

Review

of the

Primary Schools'

General Allocation Model

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Executive Summary

The allocation of additional teaching resources to schools under the terms of the General Allocation Model (GAM) was intended to make possible the development of inclusive primary schools; ensure that primary schools have a means of providing additional teaching support to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils and included additional teaching time that was previously allocated for learning-support teaching as well as an allocation of additional teaching time for what was termed resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities.

The GAM provided additional teaching resources to assist primary schools in making appropriate provision for:

- pupils eligible for learning-support teaching - in determining eligibility for learning-support teaching, schools were advised that priority should be given to pupils whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics.
- pupils with learning difficulties, including pupils with mild speech and language difficulties, pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD;
- pupils who have special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities (borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability).

The teaching resources provided under the GAM would also enable most of the pupils in the above categories to receive additional teaching support in the classroom or in small withdrawal groups in addition to the support they receive from the class teacher. However, the flexibility of the GAM also enables some pupils to receive intensive additional one to one teaching support for a specific period of time.

On its introduction in 2005, the Department of Education and Science (DES) undertook to carry out a review of the scheme after three years of operation. The DES consulted externally with the Education Partners and internally with the relevant sections of the Department as part of the review.

There appears to be a broad consensus that the introduction of the GAM was successful. The GAM principles appear sound and the model is supportive of the children with high incidence special educational needs. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Parents Council (NPC) consider that the scheme is generally working well. Within the DES, the Inspectorate welcomed the initiative while the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) considered that the GAM's introduction was very helpful in its work with schools. It also welcomed the shift in emphasis from assessment of deficit to planning for intervention.

The GAM has provided certainty to schools in relation to their staffing and has been acknowledged as meeting the needs of pupils currently within its remit. Its flexibility has empowered schools to use their professional expertise to target resources at pupils most in need of additional teaching assistance.

However, the review provided the opportunity to raise, and consider, a number of issues associated with the GAM which are detailed below. While the current economic climate imposes the need for the targeted use of resources on a priority basis at those most in need, a number of recommendations are suggested which, if accepted, will provide better information for parents of pupils with special educational needs and greater certainty to schools regarding resources.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the DES issues one consolidated circular letter on special educational needs. This circular should clearly outline DES policy in relation to supporting pupils with special educational needs; the criteria underpinning the allocation of additional teaching and/or care resources; alert schools to the various guideline and other documentation already available to assist in the support of pupils with special educational needs; specify the need for an inclusive enrolment policy which welcomes all pupils from their communities and the need to amend existing policies to ensure they comply with the Equal Status Act 2000.

Recommendation 2: The National Parents Council is concerned that parents are unaware of policy matters in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs. The DES should use the opportunity presented by the development of a consolidated circular letter to remind schools of the need to inform parents in relation to relevant circulars and that schools should bring the consolidated circular letter, when issued, to the attention of all parents. It is recommended that a parental guide to educational services provided for students with special educational need is published.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the DES should consider regulating for the specific requirement for school enrolment policies to be fully inclusive.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended the DES continue with the process of embedding in all schools, and in co-operation with relevant support agencies, the Special Education Needs Continuum approach to the assessment and programme planning for pupils with special needs, including the process underpinning the recently published Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties Continuum.

Recommendation 5. It is recommended that the Special Education Support Service (SESS), through the Teachers' Education Section (TES), should consider the issues raised in this report concerning alternative pedagogical strategies, "in-class" support and the Staged Approach raised in this report in the context of further CPD courses offered and that the DES should, in the context of available resources, continue to prioritise investment in the provision of training in this area.

Recommendation 6: As DES resources permit, the enrolment basis for allocations under the GAM should be updated and aligned to school enrolment for the previous

September. However, in the context of the current financial circumstances, the allocation ratios for the GAM should be revisited and revised to ensure a fair distribution of available posts.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended that Traveller children should be included in the valid enrolment for the purposes of allocating additional teaching resources under the GAM and for updating GAM allocations generally. Whereas it was initially considered that existing Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts might be used for this purpose, this was overtaken by a budgetary decision that RTT posts are to be abolished, subject to a small number of posts being used to readjust enrolment allocations to include Traveller pupils in DEIS schools, and for alleviation measures in other schools, pending readjustment of the GAM.

Recommendation 8: Special consideration may need to be given to a small number of schools where a significant cohort of traveller pupils is enrolled relative to the schools' overall total enrolments. It is recommended that transitional arrangements are considered for such schools in the context of overall social inclusion policy.

Recommendation 9: Schools should be advised of the need to apply for additional resources in sufficient time to enable the NCSE process applications well before the end of each school year. This will facilitate time for cluster arrangements to be finalised before the end of each school year.

Recommendation 10: A separate study should be undertaken on the effectiveness of current clustering arrangements given the concerns raised in this report. As part of this study, consideration needs to be given to the development of a web-based IT facility which would assist schools in the management of clusters.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended that research is undertaken to establish if there is a sound and equitable basis for re-classifying Down Syndrome as a low incidence disability.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that research is undertaken on the outcomes for pupils supported through the GAM.

Recommendation 13: Given that both the GAM and the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schemes provide additional teaching resources to schools, it is recommended that the next review of DEIS should consider the issue whether there should be one model of teacher allocation support for DEIS schools rather than additional teaching hours provided through a combination of DEIS, low incidence & GAM schemes.

Background to the Review

The Department of Education and Science (DES) developed a General Allocation Model (GAM) to provide additional permanent teaching resources to assist primary schools in making provision for children with higher incidence special educational needs (e.g. borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability) and replace the need for schools to have to apply for additional teaching resources on a pupil-by-pupil basis. The allocation to schools of permanent teachers was on the basis of enrolment.

The GAM built on the work in Circular 24/03 (Allocation of Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in National Schools) which provided clarification in relation to the flexible deployment of these resources in primary schools. It pointed to the need for pupils with special educational needs to belong to a peer group and to mix with pupils of different levels of ability in a variety of situations. It maintained that an exclusive reliance on using resource teaching hours for individual tuition only was contrary to the principle of integration in learning and teaching and advised that primary schools should deploy their allocated special education resources in a way that best accommodates the special educational needs of pupils. It recommended that, wherever possible, schools should provide additional teaching support for pupils in the mainstream classroom or in small groups. It anticipated that such an approach would help to maximise effective and efficient teaching and learning and to minimise disruptions to the class programme. Up until the introduction of the GAM, schools had to apply for additional teaching resources in respect of each child with a higher incidence special need.

The GAM was introduced in all primary schools in September 2005. It was agreed to review the GAM after 3 years of operation.

General Allocation Model

The allocation of additional teaching resources to schools under the terms of the general allocation model was intended to make possible the development of inclusive schools; ensure that schools have a means of providing additional teaching support to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils and included additional teaching time that was previously allocated for learning-support teaching as well as an allocation of additional teaching time for what was termed resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities.

The advantages of the GAM were intended to:

- Provide schools with permanent resources for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities facilitating flexible and early intervention for these pupils;

- Reduce the need for individual applications and supporting psychological assessments for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities;
- Provide resources more systematically, thereby giving schools more certainty about their resource levels;
- Provide greater flexibility to school management in the deployment of resources;
- Provide greater levels of certainty about resource allocations thereby facilitating better planning within the system both at central and local level, leading to a more effective and efficient delivery of services.

It was intended that the GAM would enable schools to:

- Ensure that additional teaching support was provided in a timely manner;
- Deploy additional teaching resources in a flexible manner, leading to more effective and efficient delivery of services;
- Ensure that permanent access to additional teaching support is available in schools for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities;
- Put in place transparent and equitable whole-school plans and procedures for the selection of pupils for additional teaching support;
- Ensure that additional teaching resources are allocated differentially to pupils in accordance with their levels of learning need;
- Allow for the grouping for additional support of pupils with similar needs as appropriate; and
- Allow for in-class as well as out-of-class teaching support by the learning-support/resource teacher.

The GAM was also intended to give more security to special education teaching posts.

Pupils covered by the General Allocation Model

The GAM provided additional teaching resources to assist schools in making appropriate provision for:

- pupils eligible for learning-support teaching - in determining eligibility for learning-support teaching, schools are advised that priority should be given to pupils whose achievement is at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests of reading or mathematics.

- pupils with learning difficulties, including pupils with mild speech and language difficulties, pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD;
- pupils who have special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities (borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability).

The teaching resources provided under the GAM enables schools to respond immediately to support the pupils in the above categories in the classroom or in small withdrawal groups in addition to the support they received from the class teacher. However, the flexibility of the GAM would also give schools the option of providing some pupils with intensive one to one teaching support for a specific period of time.

How were posts allocated to schools?

Different pupil teacher ratios applied to boys', girls' and mixed schools as it was expected, on average, pupils attending boys-only schools would have a marginally higher incidence of special educational need than pupils attending girls-only schools. A different ratio applied for schools designated with disadvantaged status. Teacher posts were allocated to schools under the GAM as follows:

Larger schools

Category	1 st post	2 nd post	3 rd post	4 th post
Boys	135	295	475	655
Mixed	145	315	495	675
Girls	195	395	595	795
Disadvantaged	80	160	240	320

Larger schools in each category received additional posts in line with their enrolments.

Schools qualified for a pro rata part of a post for pupil numbers below the enrolment point for the first post and between the first and second post, the second and third post, and so on. For a designated disadvantaged school with 60 eligible pupils the general allocation was 0.8 of a post; for a boys' school with 215 pupils the general allocation was 1.5 posts; for a mixed school with 700 pupils the general allocation was 4.1 (rounded to one decimal place).

Small schools

To ensure that small schools were not disadvantaged by the introduction of the general allocation model, the point at which smaller schools could appoint their first post was significantly reduced. For the purposes of the general allocation model, a

boys' school was considered to be small if it had an enrolment of fewer than 135 pupils, a mixed school was considered to be small if it had an enrolment of fewer than 145 pupils, and a girls' school was considered to be small if it had an enrolment of fewer than 195 pupils.

Boys' small schools qualified for their first post at 100 pupils; mixed small schools qualified for their first post at 105 pupils; and girls' small schools qualified for their first post at 150 pupils. However, no additional general allocation was made to boys' small schools on the basis of an enrolment between 100 and 135, to mixed small schools on the basis of an enrolment between 105 and 145, or to girls' small schools for an enrolment between 150 and 195.

Review of the General Allocation Model

Methodology

On its introduction in 2005, the DES undertook to carry out a review of the scheme after three years of operation. The DES devised a structured questionnaire to review the scheme and wrote to the following organisations in March 2008 to obtain their views:

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
Church of Ireland Board of Education
Catholic Primary Schools' Managers Association (CPSMA)
Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)
National Parents' Council – Primary (NPC)
Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Teo
Educate Together
Islamic Foundation of Ireland
The Chief Rabbi
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Appendix 1 contains a copy of the letter which issued to the organisations concerned.

Responses to the GAM questionnaire were received from the INTO, IPPN, National Parents Council (primary) and the NCSE. Some individuals also wrote to the DES with their views.

In addition, the DES consulted internally with the Inspectorate, National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) and Primary Administration Section.

Traveller Education Strategy

Consideration was given during this review to the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006. This Report has inclusion as a core principle and a central theme (p.10). Based on this principle, it recommends that no

additional resources be allocated on the grounds of membership of the Traveller community but only on the grounds of identified educational need.

In September 2005, the allocation of additional teaching resources under the GAM took into account that some Traveller pupils had access to a Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT). In such situations, the enrolment of the school was reduced by the number of Traveller pupils who received learning support through the RTT. The Traveller Education Strategy recommends a change in this approach. It recommends that:

- Learning support in primary schools should be implemented in accordance with the principles and methods described in Learning Support Guidelines (2000). An integrated, collaborative and in-class learning support system should be adopted, where appropriate, in all primary schools for all children, including Travellers, who have identified educational needs (recommendation 4).
- Travellers should be included in the valid enrolment for the purposes of allocating special-teaching resources under the new general allocation system September 2005 (recommendation 6.1 & 6.2))
- RTT posts should be used by schools to implement these decisions and for the betterment of all pupils (recommendation 6.1 & 6.2).

General findings

The responses received show a broad consensus that the introduction of the GAM was successful and is generally accepted as working well. The GAM principles are sound and model is supportive of the children with high incidence special educational needs. A number of respondents considered that some pupils could benefit from further increased levels of support.

The INTO advised its view that the GAM is generally working well for pupils with special educational needs in the categories covered by the model. The INTO consider that positive outcomes include:

- The stability of staff with a permanent allocation of learning support/resource teacher provision
- The increased flexibility at school level to respond to the diverse needs of individual pupils, and to provide in-class or out of class support as deemed appropriate
- The greater flexibility of teaching approaches, allowing for either individual or group teaching as the situation requires
- The development of a team approach by staff involved with pupils with special educational needs
- The increased emphasis on inclusive education for pupils with special educational needs.

The INTO believes that there is an arguable case for an increase in provision under the GAM for the most acutely disadvantaged schools. The IPPN also raised the issue of severely disadvantaged schools.

The IPPN considered the introduction of GAM has been generally welcomed by most schools with some exceptions. The NPC stated that, in general, the GAM is a significant improvement on the former procedures for allocating resources to children with high incidence needs. The NPC was concerned that there is a low awareness of GAM amongst parents in its consultation group. The NCSE noted that it had limited involvement with children catered for under the model but advised that the GAM did appear to facilitate the accommodation of children with high incidence special educational needs and the provision of additional educational supports to these children.

The lack of response from some of the partners is informative of itself. The Education Sector is dynamic and partners tend to be proactive in advising the DES of significant difficulties.

Within the DES, the Inspectorate advised that “in general, the GAM has been successful” and highlighted the positive effect the GAM has had on primary schools and pupils and that far more learning support and resource teaching positions are now held by qualified teachers. The abolition of the need to apply for additional teaching resources on a case by case basis was of “huge assistance”. It has allowed schools to plan for the future in the knowledge of the number of teachers available for support. The Inspectorate further considered that the GAM facilitated a speedy response to the needs of pupils with high incidence needs. NEPS considered that the introduction was very helpful in its work with schools. It also welcomed the shift in emphasis from assessment of deficit to planning for intervention.

Availability of Permanent Staff to schools

Two of the objectives of the GAM were to provide and deploy additional teaching resources, leading to more effective and efficient delivery of services as well as ensuring permanent access to additional teaching support in schools for pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities

The availability of additional teaching resources on a permanent basis in line with school enrolments was broadly welcomed by all respondents. The INTO welcomed the stability of staff as a positive while the IPPN referenced the flexibility of the GAM in enabling schools to determine the allocation of support within the school population as being helpful to schools and of assistance. The IPPN considered that the Principal Teacher should have the choice to be a support teacher under the GAM.

The NPC experienced this feature of GAM in both positive and negative ways advising that it considered resources were often stretched in schools with large numbers of pupils with high incidence special educational needs. It was concerned that the deployment of resources relied on the school principal rather than qualified assessment and need.

In general, the NCSE considers that the scheme is well understood and operating in accordance with the guidelines.

Within the DES, both the Inspectorate and NEPS remarked on this aspect of the GAM as a positive development which provided schools with more ownership of the deployment of resources enabling intervention to follow quickly on identification of need. It should also be noted that the use by schools of the Staged Approach to the Assessment, Identification and Learning Programme Planning for Pupils with Special Educational Needs leads to evidence to be used by Principals and Teachers in the allocation and use of resources.

Flexibility of the General Allocation Model

One of the objectives of the GAM was to provide greater flexibility to school management in the deployment of teacher resources to support pupils with special educational needs.

There was consensus that the GAM's flexibility in allowing for the grouping of pupils for additional support as well as facilitating in-class and out-of-class teaching support was both positive and beneficial. The NPC pointed out that this aspect of GAM promotes better integration of children with high incidence needs within school daily life and activities.

The INTO highlighted the flexibility of the GAM and the DES in facilitating local arrangements, especially in the context of unclusterable Home School Liaison allocations. The IPPN referenced that the GAM gave schools the necessary flexibility to cater for children in a more client friendly way enabling school management to give the required help when and where needed through in-house consultations.

The NCSE advised that it has encountered in schools instances of reluctance to provide 1:1 teaching, even for a short period of time, to a child that came within the remit of the GAM even though the school clearly identified the need for such intervention. The NCSE pointed to a tendency for schools to seek assessment and re-classification of pupils in such circumstances.

Within the DES, both NEPS and the Inspectorate pointed to the very good practice and proficiency of some schools in utilising the range of support mechanisms. However, both highlighted that some schools continued to have a heavy reliance on the "withdrawal" method of support which can lead pupils becoming more dependent on adults as well as limiting access for the pupils to areas of the curriculum which they may miss by being withdrawn from class. NEPS pointed to the need to encourage and support the "in-class" support approach.

Clustering arrangements

One of the objectives of the GAM was to maximise the extent of the availability of full-time permanent posts and schools with smaller enrolments were grouped in clusters where possible. The DES was aware that these clustering arrangements had proved challenging for some smaller schools. The partners were asked for their views on this issue and to recommend any way the current system could be improved.

The INTO, while stating that the current arrangements for clustering of schools are working well, suggested that a web-based notification facility could be beneficial for the relatively small number of schools with unclustered part-time hours – this suggestion was also supported by a Principal. The IPPN recommended that where schools were allocated additional low incidence hours, this should take precedence over any existing cluster. One Principal suggested the DES should compile a list of schools with part-time hours each year that schools could access and then make local arrangements. Another Principal suggested a local co-ordinator or the SENO should make these arrangements. She also considered that smaller schools, e.g. 2 teacher schools, should be allowed flexibility with regard to the retention of a full-time special education teacher post.

Reference was also made to the time lost due to teachers travelling between schools and it was suggested that clustered posts be allocated on the basis of a 20 - 22 hour contact time week, rather than the current 25 hour week, to allow some time for travelling between schools. It should be noted that clusters are based on a 25 hour working week against the normal 28 hours and 20 minutes working week.

The DES considered that the clustering arrangements are challenging administratively and is concerned that much time is still spent by teachers travelling between schools. This is compounded by the fact that the number of pupils with special educational needs or who are eligible for learning-support/resource teaching may increase/decrease from year to year in any given school. It is acknowledged that teachers do need to travel to and from clustered schools and it is important that such factors need to be taken into account by schools locally when considering the viability of a cluster arrangements.

The clustering issue is proving challenging for schools and the DES. An effective cluster needs to balance the benefits of a share in a permanent teacher with the need to maximise pupil contact time, minimise travelling arrangements and administrative difficulties. It is suggested that this issue needs further detailed consideration in a separate review. However, in the interim, it may assist if schools were advised earlier in the school year of the extent, if any, of their allocation of low incidence resource teaching hours. As the NCSE is dependent on schools to send in applications for low incidence hours in a timely manner, it is recommended that all schools are reminded of the need to apply as early as possible for additional resources. An early notification of any adjustment to resource teaching hours would provide more time to schools to adjust clusters as appropriate.

Inclusive school enrolment policies

Allocations under the GAM are conditional on the Board of Management implementing an inclusive enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000.

There was considerable consensus that the majority of schools operated an inclusive enrolment policy. However all respondents considered that this is not a universal practice and that this issue in remaining schools should be addressed as a matter of urgency. The NPC highlighted the recent DES enrolment audit and stated that this

had indicated difficulties remained in both the area of inclusive enrolment policies and also in the area of informal practices.

Within the DES, the Inspectorate advised that inspection reports still continue to have to make reference to the need for schools to amend enrolment policies to ensure that admission is not conditional on the receipt of additional resources. The Inspectorate recommended that consideration should be given to the publication of a short circular drawing attention to the practice and disseminated to schools.

Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 requires that all children shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child (as determined by any assessment carried out under the Act) or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

Schools receive additional teaching and special needs assistant resources to enable them provide an appropriate education to pupils with special educational needs. Where necessary, funding is provided for assistive technology and specialist equipment. School buildings can be adapted to meet individual pupil's needs. Special school transport arrangements are provided.

While the DES has not, to date, provided specific wording to schools in relation to their enrolment policies, it would appear that difficulties remain in this area and that different enrolment practices are in place in relation to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. It is not acceptable for any school to have enrolment policies that are not fully inclusive. It is recommended that the DES should consider regulating for the specific requirement for school enrolment policies to be fully inclusive and in line with the requirements of Section 2 of EPSEN as well as other legislation such as the Equal Status Act and the Education Act.

School Special Education Support Teams

The formation of special education support teams in schools was promoted in the Learning Support Guidelines, Circular 24/03 and Sp Ed 02/05.

The INTO and IPPN highlighted that there had been a positive development of a team approach by staff involved with special educational needs pupils. The collaboration of such teams works very well to support pupils, class teachers and parents especially in larger schools. NEPS pointed to the role of the Principal as leader in the success of such teams.

The NPC advised that the general awareness of such teams in schools amongst parents was low. It also advised that some parents have been refused access to information regarding these teams and also refused access to view the relevant DES circulars. The NCSE stated that it does not have a function in relation to such teams and had little information on their operation or effectiveness. The IPPN was concerned by the lack of NEPS support in many schools and also referred to time difficulties for the co-ordination of such meetings and for intra-staff consultations.

Within the DES, both the Inspectorate and NEPS also highlighted the team approaches in schools as a positive development.

Staged Approach to the Assessment, Identification and Learning Programme Planning for Pupils with special educational needs

Guidance material issued by the DES advised schools to establish a staged approach to the assessment, identification and learning programme planning for pupils with special educational needs.

The responses suggested that, while the staged approach is taking root in schools generally, embedding the approach isn't without difficulties. The NCSE's experience has been that some schools, while adopting a staged approach, are inclined to fast track a pupil to an assessment if difficulties are encountered. The NCSE considered this may be because teachers may not be fully conversant with the staged model and may not have a fully assigned NEPS psychologist to encourage and reinforce that approach. The NCSE suggested that there may be a prevailing view in schools that difficulties can best be dealt with by additional resources rather than alternative pedagogical strategies. The IPPN stated that the staged approach, while necessary, is very time consuming and works well up to stage 3. It also referenced the lack of NEPS psychologists as being a difficulty.

The NPC voiced its frustration that parents are operating in a vacuum of information regarding the approaches, directives and circulars school follow and the lack of an integrated HSE/DES approach for their child's individual needs. The NPC believes that a systematic approach needs to be developed that includes all the education partners and which addresses the information and support needs of parents of children with high incidence special needs.

Within the DES, NEPS suggested that the development of protocols, to be used to outline the assessment and interventions carried out using a staged approach for pupils for whom they consider additional resources are required, would be helpful for schools*. The Inspectorate referred to the ongoing need for learning support/resource teachers to avail of in-career development opportunities.

* Such protocols "Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support" have been prepared and are available on the Department's website: www.education.ie.

Other Issues Raised

- **Categories of Pupils**

Some concern was expressed that the GAM's criteria are stringent and do not facilitate the delivery of an appropriate level of support to children who may be just outside the qualifying criteria for individual support. The IPPN recommended that serious thought should be given to counting specific learning difficulties, dyslexia and mild general learning disability as low incidence disabilities. One principal, while expressing the view that the GAM was a very good model in principle, suggested re-visiting the categories of schools to favour large urban schools as she considered that

these were the schools catering for the highest number of children with needs. She also suggested that dyslexia should be included in the low incidence table of disabilities and specific speech and language disorder should be re-classified to include children with low IQ.

The NCSE advised that its SENOs had received some complaints from schools that the GAM is not sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of the cohort of learning support pupils and special educational needs pupils.

Some respondents raised the inclusion of pupils with Down Syndrome who also had a Mild General Learning Disability within the cohort of pupils to be supported under GAM resources. It was suggested that these children had significant additional needs than other children with a Mild Learning Disability e.g. auditory processing difficulties, medical needs which require more intensive support than the GAM currently provides.

This suggestion is outside the scope of this report and would require expert analysis within the DES, in consultation with the NCSE, to establish if there is a fair and equitable basis for including Down Syndrome with other low incidence Disabilities and not other syndromes.

One submission received advised of the outcome of a survey of teachers in relation to a number of issues. A majority of 295 teachers surveyed in 2007 perceived the current system of educational provision for pupils with a Mild GLD to be inadequate – whether this provision was in a special school, special class or through learning support. 67.5% of these teachers perceived placement in a special school provided inadequately for MGLD pupils, 52% perceived placement in a special class to be inadequate and 82.5% of learning support teachers who responded perceived that the current system of educational provision was inadequate. This survey was based on teachers' perceptions rather than the outcomes for children.

An earlier survey (Stevens, P.J (2007), 'Educational provision for children with mild general learning disabilities in National schools and special schools in the Republic of Ireland 1989-2004', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin) on the same topic had reported that the majority (60%) of special class teachers suggested that their pupils would benefit from increased integration and inclusion. The greatest demand for increased integration/inclusion by parents was reported among special class teachers (30%).

A further suggestion was received recommending a move away from the current "medical" model of disability categorisation for allocation of teaching supports. The current reliance on a single IQ score was considered by one respondent to be contrary to best practice and confidence intervals should be applied to take test error into account.

However, none of the respondents suggested a return to the pre-GAM methodology of allocating supports. The respondents broadly supported the principles of the GAM, but sought additional resources for schools to be used to support pupils with special educational needs.

The appointment ratio was also given much consideration within the DES. The Inspectorate advised that it isn't always clear that the pupils with more severe needs, e.g. pupils with very low percentile rankings in English and Mathematics and pupils in the lower range of Mild General Learning Disability, receive sufficient additional support to adequately address their level of needs and that this needs to be addressed within each school. The Inspectorate highlighted poor practice in some schools where teachers are allocated to pupils in an inflexible way and highlighted the advice in Circular 02/05 regarding differentiated support for pupils. The appropriate use of resources should be prioritised within each school and schools need to become more adept at providing differentiated levels of support to pupils based on special needs in line with Circular 02/05. The Inspectorate pointed out that there was need for greater collaboration between the learning-support/resource teacher and classroom teachers to ensure transfer of learning and skill development across the curricular activities of the school day. The Inspectorate further noted that in some schools, there continues to be an over-use of the withdrawal approach to teaching. This, together with an over-reliance on individual tuition in a withdrawal setting, can lead to pupils becoming more dependent on adults.

The Inspectorate recommended that the class teacher continue to take full responsibility for all the pupils in their classes with in-class support by learning-support/resource teachers.

- **Current allocation system – is there a need for more flexibility?**

Some concern was expressed that the GAM embedded and increased systemic structural inequalities with regard to DEIS initiatives and considered that all DEIS schools should receive the enhanced staffing associated with disadvantaged schools. The IPPN was concerned that resources were stretched in some schools with large numbers of pupils with high incidence disabilities. One suggestion was made that the current gender/disadvantaged banding ranges used to allocate teacher posts should be revisited to favour the needs of large urban schools. The INTO raised the issue of increased provision under the GAM for the most acutely disadvantaged schools. The IPPN recommended that DEIS Band 2 schools should also benefit from the 80:1 ratio; DEIS reading recovery and maths recovery programmes should be given an additional post rather than relying on GAM resources and that DEIS Band 1 schools should have the option of counting the number of special needs pupils in the school and having a formula agreed for these or overall enrolment to be counted. A further suggestion was that the bands could be revisited to favour smaller schools.

There is always a balance between systems which work well generally and the exceptional situation. In both the GAM and DEIS schemes, all schools are treated identically. There is consensus that the GAM is working well generally. However, there appears to be merit in considering both the GAM and DEIS to see if two separate schemes provide the optimum response for certain disadvantaged schools with exceptional numbers of pupils with low levels of educational attainment. It would be important to balance such an initiative with the need to only reinforce good teaching practice in schools.

- **Planning time for teachers**

The IPPN recommended that time for planning and collaboration should be factored in to each teacher post. It stated that the 25 contact hour week was too tight for each teacher and this should be reduced to 22.5 hours. It should be noted that clusters are based on a 25 hour working week against the normal 28 hours and 20 minutes working week. It should also be noted, however, that the PCW agreement acknowledged that some identified teacher duties including school planning, liaising with parents and collaborative subject preparation would not reduce the normal arrangements for class teaching time.

- **Demographics**

The allocation of additional teaching posts to schools under the GAM was based on the enrolment of September 2003. The INTO raised this as a serious issue and recommended revised allocations should be made on the relevant staffing schedule on an ongoing basis. The IPPN recommended that that GAM allocations are based on the numbers on the 30th of September each year as with other staffing.

The GAM was intended to allocate additional teaching resources across all schools in line with set ratios and enrolments. Accordingly it is appropriate that allocations made under the GAM should be capable of adjustment in line with changes in enrolment and/or available resources.

Conclusion & Recommendations

There appears to be a broad consensus that the GAM is achieving its aims and has been successfully embedded in schools. The GAM principles appear sound and model is supportive of the children with high incidence special educational needs. “That the system has now bedded in so successfully is a tribute to the ongoing professionalism and commitment of primary teachers to pupils with special educational needs” – INTO submission. The model provides certainty to schools in relation to their staffing and has been acknowledged as meeting the needs of all children currently within its remit. Its flexibility empowers schools to use their professional expertise to target resources at pupils most in need of additional teaching assistance.

However, the review provided the opportunity to raise, and consider, a number of issues associated with the GAM. While the current economic climate imposes the need for the targeted use of resources on a priority basis at those most in need, a number of recommendations are suggested which, if accepted, will provide better information for parents of pupils with special educational needs and greater certainty to schools regarding resources.

While this report looked at how well the GAM was working in schools, a future review would benefit from the availability of research on the outcomes for children who are supported through the GAM.

School Support

The DES was concerned that parents are unaware of policy matters, circulars and resources provided to schools under various initiatives targeted at supporting pupils with special educational needs. The INTO recommended the coordination of advice and guidelines issued by the DES and its agencies on the basis of a whole school approach.

In many schools, children are included because they are seen as belonging to the local community and their exclusion is not considered on any grounds. This is commendable. Qualified enrolment policies are inimical to schools being properly and fully inclusive – they also discourage parents from enrolling their children with special educational needs in such schools.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the DES issues one consolidated circular letter on special educational needs. This circular should clearly outline DES policy in relation to supporting pupils with special educational needs; the criteria underpinning the allocation of additional teaching and/or care resources; alert schools to the various guideline and other documentation already available to assist in the support of pupils with special educational needs; specify the need for an inclusive enrolment policy which welcomes all pupils from their communities and the need to amend existing policies to ensure they comply with the Equal Status Act 2000.

Recommendation 2: The National Parents Council is concerned that parents are unaware of policy matters in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs. The DES should use the opportunity presented by the development of a

consolidated circular letter to remind schools of the need to inform parents in relation to relevant circulars and that schools should bring the consolidated circular letter, when issued, to the attention of all parents. It is recommended that a parental guide to educational services provided for students with special educational need is published.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the DES should consider regulating for the specific requirement for school enrolment policies to be fully inclusive.

Continuing Professional Development

Good teaching practice is flourishing in many schools across the country and pupils with special educational needs are being well supported in schools. However, there is a need to encourage further awareness of the Staged approach to the support of pupils with special educational needs, strengthen the model of “in-class” support by learning support/resource teachers and reduce the reliance on withdrawing pupils from classes.

The IPPN recommended the provision of whole school in-service training so that all staff members are trained and share good practice, particularly in relation to in-class supports.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended the DES continue with the process of embedding in all schools, and in co-operation with relevant support agencies, the Special Education Needs Continuum approach to the assessment and programme planning for pupils with special needs, including the process underpinning the recently published Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties Continuum.

Recommendation 5. It is recommended that the Special Education Support Service (SESS), through the Teachers’ Education Section (TES), should consider the issues raised in this report concerning alternative pedagogical strategies, “in-class” support and the Staged Approach raised in this report in the context of further CPD courses offered and that the DES should, in the context of available resources, continue to prioritise investment in the provision of training in this area.

Demographics

It had been decided that the original allocations of additional teaching resources to schools under the GAM would not be adjusted until this review had taken place. This has led to a situation whereby the original allocation may no longer reflect current enrolments.

This review has established that the GAM has been successfully embedded in schools and is supporting pupils with special educational needs. The GAM should therefore become integrated into the annual allocation of teaching posts to schools. It is recognised that this recommendation has implications for both resources and existing clustering arrangements. Recommendation 10 seeks to address the latter, however, the resource implications will have to be considered within the overall funding available to the DES as well as other competing demands.

Recommendation 6: As DES resources permit, the enrolment basis for allocations under the GAM should be updated and aligned to school enrolment for the previous September. However, in the context of the current financial circumstances, the

allocation ratios for the GAM should be revisited and revised to ensure a fair distribution of available posts.

Children of the Travelling Community

The GAM provides an integrated, collaborative and in-class learning support system for pupils with high incidence special educational need. This review highlights the GAM's success in providing an inclusive environment for all pupils with high incidence special educational needs.

Given this conclusion, together with the recommendation in the Traveller Education Strategy report that an integrated, collaborative and in-class learning support system should be adopted, where appropriate, in all primary schools for all children, including Travellers, who have identified educational needs and that Travellers should be included in the valid enrolment for the purposes of allocating special-teaching resources under the new general allocation system September 2005, a clear recommendation is for Traveller children, who had been excluded from the GAM given the availability of an RTT post, to be included in the valid enrolment for the purposes of allocating additional teaching supports to schools under the GAM. In addition, the GAM should provide traveller pupils with high incidence special educational need with additional teaching support on the same basis as any other pupil. The RTT posts could be used to implement this recommendation.

The Traveller Education Strategy recommends that schools should be allowed to retain the remaining RTT posts pending a further review of these arrangements in four years time. However, the current economic climate does not lend itself to the retention of such resources at the same time as expanding the GAM to include Traveller children.

It is the case that some schools have multiple posts of RTT to support their Traveller pupils and the allocation of additional support under the GAM may result in the loss of teacher posts to that school. The introduction of the GAM in September 2005 was accompanied by a transitional arrangement to ensure a smooth change from an individual allocation support system to the GAM. In certain circumstances, schools with significant allocations of additional individual teaching hours were transitioned to the GAM over a longer timeframe.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended that Traveller children should be included in the valid enrolment for the purposes of allocating additional teaching resources under the GAM and for updating GAM allocations generally. Whereas it was initially considered that existing Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts might be used for this purpose, this was overtaken by a budgetary decision that RTT posts are to be abolished, subject to a small number of posts being used to readjust enrolment allocations to include Traveller pupils in DEIS schools, and for alleviation measures in other schools, pending readjustment of the GAM.

Recommendation 8: Special consideration may need to be given to a small number of schools where significant numbers of traveller pupils are enrolled relative to the schools' overall total enrolments. It is recommended that transitional arrangements are considered for such schools.

Clustering Arrangements

A clear finding of the review was confirmation that the clustering arrangements are proving challenging for some schools. It is suggested that this issue needs further detailed consideration in a separate review. However, in the interim, it may assist if schools had more time to adjust clusters locally.

Recommendation 9: Schools should be advised of the need to apply for additional resources in sufficient time to enable the NCSE process applications well before the end of each school year. This will facilitate time for cluster arrangements to be finalised before the end of each school year.

Recommendation 10: A separate study should be undertaken on the effectiveness of current clustering arrangements given the concerns raised in this report. As part of this study, consideration needs to be given to the development of a web-based IT facility which would assist schools in the management of clusters.

Categories of Pupils

A number of submissions raised the current inclusion of Down Syndrome children who have a mild general learning disability within the cohort of pupils to be supported through GAM resources. While the additional, inherent complexities of Down Syndrome children were described, the case for re-classifying DS pupils solely on the DS diagnosis while continuing to classify other pupils with assessed syndromes and a Mild General Learning Disability or other MGLD pupils with other needs was not made.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended that research is undertaken to establish if there is a sound and equitable basis for re-classifying Down Syndrome as a low incidence disability.

This report considered the general workings of the GAM in schools. However, the remit of the review did not include commissioning research on the outcomes for pupils supported through the GAM. Such research, if commissioned, could further inform future reviews of the GAM and would therefore have considerable merit.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that the research is undertaken on the outcomes for pupils supported through the GAM.

Ratios for schools

Many contributors raised the issue of the current ratios for schools. But some of the contributions were contradictory in nature. For example, one contributor advised that the GAM was working well and that schools are pleased that resources are in place for high incidence pupils. It stated that the model cut down enormously on the paperwork associated with high incidence pupils and noted the much greater flexibility in allocating resources. It then called for the re-introduction of individualised hours for high incidence disability categories which would lead to a re-introduction of the paperwork, remove the flexibility associated with a school-based

allocation and logically the consequential removal of the additional GAM resources in place that schools welcomed.

A number of contributors referred to DEIS schools and the higher incidence of special needs in such schools. A number of suggestions were made to try and “weight” schools to provide for a greater allocation of GAM resources to such schools. However, no suggestion was made for a counter-balancing reduction in schools which do not achieve the revised weighting or for schools that do not have as high an incidence of special educational needs.

The allocation basis for schools is a complex issue requiring careful consideration before changing existing rules. In recognition of the challenges in DEIS schools, the DEIS scheme carries with it additional resources for schools and the GAM also allocates additional teaching on a much lower pupil enrolment ratio. However, it may be the case that some DEIS schools do have significantly greater numbers of pupils with very low levels of educational attainment than other DEIS schools.

Recommendation 13: Given that both the GAM and the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schemes provide additional teaching resources to schools, it is recommended that the next review of DEIS should consider the issue whether there should be one model of teacher allocation support for DEIS schools rather than additional teaching hours provided through a combination of DEIS, low incidence & GAM schemes.

Review of the General Allocation Model

Dear

As you are aware, the General Allocation Model (GAM) was introduced in all primary schools in September 2005. At that point, the Department undertook to carry out a review of the scheme after three years of operation. It is in this context that I am now consulting with your organisation.

Up until the introduction of the GAM, schools had to apply for additional teaching resources in respect of each child with a higher incidence special need. The intention of the GAM was to provide additional permanent teaching resources to assist schools in making provision for children with higher incidence special educational needs. It was specifically intended that the general allocation would assist schools in the following manner:

1. As the additional teaching resources are now in place in schools before the enrolment of individual children with high incidence needs, there is no need to apply on a pupil by pupil basis for additional resource hours – *In your view has this been of assistance in supporting pupils with special educational needs?*
2. As the additional teaching resources are now available on a permanent basis in line with enrolment and on the basis of certain categorisations, schools and principals can pro-actively deploy teaching resources in a flexible manner so that teaching supports are targetted differentially to pupils in line with their needs – *Has this been of assistance to schools?*
3. Allowing for the grouping for additional support of pupils and/or in-class as well as out-of-class teaching support – *Has this been a positive development in the support of pupils with special needs?*
4. One of the objectives of the GAM was to maximise the extent of the availability of full-time permanent posts. To this end, schools, particularly those with small enrolments, were grouped in clusters where possible – *has this been successful or can this be improved upon further – if so, please provide details?*
5. The NCSE's Implementation Report acknowledges the significant advances that have been made relating to the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the primary school system through this model. You will be aware that the GAM is conditional on the Board of Management

implementing an inclusive enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 – *Is it your view that such an inclusive enrolment policy is now in place in all schools?*

6. The formation of special education support teams in schools was promoted in the Learning Support Guidelines, Circular 24/03 and SP ED 02/05 – *What is your view on the contribution made by these support teams to supporting children with special educational needs?*
7. Guidance material issued by the Department advised schools to establish a staged approach to assessment, identification and learning programme planning for pupils with SEN. This advice is in keeping with advice that has been provided to schools in previous circulars and in the Learning-Support Guidelines and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) model of service. A staged approach to identification and intervention is also advocated in the Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia. – *What has been the general experience of implementing this approach?*

The Department would welcome any other comments you wish to make in relation to the operation of the General Allocation Model with particular reference to how it is working in schools.

Where comments may relate to resourcing issues, it would be helpful if you could indicate the relative level of priority attaching to such comments in the context of competing demands for additional resources within the educational sector.

I would appreciate receiving your views in due course no later than the 11th of April.

Yours sincerely