Spending Review 2019

Monitoring Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes in Special Education Needs Provision

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Executive Summary

Key Trends and Features of Special Education

- Special Education Needs (SEN) expenditure represents over 19 per cent of the budget of the Department of Education and Skills, with €1.9 billion allocated for 2019. This level of expenditure has grown considerably in recent years, increasing the extent and variety of supports provided.

- The primary objective of special education spending is to ensure that each child receives an education appropriate to his or her needs. The Government’s stated objective for inclusive education with implementation as far as is practicable.

- While efficiency can be assessed at a high level, by and large the ongoing monitoring of programmes outputs and outcomes is left at school level. There is not a central collection of metrics or monitoring on detailed outputs and outcomes by the NCSE or the Department of Education and Skills in most cases. It is not possible to assess if objectives are being met and outcomes improved.

- Given the increased focus of recent changes to special education provision on improving outcomes for students/pupils it is now timely to consider the development of an evaluation framework to assess effectiveness and identify some standardised indicators for inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Key Findings

- For the special teacher allocation and the School Inclusion model a process should be implemented to monitor the numbers of pupils supported.

- This paper proposes an evaluation framework considering metrics or indicators, under four themes. This paper proposes a tiered programme logic model approach, to evaluating SEN provision considering the appropriate metrics for each scheme at 5 levels, scheme, school, class and individual pupil – SEN and mainstream levels.

- The next steps to develop such a framework are outlined below:
  - A programme logic model, with potential metrics, aligned with the proposed framework will be developed for each SEN programme.
  - The current data collected will be examined and considered for usability including the Primary Online Database, the Post-Primary Online Database (POD and PPOD), data collected by the CSO, data collated by schools and any data collected by the NCSE.
  - This data exercise will inform the DES overall data and evaluation strategies having recognition of GDPR requirements.
  - Data gaps between identified potential metrics and what is collected should be examined, and a plan put in place to collect the most necessary data in line with GDPR requirements.

- This approach and the collection of selected metrics will be piloted in the School Inclusion Model trial. These metrics will be prioritised as a pilot of the framework, hence allowing the data collection to be piloted. This will be informed by the evaluation plan to be developed for the new model.
1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Skills has a €9.8 billion total current allocation for 2019. Special Education Needs expenditure represents just over 19 per cent of the Department of Education and Skills at €1.9 billion expenditure allocated for 2019. The 2019 allocation represents an increase of 52 percent since 2011, up from €1.25 billion.¹

Using its simplest definition, value for money refers to “doing the right things and doing them right”. When assessing the value for money of spending on programmes and schemes, examining efficiency can only establish, in relative terms, if things are being “done right”; however, evaluations need to examine outcomes to establish if an intervention is achieving its objectives – that is, “doing the right things”. Schemes might be highly efficient at turning inputs into outputs, but if outcomes do not deliver on objectives then value for money has not been achieved.

Given the level of state investment in this area, and the high rate of expenditure growth, it is important to ensure that the most appropriate form and level of support to provide better outcomes for pupils with special educational needs is being provided. To assess this a clear understanding of the targeted outcomes of schemes and the evaluation thereof is needed. Furthermore, a number of new initiatives and reforms in the provision of special education are currently underway, including the new special education teacher allocation model, the in-school demonstration project and recently announced School Inclusion model pilot. These changes in the approach to the provision of special education all focus on improving the outcomes of pupils. This further highlights the need to examine how expenditure is monitored in this area and identify a framework under which potential indicators could be developed to monitor and evaluate the new initiatives on an ongoing basis.

This paper is set out in sections as follows:

- Section 2: Context and Rationale of Special Education Needs Provision
- Section 3: The Efficiency of Special Education Needs Provision
- Section 4: How are Special Education Schemes Currently Monitored?
- Section 5: International Evidence and Best Practice
- Section 6: Selected Indicators for Monitoring Special Education Needs Initiatives
- Section 7: Challenges and Potential Data Sources
- Section 8: Conclusions and Next Steps

Quality Assurance (QA)

Quality assurance refers to the concepts of:

- Accuracy of the data and other information presented, and
- Rigour applied in using analytical techniques and integrity in reporting.

As part of the quality assurance process feedback was sought on the analysis format (structure), clarity (quality of writing), accuracy (reliability of data), robustness (methodological rigour), and consistency (between evidence and conclusions). Further detail on the quality assurance process is set out in Section 9. It is important to note that involvement in the QA process does not infer agreement with the findings of the analysis. In addition, the relevant sections of the Department of Education and Skills, were consulted on the paper for observations and fact checking. The paper was finalised in July 2019.

¹ For comparison purposes in the rest of this paper the 2018 outturn of €1.8 billion will be used.
2. Context and Rationale of Special Education Needs Provision

Within the modern Irish education system Special Education has become a major element. The context and rationale for special education has evolved considerably in recent years. The rationale for special education needs provision is grounded in Article 42 of the Constitution which places an obligation on the State to provide for education. This has been interpreted in a number of landmark Court judgments and the State is required to ensure that each child has access to an education appropriate to his or her needs. The Education Act 1998 Section 7 (1) (a) outlines that “to ensure, subject to the provisions of this Act, that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person”. The principle of inclusive education, whereby as far as practicable a child with special educational needs should be educated with children who do not have such needs, is set out in the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN). The EPSEN Act outlines the concept of inclusion where all persons have the same rights as any other cohort to participate in education. The Act lays out the following proviso, every child with special education needs (SEN) must be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have special education needs, unless to do so would not be in the best interest of the child or, it would impair the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

There are three ways in which special education support may be delivered - in a mainstream class setting model, in a special classes model within mainstream schools and in a special school setting model. The provision made for different special education support structures is dependent on the needs of the pupil, this can be inclusive of learning/language support teachers, resource teachers and SNA’s. Considerable changes have been made to the special education provision system and the provision of additional resources has enabled the inclusion of children with special education needs in mainstream schools.

Since 2004 the landscape of special education has seen substantial and continuing change, with special education becoming an increasingly prominent feature of the primary and post-primary education sector. This prominence prompted the consideration of special education expenditure in two papers in the first year of the current three year cycle of the spending review. These papers, published in Spending Review 2017 considered the efficiency of special education expenditure (DPER 2017a, 2017b). In examining the efficiency of special education expenditure these papers analysed the inputs, activities and outputs of the different special education schemes. They also highlighted the underlying drivers of special education expenditure, including demographics and the increasing prevalence of diagnosis of special educational needs in the school going population, in particular the increasing number of pupils presenting with an autism diagnosis. In research conducted by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), this increasing prevalence is partially attributed to the widening of the definition of special educational needs (Banks and McCoy, 2011).

In response to the changing landscape of special education provision recent years have seen the introduction of considerable changes and new initiatives in the area of Special Educational Needs. These changes have focused on improving the outcomes of pupils supported under these schemes. The key initiatives introduced over the past two years include the New Allocation Model for Special Education Teachers, the In-School Demonstration Project and the Proposed School Inclusion Model.

2 Article 42 (4) - ‘The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.
3 O’Carolan 2003 NO971JR; O’Donoghue 1992 NO75JR; Sinnott 1997 NO54PHC; Sinnott 2014 972OPHC
2.1 The Special Education Teaching Model

The Special Education Teaching Model was introduced in September 2017 as a new way of allocating teaching resources for pupils with special education needs. The new allocation model does not require individual diagnosis as the allocation of teachers is based on the profiled needs of the school.

NCSE policy advice indicated a risk that children were being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for health reasons. The policy advice also noted that there is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need (NCSE, 2014). The previous system allocated the same level of support for students within certain categories of special educational needs even though one student may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability.

The new allocation model is now based on two components:

1. A school educational profile component; which includes:
   a. The number of pupils with complex needs
   b. The learning support needs in schools as evidenced by attainment levels in standardised test results
   c. The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender

2. A baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention.

As noted in the 2018 Spending Review paper on Pay Expenditure Drivers (DPER, 2018) there has been an increase in the number of special education teacher posts by 38 per cent from 2011 to 2018, with 13,315 posts in 2018. It is expected to deliver both better and more equitable outcomes for pupils with special education needs (NCSE, 2014). As pupils can now receive support without a requirement for diagnosis some pupils previously not assessed will now receive support in schools. Schools also have discretion to allocate resources based on need and are not constrained to allocate a particular quantum of support for a particular special education categorisation. Given these goals it is important to ensure appropriate metrics/indicators are identified and collected to evaluate the objectives of the model, and outcomes for those supported, and that an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the model takes place.4

2.2 The In-School Therapy Demonstration Project5

The In-School Therapy Demonstration Project was introduced on a pilot basis in September 2018. This new initiative provides speech and language and occupational therapy supports to 75 schools and 75 pre-schools in the CHO7 region6. As part of the programme there are 19 speech and language therapists and 12 occupational therapists working with schools and pre-schools across the region. The schools include schools with educational disadvantage, urban, large and small schools, schools with high profiled need under the special education teaching model, mainstream schools with special classes and special schools. Therapists provide supports to schools including continuous professional development for teachers in clusters of schools and pre-schools. Once

4 The allocation model allocates additional special education teachers to schools, based on the profiled needs of schools. Schools then have discretion to provide special education teaching support to pupils who have additional learning needs in schools. The level and nature of support provided can vary to take account of the needs of the child at a particular time. The recording of the effect of this teaching and the effect on pupils' outcomes has to date taken place at school level and is recorded and monitored in student support files/Individual education plans. New metric and data return mechanisms will be required to be developed in order to capture macro data on pupil outcomes at a more centralised level.


6 CHO7 is the HSE Community Healthcare Organisation region which covers Kildare/West Wicklow, Dublin West, Dublin South City and Dublin South West.
again this project focuses on ensuring improved outcomes for children and ensuring they reach their full potential.

2.3 The Proposed New School Inclusion Model

In March 2018 the NCSE published a Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme (NCSE, 2018). This review examined the current supports provided through the SNA Scheme to children with SEN. The paper found that while there was many positive aspects of the SNA scheme it was “a blunt instrument’ to address a wide range and variety of needs.’ It identified and set out the parameters to develop the new model, including a frontloaded allocation model similar to the Special Education Teaching Model which will not be diagnosis based. The trial of the new model will build on the In-School Therapy Demonstration Project in CHO7 and focuses on improving the outcomes of pupils with special education needs by providing a more integrated education and health service model in schools. An evaluation process for the School Inclusion Model is being developed and an evaluation will take place over the course of the 2019/20 school year. This evaluation will include trialling of the framework and appropriate key metrics set out in this paper.

Given the development of these new initiatives and the objectives of improving outcomes in all three it is important that indicators and metrics are identified to be collected hence facilitating evaluation against these objectives. Furthermore a key finding of the Spending Review papers (DPER 2017a,2017b) included “It is of the utmost importance that all special education schemes are monitored, regularly reviewed and revised as necessary, and the outcomes for pupils are captured in a meaningful way to ensure the most appropriate form of support is being provided.” This remaining sections of this paper seek to further progress this work by considering how special education is monitored both in terms of efficiency and considering effectiveness through the monitoring of outcomes.

3. The Efficiency of Special Education Needs Provision

This Section provides a brief overview of the efficiency of Special Education Needs Provision, updating key trends in expenditure, staffing and pupils supported from the previous spending review papers. First overall trends in special education expenditure are considered and then the four main areas of support (Special Education teachers, Special Needs Assistants and Special Schools and Special Classes) are examined in more detail. School transport expenditure is being considered as part of a separate Spending Review paper and so is not considered further here. As the nature of special education supports are by and large targeted at early intervention this paper focuses on supports in primary and post-primary schools.

3.1 Special Education Expenditure Trends

In 2018, current expenditure by the Department of Education and Skills was €9.5 billion. SEN expenditure represents over 19 per cent of the Department of Education and Skills at €1.8 billion expenditure for 2018. The trend in SEN expenditure has been on an upward trajectory from 2011 to 2018. In 2011 expenditure was at the €1.25 billion mark and it remained almost constant to 2014 at €1.29 billion. This shows the prioritisation of SEN over the crisis period. Since 2014 there have been considerable increases year-on-year to the 2018 provisional outturn of €1.8 billion. This is an almost 40% increase within a four year period. It should be noted that these increased costs here, and in the Figures 2-5, may in part be attributable to a range of factors including increases


8 While this and other aspects of SEN expenditure, such as support in the further education sector and other support services are not examined in detail in this paper, it is expected that the overall principles and relevant indicators of evaluation of special education needs provision identified in Section 5 would be relevant to these aspects. These should be considered by the relevant sections in evaluation of ongoing programmes and evaluation proofing of policy and any proposed policy changes in future.
from the intensified incidence of special educational needs and disability, a phenomenon which is consistent with international trends; and pay restoration.\(^9\)

The main component of overall SEN expenditure is pay at €1.6 billion (88 per cent) which is split between pay for additional teachers at €1.1 billion (68 per cent) and SNA pay at €520 million (32 per cent). The additional teachers’ pay is inclusive of resource teacher provision, teachers in special classes and special schools and also teachers that are allocated under the new special teacher allocation model, along with general public sector pay restoration measures in recent years.

**Figure 1: Special Education Needs Expenditure 2011-2019 (projected)**

Special education expenditure increased by 43 per cent from 2011 to 2018 (Table 1). This is far in excess of the increase in gross current education expenditure at 10 per cent. This overall increase reflects considerable increases in special education teacher (47 per cent), SNAs (49 per cent), and school transport expenditure (77 per cent). These increases are examined further in Figures 3-5.

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\(^9\) International trends are examined in Banks and McCoy (2011)
Table 1: Summary table of the expenditure changes between 2011 and 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure provision</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2018*</th>
<th>Change 2011-2018</th>
<th>% change 2011-2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special education total</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>1,794</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teachers</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>1,057</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAs</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Transport</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education (Specialist Training Provider etc.)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Educations Psychological Services</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council of Special Education</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support - Third level Disabilities Fund</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitation (Enhanced element only)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Grants (Exams, ICDU, Equipment)</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
<td>-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Current Education Expenditure (incl. NTF)</td>
<td>8,606</td>
<td>9,482</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Voted Government Current Expenditure</td>
<td>52,149</td>
<td>57,052</td>
<td>4,903</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Education and Skills
Notes: * Provisional Outturn

3.2 Selected Schemes Trends in Expenditure, Inputs and Outputs

3.2.1 Special Education Teachers

Expenditure on special education teachers, mainstream and special school teachers, increased by 47 per cent from 2011 to 2018. Figure 2 examines special education teachers in mainstream education. As demonstrated the cost increase is largely driven by an increase in the number of teachers (increasing 38 per cent from 2011-2018). The growth in special education teacher numbers slows down considerably and levels off in 2018/2019 with the introduction of the new allocation model in September 2017. The increase in total cost of 44 per cent (€265 million) from 2011/12 to 2018/2019 is in line with the overall trend of SEN expenditure in the same time frame. Pupil numbers supported have grown at the same rate as growth in teachers numbers, increasing by 21 per cent over the 2011/12 to 2018/19 period. This implies a fall in pupils per teacher from 14.2 in 2011/12 to 12.4 in 2018/19. As a result the cost per pupil has increased by €838 (19 per cent). This may in part reflect the prevalence and complexity of special education needs in mainstream setting over the time period but may also reflect policy changes.
Figure 2: Trends in Special Education Teachers in Mainstream Education, Pupil numbers and Teacher Pay Cost Index

Source: Department of Education and Skills

3.2.2 Special Schools and Special Classes

While there is a goal of inclusion in mainstream education for all pupil it may be deemed in the best interest of the child to receive his/her education in a special class in mainstream schools or in a special school. The number of pupils in these settings also effect costs of special education teachers (the number of pupils in special schools and special classes was only equal to 8.7 per cent of the pupils supported by special education teachers in a mainstream setting in 2018/19). Figure 3 shows an index of the overall increase in the pupils. Pupils in special classes in mainstream education decreased steadily until 2009/2010. However, these numbers have increased again more recently to surpass their 2000/01 level in 2014/15. The pupil numbers are now 74 per cent higher than the 2000/01 level in 2018/19, with an escalation in the increase over recent years.

In contrast the index of pupils in special schools has remained relatively stable since 2000. A slight decrease can be seen up to 2008/2009 when number began to increase again over the 2000 level. In 2018/19 numbers were 15.4 per cent higher than their 2000 level. Taking both special school and class pupil numbers together there is a downward trend from 2000/01 (10,718 in total) to 2009/10 (9,530 in total) in both pupil numbers but from that year to 2018/19 the trend has not only reversed but increased substantially by 52 per cent since 2009/10 (14,474 pupils in total).
Figures 4 a and b show the trends in cost per pupil and total cost for special schools and special classes over the period 2012/13 to 2018/19. While special class cost per pupil has increased by 11.3 per cent special school cost per pupil has increased by 9.1 per cent from the 2012 to the 2018 school year. This coupled with the volume dynamics in later years in Figure 3 (where special class pupils increased by over 80 per cent, and special school pupils increased by 7.3 per cent since 2012/13) have led to increases of 17 per cent in total expenditure for special schools and 146.5 per cent for special classes. Similar trends are seen in the increase in number of teachers over the period, with special school teacher numbers increasing by 12.2 per cent and special class teacher numbers increasing by 136.4 per cent. This reflects the fact that costs are largely driven by pay and teacher numbers.

3.2.3 Special Needs Assistants (SNA’s)

SNA expenditure makes up 30 per cent of total special education expenditure. Figure 5 highlights the sharp increase from 2011/12 to 2018/19 of the number of SNAs, pupils supported by them and the overall cost associated. The number of SNAs grew by 45 per cent over the period while the cost of those SNAs increased by
54 per cent. The amount of students supported has also increased by 65.5 per cent from 2011/12 to 2018/19. This again fits with the overall increased expenditure trend in Special Education across the period.

**Figure 5: Trend of SNA numbers, pupil numbers supported and overall cost**

Numbers (LHS) € Million (RHS)

Source: Department of Education and Skills

### 3.3 Summary

While expenditure has increased considerably across all special education needs schemes this in part due to increases in the number of pupils supported under each. Pay restoration will have had an effect on the increases in cost, however increases in staff numbers appear to have a considerable impact on overall costs. The complexity of special educational needs and diagnosis driven aspects of policy may in part effect this increase. In the special education teacher area, the effects of the new allocation appear to be having a positive impact on efficiency with a slowing of the increase in teacher numbers. However, in order to assess efficiency and effectiveness fully more detailed metrics would need to collected and examined. The way in which special education schemes are currently monitored in the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies is examined in the next section.

### 4. How are Special Education Schemes Currently Monitored and Evaluated?

Programmes are currently evaluated largely on the basis of commissioned research. These evaluations and pieces of research have been undertaken by the ESRI and other researchers, and are generally commissioned by the NCSE. The data used includes, administrative data, data collected by evaluation specific data collection such as surveys and data sets such as Growing up in Ireland (GUI). By and large the ongoing monitoring of programmes outputs and outcomes is at school level, with monitoring being undertaken at an individual level by schools and on an annual spot check sample by the Inspectorate. However, there is not a central collection or collation of metrics or monitoring of outputs and outcomes by the NCSE or the Department in most cases.

#### 4.1 Monitoring By the Department of Education and Skills and Agencies

4.1.1 Data monitoring by the Department of Education and Skills

The Department of Education and Skills and its agencies collect data from a number of sources which include details in relation to the educational attainment of pupils in the education system. These include –

- Annual Standardised Test Data from Primary Schools, National Assessments in mathematics and literacy
  Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)
- Participation in PISA, PIRLS, TIMS\(^{10}\)
- OECD/Eurydice Reports
- School attendance and school retention data at post primary level\(^{11}\)
- Data collection and statistical information Pupil Primary Online Database (POD) and Post Primary Online
  Database (PPOD)
- Data on the number of pupils with Disabilities accessing Third level education
- Output data- number of pupils supported by SNA, Assistive Technology etc. (NCSE/DES)

With the estimated prevalence of special education needs in the pupil population, some of the improvements in
the overall outcomes of pupils within the educational system may include improvements for pupils with special
educational needs. However, it is not possible to ascertain if this is the case without data disaggregated to
indicate special education pupils. Data returns for standardised tests or state exams, or retention data do not
currently have special education indicators which would allow this set of pupils to be separated from the overall
pupil data returns to allow their outcomes to be measured, or compared over time. In order to be in a position
to desegregate data specifically for pupils with special educational needs a common identifier would have to be
developed and applied to data returns, this could alternatively be achieved through linking existing data held at
school level through student numbers.\(^{12}\)

4.1.2 Internal Evaluation in the Department of Education and Skills
In 2018 a new division was established at the Department of Education and Skills with the express purpose to
support “evaluation reviews being conducted within the Department; building the capacity to develop and
analyse data on education outcomes and policy impacts so policy can be more firmly based on evidence.” The
Division brings together expertise in project management, statistics, economics and evaluation, as well as data
governance and is engaging in a number of projects to enhance the use of cross-departmental data and provide
cross-departmental policy support to units.

As part of building capacity a cross-departmental Research, Appraisal and Evaluation Group has been
established to provide a more formal structure to support research, appraisal and evaluation across DES to
ensure that evaluation principles are embedded in processes as early as possible.

Work is ongoing in the Department of Education and Skills on the development of high-level indicators for the
Education sector, which will be published later in the year. These indicators have an increased focus on outcome
data, and will support the Performance Budgeting process as well as enhancing evidence-informed policy
making. The work proposed in this paper will feed into this broader process.

4.1.3 Inspectorate Reports
The Department’s Inspectorate Division is responsible for the evaluation of primary and post-primary schools.
The Inspectorate provides an assurance of quality and public accountability in the education system and carries
out inspections in schools and centres for education. The Inspectorate conducts inspection reports on individual
schools and reports on curriculum provision, teaching, learning and assessment generally in the educational
system.


\(^{12}\) With engagement of the CSO.
The Division also conducts inspections of the use of particular types of teaching support and has a model for evaluating Provision for Students with Additional and Special Educational Needs in both Primary and Post-Primary Schools. The Inspectorate’s Special Education Teaching Evaluation model reviews -

- How good are the learning outcomes for students with additional and special educational needs?
- How good are the learning experiences of students with additional and special educational needs?
- How well is the school using the resources it receives for students with additional and special educational needs to improve learning experiences and learning outcomes?
- How effective are the structures and systems that the school has in place in fostering the inclusion, equality of opportunity and holistic development of students with additional and special educational needs?

The Inspectorate Division is currently conducting an analysis of the reports on special education teaching and will provide a report on the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) and its implementation. The Inspectorate’s analysis is due to be completed in 2019 and will consider, among other things, the use of resources, highlight areas of good practice and outline the learning experiences of students.

4.1.4 Role of NCSE to Review Policy and Programmes

The NCSE has a statutory function to review the effectiveness of special educational schemes and programmes in order to consider their effectiveness and to make recommendations designed at making improvements in this regard. The Agency has published a number of policy advice papers in recent years, which have made recommendations aimed at developing a better educational services for children with special educational needs. The NCSE also conduct evaluative reviews and publish policy advice papers.

4.5 Monitoring in Schools

The measurement and review of the impact of additional support measures on the educational progress of children with special educational needs is done primarily by schools, taking into account an individual child’s particular needs, and in conjunction with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. Whereas there is currently not a statutory requirement for schools to provide a particular form of IEP, all schools are encouraged to plan effectively for the delivery of additional teaching or care supports for children with SEN. Tools such as the Student Support File are intended to equip schools to undertake such work which would exist as an obligation in any event.

The new model for allocation of special education teachers to schools notes the importance of education planning. Educational planning is an essential element of a whole-school approach to meeting pupils’ needs and should be differentiated in line with a student needs. A pupil’s support plan should include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs in line with the Continuum of Support process.

15 Guidelines for schools on educational planning and monitoring of outcomes through the Student Support File, are contained in the Guidelines for Primary and Post Primary Schools: Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf
https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Post-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Students-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf. The Guidelines note the importance of schools recording outcomes and that pupils’ progress in relation to achieving their targets should be regularly and carefully monitored. The guidelines also note the importance of monitoring outcomes at class, group and whole-school level.
16 Circulars 0013 and 0014 2017
Individual planning and monitoring process is the primary mechanism by which schools measure the effectiveness of educational interventions and access their impact on the outcomes of pupils. However, these outcomes are not monitored and submitted to the NCSE or the Department and so are not used to evaluate and monitor the supports as a whole on an ongoing basis.

4.6 Commissioned Research

4.6.1 Review of Research and Evaluations

A range of commissioned research papers and reports have considered or reviewed outcomes for students with special educational needs in schools.\textsuperscript{17} Douglas et al (2012) provided an overview of how educational engagement, progress and outcomes (formal and informal) are tracked and measured internationally and in Ireland ‘Measuring Educational Engagement, Progress and Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs’. The report identified a range of different outcomes measures which could assist to evaluate how students with SEN are progressing in schools, grouping outcomes into a number of outcome areas:

- Engagement related outcomes
- Academic achievement-related outcomes (such as literary, numeracy, examination results).
- Attendance related outcomes (such as school attendance, early school leaving).
- Capacity to be included in mainstream education (inclusive as opposed to a more segregated education)
- Happiness and Independence related outcomes (such as confidence, self-esteem, quality of life indicators (e.g. socialisation skills, independence skills))
- End of school outcomes (transition to higher education, employment etc.)

An NCSE report (Cosgrove et al., 2014) noted the importance of measuring education engagement and outcomes of pupils with SEN. It noted, however, that there were a range of different kinds of outcomes that may be applicable for these pupils. The report explored the outcomes of children with SEN using data collected from children and their parents, teachers and school principals as part of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study. The outcomes of children in SEN groups were considered in the areas of:

- Engagement and attendance: children’s liking of school/subjects; numbers of days of school missed.
- Attainment / achievement: Drumcondra reading and mathematics test scores; parents’ and teachers’ ratings of children’s performance in various skill and subject areas; parents’ educational expectations.
- Happiness / well-being: Piers-Harris self-concept scale and subscales, which measure happiness and well-being (Piers & Herzberg, 2007); levels of physical activity; bullying; number of close friends; socialising with friends.
- Independence: this set of outcomes is more relevant to older children and adults, though two are included – child’s level of dependence on his or her caregiver(s) (reported by parents; Pianta, 1992); child-reported participation in self-care tasks.

This research highlights the need to consider how SEN supports are evaluated, with consideration of a range of potential outcomes measures. Any evaluation of educational outcomes for individual pupils would have to take into account a range of factors which would be required including considerations of issues other than just academic attainment.\textsuperscript{18} To take full account of these other factors in an evaluation setting individual level data needs to be collected reflecting these factors, such as performance relative to a student’s plan and relative ability. An engagement should take place with the school sector, and the data gathering units within the

\textsuperscript{17} These reports include: Cosgrove et al., 2014, 2018.

\textsuperscript{18} It is for this reason that the starting point for evaluation of outcomes for individual pupils takes place locally by schools who can monitor the achievement relative the supports being received on an ongoing basis, as detailed below through Individual Education Plans (IEP).
Department of Education and Skills, in order to establish how this information, which is currently maintained at school level, can then feed into the overall monitoring of schemes and objectives.

4.6.2 Evaluation of the In School Therapy Demonstration Model

A demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services has been taking place over the course of the 2018/19 school year. An evaluation of the project is being conducted to test its effectiveness. This will involve determining the outcomes for the children involved in the project and measures relating to school and early years staff development and capacity, it will also involve a process element and assess how the project operated, the linkages and relationships between all the partners involved across health and education and the pathways of care across services and the relationships with parents. Further details of the evaluation process are set out at Appendix 2.

5. International Evidence and Best Practice

International evidence and best practice advocates the monitoring of outcomes in special education and the identification of metrics to do so. Ireland is not alone in grappling with developing a set of common indicators, the UK and the US have made some strides toward this. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education notes the need to develop a common framework to develop common and comparable indicators across countries. This approach should be applied across programmes within Ireland’s Special Education Sectors as outlined in Section 6.

5.1 UK

The UK Department of Education collects data on Special Educational Needs in England annually. This data is primarily focused on the characteristics of pupils, including the level and type of special educational needs. However, there is also data collected on outcomes, collated from a number of datasets and published in analysis documents of special education needs. The latest publication “Special educational needs: an analysis and summary of data sources” examines prevalence and characteristics but it also considers:

- Attainment: early year’s foundation stage profile, phonics screening check, attainment at reading writing and maths,

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19 Following a Request for Tender for the Evaluation of the In-School and Pre-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, the evaluation is being conducted jointly by University College Cork and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The evaluation of the project has been taking place over the course of the 2018/19 school year and the report is due to be completed by September 2019.

20 Following a Request for Tender for the Evaluation of the In-School and Pre-School Therapy Support Demonstration Project, the evaluation is being conducted jointly by University College Cork and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The evaluation of the project has been taking place over the course of the 2018/19 school year and the report is due to be completed by September 2019.

- Preparation for adulthood: participation in education post 16 years of age, participation in further education, destination in terms of employment, education or training, and accommodation status for adults with learning disabilities,
- Absences and exclusions, and
- Experience of the special education needs and disabilities system: the number, transfers and timeliness of issue of statements and education, health care plans.  

This approach of leveraging existing datasets to examine special education outcomes should be considered in the Irish context. Data which could be considered are discussed in Section 6.

### 5.2 USA

The US Department of Education collects data on Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part B from the Office of Special Education Programmes. The data is provided at State level under 8 headings, including child count, education environments, personnel, exiting, discipline, assessment, dispute resolution and maintenance of effort reduction and coordinated early intervening services. A list of the variables collected is included in Appendix 1.

The US National Centre on Education Outcomes, a research centre supported by the US Department of Education, provided a survey of special education trends, new initiatives, and performance across the US (Thompson et al., 2005). The report examines participation in state assessments for those with special educational needs. It notes difficulties in standardisation of reporting in participation, for example differences in reporting practices for those who sat but did not complete the assessments with some States counting the students and not scoring them and others counting the participants and giving them a low score. This underscores the importance of a standardised reporting framework to ensure indicators are comparable. The States were also asked to report on the performance of students with disabilities on state tests, and identify what the perceived causes of these achievement trends were, with 88 per cent of states able to report a three year trend. The survey also covers alternative assessments where students are not able to participate in regular state wide assessments. The alternative assessments measure outcomes including:

- Skills/Competence
- Level of Assistance
- Degree of Progress
- Number/Variety of Settings
- Alignment with Academic Content Standards
- Ability to Generalise
- Appropriateness
- Staff Support
- Social Relationships
- Self Determination
- Participation in General Education Settings
- Support

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23 Characteristics data includes type of need, gender, ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals and types of schools.

5.3 European Research and Initiatives

5.3.1 Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA)

The CPRA is a European Commission led programme. While not solely focused on Special Education it is a key piece of work across inclusive education in Europe. The CPRA reflects on the development of country policies for inclusive education across 14 different European Member States. An important point to note is that the CPRA compilation does not assess how the considered policy in the relevant countries is actually being implemented. Its core purpose is to assess the current relevant inclusive education policies within the participant countries.

The CPRA assessment provides a collation of individual country data in a standardised format. It aims to get the participating countries thinking on their current policy frameworks for inclusive education. There are also recommendations included on priorities that are tailored specifically for each individual country to address. The policy context for the CPRA work is the three main priorities within the Education and Training 2020 strategic objectives (ET 2020) strategic objectives and European Council European Council Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs). There are 11 overall measures that are used for assessment and these have a number of indicators within them that are for inclusive education and SEN learners. These reviews could be leveraged to identify potential indicators to monitor the SEN outcomes.

5.3.2 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education was established in 1996 as an initiative of the Danish Government, endorsed by the Member States’ Education Ministers. The establishment of the Agency took place at the end of the European Commission’s Helios II programme and reflected the need for a permanent and systematic structure for European collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education. In 1999 the Agency was formally established as a European organisation with the mandate to act as its Member States’ platform for collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

There are currently 31 Member States involved with the agency including Ireland. The Agency has a number of publications that could add to the narrative around SEN and evaluation.

The Participation in Inclusive Education – A Framework for Developing Indicators paper highlights the difficulty around agreeing and setting a common single set of indicators for inclusive education across countries. This would mean that current local, regional and national practices would be ignored thus setting this set of indicators up for failure. The paper states “the project has developed a common framework, methodology and tools and it is the member countries that should provide the information and data that is available in their system and define the domains where common and comparable indicators should be developed”. So the common framework principle is built around shared definitions, organisation of information and increasing the compatibility of data from diverse sources. In terms of the future there are five steps highlighted to help build the capacity for developing these comparable indicators. The five steps are:

1. Make an inventory of available data;
2. Identify gaps in available data;
3. Check whether available data can be aggregated and disaggregated across levels;
4. Check whether available data can be monitored across the process of education;

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26 https://www.european-agency.org/projects/country-policy-review-and-analysis
27 https://www.european-agency.org/about-us/who-we-are/history
5. Check whether available data respects the interests of the persons behind the data.

The paper also discusses potential and examples of existing indicators on participation, participatory policies and practices. This work should be leveraged to align any potential indicators and frameworks to the recommended common European one.

5.4 Better Outcomes Brighter Futures

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs led programme Better Outcomes Brighter Futures provides an outcomes framework for children and young people in Ireland. This outcomes framework is based on five broad categories with outcomes indicated under each (Table 2). While it may not be possible or relevant to include all of these areas when monitoring special education supports, outcomes indicators should be aligned with this framework to some extent. Clearly in particular “achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development” will be especially relevant to education supports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active and Healthy</th>
<th>Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development</th>
<th>Safe and protected from harm</th>
<th>Economic security and opportunity</th>
<th>Connected, respected and contributing to their world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physically healthy and make positive health choices</td>
<td>Learning and developing from birth</td>
<td>Secure, stable, caring home environment</td>
<td>Protected from poverty and social exclusion</td>
<td>Sense of own identity, free from discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Mental Health</td>
<td>Social and emotional wellbeing</td>
<td>Safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation</td>
<td>Living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities</td>
<td>Part of positive networks of friends, family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health</td>
<td>Engaged in learning</td>
<td>Protected from bullying and discrimination</td>
<td>Opportunities for ongoing education and training</td>
<td>Civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoying play, recreation, sport, arts, culture and nature</td>
<td>Achieving in education</td>
<td>Safe from crime and anti-social behaviour</td>
<td>Pathways to economic participation and independent living</td>
<td>Aware of rights, responsible and respectful of the law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6. Selected Indicators for Monitoring Special Education Needs Initiatives

6.1 A Programme Logic Model Approach

The Value for Money (VFMR) and Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) Guidance (DPER, 2018) note the Programme Logic Model as an appropriate framework structure in terms of linking the policy objectives through to the outcomes is the programme logic model. This approach is used in VFMRs, FPAs and other evaluations across sectors in the public service. In order to facilitate evaluation in line with these guidance the programme logic
model approach should be used when developing a suite of indicators for schemes and programmes. The programme logic model creates a framework for understanding how programme resources are used to implement key strategies and activities and how their implementation contributes to short- and longer-term outcomes. This programme logic model approach will help to identify and consider the issue of attribution and the implications thereof. The model takes the following broad format.

**Table 3: Summary of programme logic model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>The desired outcome at the end of the scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>The resources devoted to the scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>The actions that transform the inputs into outputs; the tasks that produce the outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>The goods or services produced by the scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>The effect of the outputs on the targeted beneficiaries in the short and long run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>The wider effects of the policy programme from both a sectoral and national perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DPER Value for Money (VFMR) and Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) Guidance.

New initiative pilots such as the new School Inclusion model provide an opportunity to test the model assumptions and to develop a better understanding of how to link inputs and activities with outputs and outcomes. It is important to ensure that key metrics are identified and a plan is developed to collect them at the start of such initiatives. This will inform the evaluation of the pilot which will be necessary to decide whether further roll out is appropriate and to ensure the model is delivering on its objectives. Table 4 provides an illustrative example of a programme logic model for special education within the School Inclusion model.

Further work would need to be undertaken to consider what is possible, through the data gaps exercise which is proposed. This will be undertaken as part of the work of the technical sub-group on evaluation reporting to the School Inclusion Model Steering Group.

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31 The definitions set out are for illustrative purposes. The actual programme logic model objectives and indicators will be required to be developed by the project team and evaluation team
Table 4: Illustrative SEN programme logic model using School Inclusion Model Pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>The policy objectives of the pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Provide inclusive support for children with special education needs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ensure SNA support is available in schools on the first day of school,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Provide a range of supports to schools, such as behavioural therapy, speech and language or occupational therapy support, nursing services, or additional support for schools by NEPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>- Expenditure,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Staff (SNAs, Regional NCSE Team, Nurses, NEPs), in different settings (e.g. mainstream schools, special classes, special schools, DEIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>- New allocation model of SNAs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Continuation of the pre-school and in-school demonstration project,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Allocation of NEPS to support pilot schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Development of Nursing Support Scheme for complex needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>- Number of children receiving support from SNAs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Range of SEN type supported,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of SNAs hours,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of nurses hours allocated to complex needs cases,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of children supported by nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of schools served by OTs/SLTs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of CPD sessions delivered to teachers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Number of NEPS support hours per school,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>No of Individual Education Plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes:</td>
<td>Pilot specific metrics (to be measures for mainstream pupils were applicable also):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Inclusion, Attendance and Engagement: Days attendance for pupils with SEN, hours inclusion in mainstream classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Attainment/Academic Achievement: Standard test results Literacy/numeracy, alternative assessment under IEPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Level of Independence: informed by questions from GUI, survey of teachers, parents, SNAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>End of school outcomes and transitions: Transition to second level where applicable, completion rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer Term Metrics:</td>
<td>- Inclusion, Attendance and Engagement: Early school leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Attainment/Academic Achievement: Numbers taking state exams, e.g. Leaving/Junior cert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Level of Independence: transitions/end of school metrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>End of school outcomes and transitions: Transition to second level, higher education, further education and training, employment, completion rates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: While the evaluation of the pilot is unlikely to be able to fully evaluate outcomes due to a short timeframe between intervention and evaluation it will consider the effectiveness of the pilot and the collection of output data.
6.2 Frameworks and Potential Indicators

A framework outlining the special education outcomes, and aligning indicators within that framework, is something which should be expanded on within the special education area in Ireland. The work done under the Better Outcomes, Better Futures can be leveraged to inform this. That framework should feed into any future framework developed by the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the recommended outcome areas identified by the NCSE (Cosgrove et al., 2014).

Metrics should be developed to monitor each part of the Programme Logic Model from inputs to outcomes. In relation to inputs and outputs at a minimum there should be metrics to monitor:

- Expenditure inputs
- Number of teachers, SNAs and special education teachers etc. allocated
- Number of children provided with supports,
- Number of hours support provided to children/teachers as applicable

While there is currently monitoring of expenditure and numbers of children supported the recent changes to the special education teacher model and the SNA model will mean the current method of central monitoring of pupil numbers will be untenable. Consideration needs to be given to what a new monitoring system should incorporate, including fields such as PPSNs and Eircodes, and how best it can be aligned with the National Data Infrastructure (NDI). Any new monitoring system ought to facilitate examination of how many children are being provided support for the €1.9 billion investment across special education expenditure.

In relation to outputs and outcomes i.e. results and impacts, a framework should be developed based on the research commissioned and undertaken by the NCSE and the objectives outlined in the EPSEN Act 2004. The Act notes, “the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives”. This may be seen as the objective of special education, and highlights the need to consider, inclusion, attendance and attainment, as well as independence and end of school outcomes.

From the EPSEN and the research outlined the following categories of outcomes and potential metrics/indicators could be considered among others.

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32 In line with any requirements under GDPR.
### Table 5: A Framework for Considering Output and Outcome Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion, Attendance and Engagement</th>
<th>Attainment/Academic Achievement</th>
<th>End of School outcomes and Transitions</th>
<th>Independence, Happiness/Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days attendance</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Transitions to tertiary, employment etc.</td>
<td>Level of independence**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in mainstream classes</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Completion rates</td>
<td>Levels of physical activity**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early school leaving</td>
<td>Achievement IEP based</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piers-Harris scale*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of school/subjects**</td>
<td>Numbers taking exams, e.g. leaving/Junior cert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents educational expectations**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents/Teachers ratings of achievement**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * Piers-Harris Scale of self-concept may be difficult to collect data on an ongoing basis and could be assessed through the Growing Up in Ireland dataset. **Liking of subjects, level of independence, physical activity and parents/teachers ratings/expectations could be examined in particular evaluations through surveys or use of the Growing Up in Ireland dataset.

The appropriateness of these metrics should be considered as part of the development of any new models or evaluations. Identifying these metrics as early as possible in setting up new initiatives is important in order to ensure that mechanisms can be put in place to collect data, ensuring all regulations are complied with (e.g. GDPR) and that initiatives can be evaluation proofed. Engagement should also take place with the schools sector, Education partners, and the data gathering units within the DES to establish the type of information that schools will be requested to return, and the manner in which it can be returned. This will be undertaken as part of the pilot of the School Inclusion Model to be rolled out in September 2019.

### 6.3 A Tiered Approach to Monitoring Outcomes in Special Education

Given the objective of inclusive education and the recent changes to the provision of education focusing on providing resources to schools who then allocate them accordingly it is important to consider a tiered approach to monitoring metrics. This should consider the following tiers:

- Overall scheme level
- School level
- Outcomes for classes
- Outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs
- Outcomes for mainstream children

As outlined in the last point it is important to also consider the secondary benefit for pupils who do not have special education needs (mainstream children). This is important given the definition of inclusive education under the EPSEN Act 2004:

“A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with—

(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or
(b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.”

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33 Under the Public Spending Code all business cases should include detailed plans for evaluations and monitoring, including specifying data to be collects and methods of gathering data.
Figure 6 provides an example of how the tiered model could be considered, with some example of inputs, outputs and outcomes which should be collected at each level.

Table 6: A Tiered Approach to Monitoring Special Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>Schools Involved,</td>
<td>SEN attendance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>No. Hours services supplied</td>
<td>Linked to policy objectives of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overheads</td>
<td>No. Children supported</td>
<td>individual scheme,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Teachers/SNAs etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transitions/Progression data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>No. Children Supported</td>
<td>Attendance rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Teachers</td>
<td>Hours Support</td>
<td>Attainment rates –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. SNAs</td>
<td>Hours CPD for teachers/SNAs</td>
<td>Drumcondra, state exam participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. OLTs/STs etc.</td>
<td>Inspectorate sample info e.g. IEPs done</td>
<td>Progression rates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Teachers</td>
<td>No. Children Supported</td>
<td>Ratio of Mainstream pupils to SEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. SNAs</td>
<td>Hours of Supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Supports, e.g. SLTs, OTs etc.</td>
<td>Range of SEN type supported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual Pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>No. Teachers</td>
<td>Class hours</td>
<td>Attendance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. SNAs</td>
<td>Hours specific SEN support</td>
<td>Attainment - Drumcondra tests or alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Supports, e.g. SLTs, OTs etc.</td>
<td>No. Supports received</td>
<td>Independence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Progression/Transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mainstream

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Teachers</td>
<td>Class Hours</td>
<td>Attendance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Any additional class support from OT/SLT/ behavioural therapists/special education teachers</td>
<td>Attainment - Drumcondra test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Progression/Transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Challenges and Potential Data Sources

7.1 Potential Challenges

There are some potential challenges to monitoring and evaluating special education provision. These challenges are not insurmountable, nor are they limited to this area, and will be considered as part of the pilot of the School Inclusion model.

7.1.1 Attribution

Due to the nature of special education supports many children may be receiving a number of different supports. The wide variety of supports which may be provided to students complicates the evaluation of policy. Evaluating policy impact can be difficult as while it might be possible to determine that an outcome has occurred, it may be

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34 The definitions set out above are examples of the kind of indicators that might be used in a tiered model. The objectives and indicators will be required to be developed following consultation with the education sector and DES data gathering units.
difficult to determine if a specific policy is responsible. This is not an education specific issue and is referred to as attribution. The issue of attribution needs to be considered in all evaluations, and underlines the need to ensure objectives and metrics are clearly defined and collected in line with a programme logic model (see Section 6.1).

7.1.2 Data Collection and Collation
As discussed in section 4 monitoring of special education outputs and outcome metrics in particular largely takes place at school level. In order to ensure schemes can be monitored effectively linking their objectives, inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, a more centralised data collection will need to be examined. As recommended in international literature this should be by reference to a common framework and set of indicators across schemes such as the one discussed in Section 6. Furthermore, ensuring GDPR compliance in particular in relation to sensitive information may pose some challenges. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Engagement should also take place with the schools sector, Education partners, and the data gathering units within the DES to establish the type of information that schools will be requested to return, and the manner in which it can be returned. Additionally there is potential to leverage existing data sources in order to minimise data collection requirements where possible.

7.2 Potential Data Sources
Once indicators are identified, a method for collection of data must be examined. This should take account of the potential to leverage existing data sources. There is a wide variety of data sources which could be drawn upon in developing indicators. These included:

- CSO data including administrative data through the NDI,
- Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data,
- Administrative data in the Department of Education and Skills, such as the Primary Online Database and the Post Primary Online Database,
- Data held by agencies of the Department of Education and Skills, such as the SOLAS PLSS data and HEA data for assessing progression,
- Data collected by the NCSE
- Data held and collected by schools in allocating resources.

These and other data sources should be examined and considered as a first port of call for indicators to ensure the principle of data minimisation under GDPR is adhered to. This will facilitate the identification of data gaps and where existing data infrastructure can be leveraged to fill such gaps while minimising administrative burden.

The National Data Infrastructure (NDI) was established in 2017. The development of a National Data Infrastructure, led by the Central Statistics Office, will allow for an innovative approach to the provision of insight to support policy development and service delivery. Recent reforms have focused on Public Service Bodies (PSBs) implementing a consistent code of practice and standards for the gathering, use and dissemination of statistical data. Future work will focus on embedding the National Data Infrastructure project across all the Civil and Public Service. The concept of the NDI involves the collection and storage of three key identifiers on all public sector data holdings, whenever they are relevant to Public Sector Body transactions with customers. The three identifiers needed for the NDI to be effective are the PPSN for interactions between the individual and the public sector; the Eircode to identify location of the respective individual/business; and a unique business identifier, to enable improvements in service delivery, and policy formulation and analysis for businesses when interacting with the public sector. The collection of indicators for evaluations should align with this work.
8. Conclusions and Next Steps

The level of expenditure on Special Educational Needs represents nearly 20 per cent of the budget of the Department of Education and Skills, at €1.9 billion expenditure allocated for 2019. This expenditure has grown significantly in recent years. While efficiency can be assessed at a high level detailed metrics in relation to activities, outputs and outcomes should be collected in order to facilitate a more detailed assessment of both efficiency and effectiveness. Individual level data needs to be collected in order to allow an assessment of outcomes for pupils and whether the objective of policies are delivered as planned.

While the primary objective and outcome of special education support spending is that the inclusive education of all children can be provided for, each special education support has specific objectives which need to be monitored also. The overall expenditure on special education provides for a range of different schemes and programmes to ensure that inclusive education can be provided for. Objective, input, output and outcome indicator data should therefore be set out for these programmes. All SEN programmes, and the criteria applicable for accessing them, should be evaluated and reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the scheme objectives and outcomes are being met. To do so it is important to ensure the appropriate data is collected.

Having reviewed international literature and best practice there are some examples of where countries, such as the US, are collecting indicators on special education supports. Similarly, reviewing the literature produced by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and the NCSE advocates the monitoring of outcomes in special education and the identification of metrics to do so.

Programmes are currently evaluated in the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies largely on the basis of commissioned research. The data used includes, administrative data, data collected by evaluation specific data collection such as surveys and data sets such as Growing up in Ireland. By and large the ongoing monitoring of programmes outputs and outcomes is left at school level, with monitoring being undertaken at an individual level by schools and on an ongoing sample by the inspectorate. However, there is not a central collection of metrics or monitoring on outputs and outcomes by the NCSE or the Department in most cases. There is no overall framework for evaluation of outcomes in special education. Given the increased focus of recent changes in SEN provision on improving outcomes it is now timely to consider how such a framework can be delivered and identify some standardised indicators to be considered.

This paper provides a way to develop such an evaluation framework over time. In line with NCSE research the framework could consider metrics or indicators under the following themes, inclusion, attendance and engagement, attainment/academic achievement, happiness/wellbeing and independence, and end of school outcomes and transitions. Metrics should be considered for each of these areas, aligned with the objectives of the specific programmes/schemes. In order to ensure this feeds through from objectives to outcome metrics the programme logic model approach should be utilised, clearly identifying specific, measureable, achievable realistic and time bound objectives and metrics to monitor inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. This paper also proposes a tiered approach to the evaluation of special education provision considering the appropriate metrics for each scheme at 5 levels, scheme, school, class and individual pupil – SEN and mainstream levels. This will involve developing a single system to ensure consistent and appropriate data available at all levels for pupils, schools and scheme.

The next steps for the development of such a framework are outlined below:

- A programme logic model, with potential metrics, aligned with the proposed framework will be developed for each SEN programme, including the new special teacher allocation model and the School
Inclusion Model. By the time this paper is published the first year of the In School Therapy demonstration project will have been completed. From 2019/20 it will form part of the School Inclusion Model and will be part of that evaluation.

- The current data collected will be examined and considered for usability including the Primary Online Database, the Post-Primary Online Database (POD and PPOD), data collected by the CSO, data collated by schools and any data collected by the NCSE.
- This data exercise will inform the DES overall data and evaluation strategies having recognition of GDPR requirements and ensuring privacy protections.
- Data gaps between identified potential metrics and what is collected should be examined, and a plan put in place to collect the most necessary data in line with GDPR requirements, introducing legislation where necessary.
- In particular, for the new special teacher allocation model and the School Inclusion pilot a process needs to be implemented to monitor the numbers of pupils receiving supports.

This approach and the collection of the selected metrics will be trialled in the School Inclusion Model pilot. These metrics should be prioritised as a trial of the framework, hence allowing the data collection to be piloted also. This will be informed by the evaluation plan to be developed as part of the pilot model. The evaluation plan will consider the practicalities of data collection and administration.
**Bibliography / References**


9. **Quality Assurance**

**Quality Assurance Process**

To ensure accuracy and methodological rigour, the author engaged in the following quality assurance process.

- ✓ Internal/Departmental
  - ✓ Line management
  - ✓ Spending Review Sub-group and Steering group
  - ✓ Peer review (IGEES network, seminars, conferences etc.)

- ✓ External
  - ✓ Other Government Department
  - ☐ Advisory group
  - ☐ Quality Assurance Group (QAG)
  - ☐ Peer review (IGEES network, seminars, conferences etc.)
  - ☐ External expert(s)

☐ Other (relevant details) – INSERT
10. Appendices

Appendix 1: US Data

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs collect data under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Each State is required to submit data on children with disabilities from age 3-21 who are supported by special education and related services under part B of the Act. The variables collected include:

- Student Count - Early Childhood,
- IDEA – Student Count - School Age,
- IDEA – Alternate Assessment Caps (1%/2%),
- IDEA – Not Participating in Assessments,
- IDEA – Exiting Special Education,
- IDEA – Suspensions/Expulsions,
- IDEA – Disciplinary Removals,
- IDEA – Total Disciplinary Removals,
- IDEA – Removal to Interim Alternative Educational Setting,
- IDEA – Reasons for Unilateral Removal,
- Educational Services During Expulsion,
- Special Education Teachers (FTE),
- Special Education Paraprofessionals (FTE),
- Special Education Related Services Personnel.

35 https://datainventory.ed.gov/Search?txtMenuSearchTerm=&txtSearchTerm=&searchTerm=EDFacts&advanced_search=&rdSearchType=And&seriesID=196&studyID=254&studyType=study&seriesVar=&seriesVarTerm=&seriesVarType=And&study Var=&studyVarTerm=&studyVarType=And&currentSearch
The Programme for a Partnership Government 2016 committed that a new in-school speech and language therapy service be established to support young children as part of a more integrated support system.

The scope of service was expanded to include occupational therapy and also to early years settings. A demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services took place over the school year 2018/19. The evaluation of the project is underway, and it is due to be completed shortly.

The new initiative provides speech and language and occupational therapy supports to 75 schools and 75 pre-schools in the CHO7 region.

As part of the programme there are 19 speech and language therapists and 12 occupational therapists working with schools and pre-schools across the region. The schools include schools with educational disadvantage, urban, large and small schools, schools with high profiled need under the special education teaching model, mainstream schools with special classes and special schools. Therapists provide supports to schools including continuous professional development for teachers in clusters of schools and pre-schools.

- The evaluation will examine the effectiveness of the demonstration project in improving the capacity of educational settings to support children and families.
- It will examine outcomes to assess if the desired changes have occurred and if targets were met.
- It will identify who has benefitted, or who has not, and in what way.
- It will identify what has worked and when elements have not worked, in addition to identifying any unintended outcomes.
- The evaluation will also examine attribution, that is, to what extent are the changes in outcomes due to the Demonstration project.
- A process evaluation will also be conducted in order to assess the design and delivery of the service, which will inform future replication and scaling.
- The process evaluation will examine if the model was delivered as intended, if participants are reached as intended, and participants’ reactions.
- Evidence was been gathered through target trackers, interviews, focus groups, surveys of managers/principals and staff as well as case-studies within some sites.

CHO7 is the HSE Community Healthcare Organisation region which covers Kildare/West Wicklow, Dublin West, Dublin South City and Dublin South West.