

# Tom reappointed to NCSE

**I**NTO Assistant General Secretary Tom O'Sullivan has been reappointed to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) by Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe, TD, for the 2010-2012 term of office.

The NCSE was established under the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. In appointing the new members, the Minister paid tribute to the outgoing members of the Council for their significant contribution to special educational needs provision in Ireland over the last three years.

## Council Members

**Sydney Blain** was the Chairperson of the outgoing Council and is being re-appointed as Chairperson of the Council for 2010-2012. He recently retired as Principal of the Church of Ireland College of Education.

**Dr Anne Lodge** has held the posi-

tion of Senior Lecturer in the Education Department of NUI Maynooth. She was course leader for the Masters in Education and Ph.D/M.A. programmes. She is currently the Principal of the Church of Ireland College of Education.

**Joan Russell** is currently Education Officer for Co Cork VEC. She was previously Principal of a Vocational School. She has co-authored *Supporting the ICT/Special Education Needs Partnership in Post-Primary Schools/Colleges*. She also piloted a team-teaching project to ensure inclusion and effective teaching and learning for students with special education needs in 2007/08.

**Dr Seamus Hegarty** (existing member) is Chair of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) which is a grouping of ministries of education, universities and research institutions from 62 countries across the world, responsible for the conduct of major international comparisons of student achievement.

**Julie O'Leary** is a graduate of UCC and currently a postgraduate student in NUI Galway. She is an advocate for young people with disabilities.

**Tom O'Sullivan** (existing Council Member) is the Assistant General Secretary of the INTO. He has responsibility for special education and social inclusion policy with the INTO. He is a former primary school Principal of St Senan's Boys NS in inner city Limerick.

**Sr Mairead Ní Ghallchobhair** (existing Council Member) is the retired Principal of Benincasa Special School, Blackrock, Co Dublin in 2006.

**Pat Kinsella** is currently the Principal of Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Co Cork.

**Don Mahon** (existing member) is an Assistant Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and Science. He works within the policy sub-division of the Inspectorate. Among his responsibilities are the management of inspection work in special schools and the provi-



sion of advice to administrative sections of the DES in relation to special education matters.

**Teresa Griffin** (existing member) is Principal Officer at the Department of Education and Science with responsibility for Special Education policy.

**Marie Kennedy** is Principal Officer at the Office of the Minister for Disability and Mental Health.

The Minister will appoint two other members of the Council early in 2010. These members will be appointed from nominees of the National Disability Authority (NDA).

## Appeals on SENO decisions

**T**he new procedure for appealing SENO decisions in relation to the allocation of teaching hours and special needs assistants to schools will come into effect from the beginning of February. The process is currently being piloted in a small number of schools before being promulgated nationally from the beginning of February. The new process is underpinned by the number of key principles outlining how decisions are currently arrived at. It also confirms that all appeals should be processed through the school and that the school principal or chairperson of the board, on behalf of the school, may appeal a SENO decision.

An appeal of a decision can be sought on grounds that the SENO:

1. misinterpreted or ignored the Department of Education and Science

2. that the SENO failed to take due account of the evidence of educational and/or care needs of the child or the resourcing available within the school when applying the DES policy; or
3. a combination of 1 and 2 above.

The process lays out a clear timescale for the processing of any appeal and for a decision to be issued to the school.

On receipt of the appeal decision a school board of management may request an independent examination of the appeal process where it feels that that process was:

1. inadequate or inappropriate in addressing the concerns raised or that the rationale for the decision had not been adequately communicated; or
2. that the decision represented an

irrational interpretation of the facts and application of the policy criteria. This request will be passed to an Appeals Advisory Committee consisting of an independent chairperson, a representative of school management bodies and a parent representative.

The INTO has been pressing for some time for an appeals process on SENO decisions and welcomes the fact that this has now been brought to fruition.

In addition to the appeals process the NCSE will also be publishing a *Code of Professional Practice for SENOs* and the complaint procedure about the service provided by the NCSE. All these documents will be placed on the INTO website and the NCSE website as soon as the initial pilot phase is completed.



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council for Special Education

## First NCSE research seminar

*Wide range of topics discussed*

**T**he NCSE hosted its first research seminar in the Croke Park Conference Centre on Friday, 11 December 2009. An audience comprising representatives of the education partners, disability groups, and professionals working in the special education area, were presented with a wide ranging programme.

### Education of deaf and hard of hearing children

The first presentation to the research seminar was an international review of the evidence of best practice models and outcomes in the education of deaf and hard of hearing children. This was presented by Dr Marc Marschark from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in the USA.

The review was undertaken in order to provide an evidence base to inform policy advice on the education of deaf and hard of hearing children. The report provides a detailed review of what we know and what we do not know, describing the existing research with regard to various educational practices and their outcomes. The presentation focused on four major issues identified as providing the foundations for educating deaf and hard of hearing children: early identification and intervention, language (including cochlear implants), educational models, and teaching/ learning.

The presentation also focused on key recommendations made to the NCSE based on existing research and the implications of those recommendations for the current and future status of educational practice in Ireland.

### Education of persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Dr Sarah Parsons and Dr Karen Guldberg from the University of Birmingham presented an international review of the



Jean Ware, Joe Travers, Therese Daly and Anne Marie Farrell from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, with Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector and member of the NCSE Research Committee.

literature of evidence of best practice provision in the education of persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

The literature review had two main evidence strands, empirical and expert. The empirical strand involved systematic searching of electronic databases featuring peer reviewed empirical studies; from 499 articles identified, 100 articles were retained for review. The expert strand included key selected reports or policy guidelines regarding best practice for children and adults on the Autistic Spectrum, from the UK and Ireland only.

Findings highlighted the importance of maintaining a range of educational provision to cater appropriately for a wide diversity of need; one type of approach or intervention is unlikely to be effective for all. Behaviourally based intervention approaches from North America, especially for children under five years, dominated the empirical evidence. The corollary of this was significant gaps in the evidence base, especially with regard to educational provision more widely (as

distinct from a specific type of intervention or learning approach); provision for, and experiences of, older children and adults; qualitative exploration of educational contexts and young peoples' views; Irish-specific evidence, objective, independent evaluation of interventions and effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration.

There is a need for greater collaboration between researchers and practitioners to establish what 'works best' for children and young people on the autism spectrum in real world classrooms and education generally.

### Education of blind and visually impaired children

The research seminar also heard a presentation from a team of researchers at the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham assisted by Jean Ware and Ann Marie Farrell from St Patrick's College, Dublin.

The topics focused on in their international review of the literature of evidence of best practice models and outcomes

and the education of blind and visually impaired children included:

#### Access to the mainstream curriculum

1. Assessment of learning needs.
2. Pedagogy and teaching strategies to access the curriculum.
3. Access to public examinations.
4. Print literacy.
5. Braille literacy.

#### Access to the additional curriculum

6. Mobility and independence.
7. Social and emotional inclusion.
8. ICT.
9. Low vision training.

The report also presents an analysis of the literature for each of the topics and has an associated evidence based recommendation. The final section of the report considers the review in the Irish educational context.

### The role of special schools and classes

A team of researchers from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra,



presented the long awaited report on the current and future role of special schools and special classes in Ireland.

This study has been conducted in two phases, the second of which was commissioned by the NCSE, and has five key elements:

1. Questionnaire survey of special schools and mainstream schools, primary and post primary, with special classes.
2. Literature review of international practice in special education focused on the roles of special schools and special classes.
3. Focus group interviews involving pupils, parents, teachers, principals, special needs assistants).
4. Case studies in three schools.
5. Submissions from relevant organisation, and the public at large addressing the key research questions.

Both special schools and special classes were regarded by the study participants as an important part of the continuum of provision for pupils with special needs. Two clear roles were envisaged for special schools into the future:

- 1 Providing for those pupils with the most complex needs.
- 1 Supporting and collaborating with mainstream schools.

Special classes were perceived to have advantages in:

- 1 Facilitating inclusion within the mainstream class.
- 1 Providing a 'safe haven' for some pupils.
- 1 A favourable pupil:teacher ratio.
- 1 Enabling pupils to remain in their local area.
- 1 Flexibility in the organisation of teaching and curriculum provision.

Issues which emerged for fulfilling these roles:

- 1 Expertise and resources.
  - Only a quarter to a third of teachers working with pupils



NCSE Research Committee members Tom O'Sullivan, Jennifer Doran (Head of Research and Development), Séamus Hegarty and Patricia Noonan-Walsh.

with special educational needs have undertaken specialist training at diploma level or higher.

- Not all special schools currently have the resources and/or the expertise to support mainstream schools.
  - Insufficient and inconsistent multidisciplinary support.
  - Informality and unresourced nature of dual placement arrangements.
- 1 Lack of continuity between special class provision in

primary and post primary schools.

15 key recommendations were made in the report including the continued provision of a range of special school provision, outreach and inreach support for mainstream schools, the availability of resources and continuous professional development for staff, continued support for special class provision in appropriate circumstances, the facilitation of dual placement arrangements and the need for

further research to be conducted on a range of issues related to special schools and special classes.

**Abstracts from the reports and copies of the presentations are available on the NCSE website at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie) under the 'Research' tab. The full reports will also be available on the website in due course. The NCSE will be considering the reports as part of the policy advice process for the Minister for Education & Science.**



Robert Jones, Principal, St Joseph's Special School, Séan O'Murchú (DES Inspector), Dr Marc Marshark and Liam O'Dwyer (CEO of the Catholic Institute for Deaf People)

# INTO meets DES on Disadvantage

**A**n INTO delegation met with officials from the DES on 18 February to discuss a range of issues relating to educational disadvantage. The first item for discussion was the current provision for schools involved in the DEIS scheme. DES officials confirmed that, while a Budget decision had been made last year to withdraw funding and supports from schools not in the DEIS scheme, there had been no cuts in the DEIS related direct spend to the schools in the urban and rural elements of DEIS. The Educational Research Centre is currently reviewing the outcome of standardised tests conducted in a random sample of DEIS schools and the DES Inspectorate will also be conducting a thematic review

on a number of DEIS schools. DES officials confirmed that a review of the DEIS scheme has already commenced and that it would continue through 2010. INTO representatives raised the importance of early childhood education, support for pupils with significant social and emotional needs, the home school community liaison scheme and the school completion programme in any follow on programme. The INTO also stressed the importance of ongoing support for principals who are involved in DEIS schools. DES officials indicated that as part of the review a technical working group was currently looking at the criteria to be used in any identification process for a follow on scheme to tackle

educational disadvantage and that the views of education partners will be sought.

Other issues discussed under the general issue of educational disadvantage included the current status and provision for schools involved in the Limerick re-generation project, and the potential impact of the threatened withdrawal of supply panels from schools in the DEIS initiative.

The meeting then went on to discuss the current status of the Traveller Education Strategy. DES officials confirmed that a new Consultative Forum had been established which was discussing a number of the key strategies and recommendations in the original Traveller Education Strategy Report. The

meeting discussed issues including attendance and retention levels of Traveller children in schools, the value of the Visiting Teacher for Traveller Service, pre-school provision for Travellers and transition between first and second level for Traveller pupils. The INTO delegation also raised the issue of schools that had seen significant increases in enrolment of Traveller pupils but had not had additional teaching resources appointed. The DES indicated that this matter was being considered in the context of the review of the General Allocation Model.

In conclusion, both sides agreed to maintain contact in relation to further developments.

## Wide Special Education agenda discussed

**I**NTO representatives and DES officials held a wide ranging discussion in mid February on current special education issues. The INTO delegation first raised the issue of the review of the General Allocation Model. While acknowledging that the priority staffing issue in primary schools was the maintenance and possible improvement of the current staffing schedule, INTO representatives emphasised the importance of progressing the GAM review, particularly in the context of schools that had increased enrolment in recent years but had not achieved developing schools status. DES officials confirmed that the matter was being progressed within the DES but would have to be dealt with in the context of budgetary and staffing priorities.

The meeting discussed at length the current situation in relation to special schools and special classes and the recent report which had been presented at the first NCSE research seminar. INTO representatives raised a number of concerns which had been expressed by members in the special school and special class sector about SNA staffing reviews and also the categorisation of children in some schools. The INTO emphasised the necessity for ensuring a co-ordinated and strategic look at the role of special schools. The INTO also acknowledged the confirmation from the DES that current teaching levels will be

maintained in the present school year. Both sides agreed that it was important that policy advice would be developed as early as possible by the NCSE on the future of role of special schools and special classes.

The meeting went on to discuss the current status of the EPSN Act. While acknowledging the commitment in the new programme for Government to the implementation of the EPSN Act, the INTO expressed concern about the time scale for implementation and the level of resources that were needed to ensure that both the EPSN Act and the Disability Act were implemented in a co-ordinated and planned fashion. DES officials confirmed a number of developments, including the recruitment of additional educational psychologists and therapists. The DES also confirmed that, while a lot of planning had been done, further progress would be dependent on Budgetary provision. The DES confirmed that the Value for Money and Policy Review Audit of the SNA scheme which had been conducted in 60 primary, 20 special and 20 post primary schools was almost complete and it was expected that the final report would be published in the second quarter of the year. INTO representatives again emphasised the importance of ensuring that appropriate and adequate teaching and SNA resources were available for children with special education needs in order to ensure the

success of an inclusive education model.

The meeting also discussed the current status of the 13 stand-alone autism centres. The Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) pilot scheme was set up in the absence of the current national network of autism specific special classes. Broad agreement has been reached on the core conditions to enable these centres to be recognised as special schools for children with autism and applications have been received for special school recognition from the centres. The DES confirmed that in excess of 380 autism specific classes have now been approved at primary and post primary level. In addition, there are approximately 3,300 children with autism who are receiving additional teaching and/or special needs assistant support in mainstream schools.

The last item on the agenda was a discussion on support for pupils with challenging behaviour.

INTO representatives stated that this issue continued to be of significant concern for members in schools. The DES made reference to recently developed guidelines by NEPS for classroom management and the INTO indicated that it would be making a response to the NEPs guidelines during the course of the coming week.

It was agreed to hold further discussions later in the year on the on-going issues.



## Review of SNA allocations

In February 2009 the NCSE was requested to review the SNA allocation in all schools with a view to ensuring that the criteria set out in the relevant DES circulars on SNAs were being properly adhered to. The report from the NCSE on the review of SNA allocations was presented to the Minister for Education and Science at the end of the March 2010.

The report outlines that of 2,913 schools over approximately 3,150 schools in the

primary, post primary and special schools sectors with SNA allocations, the net reduction in the number of SNAs was 358. Approximately 900 schools do not currently have an allocation of an SNA.

At primary level 2,283 schools were reviewed. Prior to the review there was 6,096 SNAs in the schools and following the review there were 5,801, a net reduction of 295. While 723 SNAs were freed up because of students leaving and 534 were

freed up because of diminishing care needs, a total of 962 SNAs were allocated to new students. In the special schools sector a total of 57 special schools were included in the review of the report. Prior to the review these schools had a total of 1,018 SNAs and following the review, a total of 1,006 a net reduction of 12 SNAs.

The NCSE review carried out over the last year encompassed a look at both current SNA resources in schools together

with the processing of applications for additional SNA resources during the course of the current school year. A separate value for money and policy analysis review is being conducted by the DES on the SNA scheme. A total of 60 primary, 20 post primary and 20 special schools were reviewed under this process. It is expected that the final report from the value for money and policy analysis will be published in the near future.

## Education of deaf children

A major conference on the future education of deaf and hard of hearing children in the Republic of Ireland was held on 4 March in the Croke Park Conference Centre in Dublin. The conference was organised by the education partnership group which comprises deafhear.ie, the Irish Deaf Society, the Centre for Deaf Studies in TCD and the Catholic Institute for Deaf People.

The conference was attended by more than 300 delegates from a wide variety of organisations including, teachers, advocacy groups, health professionals and state agencies and departments. The INTO was represented by Tom O'Sullivan,

Assistant General Secretary.

The conference heard a number of presentations including from Teresa Griffin, Principal Officer, Special Education Section, DES; Pat MacSitríc, Assistant Chief Inspector and Manager of the Visiting Teachers Services; Liam O'Dwyer, CEO, Catholic Institute for Deaf People and Professor Mark Marschark, Centre of Education Partnership.

Presentations were also made by Marie Maddan, a parent of a child who is deaf and Sean Herlihy, who is a past pupil of mainstream and deaf schools and is currently a teacher at St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys.

A policy paper on a partnership approach

to the delivery of education for deaf and hard of hearing children was presented by Dr John Bosco Conama from the Irish Deaf Society at Trinity College, Dublin. In his presentation Dr Conama outlined the background to the development of policy document and the context both in a Irish legislative and international convention context of the development of the policy. Issues covered by the paper include structural supports for pupils who are deaf and hard of hearing, education service provision in the development of the deaf education centre. A copy of the policy paper is available from the CIDP website at [www.cidp.ie](http://www.cidp.ie).

## Future of special schools

The long awaited report on the review of special schools and special classes commissioned by the NCSE and carried out by St Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, is due to be published on the NCSE website shortly.

The INTO recently met with principals of special schools to discuss a range of issues of concern including staffing levels, categorisation and the changing demands on special schools. The INTO has also raised these issues directly with officials in both the DES and the NCSE in recent weeks.

The INTO will be consulting with members in special schools during the course of the coming term about the development of a policy framework for the future of the special school sector. The INTO has already written to support groups of principals of special schools about this matter and further updates will be carried in the next *InTouch*.

## Lesson plans on diversity



**Signposts: Lessons for Living** was launched at Congress. Written by Anita Dermody, (right), Fionnuala Ward, (left) and Elisha Kelly, these lessons on diversity are aimed at pupils from Junior Infants to Second class and address issues related to social justice, world religions, the environment and self-awareness. The book was officially launched by former INTO President, Sally Sheils, (centre). To order a copy or for further information, please see [www.signposts.ie](http://www.signposts.ie)

# INTO group meets on special schools

**A**t its meeting in May the CEC decided to invite representatives from the support groups for principals of special schools to a meeting in INTO Head Office to discuss the development of a policy framework on the future of the special school sector.

Amongst the issues discussed at the meeting were:

- current issues affecting special schools;
- staffing levels of both teachers and SNAs;
- resources and funding;
- identification and assessment of pupils with SEN;

- designation and location of special schools; and
- co-operation between health and education.

A further meeting is planned for mid-June and the INTO has also written to the Irish Association of Teachers in

Special Education to arrange a meeting prior to the summer break to discuss the policy framework.



Theresa McMahon, Helen Forde, Monica Shannon, Kathryn O'Connor, Anne McGrath and Mary Carrig at the meeting in INTO Head Office.

## NCSE considers wide agenda

**T**he National Council for Special Education recently held a full day meeting to consider a wide ranging agenda on special educational needs. Amongst the items discussed were a framework for policy development in relation to the future of special schools and special classes, a review of the ongoing

research programme approved by NCSE, and planning for an NCSE research seminar later in 2010. The Council also heard a report from the Chief Executive Officer, Pat Curtin, about ongoing activities and plans for the future, as well as updates on the processing of applications for pupils with special education needs.

The Council also approved a draft of the NCSE Annual Report for 2009, which will be published on the NCSE website in due course.

Amongst the significant items within the report is that SENOs processed applications in respect of more than 11,000 pupils during the course of 2009.

## Transitional arrangements for special schools

**T**he INTO had a number of discussions in recent times with representatives of the DES and also the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education about staffing allocations in special schools for the coming school year. A meeting was held in the DES at the beginning of May at which the INTO, NABMSE, CPSMA, NPC, NCSE and DES officials discussed the situation and also the broader issue of a framework for the future of special schools.

At the meeting it was confirmed that transitional arrangements would be put in

place for the coming school year whereby, as a general rule, special schools would hold their teacher allocations pending the development of policy advice from the NCSE and the finalisation of policy by the DES. The retention of teachers will be subject to a provision whereby certain schools that have an excess of teachers warranted by the strict application of DES policy would not replace a teacher who retired this year, and that a small number of schools which had a significant excess of teachers would be the subject of further discussion.

## Special Olympics kicks off in Limerick

**1,900** Special Olympics athletes from the 4 corners of Ireland will travel to Limerick in June to participate in the 4-day residential games, in 13 sports competitions. The games start with an opening ceremony in Thomond Park on 9 June.

The Law Enforcement Torch Run is one of the most high profile events organised by Special Olympics Ireland around Games time. Generally the run takes place over four days with hundreds of police officers from all over the country taking part, carrying the Special Olympics Torch – Flame of Hope – as it travels throughout Ireland.

For the 2010 Special Olympics Ireland Games the Law Enforcement Torch Run will take place from June 2 to 9. The Torch Run will have 4 routes running simultaneously from June 2-4. The Law Enforcement Torch Run will commence the journey to Limerick from the Odyssey Arena in Belfast, where the 2006 Special Olympics Ireland Games were held. The Torch will visit local primary schools, residential special needs schools and local Special Olympics Clubs across the country.

For more information see [www.specialolympics.ie/](http://www.specialolympics.ie/)



# (Teaching matters)

Articles and opinions on primary teaching, with tips and ideas for the classroom

## Dealing with challenging behaviour

### New NEPS guidelines for teachers

Meeting the academic and social needs of pupils who exhibit behavioural, emotional and social difficulties can be particularly challenging for teachers.

It is estimated that up to one in five pupils may experience emotional and or behavioural difficulties at some stage during their primary and post primary years, however many teachers express a lack of knowledge and confidence about how to respond to the needs of such pupils.

In response to a growing demand for advice and support in relation to pupils experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties NEPS has just published *Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties – A Continuum of Support-Guidelines for Teachers*.

This publication is designed to complement the previously published *Special Educational Needs –*

*A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers and Resource Pack* (2007).

These new guidelines are underpinned by the same guiding principles namely, that needs occur along a continuum and schools need to be able to provide a flexible range of supports in proportion to the needs of the pupil.

The emphasis is on careful identification of needs to inform planned interventions which are systematically evaluated.

To this end a graduated problem solving process is outlined comprised of three distinct school based processes and which are underpinned by whole school and classroom approaches to promote the academic, social and emotional competence of all pupils.

**1** In the introduction a brief overview of a range of theoretical perspectives on social and emotional development are presented. These theoretical perspectives assign different causal models to the development of difficulties which are then addressed through related intervention processes. The perspectives presented range from those which focus on self-individual factors to those which focus on self-others and self-environment factors.

NEPS perspective, which is informed by best practice in the fields of educational psychology and mental health, is one which emphasises the importance of considering behaviour as being determined by interrelated and interdependent biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors.

This perspective respects the uniqueness of the

individual pupil but acknowledges the importance of social and environmental factors in the development and maintenance of difficulties.

This perspective also highlights the potential of the class teacher to influence the outcomes for pupils through focusing on those factors over which they

«A smaller group of pupils need a more individualised response»



have control e.g. classroom management, learning environment, promotion of social and emotional competence and their own beliefs, behaviour and response to pupil behaviour.

2 There is a substantial body of evidence indicating that schools can and do make a difference when it comes to behaviour. Section two of the guidelines outlines the importance of a whole school approach to promoting social and emotional competence and positive behaviour. This section is designed to stimulate staff reflection and review of practices under a number of themes in order to create an effective system of care and support for pupils, teachers and parents.

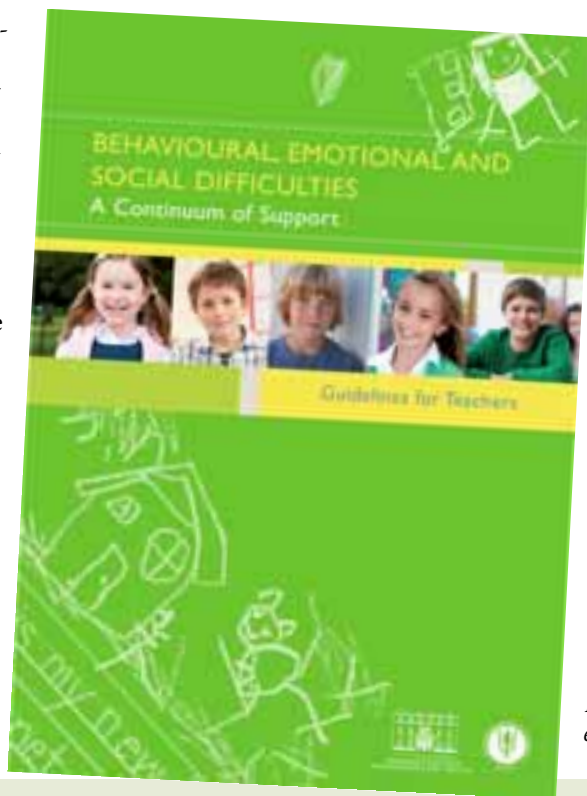
3 Section 3 of the guidelines provides a detailed description of classroom supports and structures which research has indicated are essential elements in preventing and minimising disruptive behaviours and promoting social and emotional competence.

Teachers spent a lot of time and energy at the beginning and throughout the school year in planning the effective delivery of the curriculum.

Research has shown that promotion of social and emotional competence is also linked to academic success and the prevention and reduction of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Therefore it is important that teachers consider the social and learning environment they create in the classroom. This section covers key areas for consideration including the importance of fostering positive relationships, classroom organisation, a systematic approach to responding to

behaviour and social and emotional teaching strategies. A teacher checklist for whole class structures and supports is provided in the appendices to facilitate reflection and

There is a substantial body of evidence indicating that schools can and do make a difference when it comes to behaviour



planning.

Supportive school and classroom practices should address the needs of all students and most pupils whose difficulties are relatively mild or transient. A smaller group of pupils however will need a more individualised response.

4 Section four is comprised of four detailed case studies which provide examples of the types of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties pupils may exhibit and the assessment and intervention process at classroom support, school support and school support plus levels. In each case study there are examples of checklists, assessment tools and intervention strategies and samples of individual planning and review records. All of the assessment tools and interventions referred to are contained in the appendices which comprise the resource section of this publication.

There are three appendices which provide a comprehensive though not exhaustive set of photocopiable resource materials to assist schools and teachers in responding to pupils at all levels of need.

Appendix 1 contains checklists, planning and review templates.

Appendix 2 contains assessment resources such as behaviour and social skills checklists, guidelines on observation and behaviour recording and interview schedules for working with individual pupils.

Appendix 3 includes a range of classroom intervention resources and individual intervention resources such as setting up an individualised behaviour chart and reward system.

NEPS, Frederick Court, 24/27 North Frederick Street, Dublin 1. Tel: 01 8892700, email: [neps@neps.gov.ie](mailto:neps@neps.gov.ie)

## ONGOING SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE

NEPS psychologists will be introducing these guidelines to schools over the coming term and can offer support to schools in relation to planning and implementing a continuum of support for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. NEPS psychologists normally provide indirect support for pupils at classroom and school support levels through whole staff development, group and individual consultation with teachers and advice on setting up and running small group initiatives such as social skills groups. Psychologists may also be directly involved in

the assessment, intervention planning and review processes for pupils receiving support at School Support Plus level. These guidelines will also be available to download from the NEPS section of the Department of Education and Skills website.

NEPS are confident that these guidelines will provide support for schools and busy classroom teachers in meeting the challenge of addressing the academic social and emotional needs of pupils. NEPS also hope that these guidelines will be of particular value to busy classroom teachers.



# Joe O'Toole's keynote speech opens wide ranging conference of Irish Learning Support Association

The 36th Annual Conference of ILSA took place on Friday 17 and Saturday 18 September in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. 450 members attended the conference.

The keynote speaker was Senator Joe O'Toole. Joe has had a lifelong commitment to education at all levels and as a Senator, he continues to be a successful advocate for education and in particular, through his many interventions on the Epsen Act he has championed the cause of special education.

There were 24 presentations over the two days of the conference, on such diverse topics as Mathematics and SEN at Post-Primary, Curriculum Access to schools for students with moderate General Learning Disability in Mainstream Schools, Inclusive Education Policy: Teachers' efficacy, Beliefs for including pupils with SEN in primary schools, to mention but a few.

There was also a major display of current



educational resources. Exhibitors were thanked for their continued support and for offering ILSA members a comprehensive range of materials to browse at the start of the academic year.

*Pictured at the conference are: Dr Paraic Travers, President, St Patrick's College, Miriam Murphy, Senator Joe O'Toole, Audrey Harford, Tony Sweeney, Chairperson, ILSA, Catherine Sweeney ILSA Executive and Catherine Yore.*

## New MIC buildings double capacity of the College

Friday, 24 September marked a day of celebration for Mary Immaculate College (MIC) Limerick, as the long awaited official opening of two campus buildings, Teamhair/TARA and Tailteann took place with An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen, TD in attendance.

The recently developed Teamhair/TARA building doubles the previous capacity of the College with 8,500 square metres of additional space. The four storey building, which was built at a cost of €17 million, contains a 500 seat auditorium, four large lecture theatres, a simulated classroom, microteaching rooms, meeting rooms, teaching laboratories, computer laboratories, seminar rooms, a mediation room, counselling rooms, Students' Union facilities and an enormous student forum.

Tailteann, a state-of-the-art sports complex and also a facility for physical education of primary teachers, was completed in 2007 at a cost of €16

million and was voted Best Leisure Building of the Year at the 2008 Royal Irish Architecture Awards.

Speaking at the packed event President of the College, Prof Peadar Cremin thanked the Government for the much

needed financial support for the recent developments, allowing a complete transformation of the College campus.



*The new Teamhair/TARA building*

# Planning and evaluation – key issues in tackling educational disadvantage

INTO representatives recently met with officials from the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Skills in relation to educational disadvantage.

The first item discussed was the current status of the DEIS scheme and future plans to combat educational disadvantage. DES officials confirmed current provision across over 670 schools in the urban and rural bands of the current scheme. INTO representatives emphasised the importance of planning for a follow-on initiative to build on the success of the DEIS scheme. The DES confirmed that initial consideration was being given to planning for a further identification process. The Educational Research Centre was also completing an evaluation of the DEIS scheme and the INTO emphasised the importance of publishing the results of the evaluation at the earliest possible date. It was agreed that further consultation will take place with the education partners on the development of a follow-on scheme to DEIS but the DES officials also stated that matters would have to be



*INTO representatives meeting with the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES*

framed in the context of current budgetary considerations.

The meeting went on to discuss a range of other issues, including supports for literacy and numeracy schemes in DEIS schools. INTO representatives stressed the importance of support for school leadership and school development plan-

ning. The meeting also heard an update on the implementation of the various strategic priorities under the Traveller Education Strategy. INTO representatives emphasised the importance of ensuring appropriate provision to tackle educational disadvantage is made under Budget 2011.

## Implementing the Traveller Education Strategy

*Consultative Forum meets in Athlone*

The Traveller Education Strategy Advisory and Consultative Forum met at the DES Athlone on 13 October. The Forum comprises representatives from the relevant DES departments, Traveller representative groups, school management bodies and union representatives including the INTO.

The Forum considered a range of issues in relation to the implementation of the Traveller Education Strategy including school transport, provision for early childhood education, and heard a presentation from Pavee Point on the All Ireland Traveller Health Study, which included aspects of education. A copy of the Traveller Education Strategy is available from the Publications section of the INTO website.

## INTO outlines concerns on special education provision to DES

**Department confirms ongoing commitment to special schools**

INTO representatives and DES officials met in mid-October to discuss a wide ranging agenda in relation to special education. In the discussion on the role of special schools and special classes, DES officials confirmed the Department's ongoing commitment to special schools and a continuum of provision. INTO representatives outlined a range of concerns which had been raised by the special schools and special class sector about future provision.

The meeting went on to discuss planning for the implementation of the EPSEN Act. The INTO representatives emphasised the importance of planning for the co-ordinated implementation of the EPSEN and the Disability Acts, even allowing for the current budgetary situation. The meeting then moved on to discuss the review of the General Allocation Model. The DES confirmed that the review was at an advanced stage but the implementation of any recommendations will be subject to budgetary considerations. The INTO raised the issue of schools that had significantly increased enrolment in the last few years

but had not received a revised allocation and the pressure that was being put on schools to provide appropriate provision for children covered by the General Allocation Model. The meeting also discussed the current value for money and policy analysis review of the SNA scheme which is being conducted by the DES. The DES officials confirmed the process was almost complete and it was hoped a report will be published in the near future.

The meeting also discussed the schools for children with autism and complex needs which had recently achieved recognition from the DES. The DES officials confirmed that ads for principals in the 12 schools concerned would be published before the end of October. Following the filling of the principalships the process of filling the relevant number of teaching posts will begin.

In conclusion, INTO representatives acknowledged the progress made on special education in recent years and emphasised the importance of ensuring that provision is protected to the greatest extent possible in Budget 2011.



# The future role of special schools and special classes

## *INTO President praises teachers in special education*

INTO President Jim Higgins praised the ongoing commitment of teachers working in special education settings in his address to the Consultative Conference. Jim said that teachers in special schools and special classes had improved the lives of the pupils in their care and built up the system of special education in this country over the years. Jim also praised the ongoing commitment to professional development that teachers had shown through their participation in a wide variety of courses on aspects of special education. He also reflected on his own experiences as a teacher and teaching principal with pupils with special education needs. The President said that the INTO would be pursuing the issues raised and looked forward to hearing the views of members raised at the Consultative Conference.

### Charting the future

INTO General Secretary Sheila Nunan said that the INTO conference took place against the backdrop of an unprecedented financial catastrophe that has destroyed jobs, and jeopardised economic recovery. She said we are up against a government that puts the interests of speculators ahead of special needs children and the interests of the wealthy before the workers. She also said that people need a credible

plan for recovery that will offer reassurance and hope. "Withdrawing resources from children with special needs may shave a tiny fraction from the current deficit but will store up decades of social, personal and economic misery for those children and their families," she said.

"Special schools and classes make an enormous contribution, both socially and economically, ensuring that pupils not only get an appropriate education but the life skills to play a part in society," said Sheila. She stated that they must continue to be properly supported and resourced but there is a need to refocus and redefine their roles in the educational infrastructure. "We must chart the future so that these schools and classes can provide a quality education for pupils with the most complex needs, facilitate inclusion, provide a 'safe haven' for some pupils and enable them to remain in their local area with appropriate curriculum provision," said Sheila.

### Next steps

The then Minister for Education and Science Mary Hanafin TD, commissioned a review in 2005 of special schools and special classes which was conducted in two phases, including a questionnaire-based census of special schools and mainstream primary schools

with special classes. The final report was submitted to the National Council for Special Education in October 2009. A copy of the report has been forwarded to the Minister for Education and Skills and published on the NCSE website and the INTO website.

The INTO policy framework, which has been published on the INTO website, has been forwarded to the NCSE and the INTO will be engaging with them on the issues raised in the document. The NCSE is finalising policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills. A Consultative Forum, comprising representatives of various disability groups and education partners, including the INTO, has been established under the EPSN Act. The Forum has met to considering the issues also. A Working Group to look at the issue of staffing in special schools has been established. The Group consists of representatives from the DES, NCSE, NABMSE, CPSMA, NPC and INTO and is scheduled to meet in early November. At a meeting about special education between the DES and INTO on 13 October the INTO delegation emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Working Group completed its work as soon as practicable to allow special schools to plan for the next school year.



## Lively discussion groups

Over 250 delegates engaged in lively discussions during sessions at the Consultative Conference.

The first area covered was the issue of designation and enrolment. Delegates considered the actual enrolment and profile of special schools at present and how this related to the original purpose for which schools had been established. Delegates clearly expressed the view that the education provided, and the location for the education, should be in the best interests of the child. They also wanted to ensure that there was flexibility in both special schools and special classes to respond to the individual needs of pupils. One of the important issues raised was the need to ensure that appropriate information was provided to all parties, including parents, on educational provision for pupils with

special educational needs.

The second session covered the areas of assessment, curriculum and supports for schools and classes. Concern was raised about how enrolments were being determined, and who could decide whether a child was accepted into a special school or special class. There was a consensus that all children should have access to a curriculum appropriate to their needs. This included appropriately resourced and staffed second level programmes. Delegates also emphasised the importance of health supports and multi-disciplinary teams being provided for the relevant pupils. There was serious concern that the current economic situation would adversely impact on the provision of services. There was also widespread support for greater emphasis on special education in pre-service training, and for ongoing pro-



fessional development opportunities being provided for teachers.

The third session considered resources for special schools and special classes and links to other schools. Delegates felt that staffing should reflect the more complex needs of children, and that the current model did not reflect the situation in schools and classes. They also emphasised the importance of planning appropriate education programmes for children, and the

need for ongoing review of these programmes. While many felt that there should be opportunities to share good practice between schools and classes, in both special education and mainstream settings, concern was expressed about this could work in practice. Delegates to the Conference also felt that adequate ancillary staff should be employed to enable children benefit from their educational experiences to the greatest extent possible.