



**Proposed New Model for Allocating  
Teachers for Children with SEN in  
Mainstream Setting**

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**Prepared for:  
Joint Committee on Education and Social  
Protection**

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**Prepared by:  
Irish Primary Principals Network**

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# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 OBSERVATIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 SCHOOL PROFILING - PRINCIPAL TEACHERS DEEPLY CONCERNED.....	3
2.2 RESOURCING .....	3
2.3 NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DATABASE.....	4
2.4 BENEFITS OF PROPOSED NEW MODEL.....	4

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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IPPN welcomes the proposed new model of allocating teaching resources to children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. IPPN believes that it is a move in the right direction to bring about a more equitable system of applying resources to each child based on their need.

However, IPPN has a number of serious concerns which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- We believe that the increasing population demographic in Irish Primary Schools warrants an immediate increase in the number of Support Teachers allocated.
- The survey being administered currently in schools is causing great anxiety to principals. The data required by the survey is extremely sensitive information which parents would not be in the practice of sharing with the school. Information regarding medical cards, social welfare and local authority housing is being sought through the survey. Principals feel that their relationships with parents, which have taken years to establish, will be damaged directly or indirectly if principals are 'enquiring' about such matters. . It seems odd that information which is already held by the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office is being collected through schools.
- There is an option not to complete sections of the survey but principals fear that this might result in lesser allocation of resources for their school.
- Schools, for the last number of years have been carrying out standardised tests and forwarding results to the DES on the clear understanding that these results were only to be used for the purposes of assessing literacy and numeracy standards. Principals are upset that these results are now being used to allocate staffing.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) accepts the rationale behind this proposed new model of allocating resources for students with Special Education Needs in mainstream schools. It is always desirable that schools with the greatest need for additional supports have a mechanism whereby these supports can be accessed. It is also desirable that equity prevails and that a school with the greatest need receives the greatest level of support.

Staffing and financing schools to reflect the additional resources required for children with additional needs is a complex process. There is a very real fear amongst Principals and teachers nationwide that the proposed new model could be used as a tool to further reduce SEN allocations to primary schools. It is imperative that the 15% reduction in resource allocations to primary schools imposed in recent years should be immediately restored and this to be used as an initial alleviation for schools who will be losing staff.

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## 2 OBSERVATIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

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IPPN wish the following observations and recommendations to be noted. These recommendations are made in the belief that the EPSEN Act will be fully implemented within a reasonable timeframe.

### 2.1 SCHOOL PROFILING - PRINCIPAL TEACHERS DEEPLY CONCERNED

- 2.1.1 Clarity is required around the school educational profile component of the proposed model. Principals are not in a position to accurately identify and verify the social context of individual families. There is disquiet amongst principals on the 'guesstimate' nature of the evidence which may be subject to audit.
- 2.1.2 There is concern amongst principals, particularly in rural and smaller communities that the gathering of such personal information could damage the school – home relationship.
- 2.1.3 Clarification has been sought by many principals on the following.
- ❖ Will high performing schools be punished for efficient use of available resources and lose some of their current allocation?
  - ❖ Is profiling guaranteed to deliver a more equitable distribution of resources?
  - ❖ Can the NCSE and the DES guarantee that profiling will not lead to the establishment of school league tables without regard for complexity of need and social context?

Answering these questions might go a long way in allaying the concerns of many school leaders.

### 2.2 RESOURCING

Many schools will inevitably lose supports as a result of school profiling and the establishment of a revised baseline allocation. IPPN requests that transitional arrangements are to be put in place for schools that experience significant changes to staffing allocations. These transitional arrangements must ensure that schools are not left in a state of uncertainty in relation to staffing levels and provide a level of flexibility that ensures unexpected and emerging needs are addressed. IPPN considers that the two year timeframe whereby schools retain their current allocations should be extended by a further two years and that no school, no matter how positive the profile, suddenly loses its existing allocation.

Restructuring the allocation of the 10,000 plus Resource and Learning Support teachers within the system will hopefully deliver greater equity. However, this reallocation is unlikely to meet the needs of all students as greater numbers are entering the system due to increased enrolments. As austerity begins to be eased, additional support teaching posts should now be created to cope with increased numbers coming into the system.

The issue of the allocation of Special Needs Assistants needs to be addressed in parallel to this process. Pupils accessing Early Intervention Programmes do not automatically qualify for support when entering mainstream and this anomaly causes delay, exacerbates transition difficulties and creates needless stress for parents and professionals.

It is also important that the DES make provision for an increased number of NEPS psychologists within the system to support schools in the implementation of this new model. The provision of evidence-based interventions requires a continuum of supports. Schools must be supported in utilising resources to optimum effect, planning early interventions and evaluating outcomes. The role of the Inclusion Support Service (ISS) also requires clarification. Will this be an independent body or will it operate as an arm of the SESS or indeed replace the SESS?

### **2.3 NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DATABASE**

For more than a decade IPPN has lobbied the DES to put in place a national database of children. In agriculture every beast has its details recorded within 14 days of birth. We still do not have a facility to monitor and track children in either preschool or primary education. Currently, a Pupil Online Database (POD) is under construction but already it has encountered significant problems. Because this database requires schools to upload children's data, the database cannot readily interact with commercial administrative software systems which most large schools have had to purchase given the lack of provision of any alternative to date.

### **2.4 BENEFITS OF PROPOSED NEW MODEL**

- ❖ Streamlining the allocation process does bring benefits. In introducing greater equity to the system, large numbers of Traveller children, Newcomer children and children with complex needs will have unhindered access to adequate supports.
- ❖ Automatic access to necessary supports without the requirement of a diagnosis is also a positive move and benefits children of parents who may not be in a position to meet the financial costs of private assessments.
- ❖ IPPN welcomes the use of the term 'Support Teacher'. The organisation has been advocating for the use of this role title for many years.
- ❖ IPPN also welcomes the decision to combine the hours of Learning Support and Resource Teachers. It was a mistake to create a distinction in the first place, a decision which caused immense problems for principals attempting to form cluster groups.

