*

- *Direct training to the school as a whole whilst retaining an array of strategies and models to achieve different objectives and address different needs.*

- *Promote self-development, creating opportunities for networking amongst teachers, schools and communities.*

- *Encourage teachers themselves to develop new teaching materials".* (UNESCO, 2003, p.25)

A survey of CPD programmes in OECD countries (Magrab, 1999, cited in OECD, 2003) identified professional development in inclusive schooling as an area of *"high priority, an immense challenge and in need of considerable extension"* (OECD, 2005, p.25). Magrab identified the following developmental practices as important for effective inclusive education:

- Working as the special education co-ordinator.
- Team teaching.
- Developing mutual support between teachers.
- Effective collaboration through discussion and a problem-solving approach.
- The pedagogy of curriculum differentiation.
- The development of individual education programmes.
- The monitoring of progress.

At the individual teacher level, the 2009 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) identified "teaching special learning needs students" as the area where the greatest development was needed with almost one third of all respondents (i.e. lower secondary education teachers and the principals of their schools) across the 23 participating countries rating their development need in this area as high (the figure for Ireland was slightly above the overall average at 38.3%) (OECD, 2009). This indicates not only a recognition by mainstream teachers of the importance of developing their competence in this area but also a general feeling among them that they are not fully equipped to deal with the challenges which inclusion brings. Some authors also highlight the need for more specialist support and "inclusion champions" within schools.

> *"In responding to the rapidly changing scenarios of present day education systems, there is a need both to adapt and improve instruction and also to keep abreast of policy change. There is a requirement for professional learning for all teachers in the pursuit of inclusion and an urgent need for specific professional learning for the key promoters of inclusion within the school".* (O'Gorman, 2010, p.41)

The challenges of inclusion experienced by teachers derive not only from changes in policy and teaching practice but also in the range of special educational needs that they might encounter in the classroom and the increased interaction that they will have with the parents of these students. Research has also shown that a substantial proportion of parents of children with special educational needs have some concerns regarding teachers' understanding of their child's specific needs. According to Grove and Fisher (1999), parents' overarching perception of their children's teachers is that they have insufficient knowledge and expertise in the area of special education. Almost half (49%) of parents surveyed in a Queensland-based study believed that teachers required more CPD to meet the special educational needs of their children (Elkins et al., 2003).

Whitaker (2007) found that satisfaction levels of parents of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) regarding special education provision were strongly influenced by their perception of the level and quality of the teachers understanding of the child's difficulties. A high proportion (50%) of parents expressed concern in relation to this. When asked what would constitute "a good understanding of their child's condition", 25% cited the correct deployment of appropriate teaching and management strategies. Parents who took part in this study also wanted teachers to be able to appreciate the implications of their child's diagnosis and to empathise with the child and its arising needs.

In the study by Grove and Fisher (1999), parents perceived a dialogue with teachers, specifically relating to their child, as both a necessity and an investment in the future of their children. They also recognised the difficulty and tensions teachers experience in the reality of educating a heterogeneous group of students. In research in Northern Ireland, parents expressed concern with respect to the ability of teachers with general education qualifications to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. To bridge this gap they suggested both the allocation of additional funding to further develop CPD, and the provision of a trained special education teacher in every school (O'Connor et al., 2003).

In a recent study undertaken by PwC (2010) for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), it was found that parents were generally satisfied with the level of knowledge of teachers of students with special educational needs (70%). Parents of students in special and primary school settings tended to be more positive in relation to each of these aspects of support than those with children in post-primary settings. In general, teachers in post-primary schools were found to be more likely to experience greater challenges in responding to their students' special educational needs.

A report commissioned by the NCSE (2009) found that teachers in general believed that there was limited dedicated time for developing inclusive practice through CPD days, staff meetings and CPD support. Indeed, inadequacies in undergraduate, postgraduate and on-the-job CPD were the constraints most commonly cited by participants in the NCSE research to creating inclusive learning environments. What is more, participants considered that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) did not cover special education in sufficient depth and this, they felt, had major implications for inclusive practice (Shevlin et al. 2009). This highlights the demand for and importance of in-service support for CPD in the area of special education, which is offered to school staff via SESS amongst others.

Some characteristics of effective CPD

There is some evidence that teacher CPD can have a significant impact on students' outcomes. A review of the evidence on the impact of CPD on student outcomes in mainstream primary school settings, found that teachers who receive substantial professional development (i.e. around 49 hours) can boost their students' achievements by about 21% (REL Southwest, 2007). This finding is backed up by an NCSE study which recommends that teachers should have more access to appropriate CPD, which reflects the variety of roles that staff fulfil and the particular groups of students that they work with, as these were seen as key factors in contributing to the progress of students with special educational needs (Ware et al., 2009). This CPD should be available to all teachers working in special schools including the principal due to his or her central role in setting the school ethos.

The recent Teaching Council of Ireland's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011) emphasises the importance of innovation, integration and improvement across ITE, induction and CPD. The policy advocates that teacher education as a whole should be underpinned by a number of key principles, stating that it should:

- Be informed by the core values of the Teaching Council's Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers.
- Be informed by the best available research and evidence.
- Recognise teachers as lifelong learners and teacher education as a continuum.
- Develop the capabilities which are central to teachers' professional practice and personal growth throughout the continuum.
- Foster reflective, critical and enquiry-oriented learning.
- Be based on a broad understanding of the practice of teaching as one involving complex relationships and requiring different types of professional knowledge, attitudes and dispositions.
- Be supported by appropriate structures designed to achieve coherence across all stages of the continuum.
- Be provided using a partnership model involving teachers, schools and teacher educators.

- Be adequately resourced to meet teacher, school and system needs.
- Foster the development of competences to facilitate quality learning and cater for educational priorities.
- Be subject to periodic review and ongoing evaluation of needs and priorities.

The policy emphasises that CPD is both *"a right and responsibility"*, stating that:

> *"CPD is a right for all registered teachers. In that context, an allocation of time for individual and/or staff group CPD should be built into teachers' scheduled non-teaching time. The allocation of time should be significant and should reflect the importance of CPD for effective professional practice. CPD should be based on teachers' identified needs within the school as a learning community. CPD is a responsibility of all registered teachers. In that context, a registered teacher should take reasonable steps to maintain, develop and broaden the professional knowledge, skill and capabilities appropriate to his or her teaching".* (Teaching Council, 2011, p.19)

The Teaching Council also presents the following principles for CPD, based on: self-reflection; collaboration; personal responsibility and, ultimately, student outcomes:

- *"CPD should promote knowledge-for, knowledge-in and knowledge–of practice in a context where there is adequate time for feedback and follow-up support.*

- *Effective CPD, which is participative in nature, should encourage teachers to evaluate their pedagogical beliefs and practices, to critically reflect on their professional practice and working environments and to engage in professional collaboration.*

- *Individual teachers should actively shape their own professional development, in the context of a professional development portfolio commenced during initial teacher education and retained throughout the teaching career.*

- *CPD should facilitate teachers' critical engagement with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to maximise students' learning".* (Teaching Council, 2011, p.20)

Likewise, in ongoing work on teacher CPD in Australia, effective professional learning, according to the Victorian Government (Department of Education and Training, 2005), is:

- Focused on student outcomes (not just individual teacher needs).
- Focused on and embedded in teacher practice (not disconnected from the school).
- Informed by the best available research on effective learning and teaching (not just limited to what they currently know).
- Collaborative, involving reflection and feedback (not just individual inquiry).
- Evidence-based and data-driven (not anecdotal) to guide improvement and to measure impact.
- Ongoing, supported and fully integrated into the culture and operations of the system – schools, networks, regions and the centre (not episodic and fragmented).
- An individual and collective responsibility at all levels of the system (not just at the school-level) and it is not optional.

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in England has also considered the characteristics of effective CPD for teachers, based on commissioned research and evidence from OfSTED inspection reports (TDA, 2007; TDA 2008a; and TDA 2009). Again, it emphasises the importance of collaboration, personalisation and evidence-based practice. The key characteristics of effective CPD as identified by TDA are illustrated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of effective CPD

Characteristic	Comment
Each activity is part of a coherent long-term plan that gives the participants opportunities to apply what they have learned, evaluate the effect on their practice, and develop their practice.	Research shows that CPD is most effective when it is sustained, as part of a deliberately planned process.
It is planned with a clear vision of the effective or improved practice being sought. This vision is shared by those undertaking the development and by the people leading or supporting it.	The plan needs to show precisely what expertise, understanding or technique the CPD is intended to deliver. Well defined outcomes are also the starting point for evaluating the impact of the CPD.
It enables the participants to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to their current role or career aspiration – for example, in curriculum or subject content, learning and teaching strategies and the uses of technology.	CPD is only effective when it is directly relevant to each participant. Where CPD is provided for large groups, or for the whole staff, it may be useful to separate the participants into smaller groups so the CPD can be customised to suit each type of participant.
It is provided by people with the necessary experience, expertise and skills.	These providers may sometimes be colleagues and peers. At other times they may be specialists from inside or outside the school.
It is based on the best available evidence about learning and teaching.	The evidence needs to include current research and inspection evidence. Research shows that students learn best when staff are motivated, developed and updated. Research also indicates positive links between students' learning and sustained CPD.
It takes account of the participant's previous knowledge and experience.	Professional learning needs to be tailored to the individual so that it provides experience and insights which build on their existing level of expertise. Professional learning journals and various forms of accreditation can be useful in ensuring a person's existing expertise is properly taken into account.
It is supported by coaching or mentoring from experienced colleagues, either from within the school or from outside.	Coaching is most effective when a staff member with a clearly identified need is paired with a colleague who has acknowledged expertise in that area.
It uses lesson observation as a basis for discussion about the focus of CPD and its impact.	Conducted in a collaborative and supportive manner, observations of teaching can be particularly useful for identifying areas for development.
It models effective learning and teaching strategies, e.g. active learning.	To be effective, CPD needs to go beyond theory and exposition. Ideally, it demonstrates techniques and strategies and gives the participant opportunities to try them out in a supportive setting.
It promotes continuous enquiry and problem-solving embedded in the daily life of schools.	A hallmark of effective CPD is an ethos in the school of lifelong learning and development. If the staff exemplify learning as an instinctive and continual activity, they will also act as role models for the students.
Its impact on learning and teaching is evaluated, and this evaluation guides subsequent professional development activities.	The ultimate purpose of all CPD in a school is to maintain the highest possible standards of education and care for children and young people. CPD needs to be vigorously evaluated to ensure it is making the maximum contribution to this objective. The most effective evaluations are planned from the outset as an integral part of the CPD.

Source: TDA (2007) *What Does Good CPD Look Like?* London: TDA. Based on research by The Centre for Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice and OfSTED.

However, research commissioned by the TDA into the implementation of CPD in schools in England (TDA, 2008a), found that these principles are not always reflected in practice. Key findings from this study include:

- Research-informed and classroom-based collaborative approaches to CPD are characteristics of effective CPD identified by the TDA and the literature review. However, most teachers' approaches to CPD tend not to be collaborative, nor clearly contextualised in classroom practice, nor research informed.

- Teachers, irrespective of school characteristics (such as school location, sector, region and achievement band) and irrespective of teacher characteristics (such as levels of responsibility, career stage, and years of teaching experience) record levels of practice for collaborative, class-room based approaches to CPD that are significantly behind their values. Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs)/excellent teachers and head teachers record higher levels of practice than others.

- School-level impacts or impacts on beliefs and practices of others such as teachers or students are rarely identified by teachers. Thus there is little indication that current CPD is perceived as having an impact on raising standards or narrowing the achievement gap.

- There is a widespread absence of a strategic approach to CPD in schools: it is often not coherently planned and leadership of it can be diffuse and reactive.

- Teachers tend not to make connections between CPD and strategic benefits such as school improvement.

Specific barriers to implementing or accessing effective CPD programmes identified by Goodall et al. (2005) include:

- Time out of the classroom.
- Cost of provision.
- Perceived disruption to students (i.e. when their teacher undertakes CPD during school hours).
- Identifying CPD opportunities.
- Knowledge about providers and new CPD opportunities.

These barriers may vary by individual, school type and the resources available to schools.

> *"The primary barrier to CPD for teachers is a lack of access to a range of opportunities. This is especially true for teachers with little experience, at early career stages and with little leadership responsibility, who have a narrower range of CPD opportunities available to them than their more experienced or senior colleagues. School type and conditions can also serve as barriers to CPD engagement. Primary school teachers and teachers in schools with low achievement levels have a narrower range of CPD opportunities offered to them. Teachers often make decisions to participate (or not participate) in CPD activities based on their perceptions of the financial resources available and the perceived quality of supply teachers".* (TDA, 2009, p.11)

Evaluating CPD

Among the most well-known means of evaluating CPD is probably Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model (Kirkpatrick, 1994) which is still used frequently today. This model encompasses: *reaction* (Level 1 – an assessment of participant satisfaction); *learning* (Level 2 - the extent to which participants have gained new knowledge, skills or attitudes through CPD); *behaviour* (Level 3 – the extent to which participants change their working behaviour); and *results* (Level 4 – the impact of the CPD on, for example, student outcomes). Achieving change at Level 4 is the desired outcome for teacher CPD however evaluation becomes increasingly more difficult as it moves from Level 1 through to Level 4.

This evaluation of SESS will examine the impact of the CPD it provides at each of Kirkpatrick's four levels where relevant information is available. It should be noted, however, that, while participants in this research may well report changes in their reaction or learning (Levels 1 and 2), exploring the degree of change in terms of behaviour and student outcomes is likely to be more problematic given that this will depend largely on self-reported data, in the absence of national, longitudinal data on student outcomes.

It should also be noted that even if national, longitudinal data on student outcomes were available, it would be necessary to determine the extent to which any changes in outcomes could be attributed to the work of SESS. Due to the number of external factors which have the potential to influence student outcomes, it would be very difficult to establish a direct causal link between SESS provision and these outcomes.

The remaining sections of this review consider different approaches to CPD at the national, school and individual teacher levels, with a specific focus on some of the main factors which influence the effectiveness of CPD programmes at each level.

National policy on CPD

The Teaching Council of Ireland's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011) emphasises the importance of a national perspective on teachers' CPD. It advocates a national framework, based on evidence of good practice and with appropriate structures at the national, regional and local levels. It refers explicitly to inclusion as one of the key national priorities for CPD provision. According to the Council:

- Effective CPD provision requires the adoption of a coherent national framework that is informed by international and national research evidence and which promotes individual and collective teacher development as well as in-service preparation for the implementation of the latest reforms.

- A national framework should identify ways in which professional development can be resourced and facilitated both within and outside school time, within a school and/or within a cluster of schools. A key challenge will be to take account of different areas of need and address current shortfalls while recognising the integrity of the school year and the need to minimise disruption to student learning.

- There should be a partnership approach to policy development and planning involving all the key stakeholders.

- CPD programmes should have access to a national support service.

- The provision of CPD should be supported by appropriate structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level.

- CPD should foster the development of competences to facilitate quality learning and cater for educational priorities. At the time of drafting this policy, key national priority areas include: literacy, numeracy and assessment, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and inclusion.

The paragraphs which follow consider some national level approaches to CPD such as national structures for CPD provision, mandatory requirements for CPD, funding and resourcing, ensuring a diversity of provision, and delivery modes.

The structure of CPD provision

In the introduction to this report, we described some of the ways in which the structures of teacher education have evolved in Ireland over the last decade or so. A report by Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) on teacher education in Ireland (2004) emphasises the benefits that have accrued from the development of support services across Ireland, particularly in relation to the model of recruiting experienced teachers to develop and deliver CPD provision.

> *"During the past decade considerable opportunities for continuing professional development have been provided for teachers. There is clear evidence that they value the availability and quality of activities provided by the various support services. The direct involvement of teachers in the design, delivery and management of support services has been a very positive feature of the activities, and there now exists a cadre of high quality trainers with generic skills in the system. In addition, the expansion of the Education Centre network provides an infrastructure through which future developments can be organised and managed".* (Egan, 2004, p.17)

Egan does, however, identify a number of challenges that have emerged from the new focus on CPD in Ireland. It would be interesting to consider the extent to which these challenges continue to persist in the intervening period, given ongoing reforms in the Irish education system. The challenges noted by Egan (2004) include:

- The timing of in-career development activities in core school time.

- The principle of recruiting practicing teachers by open competition to support services sometimes results in experienced teachers, many with postgraduate qualifications, being replaced by less experienced colleagues.

- A lack of time for collaborative school planning and team development.

- A system which is essentially centrally driven: the level of activity associated with curriculum and programme reform at both primary and post-primary levels has resulted in a diminution of teachers' attendance at locally generated professional development activities.

- The turnover of teachers in certain subjects which creates more demand for access to relevant professional development activities.

- The level of accredited programmes is extremely limited. There appears to be a clear appetite amongst teachers for the accreditation of in-career development programmes. This is strengthened by the significant number of teachers pursuing post-graduate qualifications in their own time at their own expense.

- Access to resources - with a focus on nationally driven professional development programmes, the range of local events has diminished. Under current structures, a school which identifies particular aspects it wishes to address may not be able to recruit a suitable person to assist them locally.

- A certain level of fragmentation - at primary level significant attempts have been made to ensure coherence in all the professional development activities which are available to schools. The situation at second level is also relatively complex.

- Meeting system needs while also meeting the professional development needs of teachers. At national level the primary focus of CPD activities has been associated with curriculum reform or Departmental initiatives. Looking to the future, the principles underpinning Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) and school development planning, involving school review and self-evaluation, should empower schools to take greater ownership in identifying school and teacher CPD needs.

Given the differences in national structures, it is difficult to compare different educational systems in terms of approach to the provision of CPD for teachers. In Ireland, for example, there is a centralised administrative structure for education and the majority of schools are locally managed and relatively autonomous, whereas in England, the Local Authorities play a key role in managing schools within their local area. It is worth noting, however, the example of TDA in England. The remit of the TDA as a national body covers the supply, development and reform of the whole-school workforce. In terms of development, this includes (TDA, 2010):

- Promoting a learning culture in schools through the implementation of the Professional Development Strategy of the Children's Workforce in schools.

- Developing and reviewing the framework of qualifications and professional and national occupational standards for the whole-school workforce.

- Improving learning and teaching through development of a Masters level profession, including the continued development and roll-out of the Masters in Teaching and Learning.

Following on from the publication of the Lamb Inquiry report (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009) on special education in the UK, the TDA was tasked by the previous administration to support the implementation of the Lamb recommendations into improving parental confidence in special education (TDA, 2010). The Lamb inquiry made the following recommendations relating to CPD:

- Special education should be embedded in preparation for school leadership.

- TDA should develop guidance on the effective deployment of teaching assistants.

- The DCSF (now the Department for Education) should commission the TDA to develop materials to support CPD at an advanced level in each of the five main areas of special educational needs.

- The DCSF should commission the TDA to develop teachers with specialist special educational needs and disability skills across clusters of schools.

- Preparation for working with parents of disabled children and children with special educational needs should be included in initial and continuing professional development across the children's workforce.

- New governor training should give a high profile to governors' responsibilities for special education, with a particular focus on progress and outcomes.

- All inspectors should receive CPD on special education.

Given both the recency of this review and the importance of parental involvement, and confidence, in special education provision, there may be value – despite the differences in the Irish and English systems – in exploring more closely the role of the TDA and how it intends to meet these specific challenges.

Mandating a minimum level of CPD

In its Policy (2011) noted above, the Teaching Council highlights its intention to make CPD activity a condition of registration with the Council.

> *"The Council intends to work towards a position, following the adoption of a coherent national framework for CPD, where renewal of registration with The Teaching Council will be subject to the receipt of satisfactory evidence in relation to engagement in CPD".* (Teaching Council, 2011, p.16)

The extent to which the general CPD of school personnel contains some compulsory element or elements varies from country to country. The TALIS survey of lower secondary education teachers and the principals of their schools found that on average across the 23 countries approximately half of teachers' professional development was compulsory (i.e. ranging from 31% in Austria to 88% in Malaysia). Ireland came in slightly below the overall average with 41% of professional development days taken being compulsory (OECD, 2009). It is interesting to note, however, that there does not appear to be any correlation between the average number of days of CPD and the percentage which was compulsory.

> *"Some professional development may be deemed compulsory because the skills and knowledge the development activities aim to enhance are considered important for teacher quality... It can also be important for teachers to exercise their own professional judgement by identifying and taking part in development activities which they feel are most beneficial to them".* (OECD, 2009, p.64)

Some countries impose specific requirements in relation to CPD in the area of special education. For example, the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland identifies the following competences expected of teachers in relation to teaching students with special educational needs:

> *"A knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and know the features of the most common special educational needs and appropriate strategies to address these...*
>
> *Plan and evaluate lessons that enable all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to meet learning objectives/outcomes/ intentions, showing high expectations and an awareness of potential areas of difficulty...*

> *Employ strategies that motivate and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional educational needs and for those not learning in their first language".* (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, 2007, p.14)

Similarly, in England, all qualified teachers must have basic knowledge and skills in the area of special education and be familiar with the Code of Practice. Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are subject to statutory induction standards which include effective planning to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

Funding and resourcing CPD

The degree to which CPD is centrally supported also differs across countries. Support can take the form of financial support - in terms of paying the cost of CPD activities (e.g. the School Development Grant in England) or providing salary supplements for specific types of CPD - or resource support to allow teachers time out of the classroom to participate in CPD.

The TALIS survey found that, on average across 23 countries, the costs of approximately two thirds of teachers' CPD were paid in full and with a further quarter partially funded. This means that teachers paid the full costs of their CPD in less than 10% of cases. This survey indicates that teachers in Ireland receive a greater than average level of financial support to cover the cost of CPD (i.e. Irish teachers made no contribution to the cost of 79% of CPD activities, paid part of the cost of 17.5% of their CPD and incurred the full cost of just 3.2% of their CPD) (OECD, 2009).

Analysis of the TALIS data indicates an inverse relationship between financial support for fees and the uptake of CPD. This is potentially caused by finite budgets (e.g. a limited budget will only cover the full cost of CPD where the uptake is low). However, it should also be noted that teachers are more likely to have to pay some or all of the costs of more time intensive activities like qualification programmes and research activities.

> *"On average, teachers who paid nothing towards the cost of their professional development had 13 days of professional development, while those who paid some of the cost had 23 days and those who paid all of the cost had 32 days".* (OECD, 2009, p.66)

Salary supplements were less commonly used to support CPD, with approximately a tenth of teachers across the 23 countries receiving them on average. The percentage of teachers in Ireland who had received salary supplements during the research period was approximately half the overall average (i.e. 6%).

What is interesting, however, is that the vast majority of Irish teachers who were surveyed had been allocated time for participating in CPD activities (i.e. 95%). This is the highest proportion of all 23 countries, which ranged from less than 30% in Korea, Portugal and Spain to over 85% in Australia, Austria and Malaysia and 95% in Ireland. The overall average percentage of teachers that had been allocated time for participating in CPD activities across the 23 countries was 63%.

As with financial support, there appears to be a negative correlation between the uptake of CPD and the allocation of time in which to undertake it. Again this could be to do with limited resources and the time commitments required for certain types of CPD (i.e. the feasibility to give teachers a relatively small number of days of scheduled time for CPD).

Ensuring a diversity of provision

In Chapter 1 we noted that there is a range of organisations involved in the provision of teacher CPD in special education in Ireland. Indeed a recent report commissioned by NCSE highlighted the importance of giving school personnel access to a variety of resources and CPD to reflect the variety of roles which they fulfil and the needs of their students (Ware et al., 2009).

This diversity of provision is a common approach adopted internationally. For example, in Northern Ireland higher education institutions, the Education and Library Boards and schools are all seen as crucial players in teacher development (O'Gorman et al., 2009).

In England, Local Authorities (LAs), higher education institutions, independent consultants and voluntary agencies are all involved in the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs. However, a recent survey of NQTs undertaken by the TDA found that less than half considered the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) they had received in relation to special education to be either good or very good (2008). It was reported that this has put additional pressure on CPD, as schools and LAs subsequently have to invest more in CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs.

In this respect, England could benefit from some degree of consolidation and co-ordination of CPD in special education, such as that afforded by an organisation like SESS. Research has shown that the lack of awareness of the range of CPD options in the area of special education and inconsistencies in provision often result in duplication of effort. Furthermore, this fragmentation does not facilitate efficient procurement decisions at a local level (Salt, 2010). To address this the TDA is working on a series of projects designed to improve the coverage of special education and disability issues in ITT as well as producing various CPD materials for experienced teachers developed under the Inclusion Development Programme. The TDA is also developing a nationally accredited scheme for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in schools (TDA, 2011).

Often the provision of support for CPD is directed towards the area(s) of greatest need. For example, much like SESS has prioritised ASD and challenging behaviour as key areas for support, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in Scotland has focused on ASD recommending that:

> *"Education authorities should ensure that teaching and support staff have access to a programme of staff development relating to autism spectrum disorders. Continuing professional development at an appropriate level should be available to all staff in schools where there are pupils with autism spectrum disorders. Specialised training should be provided for teachers and non teaching staff working directly with pupils with autism spectrum disorders. The Scottish Executive should work with training providers to ensure that a comprehensive and progressive programme is available."* (HMIE, 2006, Recommendation 7).

To this end, the General Teaching Council for Scotland added an ASD programme to the Framework for Professional Recognition. The Framework aims to ensure that teachers' CPD is sufficient to meet the challenges they face. A key feature of the Framework is that after five years teachers are required to demonstrate that they have maintained their knowledge and expertise in order to keep their professional recognition.

Inclusive approaches to teaching students with ASD have also been embedded into ITE in Scotland and more is being done to make postgraduate qualifications in autism more accessible for teachers, e.g. by offering different modes of delivery (Scottish Executive, 2009).

Modes of CPD delivery

The TALIS survey found that, on average, "individual and collaborative research", "informal dialogue to improve teaching" and "qualification programmes" were seen as the most effective forms of CPD across the participating countries with almost 90% of teachers reporting a moderate or high impact from these activities.

"Education conferences and seminars" and "observation visits to other schools" were seen as relatively less effective; although three quarters of teachers still reported them as having a moderate or high impact. The responses from Irish teachers were in line with the overall average.

It is interesting to note, however, that although 87% of teachers rated "qualification programmes" as having a moderate to high impact, only 25% of teachers surveyed had participated in this type of CPD. Similarly although "individual and collaborative research" was ranked highest in terms of impact it was ranked sixth in terms of participation.

A study into teacher preferences for CPD in Ireland found that block release to attend a college or university programme, network meetings with other teachers and SESS school-based support were the three most preferred modes of delivery amongst teachers and principals alike. They were also considered to be the most effective ways to develop teaching skills. (O'Gorman, 2010)

At a sector level, however, although the top three remained the same, more post-primary school principals indicated that SESS school-based type support was their most preferred context, whereas primary principals indicated that block release was the preferred context. This was linked to difficulties in providing substitute cover for block release at post-primary level (O'Gorman, 2010). O'Gorman (2010) also found that although over two fifths of respondents had used online CPD this was not a highly preferred option (however, the figure was higher for primary teachers than post-primary teachers). This may be because online learning is still a relatively new form of CPD.

In a 2009 SCoTENS report (O'Gorman et al., 2009), participants were asked about the modes they used to further their professional development. In the Republic of Ireland, block release to attend university appeared to be the most frequently used context (67%), while only 39% of the Northern Ireland sample mentioned having used the university/college as a setting for CPD. For the Northern Ireland sample, the most frequently mentioned contexts were all school-based; that is, via colleagues or help and support via the Education and Library Boards. Online/distance education was mentioned by 27% of the Republic of Ireland sample and by only 4% (one respondent) of the Northern Ireland sample. Within the Republic of Ireland, professional learning via block release (37%) and network meetings (16%) were the preferred delivery modes. Online learning did not appear to feature strongly as a mode of professional learning within either sample.

Research by Guskey and Yoon (2009) showed that where workshops focus on the implementation of research-based instructional practices, involve active-learning experiences for participants, and provide teachers with opportunities to adapt the practices to their unique classroom, a positive relationship emerges between professional development and improvements in student learning. On the other hand, the research also suggested that in-class visitations are not necessarily a key component of in-service for teachers. Whilst the population for this research was quite small and relates only to programmes that were devised and examined by university professors and not statutory agencies, the research does provide some indication of effective modes of CPD delivery.

The "state of the nation" research commissioned by the TDA in 2008, found that much CPD activity in England was largely passive, contrary to its principles of effective CPD.

> *"The forms of learning in which teachers spent the majority of CPD time were more passive than active. Teachers spent the most time listening to lectures or presentations (67%). They also spent a substantial amount of their time participating in small (58%) or large group discussions (44%). Some teachers did, however, tend to participate in CPD activities with colleagues (47%). Teachers were less likely to spend their CPD time in active learning forms. For example, few teachers participated in practising the use of student materials (17%), engaging in extended problem-solving (9%) or in conducting a demonstration lesson, unit or skill (6%)".* (Pedder et al., 2008, p.13)

Research conducted by Kennedy (1998) however, reported that it was more important to focus on the content of in-service development than total contact time, organisational and structure of the programme.

School-level approaches to special education and CPD

It is clear from the literature that school ethos and culture has a significant impact on the extent to which both an inclusive approach and a commitment to CPD are embedded in practice. According to O'Gorman (2010) the success of inclusive approaches to teaching requires more than just teachers with the knowledge and skills to support inclusion; it also requires the development of appropriate support structures within schools and for school personnel to develop collaborative relationships.

Therefore, successful inclusion requires a "whole-school" approach. Indeed a recent review by the NCSE (2010) into the principles and practices relating to inclusive education identified the following keys to success:

- Leadership: which demonstrates a commitment that all students are welcome in the school regardless of need.
- Teachers: mainstream teachers who take ownership of inclusion and believe in their own competence to teach students with special educational needs.
- Teacher beliefs and attitudes: about the feasibility of inclusion.

- Teacher CPD: to ensure that teachers are both competent and confident in their ability to teach students with special educational needs.
- Teachers needs: including time for planning, ongoing CPD, in-class support and adequate curriculum resources and equipment.
- Teaching assistants: good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants relies on role clarity and teachers being trained to work with other adults in their classroom.
- Involving families: as part of a collaborative team.
- Involving the student: in decisions about their own education.
- Curriculum differentiation: to make it both accessible and flexible to the needs of all students.

The following paragraphs consider the role of school leadership, the extent of school self-evaluation and the organisation of CPD within the context of CPD.

School leadership

Developing people and nurturing talent is a key strategic leadership issue facing all types of organisations across different industry sectors. Within the schools context, the international literature shows that one of the most important ways in which school leaders contribute to learning and teaching is through their impact on the motivation, development and well-being of staff. The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in England has also researched leadership and inclusion and has identified four key characteristics of effective leadership to facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities. These include (NCSL, 2010):

- **Shared vision:** strong values and beliefs around the entitlements and expectations for all children and young people. The vision is clearly articulated, shared and modelled, and the achievement of key aims is monitored and evaluated.

- **Commitment:** determination to secure the most appropriate provision, commit resources and engage specialist staff to improve inclusion. A commitment to constantly develop and deploy staff to meet the needs of individual students.

- **Collaboration:** a culture of collaboration that shares working practices between schools and across phases of education, recognising that all schools have good practice that can be shared.

- **Communication:** effective communication with children and young people, parents, carers, staff, children's services and other agencies. Good listeners who demonstrate professional humility.

The changing educational landscape, including increasing inclusion, will make these characteristics even more vital, with implications for the CPD of school leaders. At the same time, these leaders will be responsible for promoting and developing a culture of lifelong learning throughout their establishments. Ultimately, it will be the role of the school principal to assess the optimum level and organisation of CPD and to help ensure that learning is embedded in the organisation once it is complete.

Organisation of CPD

Despite the extensive literature on effective CPD, research has demonstrated that practice varies by school in terms of the balance between active and passive learning. In the TDA research into CPD provision in schools in England (2008), it emerged that:

- School leaders believe CPD that is clearly based in school and classroom practice provides most value for money. CPD taking place outside schools – without a clear basis in school and classroom practice – is seen to provide least value for money.

- The most common CPD activity is in-school workshops or seminars, and most CPD learning occurs through lectures, presentations and discussions – passive rather than active modes of learning.

- Those who organise CPD activities rarely lead them; CPD is most often led by subject leaders, consultants and peers.

- Schools varied in their reliance on the expertise of their own staff and internal resources. Some schools had a marked reliance on external CPD provision. These schools often adopt a brokerage role, directing individual members of staff to particular external CPD that appear to relate to an expressed need.

- The proportion of school budgets spent on CPD varies significantly by school characteristics. Overall, the major part of schools' CPD budgets is spent on external provision and supply cover allowing teachers to attend these programmes.

Embedding learning in schools is important if schools are not to face an over-reliance on external CPD in times of constrained resources. In our research into parental views on provision for students with special educational needs in Ireland (PwC, 2010), there was a general consensus among teachers participating in this study that inclusion policies are well developed within schools and that these are well communicated to staff and families. However, teachers also identified a number of problems including:

- A perceived high turnover of teaching staff, leading to challenges in familiarising all staff with school policy on special education.
- Waiting lists for CPD programmes.
- Access to special education CPD being limited to those working in the area of learning support.

These factors will mitigate against the extent to which professional development can become embedded throughout schools and also to which all teachers consider themselves to be teachers of students with special educational needs.

Self-review and evaluation

It is also accepted in the literature that school self- review and evaluation is essential in developing both an inclusive environment and in stimulating focused CPD. In Ireland, the NCSE, for example, is working with key stakeholders on the development of an Inclusive Framework and self-reflection template to help schools assess their levels of inclusiveness.

> *"In developing inclusive schools, the key outcome of good self-assessment is that it enables each school to set individual goals which are specific to the context and to the current status [of that school]".* (Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe (ICEP Europe), 2010, p.36)

Schools in England use the *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools* to support the development of a more inclusive learning environment. The Index is intended to build supportive communities and foster high achievement for all staff and students. According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE, 2010), schools can use the Index to:

- Adopt a self-review approach to analysing their cultures, policies and practices.
- Identify the barriers to learning and participation that may occur within each of these areas.
- Prioritise the key areas for change, including the identification of appropriate CPD to enable that change.
- Evaluate their progress against their change objectives.
- Encourage a wide and deep scrutiny of all school activities as part of their existing development policies.

Self-evaluation is an important part of school development and improvement, but it requires adequate time and resources, which must be integrated into the planning for all CPD rather than being treated as an "add-on" (Goodall et al., 2005). It helps ensure that professional development is undertaken in a planned way, in accordance with the school's priorities and local needs.

CPD at the individual level

This section considers attitudes towards and experiences of CPD from the individual perspective – in relation to attitudes towards inclusion; teachers' views of their development needs; and views on the accreditation of CPD.

Attitudes towards inclusion

We have discussed in previous sections the centrality of the teacher in terms of student attainment. Given the increasing move towards inclusion in Ireland, and particularly since the introduction of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in 2004 (EPSEN Act, 2004), it is likely that teachers' views and experiences of inclusion will influence the extent not only to which they access professional development opportunities but also the impact of these opportunities on their subsequent behaviour in the classroom.

Indeed, in a synthesis of the existing literature on teachers' attitudes towards integration and inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) conclude that, while teachers are generally positive about the philosophy of inclusive education, this may vary in relation to the inclusion of students with more complex needs or behavioural problems. They note that teachers become more positive over time but suggest that there should be sufficient external support systems and in-school learning support teams to provide guidance to teachers as the need arises.

> *"The evidence seems to indicate that teachers' negative or neutral attitudes at the beginning of an innovation such as inclusive education may change over time as a function of experience and the expertise that develops through the process of implementation".* (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, p.7)

However, research in Northern Ireland (Winter, 2006), states that some current mainstream teachers do not feel well prepared to teach students with special educational needs, suggesting that existing ITE programmes may not have adequately prepared them for the classroom. Winter also found that that those who had exposure to students with special educational needs in their ITE believed that they had information about certain special educational needs and disabilities (e.g. Autism or Dyslexia) but lacked input and strategies on how to teach the students who had them.

Longitudinal research by the EPPI-Centre at the Institute of Education (Rix et al., 2006) emphasises the importance of a positive attitude towards inclusion on teacher-student interactions; student participation; and ultimately student outcomes.

- Positive teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs are reflected in the quality of their interactions with all students and to the way in which students' view their own special educational needs.

- Teachers who see themselves responsible for the learning of all promote higher order interactions and engage in prolonged interactions with students with special educational needs, while teachers who see others (e.g. support staff) as primarily responsible engage in non-academic and low level nature interactions.

- Interactions with successful academic and social outcomes are characterised by questions and statements that involve higher order thinking, reasoning, and personal perspective. The teachers who enable students to achieve these outcomes spend most of the available time in these high-quality on-task interactions as opposed to the low-quality off-task interactions.

- High quality interactions are those in which teachers offer learners the opportunity to problem-solve, to discuss and describe their ideas, and to make connections with their own experiences and prior understandings, while those teacher interactions that are less successful focus on procedural matters, behaviours and general classroom management.

- Students with special educational needs participate more fully when encouraged to identify and document their thoughts, particularly through one-to-one discussion with the teacher.

- Successful interactions are commonly based in learners' experiences, being meaningful to learners in the here and now of their lives, involving direct experiences and realistic problems, offering multiple opportunities to engage with the learning situation and others within it.

Teachers' views of their development needs

The recent SCoTENS publication (O'Gorman et al., 2009), presents research into the perceived professional development needs of teachers of students with special educational needs in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. The top five priorities for teachers in the Republic of Ireland were:

- Effective learning and teaching.
- Coping with stress.
- Evaluating special education provision.
- Behaviour management.
- Listening, counselling and guidance.

The authors noted that teachers often sought information on specific learning disabilities or areas of special educational need rather than on pedagogical issues. This may reflect the fact that, while all teachers are likely to teach at least one student with a special educational need, the range of needs they may encounter are very diverse and will be specific to the individual student.

> *"In relation to specific professional development sought, there was a strong emphasis on information pertaining to various classifications of disability and a corresponding lack of emphasis on pedagogy and curricular adaptations".* (O'Gorman et al., 2009, p.8)

Research on teachers' perceptions of CPD in general in England found that most CPD was focused around school-based delivery and that while few had the opportunity to undertake research, secondments, award-bearing programmes or international visits, these forms of CPD were highly valued by teachers (Hustler et al., 2003).

Teachers' views on accreditation of CPD

Access to accredited CPD opportunities and the associated impact on teachers' motivation to undertake professional development activity is also a theme in the literature. Our evaluation had identified mixed views on the importance of accreditation. In the TDA commissioned research (2008a), accreditation was not viewed as important by teachers in England, though this did vary by length of experience. The TDA research found that:

- Accredited programmes with a clear basis in CPD that is rooted in school and classroom practices, and that foster collaborative and research-informed approaches to enquiry and capacity building, are valued by teachers and school leaders as useful and good value for money.

- Most teachers do not see gaining accreditation as an important benefit in itself. Three quarters of teachers surveyed for the TDA research said that accreditation is "not important" or "of limited importance" in their decision to take part in CPD.

- In the focus groups there was an overall evenly spread balance of opinion about accreditation in both primary and post-primary schools. However, in approximately half the focus groups, accreditation of CPD achievement was rated last or almost last in terms of CPD prioritisation.

- School leaders felt that CPD resulting in accreditation provided less value for money and had less benefit than other forms.

- Teachers at the beginning of their career tended to be more approving of accreditation because it could potentially lead to career-stage promotion. More experienced teachers tended to be less interested in CPD for career development.

However, in the SCoTENS report (O'Gorman et al., 2009), it was suggested that, specifically in the area of special education, accredited programmes help improve the confidence of teachers to work with students with special educational needs.

"Evidence emerging from these research findings on professional development suggests that courses which led to additional qualifications had an impact on teacher efficacy. In general, the teachers who were interviewed and had additional qualifications tended to show particular confidence in their ability to carry out their roles. This link between professional development and self-efficacy was also noted internationally (Wise, 1987; Darling- Hammond, 2000). Billingsley (2004) also identified this as important in continuing effectiveness in the area of special educational needs". (O'Gorman et al., 2009, p.76)

Conclusion

There is broad agreement in the international research that factors associated with the quality of teachers and teaching are among the most important influences on student learning. Given the international move towards greater inclusion and the increasing complexity of needs which teachers are experiencing, the demand for effective CPD in the area of special education has increased dramatically, particularly among those who teach in a mainstream setting. This demand relates not only to specific special educational needs, but also to new ways of working, whether these be new pedagogical approaches, team-working and collaboration with other specialists and supports, and increased interaction with parents.

The literature emphasises that effective CPD should be: self-reflective; evidence-based, collaborative; focused on student needs; integrated into the culture of the school; and an individual and collective responsibility of all in the education system. There is some evidence of a potential tension between the needs of an individual school and of national priorities in terms of CPD provision. Despite this, evidence from some jurisdictions suggests that CPD can be largely passive rather than active. Common barriers to accessing effective CPD include time out of the classroom; access to funding for provision; and identifying CPD opportunities.

In order to measure the effectiveness of teacher CPD it is important to evaluate its impact on each of Kirkpatrick's four levels (Kirkpatrick, 1994). However, evaluation becomes increasingly difficult as it moves from Level 1 through to Level 4 due to the number of external factors which influence teacher behaviour and student outcomes. Our evaluation of the impact of SESS provision, presented later in this report, is largely dependent on self-reported data, in the absence of any longitudinal data.

Countries have responded to this increased demand for CPD in a variety of ways, including mandating a minimum level of CPD, providing resources and/or financial support for CPD, as well as ensuring diversity of provision and modes of delivery.

The Teaching Council of Ireland has announced its intention to move towards a mandatory CPD system as a condition of teacher registration. It has also identified inclusion-related CPD as a priority. Irish teachers, through SESS, have access to a range of provision in terms of subject matter (e.g. specific programmes on ASD) and modes of delivery. There is some evidence that block release to attend third-level based CPD provision is the delivery mode most preferred by teachers in Ireland. While this mode focuses on the development of the individual attending the programme only, their learning can be cascaded to colleagues throughout the school, as appropriate, on their return to school. Such knowledge transfer activities should be encouraged by the in-school management team.

At a school level successful inclusion requires a "whole-school" approach; starting with the principal and involving the whole-school staff, parents and students. The organisation of CPD and embedding learning is also important at the school-level. To continue to maintain and improve provision for students with special educational needs, schools should regularly engage in a process of self-evaluation.

Individual-level characteristics and motivations can also impact on the effectiveness of CPD, particularly in the area of special education. These factors can include: attitudes towards inclusion; levels of experience of, and confidence in, working with students with special educational needs; appetite for qualifications; and individual perceptions of skills needs.

Some of these national, school-level and individual factors will impact on the extent to which SESS can directly meet its aims of improving the quality of learning and teaching. It may however, be able to influence these factors indirectly through its promotion of the value of CPD to principals and through the support it provides to schools.

4. Approaches to CPD in participating schools

Chapter summary

This chapter is based on evidence from our focus group sessions and our survey of principals and teachers. It summarises the approach to continuing professional development (CPD) in respondents' schools and the ways in which teachers identify the CPD opportunities available to them. We also provide an overview of the types of CPD that respondents have accessed in the last two years, and the main challenges or barriers in accessing CPD in relation to special education that they have experienced.

The analysis shows a strong agreement that CPD is actively promoted and supported by the school management team and forms part of teachers' personal development plans. Teachers also reported that they had the opportunity to put their learning into practice in a supportive environment. Evaluation of the impact of CPD on learning and teaching, however, was less common.

Principals were the main source of information on CPD opportunities followed by emails and other forms of advertising from providers. The most frequently cited modes of CPD accessed by respondents were attendance at external events (such as conferences and courses) and school-based workshops led by external providers. Teachers considered finding the time to undertake development activities and availability of substitution cover to be the main barriers to accessing CPD in relation to special education. Both of these barriers are, of course, beyond the direct control of Special Education Support Service (SESS).

Introduction

Before evaluating the impact and contribution that SESS makes to the CPD of teachers of students with special educational needs, we consider attitudes towards CPD in general amongst the participants in this research, and in particular, how their schools are approaching CPD and the modes of CPD preferred by teachers and principals.

This analysis provides important contextual information as there may be some factors influencing the take-up of SESS provision which are to some degree beyond the direct control of SESS but could be perhaps addressed in part through Departmental and SESS communications with schools. Our overview of the current literature has, for example, illustrated that national, school and individual characteristics can impact on the extent to which provision is accessed and indeed acted upon. This section is therefore structured under the following headings:

- School-level approaches to CPD.
- Gaining awareness of CPD opportunities.
- Modes of CPD.
- Number of days of CPD undertaken.
- Challenges in accessing CPD.
- Conclusion.

School-level approaches to CPD

Evidence from our focus group sessions suggested that school staff engage in CPD on an ad hoc basis rather than having a fixed allocation of time for CPD each year.

> *"There is no allocated CPD time per year at the moment."* (Focus group participant)

> *"We would try to make sure that everybody gets the opportunity to attend in-service in the year. We look at the courses that they offer and we pick courses that are suitable for the children that we teach."* (Focus group participant)

As outlined in Figure 4.1, the findings from the survey of principals and teachers indicated that most schools have an ethos of lifelong learning and development, with 92% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. What is more, 90% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that CPD is actively promoted and supported by the school management team. We considered the other responses to these questions by role, and there was a similar pattern of responses for both principals and teaching staff.

Although 81% of respondents stated that CPD was part of a personal development plan where they had the opportunity to apply their learning and evaluate the impact on their teaching practice, continuous evaluation of the impact of CPD on learning and teaching was less widespread. In fact, just over half of respondents (53%) stated that CPD is continuously evaluated in their school in terms of its impact on learning and teaching, with fewer again (38%) commenting that lesson observation is used to assess the impact of CPD and areas for further development. We have seen in our review of the existing literature that while there are challenges in evaluating the impact of CPD, it is important that the impact of professional learning is measured to gauge its effectiveness and efficiency and to help embed it in daily practice.

Figure 4.1: Approach to CPD in respondents' schools
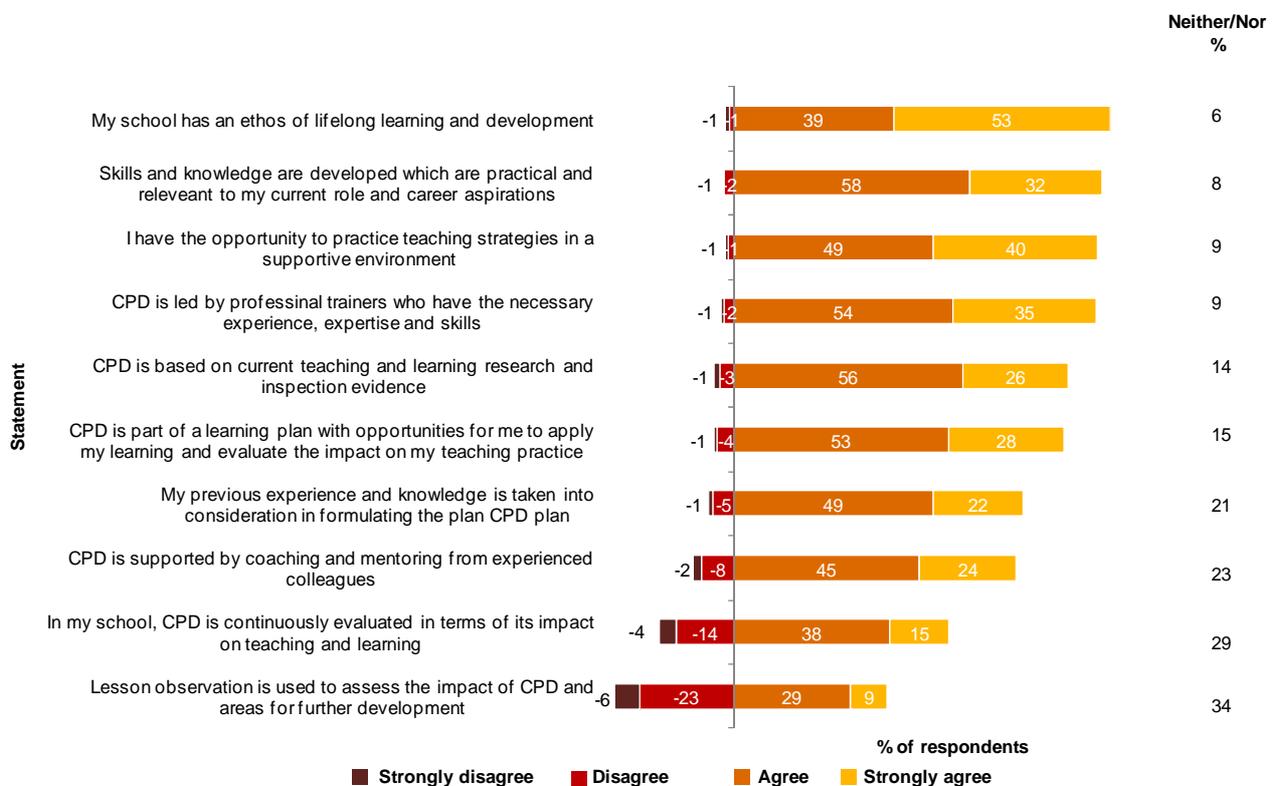
Weighted base: 1,194-1,240
Unweighted base: 1,186-1,236

The majority of survey respondents (89%) commented that their CPD was delivered by professional trainers. In addition, coaching and mentoring from experienced colleagues was reported by more than two thirds of respondents (69%). Almost nine out of ten respondents stated that they had the opportunity to practice the acquired teaching strategies in a supportive environment (89%).

Some focus group participants indicated that once a member of staff had identified and participated in a particular programme of CPD, there was normally an attempt to cascade that learning throughout their school. The formality and scale of this knowledge transfer varied depending on the number of teachers in the school and the relevance of the CPD to other members of staff. Sometimes, the school management team actively facilitated the sharing of knowledge through fora such as staff meetings, whereas in other schools the onus was on the individual to take the initiative to impart their knowledge to others.

"Generally we give feedback at our next staff meeting on the course and if there are any relevant worksheets or notes we circulate them or keep them in a central location." (Focus group participant)

"I wouldn't be asked to recall what I had learned, but I might informally make a worksheet of bullet points on what was said. Nobody would ask me to do it. I just do that myself." (Focus group participant)

Gaining awareness of CPD opportunities

As shown in Figure 4.2, the survey of principals and teachers indicated that the principal plays a key "gate keeper" role in relation to informing teachers of the CPD opportunities that are available to them, with 69% of teaching staff selecting this option. The main modes of raising awareness for principals were an email from CPD providers (69%) and communications from their professional association (56%). This highlights the importance of developing relationships with principals to increase awareness and likely take-up of CPD, particularly through email.

Figure 4.2: Gaining awareness of the range of CPD opportunities that is available to principals and teachers
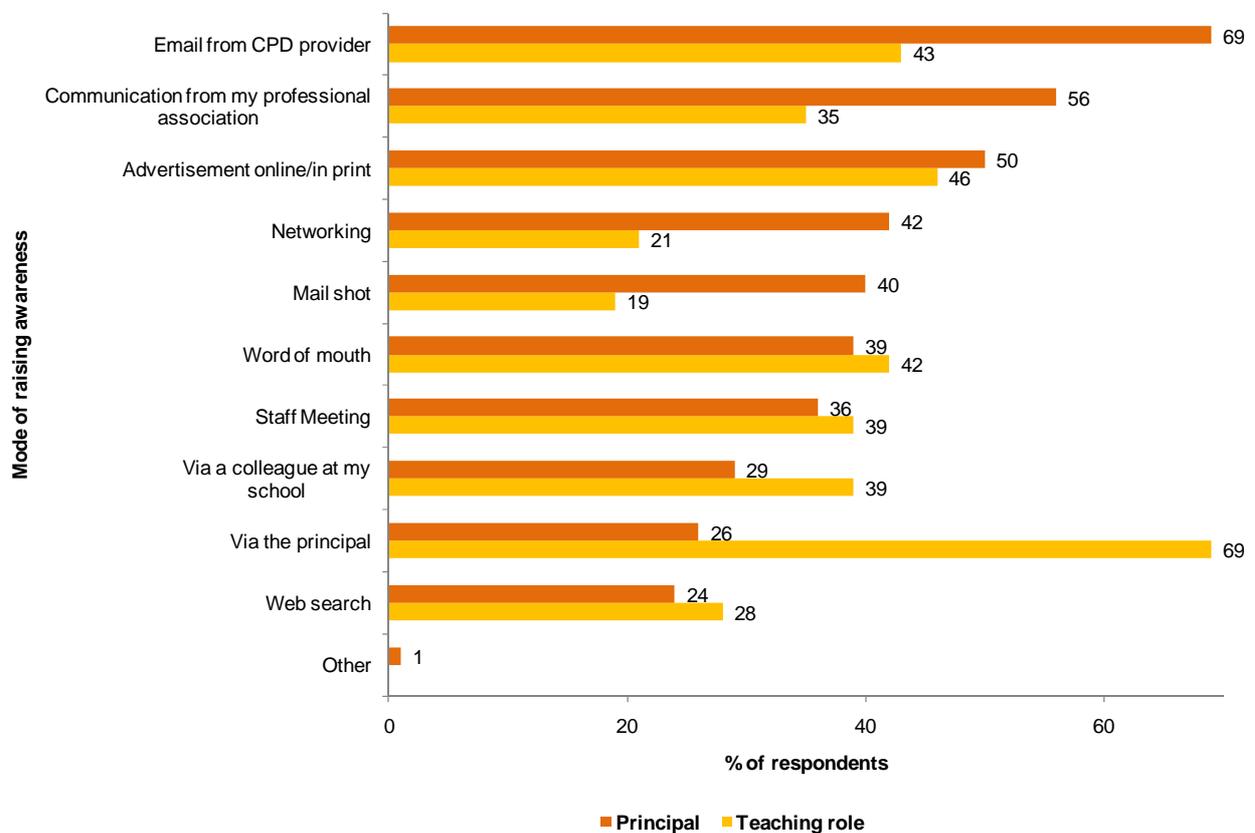
Weighted base: 1,482
Unweighted base: 1,483

Modes of CPD

We also asked respondents what modes of CPD they had completed within the last two years, based on a list of broad categories of CPD that were likely to resonate with teachers. The most common forms of CPD provision accessed by survey respondents during this period were those which use more traditional class based modes of delivery, such as seminars and courses delivered by external providers. Overall the most frequent methods of CPD were attendance at an external seminar/conference (69%), followed by attendance at external CPD courses (59%) and school based workshops led by an external provider (57%). Figure 4.3 illustrates that respondents from primary and special schools were more likely to have accessed online courses (46% and 54% respectively) and summer courses (63% and 56%) than respondents from post-primary schools (11% accessed online courses and 3% summer courses). This may be due to greater challenges in providing staff cover in primary and special schools during term time or to the Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days available to primary and special school teachers who attend CPD programmes whilst on leave (including up to one online programme). Primary and special school teachers are eligible for between two and five EPV days in any school year, dependent on the duration of the programme of CPD undertaken (DES, 1997).

The survey findings indicate that teachers and principals at larger schools were more likely to access more formal CPD programmes; in particular, school based workshops. This may be related to economies of scale where it is more efficient to organise CPD in school for a larger number of staff.

Figure 4.3: Form of CPD completed in the last two years by respondents
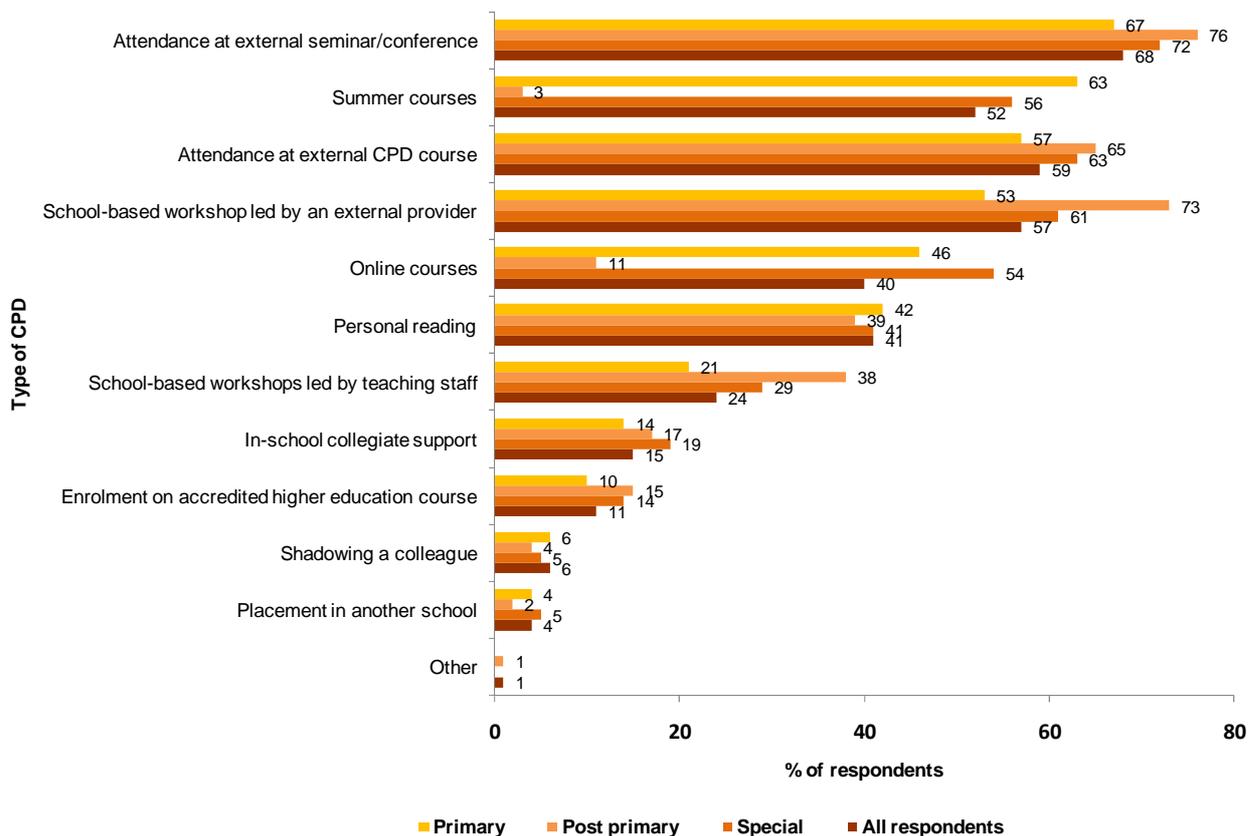
Weighted base: 1,251
Unweighted base: 1,248

Number of days of CPD undertaken

As shown in Table 4.1, a third of respondents had completed between five and ten days of CPD in the last two years. Despite the fact that CPD is not mandatory in the education sector in Ireland, only 8% of respondents had not completed any CPD in the last two years.

Table 4.1: Number of days of formal CPD completed by respondents in the last two years

Number of days	Class/subject teacher	Special class teacher	Learning support teacher	Resource teacher	Principal	Member of the In-School Management Team	Other	Total
None	12%	4%	5%	6%	7%	8%	0%	8%
1	7%	5%	5%	4%	4%	5%	3%	6%
2	10%	3%	13%	13%	12%	11%	14%	11%
3	7%	8%	10%	12%	6%	6%	1%	8%
4	8%	11%	9%	7%	7%	9%	7%	8%
5-10	30%	29%	29%	28%	38%	28%	39%	32%
11-25	23%	26%	26%	26%	24%	31%	29%	25%
26+	3%	13%	3%	4%	1%	4%	8%	3%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,349
Unweighted base: 1,338

As Figure 4.4 demonstrates there is considerable variation in the responses by school phase. Over a quarter of respondents from primary (29%) and special schools (26%) stated that they had completed between 11 and 25 days compared to only 7% of respondents from post-primary schools. The overall average was eight days of CPD. There was, however, considerable variation in relation to the number of days reported by respondents. Due to the occurrence of extreme outliers in this case we have considered the modal number of days of formal CPD, which for all respondents was two days, however, for class/subject teachers and principals this was ten days.

Figure 4.4: Number of days of formal CPD completed by respondents in the last two years
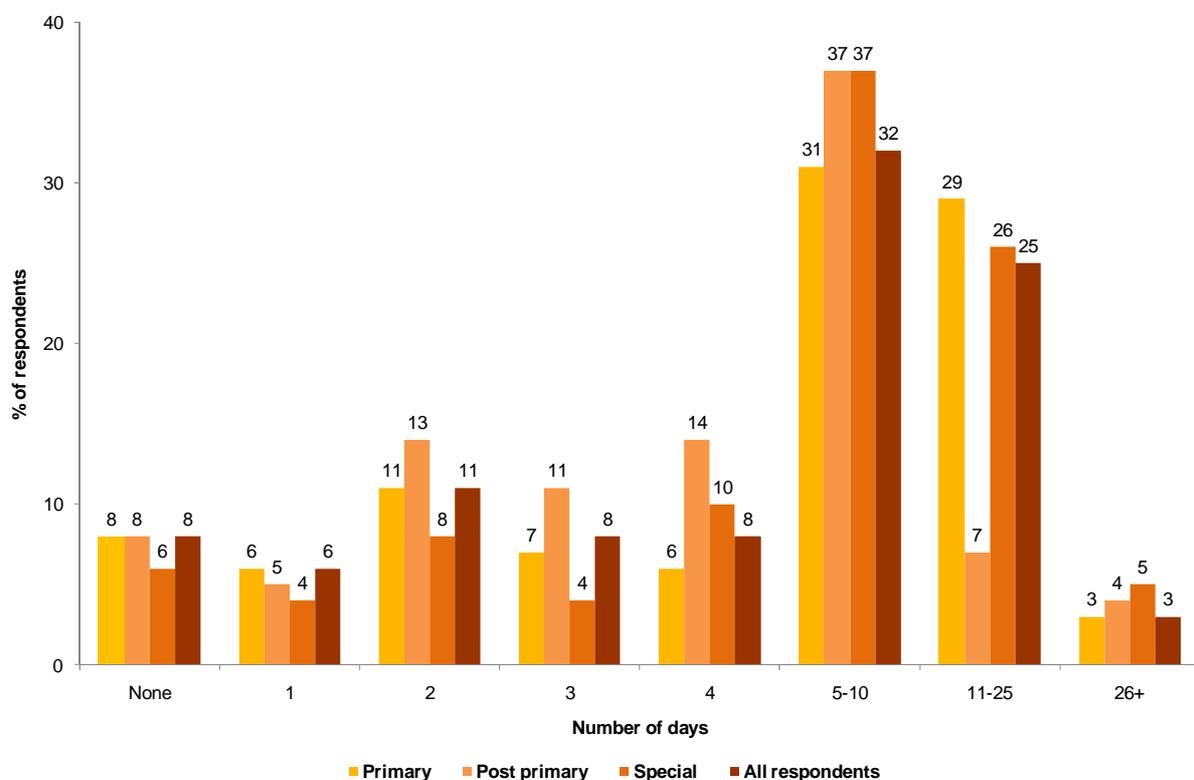
Weighted base:1,007
Unweighted base: 970

It is interesting to note that the promotion and support of CPD by the school management did not greatly impact the number of days of CPD completed, with similar responses reported in both cases. Over two thirds of respondents stated that the amount of CPD received was the same as or greater than previous years. This would suggest that there is a continued commitment to the development of teaching staff both in terms of the Department's provision for CPD and the amount of time which teachers devote to CPD.

As would be perhaps expected due to their role, special class teachers (51%), learning support teachers (42%) and resources teachers (51%) accessed higher proportions of CPD related to special education, i.e. more than three quarters of their total CPD in the last two years. Similarly respondents from special schools were more likely to access CPD related to special education than their counterparts in mainstream settings. Four in five (80%) respondents from special schools said that at least half of their CPD in the last two years was related to special education, compared to 37% of primary respondents and 33% of post primary respondents.

Challenges in accessing CPD

As shown in Figure 4.5, the majority of respondents (71%) stated that finding the time to undertake CPD was the greatest challenge in accessing CPD on special education. However, this was less common amongst the special class teachers who responded (62%). Just over half of respondents (52%) cited the availability of substitution cover as a barrier. This was reported by a greater proportion of principals (62%), members of the school management team (60%) and class/subject teachers (59%). Another issue reported by over two fifths of respondents was lack of awareness of the support that is available to them outside of school; however, here there was only a marginal difference between the responses of principals (39%) and teaching staff (43%).

Figure 4.5: Challenges in accessing CPD in relation to the needs of students with special educational needs
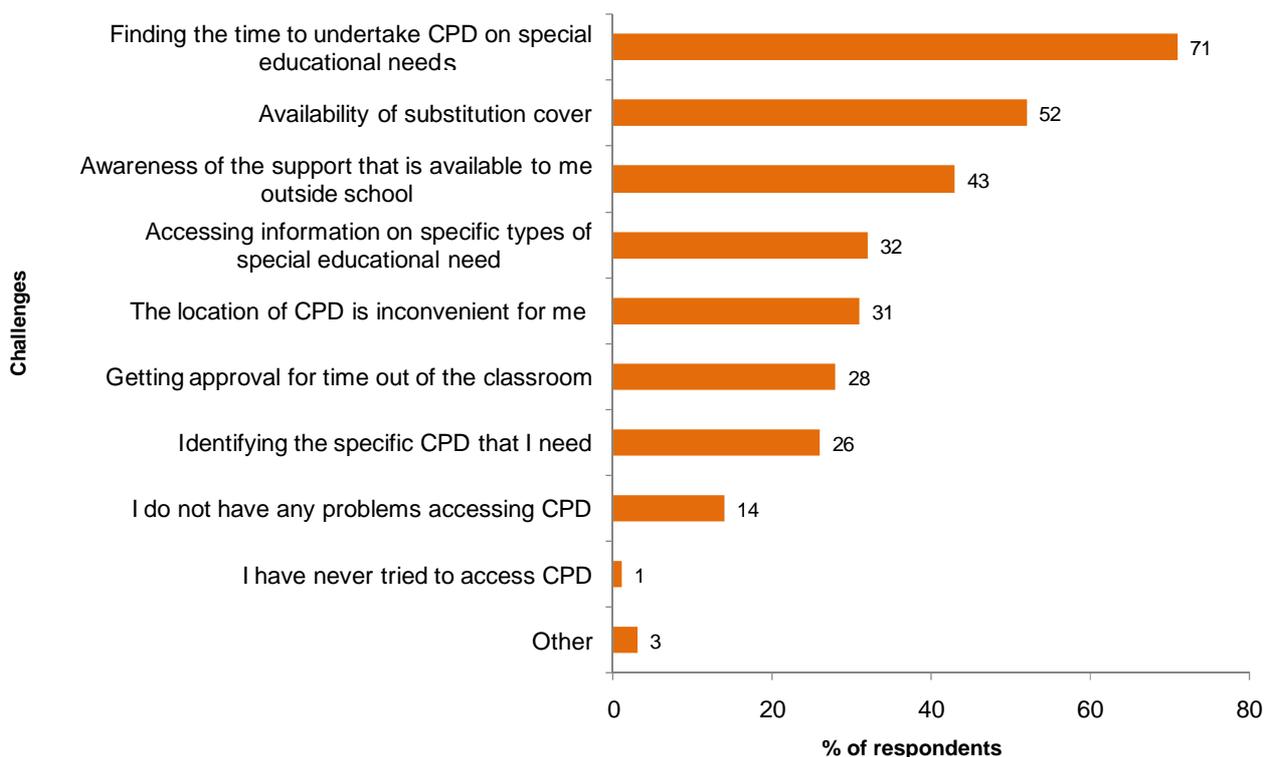
Weighted base:1,186
Unweighted base: 1,182

When these results are considered in relation to school phase we found that, although there was a slight difference between primary and post-primary respondents in relation to the challenge of finding the time to undertake CPD (71% and 74% respectively), the availability of substitution cover appears to be more of an issue for primary (53%) than post-primary (43%) respondents.

Conclusion

This section of the report has considered the views and experiences of participating teachers and principals in relation to CPD in general. Encouragingly, there was a strong agreement that CPD is actively promoted and supported by the school management team, that it was integrated into teachers' personal development plans and that teachers have the opportunity to put their learning into practice in a supportive environment. However, there was a less strong response to the evaluation of CPD in schools, with almost a fifth disagreeing that the impact of CPD on learning and teaching is evaluated in their school.

The main ways in which teachers become aware of CPD opportunities are via the principal, email alerts from the provider and advertisements and the most frequently cited modes of CPD undertaken were attendance at external events (conferences and courses) and school-based workshops led by external providers. Forms of CPD such as shadowing a colleague or undertaking a placement in other schools were less frequently reported.

Participants reported that the main barriers to undertaking CPD in relation to special education were finding the time to undertake development activities and availability of substitution cover – both of which are beyond the direct control of SESS. However, a substantial proportion (43%) stated that a lack of awareness of the support available was a challenge, suggesting that there is some room for improvement in the way CPD opportunities are communicated.

5. *Special Education Support Service (SESS) organisational structure*

Chapter summary

This chapter is based on our stakeholder consultations and documentation provided by SESS and Cork Education Support Centre (CESC). It provides an overview of the background and context to the establishment of SESS and the continuing professional development (CPD) and support which it provides to teaching professionals. We also describe SESS organisational structure and income and expenditure between 2007 and 2010.

The findings indicate that SESS has succeeded to some extent in co-ordinating and consolidating CPD on special education. Focus group participants welcomed the understanding that SESS Advisors, as teaching professionals themselves, brought to the provision. There were, however, some concerns from stakeholders about the limited level of resources and demands placed on SESS and its staff.

Departmental funding to SESS between 2007 and 2010 ranged from €2m to €3m per annum. Since 2010 SESS has generated additional revenue from online library fees. Overall expenditure is primarily driven by programme expenditure. It is important to note that the salaries of professional staff seconded to SESS on a full-time or part-time basis are paid by the Department directly. Staffing costs included in the SESS budget relate to administrative personnel only.

Introduction

This section of our report provides an overview of SESS and considers the efficiency and effectiveness of its organisational structure in order to address the first aim of our evaluation. It is structured as follows:

- Background and context.
- SESS provision.
- SESS organisational structure.
- SESS income and expenditure.
- Conclusion.

Background and context

SESS was established in 2003 in response to two factors; a recognition by the Department of Education and Science (now Department of Education and Skills, DES) that the co-ordination of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs could be improved and the need to provide teachers with the requisite knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the learning and teaching needs of students with special educational needs. The establishment of SESS represented further development of the Department's provision for CPD at that time, which included funding a range of post-graduate programmes in special education in a number of third-level institutions. The aims of SESS are to:

- Enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs.
- Design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel.
- Consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

SESS aims to improve the learning and teaching of students with special educational needs through the provision of CPD and support to teachers. The mission statement of SESS outlines its purpose:

"Through our work in supporting school personnel, SESS promotes the acceptance of the individuality, potential and worth of every student with special educational needs. As a service that acknowledges and values difference, we work with schools to secure these principles and to provide high quality continuing professional development and support structures for teachers. We are committed to combining a flexible and person-centred approach to the development of teachers' knowledge and skills with theoretical and practical perspectives so that students with special educational needs are enabled to reach their full potential and be included in the whole life of the school". (SESS, 2010, p.7)

As Figure 5.1 illustrates, SESS operates under the remit of the Teacher Education Section (TES) of DES and within the context of CPD provision more generally. This diagram is necessarily an overview, given the number of Education Centres (i.e. 30 in total; 21 full-time and 9 part-time) and other stakeholders in the system.

Figure 5.1: A schematic overview of the context within which SESS operates
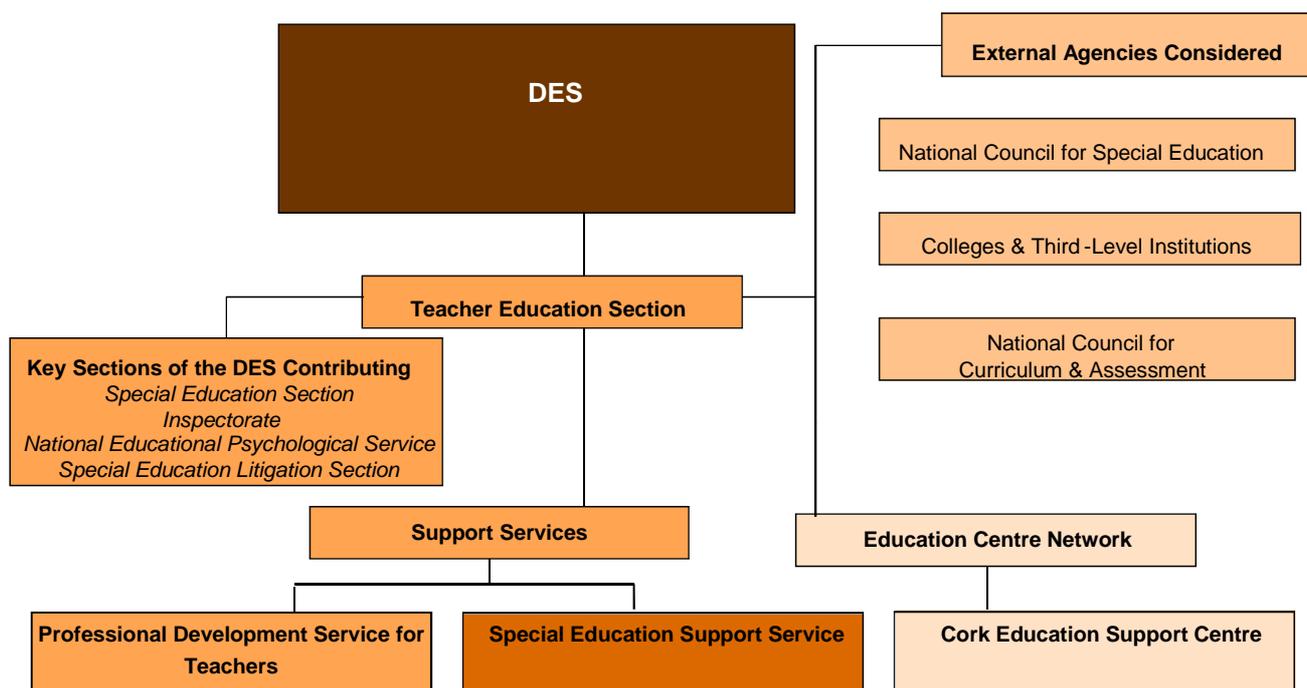
SESS provision

SESS provides CPD and support through the design and delivery of CPD using both its own staff and other CPD providers. SESS is responsible for co-ordinating, developing and delivering a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

SESS aims to provide CPD to assist teachers in the learning and teaching of all students with special educational needs. CPD is also provided on the principles of curriculum differentiation, individualised planning and the promotion of inclusive practices. SESS intends that CPD for teachers is set within whole-school practices and an emphasis is placed on promoting each student's access to the curriculum whilst also optimising students' outcomes, taking into account his or her specific special educational need(s). SESS provides a range of support to schools, individual teachers, practitioners and professional groups including (SESS, 2010):

- **In-school support:** schools may avail of advice or support relating to a specific special education issue in the school. SESS may offer advice over the telephone, an in-school visit from a member of the team or a CPD programme for staff.

- **Individual professional development:** individual teachers may attend a programme through availing of funding that is specific to their professional development needs and to the needs of their students and school.

- **Group professional development initiatives:** a school, group of teachers or professional organisation may undertake a professional development activity in relation to a specific area of interest.

- **Telephone helpline and e-mail support**: individual teachers may contact SESS directly for advice and/or guidance in relation to a particular special education issue or need.

The professional development programmes offered by SESS reflect a variety of modes, levels of accreditation, and target audiences (including principals and teachers) and include:

- SESS designed and delivered programmes.
- SESS supported programmes.
- SESS supported online programmes (currently through Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe (ICEP Europe)).
- Seminars and conferences.
- Teacher exchanges/visits.
- College and university programmes.
- Programmes for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in specific provision for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

There are various initiatives developed and administered by SESS which vary from year to year and are subject to availability. Table 5.1 shows the programmes which are available at national, regional and local levels for all teachers.

Table 5.1: SESS initiatives accessible to all teachers

SESS Initiative	School type	Availability
Support scheme	Primary, post-primary and special (separate)	National
Individualised planning	Primary and post-primary (separate)	National
Capacity building (transition)	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	National
On-line CPD	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	National
International speakers	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	Regional and local
Special educational needs in a mainstream setting	Primary	Local

Table 5.2 highlights the more specialised support that SESS provides targeted at a particular need.

Table 5.2: SESS initiatives with a specified target audience

SESS Initiative	Target audience	School type	Availability
Autistic Spectrum Disorders	Teachers working in designated classes/units; resource/support teachers; teachers in special and mainstream schools	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	National
Exceptionally able	Teachers working with exceptionally able students	Primary	Local
Deaf/hard of hearing	Teachers of students who are deaf/hard of hearing	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	Regional
Visual impairment	Teachers of students who are visually impaired	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	Local
Managing challenging behaviour	Whole staff in mainstream schools with ASD classes/ units and whole staff in special schools	Primary, post-primary and special (combined)	School-based
Inclusion conference	Principals	Post-primary and special schools with second level curricula	
Projects	Various	Various	National and local
Post-graduate certificate & diploma	Teachers working with students with ASD	Primary and post-primary (combined and separate)	National

SESS also provides support to teachers through the design and development of resource materials. Examples of these resources include toolkits, magazines, DVDs and newsletters (SESS, 2010). The content of these resources include such areas as:

- Teaching methods and organisation.
- Behaviour management.
- Assessment.
- Inclusion.
- Reference material.
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- Curricular material.
- Transition from primary to post-primary.
- SESS online book library.
- Miscellaneous resources.

In 2008 SESS published *Signposts*, which provided advice for teachers on the implications of a wide range of special educational needs for learning and teaching and suggests a range of resources for teachers. This was distributed to all schools and is available electronically via the SESS website.

In addition to its role in designing and delivering a range of CPD supports to teachers of students with special educational needs, SESS also sponsors or funds programmes delivered by other educational trainers, third level colleges or institutions.

Working in partnership with other organisations

Part of the remit of SESS is to consolidate and co-ordinate provision in relation to CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs. This arises from a recognition that, prior to the creation of SESS, there was a clear lack of co-ordination of provision and a subsequent risk of duplication of effort. According to DES, part of the rationale for establishing SESS in 2003 included:

- The lack of co-ordination and consolidation of the existing provision can lead to possible duplication and on occasion under-utilisation of expertise when available.
- The lack of precise details on additional CPD/qualifications deficit at national level.
- The lack of information on available expertise nationally.
- The lack of a structure to identify these needs and respond to them in a prioritised and co-ordinated manner.
- Demands for additional CPD.
- The constant turnover of teachers working in special education has militated against the accumulation of a large "body of expertise" such as exists in special school and care environments.

Its role in consolidating and co-ordinating existing CPD provision has led SESS to adopt a partnership approach in much of its work to deliver specific professional development opportunities in collaboration with a wide range of other programmes, support services, stakeholders and external agencies. Table 5.3 lists the organisations with which SESS reports it has engaged between 2008 and 2009.

Table 5.3: SESS partnerships

Organisation	Organisation
The Visiting Teachers Service	Middletown Centre for Autism
Cochlear Implant Unit – Beaumont Hospital	Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS)
Second Level Support Service (SLSS)	Inspectorate, DES
National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)	National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals	Irish Primary Principals Network
Irish National Teachers Organisation	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
Second-Level Support Service	Joint Managerial Board
Adapted Physical Activity Organisation	Féach
Down Syndrome Ireland	

SESS has collaborated with the above organisations on a number of issues related to special education, including sharing ideas and information, the development of working protocols and improving working relationships. In addition to its collaborative work SESS is represented in a number of special education committees for the NCCA and the NCSE (SESS, 2010). It has also developed three working documents with the PPDS, SLSS (both now subsumed into the Professional Development Service for Teachers, (PDST)) and the Visiting Teacher Service to help ensure that duplication of provision is minimised across the three services.

SESS has also contributed to North-South co-operation and development, through exchange programmes such as the *Special Educational Needs Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme* which was funded under *Measure 5.5: Education, Cross-Border School and Youth Cooperation* of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Peace II). This programme enabled teachers, educational psychologists and other professionals from the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to come together and exchange experiences and models of best practice.

SESS has recently been added to the Inclusive Education in Action website as an example of good practice in terms of inclusive education. It has also received international recognition for its provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs. In 2010, a SESS project was used as a case study in the Practice Review publication, *"ICTs in Education for People with Disabilities"*, a project by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. The SESS case study focused upon a collaborative project called EagleEyes, which involved SESS, ICT researchers from Boston College, Boston and schools. The aim of the project was to implement a specialised ICT initiative to support learners with physical disabilities (UNESCO IITE, 2011).

A range of national stakeholders was consulted as part of this evaluation to gain an insight into the perceived effectiveness and efficiency of SESS. A full list of these stakeholders is presented in Chapter 1 of this report. Many of the stakeholders consulted commented positively on the range of support offered by SESS, which is developed in partnership with other organisations. A number of stakeholders stated that SESS facilitated effective co-ordination through partnerships with other organisations including ICEP Europe, universities, colleges and Education Centres.

> *"SESS has been involved in developing a national approach to using TEACCH [**T**reatment and **E**ducation of **A**utistic and related **C**ommunication-handicapped **CH**ildren] and have brought over trainers from North Carolina… the links built up with international organisations and professionals are extremely important to Ireland and should be encouraged."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Although some stakeholders stated that consolidation had occurred due to partnerships and collaboration with other service providers, others identified the occasional duplication of CPD provision with the offerings of similar support from parent groups and other teacher support services.

> *"The capacity and expertise, which has been developed serves to consolidate the support and extend it into the schools. This needs further investment to maintain sustainability."* (National stakeholder written submission)

> *"Other teacher support services occasionally provide similar services… perhaps there should be greater contact between these services in order to have consistency of message and to ensure the provision of comprehensive support to all children and teachers in this area."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Many stakeholders that participated in the consultation phase of this research described a perception of SESS as a one-stop shop and a first port of call, suggesting that it has established itself well in its co-ordination role. Several of the professional associations and other representative bodies noted that links to the SESS website were featured on their organisation's sites, which also underlines the extent to which SESS has appeared to reach out across the system.

> *"I would see it as a one-stop shop. They certainly have carved out a niche. If you mention any kind of special education in schools now it's SESS. They have really pulled it together… They have a very easily identifiable support structure that is meaningful for people in schools as well. And they have reached out. It has been incredible… they have a fabulous publication [Signposts] which is a great terms of reference in schools."* (National Stakeholder interview)

> *"Principals, and particularly our new large cohort of newly appointed school leaders, can find they are faced with deficient provision in their schools and a bewildering array of 'good ideas' and possible solutions. SESS offers a safe, one-stop-shop for such school heads and their special education departments and should always be the first port of call in these instances."* (National stakeholder written submission)

> *"Special education in Ireland is extremely complicated and unco-ordinated. Identifying who has responsibility or a specific role in a certain area can be very difficult to ascertain. Having a single point for CPD has been very helpful."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Other issues raised included a lack of provision for the Irish-medium sector, and the need to ensure that college-based provision is maintained. However, it should be noted that amongst the Irish-medium sector respondents to our survey, satisfaction levels with SESS were relatively high, based on the results of our survey. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

> *"[SESS has been] very successful except in the case of the needs of Irish-medium schools."* (National stakeholder written submission)

"I don't think SESS is the answer to everything, I don't think it can be. I think the colleges have an extremely important part to play in terms of providing the more certificate bearing type of courses going into diploma and leading onto masters levels and beyond that. I think SESS is about or obviously has gone into that area to some small extent in relation to autism and would like to provide as much certification as they can for much of their courses for teachers, but at the same time I think it must be careful of its role... it is co-operative in terms of what it does with the colleges." (National stakeholder interview)

A substantial minority of stakeholders felt that the collaborative approach of *SESS* could be developed further by involving other stakeholders as partners in SESS programmes, to ensure better progression of students with special educational needs. This could include harnessing local and regional expertise.

"I would recommend greater links being established with Disability Professionals in Higher Education so that more teachers are aware of new developments in assistive technology for inclusion of students with special educational needs." (National stakeholder written submission)

Another suggestion by some stakeholders included engaging with students, parents and advocates to increase awareness of the CPD and services available which would, in turn, improve outcomes for students. One stakeholder felt that parents should be able to avail of SESS CPD and support. It should be noted, however, that this is outside the current scope of *SESS* remit.

"Courses could also be made available to parents as they are the primary educators." (National stakeholder written submission)

Most focus group participants felt unable to comment on the extent to which *SESS* has helped to consolidate and co-ordinate existing CPD in the area of teaching students with special educational needs, however, there was a general perception amongst participants who believed that *SESS* had *"professionalised it."*

SESS organisational structure

SESS provides CPD and support to teachers of students with special educational needs using a combination of its own staff, other CPD providers and a network of special advisors. Figure 5.2 overleaf illustrates the organisational structure of SESS, highlighting the roles of the TES and CESC, where SESS is based. The organisation has eighty-one professional staff (including seventeen full-time and sixty-four part-time positions), it also has twenty-nine part-time local facilitators (each contributing a maximum of six days per annum) and seven administrative staff (four full-time and three part-time positions).

Figure 5.2: SESS organisational chart

| Department of Education and Skills Teacher Education Section (TES) |

| SESS Steering Committee |

| Administrators (4 Full-time & 3 Part-time) | Director SESS (1 Full-time) | Cork Education Support Centre Director |

| Deputy Directors (2 Full-time) |

| Assistant National Co-ordinators (8 Full-time) |

| SESS Advisors (6 Full-time) | Associates (34 Part-time) | Local Facilitators (29 Part-time) | Specialist Advisor (1 Part-time) |

Source: SESS (2010). *Summary report*

SESS is a national support service which employs practicing teachers to design and deliver teacher-centred CPD and support, with a view to enhancing the learning and teaching for students with special educational needs. Members of SESS professional staff are seconded from their teaching positions by the Management Committee of CESC and are under the management of SESS Steering Committee. The Director and staff of CESC support the work of SESS in accordance with the *Guidelines on National Programmes and Support Services.*

Our stakeholder consultations with representatives from SESS and CESC indicate that the organisations have developed an effective working relationship, which has been reviewed and refined over time. Established working arrangements are in place, such as formal monthly meetings between SESS and the Director of CESC, to discuss the operation of SESS, including finance and budget issues.

The roles and responsibilities of each element of the organisational structure are outlined below (SESS, 2010):

- *TES* provides funding for SESS, which operates under its remit.

- *The SESS Steering Committee*, established by TES, has overall responsibility for the management of SESS. It decides the overall direction of SESS, subject to the general terms and conditions determined from time to time by TES and subject to available resources as determined by TES.

- *CESC* hosts SESS and provides support to SESS in the development of a nation-wide service, providing support to school personnel working with students with special educational needs.

- *SESS design teams and advisory committees* are created for particular issues or specialisms within the field of special education.[5] The role of these groups is to provide advice and support to SESS as well as acting as a quality control mechanism.

- *Professional and administrative staff* work and support each other in ensuing the provision of support for schools and school personnel. The professional staff consists of SESS associates who are teams of teachers selected for their expertise in special education who are released from their schools on a part-time basis (for 20-30 days per annum) to work with SESS in providing CPD and support to school personnel around Ireland. SESS tutors are "local facilitators" with expertise in special education who are released from their schools on a part-time basis (for up to six working days per annum) to work with SESS in providing CPD and support to school personnel.

TES provides SESS with funding. CESC is responsible for the administration of SESS and works in conjunction with and supports SESS in managing accountability and compliance with legislative requirements. The Director of SESS is responsible for running it day-to-day. This is the organisational structure which the Department uses to deliver all its educational support services. In effect this model adds a layer of management between SESS and TES. From a risk management perspective, this provides increased scrutiny of SESS activities. However, from an organisational effectiveness perspective this may create additional bureaucracy, and may increase the time taken to make decisions.

SESS operates a model based on regular team meetings, including (SESS, 2010):

- Co-ordinators' meetings – there are 10 co-ordinators' meeting per annum. The focus of these meetings is the programme of work, organisational developments, design and delivery and budgeting.

- Advisor team meetings – these are held once per term and focus on the programme of seminars and school visits, including any challenges arising as well as the design, content and presentation of the programme.

- National team events – there are normally two national team events per year. These events provide SESS staff with the opportunity to come together to address specific issues such as team training or end of year reviews.

As previously discussed SESS is a national support service and while most of the stakeholders we consulted considered the national delivery model to be appropriate, a minority of stakeholders suggested that a more local or regional delivery model, which developed advisory capacity within each region, would be preferable. However, it was acknowledged that this would require significant additional resources.

> *"SESS should consider a regional approach where a link person is identified within each of the [Education Centre] regions in order that regional balances can be attained and information pertinent to the region can be shared and strategies considered."* (National stakeholder written submission)

> *"Ireland is a small country and the national model, while not ideal, is working well within its current constraints. However, I would like to see some regionalisation but understand having expertise in all areas per region is not appropriate and that national expertise/specialists are best in this instance."* (National stakeholder interview)

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[5] These include ASDs, Contemporary Applied Behaviour Analysis, Challenging Behaviour, Meeting the Needs of Students with Special Educational Needs through Individualised Planning (Primary), Meeting the Needs of Students with Special Educational Needs through Individualised Planning (Post-Primary), Deaf Education, Transition, Post-Graduate Special Educational Needs Committees, Management Committee, Operational Sub-Committee.

Roles and responsibilities of SESS staff

Figure 5.2 described the structure of SESS staff. The roles and responsibilities of SESS staff are outlined below (SESS, 2010):

- The *Director* has overall responsibility for the operation of SESS.

- The *Deputy Directors* have assigned professional development dimensions to their role as well as dividing organisational responsibilities between them; with one Deputy taking the lead on human resource issues whilst the other leads on the financial issues.

- The *Assistant National Co-ordinators* operate in an advisory role as well as supporting the co-ordination of SESS activity including the design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of CPD programmes for SESS associates and school personnel. These individuals are also responsible for supporting the teams of SESS associates and resourcing SESS personnel (including dealing with budgetary matters). Their work involves working with a range of Educational Bodies.

- *SESS Advisors* are teachers, selected for their expertise in special education, who provide professional development and support to school personnel. Advisors operate in national level teams with two Advisors working in the ASDs Team, two in the Behaviour Team and two General Special Education Advisors.

- *SESS Associates* are school personnel (or former personnel) who are registered with the Teaching Council. They support the design and delivery of SESS programmes on a part-time basis to complement and extend its capacity.

- *Local Facilitators* are also school personnel (or former personnel) who are registered with the Teaching Council. They are engaged by SESS to facilitate, or collaborate in the facilitation of, a limited number of local events on a particular special education issue or in a particular Education Centre.

- *SESS Administrators* are responsible for developing and maintaining SESS management information systems, providing administrative support for financial matters, managing telephone contact with schools and making the administrative arrangements for SESS events.

The staffing model adopted by SESS is intended to provide teachers with access to professional staff who have extensive experience in the pedagogy of students with special educational needs. According to SESS, the secondment of experienced teachers to SESS aids in:

- Understanding the demands and key issues relating to CPD in special education.
- Assisting in the design of innovative and effective modes of delivery.
- Developing support materials and resources which are suitable for teachers.
- Applying lessons from a variety of educational settings as well as international good practice.

In addition to the experience that professional staff bring from their previous employment, SESS has an annual budget allocation for CPD and team training (in 2011 this was approximately 3% of the total budget allocation).[6] The overall staff development plan is considered in light of team development, the CPD programmes to be delivered that year, and the prioritised needs of individual teams. CPD is provided to SESS staff in a number of ways, including:

- **External providers:** both full-time and part-time staff in the national team can access CPD following the annual review provided for the entire team.

- **SESS-provided CPD:** internal exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills among teams and individuals.

- **CPD for full-time staff:** specific programmes of CPD are available for full-time staff.

- **Individual team CPD:** CPD that is related to the nature of the specialism of the team.

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[6] Based on information received from the SESS.

- **Individual team member CPD:** individuals within SESS can apply to attend conferences and seminars based on their identified individual needs.

- **Funding for post-graduate qualifications:** staff can avail of this funding, subject to certain conditions.

- **Preparation and planning:** this is part of the weekly work schedule for all members of the SESS professional team, requiring reading, researching and independent study.

SESS professional staff are selected on the basis of specialism and their practitioner expertise in relation to teaching students with special educational needs. There is, therefore, a learning curve for them in terms of becoming a facilitator responsible for designing and delivering CPD and support as well as developing the associated resources and materials. New staff are provided with training on becoming a facilitator, however, the challenges presented by this new role should not be underestimated. There is some evidence from our consultations, for example, that resource limitations and time constraints can lead to increased pressure on SESS staff. Staff may receive coaching on becoming a trainer, and although there is a time allocation in the weekly work schedule for independent study, in some situations, their desire to stay abreast of changes and developments in their specialism motivates them to further their learning in their own time.

> *"For me it was really fast and furious [becoming a trainer]... I had some experience of dyslexia but I had never presented on it. I think the following week I gave a presentation on dyslexia [by myself].The amount of [lead-in] time is very short, because you are needed out there... You have your job now, so fulfil your role. It is learning as you go... for your own benefit. There is... a system to it, but you do have to do an awful lot yourself, if you are to do it correctly."* (SESS staff member)

> *"If you are to keep updated, you have to do a lot of reading. You need to stay in touch with things ... the type of information that you keep gathering incidentally is incredible..."* (SESS staff member)

Linked to this point is the requirement for SESS staff to travel around the country to deliver CPD and support to school personnel. This obviously exacerbates resource limitations as SESS personnel suggest that they spend a considerable amount of time travelling.

> *"I found it extremely challenging, when I started, that I could be right up as far as the border doing support visits... [As I have progressed through SESS] I have been able to control the travel a little bit more... I will try as best as possible to give support over the phone, or else give it to someone who I have talked the situation through with. I used to feel very bad about that initially; I just knew I couldn't keep going [with the same level of travel]. I would leave for work on a Monday and would be back in on a Friday night. I couldn't sustain it; something was going to give.... In my planner I would have had four blocks of intensive training, and another two smaller ones, everything [else] has got to fit around that."* (SESS staff member)

Overall the stakeholders who participated in this evaluation were very positive about *SESS* and the support it provides to school personnel, particularly in relation to the range of support offered and the flexibility of its delivery. The majority of stakeholders described *SESS* as being equipped with dedicated staff and facilitators who have specific expertise in special education and who are supported by a national and regional structure. This configuration was deemed by stakeholders as being important in building relationships with teachers in schools across the country.

In general, most stakeholders felt that the organisational structure of *SESS* was appropriate given the resources available. However, almost half the participating stakeholders were aware of the financial and resource limitations that *SESS* is operating under, and believed that this could be limiting its impact.

"They are a very small organisation and working with very limited resources and I think that curtails the programme of work they can do [and] the amount of people they can reach... They are very successful with the small group of people that are working there on a national level. My own experience of the calibre of personnel working there is very high. When you're working in the context of very limited resources you won't be able to achieve what you want across the board... I think the potential benefits they could make as an organisation have yet to be reached." (National stakeholder interview)

"It is a small service and has had to focus its energies on the area of autism, challenging behaviour and another few areas so it is limited. I think the positive vibe that we get back from schools... arises from the fact that [SESS] do try and be as responsive as they can... they are hardworking in their efforts to meet needs but at the same time we are all aware that if you had a service three or four times as big as it is at the moment there would still be plenty of work for them out there". (National stakeholder interview)

"SESS is seen as a central point for professional development, together with Education Centres. However, and importantly, [based on feedback from teachers] there have been problems in some cases in accessing these resources, with extremely frustrating red-tape issues at times, making requests almost impossible to complete." (National stakeholder written submission)

"I know the Department is anxious to support schools as far as it can. At the same time, the Department is anxious to help schools to become more independent. We don't want schools in the system to become dependent on SESS so there is a balance to be preserved there. Having said that, I think SESS could if it had some more resources be able to apply those resources a bit more effectively within the system." (National stakeholder interview)

Indeed, several stakeholders commented that it is imperative to recruit more personnel if *SESS* is to successfully achieve its aims, in particular for in-school support and to up-skill teachers. Some stakeholders felt that the moratorium on public service recruitment could negatively impact the ability of *SESS* to deliver its aims as staff and expertise would not be replaced.

"Expertise and credibility built up through personal contact over many years will be difficult to replace if crucial gaps in service emerge through cuts in personnel." (National stakeholder written submission)

A number of stakeholders commented positively on the use of seconded teachers as they were considered to have extensive experience in teaching students with special educational needs and to understand the dynamics of the school environment. According to these stakeholders, this increases their credibility with other teachers. This view was also shared by the principals and teachers who attended our focus group sessions. The majority of focus group participants stated that they really valued the use of teaching professionals to deliver SESS CPD and support and believed that this made the support provided more practical and, in their opinion, more credible.

Conversely, there were some concerns amongst a minority of stakeholders about the use of temporary contracts for SESS staff which means that SESS continually has to develop and train professional staff who will eventually leave the organisation. However, it should be noted that secondees typically move on to other special education-related posts so their expertise is not lost from the system completely.

"There is a lot of haemorrhaging of staff which we find a little bit disconcerting, but perhaps there are so few with those areas of expertise in the country. They train up to a very high skill level, and then obviously they become very attractive to other institutions and organisations." (National stakeholder interview)

Another issue relating to the way in which SESS is organised, is the membership of the design teams. There is considerable overlap in terms of the personnel on who make up these teams. Whilst this may be a recognition of the level of specialist knowledge and expertise which these individuals hold in relation to special education, there is also an inherent risk in terms of sustainability and contingency planning. For example, one individual is represented on eight of the nine design teams; if this individual were no longer able to fulfil this role – for whatever reason – it would create a considerable gap for SESS to fill.

Overall, the majority of stakeholders commented that SESS is making a positive contribution by:

- Basing its work on solid national and international research.
- Having a committed team.
- Working in partnership with other organisations to successfully disseminate information.

SESS income and expenditure

SESS is funded by TES. Its income and expenditure, to date and in the future, should be viewed in light of the wider economic context. In particular the increased pressure on and scrutiny of public sector expenditure resulting from the current economic downturn and the recommendation of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009) for a structural reduction of 6,930 staff across DES and its agencies.

Between 2007 and 2010 SESS has received between €2m and €3m of funding per annum from TES. Table 5.4 provides a breakdown of SESS annual income and expenditure from 2007 to 2010. This shows that the total allocation of Departmental funding to the end of 2007 was not fully expended. These unexpended funds facilitated the increased expenditure, over and above Departmental funding granted to SESS, from 2008 to 2010. The increased expenditure was predominantly directed towards programme expenditure in 2008 and 2009. SESS expenditure in all areas decreased between 2009 and 2010. In 2010 SESS began to generate revenues from its operation of an online library. It should be noted that the figures presented in this section in relation to income and expenditure have been provided by CESC. The study team has not undertaken any audit or verification of the figures provided, as this is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Our analysis of SESS expenditure shows that although there has been some fluctuation in terms of the actual expenditure in each area between 2007 and 2010, the proportion of total expenditure represented by each area has remained relatively stable during this time.

Table 5.4: Breakdown of income and expenditure from 2007 to 2010 (€)

Description	2007 €	% of total	2008 €	% of total	2009 €	% of total	2010 €	% of total	Total (2007- 2010) €	% of total
Departmental funding received	€ 3,210,435	100%	€ 2,977,220	100%	€ 2,589,157	100%	€ 2,046,363	100%	€ 10,823,175	100%
Online library fees received	-	-	-	-	-	-	€ 4,380	0%	€ 4,380	0%
Total Income*	**€ 3,210,435**	**100%**	**€ 2,977,220**	**100%**	**€ 2,589,157**	**100%**	**€ 2,050,743**	**100%**	**€ 10,827,555**	**100%**
Staffing -Admin personnel	€ 160,922	7%	€ 173,120	6%	€ 235,665	7%	€ 221,035	9%	€ 790,742	7%
Administration	€ 112,439	5%	€ 183,127	6%	€ 267,918	8%	€ 184,472	8%	€ 747,956	7%
Programme expenditure**	€ 1,751,204	79%	€ 2,519,846	82%	€ 2,714,747	78%	€ 1,754,246	74%	€ 8,740,042	79%
Support provided to individual teachers/groups of teachers***	€ 193,104	9%	€ 203,219	7%	€ 243,801	7%	€ 214,909	9%	€ 855,033	8%
Total Expenditure*	**€ 2,217,669**	**100%**	**€ 3,079,311**	**100%**	**€ 3,462,130**	**100%**	**€ 2,374,663**	**100%**	**€ 11,133,773**	**100%**

Source: PwC analysis of SESS data provided by CESC
Note: Please note that these figures have been provided by CESC and the study team has not undertaken any audit or verification of the figures provided, as this is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

* The total allocation of Departmental funding to the end of 2007 was not fully expended. These unexpended funds facilitated the increased expenditure over and above Departmental funding granted to SESS from 2008 to 2010.

** Programme Expenditure includes SESS seminars and programme costs and resource material design, development and distribution costs.

*** Through the SESS Support Scheme individual teachers, whole-school staff, groups of teachers or professional organisations have availed of funding to undertake professional development activities specific to their professional development needs and to the needs of the their students and schools.

'Programme expenditure' represents the majority of total spend in each year (i.e. approximately three quarters). This includes the cost of delivering the range of SESS seminars and programmes and resource material produced.

The proportion of costs devoted to staffing each year ranges from 6% to 9% (with an overall average of 7% over the four year period). These staffing costs include administrative personnel only. The salaries of SESS professional staff and the cost of substitution cover for their permanent positions are paid directly by the Department rather than coming from the SESS budget. Their salaries are paid on the normal salary scale and substitution cover is paid on the standard rates. To give some indication of the breakdown of staff time across their various duties we have looked to the Summary Report produced by SESS (2010) which estimated that 56% of the Assistant National Co-ordinators' time is spent on school related activity, 30% on administration and 14% on planning and preparation. A breakdown by other job roles is not given.

We have received information from SESS about the number of teachers trained from 2007 to 2010[7] and the total number of training places supported in 2009 and 2010 (in the absence of actual figures for the number of training places supported in 2010 we have used estimates provided by SESS).[8] It also showed that in 2009 and 2010, the number of training places was actually higher than the number of teachers supported. This is due to the fact that some teachers may receive more than one form of support.

While the fact that some teachers may have attended more than one SESS event in a year is not in itself an indication of dependency, SESS should develop its existing information management system to allow it to easily monitor the uptake of support by both schools and individual teachers. This will help to ensure that the same schools and/or teachers are not accessing the same support time and time again. This will also facilitate the identification of any gaps in engagement by school type or area and allow SESS to better target its resources. Our interviews with SESS personnel confirmed that this is something which SESS has considered internally and would like to develop, resources permitting.

We have used the "Programme expenditure" data and the information on the number of training places supported to estimate the average cost per training place in 2009 and 2010. This analysis, presented in Table 5.5, shows that the average cost per training place over these two years was approximately €86.

Table 5.5: Average cost per training place

Year	Programme expenditure (€)	No. of training places	Average cost per training place (€)
2009	€ 2,714,747	29,567	€ 92
2010	€ 1,754,246	22,516	€ 78
Total	**€ 4,468,993**	**52,083**	**€ 86**

Source: PwC analysis of SESS data provided by CESC and SESS.
Note: 1) Please note that these figures have been provided by CESC and SESS and the study team has not undertaken any audit or verification of the figures provided, as this is beyond the scope of this evaluation.
2) In the absence of actual figures for the number of training places supported in 2010 we have used estimates provided by SESS.

It is important to note that the figures above are gathered from attendance rolls and do not include individuals who have only accessed other forms of support provided by SESS, such as, DVDs, on-line library, website, and therefore, the actual number of teachers who have received support from SESS could be higher. For example, the SESS website received visits from over 200,000 unique visitors from September 2008 to August 2010 (SESS, 2010).

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[7] According to data provided by the SESS data the total number of teachers supported was: 16,625 in 2007; 23,280 in 2008; 23,602 in 2009; and 20,348 in 2010.
[8] Actual figures for the total number of training places supported have been requested from the SESS. This information is not available at the time of drafting this report. Once received this information will be included in our final report.

According to its 2010 summary report, SESS administered 269 applications for funding via its Support Scheme in 2009/10. The Support Scheme has provided funding for a broad range of courses, with fees for valid courses ranging from €250 to €7,000 depending on the level of specialism. If we assume that the timing of these applications was distributed evenly throughout the academic year (i.e. 108 were received from September to December 2009 and 169 were received from January to June) and we make the same assumption in terms of the timing of this spend (i.e. 40% of the "Support provided to individual teachers/groups of teachers" in 2009 was spent between September and December 2009 and 60% of the "Support provided to individual teachers/groups of teachers" in 2010 was spent between January and June) then we can estimate the average amount of funding provided per application (see Table 5.6). This analysis should be viewed in light of the breadth of courses and course fees covered. For example, while SESS has reported that applications for courses costing €7,000 are less common, the presence of relatively few applications at the upper end of the scale in terms of cost has the potential to skew the overall average.

Table 5.6: Estimated average amount of funding provided per application to the Support Scheme

Timeframe	Support provided to individual teachers/groups of teachers (€)	Estimated no. of applications for funding only	Average cost per application (€)
Sep-Dec 2009	€ 97,520	108	€ 903
Jan-Jun 2010	€ 128,945	161	€ 801
Total	**€ 226,466**	**269**	**€ 842**

Source: PwC analysis of SESS data provided by CESC and SESS
Note: Please note that these figures have been provided by CESC and SESS and the study team has not undertaken any audit or verification of the figures provided, as this is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Although the above cost benefit estimates are based on a number of assumptions, they illustrate the relative cost to SESS of providing different forms of support. For example, the estimated average cost of providing funding directly is around 10 times the average cost of a training place on an SESS delivered programme. It should be noted, however, that cost effectiveness should not be the sole driver in choosing a delivery mode. It is important to also consider the suitability and appropriateness of the mode to the content being delivered. What is more, the teachers and principals who contributed to this evaluation indicated a preference for a range of delivery modes, which enabled them to access support in a variety of different ways. This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The study team has sought to compare the relative value for money of SESS activities to that of the PDST. The PDST could be an appropriate comparator organisation because it too is a support service for teachers which works in multi-disciplinary teams to respond to needs identified by schools. Following discussions with TES, however, it was considered that such a comparison would not be particularly useful as both organisations operate within the Department's financial guidelines and, as such, the resulting comparisons are likely to be quite similar. We have, therefore, considered potential international comparators as an alternative, including the Regional Training Unit in Northern Ireland, and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in England. These comparisons are meant to be indicative only and should be viewed in light of the substantial differences in the scope and remit of each organisation and the policy context within which it operates.

The Regional Training Unit (RTU) is the Northern Ireland education service's Leadership and Staff College. The RTU supports the professional development of leaders and senior managers in all schools in Northern Ireland as well as providing CPD opportunities for teachers and other school professionals. The NCSL has responsibility for training and developing leaders in England's schools, children's centres and children's services. TDA is the national agency and recognised sector body responsible for the CPD of the school workforce in England.

The programmes of support which the NCSL and TDA provide to school personnel are generally much longer term than those provided by SESS (i.e. covering period of one or two years). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the

average cost per training place was much higher (i.e. ranging from around €1,800 for the TDA's *Return to Teach Programme* to €16,000 for its *Subject Matter Enhancement Course*[9] and €4,400 for the NCSL's leadership development programme) (TDA, 2008b and NCSL, 2011). These figures are not directly comparable to that of SESS due to the differences in the nature and duration of these programmes (i.e. the amount of direct contact and type of support provided). They do, however, give some indication of the relative costs of the different types of support provided by other agencies.

The RTU supports the development of leaders and senior managers throughout the academic year, however, during the summer it also provides CPD opportunities for teachers and other school professionals in the form of a four day summer school. The RTU's annual summer school delivers 80 - 90 short courses to 3,000 teachers (on average). These courses cover a variety of subjects to address the needs of teachers, including some courses on special education. The average cost per person per training day (including travel and subsistence) is around €40[10] (i.e. half of the estimated average cost per SESS training place). The RTU approach of providing a four day intensive summer school is very different to the nationwide delivery model adopted by SESS, but it may create some economies of scale (i.e. by bringing a large number of teachers together to receive a range of CPD over a short period of time).

Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of SESS and the range of CPD and other support that it provides to schools at a local, regional and national level. It has also considered the relationships between SESS and other bodies and organisations in the system – whilst recognising that these relationships are in reality more numerous and complex than is illustrated.

Overall, stakeholders expressed the view that SESS has succeeded to some extent in co-ordinating and consolidating CPD on special education however some did think that more could be done to reduce duplication in the system with other state-funded providers. There was also a view that while the national model was working well, there could be scope for a more regional approach – resources permitting. Many focus group participants welcomed the understanding that SESS professional staff, as members of the teaching profession themselves, brought to the CPD and support. There were, however, some concerns from stakeholders about the limited level of resources and demands on staff as well as recruitment and turnover.

Departmental funding to SESS was between €2m and €3m per year from 2007 to 2010. Since 2010 SESS has supplemented its income with fees from its online library (accounting for €4,380 in 2010). Overall expenditure is primarily driven by programme expenditure. It is important to note that the salaries of professional staff seconded to SESS on a full-time or part-time basis are paid by the Department directly. Staffing costs included in the SESS budget relate to administrative personnel only and make up, on average, 7% of total expenditure for SESS. We have also provided an illustration of the relative costs associated with the different forms of SESS support, but note that while cost effectiveness is important it should not be the sole consideration in determining the mode of CPD delivery. It is also important that the delivery mode is appropriate for the content of CPD being delivered as well as the needs of the learners. We have included an analysis of the relative costs for other support services which provide CPD for school personnel. While each organisation has its own distinct remit and is operating within a different policy context, the figures presented provide useful benchmarks in terms of the relative costs of different types of and approaches to CPD provision.

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[9] The Return to Teach programme provides support to people returning to teaching after a period of absence.
Subject Matter Enhancement Courses provide enhancement courses in mathematics, physics and chemistry to support graduates whose degree is not closely enough matched to these subjects, to move on to a postgraduate ITT programme in one of these subjects.
[10] This information has been provided by the Director of the RTU. Please note that the study team is not in a position to validate this figure.

6. Accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision

Chapter summary

This chapter is based on the findings from our stakeholder consultations, focus group sessions and survey of principals and teachers. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the appropriateness and accessibility of Special Education Support Service (SESS) continuing professional development (CPD) and support. It considers teachers' experiences of teaching students with special educational needs and their perceptions of their role in inclusion. We also analyse the level of awareness which teachers have of SESS and the types of CPD and support it provides. The uptake of SESS support amongst our survey respondents and their perceptions of the accessibility of SESS provision are then described.

Our findings demonstrate that there is clearly an audience for CPD relating to special education with the majority of survey respondents having taught at least one student with special educational needs in the last two years. In addition, the level of awareness of SESS provision was high amongst respondents. These results are perhaps unsurprising given the sampling approach used for this survey.[11] There was, however, a relatively substantial minority of respondents who were either "not very aware" or "not at all aware" of SESS.

Usage of SESS by survey respondents was also reported to be high, with teachers from special schools reporting higher proportions of usage than those in mainstream schools. Overall the findings of our primary research were positive in relation to the accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision, with a large proportion of survey respondents describing SESS CPD and support as very relevant to their teaching roles. What is more, many participants welcomed the range of delivery modes used by SESS. Areas of concern tended to focus on access to and the relevance of the content to specific groups such as class or subject teachers in mainstream schools.

Introduction

This section of our report examines the accessibility and appropriateness of the CPD provided by SESS. It commences with a discussion of the profile of the teachers who participated in the survey including their experience of teaching and of the special educational needs that they encounter in the classroom. This chapter is therefore structured under the following headings:

- Special educational needs in participating schools.
- Teachers' perceptions of their roles in inclusion.
- Awareness of SESS provision amongst teaching staff.
- Take-up of SESS support.
- Accessibility of CPD programmes.
- Conclusion.

Special educational needs in participating schools

The following paragraphs provide background information on the experience of teachers who participated in the survey and on the range and levels of special educational needs that they encounter amongst their students to give some context to the accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision.

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[11] i.e. principals were asked to complete one questionnaire and distribute the remaining three questionnaires to teachers with experience of the SESS or of teaching students with special educational needs..

As shown in Table 6.1 approximately half of all respondents stated that they had been teaching for more than 20 years. This may be due, in part, to the fact principals were asked to complete one questionnaire themselves and forward the remaining three questionnaires to members of staff who had specific experience of SESS support or teaching students with special educational needs in order to target those potential participants who would be best placed to respond to the questions asked. This may have biased the sample towards those with more teaching experience in general.

Table 6.1: Number of years that respondents have been teaching

No. of years	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
Less than 1	1%	0%	1%	1%
1 - 2	2%	1%	2%	2%
3 - 5	10%	9%	11%	10%
6 - 10	18%	12%	15%	17%
11 - 15	11%	15%	19%	12%
16 - 20	7%	12%	10%	8%
More than 20	51%	51%	43%	51%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,493
Unweighted base: 1,492

When asked about the length of time they had been in their current role the responses were more evenly distributed, with approximately a quarter of respondents in each of the following categories:

- Less than three years (24% of respondents).
- Three to five years (27% of respondents).
- Six to ten years (24% of respondents).
- More than ten years (26% of respondents).

The pattern of responses to our survey therefore reflects a broad mix of teaching experience. Overall, nearly all respondents (93%) stated that their school had an official policy on special education and/or inclusion. As shown in Table 6.2, most respondents also had personal experience of teaching students with special educational needs in the past two years.

A substantial proportion of primary respondents (39%) and post-primary respondents (32%) stated that up to 10% of the students they taught in the last two years had special educational needs. However, approximately a third of primary respondents (35%) and post-primary respondents (36%) said that this percentage was over 20%. Consideration of these responses by job role demonstrates that a third of class/subject teachers stated that up to 5% of students they taught had special educational needs; with a further fifth (21%) stating between 6% and 10% of their students in the last two years had special educational needs.

Table 6.2: Proportion of students taught in the last two years with special educational needs

Percentage	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
None	9%	13%	6%	10%
1%-5%	24%	15%	0%	21%
6%-10%	15%	17%	2%	15%
11%-15%	9%	8%	1%	9%
16%-20%	8%	12%	1%	9%
21% or more	35%	36%	91%	37%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,388
Unweighted base: 1,389

Figure 6.1 illustrates the range of special educational needs which survey respondents have experienced teaching over the last two years. This highlights the diversity of needs presented as well as the variance within each special educational need. For example, although approximately a third of all respondents had taught at least one student with an assessed syndrome in the last two years, there is quite a lot of variation in terms of the specific types of different assessed syndromes which they reported.

The most common special educational needs are emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems (reported in 2,277 cases), general learning disabilities (1,830 cases), specific learning disabilities (1,301 cases) and specific speech and language disorders (1,194). In relation to specific special educational needs, three quarters of respondents (74% or 922 respondents) stated that, in the last two years, they had taught a student with dyslexia. Please note that this was a multiple response question where respondents could select more than one option, in order to account for the fact that many students are likely to have more than one special educational need.

Figure 6.1: Range of special educational needs presented by students taught by respondents[12]

Weighted base:1,245
Unweighted base:1,243
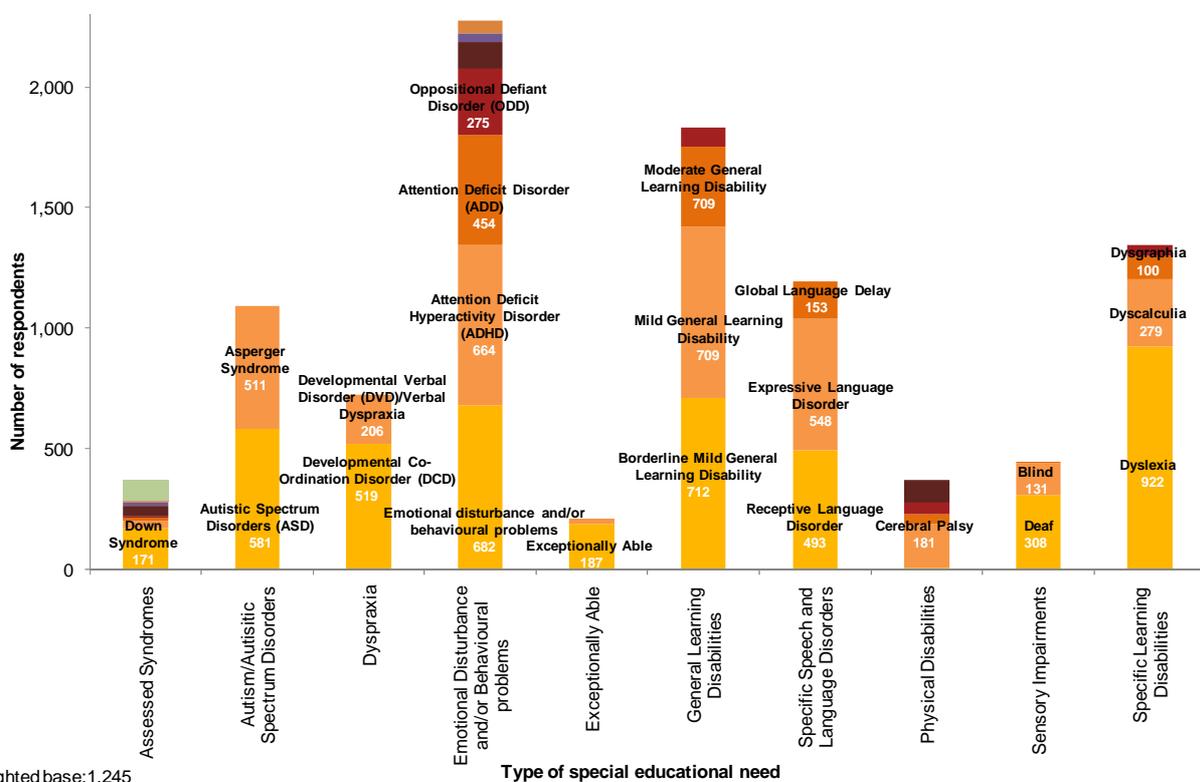
Note: This is a multiple response question.

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[12] Assessed Syndromes include Down Syndrome, Fragile X, Prader-Willi Syndrome, Rett/Rhett Syndrome, Tourette Syndrome, Turner Syndrome, Usher Syndrome, Williams Syndrome and other Assessed Syndromes.
Emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems include emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Conduct Disorder (CD), Childhood Psychosis and Other emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems.
Exceptionally Able includes Exceptionally Able and Dual Exceptionality.
General learning disabilities include Borderline Mild General Learning Disability, Mild General Learning Disability, Moderate General Learning Disability and Severe to Profound General Learning Disability.
Specific Speech and Language Disorders include Receptive Language Disorder, Expressive Language Disorder and Global Language Delay.
Physical Disabilities include Brittle Bone Disease, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Muscular Dystrophy and Other Physical Disability.
Sensory Impairments include Deaf/Hard of hearing, Blind/Visual impairment and Deafblind.
Specific learning disabilities include Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia and other special educational need not included above.

On average, respondents have taught four students with two or more special educational needs over the last two years. Special class teachers are twice as likely to have between five and ten students with multiple needs compared to other teaching staff (i.e. 23% as opposed to 41% for special class teachers).

As Figure 6.2 shows, approximately two fifths of special school and post-primary respondents taught between five and ten students with more than one special educational need compared to less than a fifth of primary respondents. It is important to note, however, that post-primary teachers are likely to teach a higher number of classes (and therefore students) than primary school teachers, who will typically teach one class per year.

Figure 6.2: Number of students that respondents have taught in the last two years with two or more special educational needs
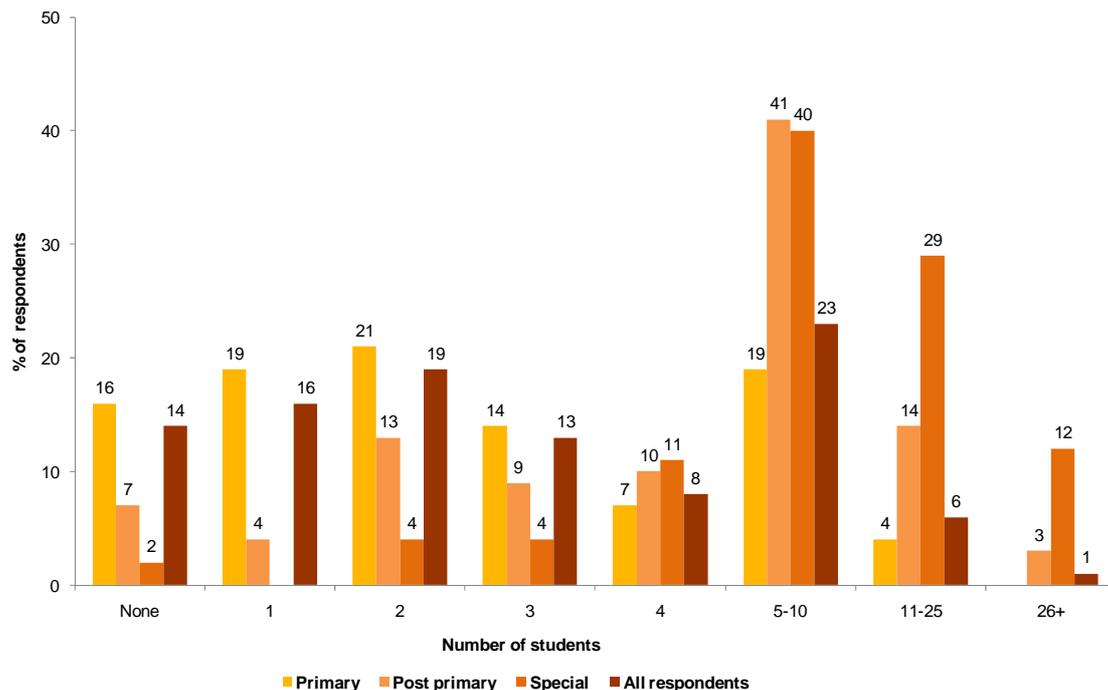
Weighted base: 1,007
Unweighted base: 970

These findings support evidence from the literature and anecdotal evidence that teaching professionals are working with students with increasingly diverse and complex needs. In a recent report for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) into parents' experiences of provision for special education, nearly a half (47%) of participating parents reported that their child had more than one special educational need diagnosed by a professional, further evidencing the complexity of special educational needs presented by students and emphasising the importance of learning and development for teachers of these students (PwC, 2010).

Teachers' perception of their role in inclusion

To understand teachers' perceptions of their role in inclusion, we invited the participants of one focus group to draw a map or a picture to represent their role in inclusion. Participants were asked to consider, as a teaching professional:

- What was their role in the inclusion of students with special educational needs?
- Which organisations and individuals did they interact with in relation to teaching students with special educational needs?

The key themes identified by the teachers who took part in this task include teachers being connected or linked to various other individuals including students, other teachers, parents, and external organisations or professionals (such as medical practitioners). This highlights the role of the teacher as a key individual in inclusion, often working in collaboration with other individuals to promote inclusion as well as applying the experience of other stakeholders and professionals in the classroom to achieve the best outcomes for students.

This finding emphasises that the inclusion agenda is not delivered by teachers in isolation and that many individuals have a role to play in the successful implementation of inclusion. Through the images, some participants also highlighted that it was important to consider the "whole child" including their personal, social and emotional needs as well as their learning needs.

An example of one teacher's drawing and commentary is provided below in Figure 6.3. A selection of other drawings is provided in Appendix F.

Figure 6.3: One teacher's perception of their role in inclusion

"I take a group of four [students]. The emphasis is on listening, sharing, helping and taking turns. That spreads out to the rest of the school. This [in the centre of the picture] is the resource teacher and the Principal. I would be working very closely with them with the class teacher [coming] in and out [of these sessions]. If there is a child with a particular social or emotional difficulty at the time, such as bereavement, you are going to target that child more for a period of time.

In the [school] yard we try to get them to improve their friendship building skills, that is [represented by] the friendship stop here. We have a playroom, we bring all of the children to the playroom at a scheduled time…. That is improving all of their other skills as well. We have a lot of outdoor play equipment as well as indoor toys for the whole development of the child.

Those are my IEPs [Individual Education Plans] inside the filing cabinet. I have responsibility for 15 IEPs. The phone is to phone the OTs [occupational therapists], or the school psychologist or whoever.

The little trophy is because we have a star of the week celebration in the hall every week. Students are commended for behaving positively. [That is] nothing to do with academic skills."(Focus group participant)

Awareness of SESS provision amongst teaching staff

The national stakeholders who contributed to this evaluation had a good level of awareness of the support offered by SESS. The majority of stakeholders considered SESS as a key point of contact for CPD in the area of special education and were predominately positive in relation to SESS offer of a range of support including funding, in-school support, conferences and qualifications. However, it appears that not all stakeholders were aware of the full range of activities and programmes it provides. For example, few stakeholders were aware of SESS supported teacher exchanges/visits. This is to be expected, however, given the range of stakeholders consulted – some of who will have had more operational involvement with SESS than others. A full list of the contributors to the stakeholder consultations is set out in Chapter 1 of this report.

Some stakeholders thought that not all schools are aware of the support that they can access from SESS. Several commented that SESS could improve its delivery of CPD by increasing awareness among teachers, in particular, class teachers and those in mainstream schools. Any activities to increase awareness should seek to maximise the potential of online communication tools in light of the Department's policy on restricting the level of printed publications.

> *"There is a need to raise awareness with classroom teachers of the programmes that are available and to provide access for classroom teachers to this in-school service."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Other stakeholders stated that awareness could be increased among school personnel through better signposting for teachers of the services provided by SESS as schools may only avail of support when a particular need arises.

Focus group participants' awareness of the range of CPD and support provided by SESS tended to vary depending on their role and length of time they had been teaching students with special educational needs. The principals who took part in our focus group sessions displayed a particularly well informed knowledge of the range of CPD and support provided by SESS. However, it should be noted that these focus groups were held at SESS events and that awareness should therefore be expected to be fairly high.

> *"The SESS calendar is excellent. It is a wealth of information."* (Focus group participant)

> *"SESS would circulate a letter in the post."* (Focus group participant)

> *"Two of the teachers [at my school] had been on this course previously and they told me about it."* (Focus group participant)

In our survey, teachers and principals had a high level of awareness of SESS.[13] However, as shown in Table 6.3, respondents from special schools and post-primary schools were slightly more likely to be aware or very aware of SESS than their counterparts in primary schools. By applying index scores[14] to the survey responses, it can be shown that awareness of SESS is significantly higher in post-primary and special schools than in primary schools. This differs from the perception of national stakeholders and focus group participants who suggested that, in general, primary school teachers would be more likely to have some awareness of SESS than post-primary school teachers.

SESS was unable to provide a profile of the uptake of its support by the type of school in which the teacher works. It was, however, able to provide a breakdown of the number of individual schools applying through the SESS support scheme by school type for the academic years 2008/2009 to 2010/2011. An analysis of these figures showed that the profile of schools applying to the scheme was broadly in line with the profile of schools at a national level (i.e. 79% of applications to the SESS support scheme between 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 were from primary schools, 17% were from secondary schools and 4% were from special schools).[15] Therefore, it would be logical to expect, based on our analysis of the applications for the support scheme alone, that all schools would have similar levels of awareness of SESS. It should be noted that this calculation relates to school-based support and not to courses and conferences, for example, attended by individual teachers.

The principals of every school in our sample were asked to complete one questionnaire themselves and distribute the other three to teachers who had specific experience of SESS support or of teaching students with special educational needs. It is possible that, due to the relative size of post primary schools in comparison to primary or special schools, post primary principals had a larger number of teachers to choose from and were, therefore, more likely to identify teachers who had experience of SESS support than their counterparts in primary and special schools.

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[13] Please note that, in order to obtain meaningful results and insights into the relevance of SESS provision, principals were requested to distribute questionnaires to members of teaching staff with experience of SESS provision or of teaching students with special educational needs. It is to be expected, therefore, that awareness of the SESS should be relatively high.
[14] Index scores are calculated by attributing a value to each response to a question with a Likert scale, where a score of 100 is applied to the most positive response and 0 to the least positive. Subsequently, an overall score is calculated through an average across all variables. For analysis purposes, we examined the mean scores for awareness and undertook significance testing to examine significant differences of the mean scores between segments/groups.
[15] In the academic year 2009/2010 primary schools accounted for 79% of all schools in Ireland, secondary schools accounted for 18% and special schools accounted for 3% of all schools nationally (DES, 2010a).

Table 6.3: Respondents' awareness of SESS

Level of awareness	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
Very aware	34%	48%	58%	37%
Quite aware	47%	40%	33%	45%
Neither/nor	7%	4%	4%	6%
Not very aware	11%	8%	5%	10%
Not at all aware	2%	-	1%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,480
Unweighted base: 1,480

Analysis of respondents' awareness by job role showed that special class teachers were most likely to be either aware (33%) or very aware (61%) of SESS and that class/subject teachers were least likely to be aware (47%) or very aware (27%) of it. Principals were considerably more likely to be quite or very aware (88%) of SESS than class/subject teachers (74%). This may be related to the principal's role in disseminating information on CPD through his or her school.

The fact that relatively fewer class/subject teachers had some awareness of SESS (compared to special class teachers and principals) may be related to their personal CPD priorities. As reported previously, more than half of class/subject teachers (55%) reported that less than 10% of the CPD they had completed in the last two years was related to special education.

Again, using index scores, we found that respondents in English medium schools were slightly more likely to have some awareness of SESS than respondents in Irish-medium schools (i.e. 59% of respondents compared to 52%). We also found that awareness of SESS was also more common amongst respondents who said that their school management team actively promoted and supported CPD. Respondents who, over the last two years, had taught 21% or more students with special educational needs were also more likely to be aware (or very aware) of SESS than respondents with less than 15% of students with special educational needs.

In terms of area of special educational need, respondents who had taught students with Assessed Syndromes or Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) in the last two years were more likely to have an awareness of SESS than those who had taught students with emotional disturbance and/ or behavioural problems, general learning disabilities and specific learning disabilities.

Awareness of the specific types of CPD and support offered by SESS also varied amongst respondents as illustrated by Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4: Awareness of specific CPD and support offered by SESS
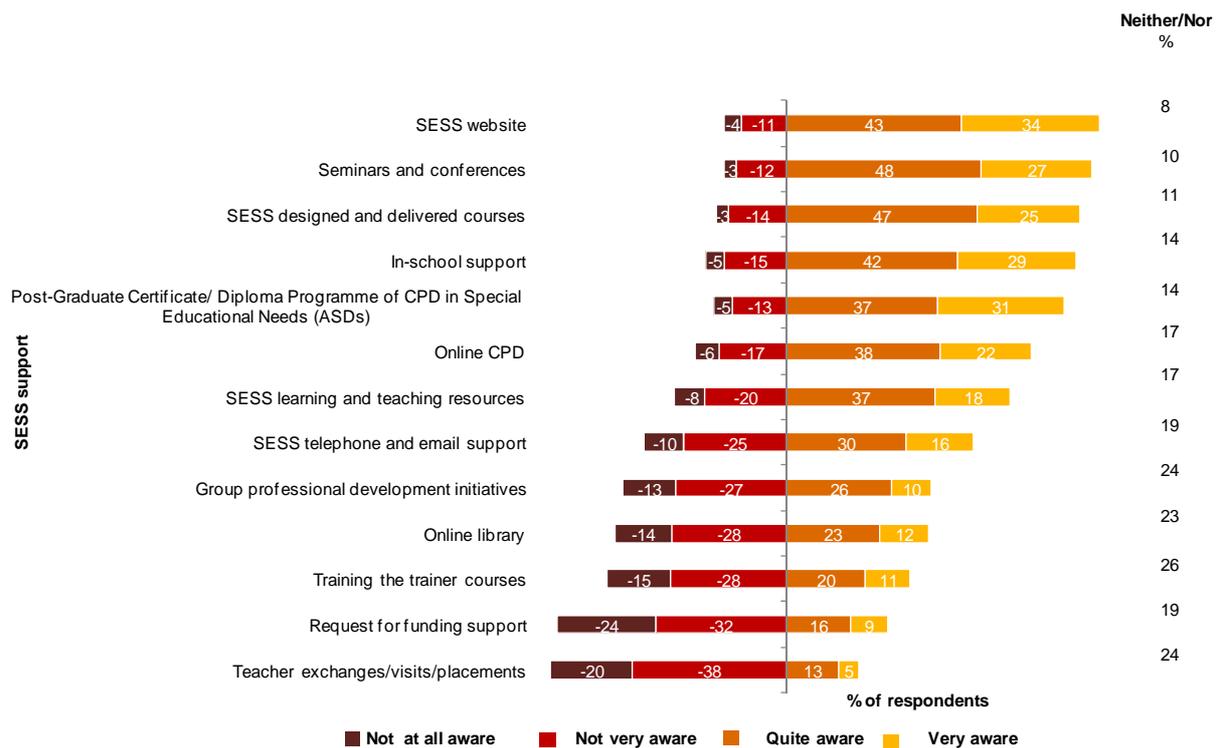
Weighted base: 1,385-1,457
Unweighted base: 1,381-1,456

Respondents were more likely to have indicated an awareness of the SESS website (77% were either "quite aware" or "very aware"), seminars and conference (75% were "quite aware" or "very aware"), SESS designed and delivered courses (72% were "quite aware" or "very aware") and in-school support (71% were "quite aware" or "very aware"). Respondents were less likely to have reported that they were either "quite aware" or "very aware" of teacher exchanges/visits/placements (18%), requests for funding support (25%) and Training of Trainer course (31%).

It appears that the principals and members of the school management team who responded to our survey were aware of a greater number of the different types of CPD and support provided by SESS. Class/subject teachers, on the other hand, were less familiar with the full range of SESS provision. As discussed previously, this may be linked to the role of the principal in informing respondents about the range of CPD opportunities that are available to them and in the decision-making process to access, for example, school-based support.

Our focus group sessions with principals and teachers found that most school staff are made aware of CPD opportunities in general via direct mailing, usually from the Education Centres to the school or the principal. In relation to SESS supported CPD programmes, direct mail (postal and electronic), the SESS website or contact with its staff were the main mechanisms for creating awareness. A small number of participants heard about SESS through word of mouth.

> *"We would get documentation sent out from the Education Centre or documentation would come into the principal directly and he would tell us what courses are available."* (Focus group participant)

Respondents reported SESS printed material as the most common way of finding out about the work of SESS (72% of principals and 48% of teaching staff). Contact with external stakeholders was also a key means for principals for creating initial awareness, including contact with National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS, 47%), Education Centre Networks (41%), NCSE/ Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs, 35%) and their professional associations (31%). On the other hand, respondents with teaching roles often found out about SESS from the principal (43%). Differences in response were also noted between the categories of

teaching staff, with half of special class teachers (50%) finding out about SESS through its website compared to 34% of class/subject teachers and 37% of learning support teachers.

Figure 6.5: How do teachers and principals first hear about the work of SESS?
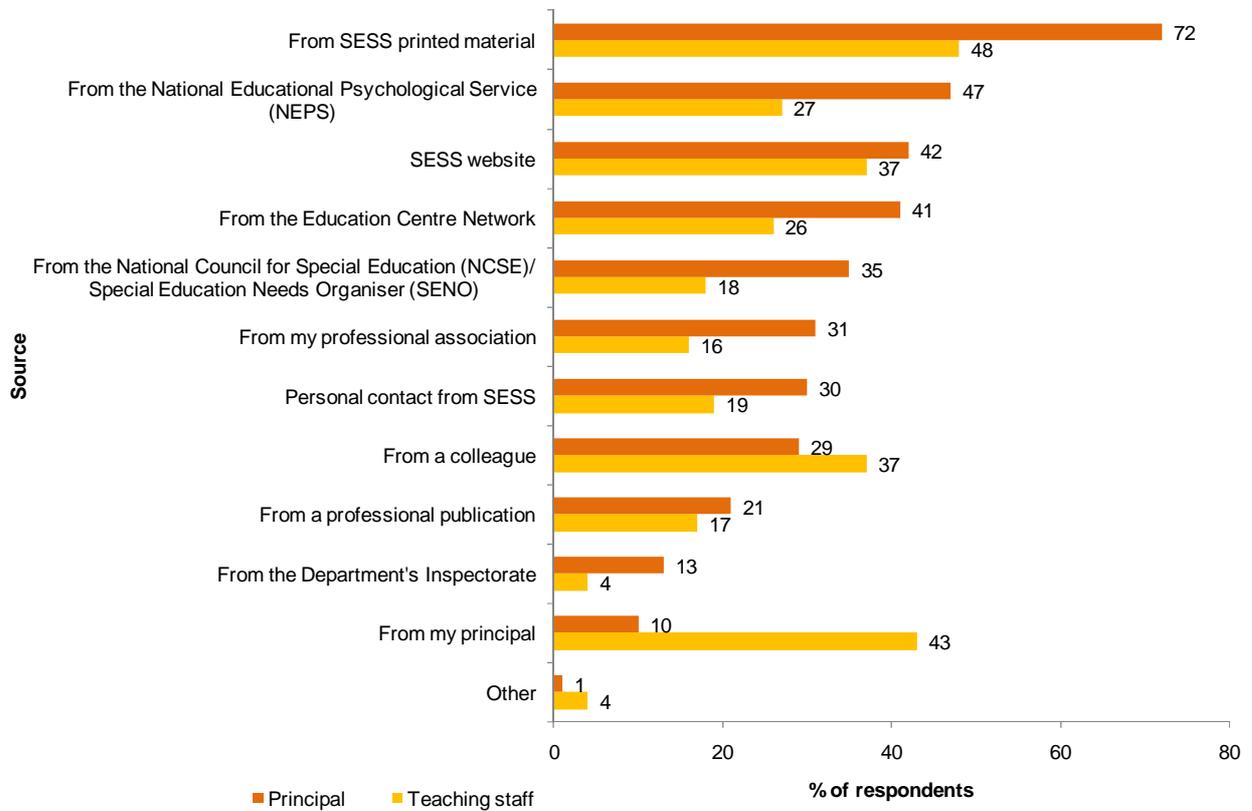
Weighted base: 1,327
Unweighted base: 1,329

In special schools, respondents were more likely to hear about SESS via the principal (along with SESS printed material) than respondents in primary and post-primary schools (with 54%, 38% and 32% of respondents respectively). In addition, respondents in post-primary and special schools were more likely to have heard about SESS through personal contact from SESS (i.e. 30% of respondents in special schools, 28% in post-primary and 19% of respondents in primary schools heard about SESS in this way).

Take-up of SESS support

Table 6.4 overleaf presents the proportion of respondents who stated that they had accessed the various types of SESS CPD and support over the last two years.

Table 6.4: Use of SESS in the last two years

Type of support accessed	Primary	Post primary	Special	Total
In-school support	41%	48%	45%	42%
Seminars and conferences	45%	51%	54%	47%
SESS designed and delivered courses	40%	36%	63%	40%
Training the Trainer courses	3%	2%	8%	3%
Post-grad Cert/Dip in Special Educational Needs	5%	10%	9%	6%
Online CPD	21%	12%	25%	20%
Teacher exchanges/visits/placements	4%	5%	6%	4%
Group professional development initiatives (in-school)	8%	14%	16%	9%
SESS telephone and email support	17%	21%	26%	18%
SESS learning and teaching resources	32%	38%	25%	33%
SESS website	55%	58%	67%	56%
Online library	7%	7%	15%	8%
Request for funding support	4%	4%	27%	5%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,155
Unweighted base: 1,174

This shows that the most frequently cited form of support accessed by survey respondents over the last two years was the SESS website (56%) and the least cited was Training the Trainer courses (3%). The most commonly accessed types of support, by respondent type, were: in-school support (principals, 51%; teachers, 43%); the SESS website (principals, 50%; teachers, 56%); and seminars and conferences (principals, 45%; teachers, 47%). In comparison to the other job roles, the class/subject teachers who responded were less likely to have attended seminars/conferences and SESS designed and delivered courses (34% and 27% respectively) compared to special class teachers (55% and 62%). This may be related to difficulties in organising suitable supervision cover. In addition, class/subject teachers and principals were less likely to have accessed online CPD (15% and 17% compared to 27% of special class teachers) and the SESS website (with 49% and 50% of respondents compared to 65% of special class teachers).

In general, respondents from special schools reported higher patterns of usage of all forms of SESS support in the last two years than their counterparts in primary and post-primary schools, particularly in relation to SESS designed and delivered courses and request for funding support (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.5 overleaf illustrates the number of SESS CPD events attended by respondents in the last two years. In total, just over a quarter (29%) of survey respondents had attended no SESS CPD events, almost half (49%) attended one or two events, with the remainder having attended three or more events. On average respondents attended two events in the last two years; however the average was higher amongst respondents from special schools who attended three events on average.

Class/subject teachers (43%) principals (39%) and members of the school management team (30%) were the most likely not to have attended any SESS CPD event in the last two years. This may be due to a lack of suitable substitution cover for these roles.

As Table 6.5 shows, overall 5% of respondents with teaching responsibilities had attended six or more events in the last two years, this figure was much higher for special class teachers (i.e. 22%).

Table 6.5: Number of SESS CPD events that respondents have attended in the last two years

No. of events attended	Class/subject teacher	Special class teacher	Learning support teacher	Resource teacher	Principal	Member of the In-School Management Team	Other	Total
None	43%	20%	17%	16%	39%	30%	36%	29%
1	27%%	13%	28%	27%	28%	27%	15%	26%
2	15%	31%	30%	26%	20%	23%	22%	23%
3	7%	10%	13%	16%	7%	8%	15%	10%
4	3%	3%	5%	7%	3%	5%	9%	5%
5	3%	1%	3%	3%	-	2%	-	3%
6+	2%	22%	4%	6%	2%	5%	2%	5%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 852
Unweighted base: 854

We asked survey respondents how often they visited the SESS website. Almost two fifths (37%) of respondents reported that they used it once a month or more, 30% once every couple of months and 20% once or twice only. Figure 6.6 illustrates how usage of the website varied by role, with class/subject teachers the least likely to have used it and special class teachers most likely to have used it. The findings suggest that respondents from special schools used the SESS website on a more regular basis, i.e. 60% used it at least once a month compared to 37% of post-primary respondents and 36% of primary respondents.

Figure 6.6: Frequency of visits to the SESS website
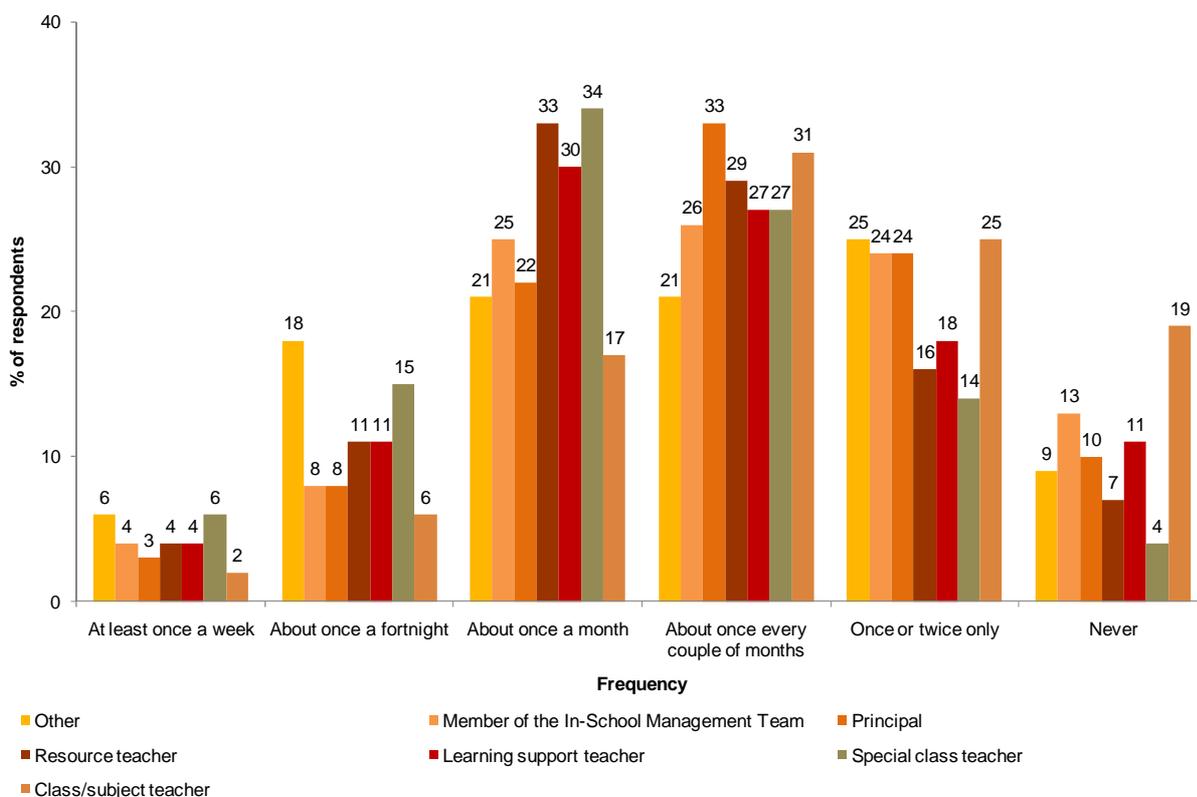
Weighted base:1,320
Unweighted base:1,326

Accessibility of CPD programmes

A key factor in the provision of CPD for teachers is the accessibility of programmes, which includes issues such as:

- **Availability**: to what extent are participants able to enrol on courses/programmes and how frequently are they delivered throughout the year?

- **Geographical location**: are programmes delivered in places that are sufficiently close to participants to enable them to attend without onerous travel?

- **Timing**: are programmes delivered at a time that is appropriate for teachers i.e. during the school day when teacher cover is required in order to attend the programme?

- **Relevance:** how easy is it for participants to understand the knowledge being shared and to identify opportunities for them to put this learning into practice?

- **Calibre of trainers:** are the facilitators suitably knowledgeable and skilled in the delivery of the programmes?

- **Content of support:** is the content of the programmes clear and easy for teachers to understand?

- **Types of CPD provision:** are the modes of delivery appropriate to the content of the programmes and the needs of teachers?

The paragraphs which follow address each of the above factors in turn.

Availability

National stakeholders and focus group participants alike perceived that there is a high level of demand for SESS CPD and support. As a number of focus group participants indicated, one obvious consequence of such a high level of demand for a finite number of places on SESS seminars is that not everyone who wants to attend can do so**.** However, SESS does repeat certain events throughout the year, creating waiting lists for courses which are oversubscribed to help manage demand. Despite this, several participants stated that there are some issues around teachers accessing SESS support due to oversubscription of places or administrative issues.

> *"The level of uptake is very high often with courses and seminars being oversubscribed."* (National stakeholder written submission)

> *"I missed the course on mental health in the classroom, which I would really have liked to have attended. The people who were at it said it was very good. It would really feed into the job I'm doing. I applied, but I was told that it was full. It would be great if that could be offered again."* (Focus group participant)

> *"Today's course was for people who were on a waiting list. I had applied for it in October or November and it was full so they ran it again. It is great when they do that."* (Focus group participant)

In the main, focus group participants reported that the content and processes associated with SESS CPD programmes were both practical and appropriate. In particular, the text messages sent by SESS to remind teachers that they were enrolled on a seminar the following day were described as a useful service.

> *"We even got a text message reminder. Things like that are good because you could easily forget."* (Focus group participant)

The majority of stakeholders, however, thought that SESS was successful "to some extent" in making their support accessible to schools. A minority of stakeholders described SESS CPD and support as only accessible to resource teachers and believed that mainstream schools were not able to avail of SESS support fully.

Likewise a majority of focus group participants felt that most SESS support was equally accessible to all teachers. However, there was a perception amongst some that seminars and CPD programmes were more accessible for resource and learning support teachers than for class teachers and more accessible for primary than post-primary schools. This was said to be due to the need for substitute cover and is not exclusive to SESS provision. It should be noted, however, that substitute cover is made available to teachers, where it is deemed essential, in order to facilitate their attendance at an SESS seminar.

> *"If you were a class teacher you would be leaving the class [to attend a seminar] for the needs of one child out of thirty-four. They are definitely not accessible to class teachers, but I think they should be."* (Focus group participant)

> *"The class teachers need to hear this. Sometimes I think that even though you are going back with the information, you can never impart it all. Class teachers are facing the challenging behaviours every day. More so than we are [in learning support]."* (Focus group participant)

Several stakeholders commented that it is important that access to CPD should extend beyond class, resource and learning support teachers to include Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)[16] and other support staff.

> *"In an era where resources are stretched and budgets tight, I feel it is important not to neglect CPD for SNAs, care staff and other ancillary staff whose work with SEN students is central to the quality of the students' experience of school."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Some stakeholders suggested that SESS should consider further their role in relation to post-primary schools and mainstream class teachers as they did not feel that SESS was meeting the needs of these sectors in full. They considered that there was a particular need in relation to managing the transition of students with high incidence special educational needs from primary to post-primary schools, and that SESS should work more closely with post-primary schools.

When survey respondents were asked whether or not they would have accessed a similar range of special education CPD in the absence of SESS, 43% of respondents agreed and 25% strongly agreed that they would <u>not</u>. Only 14% of the teachers and principals surveyed indicated that they could access similar CPD elsewhere. Almost two thirds of respondents (62%) agreed that SESS offers a wider range of CPD and support than other providers that they have used in the past.

Geographical location

More than half of all respondents (53%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the CPD courses that SESS provides are convenient and easily accessible in their local area. Respondents from special schools were more likely to respond positively to this question than their counterparts in the mainstream setting (i.e. 72% of special schools respondents, 52% of primary school respondents and 55 % of post primary school respondents considered SESS courses to be convenient and easily accessible).

Not surprisingly, respondents who stated that their school was based in a village or the countryside were less likely to consider SESS courses to be easily accessible and convenient (44%), whereas there were only slight differences between respondents who taught in schools in cities (66%), large towns (62%) and towns (61%).

Timing

Two fifths of survey respondents (40%) stated that SESS events were not held at suitable times with a further 35% of respondents stating that they were neither suitable nor unsuitable. An analysis of responses by school phase showed substantial variation: 56% of respondents from special schools thought that the timing was unsuitable, compared to 42% in primary schools and 28% in post-primary schools. The timing of SESS events may therefore be an issue worthy of further consideration.

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[16] The SESS currently provides programmes for SNAs in ASD-specific provision.

Relevance

In general, focus group participants thought that the content of SESS CPD provision was relevant and that it was updated in line with the needs of teachers.

> *"I think they have been excellent. Each time I think, 'they should run a course on that,' it comes up. I think they are in touch with and responsive to the needs of primary teachers. If you put something on an evaluation form that you feel you need they try to deliver it… If they don't have the expertise themselves they'll source it."* (Focus group participant)

Almost half of all respondents to our survey (49%) thought that the CPD and support provided by SESS was "very relevant" to their teaching role, with a further 39% of respondents stating that it was "relevant". As illustrated in Figure 6.7, this was particularly the case of teachers in special schools, with 71% stating that it was "very relevant".

Figure 6.7: Relevance of CPD and support provided by SESS to participating teachers
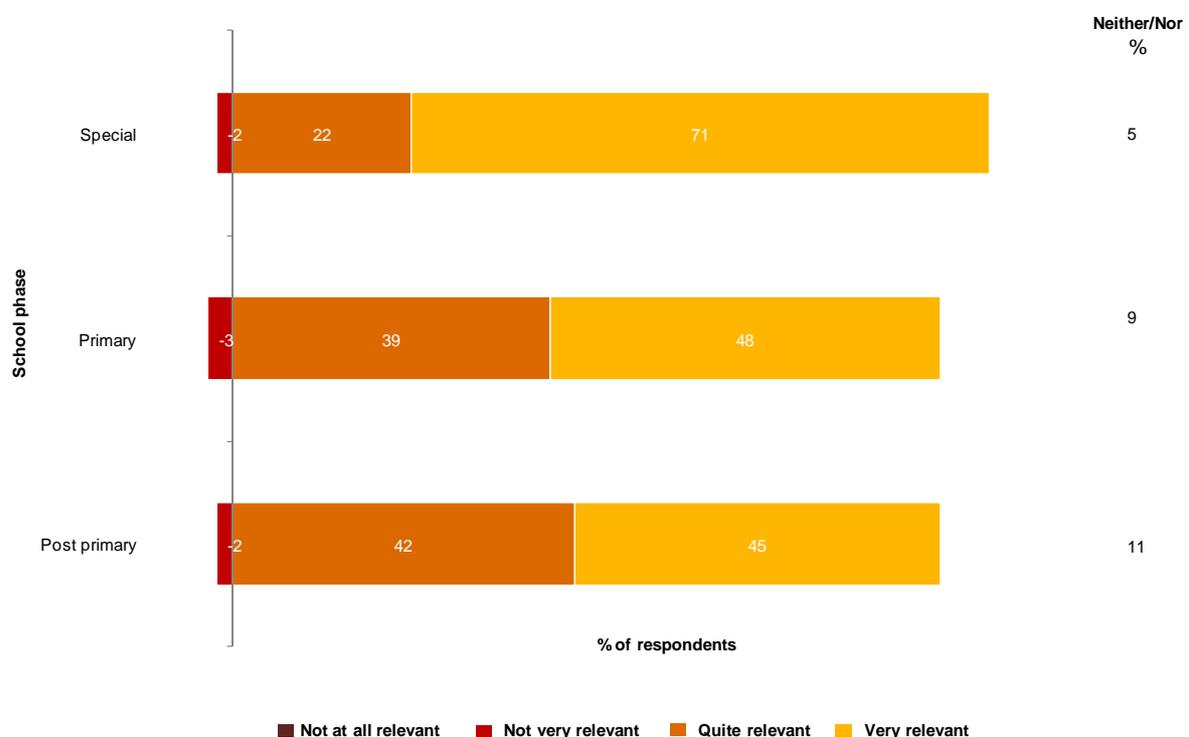
Weighted base: 1,059
Unweighted base: 1,078
Note: No respondents answered 'not at all relevant'

Respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of each of the individual types of CPD support in developing their skills and knowledge. As Figure 6.8 overleaf demonstrates, the more traditional forms of CPD such as SESS designed and delivered courses and seminars and conferences were most likely to be rated either "effective" or "very effective", followed closely by the SESS website (85%). Respondents were less likely to identify teacher exchanges and training the trainer type courses as "effective" (or "very effective") – but the high proportion of "neither/nor" and "not applicable" responses in these cases are likely to be indicative of lower levels of awareness and/or relevance to individual respondents rather than the relative effectiveness of these types of support. Nearly half of the participating teachers and principals (47%) stated that the online library is effective which is encouraging given that this is a relatively recent initiative.

In general, the survey findings indicated that a higher percentage of special class teachers thought that SESS provision in relation to the various type of support provided was "very effective" compared to other respondents Overall, post-primary school respondents were less positive about the effectiveness of SESS support compared to respondents from primary and special schools, in particular, online CPD (56% of respondents in post-primary schools considered this to be "effective" or "very effective" compared to 70% of primary school respondents and 81% of special school respondents).

Primary school respondents were less likely to state that the *Post-Graduate Certificate/ Diploma Programme of CPD in Special Educational Needs (ASDs)* was "effective" or "very effective" than post-primary and special school respondents (with 48%, 75% and 72% of respondents respectively). The largest variance among school phases was in relation to the request for funding where 81% of special schools thought that this was "very effective" or "effective" compared to 36% of post-primary respondents and 30% of primary respondents. This may be related to usage of this support (i.e. respondents in special schools were more likely to report that they have accessed this type of support).

Figure 6.8: Effectiveness of SESS CPD and support in developing knowledge and skills
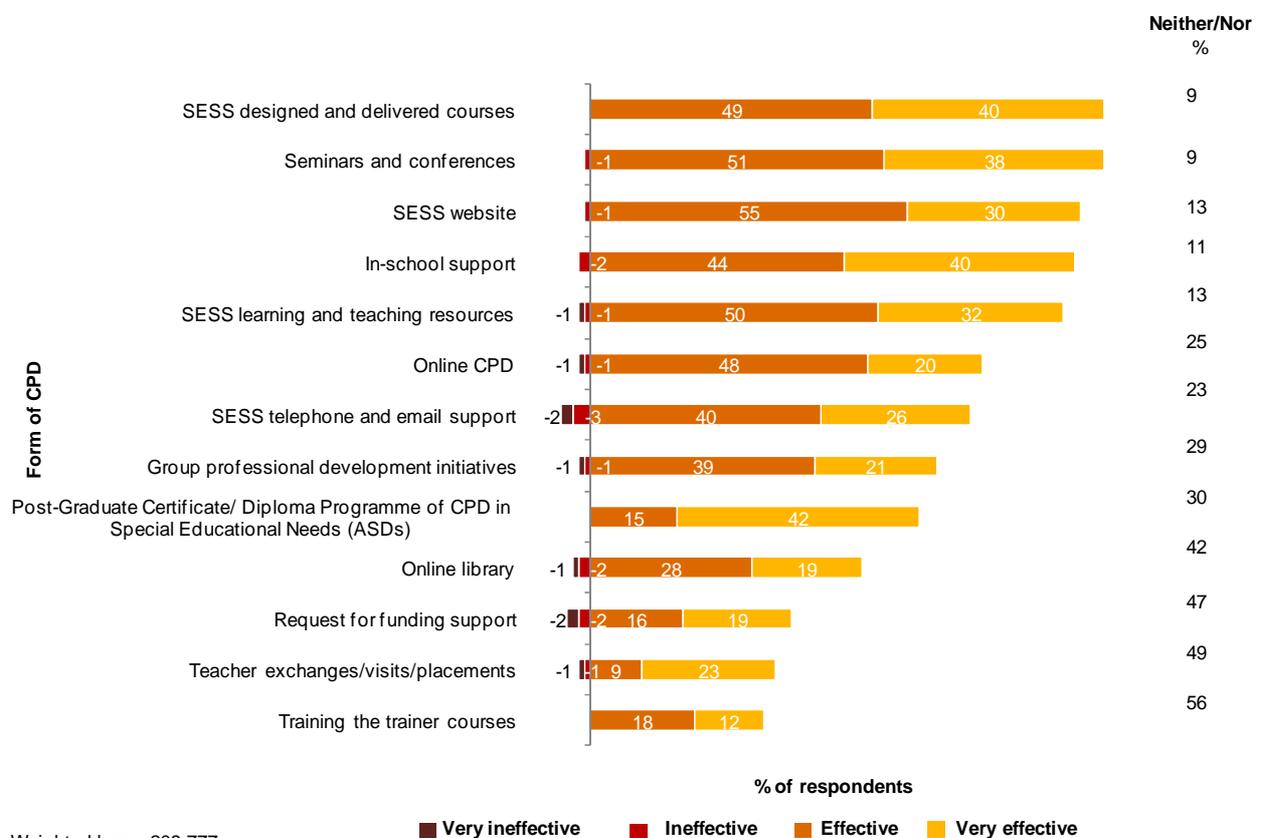
Weighted base: 209-777
Unweighted base: 223-801
Note: Respondents who had not availed of this support selected 'not applicable'

Some focus group participants noted that there could be more personalisation and choice in terms of SESS support which would make provision more relevant. These teachers suggested that SESS could achieve this by splitting provision into stages according to the level of complexity of the content, thus allowing individual teachers to select the level which is most appropriate for them and the needs of their students. For example, this could involve allowing a teacher with over five years' experience of working with students with autism to miss out the beginner's stage and participate in a programme which is more tailored to their level of knowledge and experience.

Calibre of trainers

Mirroring the comments of national stakeholder on the SESS staffing model (see Chapter 5), on the whole, focus group participants were very positive about their experiences of SESS. They particularly valued the use of teaching professionals to deliver CPD.

"There is something about getting the information from somebody who you know has experience." (Focus group participant)

"[SESS CPD and support] is based in practice rather than theory [alone]. That makes a difference." (Focus group participant)

"SESS is our only resource in this area [of challenging behaviour]. I think it is essential. I think that is why people find this course so useful. The advice is so practical and it gives us a manageable way forward for working with these children." (Focus group participant)

"[At an SESS seminar] we were given the opportunity at the end to actually plan for the child that we were attending the course for. I was there with the class teacher and we sat down for the last half hour and the facilitator was there to help us out. It was brilliant because we were able to go back the next day and fill in the IEP [Individual Education Plan] together." (Focus group participant)

This view was also supported by survey respondents with over a third of respondents (34%) agreeing strongly and over half (52%) agreeing that SESS uses high quality facilitators/presenters for its CPD events. Respondents who had attended SESS designed and delivered courses were marginally more positive about the high quality of facilitators (92% agreed or strongly agreed) compared to those who attended SESS CPD provided by external providers (89% agreed or strongly agreed) such as the *Post-Graduate Certificate/Diploma Programme of CPD in Special Educational Needs (ASDs)* and online CPD.

Content of SESS support

The majority of national stakeholders stated that SESS offers high quality, professional and well designed support that includes a range of initiatives which appropriately cater to the needs of teachers and students. However, some did comment that professional initiatives are overly weighted towards the provision of CPD in relation to ASDs.

"SESS tends to 'buy in' top level expertise worldwide and works with these experts in designing and delivering appropriately tailored courses." (National stakeholder written submission)

"The scope and range of initiatives SESS offers is truly impressive." (National stakeholder written submission)

In the main, focus group participants commented positively on provision by SESS, and in particular, noted the practical nature of the content delivered by experienced teachers. However, a small number of focus group participants thought that some SESS seminars were perhaps too focused on students with severe special educational needs, and may not be transferable to more moderate special educational needs or employed practically in a mainstream environment.

"I attended a Challenging Behaviour Seminar. I liked that. They did put a lot of focus on the children who had quite severe difficulties which you might not often find in the regular classroom, it would be more mild to moderate [needs]." (Focus group participant)

"They are very good, but I suppose the NCSE and SESS courses are more specific to a certain need. It is more difficult to take it all in when you are doing a broad range [of needs]." (Focus group participant)

"Sometimes the situation is so different for a teacher with one child who has special educational needs within a mainstream class. That is an area for development I would say… courses delivered by people who have worked in mainstream schools because it is a totally different setup in a mixed ability class. It is totally different from working in a Special Educational Unit." (Focus group participant)

The majority of survey respondents commented that the content of SESS CPD materials was clear and easy to understand, with 62% agreeing and 26% strongly agreeing with this statement. Special class teachers were most likely to strongly agree with this statement (45% of respondents strongly agreed), followed by learning support and resource teachers (30% of respondents) and class/subject teachers (19% of respondents). It is possible that special class and resource/learning support teachers are more familiar with the concepts and terminology used in relation to special education, due to the level of their experience in working with students with special educational needs. While we found no significant relationship between the number of years the respondent had been teaching and their response to this question, care should continue to be given to ensuring that the content of provision is appropriate to the target audience.

One stakeholder commented that it is important that the proposed policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education is considered with regards to the future development of SESS, to provide a more targeted and consolidated support service. This opinion was shared by the principals who attended the focus group sessions, who commented that they would like SESS to play a greater role in developing special education programmes for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Based on their experience of NQTs, those principals were not convinced that NQTs had sufficient knowledge of a specific special educational need, such as autism, and suggested that they were therefore not as well equipped as they should be to deal with students with special educational needs. Participants in this group felt that NQTs would benefit from foundation skills and interpersonal skills training or development opportunities at an earlier stage.[17]

When asked for suggestions for any improvements which SESS could introduce in terms of programme content, focus group participants commented that SESS was active in seeking, and responding to, feedback from teachers. For example, standard evaluation forms were distributed and collected at all SESS events. Areas where at least one participant mentioned that they would appreciate more support and guidance were:

- Methods for maintaining the attention of an exceptionally able student in a mainstream setting.[18]

- Programmes on occupational therapy and speech and language from the teacher's perspective (as opposed to the therapist's perspective).

- Teaching students with moderate general learning disabilities.

- Creating formal links between mainstream schools and a special school in a "centre of excellence" style approach, to better facilitate the continuum of provision which the Department aims to provide.

Types of CPD provision and support
Range of delivery modes

Although the stakeholders consulted had varying levels of awareness of the range of activities provided by SESS, the majority was positive in relation to the diversity of support and delivery modes employed which facilitated personalised learning.

> *"Ongoing support has a positive impact because teachers can develop their skills at their own pace. In-school visits are particularly helpful because they are so specific [to the needs of the teacher and the students]."* (National stakeholder written submission)

> *"The online options enable teachers to engage in CPD training which otherwise would be impossible due to travel restrictions."* (National stakeholder written submission)

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[17] It should be noted that SESS has been liaising with NQTs with regards to developing collaborative practices.
[18] It should be noted that SESS already has an initiative for teachers working with exceptionally able students.

When asked about their preferred mode of CPD provision, most focus group participants acknowledged that an approach which provides a diverse range of support and delivery modes, like the one adopted by SESS, was most appropriate because it allows flexibility in selecting the method which is most effective to deliver that particular content. Some suggested, for example, that using books or online resources to support self study is a good way of imparting mainly factual information, because it allows the learner to study at their own pace and at a time which suits, whereas seminars and class based learning environments are more appropriate for sharing experiences and new pedagogical techniques.

Most focus group participants stated that they appreciated the fact that visiting other schools and attending seminars and conference style events gave them the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussions with SESS staff and other teachers.

> *"This job can be quite isolating, so the opportunity to connect with others [in a similar situation] is good."* (Focus group participant)

> *"I am the only learning support, resource teacher in the school so it is good to meet other people who are doing the same job."* (Focus group participant)

> *"People gave advice about what worked and what didn't work [for them]. That's what I found wonderful. It is great to meet up and share ideas."* (Focus group participant)

Indeed, in one focus group, participants commented favourably on a range of online courses, some of which had incorporated online chats/blogs and online assignments which allowed them to complete courses without travelling. However, not all courses had this option, and other participants commented on the lack of tutor interaction or one-to-one consultation, which again could be an area for further consideration as this form of provision develops.

Participants had mixed views about whether SESS support and CPD should provide access to accreditation. Whilst most teachers agreed that additional accreditation would be nice to have, there was some concern that this would attract people for the wrong reasons, i.e. to achieve the accreditation rather than because they really valued the subject matter.

> *"If there was some accreditation then I'm sure more teachers would be more willing to do more courses."* (Focus group participant)

> *"You could find teachers wanting to do the course just for the accreditation."* (Focus group participant)

SESS website and online support

As Figure 6.9 shows, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the SESS website was a valuable source of information on specific special educational needs (86%) and was user-friendly (84%). However, a smaller proportion of respondents (58%) agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher resources on the SESS website were very useful in their day-to-day teaching practice. Around half (49%) of respondents considered the SESS website to be their first port of call when looking for information on special education and CPD.

Figure 6.9: Teachers' views on SESS website

Neither/Nor
%

Statement		Neither/Nor %

The SESS website is a valuable source of information on specific types of special educational needs — -2, 59, 27 — 7

The SESS website is user-friendly and easy to navigate — -2, 62, 22 — 9

I welcome the opportunity to undertake CPD on-line — -3, -9, 43, 20 — 22

I find the teacher resources on the SESS website very useful in my day-to-day teaching practice — -1, -4, 42, 16 — 30

I consider the SESS website to be my first port of call when I'm looking for information on special educational needs and CPD — -4, -18, 34, 15 — 25

The online library is a valuable resource for me and my colleague — -2, -7, 27, 7 — 40

% of respondents

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

Weighted base: 912-1,013
Unweighted base: 935-1,037

Analysis by job role demonstrates that special class teachers were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the SESS website is user friendly and easy to navigate (91%) than class/subject teachers (81%) and other respondents (81%).

As shown in Figure 6.9, almost two thirds of respondents (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that they welcomed the opportunity to undertake CPD online. However, this varied by phase, with around three quarters of special school respondents (76%) agreeing or strongly agreeing compared to almost two thirds of primary school respondents (64%) and around half the post-primary respondents (52%).

Around a third (34%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the online library was a valuable resource for themselves and their colleagues, with those in special schools more likely to perceive it to be valuable (45% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed) than respondents in mainstream settings (with 34% of primary and 33% of post primary respondents). Although this figure may appear relatively low, it is important to note that the online library is quite a new addition to the range of support offered by SESS (introduced in 2010).

In-school support

As illustrated in Figure 6.10 overleaf, in relation to in-school support, just under half of respondents (46%) agreed or strongly agreed that the telephone and email support provided by SESS was a useful service when they had a specific enquiry. However, it is important to take into consideration that not all teachers who responded to this question will have accessed this support in the last two years. Principals were the most positive about the usefulness of this service (36% agreed and 22% strongly agreed).

Almost two fifths of respondents (39%) stated that visits to their school by SESS had increased their capacity to deal with specific issues on special education, with principals being the most positive (60%). A small majority of respondents (58%) thought that in-school support from SESS had increased their knowledge and skills and those of colleagues, with special class teachers (74% agreed or strongly agreed) and principals (73% agreed or strongly agreed) the most likely to respond positively to this statement. There were also marginal differences between phases, with more respondents from special schools (69%) reporting that in-school support had increased the knowledge and skills of teachers, followed by post-primary school (61%) and primary school (56%) respondents.

Figure 6.10: Extent to which respondents agree that in-school support from SESS has increased capacity in their school
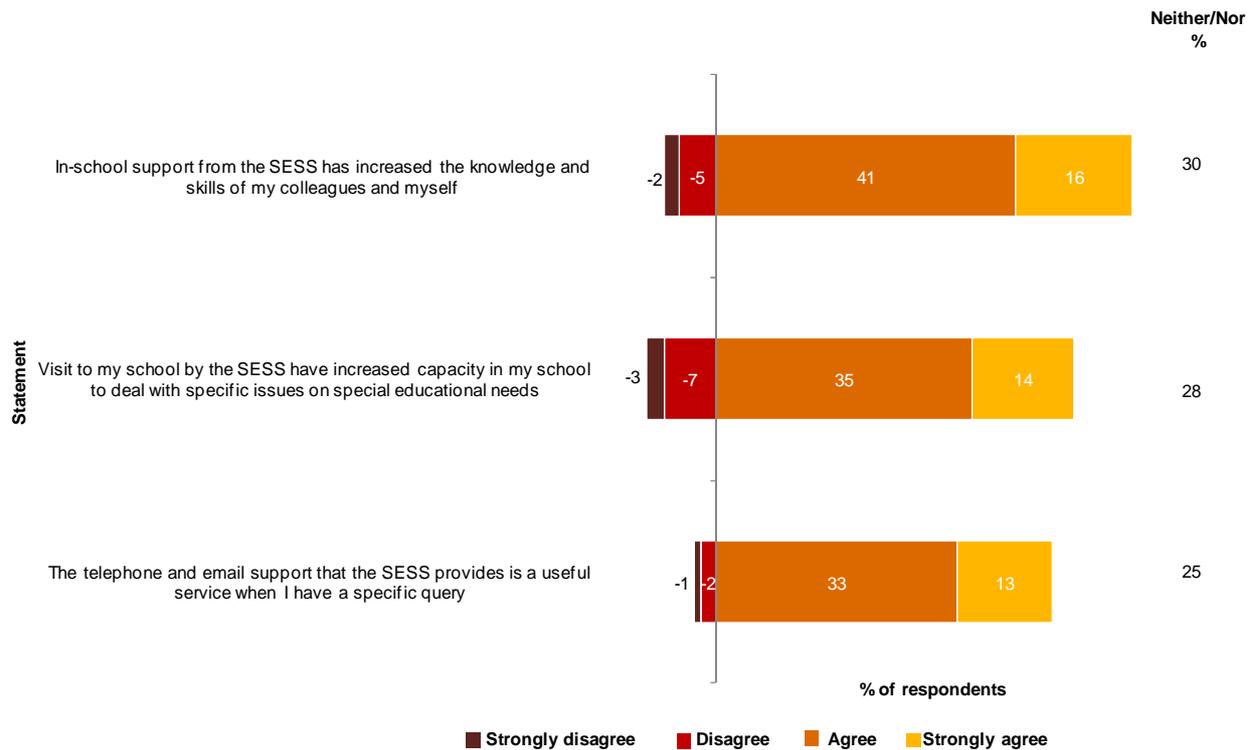
Weighted base: 863-948
Unweighted base: 894-962

Conclusion

This section of the report has considered the accessibility of programmes of CPD for teachers provided by SESS and the appropriateness of the content and process of the programmes. To set the findings in this section in context, we have provided some profile information on the teachers participating in the survey. This demonstrates that participating teachers are, in the main, experienced with the majority having more than 10 years teaching experience.

Over the last two years, only 10% of these teachers have not taught any students with special educational needs and a third of teachers in primary and post-primary schools report that over a fifth of their students have a special educational need. While this is likely to vary by the specific role of the respondent, it demonstrates that there is a clear demand for CPD relating to special education. The main special educational needs encountered by teachers are emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems followed by general and specific learning disabilities. In many cases, teachers stated that their students have more than one need.

Overall, awareness of SESS provision and support was high (particularly amongst special class teachers) but there is room for improvement, with 12% of respondents to our survey "not very aware" or "not at all aware" of SESS - despite the request to principals to distribute the questionnaire to teachers with experience of SESS or of teaching students with special educational needs.

Many participating stakeholders commented that awareness could be improved amongst classroom teachers. Our analysis has shown that awareness of SESS support also tends to be lower amongst:

- Teachers in primary schools.
- Teachers in Irish-medium schools.
- Teachers in schools with lower proportions of students with special educational needs.
- Class/subject teachers.
- Teachers of students with emotional or behavioural problems and general and specific learning disabilities.

Consideration could perhaps therefore be given to tailoring communications to these teacher groups in order to raise awareness of SESS support. In terms of the various elements of support, the SESS website, courses and conferences rated highly. However, awareness tended to be lower for teacher exchanges, the online library and requests for funding support, suggesting that more could be done to promote these services.

Principals emerged as a key source of information on CPD opportunities for teachers - this role was one of the main means of communicating with special schools. Given that teachers in special schools also reported the highest level of awareness of SESS, there may be scope for deepening relationships with principals of mainstream schools further.

As would be expected given the sample for this research, usage of SESS was reported to be high, particularly in relation to the website, seminars and conferences, in-school support and SESS designed and delivered courses. Teachers from special schools tended to report higher proportions of usage, which is most likely linked to the awareness issue, but may indicate that further exploration of SESS promotional activity is required to encourage participation from mainstream schools.

Linked to the levels of usage of SESS support, there were some concerns around waiting lists and, on the part of some focus group participants, that CPD programmes are more geared towards resource and learning support teachers than classroom or subject teachers. While the location of SESS events were generally thought to be suitable, a substantial minority suggested that the timings were not convenient.

Overall, however, a large proportion of the respondents to our survey described SESS CPD and support to be very relevant to their teaching roles. This was particularly the case for seminars, courses and conferences and the SESS website. Participants particularly valued the expertise of course facilitators but some did question whether there could be greater personalisation of the course content. There were also some concerns around a perceived focus on ASDs and on more severe special educational needs.

Many participants welcomed the range of delivery modes, though a number did state that they preferred external, face-to-face events as this gave them the opportunity to interact with their peers. In terms of self-directed learning, the majority of participating teachers thought that the SESS website is a valuable source of information on specific special educational needs. The findings demonstrate, however, that more could perhaps be done to promote the online library as around half of teachers either disagreed (9%) or were non-committal (40%) in relation to the value of the library as a resource. This may be due, to some degree, to this initiative being relatively new. Respondents were also largely positive about the in-school support provided by SESS, where this had been accessed.

Overall, therefore, participants in the national stakeholder consultation, the focus groups and the survey of teachers and principals were aware of SESS CPD and support and were very positive in relation to the accessibility and appropriateness of this provision. Areas of concern tended to focus on access to and the relevance of the content to specific groups such as class or subject teachers in mainstream schools.

7. *The impact of SESS on teachers, schools and students*

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the impact which Special Education Support Service (SESS) continuing professional development (CPD) and support has had on teachers' knowledge and understanding, their classroom practice, whole-school practice and student outcomes. In addition, it considers the overall level of satisfaction with SESS provision and participants' views on whether the benefits arising from SESS CPD and support are sustainable. It also includes a summary of the findings of this evaluation from the perspective of the Irish-medium sector. Please note that the responses received from the Irish-medium sector have also been included as part of the overall findings presented throughout this evaluation. We have also separated out the key issues identified through our research in relation to the sector where appropriate.

Our evaluation found a general consensus that SESS provision has enhanced teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to special education. The majority of teachers reported that involvement with SESS had affected their own teaching practice and whole-school practice in relation to special education. The majority of respondents also reported an improvement in student outcomes as a result of their involvement with SESS. Given the scope and timeframe of this evaluation, and in the absence of national data on outcomes that can be directly linked to teacher CPD, these findings are necessarily based on teachers' perceptions. Overall satisfaction with SESS was high and the vast majority of respondents believed that the benefits of its support were sustainable, either to "some extent" or a "great extent".

Introduction

The aims of this evaluation include an assessment of the impact of SESS on the development of teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills, on classroom and whole-school practice, and student outcomes. As we have identified previously in the literature, exploring the impact of CPD is challenging. While there are difficulties in measuring the impact of CPD at Kirkpatrick's Level 4, particularly in the absence of information on changes in student outcomes over time which can be directly linked to teacher CPD, there is some evidence that teacher CPD can have a significant impact on students' outcomes. Given the timescale for this research and the lack of available data on student outcomes at a school-level, this consideration of the impact of SESS CPD is therefore based on self-reported data from the teachers, principals and other stakeholders who participated in this research. This section of our report is structured under the following headings:

- The impact on teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- The impact on classroom practice.
- The impact on whole-school practice.
- The impact on outcomes for students with special educational needs.
- Overall satisfaction with SESS-provided support.
- Views on the sustainability of the benefits of SESS provision.
- Views from the perspective of the Irish-medium sector.
- Conclusion.

The impact on teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills

Although not all stakeholders were able to comment on the specific impact of SESS activities, many noted that SESS has highlighted the importance of developing knowledge in relation to the needs of students with special educational needs and in doing so has brought significant expertise and resources to schools. Other stakeholders commented on the benefits of the direct support available from SESS which has facilitated more personalised learning.

"SESS is an excellent support service; probably the most effective one in schools as they try to integrate children with special educational needs… the work of SESS has been largely instrumental in ensuring that teachers are sufficiently up-skilled to meet the challenges of the modern classroom and the mainstreaming of children with special learning needs." (National stakeholder written submission)

"Ongoing support has a positive impact because teachers can develop their skills at their own pace. In-school visits are particularly helpful because they are so specific [to the needs of the teacher and the students]." (National stakeholder written submission)

Most focus group participants believed that SESS has enhanced their own knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence in relation to teaching students with special educational needs. A selection of comments from focus group participants is provided below:

Knowledge
"SESS were absolutely wonderful. They came out to the school… everything they could provide to us they did. They are a source of information for us." (Focus group participant)

"I can go back to school now and I will be able to make a checklist to diagnose certain children's problems. That gives me a platform to work on." (Focus group participant)

Understanding
"I am better able to understand their [challenging] behaviour." (Focus group participant)

"[It has improved my] understanding about how this child feels… I wouldn't have had a clue if it wasn't for SESS." (Focus group participant)

Skills
"It's like a refresher course, every time you come it gets you back into the zone." (Focus group participant)

Confidence
"I feel secure now… that if a priority for a child was to develop social skills [for example] then I could use the resource time for the practical development of social skills… It gave me that confidence to prioritise the child's needs and they might not always be academic needs." (Focus group participant)

Many focus group participants attributed their enhanced knowledge and skills to the combination of practical strategies provided by *SESS* for working with students with special educational needs and positive affirmation by *SESS* that what they were already doing in their classroom was in line with current ideas about good practice.

"SESS resources give you direction in terms of what to do… That will have an effect [on learning and teaching]. It gives us a complete framework." (Focus group participant)

In addition, most focus group participants agreed that their involvement with SESS had encouraged them to continue to access further CPD opportunities. In the absence of SESS provision, some focus group participants stated that they would have looked to the Colleges of Education for support, however, the majority suggested that they would not have attended as many CPD events due to the use of less convenient locations, less personalised content and the greater time commitment required. Some suggested this would have impacted upon their confidence to teach students with special educational needs and their pedagogy.

"I guess the children would suffer. At the moment, I feel that we are much more aware of the different learning styles that children have and that if one strategy doesn't work, you have got to go for another one." (Focus group participant)

The majority of survey respondents stated that the CPD events they have attended have informed their pedagogical practice, with 34% strongly agreeing and 57% agreeing with this statement. Special class teachers (93% strongly agreed or agreed), learning support (92%) and resource teachers (92%) were the most positive about the impact on their teaching practice. In fact, almost half of participating special class teachers (49%) strongly agreed that it had an impact.

The impact on classroom practice

The majority of respondents (70%) stated that, overall; their involvement with SESS had had a significant (50%) or very significant (20%) impact on their teaching practice (see Table 7.1 below).

Table 7.1: Impact of involvement with SESS on teaching practice

	Primary	Post-primary	Special	Total
Very significant	19%	16%	42%	20%
Quite significant	51%	48%	39%	50%
Neither/nor	16%	23%	9%	17%
Not very significant	12%	11%	8%	12%
Not at all significant	2%	3%	2%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 999
Unweighted base: 1,021

As shown in Figure 7.1, special class teachers were most likely to state that their involvement with SESS had an impact on their teaching practice (with 45% stating that it had a very significant impact and 38% stating that it had quite a significant impact). It is interesting to note that there was not a considerable difference between the level of impact reported by English medium (70%) and Irish-medium schools (67%). This differs from the findings of our stakeholder consultations which indicated that the needs of the Irish-medium sector may not be appropriately met by SESS due to a lack of materials in the Irish language. However, as we have seen, it should be remembered that awareness of SESS provision is also lower amongst teachers in Irish-medium schools.

Figure 7.1: Impact of involvement with SESS on teaching practice
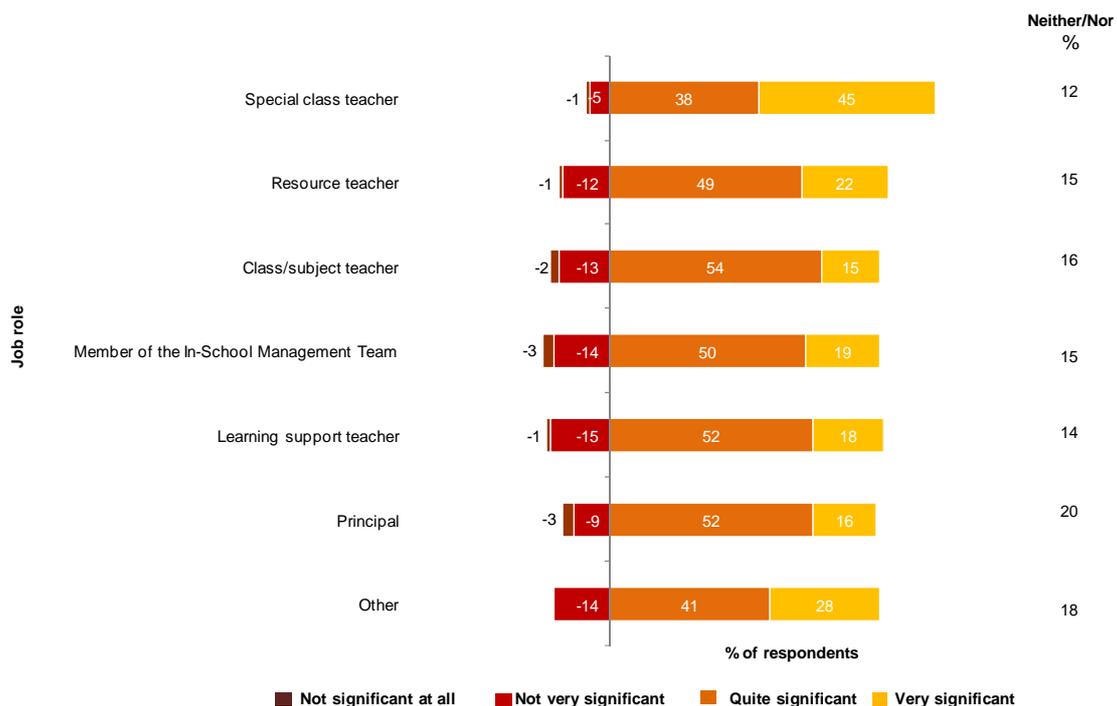
Weighted base: 1,016
Unweighted base: 1,033

When respondents were asked to explain their response in an open-ended format, around half stated that their involvement with **SESS** had provided expertise, guidance and/or useful support with approximately a quarter of respondents stating that it has assisted them in understanding or meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. Selected verbatim responses are provided in the box below.

Provides information, guidance and practical advice

"SESS has provided me with a wide range of training for dealing with children new to our school. We do not always have prior knowledge on particular disabilities and SESS gives training [in the form of] CPD courses and online courses. The best resource SESS can give is an in school support from teachers with expertise in certain areas. This is most helpful to us." (Survey respondent)

"Very little training is given when training to be a teacher in relation to special needs, CPD is imperative. SESS offer an excellent service. It is your first port of call, it has offered fantastic courses which I now use as my core curriculum/teaching methodologies for resource. Since I have established these methodologies in resource I have seen a huge improvement in my teaching and seen great progress and support for special needs children." (Survey respondent)

SESS designed and delivered courses were a vital part of my preparation for the role of resource teacher. From behaviour techniques to differentiation methodologies the advice was solid, sound and more importantly, practical." (Survey respondent)

"It has been one of the main sources of my education and information in the area of special education given that I went into Learning Support/Resource Teacher straight from the classroom teaching (mainstream) without prior training in special educational needs. SESS have been a great support and reassuring to know they are there." (Survey respondent)

Assists in understanding and meeting the needs of students with special educational needs

"Our school population is changing rapidly. Our children have very different needs - complex, challenging behaviours. SESS with their interventions have helped overcome these challenges allowing children to access the curriculum." (Survey respondent)

"The SESS has helped me understand through its courses how best to teach children with special needs. I have learnt different strategies for coping with various needs and helping [students] access the curriculum as best they can." (Survey respondent)

Figure 7.2 illustrates the extent to which SESS support has improved individual teaching practice (as compared to Figure 7.1 which examines the significance of the impact on teaching practice as a whole). More than three quarters (77%) of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that SESS support has improved their teaching practice, with special class teachers most likely to agree (92% agreed or strongly agreed). Principals were least likely to agree or strongly agree (71%), however, this is likely to be driven by the fact that not all principals surveyed will have a teaching role (this category includes principals in post-primary schools). There were no substantial differences identified when reported improvements in teaching practice were analysed by the type of support accessed.

Figure 7.2: Extent to which SESS support has improved individual teaching practice

Weighted base: 996
Unweighted base: 1,009
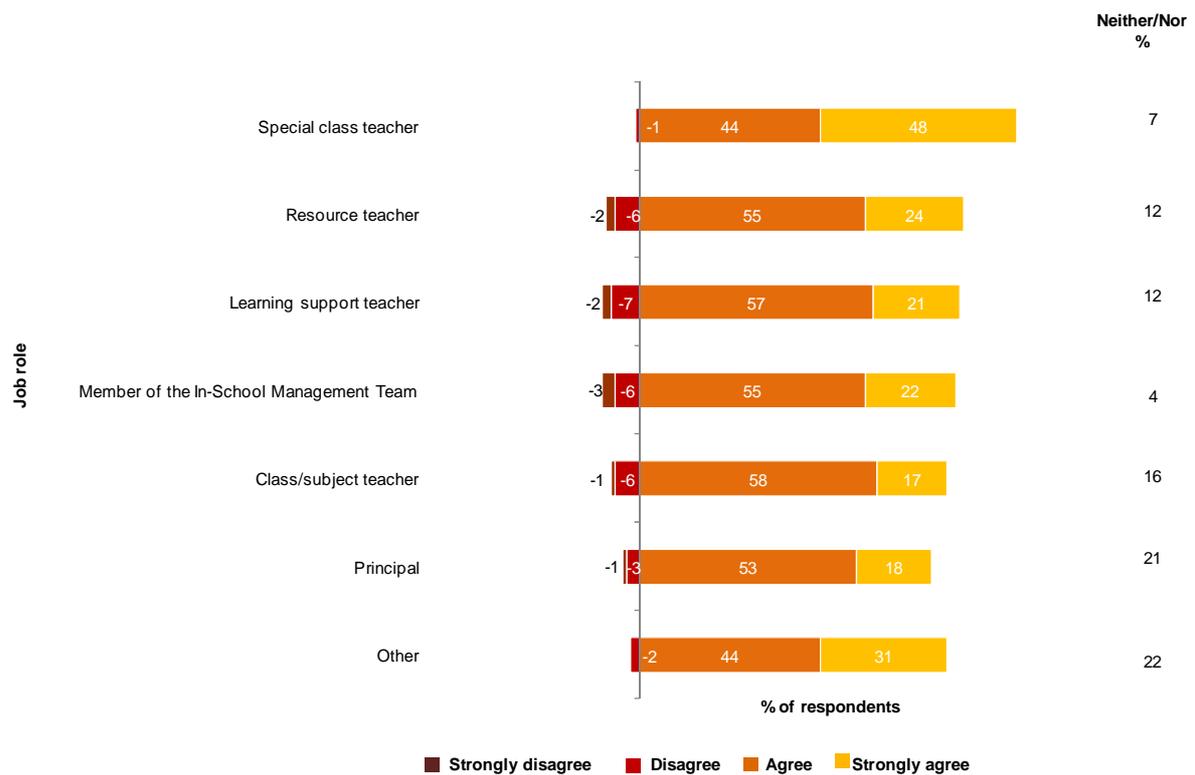
As illustrated in Figure 7.3 overleaf, respondents were most commonly in agreement that SESS support has helped improve their planning to meet the individual needs of students with special educational needs (84%), followed by increasing their confidence in teaching students with special educational needs (81%) and personalising learning to the specific needs of specific students (80%). While around two thirds of respondents (63%) stated that SESS support had improved their interaction with parents of students with special educational needs, this was the area that received the lowest level of agreement.

Figure 7.3: Reported improvements to classroom practice as a result of the support provided by SESS
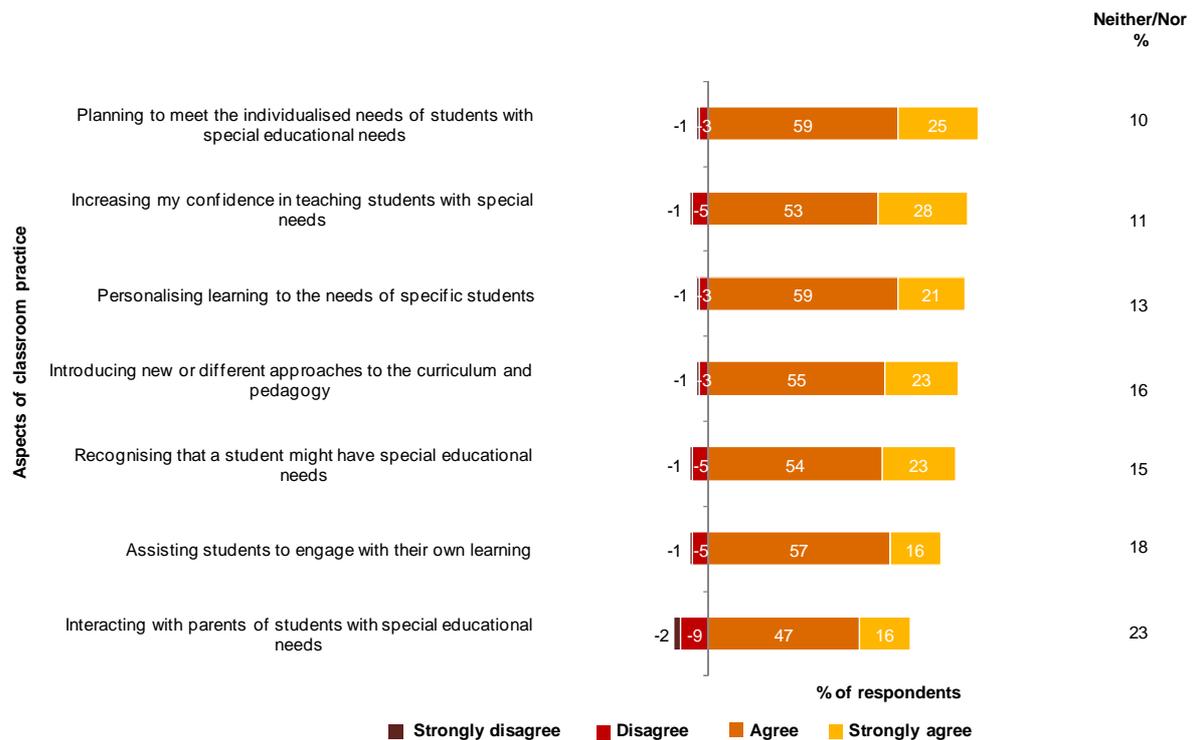
Weighted base: 953-985
Unweighted base: 943-1,004

Following support from SESS, the teachers and principals who responded to the survey noted that they had made a significant number of changes to their classroom practice including:

- Physical changes to the classroom environment, e.g. the use of workstations and seating plans.
- Change to pedagogy/teaching style, e.g. use of **T**reatment and **E**ducation of **A**utistic and related **C**ommunication-handicapped **CH**ildren (TEACCH)[19], visual aid and colour.
- Changes to equipment/resources used, e.g. social stories software.
- Changes to lesson-planning.
- Personalised instruction to match the learning style of these students, e.g. Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- Collaboration with other teachers, e.g. team teaching.
- Implementation of behaviour/classroom management strategies such as behaviour contracts and rewards systems.

Illustrative examples of changes made as a result of SESS support are provided by the quotations from survey respondents opposite.

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[19] The TEACCH model was developed at the University of North Carolina by Dr. Eric Schopler and Dr. Gary Mesibov. The TEACCH approach is a family-centred, evidence-based practice for autism, based on a theoretical conceptualisation of autism, supported by empirical research, enriched by extensive clinical expertise, and notable for its flexible and person-centred support of individuals of all ages and skill levels. It emphasises structured teaching, in which the student's preference for sameness is accommodated by providing them with schedules of activities.

Physical changes to the classroom environment

"I have rearranged my classroom layout following attendance at an SESS course on autism. This has improved pupils behaviour greatly." (Survey respondent)

Change to pedagogy/teaching style

"I use less language myself and my SNAs have been trained to do this also. I have made structural TEACCH recommended changes treated social stories and behaviour programmes for individuals." (Survey respondent)

"I have adapted my curriculum to suit the varied needs of my pupils e.g. smaller, more specific targets (SMART), differentiation and increased use of Assistive Technology." (Survey respondent)

Changes to equipment/resources

"I have used colour coded symbols for a child who finds it difficult to follow lengthy instructions. These symbols remind him of the lesson being undertaken and the resources he will need for the task." (Survey respondent)

Personalised instruction to match the learning style of the students

"I have used different approaches to meet the needs of an individual student who had presented with behavioural difficulties." (Survey respondent)

Changes to lesson-planning

"I have made better informed decisions regarding my long and short term planning - my classroom management specifically with regard to dealing with challenging behaviour." (Survey respondent)

"My knowledge of children on the autistic spectrum has increased significantly. My awareness in relation to dealing with issues that arise for students on the spectrum has changed... instruction and lesson-planning." (Survey respondent)

Implementation of behaviour/classroom management strategies

"[I have] developed strategies to recognise when students are in need of support and help them develop strategies to enhance their learning and behaviour, e.g. time-out, follow up, traffic lights etc." (Survey respondent)

"I now use a number of teaching strategies with the Autistic/Asperger's children as well as other children I work with as it is so helpful to them. The behaviour of these students that I work with has improved in class." (Survey respondent)

"[I have] created individual work stations, behaviour plans, reward systems to encourage good behaviour and meet targets... It has made me much more aware of presenting information in many different ways to reach all learning styles in the unit." (Survey respondent)

Of those individuals who stated that SESS had either not very significant or not at all significant impact on their teaching practice, half stated that they had limited interaction with SESS (50%) over the last two years.

Focus group participants reported that putting the learning they had received into practice in their classroom was facilitated by accessing support which is relevant to their current situation and by revisiting the CPD material once they had returned to school. The main barriers to implementing changes were thought to be time constraints, a lack of confidence and or experience, and their colleagues' expectations and opinions.

> *"When presented with challenging behaviour [now] I find I stand back a bit. I meet the child at eye level and use the tools that [SESS] told us to use and it does help. You still have problems, but at least you feel you have the tools to be able to deal with them."* (Focus group participant)

> *"The class teacher attended [a SESS seminar]. I see him implementing a lot of the tools in dealing with a particular student. I would say that he is implementing it better because he has experienced the course for himself than he would be if he was just hearing it second hand [from me]. There is certainly an argument for some of these courses to be delivered on a whole-school basis. I know that there are resource issues, but in an ideal world..."* (Focus group participant)

The impact on whole-school practice

Many focus group participants reported that SESS CPD and support has influenced whole-school practice in terms of the strategies they had adopted and an increased confidence in working with students with special educational needs.

> *"I have seen that the things that I have brought back [from SESS] have been implemented in classrooms [by other teachers]."* (Focus group participant)

> *"We did a course on crisis intervention with the whole staff and SESS... everyone knows now when a child is acting out and how to handle it."* (Focus group participant)

> *"Bill Rodgers is a behaviour expert from New Zealand. We have adopted his system in our school. I believe it is really working. That is something from that [SESS] course which is now working in our school."* (Focus group participant)

> *"When your intervention comes to be viewed by people externally, then you have a framework which you are working within that was given to you by an expert group [SESS]... That provides great safety for [class] teachers and resource teachers. It is an evidence base of good practice that we are using... Even telling parents that we are following an evidence-based researched method of dealing with their child [is helpful]. We have done all of this and it is reported and recorded."* (Focus group participant)

According to one focus group participant SESS CPD and support also influenced the development of school behavioural policies.

> *"Whereas before the behaviour would not have been accepted, now we understand that there is a rationale for these behaviours. Allowances for students with special educational needs have been incorporated in a lot of the behavioural policy that I have seen." (*Focus group participant)

Some participants reported an increase in their schools' capacity to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

> *"I think the increase in people's knowledge and awareness makes a school a much more accessible place for students with special educational needs. I think going around schools you can actually see where there is an increased knowledge and understanding and an acceptance that all children are not going to fit 'the norm'."* (Focus group participant)

There was also evidence of knowledge transfer between schools at SESS events.

> *"The use of therabands for sensory integration and cushions for sitting on, seemed to work well [in our school]. That came from someone outside of our school who passed it on to the resource teacher. So, that went from one school to another school. That is the benefit of face to face courses rather than online. By meeting [other] teachers you learn a lot more than online."* (Focus group participant)

An increase in school-wide knowledge was evident, with the majority of respondents agreeing that the knowledge and understanding of special education issues among teachers in their school had increased (73% agreed or strongly agreed – see Figure 7.4) following support from SESS. Respondents whose school had an official special education policy and where CPD was actively promoted and supported by the school management team tended to agree that there had been a school-wide impact. This may be due to a culture of promotion and sharing of learning with other colleagues. In general, respondents from special schools were the most positive in terms of the impacts on teaching staff in their school as a result of involvement with SESS, and those in post-primary schools less positive.

Almost three quarters of respondents agreed that teaching practice had become more focused on meeting a range of student needs due to SESS support. However, there was less agreement in post-primary schools (67% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement). Approximately half (52%) of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that teachers' confidence had increased in teaching a range of student needs.

There was also agreement that teachers' confidence in their relationships with parents of students with special educational needs had improved in the majority of cases (64%) following support from SESS. However, this was less the case amongst post-primary school respondents (51%) than amongst primary (66%) and special school (65%) respondents.

Figure 7.4: Extent to which respondents agree with the impact of SESS on whole-school practice

Weighted base:1,025-1,038
Unweighted base:1,048-1,061
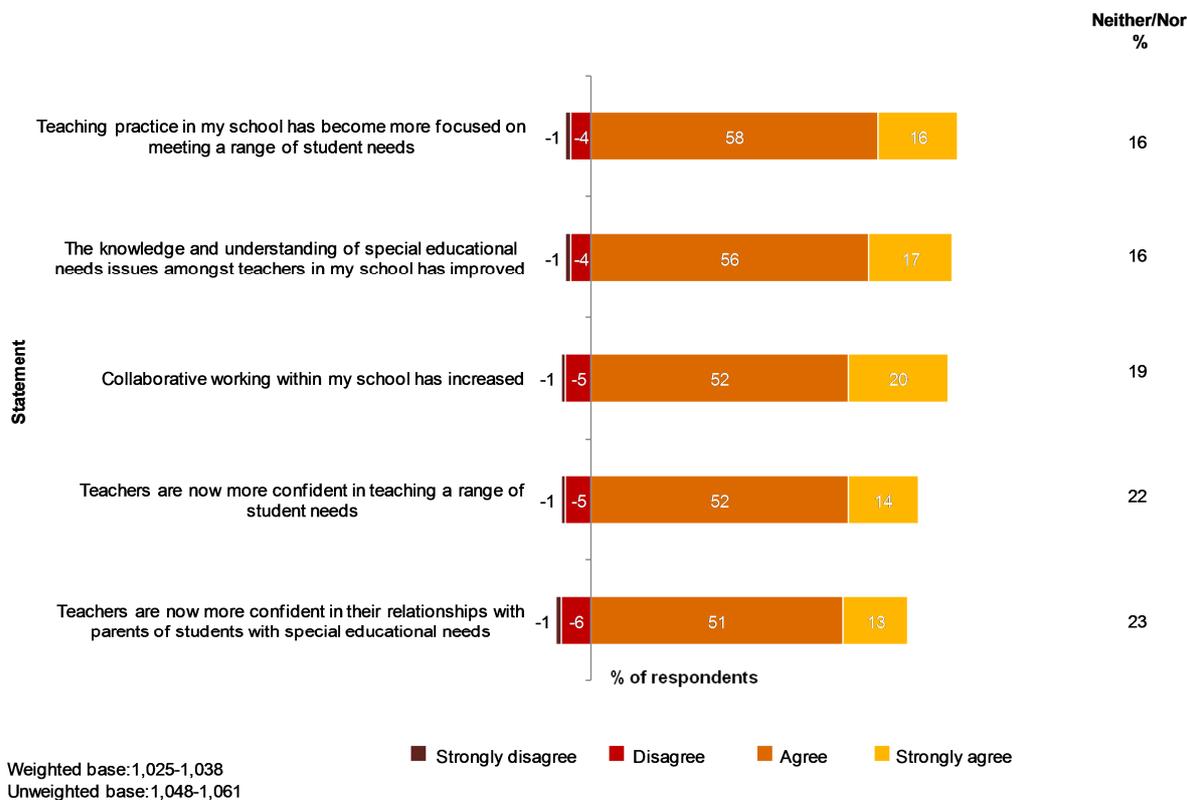
Figure 7.5 describes the impact of SESS support at the whole-school level with around two thirds of survey respondents (62%) agreeing that their schools were more inclusive as a result of SESS support. Principals were the most positive about the impact of SESS on inclusion in the school (70%). It should also be noted that those schools who had an official policy on special education agreed that their school was more inclusive as a result of SESS support: 65% of respondents whose school had an official policy on special education agreed that the degree of inclusion had increased compared to 30% of respondents in schools with no official policy.

Although the majority of focus group participants believed that SESS had not led to changes in the way that schools or teachers plan their CPD to date, the findings from the teacher and principal survey provided some degree of evidence that SESS support and programmes are having an impact on how CPD is organised. As Figure 7.5 shows, approximately half (51%) of the participating teachers and principals reported that there was some element of change made to the way CPD is organised in their schools as a result of SESS supported CPD, with a third of respondents stating that teachers have changed how they plan their CPD to take advantage of the support provided by SESS.

Figure 7.5: Impact of SESS support at the school level

Neither/Nor %

When one teacher gets SESS provided CPD it is cascaded to other teachers in my school — -1, -11, 53, 10 — 22

My school is more inclusive as a result of the SESS support — -1, -7, 50, 12 — 26

Teachers in my school have changed how they plan their CPD to take advantage of the support provided by the SESS — -2, -13, 26, 9 — 42

The SESS supported CPD has made no change to the way CPD is organised in my school — -10, -41, 16, 3 — 25

% of respondents

Weighted base:1,000-1,029
Unweighted base:1,020-1,049

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

The impact on outcomes for students with special educational needs

As previously discussed, achieving change at Kirkpatrick's Level 4 (*results* which relates to the impact of CPD on, for example, student outcomes) is evidently the desired outcome for professional development. However, the evaluation of CPD becomes increasingly more difficult as it moves from Level 1 through to Level 4 and there is no longitudinal data available to measure student outcomes pre- and post-intervention that can be directly linked to teacher CPD. Therefore, it should be remembered that the findings in this section of the report are based on the views and experiences of the principals and teachers participating in this evaluation.

Not all stakeholders were able to comment on the impact of SESS support and services on students due to their lack of direct contact with students. However, some stakeholders suggested that, through anecdotal evidence and comments from teachers who had availed of SESS support, they believed that students are more able to access, participate and benefit from an appropriate education - mainly through the opportunity for teachers to be trained in up-to-date methodologies and the sharing of best practice. This was believed to increase the level of inclusion in schools.

> *"By suggesting appropriate resources and methodologies, by training and up-skilling individual teachers and whole staff, it is much easier to include special educational needs students in mainstream schooling."* (National stakeholder written submission)

Many focus group participants had only limited evidence of the impact which their involvement with SESS had on the outcomes for their students with special educational needs. However, some participants were able to provide specific examples of improvements in student outcomes as a direct result of SESS CPD and support.

To illustrate this point, one participant gave the example of a student with autism who was displaying challenging behaviour in their Physical Education (PE) class. The student would "*act out*" if he lost a game. Following a SESS CPD event, the teacher developed a social storyboard to explain to the student that it did not matter whether he won or lost the game. The storyboard included photographs of the student's behaviour before, during and after both winning and losing a game. The student was taken through the storyboard prior to participating in PE to encourage him to demonstrate positive behaviour regardless of the outcome. The school noted a marked improvement in the student's behaviour.

"We actually photographed him, prior to, during and after the event, just to show him... it did actually work." (Focus group participant)

"One of the kids had huge problems with organisational skills. Practical advice, like colour coding the timetable, has been a life saver." (Focus group participant)

Indeed, a focus group participant commented that CPD for teachers and other staff is essential for the inclusion strategy to be successful, not only in relation to the behaviour of students with special educational needs but also to provide them with the opportunity to reach their potential.

"Training the people who work [with these students] and giving them an understanding of special educational needs is essential if we are to accommodate and get the best out of these children. There is no point including them and just having them sitting in the class. We have to let these children reach their potential as well. Without training that won't be possible... the [CPD] programmes have to be designed by people who know what they are talking about and who are bringing out the child's potential... [by] providing appropriate challenges." (Focus group participant)

Some participants noted that SESS support not only benefited students with special educational needs, but other students in the classroom as well due to an increase in their teacher's knowledge, understanding and skills.

"You can also pass what you learn for a student with special educational needs to the other students in the mainstream [setting]. They can benefit from it at the same time." (Focus group participant)

Overall, principals and teachers who participated in the survey were positive about the impact that of the support and CPD that they have received from SESS in relation to improving outcomes for students (60% agreed and 13% strongly agreed). Almost nine out of ten special class teachers (87%) agreed that the outcomes for their students had improved (see Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6: Extent to which respondents agree that the CPD and support they have received from SESS has improved the outcomes of their students

Weighted base: 992
Unweighted base: 1,008
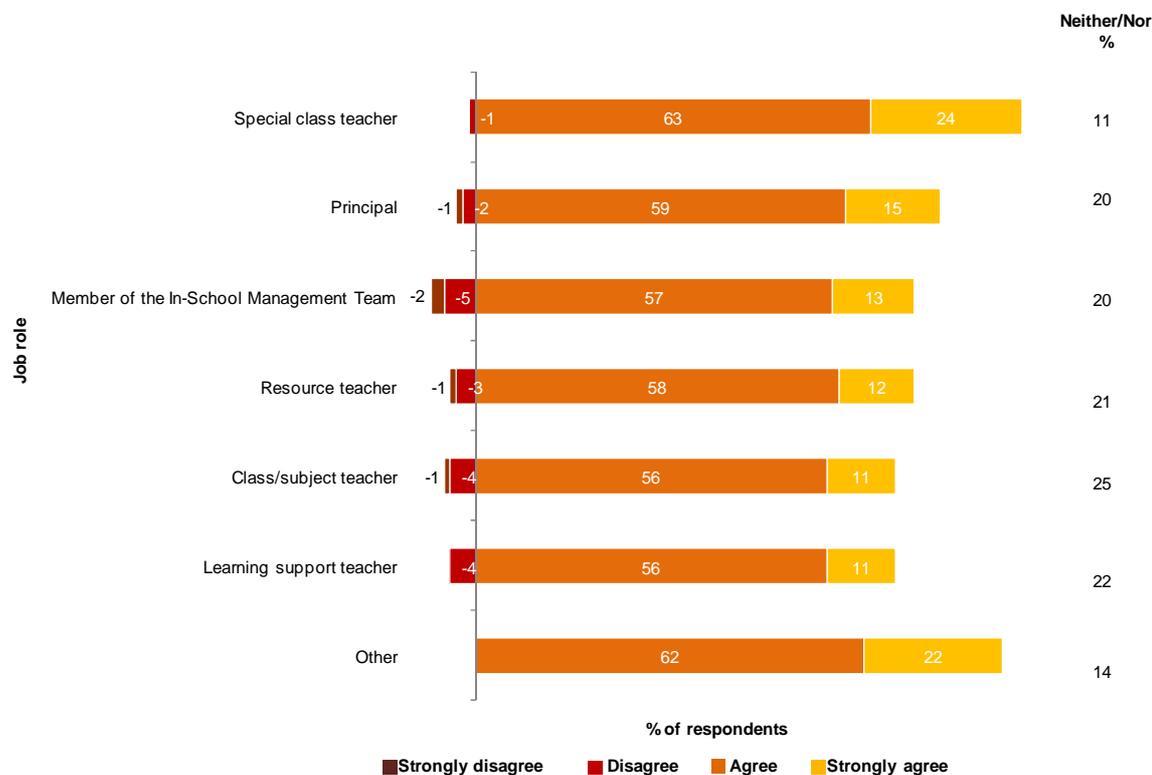
Overall, approximately six in ten respondents (58%) to the survey agreed that students' academic achievement had improved following SESS support (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Agreement that students' academic achievement had improved following SESS support

	Primary	Post-primary	Special	Total
Agree strongly	10%	13%	18%	11%
Agree	48%	44%	41%	47%
Neither/nor	28%	29%	25%	28%
Disagree	4%	5%	3%	4%
Disagree strongly	1%	-	-	1%
Too early to tell	4%	4%	7%	4%
Don't know	5%	6%	6%	5%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1005
Unweighted base: 1029

Positive student outcomes evidently encompass not only student attainment and achievement, but also the "whole student" with emphasis placed on their interpersonal and social skills as well. In the main, survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that involvement with **SESS** had positively impacted student outcomes, with 64% of respondents indicating that it has improved students' inter-personal and social skills as illustrated in Figure 7.7. Three fifths of principals and teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that students appeared to be more enthusiastic about learning as a result of SESS support. This may be in part due to the diversity of teaching methodologies that are taught by SESS staff including use of colour, visual aids and social stories which may be more engaging for students. Respondents from special schools tended to agree more that there had been an improvement, in particular, to the behaviour of students (special schools 70% compared to 58% primary schools and 53% in post-primary schools).

Figure 7.7: Impact on students following support provided by SESS
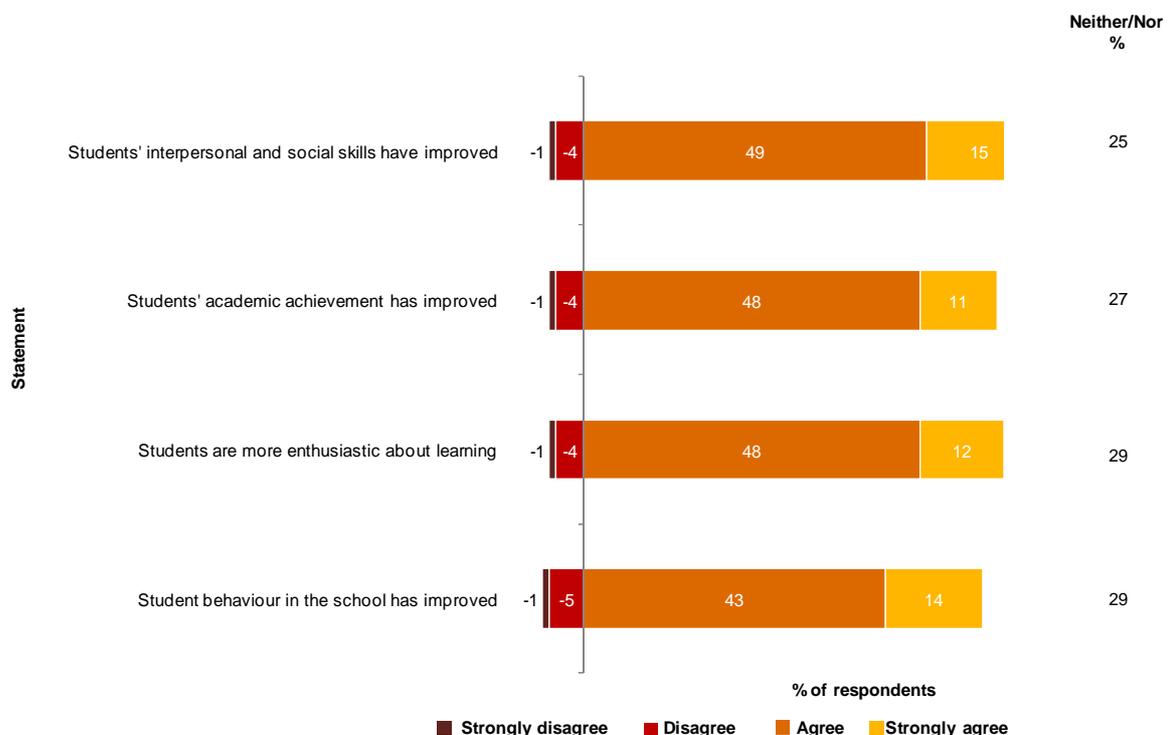
Weighted base: 1,005-1,015
Unweighted base:1,029-1,033

Overall satisfaction with SESS-provided support

Although not all of the stakeholders consulted had direct contact with SESS, anecdotal evidence they received from schools suggested that there was a high level of satisfaction with the support provided.

> *"Colleagues have reported that they are extremely pleased with the level of support provided by SESS in support of teaching staff, support personnel and students with special educational needs."*
> (National stakeholder written submission)

Overall, more than four fifths of survey respondents stated that they were satisfied (54% quite satisfied and 27% very satisfied) with the support and service provided by SESS (see Table 7.3). Respondents from special schools were more likely to report that they were very satisfied than those from primary and post-primary schools.

Table 7.3: Overall satisfaction with SESS support

	Primary	**Post-primary**	**Special**	**Total**
Very satisfied	26%	26%	55%	27%
Quite satisfied	55%	53%	35%	54%
Neither/nor	13%	17%	6%	14%
Not very satisfied	5%	4%	2%	5%
Not at all satisfied	1%	-	1%	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Weighted base: 1,055
Unweighted base: 1,081

From Figure 7.8, it is evident that special class teachers had the highest level of satisfaction (90% overall satisfaction), with more than half of this group stating that they were very satisfied (50%).

Figure 7.8: Level of satisfaction with the support and services provided by SESS
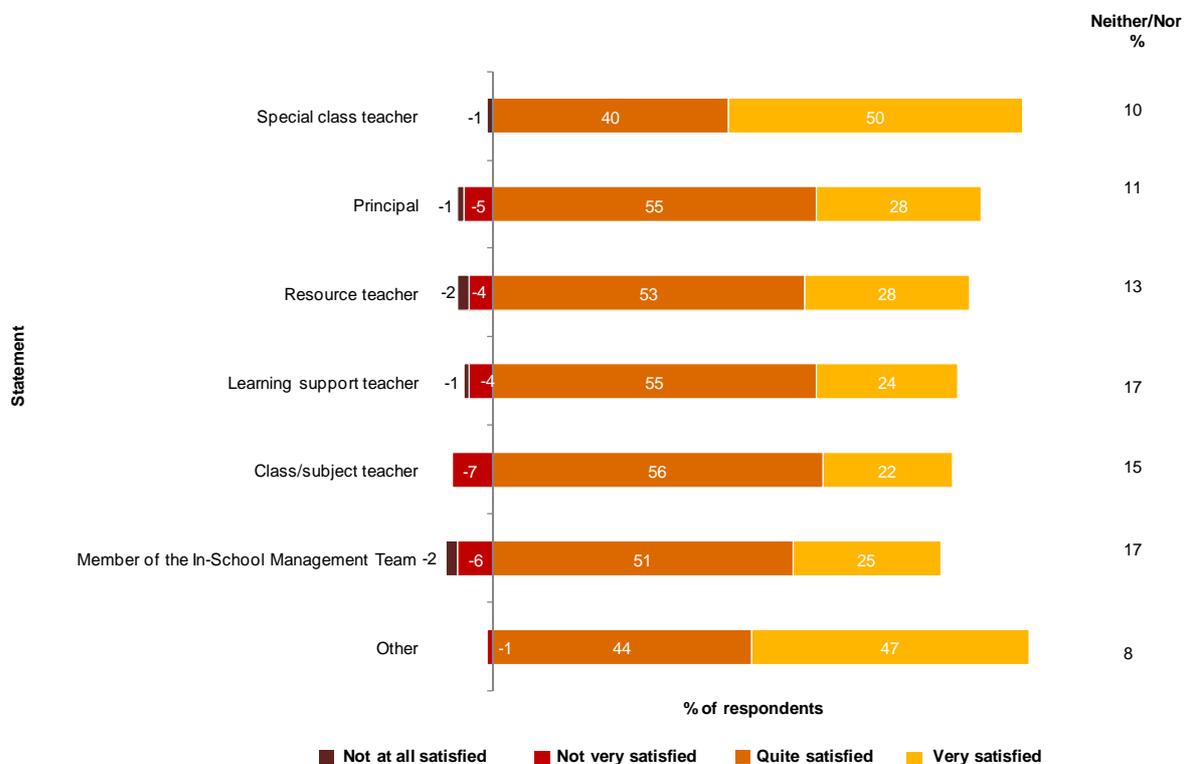
Weighted base: 1,043
Unweighted base: 1,066

In order to understand the drivers of respondent's satisfaction with the CPD and support provided by SESS, regression analysis was undertaken on the survey data.[20] This analysis highlighted that the main drivers of satisfaction with SESS (and their contributing weights) were:

- Involvement with SESS had a significant impact on the respondent's teaching practice (51%).
- Attendance at seminars and conferences (22%).
- The support that respondents have received was relevant (21%).
- Support provided by SESS had helped increase respondent's confidence in teaching students with special educational needs (6%).

As a conclusion to our survey, we asked teachers and principals if there was anything else that they would like to comment on in relation to SESS and its range of CPD events and support. A large number (430) individuals provided a response with the majority of respondents commenting on the positive contribution of SESS to teachers and students. Main themes from the open-ended responses include the need to increase the awareness of SESS and to provide opportunities for all school personnel, in particular class/subject teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to access support:

> *"Support is informative and useful but accessing the courses is not always open to class teachers… I do not think teachers are aware of the level of support available to them."* (Survey respondent)

> *"I would like SESS to be extended to provide training and funding for training for SNAs as they are very important members of our school community."* (Survey respondent)

Although some respondents identified challenges, for example, a lack of suitable substitution cover or time constraints, they were still motivated to access SESS support:

> *"In our school it is usually the learning support or resource teacher who attends CPD events. I would be very interested in attending as I have special needs children in my class for most of the day but there is no sub cover and I cannot leave my class. Any extra help would benefit me and the class but I cannot access this help easily."* (Survey respondent)

> *"I always felt that I don't have enough time to really access SESS - when I do I like what I see."* (Survey respondent)

One respondent commented that a culture change in schools in relation to the responsibility for special education would facilitate a broader category of teachers availing of SESS support:

> *"There is a need for a major drive to move attitudes to special education so true inclusive practice is achieved. Great ideas are produced by SESS, NEPS [National Educational Psychological Service] etc. but unless school management can be really engaged, courses have little impact except on the converted. Schools can see courses as too time consuming. Much more work is needed to educate management on methods of whole-school planning, training in how to do this and involve all staff."* (Survey respondent)

When respondents were asked to describe any additional areas where they would appreciate CPD or other forms of support, the main responses given related to more opportunities to work with experienced practitioners in relation to special education and more support around behavioural issues (see Figure 7.9).

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[20] Regression analysis is a technique used for analysing several variables, when the focus is on the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. More specifically, regression analysis helps understand how the typical value of the dependent variable changes when any one of the independent variables is altered, while the other independent variables are held fixed. In this example, the dependent variable is satisfaction with the SESS and the independent variables are the other answers provided by survey respondents.

Figure 7.9: Areas where principal and teacher respondents would like additional support in relation to teaching students with special educational needs
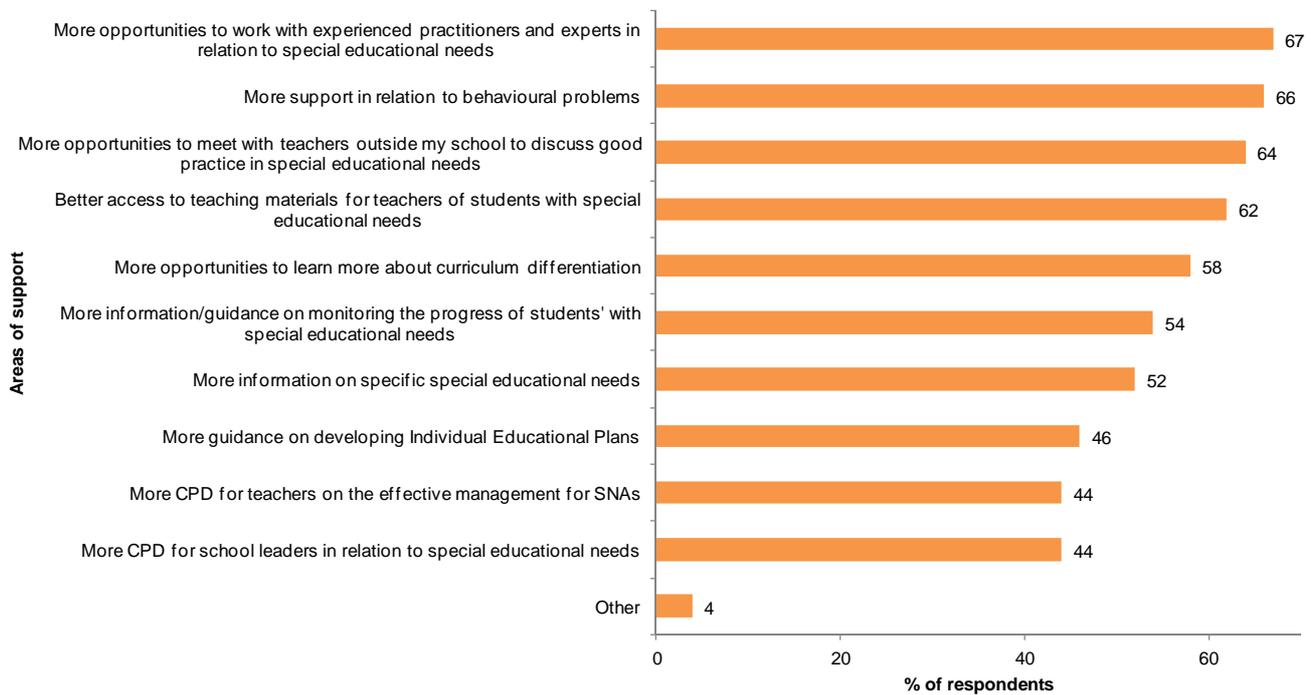
Views on the sustainability of the benefits of SESS provision

Most focus groups participants were keen that the benefits of SESS were sustainable in the longer term but identified three key areas for development:

- Transition from primary to post-primary level – teachers currently believed that they were well equipped to include students with special educational needs in the primary sector; however, some thought the transition to the post-primary sector needed greater focus.

- Follow up sessions and refresher courses after completing courses would allow for assistance and support in practising their learning in the classroom as well as allowing teachers to update their learning and relevance and share knowledge with colleagues. In some situations, a teacher would attend a CPD programme because they had a student with a particular special educational need; however, as the student progresses through the system, not all their subsequent teachers will have had this CPD.

- Engaging more with the wider community – some teachers commented that it is important that the entire community is included in any CPD. For example, a suggestion of a SESS led programme for parents would allow for consistency in how parents and teachers approach the learning and teaching of students with special educational needs.

> *"One of the saddest things I see is that a lot of the children that we have put through the primary school system and eight years of inclusion are now going back into special education for secondary school. From what I see, the secondary schools are only beginning this process of learning how to accommodate someone with special educational needs into their systems. Because their system is driven by exams and academia, inclusion is not going to be as easy."* (Focus group participant)

> *"You are not going to take in everything [the trainer] says. You take in what is relevant to you, but in one year's time, something different is going to be relevant. So, it is important to keep going on [refresher] courses."* (Focus group participant)

"Consistency is key when dealing with a student with special educational needs and if both the teachers(s) and parents were trained in the same fashion, this could greatly benefit the child's chances of development... a course between the parents and SESS would be of benefit." (Focus group participant)

Almost half of teachers (49%) and principals surveyed believed the benefits associated with SESS CPD and support to be sustainable to a great extent, with another 50% stating that they were sustainable to some extent. Differences were evident between phases with more respondents from special schools believing that the benefits were sustainable (70% stated that they were sustainable to a great extent) compared to primary (50%) and post-primary (40%) respondents. A greater percentage of special class teachers (63%) and resource teachers (54%) held the view that the benefits were sustainable to a great extent.

Survey respondents were subsequently asked, unprompted, why they thought that the benefits were sustainable or unsustainable. Many thought that the benefits associated with SESS were sustainable as it led to an increase in knowledge and expertise which could be applied throughout the whole career of the teacher. This support was seen as essential in an environment with an increasing number of students with special educational needs and was thought to give teachers increased confidence through new teaching methodologies.

"[The] strategies learned can be used and improved on throughout my career as a teacher." (Survey respondent)

"It is important to continue to provide SESS CPD and support to teachers because the range and number of students with special educational needs is increasing in mainstream classes and teachers need information and strategies to deal with the problems presented in mainstream classes in order to help all students to reach their full potential." (Survey respondent)

"Once the knowledge and strategies involved in teaching children with particular needs have been acquired I feel teachers become more aware and competent going forward." (Survey respondent)

"There are more than ever students who need specific supports from the teaching staff within the school. Such supports can only be delivered if adequate in-service training is provided. We are experts in very specific areas of pedagogy, therefore, support for us is essential to deal with the demands and complexities of modern school life." (Survey respondent)

A substantial proportion of respondents suggested that the support was sustainable as it had an impact on the achievement and attainment of students with special educational needs. SESS-provided support fostered a culture of inclusion in schools with the needs of individual students being recognised and met more effectively.

"It makes the school more inclusive and the needs of all students are recognised. Students with difficulties are being recognised earlier in our system." (Survey respondent)

"Children would be at a severe disadvantage if support services were withdrawn now." (Survey respondent)

"[The support] allows students with special educational needs to have learning barriers removed." (Survey respondent)

In some situations, respondents commented that the expertise and knowledge acquired is shared with colleagues and cascaded throughout the school which leads to a more sustainable ethos of inclusion.

"Materials are shared among staff readily available to be accessed. [There is] greater inclusion in school." (Survey respondent)

"Benefits over the years have included teacher/ teacher mentoring, amongst others, also knowledge gained is dispersed through junior to senior level and produces a definite, well thought out and clear direction to all." (Survey respondent)

It is important to note that around one in ten respondents commented that time, resource or funding constraints could have an impact on the sustainability of the benefits associated with SESS CPD and support. Some individuals commented that if funding were to be removed from SESS, there would be a reduction in the impact of provision as there will be fewer opportunities for teachers to access support. Another challenge identified by respondents was a lack of time to gain support or to cascade learning among colleagues.

Views from the perspective of the Irish-medium sector

Our approach

272 questionnaires were sent, in the Irish language, to 68 schools in the Irish-medium sector. In total, 61 completed questionnaires were received from 26 schools. This represents a total response rate of 22% and a school response rate of 38%.

Accessibility and appropriateness of SESS provision

Teachers and principals from the Irish-medium sector were less likely to be aware of the SESS (53% quite aware or very aware) than their counterparts in English medium schools (84% quite aware or very aware). Awareness of the SESS website was also considerably lower in respondents from Irish-medium schools (48%) than respondents from English medium schools (78%). The most common types of support accessed by principals and teachers who responded from the Irish-medium sector were seminars and conferences (52%) and in-school support (45%).

During our consultations, one stakeholder commented on a perceived lack of recognition of the needs of the Irish-medium sector as well as inadequate content, CPD programmes, resources and expertise for teachers of students with special educational needs in Irish-medium schools. However, this is not necessarily supported by our survey findings as more than three quarters of Irish-medium respondents reported that the CPD and support provided by the SESS was relevant to their teaching role (28% stated that it was very relevant and 50% quite relevant). Although there was a lower usage of the SESS website amongst respondents from the Irish-medium sector, 83% of the teachers and principals who had used the website thought that it was effective in developing their knowledge and skills (compared to 85% in English medium schools). What is more, over three quarters of Irish-medium respondents (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that the content of the SESS CPD materials was clear and easy to understand.

Impact of the SESS on teachers, schools and students

Seven out of ten Irish-medium respondents reported that the SESS CPD events which they had attended have informed their pedagogical practice, with the majority of respondents stating that, overall, their involvement with the SESS had a significant (46%) or very significant (21%) impact on their teaching practice. When asked to explain their response, around half (53%) stated that their involvement with the SESS had assisted them in understanding and meeting the needs of students with special educational needs and approximately a third (37%) stated that it had provided expertise, guidance and useful support. Over half the Irish-medium respondents (58%) agreed that students' achievement has improved following access to some form of support provided by the SESS in the last two years. However, fewer respondents from Irish-medium schools (51%) agreed (or strongly agreed) that students' interpersonal and social skills had improved following SESS support compared to respondents from English medium schools (65% agreed or strongly agreed).

Views from the perspective of the Irish-medium sector contd.

Overall satisfaction with SESS-provided support and service

More than four fifths (82%) of Irish-medium school respondents were either quite satisfied or very satisfied with the support and services provided by the SESS. Just over half of respondents from Irish-medium schools (56%) stated that the benefits of the SESS were sustainable in the long term to a great extent and a further 43% commented that the benefits were sustainable to some extent. When asked which specific areas in relation to teaching students with special educational needs that they would like to receive more support, there was no real difference between the responses from Irish and English medium schools. The majority of survey respondents requested more opportunities to work with experienced practitioners and experts in relation to special education. However, a small minority of respondents referred to the need to provide more resources in Irish and CPD which is tailored to the context of Irish-medium schools. This opinion was reflected in a written submission by an Irish-medium stakeholder who stated that more practical support was needed for teachers of students with special educational needs in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, including Irish language learning and teaching resources and specialists skilled in assessing and supporting students and teachers through the medium of Irish.

> *"Often the advice I receive related to children with special needs is 'idealistic' and very difficult to implement in a multi-class Gaeltacht classroom environment."* (Survey respondent from Irish-medium school)

> *"Currently due to the lack of support and resources available in Irish, much of the learning support/resource teaching in these schools is provided through English only. This practice may have a detrimental effect on the progress of children as they are 'operating' through Irish without support in that language."* (National stakeholder via written submission)

Conclusion

This section of the evaluation report has considered the impact of SESS CPD and support on teachers' knowledge and skills; classroom and whole-school practice; and student outcomes based on the views and experiences of participants in this research. It has also explored overall levels of satisfaction and views on the sustainability of any benefits deriving from SESS provision.

The results from the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this evaluation suggest that there is a general consensus that SESS CPD and support has enhanced teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to special education. We noted in the previous chapter that a large majority of participating principals and teachers described SESS seminars, conferences and the website as effective in enhancing their knowledge and skills, particularly teachers who were responsible for special classes (but less so post-primary teachers). Numerous participants described SESS support in its various forms as a useful information source but it also appears that many teachers are, in the main, putting their learning into practice, and were able to provide specific examples of the ways in which SESS support had informed their pedagogical approach.

Overall, a third of respondents to the survey strongly agreed that SESS support and CPD had informed their practice. This is important as the literature suggests that there is a risk that teachers may become too reliant on support and request help as a reflex action rather than reflecting on their learning and changing their practice. This is a risk that SESS has identified separately and is working to address through the way it manages and responds to requests for in-school support. Nonetheless, the level of access to, and usage of, SESS services, and in particular, the in-school support, should continue to be monitored to help assess whether specific schools are contacting SESS on multiple occasions. There was also some evidence that SESS CPD and support provided some impetus to participating teachers to undertake further CPD.

The majority of respondents (70%) stated that their involvement with SESS had had a significant impact on their teaching practice and again this was particularly the case for special class teachers and for primary teachers and teachers in special schools and less so for post-primary teachers. Overall, 14% of respondents

stated that the impact was not significant - this is a relatively substantial minority (one in seven respondents) and should be monitored going forward. Respondents agreed, in the main, that the support provided by SESS had helped them in planning to meet the individualised needs of students (84%); had increased their confidence in relation to teaching students with special educational needs (81%); and personalise learning to the needs of specific students (80%). Many teachers were also in a position to describe new techniques and ways of working through, for example, changes to the physical layout of the classroom, behaviour strategies and the use of new software.

We also considered the impact of SESS provision on whole-school practice. Around three quarters of respondents to the survey agreed that there were whole-school impacts deriving from SESS support such as: improvements in the knowledge of understanding of teachers; teaching practice becoming more focused on a range of student needs; and increased collaboration between teachers. In the focus groups, many teachers were able to provide examples of where learning from SESS CPD and support had been cascaded through the school or where new systems, practices or policies had been implemented school-wide. There was also a view amongst stakeholders and survey respondents (62%), that schools had become more inclusive as a result of SESS support.

There was also a sense, to some degree, from survey respondents that SESS support had changed approaches to CPD within the school, with around half disagreeing that SESS support had made no difference to the way in which CPD is organised and some suggesting that learning from this support is cascaded through the school. While the approach to CPD will vary from school to school and SESS has little direct control over CPD policy, it may be valuable for it to consider ways in which it could advise teachers and principals on maximising the benefits of the support they have received.

In relation to student outcomes, some stakeholders suggested that SESS CPD has helped support the move towards inclusion by making it easier for teachers to work with students with special educational needs in a mainstream setting. Not only were some focus group participants able to give specific examples of improved outcomes for students with special educational needs, they also suggested that their techniques may have benefits for other students in the classroom. Overall, around six in ten respondents to the survey agreed that student achievement had improved and three quarters thought that interpersonal and social skills had improved. Again, special class teachers were more likely to agree that SESS support has contributed to improved student outcomes.

Overall satisfaction with SESS support was high, with eight in ten participants stating they were satisfied – this was particularly the case for special schools with 90% responding positively to this question. Special class teachers were, again, more satisfied than other teacher groups. The main areas where respondents wanted more support included more exposure to expert practitioners; more support with behavioural problems; and more opportunities to meet with peers from other schools.

In terms of sustaining the benefits of SESS support, the vast majority (98%) thought this would happen to some or to a great extent, though issues identified by participating teachers included:

- The increasingly complex environment in which teachers operate.
- The potential detrimental impact if funding was restricted in the future.
- The need to refresh, review and reinforce learning from SESS CPD.
- The importance of cascading information on special education through the school.
- Maintaining progress at the primary level through the transition to post-primary.
- Providing training to parents to help support the development of their child.

Indeed, as we have seen, interacting with parents has been a sub-theme throughout the research and appears to be the area in which teachers are less confident.

Overall, however, teachers and principals do appear to identify specific impacts of SESS provision on their knowledge, understanding and skills; teaching and whole-school practice; and student outcomes – and satisfaction is high at around 80%.

8. Summary and next steps

Chapter summary

This chapter summarises the conclusions of our evaluation and identifies potential next steps for the Teacher Education Section (TES) and Special Education Support Service (SESS) Steering Committee to consider in the future. It addresses the third aim of this evaluation by drawing on the evidence presented in the preceding chapters to assess the extent to which SESS is meeting its aims, i.e.:

- Designing and delivering a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel.

- Consolidating and co-ordinating existing professional development.

- Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs.

Based on the findings from our evaluation we have identified a number of areas where SESS could expand or enhance its provision. We have not attempted to prioritise these potential next steps as, in our view, given the current financial climate, these should be considered in the context of the wider Departmental priorities and its views on the future direction of SESS.

Introduction

This section assesses the extent to which SESS is achieving its aims as established by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). It is based on the findings of our desk-based research and the qualitative and quantitative fieldwork undertaken as part of this evaluation. It is, therefore, structured under the following headings (based, in part, on the overall aims of SESS):

- Designing and delivering a range of professional development.
- Consolidating and co-ordinating existing professional development and support.
- Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.
- Some areas for further consideration.

Designing and delivering a range of professional development

The following paragraphs describe the extent to which SESS is meeting its aims in the design and delivery of a range of professional development initiatives for school personnel, with particular reference to the:

- Design of continuing professional development (CPD) and support.
- Range of support.
- Accessibility of programmes.
- Appropriateness of processes.
- Appropriateness of the content.

Design of CPD and support

SESS is a national support service which employs practising teachers to design and deliver its CPD and support. SESS staff are seconded from their teaching positions by the Management Committee of Cork Education Support Centre (CESC). The Director, Assistant National Co-ordinators and Advisors are seconded on a full-time basis, while Associates are released from their schools to work with SESS for 20-30 days per annum and Local Facilitators are released for six days.

Overall, the findings from both the national stakeholder consultation and the qualitative and quantitative research with principals and teachers were very positive about the calibre of the trainers and facilitators employed by SESS – particularly in relation to their experience as teachers of students with special educational needs and their ability to combine theory and practical examples. Our report has highlighted a number of

examples of good practice which teachers have been able to integrate into their pedagogical approach following SESS support.

However, a number of issues did arise in terms of the SESS staffing model, including:

- **The time pressures on professional staff:** while the model of seconding professional staff from their teaching positions is commendable in line with the aim of using trainers with current teaching experience, it could be questioned whether a time allocation of between 20 and 30 days per Associate is sufficient to research, design, train as a facilitator, and deliver the CPD.

- **The national structure:** while the national and regional structure was, in the main, welcomed as a means of building relationships with schools across the country, there was a view that the resources of SESS were stretched in terms of coverage. Not only does the national structure place additional travel requirements on Advisors, it was also thought to limit the coverage. Some participants also suggested that there might be value in a more localised approach to meet the needs of specific localities.

- **Staff recruitment and turnover:** linked to the first point, national stakeholders voiced some concerns about the moratorium on public sector recruitment and about the use of temporary contracts for secondees. This evidently leads to a high turnover of staff, which results in continuing development activity for new trainers. Whilst this is evidently a function of the desire for current teaching experience and teachers do, in the main, return to other parts of the education system, it may be worth considering whether this process could be made more efficient. Given overlaps in the composition of the design teams, consideration should also be given to the sustainability of SESS advisory support.

- **Office processes:** there was some evidence that, given the time pressures on professional staff noted above, and the desire on the part of SESS to remain responsive to schools' requests for support at all times, that there is a certain element of "fire fighting" and that SESS staff have little time to develop the internal processes that might help support them in their day-to-day work. This includes, for example, the development of the existing database to allow SESS to record the specific forms of support requested by individual schools and teachers, which would not only help track take-up of support but also monitor those schools that repeatedly ask for assistance without perhaps attempting to put the prior learning into practice.

Range of support

Previous chapters have demonstrated the range of support and delivery modes provided by SESS, from in-school support through conferences and seminars to self-directed CPD opportunities such as online CPD and the online library. This range of support was welcomed by many who participated in this evaluation as it was thought that an extensive range of modes of delivery suited teachers who may not always be able to secure time away from the classroom. It was also thought that this range of delivery modes was well matched with different learning styles and content types. While many participants welcomed the range of delivery modes, a number of teachers did state a preference for external, face-to-face events as this gave them the opportunity to interact with their peers. To some extent this networking could perhaps also be facilitated through a forum on the SESS website, which would allow teachers to raise issues and share experiences of and strategies for working with students with specific special educational needs, with members of the SESS team contributing to the forum on a regular basis.

In terms of self-directed learning, the majority of participating teachers thought that the SESS website is a valuable source of information on specific special educational needs. The findings demonstrate, however, that more could perhaps be done to promote the online library. Other issues that emerged in relation to the range of support included:

- **Levels of awareness of some forms of support:** approximately half the teachers and principals that responded to the survey stated that they were unaware of the request for funding support; six in ten were unaware of the teacher placements scheme; four in ten were unaware of the online library and a third were unaware of email and telephone support. This suggests that there is a need to further publicise some aspects of the support available to schools, particularly those that can be provided at relatively low cost to SESS.

- **Different patterns in usage by school phase:** our research has shown that there are different take-up patterns for different types of support by phase. Teachers from special schools were more likely to report that they had accessed the various individual types of support than those from primary and post-primary schools, particularly SESS courses and the website. While teachers in special schools will evidently have higher proportions of students with special educational needs, there may be a need to monitor take-up patterns of specific types of support and target promotional activities to certain types of school and teacher. This would help counteract the perceptions of some participants that SESS support is geared primarily to special schools or special class teachers and facilitate SESS in its aim of providing support to all schools.

- **Resources for Irish-medium schools:** the stakeholder consultation revealed a clear view from one national stakeholder that students with special educational needs in Irish-medium schools were at a disadvantage due to the lack of availability of support in the Irish language. Some respondents from Irish-medium schools did raise the issue but there were no significance differences in satisfaction between English and Irish-medium teachers. It should be noted, however, that awareness of SESS was significantly lower amongst teachers in Irish-medium schools. The Department may wish to consider the issue of special education in Irish-medium schools in the wider context – given that some of the issues raised, such as the lack of diagnostic and assessment tools in Irish, are beyond the current scope of SESS.

- **Widening support to other groups:** a common theme emerging throughout the various strands of this evaluation was the value in extending SESS provision to other groups including non-teaching school personnel and parents. While SESS does provide professional development events for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), there appears to be some demand for additional support for SNAs and other adults working in schools. Some respondents also suggested that parents should be encouraged to access SESS provision to help them contribute to their child's educational development and to facilitate better communication between teachers and families. Consideration could perhaps be given to whether this is feasible within the current SESS resourcing model or whether SESS could signpost alternative provision for parents (for example, some of the courses listed in Appendix G).

Accessibility of programmes

Awareness of the range of support available has been identified in the literature and by a substantial proportion of respondents to our survey, as a challenge in accessing CPD in general. Overall, awareness of SESS provision was generally high but this did vary across respondent groups. Awareness amongst post-primary schools and teachers in special schools was significantly higher than amongst primary school teachers, for example, and significantly higher amongst principals than other teachers, including special class teachers. Awareness was also significantly higher amongst teachers in schools where CPD in general was reported to be actively promoted and supported by the school management team. Awareness was lower amongst: teachers in primary schools; teachers in Irish-medium schools; teachers in schools with lower proportions of students with special educational needs; class or subject teachers; and teachers of students with emotional or behavioural problems. With the exception of some concerns about waiting lists and the timings of events, there did not appear to be any real issue with the location of support. In relation to accessibility, therefore, we have identified the following considerations:

- **Understanding usage patterns:** there was a perception amongst some participants in this research that take-up of SESS provision was higher amongst primary schools than in other phases, however, this was not clearly the case amongst respondents to our survey. As noted above in relation to the range of support, further consideration could be given to monitoring the take-up of provision overall, identifying the specific challenges experienced by, say, primary schools, and targeting promotional materials and support to this group – within of course the constraints of the current financial climate.

- **Deepening relationships with principals:** the literature and our research has shown that the principal is the key figure in promoting an ethos of CPD in schools and indeed, is the main gatekeeper to accessing professional development opportunities. SESS may wish to reassess and refresh its relationships with principals in order to raise awareness of its provision. It may also wish to consider distributing information on the importance of, and good practice in, developing CPD in special education given that our survey findings suggest that teachers in schools that are reported to have a supportive CPD environment tend also to suggest that the impact on classroom practice and student outcomes is more significant.

- **Prioritising need:** linked to the above points, while SESS aims to support all schools in the move towards more inclusive learning environments, it emerged from the stakeholder consultations, that given the resources available to SESS, there is a recognition that it is unlikely to be in a position to provide a universal service across all areas of special educational need. The Department could therefore give some consideration to whether there is a need to prioritise various elements of the support or various segments of the target population.

Appropriateness of processes

With the exception of some concerns around the timing of the events and the waiting lists for some CPD sessions, no real concerns emerged from respondents in relation to the logistical aspects of SESS CPD and support. On the contrary, several participants were positive about the professionalism of SESS staff, the text message reminders and the responsiveness of SESS personnel to feedback on individual events. Unprompted responses to the survey, however, suggested that the information provided to schools could be improved – for example leaflets and brochures on upcoming courses for the school year.

Appropriateness of content

A large proportion of the respondents to our survey described SESS CPD and support to be very relevant to their teaching roles and effective in developing their knowledge and skills. This was particularly the case for seminars, courses and conferences and the SESS website. Participants particularly valued the skills and experience of SESS course facilitators and the mix of theory and practical examples. Some did question, however, whether there could be greater personalisation of the course content to allow more experienced teachers to omit the introductory stages of the learning. There were also some concerns around a perceived focus on Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and on more severe special educational needs. A number of areas were identified where it was thought that SESS could develop new provision, including:

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and teaching students with special educational needs.
- Behaviour management.
- In-school collaborative working.
- Literacy, numeracy and speech and language therapy.
- Provision for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).
- Provision for parents.
- Provision for SNAs.

Consolidating and co-ordinating existing professional development and support

The second aim of SESS is to consolidate and co-ordinate CPD for special education across Ireland. This aim derives from the recognition by DES that 10 years ago, provision was rather fragmented across the system and that there was no real means of co-ordinating and prioritising CPD needs in an increasingly complex area.

The findings from the survey and the stakeholder consultation suggest that SESS has established itself well as the co-ordinating organisation for CPD in relation to special education but that more could perhaps be done. Just under seven in ten respondents agreed, for example, that in the absence of SESS they would *not* have accessed a similar range of CPD, and around half agreed that the SESS website was their first port of call for information on CPD on special education. While these responses reflect substantial agreement, there is evidently some room for improvement. SESS could also potentially link with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on available research conducted in Ireland (e.g. the NCSE information booklet for parents (NCSE, 2011)). Some national stakeholders were unaware of the responsibilities of SESS in relation to consolidating and co-ordinating provision: communication of the aims of SESS may, therefore, help facilitate this co-ordination role and thus help reduce duplication. It is important that any communication activity seeks to maximise the potential of online resources in light of the Department's policy on printed publications.

There were some concerns however about perceived resource constraints and how this might impact on consolidation and co-ordination of provision. This role is evidently linked to awareness of SESS, and, as we have seen, while awareness is high, around one in eight of the teachers who responded to the survey were unaware of SESS– despite the targeted nature of this phase of the research.

Information provided by SESS illustrates the range of partners with whom it interacts, including a number of third level institutions providing special education courses. There is some evidence from the stakeholder consultations that duplication in the system has now been reduced – while the range of supports that is available has been maintained and expanded. There were some concerns from stakeholders however in relation to a perceived lack of clarity of roles in the system and the most appropriate balance between accredited and non-accredited courses and CPD.

Some stakeholders commented on the value of the international links that SESS has established and appreciated their role in bringing external experts to Ireland. SESS has also undertaken several cross-border studies with colleagues in Northern Ireland and has contributed to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Inclusive Education in Action programme to share good practice around the globe.

The vast majority of respondents thought that the benefits accruing from SESS support were sustainable in the longer term – which is also an indicator of the level of success achieved by SESS in consolidating and co-ordinating support. The main reasons given for this included increasing teachers' skill levels throughout their teaching career and the reported impact on the achievement of students with special educational needs.

There is some evidence in the literature that teachers in Ireland believe that special education receives insufficient attention in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Given the ongoing work being undertaken by the Teaching Council on developing a more coherent continuum of teacher education, this may be one area where SESS could usefully input its expertise to a greater degree.

Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching

While we have noted the difficulties of measuring the impact of CPD at Kirkpatrick's Level 4, particularly in the absence of information on the changes in student outcomes resulting from teacher CPD, there is some evidence that teacher CPD can have a significant impact on students' outcomes. Given the timescale for this research and the lack of available data on student outcomes at a school-level, this consideration of the impact of SESS CPD is therefore based on self-reported data from the teachers, principals and other stakeholders who participated in this research.

In our survey, overall satisfaction with SESS support was high amongst the principals and teachers who responded (81%) to the evaluation. It is clear from the literature that teacher effectiveness is the main school-based factor impacting on student outcomes and that engaging teachers in high quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teacher effectiveness. In this context, the support provided by SESS has the potential to make a major impact on outcomes for students with special educational needs. We explored the impacts of the support provided by SESS at a number of levels:

- **Teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills:** there was strong support for the view that SESS support had increased the skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence of teachers working with students with special educational needs. On-going support was viewed as particularly valuable to teachers who often cited the need for refresher courses.

- **Classroom practice:** the majority of respondents also reported that their involvement with SESS had a quite or very significant impact on their teaching practice and many were able to provide specific examples of new teaching strategies that they had implemented subsequent to receiving the support. While the impact is likely to vary by the type of support accessed and the teaching role of respondents, there was a substantial minority (14%) who stated that it had not had a significant impact on their practice. One of the reasons provided for this was the need for a clearer link between education and practice whilst another related to the need for more up-to-date information. Respondents agreed that the support had helped improve their planning for the individualised needs of their students; their confidence in teaching; and the extent to which learning was personalised to the needs of specific learners.

- **Whole-school practice:** SESS CPD and support also appears to have had an impact at the whole-school level in line with DES guidelines that there should be a whole-school approach to inclusion. There was a view amongst some participants that SESS support had, at a general level, helped facilitate more inclusive environments by up-skilling teachers. In more specific terms, around three quarters of respondents agreed that teaching practice in the school had become more focused on meeting a range of student needs; that teachers' understanding of special education issues had improved; and that collaborative working had increased. Respondents from post-primary schools were, however, less positive. There was also some evidence that involvement with SESS had changed approaches to CPD within schools.

- **Outcomes for students with special educational needs:** again, almost six in ten respondents agreed that student outcomes had improved as a consequence of SESS support, with similar proportions agreeing that: academic achievement had improved; students were more enthusiastic about learning; students' interpersonal and social skills had improved; and student behaviour in the school has improved. Again, while it should be noted that this is self-reported data, it is nonetheless encouraging that teachers can perceive an impact on their students' outcomes.

There are of course other issues impacting on the extent to which SESS provision is enhancing learning and teaching. While some of these may be outside the direct control or remit of SESS, further consideration could be given to these issues by both the Department and SESS in order to maximise the benefits of CPD provision to learning and teaching. These could include promoting a culture of CPD and CPD evaluation in schools and reassessing substitution cover arrangements.

Some areas for further consideration

Overall and on balance, the findings from this evaluation would suggest that SESS is meeting its aims of developing and delivering a range of supports, consolidating and co-ordinating existing provision, and (as far as the data allows) enhancing learning and teaching by helping to improve teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching practice. The findings have shown, however, that there are variations in the patterns of awareness and take-up by phase and teacher type. There are also small but substantial minorities of respondents who have stated, for example, that SESS provision has made little impact on their teaching practice.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction with SESS and the evident respect with which it is held (demonstrated, for example, in the responses to the open-ended questions to the survey), there are a number of areas where SESS could be enhanced or expanded. These areas are presented in Table 8.1 for further consideration by the SESS Steering Committee, subject to agreement by TES. We have not attempted to prioritise these potential next steps as, in our view, given the current financial climate, these should be considered in the context of wider Departmental priorities and its views on the future direction of SESS. For example, while more special class, resource and learning support teachers tended to be aware of SESS than mainstream class or subject teachers, it may be that budgetary constraints will prompt the Department to conclude that support is best directed at these groups given the nature of their interaction with students with special educational needs.

Table 8.1: Recommendations for further consideration

Theme	Next steps	Rationale
Efficiency and effectiveness of the SESS organisational structure	**Consideration of the SESS staffing model** • Extending secondment period. • Enabling recruitment of more full-time staff to assist succession planning (i.e. the identification and development of internal personnel with the potential to fill key roles within the organisation). **Consideration of SESS processes** • Consider commissioning one-off projects (i.e. development of existing database) to improve efficiencies. • Consider sustainability of design team membership and the potential to widen membership.	• Alleviate time pressures on staff. • Facilitate succession planning and sustainability. • Free up staff time to focus on front-line delivery. • Monitor patterns of access by schools to determine where support needs to be targeted or reduced.
Design and delivery of a range of professional development initiatives	**Awareness-raising** • Raise awareness of all forms of support - particularly online CPD and the online library. • Monitor different patterns of take-up and tailor communications to different school phases and teacher types. **Needs of the Irish-medium sector** • Explore in more detail the needs of the Irish-medium sector and consider targeted recruitment from this sector. **New forms of provision** • Consider developing provision for specific non-teaching groups, i.e. SNAs and parents. • Consider developing support materials for teachers in relation to working with SNAs, parents etc. • Consider demand for CPD in relation to ICT and teaching students with special educational needs; behaviour management; in-school collaborative working; literacy, numeracy and speech and language therapy; and provision for NQTs.	• Promote self-directed learning as a cost-effective mode of learning that doesn't require substitution cover. • Counteract the perception that SESS is targeted at special class or resource teachers rather than class or subject teachers and promote the concept that special education is the responsibility of all. • Assess the extent to which there is a demand for materials and support in the Irish language. • There was a clear demand for provision for SNAs from respondents and the aim of SESS refers to provision for school personnel – not just teaching staff. Support for parents would also help improve communication between the school and the family.
Consolidation and co-ordination of existing professional development and support	**Communication** • Communicate and promote the consolidation and co-ordination role of SESS. **Liaison** • Continue to enhance international linkages. • Feed best practice and new learning into the development of ITE. **Range of supports** • Maintain and promote a range of supports (directed and self-directed and in- and out-of-school). • Monitor the balance of accredited and non-accredited provision.	• Increase clarity around roles and responsibilities in the education sector. • Increase the level and quality of knowledge in relation to special education and students with special educational needs in the education sector.
Enhance the quality of learning and teaching	**Promote CPD culture in schools** • Review links with principals as gatekeepers to CPD. • Communicate importance of evaluation of CPD to principals. • Disseminate examples of good practice deriving from SESS interventions. **Monitor impact** • Continue to monitor the impact of SESS CPD and support on schools and teachers (by phase and teacher type).	• Widen access to SESS CPD and support. • Help ensure that learning is cascaded through the school. • Celebrate the success stories of CPD support.

Appendix A: Special education CPD programmes funded by TES

Institution	Type of special education provision	Web address
Church of Ireland College, Rathmines, Dublin 6	- Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1] - Certificate for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)[2]	www.cice.ie
National University of Ireland Galway	Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1]	www.nuigalway.ie
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	- Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1] - Certificate for SNAs - Introductory course for Resource Teachers (Primary)	www.mic.ul.ie
St.Angela's College, Sligo	- Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1] - Post-Graduate Certificate/Diploma Programme of CPD in Special Educational Needs (ASDs) for Teachers - Certificate for Special Needs Assistants[2]	www.stacs.edu.ie
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9	- Graduate Certificate in the Education of Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) - Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1] - Induction courses for teachers of students with Severe & Profound General Learning Disabilities	www.spd.dcu.ie
University College Cork	Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1]	www.ucc.ie
University College Dublin	Combined Post –Graduate Diploma Programme[1]	www.ucd.ie/education

Source: SESS website (http://www.sess.ie/professional-development/college-and-university-courses)

(1) Combined Post-Graduate Diploma Programme of Continuing Professional Development for Teachers involved in Learning Support and Special Education
(2) Introductory courses are also provided through Education Centres, which can be taken as a stand-alone course or as part of the certificate course.

Appendix B: Members of the Project Advisory Committee

Committee members:

- Bernie Quinn, Assistant Principal Officer, Teacher Education Section – Replaced by Margarita Boyle, Assistant Principal Officer from July 2011.

- Mark Considine, Higher Executive Officer, Department of Education and Skills – Replaced by Rose Mc Donnell, Higher Executive Officer from June 2011.

- Dr. Emer Ring, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills and from August 2011, Head of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

- Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills.

- Breandán Ó Murchú, Former Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills.

- Dr. Michael Shevlin, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin.

- Dr. John Hunter, Managing Inspector for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

- Joan Crowley O'Sullivan, Director, Special Education Support Service.

Appendix C: Stakeholder topic guide

Purpose of interview: To explore stakeholder's experiences of SESS and gather their views on the difference SESS has made to the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs.

Process: Please introduce yourself and explain the objectives of this research to the interviewee. Outline the purpose of this interview and how it fits into the wider programme of research which we are undertaking. Assure the interviewee that this research is being conducted in line with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and ask their permission to record the interview.

All interviews should be written up fully, in this template, by the interviewer.

Section 1: Background

Name of Interviewer	Date & time of interview	Interview method (telephone/ face-to-face)
Name(s) of interviewee	**Stakeholder organisation**	**Job title(s)**

Section 2: Introduction

1. Can you give me some background to your involvement with SESS?

    –   How many years have you worked in your organisation/institution?
    –   Could you describe your current role and responsibilities? How do they relate to special education?
    –   What has been your level of engagement with SESS to date?
    –   How would you describe the aims of SESS?
    –   Can you describe how SESS delivers its support to schools and teachers?

    Ask only to interviewees from SESS/TES
    –   How would you describe your level of knowledge about its governance and management procedures?

Section 3: Management of SESS

This Section focuses on the inputs and costs of SESS and will therefore only be relevant to certain stakeholders (primarily TES and SESS staff). It should be clear, from the answers given in Section 2 of the interview, whether or not the interviewee is well placed to answer the questions in this Section.

2. In your opinion, how effective is the current organisational structure of SESS in terms of providing CPD to teachers of students with SEN? Why do you say that?

    Probe re: a) arrangements in Cork Education Support Centre b) the national network of Advisors and Associates c) design teams and advisory groups

3. In your opinion, how efficient is the current organisational structure of SESS in terms of providing CPD to teachers of students with SEN? Why do you say that?

    Probe re: a) arrangements in Cork Education Support Centre b) the national network of Advisors and Associates c) design teams and advisory groups

4. How would you describe the effectiveness of SESS management processes in terms of?

    –   Staffing structures in Cork Education Support Centre?
    –   SESS management processes in relation to support through teams designed to meet needs identified in the system e.g.

        i.   Particular special educational needs (autism, etc)
        ii.   The individualised planning process
        iii. Management of behaviour
        iv.   ICT
        v.   Additional resources or other areas that you may have experienced?

    –   SESS management processes in relation to:
        i.   The support scheme
        ii.   External expertise
        iii. Conferences
        iv.   Websites

    –   Staff numbers?
    –   Self-evaluation?
    –   What would you say are the key strengths of SESS management processes? How, if at all, could these be improved?

5. Would you like to make any additional comments about a) the management of SESS? b) the structure of SESS?

Section 4: SESS activities and support

6. In your view, how familiar would you say you are with the range of support offered by SESS?

    Probe in relation to:

        –   *In-school support*
        –   *SESS support scheme*
        –   *Conferences and seminars*
        –   *Training the trainers courses*
        –   *Online CPD*
        –   *Post-graduate certificate/diploma*
        –   *SESS website*
        –   *Learning and teaching resources such as Signposts, DVDs, Science Differentiation*
        –   *Telephone support/e-mail support*
        –   *Specific projects*
        –   *Any other support you may have accessed.*

7. In relation to SESS programmes of CPD…

    –   In your opinion, how relevant is the content of SESS programmes of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs? Why do you say that?
    –   In your opinion, are any of the above modes of delivery more effective than others? Why do you say that?
    –   Are there, in your view, any specific themes or special educational needs issues that could perhaps be considered in more detail by the programmes?
    –   How appropriate are the processes associated with the delivery of these programmes? *Probe re publicity/promotion, registration, administration, evaluation etc*
    –   How, if at all, could a) the course content or b) associated delivery processes be improved?
    –   To what extent, in your view, are the programmes easily accessible for teachers of students with special educational needs?

- How, if at all, do you think the accessibility of the programmes to teachers could be improved?
- In your opinion, overall, what are the characteristics of effective CPD provision for teachers of students with special educational needs?
- In your opinion, are the characteristics of effective CPD provision evident in the CPD provided by SESS?

8. How would you describe the uptake of this support to date?

- In your view, what is the perception of the support provided by SESS amongst a) school principals and b) teachers of students with special educational needs? *Probe re awareness of SESS*
- To your knowledge, what is the profile of teachers using SESS?
  [Prompt: in relation to each ask whether there is a difference by NQT or experienced teacher
  - Primary class teacher
  - Primary support teacher (learning support/resource)
  - Primary special class teacher
  - Post-primary subject teacher
  - Post-primary support teacher (learning/support/resource)
  - Post-primary special class teacher
  - Special school teacher
  - Other

- Is there anything SESS could do to increase demand (from those who do not make use of its services)?
- Or reduce dependence on its support (from those who request the same support time and again)?
- In your view, is SESS sufficiently resourced to meet the demand for its services a) now and b) in the near future? Why do you say that?

Section 5: Teachers supported in CPD

This section focuses on the effect that SESS has had on teachers and teaching practices. Therefore it may not be appropriate to ask all stakeholders. Use the information gained in Sections 1-4 of the interview to decide whether or not the stakeholder will be able to answer the questions in Section 5. If not proceed to Section 6.

9. In your opinion, how successful has SESS been in designing and delivering a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel since its inception? Why do you say that?

10. To what extent do you think SESS has:

    a) consolidated existing professional development and support for teachers of students with special educational needs? Why do you say that?

    b) co-ordinated existing professional development and support for teachers of students with special educational needs? Why do you say that?

11. To what extent do you think SESS has enhanced the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs? [Probe: are there any differences by a) type of support provided b) type of practitioner targeted? c) special educational needs of students? Why do you say?]

    Probe re specific examples of practice in schools

> Please tailor Q12 on the basis of the interviewee's answers to Q9-10, e.g. if the interviewee says that SESS has positively affected the quality of learning and teaching and the range of professional development initiatives and supports, but not impact on the consolidation and co-ordination of existing professional development and support, then ask Q12a-b only.

12. In your view, what aspects of the way in which SESS is delivered have contributed to:

     a.   the quality of learning and teaching;

     b.   the range of professional development initiatives and supports; and

     c.   the consolidation and co-ordination of existing professional development and support.

13. Can you think of any way in which this support could be improved?

14. In your view, in general, what are the best ways of embedding learning from CPD in the classroom?

Section 6: Impact of SESS activities and programmes

15. In your view, to what extent does SESS contribute to the development of teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to educating students with special educational needs?

16. To what extent do you think participation in SESS programmes of CPD has improved teachers' classroom practice? Why do you say that?

17. What, in your opinion, are the barriers to putting the learning acquired from the CPD into practice? And the factors that help teachers put their learning into practice in the classroom?

18. To what extent do you feel that teachers' participation in SESS programmes of CPD has affected whole-school practice? [Probe: Are you aware of any variation in the impact, for example, by school type or geographical region?]

19. Are you aware of any specific examples of good practice within schools as a result of SESS activities and programmes?

20. In your opinion, to what extent has SESS CPD programme contributed to improved outcomes for students with special educational needs? [Prompt: in terms of accessing, participating and benefiting from an appropriate education.]

21. In your opinion does provision of CPD by SESS make it more likely that teachers of students who are most in need of support can access CPD to assist them in meeting these students' needs? Why do you say that?

Section 7: Value-added

22. Do you think that the establishment of SESS has led to changes in the way that schools or teachers plan their CPD?

23. Reflecting on what you have said in relation to the impact of the CPD provided by SESS, do you think these could have happened if SESS had not been established?

24. The main aims of SESS are to:

     –   enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs;
     –   design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel; and,
     –   consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

Overall, to what extent has SESS achieved these aims in your opinion? (Where 1 is not at all and 5 is to a great extent) Why do you say that?

To a great extent	To some extent	Neither/nor	To a limited extent	Not at all
5	4	3	2	1

Have you observed any additional benefits as a result of SESS, i.e. above and beyond its main aims?

25. Are you aware of either a decline or increase in private expenditure in this area (Special Educational Support) as a result of the public expenditure associated with SESS e.g. the use of private educational consultants or teachers funding their own CPD?

26. In your opinion, to what extent are the benefits, if any, associated with SESS activities sustainable in the longer term? [Probe: how will these benefits continue to be sustainable?]

Section 8: Conclusions

27. As part of this research we would like to benchmark the management of SESS with that of other services designed to provide support for teachers and schools. Are there any other services, which you would consider to be broadly similar to SESS in terms of their aim in providing support to assist teachers in the learning and teaching process, their size or delivery model? These services do not necessarily have to have an exclusive remit for special education. These may be other services within education or other sectors. Similarly they do not have to be based in the Republic of Ireland.

28. If so, are you aware of any evaluations/ studies into the efficiency of these organisations/ projects?

29. Have you had direct experience of these organisations and if so would you describe that experience as comparable to that of your experience with SESS?

30. Is there anything further which you would like to discuss in relation to SESS and the difference it has made to the provision of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs?

Thank the interviewee for their time and their contribution to this study.

Appendix D: Focus group topic guide

Purpose of interview: to gain insight on the extent to which the aims of SESS are being achieved and to gather qualitative evidence in relation to the impact of the programmes of CPD on teachers, schools and students with special educational needs. We also aim to identify any specific issues that might affect teachers' ability to put this learning into practice.

Process: Please introduce yourself and explain the objectives of this research to the participants. Outline the purpose of this focus group and how it fits into the wider programme of research which we are undertaking. Assure the participants that this research is being conducted in line with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and ask their permission to record the session.

All focus group sessions should be written up fully, under the topic guide headings, by the facilitator and saved on the project MAP file.

Section 1: Background

Name of facilitator	Date & time of session	Region

Section 2: Approach to CPD

1. We would like to know about the general approach to CPD in your school, in terms of:

    –   The approximate number of hours devoted to CPD each year?
    –   How it is co-ordinated?
    –   Any arrangements to cascade this learning to other school staff?

Section 3: SESS Activities

2. How did you first become aware of the support provided by SESS?

3. Please describe the type(s) of support you have received from SESS to date?

4. Are you aware of any other types of support offered by SESS? [Probe: individual school support, online CPD, classroom based courses, seminars, residential courses, training the trainers courses, post-graduate certificate/ diploma, conferences and SESS projects] Can you tell me a bit more about these?

5. How accessible are SESS programmes of CPD for teachers of students with special educational needs? [Prompt: Are there any differences by: a) the type of school; or b) the experience of the teacher?] Why do you say that?

6. What do you think about the different modes of provision? [Probe: coaching, online CPD, taught courses, conferences and specific projects]

7. How appropriate was the mode used to deliver the CPD programmes which you have undertaken? Why do you say that?

8. How appropriate was the content of the CPD programmes which you have undertaken? [Probe: Did it: a) cover the right subject matter; and b) meet your needs?] Why do you say that?

9.   Would you like to suggest any examples of good practice in terms of the programme content?

10. Would you like to suggest any improvements which SESS could introduce in terms of the programme content?

11. What do you think about the processes involved in enrolling, attending and completing these CPD programmes? Why do you say that?

12. Would you like to suggest anything SESS could do to make these processes easier for participants to manage?

Section 4: Outputs from SESS

13. How successful do you feel SESS has been to date in designing and delivering a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel? Why do you say that?

14. In your opinion, to what extent has SESS consolidated and co-ordinated existing professional development and support for teachers of students with special educational needs? Why do you say that?

15. To what extent do you think SESS has enhanced the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs? [Probe: are there any differences by: a) type of support provided; and, b) type of practitioner targeted?] Why do you say that?

16. Can you give any specific examples of changes in learning and teaching in your school?

Section 5: Short term impact of SESS

17. To what extent do you feel SESS has contributed to the development of your knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to educating students with special educational needs? Can you give me any specific examples of this?

18. In your view, has participation in SESS programmes of CPD improved your classroom practice? Why do you say that? [Probe: Can you give any specific examples of changes in practice?]

19. What do you think are the factors that help teachers put this learning into practice in the classroom?

20. What do you think are the barriers to putting this learning into practice?

Section 6: Long term impact of SESS

21. To what extent has teachers' participation in SESS programmes of CPD affected whole-school practice? [Probe: Can you give any specific examples of this?]

22. To what extent has SESS impacted upon outcomes for students with special educational needs? [Prompt: in terms of accessing, participating and benefiting from an appropriate education.]

23. Is there a particular group or groups of students for which the outcomes have been particularly good?

24. Are there any improvements which SESS could make to reach more students with special educational needs or to better target specific groups of students?

Section 7: Value-added

25. What do you think would have happened if SESS had never been established? [Prompt: How would - a) your own understanding; b) your classroom practice and that of your colleagues; and student outcomes - differ from where they are now?]

26. Do you think that the establishment of SESS has lead to any changes in the way that schools or teachers plan their CPD?

27. The main aims of SESS are to:

    a) enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to the education of students with special educational needs;
    b) design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel; and,
    c) consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

    Have you observed any additional benefits as a result of SESS, i.e. above and beyond its main aims?

Section 8: Sustainability

28. To what extent, do you think, are the benefits associated with SESS activities sustainable in the longer term? [Prompt: in terms of - a) your own understanding; b) your classroom practice and that of your colleagues; and student outcomes.]

Section 9: Conclusions

29. Is there anything further which you would like to discuss in relation to SESS and the difference it has made to the provision of CPD?

Thank the group for their time and their contribution to this study.

Appendix E: Principal and teacher survey questionnaire

Evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

Principal and teacher survey 2011

Background

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) has been commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to evaluate the Special Education Support Service (SESS). The aims of the SESS are to:

- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning in relation to the education of students with special educational needs;
- Design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel; and
- Consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development.

This is an opportunity for you to give your opinions on the support provided by the SESS. Your valuable contribution to this study will assist the SESS in understanding how well it is meeting its aims and what further actions, if any, it might need to take to support teachers of students with special educational needs better.

Thank you in advance for giving this important research your consideration and attention.

Completion instructions:

- This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Please complete and return it in the pre-paid envelope **no later than Monday 16 May 2011.**
- PwC operates under the **Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct** which assures **confidentiality and anonymity of responses**. Your personal views will not be attributed to you and no identifying information will be included in our final report.
- If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Christopher McConnell at PwC at christopher.mcconnell@uk.pwc.com or by telephone at 048 90 415830. If you require additional copies of this questionnaire, please contact Christopher at this email address.

School name	
Roll number	
PwC reference number	

Section A: You and your school

1) **Which of the positions listed below best describes your teaching role in your school?**
Please tick all that apply

	Tick all that apply
Class/subject teacher	1
Special class teacher	2
Learning support teacher	3
Resource teacher	4
Principal	5
Member of the In-School Management Team	6
Other teacher (please specify)_____	7

2) What type of school do you teach in? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Primary school	1
Post-primary school	2
Special school	3

3) Is your school a DEIS school? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Yes	1
No	2

4) How would you describe the location of your school? Is it in…? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
A city	1
A large town (population between 18,000 – 75,000)	2
A medium town (population between 10,000 – 18,000)	3
A small town (population between 4,500 - 10,000)	4
A village (population between 1,000 - 4,500)	5
The countryside	6

5) Approximately how many students are enrolled in your school? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
1-75	1
76-150	2
151-300	3
301 or more	4

6) How many years have you been in your current role? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Less than 1	1
1 - 2	2
3 - 5	3
6 - 10	4
More than 10	5

7) How many years have you been teaching in total? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Less than 1	1
1 - 2	2
3 - 5	3
6 - 10	4
11 - 15	5
16 - 20	6
More than 20	7

8) Approximately what proportion of students that you have taught in the last two years, if any, have special educational needs? *Please tick one box only*
For example, you have taught 60 students in the last two years, and four of these students have special educational needs, then tick box 6%-10%.

	Tick one box
None	1
1%-5%	2
6%-10%	3
11%-15%	4
16%-20%	5
21% or more	6

Please answer Questions 9 and 10 if you said that <u>you have</u> taught students with special educational needs in the last two years, otherwise go to Section B.

9) Please indicate the range of special educational needs presented by <u>your students</u> over the last two years? *Please tick all that apply. Where students have multiple needs please tick all that apply*

Assessed Syndromes	Tick all that apply
Down Syndrome	1
Fragile X	2
Prader-Willi Syndrome	3
Rett/Rhett Syndrome	4
Tourette Syndrome	5
Turner Syndrome	6
Usher Syndrome	7
Williams Syndrome (Williams-Beuren Syndrome)	8
Other Assessed Syndrome (please specify) _____	9
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	
Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)	10
Asperger Syndrome	11
Dyspraxia	
Developmental Co-Ordination Disorder (DCD)	12
Developmental Verbal Disorder (DVD)/Verbal Dyspraxia	13
Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems	
Emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems	14
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	15
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)	16
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)	17
Conduct Disorder (CD)	18
Childhood Psychosis	19
Other emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problem (please specify) _____	20
Exceptionally Able	
Exceptionally Able	21
Dual Exceptionality	22
General Learning Disabilities	
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	23
Mild General Learning Disability	24
Moderate General Learning Disability	25
Severe to Profound General Learning Disability	26
Specific Speech and Language Disorders	
Receptive Language Disorder	27
Expressive Language Disorder	28
Global Language Delay	29

Question 9 is continued overleaf.

Question 9 continued…

Physical Disabilities	Tick all that apply
Brittle Bone Disease	30
Cerebral Palsy	31
Spina Bifida	32
Muscular Dystrophy	33
Other Physical Disability (please specify) _____	34
Sensory Impairments	
Deaf/Hard of hearing	35
Blind/Visual impairment	36
Deafblind	37
Specific Learning Disabilities	
Dyslexia	38
Dyscalculia	39
Dysgraphia	40
Other special educational need <u>NOT</u> included in this table (please specify) _____	41

10) **How many of the students that you have taught in the last two years with special educational needs, have two or more needs?** *Please give the actual numbers.*

<div style="border:1px solid #000; width:180px; height:50px;"></div>

Section B: Your Continuing Professional Development

In this section, please consider all types of CPD. We will ask you to focus specifically on the CPD and support offered by the SESS later in Section C.

11) **How do you find out about the range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities that are available to you?** (*This includes all CPD and is not limited to special educational needs*). *Please tick all that apply*

	Tick all that apply
Email from CPD provider	1
Staff meeting	2
Via the Principal	3
Via a colleague at my school	4
Word of mouth	5
Networking	6
Communication from my professional association	7
Web search	8
Mail shot	9
Advertisement online/in print	10
Other (please specify) _____	11

12) **In the last two years, approximately how many <u>days</u> of formal CPD have you completed overall?** *Please write in the space below*

13) **How does this relate to the amount of CPD you have completed on average in previous years?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Less than previous years	1
Same as previous years	2
More than previous years	3

If you have __not__ completed any CPD in the last two years, please go to Section C, otherwise continue to question 14.

14) **In relation to the CPD you have completed in the last two years, what form did this take?**
Please tick all that apply

	Tick all that apply
School-based workshops led by teaching staff	1
School-based workshop led by an external provider	2
Personal reading	3
Shadowing a colleague	4
In-school collegiate support	5
Attendance at external seminar/conference	6
Attendance at external CPD course	7
Enrolment on accredited higher education course (i.e. post-graduate certificate/diploma)	8
Placement in another school	10
Online courses	11
Summer courses	12
Other (please specify)_____	13

15) **Approximately what percentage of your CPD, in the last two years, was related to special educational needs?** *Please tick one box only*

For example if you have had 12 days of formal CPD in the last two years, and 2 of these days were related to special educational needs, then choose option 11%-20%.

	Tick one box
None	1
1%-10%	2
11%-20%	3
21%-30%	4
31%-40%	5
41%-50%	6
51%-60%	7
61%-75%	8
More than 75%	9

16) **Does your school have an official policy on special educational needs and/or inclusion?**
Please tick one box only

	Tick one box
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	97

17) **To what extent do you agree or disagree that CPD is actively promoted and supported by your school management team?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Agree strongly	5
Agree	4
Neither/nor	3
Disagree	2
Disagree strongly	1

18) **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the approach to CPD <u>in your school</u>?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My school has an ethos of lifelong learning and development	5	4	3	2	1
CPD is supported by coaching and mentoring from experienced colleagues	5	4	3	2	1
CPD is based on current teaching and learning research and inspection evidence	5	4	3	2	1
CPD is a part of a learning plan with opportunities for me to apply my learning and evaluate the impact on my teaching practice	5	4	3	2	1
My previous experience and knowledge is taken into consideration in formulating the CPD plan	5	4	3	2	1
CPD is led by professional trainers who have the necessary experience, expertise and skills	5	4	3	2	1
Skills and knowledge are developed which are practical and relevant to my current role and career aspirations	5	4	3	2	1
I have the opportunity to practice teaching strategies in a supportive environment	5	4	3	2	1
Lesson observation is used to assess the impact of CPD and areas for further development	5	4	3	2	1
In my school, CPD is continuously evaluated in terms of its impact on teaching and learning	5	4	3	2	1

19) **In your view, what are the specific <u>challenges</u> in accessing CPD in relation to the needs of those students who you have taught in the last two years with special educational needs?** *Please tick all that apply*

	Tick all that apply
Awareness of the support that is available to me outside school	1
Accessing information on specific types of special educational need	2
Finding the time to undertake CPD on special educational need	3
Availability of substitution cover	4
Getting approval for time out of the classroom	5
Identifying the specific CPD that I need	6
The location of CPD is inconvenient for me	7
I do not have any problems accessing CPD	8
I have never tried to access CPD	9
Other (please specify) _____	10

Section C: Your involvement with the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

20) Overall, how aware are you of the Special Education Support Service (SESS)? *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Very aware	5
Quite aware	4
Neither/nor	3
Not very aware	2
Not at all aware	1

21) How aware are you of the specific CPD and support offered by the SESS? *Please tick one box in each row*

	Very aware	Quite aware	Neither/ nor	Not very aware	Not at all aware
In-school support	5	4	3	2	1
Seminars and conferences	5	4	3	2	1
SESS designed and delivered courses	5	4	3	2	1
Training the trainer courses	5	4	3	2	1
Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma in Special Educational Needs	5	4	3	2	1
Online CPD	5	4	3	2	1
Teacher exchanges/visits/placements	5	4	3	2	1
Group professional development initiatives (in-school)	5	4	3	2	1
SESS telephone and email support	5	4	3	2	1
SESS learning and teaching resources (e.g. DVDs, Signpost, teaching aids)	5	4	3	2	1
SESS website	5	4	3	2	1
Online library	5	4	3	2	1
Request for funding support (through the Support Scheme)	5	4	3	2	1

If you are 'not at all aware' of any of these types of CPD or support offered by the SESS please go to question 39, otherwise go to question 22.

22) **How did you first hear about the work of the SESS?** *Please tick all that apply*

	Tick all that apply
From SESS printed material	1
SESS website	2
Personal contact from SESS	3
From my principal	4
From a colleague	5
From my professional association	6
From a professional publication	7
From the Department's Inspectorate	8
From the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	9
From the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)/ Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)	10
From the Education Centre Network	11
Other (please specify) _____	12

23) **Which of the following types of SESS support have you used in the last two years?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick all that apply
In-school support	1
Seminars and conferences	2
SESS designed and delivered courses	3
Training the trainer courses	4
Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma in Special Educational Needs	5
Online CPD	6
Teacher exchanges/visits/placements	7
Group professional development initiatives (in-school)	8
SESS telephone and email support	9
SESS learning and teaching resources (e.g. DVDs, Signpost, teaching aids)	10
SESS website	11
Online library	12
Request for funding support (through the Support Scheme)	13

24) **How frequently do you visit the SESS website?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
At least once a week	6
About once a fortnight	5
About once a month	4
About once every couple of months	3
Once or twice only	2
Never	1

25) **If you have attended SESS CPD events, how many of these have you been to in the last two years?** *Please state actual number*

26) **If you have not used any of the support provided by the SESS in the last two years, which of the following, if any, discouraged you from accessing support?** *Please tick all that apply*

	Tick all that apply
I received support from the SESS more than two years ago	1
I have used another provider for support	2
The content was not relevant to my needs	3
The CPD or support was not available at a convenient location for me	4
The delivery mode was not suitable for my needs	5
I have not had the time to access CPD/support	6
Other (please specify) _____	7

*If you have **not used** any of the CPD or support provided by the SESS in the last two years, please go to question 39; otherwise please continue to question 27.*

Section D: Your views on the SESS activities and programmes

27) **Overall, in your view, how relevant is the CPD and support provided by the SESS to you in your teaching role?** *Please tick one only*

	Tick one box
Very relevant	5
Quite relevant	4
Neither/nor	3
Not very relevant	2
Not at all relevant	1

28) **For each of the types of SESS CPD and support that you <u>have used</u>, how effective were they in helping you to develop your knowledge and skills in relation to the needs of students who have special educational needs?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick on box in each row					
	Very effective	Effective	Neither/ nor	In- effective	Very ineffective	Not applicable
In-school support	5	4	3	2	1	99
Seminars and conferences	5	4	3	2	1	99
SESS designed and delivered courses	5	4	3	2	1	99
Training the trainer courses	5	4	3	2	1	99
Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma in Special Educational Needs	5	4	3	2	1	99
Online CPD	5	4	3	2	1	99
Teacher exchanges/visits/ placements	5	4	3	2	1	99
Group professional development initiatives (in-school)	5	4	3	2	1	99
SESS telephone and email support	5	4	3	2	1	99
SESS learning and teaching resources (e.g. DVDs, Signpost, teaching aids)	5	4	3	2	1	99
SESS website	5	4	3	2	1	99
Online library	5	4	3	2	1	99
Request for funding support (through the Support Scheme)	5	4	3	2	1	99

29) **a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the CPD provided by the SESS?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
SESS CPD events							
The CPD courses that the SESS provides are convenient and easily accessible in my local area	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The content of the SESS CPD materials is clear and easy to understand	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The CPD events I have attended have informed my pedagogical practice	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The SESS uses high quality facilitators/presenters for its CPD events	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The timing of the SESS events is not very suitable for me	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

b) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the SESS website? *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
SESS website							
The SESS website is user-friendly and easy to navigate	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The SESS website is a valuable source of information on specific types of special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
I find the teacher resources on the SESS website very useful in my day-to-day teaching practice	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
I consider the SESS website to be my first port of call when I'm looking for information on special educational needs and CPD	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
I welcome the opportunity to undertake CPD on-line	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
The online library is a valuable resource for me and my colleagues	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

c) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the SESS in-school-support? *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
SESS in-school support							
The telephone and email support that the SESS provides is a useful service when I have a specific query	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Visits to my school by the SESS have increased capacity in my school to deal with specific issues on special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
In-school support from the SESS has increased the knowledge and skills of my colleagues and myself	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

Section E: Impact of the SESS activities and programmes

30) **Overall, how significant has the impact of your involvement with the SESS been on your teaching practice?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Very significant	5
Quite significant	4
Neither/nor	3
Not very significant	2
Not at all significant	1

31) **Why do you say that?** *Please write in the space below*

32) **To what extent do you agree or disagree that the support provided by the SESS has helped improve the following aspects of your classroom practice?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
Recognising that a student might have special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Assisting students to engage with their own learning	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Personalising learning to the needs of specific students	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Planning to meet the individualised needs of students with special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Introducing new or different approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Interacting with parents of students with special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Increasing my confidence in teaching students with special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

33) **Can you give any specific examples of changes you have made to your classroom practice as a result of your involvement with the SESS?** *Please write in the space below*

34) **a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about students? Following support that I have received from the SESS...**

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Too early to tell	Don't know
Students							
Students' academic achievement has improved	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Students are more enthusiastic about learning	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Students' interpersonal and social skills have improved	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Student behaviour in the school has improved	5	4	3	2	1	96	97

b) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about teachers? Following support that I have received from the SESS…

	Tick one box in each row						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Too early to tell	Don't know
Teaching staff							
The knowledge and understanding of special educational needs issues amongst teachers in my school has improved	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Teaching practice in my school has become more focused on meeting a range of student needs	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Teachers are now more confident in teaching a range of student needs	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Teachers are now more confident in their relationships with parents of students with special educational needs	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Collaborative working within my school has increased	5	4	3	2	1	96	97

35) **Please describe what other areas of CPD or support, if any, the SESS could provide to you or your school above and beyond that which it already offers?** *Please write in the space below*

36) **Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the support and services provided by the SESS?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
Very satisfied	5
Quite satisfied	4
Neither/nor	3
Not very satisfied	2
Not at all satisfied	1

37) **To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the SESS?** *Please tick one box in each row*

	Tick one box in each row					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
In the absence of the SESS I would not have accessed a similar range of special educational needs CPD	5	4	3	2	1	97
The SESS offers a wider range of CPD and support than other providers I have used in the past	5	4	3	2	1	97
SESS support has improved my teaching practice	5	4	3	2	1	97
The SESS supported CPD has made no change to the way CPD is organised in my school	5	4	3	2	1	97
When one teacher gets SESS provided CPD it is cascaded to other teachers in my school	5	4	3	2	1	97
My school is more inclusive as a result of the SESS support	5	4	3	2	1	97
Teachers in my school have changed how they plan their CPD to take advantage of the support provided by the SESS	5	4	3	2	1	97
The CPD and support I have received from the SESS has improved the outcomes of my students		4	3	2	1	97

38) **a) In your opinion, to what extent are the benefits associated with the SESS CPD and support, if any, sustainable in the longer term?** *Please tick one box only*

	Tick one box
To a great extent	3
To some extent	2
To no extent	1

b) Why do you say that? *Please write in the space below*

39) **Are there any specific areas in relation to teaching students with special educational needs where you would like to receive more support?** *Please tick all that apply*

	Tick all that apply
More information on specific special educational needs	1
More opportunities to work with experienced practitioners and experts in relation to special educational needs	2
More opportunities to meet with teachers outside my school to discuss good practice in special educational needs	3
More opportunities to learn more about curriculum differentiation	4
More support in relation to behavioural problems	5
More guidance on developing Individual Educational Plans	6
Better access to teaching materials for teachers of students with special educational needs	7
More information/guidance on monitoring the progress of students' with special educational needs	8
More CPD for teachers on the effective management for SNAs	9
More CPD for school leaders in relation to special educational needs	10
Other (please specify) _____	11

40) **Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to the SESS and its range of CPD events and support?** *Please write in the space below*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return it in the envelope provided to Christopher McConnell at PwC by 16 May 2011.

Measúnú ar an tSeirbhís Tacaíochta d'Oideachas Speisialta (STOS) (*SESS*)

Suirbhé ar phríomhoidí agus múinteoirí 2011

Cúlra

Tá iarrtha ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna (ROS) ar PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) measúnú a dhéanamh ar an tSeirbhís Tacaíochta d'Oideachas Speisialta (STOS). Is iad aidhmeanna STOS ná:

- Cur le caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus na foghlama maidir le hoideachas na scoláirí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu;
- Réimse de thionscnaimh agus tacaí um fhorbairt ghairmiúil d'fhoireann scoile a dhearadh agus a sholáthar; agus
- Forbairt ghairmiúil atá ann cheana a dhaingniú agus a chomhordú.

Deis is ea é seo chun do thuairimí a thabhairt maidir leis an tacaíocht a chuireann an STOS ar fáil. Cuideoidh a bhfuil le rá agat leis an STOS chun a thuiscint cé chomh maith agus atá a cuid aidhmeanna á shroicheadh aige agus cad iad na gníomhartha breise, más ann dóibh, a chaithfí a dhéanamh chun tacú níos fearr le múinteoirí scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais.

Go raibh maith agat as do chúnamh a thabhairt dúinn.

Treoracha chun é seo a líonadh isteach

- Glacfaidh an ceistneoir seo thart ar 20 nóiméad le líonadh. Led' thoil líon isteach é agus seol ar ais sa chlúdach réamhíoctha é **tráth nach déanaí ná An Luan 16 Bealtaine 2011.**
- Feidhmíonn PwC faoi **Chód Cleachtais MRS** a dheimhníonn **rúndacht agus neamhainmníocht na bhfreagraí**. Ní luafar do thuairimí pearsanta leat agus ní chuirfear eolas aitheantais ar bith san áireamh inár dtuarascáil deiridh.
- Má tá fiosrú ar bith agat, ná bíodh leisce ort dul i dteagmháil le Christopher McConnell i PwC ag christopher.mcconnell@uk.pwc.com nó ar an bhfón ag 048 90 415830. Má tá tuilleadh cóipeanna den cheistneoir seo de dhíth ort, déan teagmháil le Christopher ag an seoladh r-phoist seo.

Ainm na scoile	
Uimhir rolla	
Uimhir thagartha PwC	

Roinn A: Tusa agus do scoil

1) **Cé acu de na poist seo thíos is fearr a thugann cur síos ar do ról múinteoireachta i do scoil?** *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Múinteoir ranga/ábhair	1
Múinteoir ranga speisialta	2
Múinteoir tacaíochta foghlama	3
Múinteoir acmhainne	4
Príomhoide	5
Comhalta den Fhoireann Bainistíocht Inscoile	6
Múinteoir eile (sonraigh, led' thoil)_____	7

2)   Cén cineál scoile ina bhfuil tú ag múineadh? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Bunscoil	1
Meánscoil	2
Scoil speisialta	3

3)   An scoil DEIS í do scoil? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Is ea	1
Ní hea	2

4)   Conas a chuirfeá síos ar shuíomh do scoile? An bhfuil sé suite ...? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
I gcathair	1
I mbaile mór (daonra idir 18,000 – 75,000)	2
I mbaile de mheánmhéid (daonra idir 10,000 – 18,000)	3
I mbaile beag (daonra idir 4,500 - 10,000)	4
I sráidbhaile (daonra idir 1,000 - 4,500)	5
Faoin tuath	6

5)   Thart ar cé mhéid scoláirí atá cláraithe i do scoil? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
1-75	1
76-150	2
151-300	3
301 nó níos mó	4

6)   Cé mhéad bliain atá curtha díot i do ról reatha? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Níos lú ná 1	1
1 - 2	2
3 - 5	3
6 - 10	4
Níos mó ná 10	5

7)   Cé mhéad bliain atá curtha díot ag múineadh, san iomlán? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Níos lú ná 1	1
1 - 2	2
3 - 5	3
6 - 10	4
11 - 15	5
16 - 20	6
Níos mó ná 20	7

8) **Thart ar cén céatadán de na scoláirí atá múinte agat sa dá bhliain deiridh a raibh riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu, más ann dóibh?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*
Mar shampla, más rud é gur mhúin tú 60 scoláire sa dá bhliain deiridh, agus go raibh riachtanais speisialta oideachais ag ceathrar díobh seo, cuir tic sa bhosca 6%-10%.

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Dada	1
1%-5%	2
6%-10%	3
11%-15%	4
16%-20%	5
21% nó níos mó	6

Led' thoil, freagair Ceisteanna 9 agus 10 más rud é go ndúirt tú <u>gur mhúin tú</u> scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais sa dá bhliain deiridh. Más rud é nár mhúin, téigh ar aghaidh chuig Roinn B.

9) **Léirigh réimse na riachtanas speisialta oideachais a bhí ag <u>do chuid scoláirí</u> sa dá bhliain deiridh?** *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann. San áit a raibh riachtanais iolracha ag scoláirí, cuir tic le gach a bhaineann*

Siondróim Measta	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Siondróm Down	1
X Leochaileach	2
Siondróm Prader-Willi	3
Siondróm Rett/Rhett	4
Siondróm Tourette	5
Siondróm Turner	6
Siondróm Usher	7
Siondróm Williams (Siondróm Williams-Beuren)	8
Siondróm Measta Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	9
Uathachas/Neamhoird ar Speictream an Uathachais	
Neamhoird ar Speictream an Uathachais (ASD)	10
Siondróm Asperger	11
Diospraicse	
Neamhord Comhordaithe Forbartha (DCD)	12
Neamhord Forbartha Briathartha (DVD)/Diospraicse Bhriathartha	13
Suaitheadh Mothúchánach agus/nó Fadhbanna Iompair	
Suaitheadh Mothúchánach agus/nó Fadhbanna Iompair	14
Neamhord Hipirghníomhaíochta Easnamh Airde (ADHD)	15
Neamhord Easnamh Airde (ADD)	16
Neamhord Greannach Freasúraíoch (ODD)	17
Neamhord Iompair (CD)	18
Síocóis Óige	19
Suaitheadh Mothúchánach agus/nó Fadhb Iompair eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	20
Sárchumasach	
Sárchumasach	21
Sárchumas Déach	22
Míchumais Foghlama Ginearálta	
Míchumas Foghlama Ginearálta Éadrom Teorannach	23
Míchumas Foghlama Ginearálta Éadrom	24
Míchumas Foghlama Ginearálta Meánach	25
Míchumas Foghlama Ginearálta Trom go Domhain	26
Sain-Neamhoird Urlabhra agus Teanga	
Neamhord Teanga Glacach	27
Neamhord Teanga Eispriosach	28
Moill Teanga Uilíoch	29

Leantar le Ceist 9 thall.

Ceist 9 ar lean…

Míchumais Fhisiciúla	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Galar na gCnámh Briosc	30
Pairilis Cheirbreach	31
Spina Bifida	32
Diostróife Mhatánach	33
Míchumas Fisiciúil Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	34
Lagú Céadfach	
Bodhar/Deacrachtaí Éisteachta	35
Dall/Lagú Amhairc	36
Bodhar agus Dall	37
Sain-Mhíchumais Foghlama	
Disléicse	38
Dioscalcúile	39
Diosgraife	40
Riachtanas Speisialta Oideachais Eile NACH BHFUIL san Áireamh sa Tábla Seo (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	41

10) **Cé mhéad de na scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais atá múinte agat sa dá bhliain deiridh, a bhfuil dhá riachtanas nó níos mó acu?** *Tabhair líon na scoláirí, led' thoil.*

Roinn B: D'Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil Leanúnach (FGL) (*CPD*)

Sa roinn seo, cuir gach cineál FGL san áireamh, led' thoil. Iarrfaimid ort díriú go speisialta ar an FGL agus an tacaíocht a chuireann an STOS ar fáil níos déanaí i Roinn C.

11) **Conas a fuair tú amach faoi réimse na ndeiseanna um Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil Leanúnach (FGL) atá ar fáil duit**? (*Cuimsíonn sé seo an FGL ar fad agus níl sé teoranta do riachtanais speisialta oideachais*). *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
R-phost ó sholáthróir FGL	1
Cruinniú foirne	2
Ón bPríomhoide	3
Ó chomhghleacaí i mo scoil	4
De bhéal	5
Líonrú	6
Cumarsáid ó mo chumann gairme	7
Cuardach gréasáin	8
Cor poist	9
Fógra ar líne/i gcló	10
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil)_____	11

12) **Sa dá bhliain deiridh, thart ar cé mhéad lá de FGL foirmiúil atá críochnaithe agat ar an iomlán?** *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

13) **Conas atá sé seo i gcomparáid le líon an FGL atá críochnaithe agat ar an meán i mblianta roimhe sin?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Níos lú ná blianta roimhe sin	1
Mar an gcéanna le blianta roimhe sin	2
Níos mó ná blianta roimhe sin	3

Má rud é nach bhfuil aon FGL críochnaithe agat sa dá bhliain deiridh, téigh ar aghaidh chuig Roinn C. Más rud é go bhfuil, téigh ar aghaidh chuig ceist 14.

14) **Maidir leis an FGL atá críochnaithe agat sa dá bhliain deiridh, cén chuma a bhí air?** *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Ceardlanna scoilbhunaithe faoi stiúr na foirne múinteoireachta	1
Ceardlann scoilbhunaithe faoi stiúr sholáthróir seachtrach	2
Léitheoireacht phearsanta	3
Scáthfhoghlaim le comhghleacaí	4
Tacaíocht choláisteach inscoile	5
Freastal ar sheimineár/comhdháil sheachtrach	6
Freastal ar chúrsa FGL seachtrach	7
Clárú ar chúrsa ardoideachais creidiúnaithe (.i.e. teastas/dioplóma iarchéime)	8
Socrúchán i scoil eile	10
Cúrsaí ar líne	11
Cúrsaí samhraidh	12
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil)_____	13

15) **Cén céatadán, thart air, de do FGL, sa dá bhliain deiridh, a bhain le riachtanais speisialta oideachais?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

Mar shampla, más rud é go raibh 12 lá de FGL foirmiúil agat sa dá bhliain deiridh, agus gur bhain 2 de na laethanta seo le riachtanais speisialta oideachais, ansin roghnaigh an rogha 11%-20%.

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Dada	1
1%-10%	2
11%-20%	3
21%-30%	4
31%-40%	5
41%-50%	6
51%-60%	7
61%-75%	8
Níos mó ná 75%	9

16) **An bhfuil polasaí oifigiúil ag do scoil maidir le riachtanais speisialta oideachais agus/nó cuimsiú?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Tá	1
Níl	2
Níl a fhios agam	97

17) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú go ndéanann foireann bainistíochta do scoile FGL a chothú agus tacú leis go gníomhach? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Aontaím go láidir	5
Aontaím	4
Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	3
Easaontaím	2
Easaontaím go láidir	1

18) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas maidir leis an gcur chuige i leith FGL <u>i do scoil</u>? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne				
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easontaím go láidir
Tá éiteas na foghlama agus na forbartha ar feadh an tsaoil ag mo scoil	5	4	3	2	1
Tacaítear FGL ag oiliúnú agus meantóireacht ó chomhghleacaithe le taithí	5	4	3	2	1
Tá FGL bunaithe ar thaighde reatha um mhúinteoireacht agus um fhoghlaim agus ar fhianaise cigireachta	5	4	3	2	1
Tá FGL ina chuid de phlean foghlama le deiseanna domsa mo chuid foghlama a chur i bhfeidhm agus measúnú a dhéanamh ar an tionchar ar mo chleachtas múinteoireachta	5	4	3	2	1
Cuirtear mo thaithí agus eolas roimhe seo san áireamh agus an plean FGL á dhearadh	5	4	3	2	1
Tá an FGL á stiúradh ag oiliúnóirí gairmiúla a bhfuil an taithí, an saineolas agus na scileanna riachtanacha acu	5	4	3	2	1
Forbraítear scileanna agus eolas atá praiticiúil agus a bhaineann le mo ról reatha agus m'ardmhianta gairme	5	4	3	2	1
Tá an deis agam straitéisí múinteoireachta a chleachtadh i dtimpeallacht thacúil	5	4	3	2	1
Úsáidtear breathnú ceachta chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar FGL agus réimsí atá le forbairt níos mó	5	4	3	2	1
I mo scoilse, déantar FGL a mheas go leanúnach maidir lena thionchar ar mhúinteoireacht agus ar fhoghlaim	5	4	3	2	1

19) **Dar leat, cad iad na <u>dúshláin</u> ar leith atá ann i rochtain FGL maidir le riachtanais na scoláirí sin a mhúin tú sa dá bhliain deiridh le riachtanais speisialta oideachais?** *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Eolas ar an tacaíocht atá ar fáil dom lasmuigh den scoil	1
Eolas a rochtain ar chineálacha ar leith de riachtanais speisialta oideachais	2
An t-am a fháil chun tabhairt faoi FGL ar riachtanas speisialta oideachais	3
Fáil ar chlúdach ionadaíochta	4
Cead a fháil d'am lasmuigh den seomra ranga	5
An FGL ar leith atá de dhíth orm a aithint	6
Tá suíomh an FGL mífheiliúnach domsa	7
Ní aon fhadhbanna agam FGL a rochtain	8
Ní dhearna mé iarracht riamh FGL a rochtain	9
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	10

Roinn C: Do ghafacht leis an tSeirbhís Tacaíochta d'Oideachas Speisialta (STOS)

20) **Ar an iomlán, cé mhéad eolais atá agat faoin tSeirbhís Tacaíochta d'Oideachas Speisialta (STOS)?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Neart eolais	5
Eolas réasúnta	4
Idir eatarthu	3
Gan mórán eolais	2
Gan eolas ar bith	1

21) **Cé mhéad eolais atá agat faoin FGL agus tacaíocht ar leith a chuireann an STOS ar fáil?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Neart eolais	Eolas réasúnta	Idir eatarthu	Gan mórán eolais	Gan eolas ar bith
Tacaíocht inscoile	5	4	3	2	1
Semineáir agus comhdhálacha	5	4	3	2	1
Cúrsaí deartha agus curtha ar fáil ag STOS	5	4	3	2	1
Cúrsaí oiliúna don oiliúnóir	5	4	3	2	1
Teastas/Dioplóma iarchéime i Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5	4	3	2	1
FGL ar líne	5	4	3	2	1
Socrúcháin /malartuithe/cuairteanna múinteora	5	4	3	2	1
Tionscnaimh um fhorbairt ghairmiúil grúpa (inscoile)	5	4	3	2	1
Tacaíocht gutháin agus r-phoist STOS	5	4	3	2	1
Acmhainní foghlama agus múinteoireacht STOS (m.sh. DVDanna, Signpost, áiseanna múinteoireachta)	5	4	3	2	1
Suíomh gréasáin STOS	5	4	3	2	1
Leabharlann ar líne	5	4	3	2	1
Iarratas ar thacaíocht maoinithe (tríd an Scéim Tacaíochta)	5	4	3	2	1

Más rud é nach bhfuil 'eolas ar bith' agat faoi cheann ar bith de na cineálacha seo FGL nó tacaíocht a chuireann an STOS ar fáil téigh chuig ceist 39, é sin nó téigh chuig ceist 22.

22) Conas ar chuala tú ar dtús faoi obair STOS? *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Ó ábhar clóite STOS	1
Suíomh gréasáin STOS	2
Teagmháil phearsanta ó STOS	3
Ó mo phríomhoide	4
Ó chomhghleacaí	5
Ó mo chumann gairme	6
Ó fhoilseachán gairmiúil	7
Ó Chigireacht na Roinne	8
Ón tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Síceolaíocht Oideachais (NEPS)	9
Ón gComhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta (NCSE)/Eagraí Riachtanas Speisialta Oideachais (SENO)	10
Ó Líonra na nIonad Oideachais	11
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	12

23) Cad iad an cineálacha tacaíochta STOS a d'úsáid tú sa <u>dá bhliain deiridh</u>? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Tacaíocht inscoile	1
Semineáir agus comhdhálacha	2
Cúrsaí deartha agus curtha ar fáil ag STOS	3
Cúrsaí oiliúna don oiliúnóir	4
Teastas/Dioplóma iarchéime i Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5
FGL ar líne	6
Socrúcháin/malartuithe/cuairteanna múinteora	7
Tionscnaimh um fhorbairt ghairmiúil grúpa (inscoile)	8
Tacaíocht gutháin agus r-phoist STOS	9
Acmhainní foghlama agus múinteoireacht STOS (m.sh. DVDanna, Signpost, áiseanna múinteoireachta)	10
Suíomh gréasáin STOS	11
Leabharlann ar líne	12
Iarratas ar thacaíocht maoinithe (tríd an Scéim Tacaíochta)	13

24) Cé chomh minic agus a thugann tú cuairt ar shuíomh gréasáin STOS? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Uair sa tseachtain ar a laghad	6
Thart ar uair sa choicís	5
Thart ar uair sa mhí	4
Thart ar uair gach cúpla mí	3
Gan ach uair amháin nó dhó	2
Ní dhéanann riamh	1

25) **Má rud é gur fhreastal tú ar ócáidí FGL STOS, cé mhéad díobh seo a d'fhreastal tú orthu sa?** *Luaigh an líon*

26) **Má rud é nár úsáid tú aon chuid den tacaíocht a chuireann STOS ar fáil sa dá bhliain deiridh, cé acu díobh seo, más ann dóibh, a chuir tú ó thacaíocht a rochtain?** *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Fuair mé tacaíocht ó STOS breis agus dhá bhliain ó shin	1
D'úsáid mé soláthróir eile do thacaíocht	2
Níor bhain an t-ábhar le mo riachtanais	3
Ní raibh an FGL nó an tacaíocht ar fáil ag suíomh feiliúnach dom	4
Ní raibh an modh soláthair oiriúnach do mo riachtanais	5
Ní raibh an t-am agam FGL/tacaíocht a rochtain	6
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	7

*Má rud é **nár úsáid** tú FGL nó tacaíocht ar bith a chuireann STOS ar fáil sa dá bhliain deiridh, téigh chuig ceist 39; é sin, nó téigh chuig ceist 27.*

Roinn D: Do thuairimí ar ghníomhaíochtaí agus cláir STOS

27) **Ar an iomlán, dar leat, cé chomh hábhartha agus atá an FGL agus tacaíocht a chuireann an STOS ar fáil duit i do ról múinteoireachta?** *Ná cuir tic ach le ceann amháin, led' thoil*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
An-ábhartha	5
Réasúnta ábhartha	4
Idir eatarthu	3
Gan a bheith an-ábhartha	2
Gan a bheith ábhartha ar chor ar bith	1

28) **Maidir le gach ceann de na cineálacha FGL agus tacaíochta STOS a <u>d'úsáid tú</u>, cé chomh héifeachtach agus a bhí siad i gcuidiú leat do chuid eolais agus scileanna a fhorbairt maidir le riachtanais scoláirí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne					
	An-éifeachtach	Éifeachtach	Idir eatarthu	Neamh éifeachtach	An-neamh éifeachtach	Ní bhaineann
Tacaíocht inscoile	5	4	3	2	1	99
Semineáir agus comhdhálacha	5	4	3	2	1	99
Cúrsaí deartha agus curtha ar fáil ag STOS	5	4	3	2	1	99
Cúrsaí oiliúna don oiliúnóir	5	4	3	2	1	99
Teastas/Dioplóma iarchéime i Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	99
FGL ar líne	5	4	3	2	1	99
Socrúcháin/malartuithe/ cuairteanna múinteora	5	4	3	2	1	99
Tionscnaimh um fhorbairt ghairmiúil grúpa (inscoile)	5	4	3	2	1	99
Tacaíocht gutháin agus r-phoist STOS	5	4	3	2	1	99
Acmhainní foghlama agus múinteoireacht STOS (m.sh. DVDanna, Signpost, áiseanna múinteoireachta)	5	4	3	2	1	99
Suíomh gréasáin STOS	5	4	3	2	1	99
Leabharlann ar líne	5	4	3	2	1	99
Iarratas ar thacaíocht maoinithe (tríd an Scéim Tacaíochta)	5	4	3	2	1	99

29) **a) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas maidir leis an FGL a chuireann an STOS ar fáil?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easaontaím go láidir	Níl a fhios agam	Ní bhaineann
Ócáidí FGL STOS							
Tá na cúrsaí FGL a chuireann STOS ar fáil feiliúnach agus inrochtana go héasca i mo cheantar áitiúil	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Tá inneachar na n-ábhar FGL STOS soiléir agus éasca le tuiscint	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Bhí na hócáidí FGL a d'fhreastal mé orthu mar bhunús le mo chleachtas oideolaíoch	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Úsáideann STOS éascaitheoirí/láithreoirí den scoth dá hócáidí FGL	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Níl socruithe ama na n-ócáidí STOS an-oiriúnach domsa	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

b) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas maidir le suíomh gréasáin STOS? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easaontaím go láidir	Níl a fhios agam	Ní bhaineann
Suíomh gréasáin STOS							
Tá suíomh gréasáin STOS inúsáidte agus éasca le nascleanúint	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Foinse luachmhar is ea suíomh gréasáin STOS d'eolas ar chineálacha ar leith de Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Ceapaim go bhfuil na hacmhainní múinteora ar shuíomh gréasáin STOS an-úsáideach i mo chleachtas múinteoireachta ó lá go lá	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Measaim gurb é suíomh gréasáin STOS an chéad áit ar a dtugaim cuairt nuair atá eolas á lorg agam ar Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais agus FGL	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Tapaím an deis le gabháil do FGL ar líne	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Acmhainn luachmhar is ea an leabharlann ar líne dom féin agus do mo chomhghleacaithe	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

c) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas maidir le tacaíocht inscoile STOS? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easontaím go láidir	Níl a fhios agam	Ní bhaineann
Tacaíocht inscoile STOS							
Seirbhís úsáideach is ea an tacaíocht gutháin agus r-phoist a chuireann STOS ar fáil nuair atá fiosrú ar leith agam	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Mar thoradh ar chuairteanna a thug STOS ar mo scoil tá méadú tagtha ar an gcumas i mo scoil plé le ceisteanna ar leith a bhaineann le Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Mhéadaigh tacaíocht inscoile ó STOS ar eolas agus scileanna mo chomhghleacaithe agus mé féin	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

Roinn E: Tionchar imeachtaí agus chláir STOS

30) **Ar an iomlán, cé chomh suntasach agus a bhí tionchar do rannpháirtíocht le STOS ar do chleachtas múinteoireachta?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
An-suntasach	5
Réasúnta suntasach	4
Idir eatarthu	3
Gan a bheith an-suntasach	2
Gan a bheith suntasach ar chor ar bith	1

31) **Cén fáth go ndeir tú é sin?** *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

32) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú gur chuidigh an tacaíocht a chuireann STOS ar fáil le feabhsú ar na gnéithe seo a leanas de do chleachtas seomra ranga? *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easaontaím go láidir	Níl a fhios agam	Ní bhaineann
Aithint go mb'fhéidir go bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais ag scoláire	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Cuidí le scoláirí dul i ngleic lena bhfoghlaim féin	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Foghlaim a phearsanú do riachtanais scoláirí ar leith	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Pleanáil chun freastal ar riachtanais aonair na scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Cur chuigí nua nó éagsúla a thabhairt isteach maidir leis an gcuraclam agus oideolaíocht	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Idirghníomh le tuismitheoirí scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97	99
Mo mhuinín a mhéadú ag múineadh scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97	99

33) An féidir leat aon samplaí ar leith a thabhairt d'athruithe atá déanta agat i do chleachtas seomra ranga mar thoradh ar do rannpháirtíocht le STOS? *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

34) a) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas faoi? I ndiaidh dom tacaíocht a fháil ó STOS...

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easaontaím go láidir	Ró-luath le rá	Ní bhaineann
Scoláirí							
Tá feabhas tagtha ar dhul chun cinn acadúil na scoláirí	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá scoláirí níos díograisí faoin bhfoghlaim	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá feabhas tagtha ar scileanna idirphearsanta agus sóisialta na scoláirí	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá feabhas tagtha ar iompraíocht scoláirí sa scoil	5	4	3	2	1	96	97

b) Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú nó a n-easaontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas faoi mhúinteoirí? I ndiaidh dom tacaíocht a fháil ó STOS …

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne						
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easaontaím go láidir	Ró-luath le rá	Ní bhaineann
Foireann múinteoireachta							
Tá feabhas tagtha ar eolas agus tuiscint ar cheisteanna maidir le riachtanais speisialta oideachais i measc na múinteoirí i mo scoil	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Díríonn an cleachtas múinteoireachta i mo scoil níos mó ar fhreastal ar réimse de riachtanais scoláirí	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá níos mó muiníne anois ag múinteoirí chun réimse de riachtanais scoláirí a mhúineadh	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá níos mó muiníne ag múinteoirí anois agus iad ag plé le tuismitheoirí scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	96	97
Tá méadú tagtha ar obair chomhoibríoch i mo scoil	5	4	3	2	1	96	97

35)   **Tabhair cur síos, led' thoil, ar na réimsí eile FGL nó tacaíochta, más ann dóibh, a d'fhéadfadh STOS a sholáthar duitse nó dod' scoil de bhreis ar a bhfuil á chur ar fáil aige cheana féin?** *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

36)   **Ar an iomlán, conas a chuirfeá síos ar do shástacht leis an tacaíocht agus leis na seirbhísí a chuireann STOS ar fáil?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
An-sásta	5
Réasúnta sásta	4
Idir eatarthu	3
Gan a bheith mórán sásta	2
Gan a bheith sásta ar chor ar bith	1

37) **Cé chomh mór agus a n-aontaíonn tú leis na ráitis seo a leanas maidir le STOS?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin i ngach líne					
	Aontaím go láidir	Aontaím	Ní aontaím ná ní easaontaím	Easaontaím	Easontaím go láidir	Níl a fhios agam
Murach STOS ní bheadh rochtain déanta agam ar réimse dá leithéid de FGL Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais	5	4	3	2	1	97
Cuireann STOS réimse níos leithne de FGL agus tacaíocht ar fáil ná na soláthróirí eile a d'úsáid mé san am atá thart	5	4	3	2	1	97
Chuir tacaíocht STOS feabhas ar mo chleachtas múinteoireachta	5	4	3	2	1	97
Ní dhearna an FGL arna thacú ag STOS difir ar bith leis an mbealach ina n-eagraítear i mo scoil	5	4	3	2	1	97
Nuair a fhaigheann múinteoir amháin FGL arna sholáthar ag STOS déantar é a chascáidiú anuas chuig múinteoirí eile i mo scoil	5	4	3	2	1	97
Tá mo scoil níos cuimsithí mar thoradh ar an tacaíocht STOS	5	4	3	2	1	97
D'athraigh múinteoirí i mo scoil an chaoi ina bpleanann siad a gcuid FGL chun leas a bhaint as an tacaíocht a chuireann STOS ar fáil	5	4	3	2	1	97
Tá torthaí mo scoláirí feabhsaithe mar thoradh ar an FGL agus an tacaíocht atá faighte agam ó STOS		4	3	2	1	97

38) **a) Dar leat, cé chomh mór agus is féidir na buntáistí a bhaineann le FGL agus tacaíocht STOS FGL a choinneáil ar bun sa fadtéarma?** *Cuir tic i mbosca amháin*

	Cuir tic i mbosca amháin
Is féidir go mór	3
Is féidir roinnt	2
Ní féidir	1

b) Cén fáth go ndeir tú sin? *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

39) An bhfuil aon réimsí ar leith maidir le scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais a mhúineadh inar mhaith leat níos mó tacaíochta a fháil? *Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann*

	Cuir tic le gach ceann a bhaineann
Tuilleadh eolais ar riachtanais speisialta oideachais ar leith	1
Níos mó deiseanna chun obair le cleachtóirí agus saineolaithe le taithí maidir le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	2
Níos mó deiseanna chun bualadh le múinteoirí lasmuigh de mo scoil chun an dea-chleachtas i riachtanais speisialta oideachais a phlé	3
Níos mó deiseanna chun tuilleadh a fhoghlaim faoi idirdhealú curaclaim	4
Tuilleadh tacaíochta maidir le fadhbanna iompraíochta	5
Tuilleadh treorach ar Phleananna Oideachais Aonair a fhorbairt	6
Rochtain níos fearr ar ábhair múinteoireachta do mhúinteoirí scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	7
Tuilleadh eolais/treorach ar mhonatóireacht ar dhul chun cinn scoláirí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	8
Tuilleadh FGL do mhúinteoirí ar bhainistiú éifeachtach do chúntóirí riachtanas speisialta	9
Tuilleadh FGL do cheannairí scoile maidir le riachtanais speisialta oideachais	10
Eile (sonraigh, led' thoil) _____	11

40) An bhfuil aon rud eile ba mhaith leat a rá maidir le STOS agus a réimse d'ócáidí FGL agus tacaíocht? *Scríobh sa spás thíos*

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Go raibh maith agat as an t-am a ghlacadh leis an suirbhé seo a dhéanamh. Led' thoil, seol ar ais sa chlúdach iniata chuig Christopher McConnell ag PwC faoin 16 Bealtaine 2011.

# *Appendix F: Illustrative drawings from focus group participants*

Drawing 1

"I have the teacher here in the centre. The child has special educational needs and the teacher is focusing on the child's visual and auditory [senses]. Getting them to speak. Getting them to learn.

Then I have the people that she would be in touch with regarding the child, like doctors or professionals, parents, psychologists etc. Then I have the teacher trying to incorporate what the child needs into the classroom, like the cushions [to sit on] and the board for writing on. [She is] using all of the people that she speaks to and all of the information that she has gathered and bringing that into the classroom for the child." (Focus group participant).

Drawing 2

"This is the learning support/ resource teacher [at the top of the picture] and those are the other classrooms. I go into the classrooms and we do team teaching and I also withdraw so the kids are coming out [of class] as well. The arrows [show that I am] constantly interacting with all three classrooms throughout the day and then they will bring everything home with them (hopefully)." (Focus group participant).
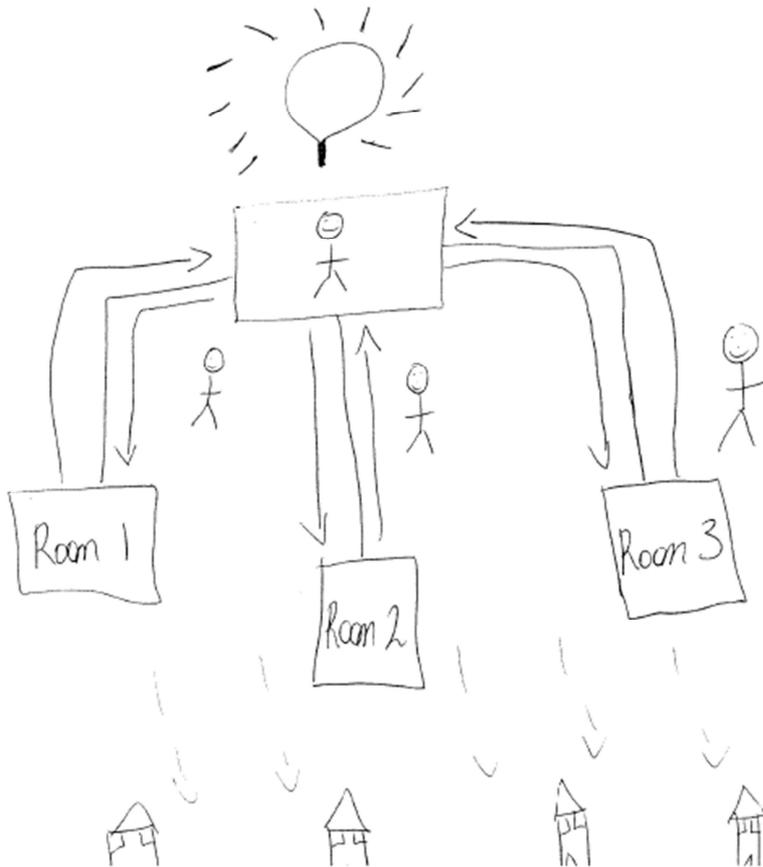
Drawing 3

"The speech bubble is representing the children we speak up for. I was a class teacher myself and I found that sometimes I would complain about the child and what they couldn't do. Now I see it from the child's point of view and where I am trying to explain their difficulty to the teacher, trying to be the voice of the child.

This is the school parent link. We try to keep the parents involved and be there to talk to them if they need a hand.

The computer is for research. I have to make sure that I know what I am doing and research if I need to.

The PE equipment is for the dyspraxia kids, the skipping rope and the balance beam.

The speech bubble and reading [book] are for some of the kids with speech and language [needs]." (Focus group participant).
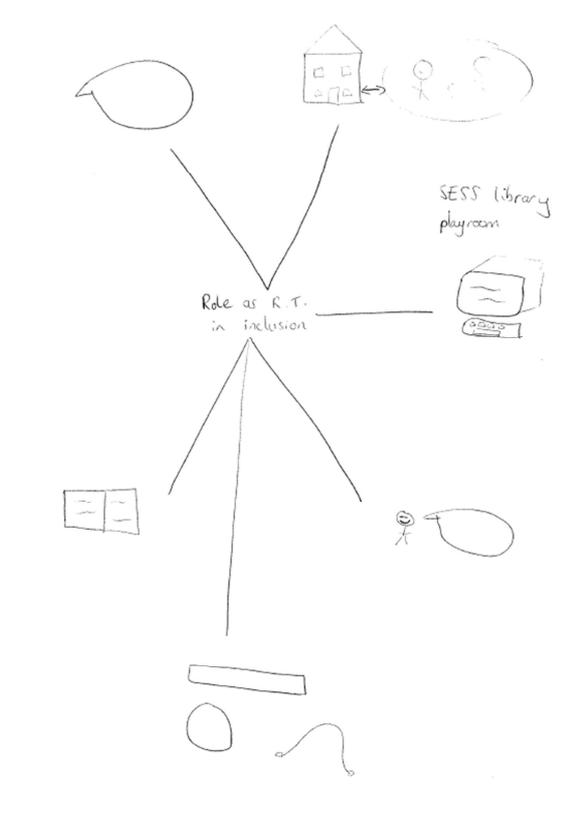
Drawing 4

"The book represents all resources. Resource teachers need to be very specialised. There is an awful lot of reading involved and there is a lot of up-skilling involved in resource teaching to stay on top of the game and stay as focused as possible.

Here I have a chain link, because I often feel that the resource teacher is a link between the parents and the class teachers and the other professionals outside of the school.

Here I have a tick because I think, in a small group we might get to see the child's strengths more than they are seen in the classroom. I think often support teachers can see what the child can do rather than what they can't.

Here I have an inclusive playground because at the moment we have children with social skills [difficulties] who find the playground very difficult." (Focus group participant).
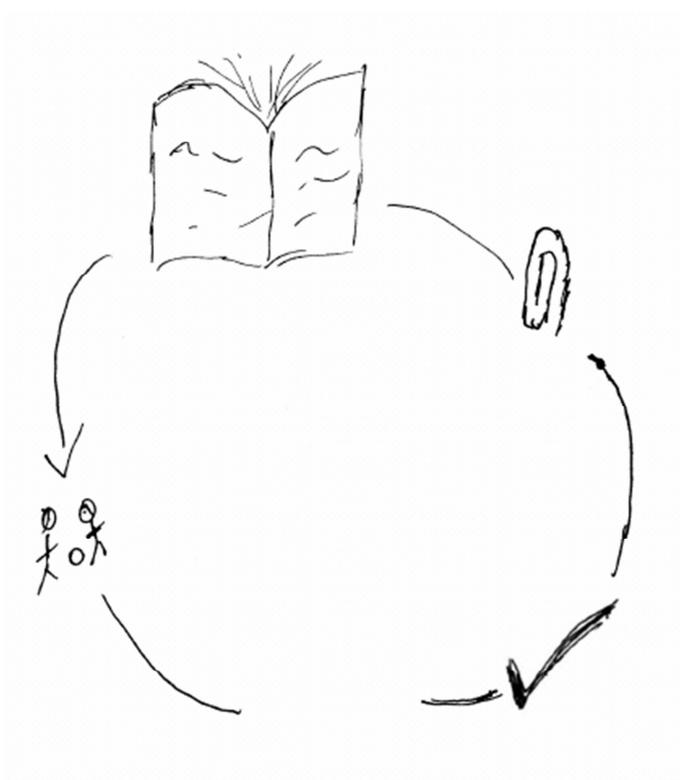
Drawing 5

"The chain is the main part of this [picture]. I chose the chain because it symbolises the role of the resource teacher and how the resource teacher often makes links between home… the class teacher, the outside agencies. You are also a kind of resource yourself. Your knowledge is used by the other teachers. You are bringing that [knowledge] and the strength that you get from linking in with all of the outside agencies and home.

*Then I put the smiley sun because if that all works it does make the child's education a more pleasant experience and it makes it easier for them. This is a road. Hopefully if everything else [in the chain] works, it is a smooth road, without any bumps. It just makes their school life that much smoother." (*Focus group participant)
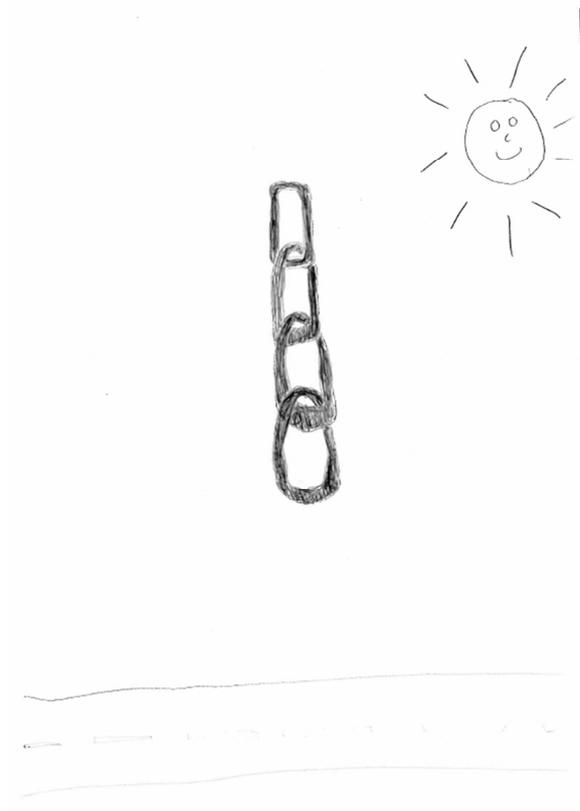
Drawing 6

"Here I have the child with their family and the outside agencies. It is not your job to just deal with the child. Often you find yourself consoling mothers or fathers. Often they can be in denial when there is a difficulty. It's not just about dealing with the child, but also their family and home life. I think it is important that children with learning difficulties get every opportunity to explore different areas, like art and drama. They need a chance to succeed and achieve success. That is why I have a child on top of the mountain.

Also as a resource teacher I think it is very important to make sure that the child is relieved of anxiety and the frustrations that they often feel in school so that is why I have the sun." (Focus group participant)

Appendix G: Special education programmes in Ireland provided by other institutions

A breadth of special education programmes are provided in Ireland by various educational institutions and Education Centres which are separate from the provision by SESS.

Institution	Type of institution	Provision (duration)	Content	Eligible to apply
University College Dublin (UCD)	University	Master of Education in Special Educational Needs (2 years part time)	Special educational needs discourse and legislation; modes of provision; education practices; models of support and management for persons with special educational needs	Teachers and other professionals involved in the education and care of persons with special educational needs and impairments
University of Dublin, Trinity College	University	Masters in Education – Special educational needs specialism (1 year full-time, 2 years part-time, or 3 years part-time)	Introduction to special education for the classroom teacher; special educational needs and the curriculum; including students with disabilities into the ordinary classroom; special education support for the ordinary school	Applicants expected to have a good honours degree and at least 2 years experience in the field of education
		Masters in Education – Co-operative Learning Specialism (1 year full-time, 2 years part-time, or 3 years part-time)	Introduction to co-operative learning (CL); implementation of CL in classroom; psychology of child and adolescent development; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the CL classroom	Teachers with a good honours degree, 2 years experience in education, and currently working in primary and post-primary education
St Angela's College of Education, Sligo (part of NUIG)	College of Education	Introductory Course in Special Educational Needs (10 hours)	Overview of special educational needs/inclusion; assessment; planning; classroom strategies	Anyone can apply
		Master of Arts in Special Educational Needs (Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), 1 year part-time)	Advanced research in an area of ASD	Candidates require a minimum H2.2 in postgraduate diploma in special educational needs (ASD)
		Master of Arts in Special Educational Needs (1 year part-time)	Advanced research in an area of special educational needs	Candidates require a minimum H2.2 in postgraduate diploma in special educational needs
		Master of Arts in Learning Support (1 year part-time)	Advanced research in an area of learning support	Graduates require a minimum H2.2 in a relevant learning support degree

Institution	Type of institution	Provision (duration)	Content	Eligible to apply
Froebel College of Education	College of Education	Masters Degree in Special and Inclusive Education (2 years part-time)	Analysis and synthesis of previous experience; portfolio creation; research methodology related to special education; international perspectives; planning in special education provision; inclusive education; research	Applicants have to be a qualified teacher and must have either a certificate or diploma in special education or learning support
		Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Special Education (1 year part-time)	Introduction to special education issues; literacy and mathematical disabilities; assessment; managing behaviour; teaching students with autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), emotional and behavioural disorders, and the psychology of the exceptional child; supervised teaching practice	Resource teachers and special class teachers in primary and special schools
Hibernia College	College of Education	Drama and inclusion of students with special educational needs (online, 20 hours)	Approaches and conventions; planning and integration; games for students with special educational needs; role play and its use in teaching social skills; strategies to increase participation in drama lessons	Any teacher
		Creating a culture of support for special educational needs (online, 20 hours)	Principles of special education; creating a welcoming school; understanding behaviour difficulties; developing collaboration in school; partnership with parents and families	Any teacher
Cavan Education Centre	Education Centre	Working with ADHD (2 hours)	Mistakes made and lessons learnt	Primary school teachers
Drumcondra Education Centre	Education Centre	Practical Strategies for working with students with behavioural and learning difficulties (2 hours)	Practical ideas for working with students with behavioural, emotional and learning difficulties in mainstream and learning support environments	Primary school teachers
		Practical Strategies for dealing with dyslexia in students in education environments (2 hours)	Practical ideas for working with primary school students with dyslexia	Primary school teachers
Navan Education Centre	Education Centre	'Easing the Transition from Home to School' A transition programme for students with ASD (2 hours)	Outline of the cross-border parent community and schools partnership programme	Infant teachers, learning support/resource teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
		Practical Strategies for Dealing with Behavioural & Learning Difficulties (2.5 hours)	Practical issues for working with students with behavioural, emotional and learning difficulties in mainstream and learning support environments	Parents

Institution	Type of institution	Provision (duration)	Content	Eligible to apply
		Working with Children with Emotional Difficulties in a School Setting (2 hours)	How students with emotional problems present in the classroom and how best to support these students	All teachers, resource teachers, support teachers and SNAs
Dublin West Education Centre	Education Centre	Course for Newly Appointed Learning Support Teachers (2 hours)	Maths; English; assessment; team teaching; individual learning profile and learning programmes	Learning support teachers
Kilkenny Education Centre	Education Centre	Down Syndrome and Education for Teachers and SNAs (2 hours)	No information	Teachers and SNAs
Wexford Education Centre	Education Centre	Teaching CSPE to Students in need of Learning Support (2.5 hours)	Differentiating the work; teaching reading; the use of visuals; appropriate active learning methods; graphic organisers	All teachers of civic, social and political education
		Learning Support Teachers – Exploring resources for classroom use – both high and low tech (2.5 hours)	Exploration of software and strategies that can be used to support students with learning difficulties	Learning support teachers
Galway Education Centre	Education Centre	Dyslexia Modules 1 & 2 (10 hours split over 4 evenings)	What is dyslexia; characteristic difficulties; screening for dyslexia; how to help reading; teaching sight words; phonic patterns; reading for meaning; paired reading	Primary and second level teachers
		Working with gifted and talented students (2 hours)	Insights into the background, needs and challenges encountered by gifted and talented students	Teachers and parents
Laois Education Centre	Education Centre	Down Syndrome and Education (2 hours)	Learning profile of students with Down syndrome; implications of Down syndrome for education; how teachers can best address the needs of these students; related issues	Teachers and SNAs
		Supporting Children Attending Learning Support in the Mainstream Classroom (4 hours split over 2 sessions)	Differentiation and team teaching; practical activities for literacy and numeracy	Teachers
Carrick on Shannon Education Centre	Education Centre	Down Syndrome – Evening Workshop (2.5 hours)	Implications of Down syndrome for education; how best to support students with Down syndrome; related issues	Teachers
		Literacy & Numeracy for Children with special educational needs (5 hours)	Basic maths and literacy; assessment of writing; coping with ASD	Teachers

Institution	Type of institution	Provision (duration)	Content	Eligible to apply
		Visual Teaching Methods and Autism Spectrum Disorders (2 hours)	Understanding the reasons for using visual teaching methods; how to adapt these to the classroom environment	Mainstream and ASD specific unit teachers, learning support, resource teachers, and teachers in special schools
Sligo Education Centre	Education Centre	Seminar for Gifted Children (1.5 hours)	Needs of high ability students; strategies to help them in school and beyond	Teacher and parents
		Conference on Dyspraxia (1 day)	Identification and assessment; case studies; report writing; support processes; relevant ICT	No information
		Workshops for SNAs	Dyslexia; ADHD; dyspraxia; numeracy	SNAs
Middletown Centre for Autism	Specialist	An extensive range of CPD programmes (1 day)	Sensory processing and ASD; structured teaching practice; developing friendship skills for students with ASD in post-primary schools; management of challenging behaviour in school; promoting emotional wellbeing in students with autism	Teachers and parents

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