John Kearney CEO
Helen Walsh Head of Inclusion and Education Support Services

ippn Because leadership matters
The Network for Principals and Deputy Principals

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

NCSE ENGAGING WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

Working together to support children and young people with special educational needs



COLLABORATING ACROSS THE SYSTEM TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS
- SHARED EXPERTISE
- BETTER OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS
- INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS, INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

A World-Class Inclusive Education System for Ireland

Learning together. Sharing expertise. Improving outcomes for every learner.

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Working with international partners to advance inclusive education and ensure every child and young person can reach their full potential.

Equity
Ensuring fairness and removing barriers to learning

Quality
High quality teaching, supports and learning experiences

Potential
Empowering every learner to achieve their potential

Collaboration
Stronger together across borders and sectors

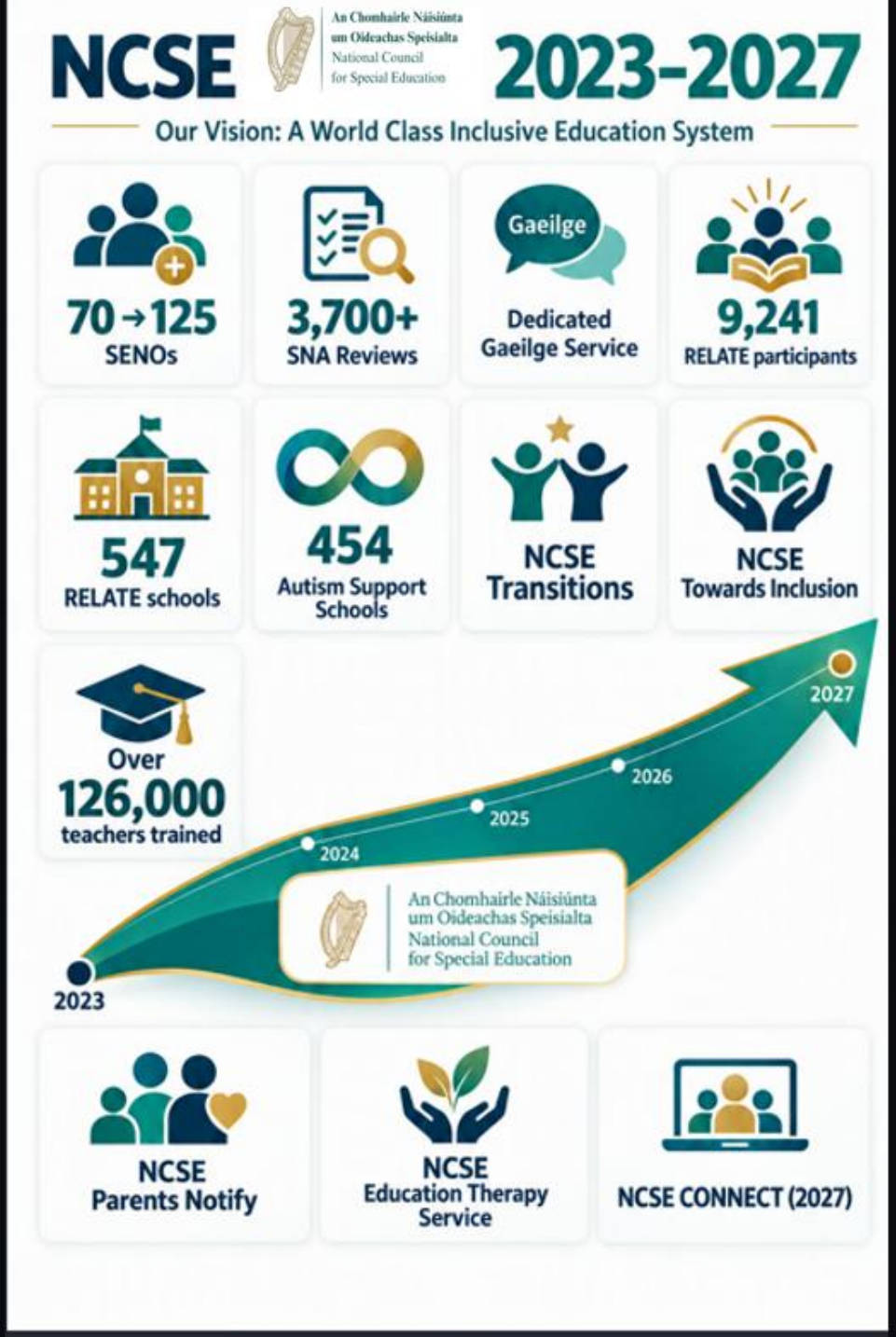
Innovation
Embracing new ideas and solutions for better outcomes

Informed
Using evidence and research to shape decisions

Belonging
Building inclusive communities where everyone belongs

A MORE INCLUSIVE TOMORROW, TOGETHER

NCSE DELIVERY 2022 -2026



SCHOOL ENROLMENT TRENDS (2019/20 – 2025/26)

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

-3.9%

CHANGE 2019/20 TO 2025/26

567,716 (2019/20) → **545,726** (2025/26)

21,990 FEWER PUPILS

ENROLMENT OVER TIME



POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

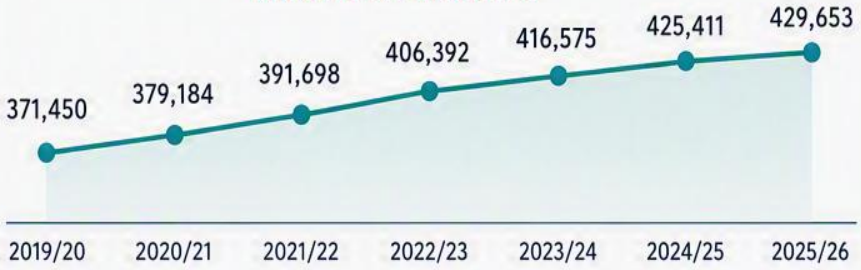
+15.7%

CHANGE 2019/20 TO 2025/26

371,450 (2019/20) → **429,653** (2025/26)

58,203 MORE STUDENTS

ENROLMENT OVER TIME



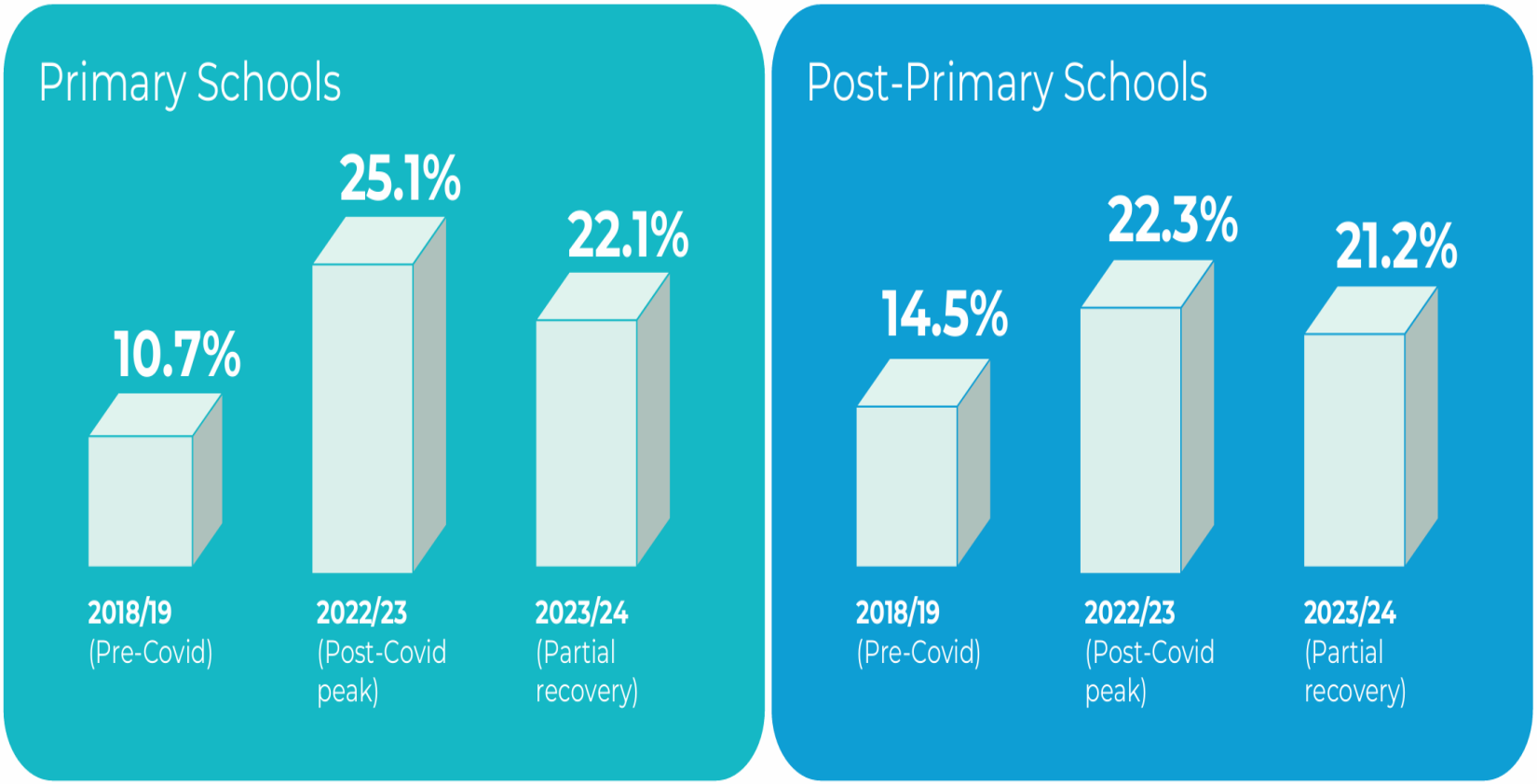
Larger cohorts are progressing through the education system,
resulting in continued growth at post-primary level despite declining enrolments at primary level.

Why Attendance Matters

tess
Seirbhís Tacaíochta Oideachais Tusla
Tusla Education Support Service

School Attendance Summit 2026

Delivering on a child's right to education



Source: Tusla Education Support Service - Analysis of School Attendance Data, 2018/19, 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Trends and Investment

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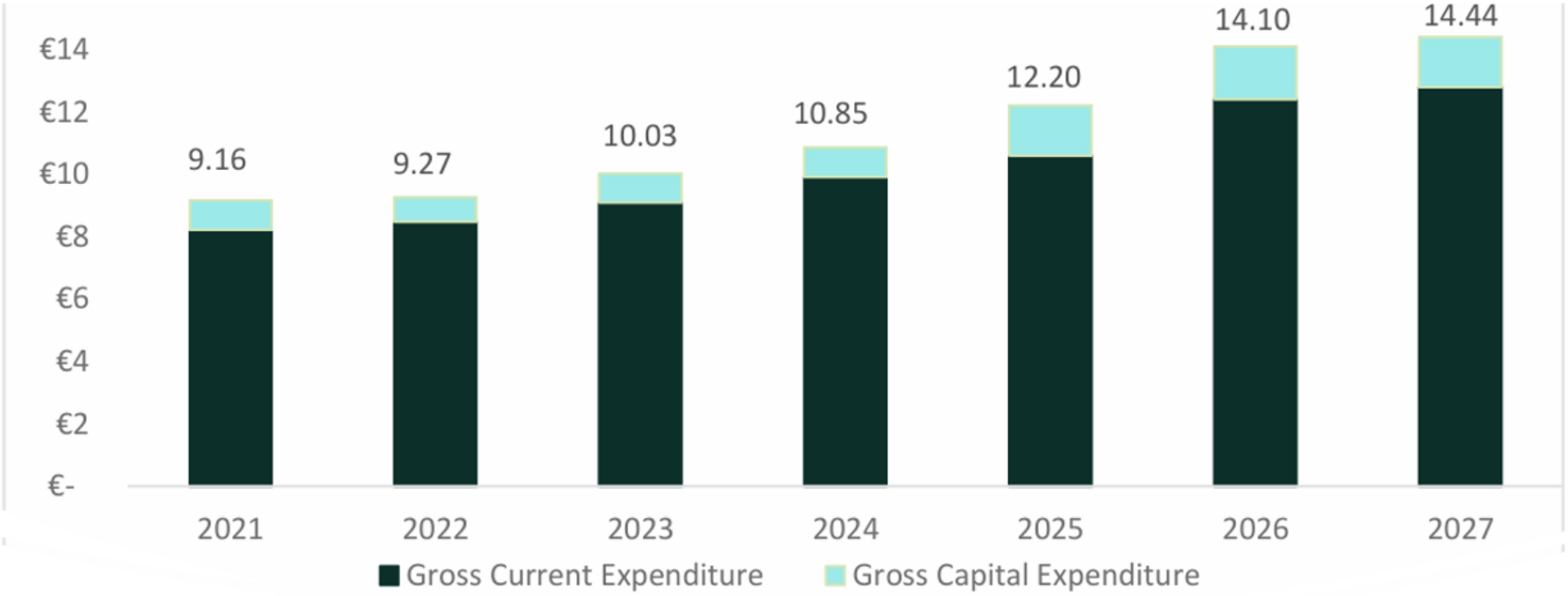

Special Education Investment Trend (2021–2027)

- Funding increased from €9.16bn in 2020 to over €14.44bn in 2027, demonstrating sustained growth in investment in special education support and capacity.

Category of Irish School

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School Type	Number of Schools
Mainstream Primary Schools	3,069
Mainstream Post-Primary Schools	723
Special Schools	129
Hospital Schools	7
CAMHS Schools	3
Total Schools & Special Settings	3,931

NCSE Special Class Provision Growth: 2020–2026

Schools with Special Classes
962 → 2,001

Total Special Classes
1,836 → 4,288

Overall Growth
+108% Schools
+134% Classes

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Sector	Schools 2020	Schools 2026	% Change	Classes 2020	Classes 2026	% Change
Primary	678	1471	+117%	1319	2985	+126%
Post-Primary	284	530	+87%	517	1303	+152%
TOTAL	962	2001	+108%	1836	4288	+134%

Summary

- Primary school coverage increased from 21% to 48%
- Post-primary coverage increased from 39% to 73%
- Special class provision more than doubled across mainstream education

Special Classes 2027/28

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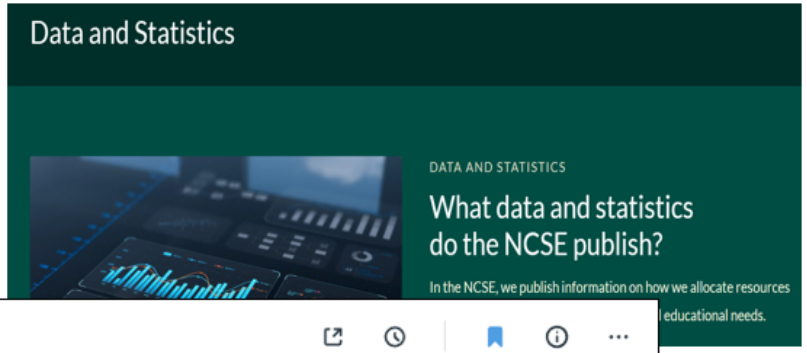
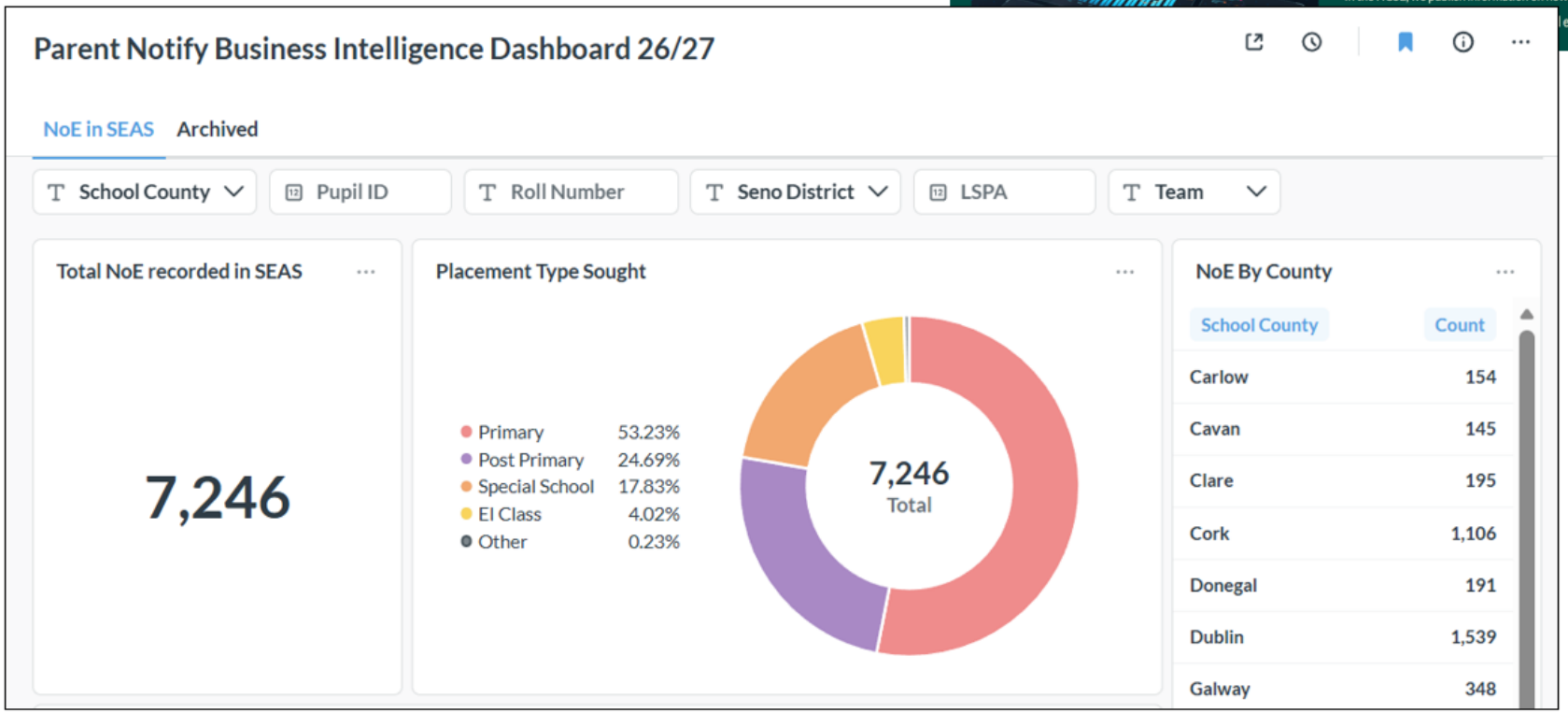
https://www.ncse.ie/ncse/data-and-statistics/





Special Class Provision Overview 2026/27

- 7,864 children were deemed eligible by October 1st with many more eligible after the deadline of which:
  - 8,309 sought special class placements
- To meet demand, NCSE established 573 special classes across both primary and post primary classes

Table 2 Sanctioned Classes

Sector	Total Sanctioned	Of which Inclusive	Standard*
Primary	378	23	355
Post Primary	206	45	161
Total	584	68	516

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Ireland Budget 2027: Contribution to Special Education

Over 25% total budget allocated to special education in 2027

2,339 additional SNAs

1,353 additional special education teachers

52,000+ staff supporting students with SEN

Continued Expansion of ETS (7M)

Special Education Training (6M)

NCSE Letter 2027/28

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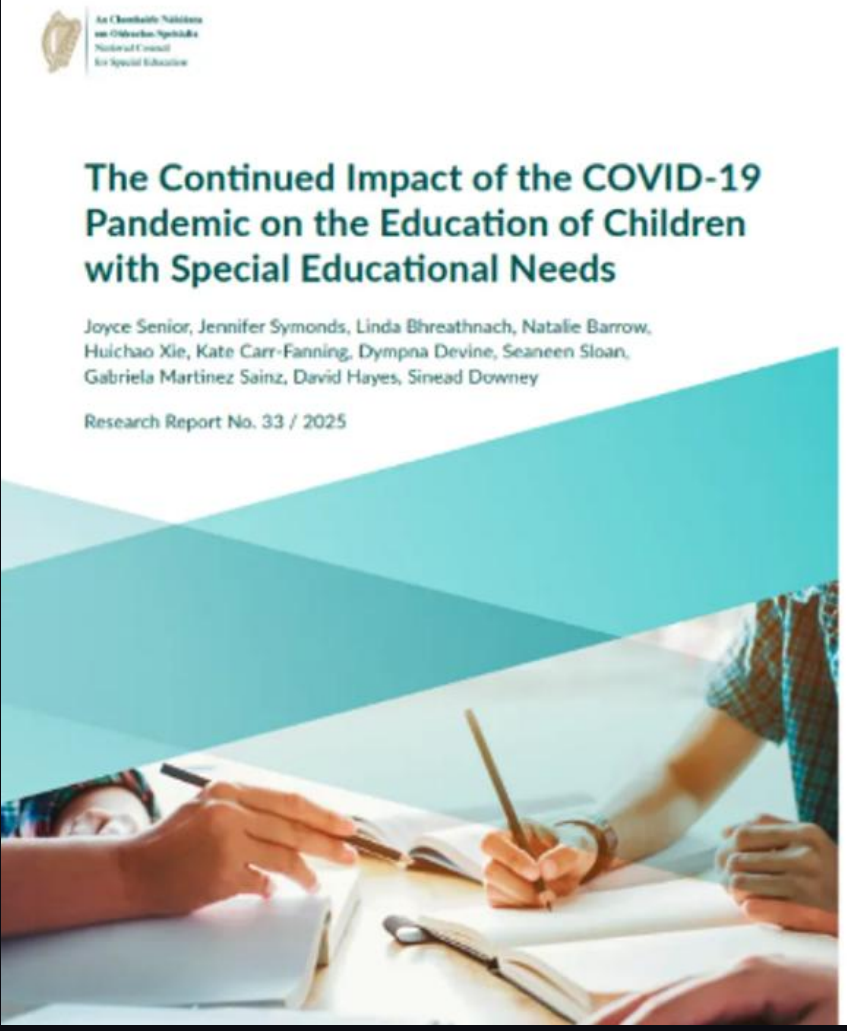
- Focus on schools with no special classes
- Schools with small numbers of special classes relative to school size
- Accommodation
  - Re-configuration
  - Inclusive Classes
- Children being supported in their mainstream schools

- NCSE Portal to facilitate schools response

The Complexity in our Schools



Complexity of Need

- It is estimated that 5.6 % of child population approx. 70,000 children require CDNT supports. This represents an increase from 3.5% , approx. 42,000 children 10 years ago.
- 5% rate of population Autism
- Growth to 42,000 children in specialist provision nationwide by 2032 from 28,000
- Estimated that over 20,000 children will be overdue for AON completion by the end of the year.

20 New Special Schools Since 2021

Year	No of New Special Schools
21/22	3
22/23	4
23/24	4
25/26	5
26/27	4

New Special Schools Opened Since 2021

4 New Special Schools 2026
Citywest Community Special School
Balbriggan Community Special School
Rosglas Community Special School
Edel Quinn School

Education Therapy Service (ETS)

Press release

Ministers Naughton and Moynihan launch recruitment campaign for new Education Therapy Service (ETS)

From: Department of Education and Youth
Published on: 28 November 2025
Last updated on: 28 November 2025

Minister for Education and Youth, Hildegarde Naughton T.D, and Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Michael Moynihan T.D., have today launched a recruitment campaign for therapists to the new Education Therapy Service (ETS).

The recruitment campaign run by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will see 90 **occupational** and **speech and language therapists** join the new service.

NCSE Education Therapy Service

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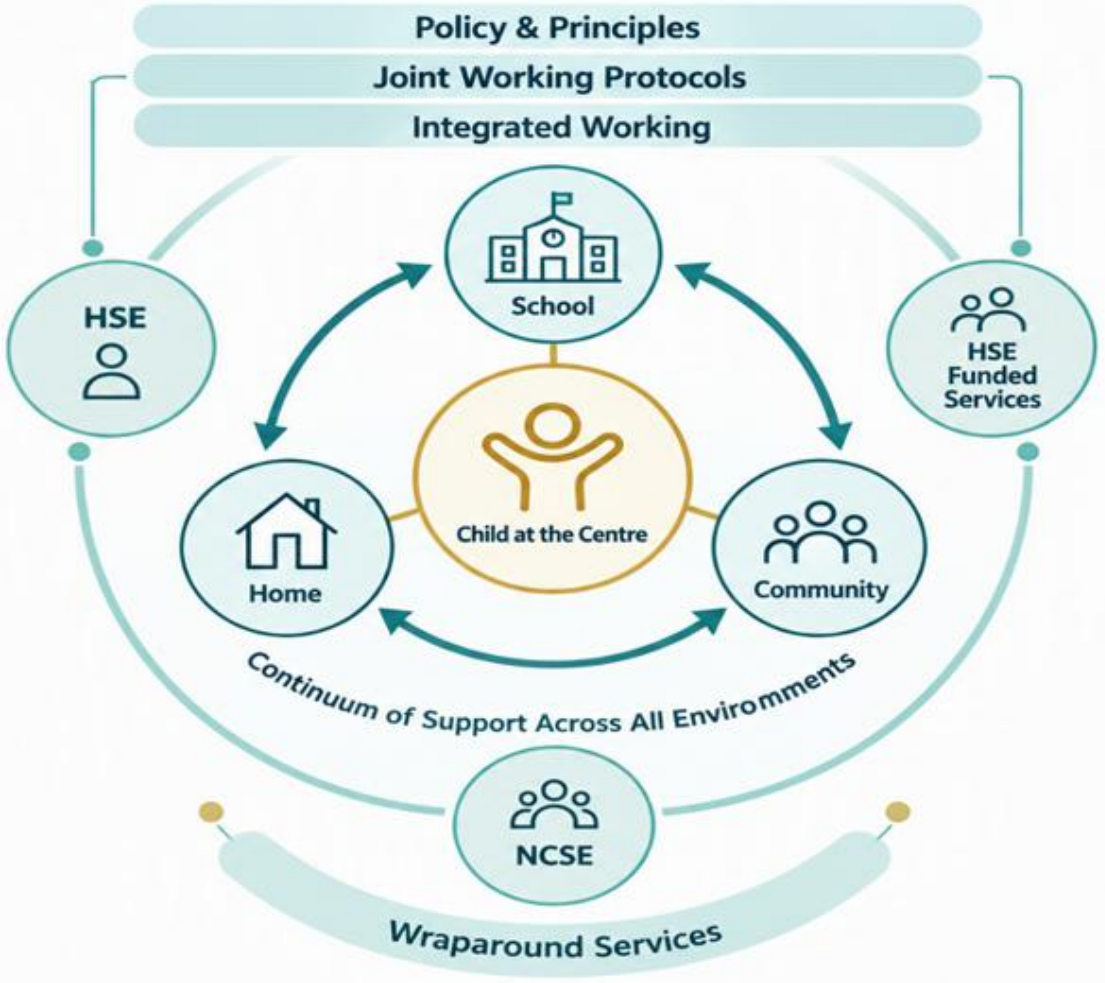
Strand I

NCSE OT and SLT

Therapists working directly with children in Special Schools and Special Classes



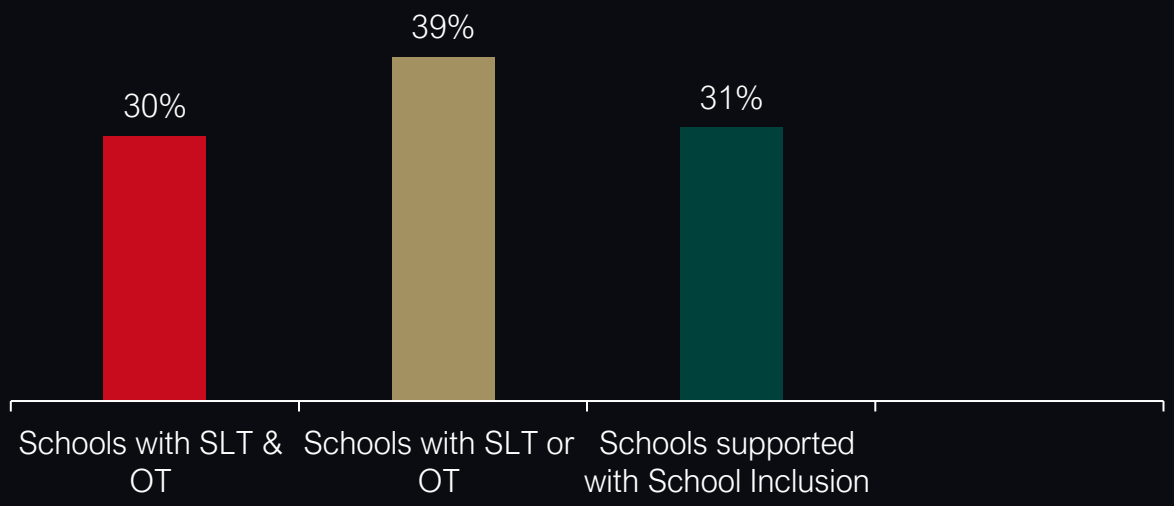
Envisioned Timelines for Implementation

Phase	Deliverable	Timeline
Phase 1	Recruit 90 therapists to work in 45 special schools initially in a large urban area with some scope for a smaller rural area. Therapists – Snr and staff grade, therapy assistants	September 2025 – August 2026
Phase 2	Service initiated in remaining special schools nationally. During this phase recruitment for therapy provision into special classes in mainstream and mainstream classes must be initiated in preparation for Phase 3.	September 2026 – December 2027
Phase 3	Deliver service to special classes and mainstream classes	January 2028 – June 2029

Strand 1 & 2 : Status Update

The first cohort of ETS therapists joined the NCSE in May, with further therapists onboarding each month.

25	64	133	40
Counties in Phase 1 and 2	Phase 1 and 2 special schools	Total special schools	ETS Strand 1 therapists (September)



National Recruitment
- Management Posts
- Senior Grades
  - SLT
  - OT
- Staff Grades
  - SLT
  - OT

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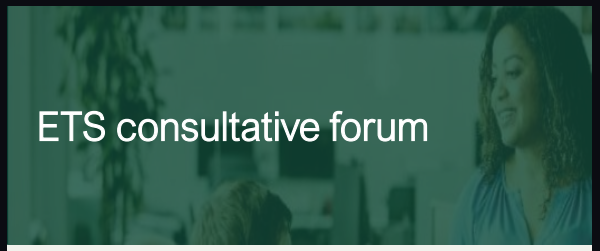
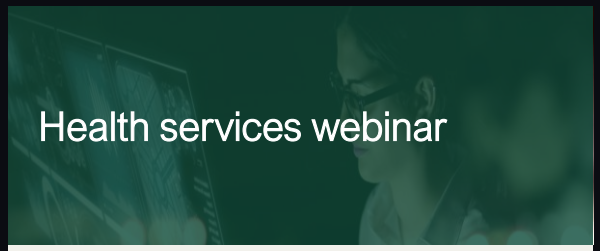
Consultation Across the System



ETS consultative forum

September 23rd

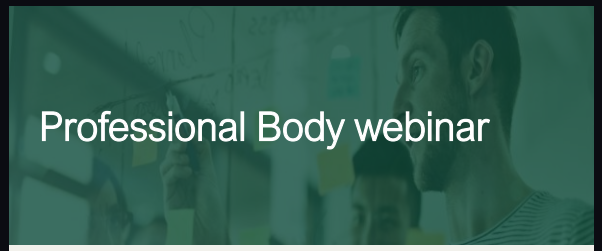
- Representatives from unions, professional bodies, advocacy groups and other key stakeholders
- Questions gathered in advance, so the session was focused and met information needs
- Updates on the ETS, with time for questions and answers



Health services webinar

Delivered Collaboratively

- Colleagues across primary care, CDNT, CAMHS and more
- Developed and presented collaboratively by health and education
- Questions invited in advance, so content matched information needs
- Regional breakout rooms to close: NCSE ETS support provision in 64 special schools shared



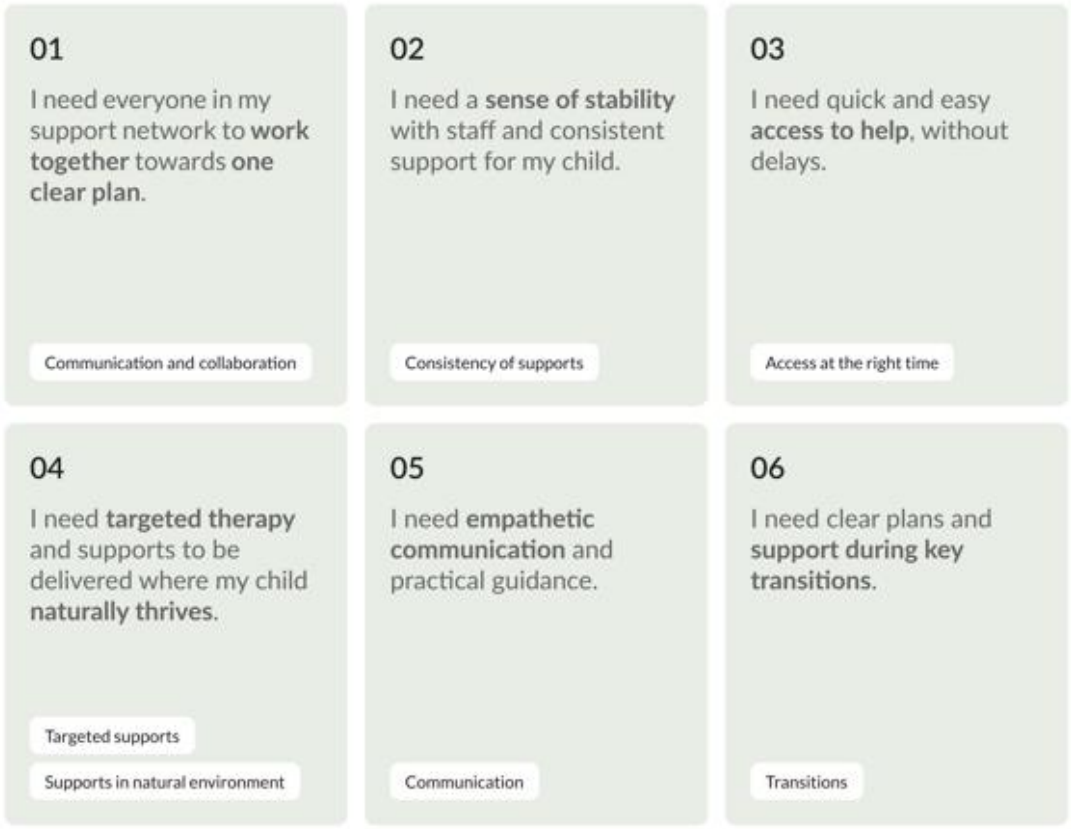
Professional Body webinar

NCSE/ DEY

- Delivered to members of the Association of Occupational Therapists Ireland (AOTI) and the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists
- Updates on ETS, service provided and development
- Information provided on recruitment
- Questions taken in advance and webinar tailored. Significant questions and answers session post webinar.

Parental Feedback

- Communication and Collaboration
- Consistency of Supports
- Access at the right time
- Targeted Supports
- Supports in natural Environment
- Communication
- Transitions



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HIBERNIA COLLEGE
EST.MM

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ICEP europe
Institute of Child Education and Psychology

Research Questions

- What drivers have contributed to the increasing demand for special class and special school placements?
- How have policy changes and societal awareness influenced this trend?
- How have clinical diagnoses influenced this trend?
- What are the experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders regarding special education placement needs?
- How can the education and health systems, including policy makers, better respond to this demand?

8 High-level Findings

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1. Increased parental awareness of SEN is seen as the greatest driver of demand for special class and special school places
2. The complexity of needs that young people are presenting intensifies the challenges felt at school level when responding to the growth in demand for special class and special school places.
3. School communities display high levels of professionalism along with care and empathy for the young people they teach and for their families, but the growth in demand for SEN places is having a direct negative impact on school leaders, teachers and SNAs.
4. Access to a diagnoses is seen to be impacting equity of access to school places.
5. Collaboration between the health and education systems, in the provision of therapeutic supports in schools, is seen as key to ensuring that learning needs are met.
6. School communities have a strong appetite for ongoing professional learning in the area of inclusion.
7. Balancing the local pressures felt in schools with the progression of national long-term inclusion policies is a task to be shared by all stakeholders.
8. Local, school and community-based initiatives to support inclusion are a strong feature of the Irish education system.

Press release

Ministers Naughton and Moynihan Announce Establishment of National Forum on Inclusive Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

From: Department of Education and Youth

Published on: 8 July 2026

Last updated on: 8 July 2026

- Bringing together key stakeholders to develop a shared national vision for inclusive education
- Progressing inclusive education in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and builds on policy advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

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NCSE SNA Review Process 2025/26

Schools reviewed over 2025/26			
% with SNA Increase/No change	0-1 Surplus post	1-2 Surplus posts	+2 Surplus posts
56%	27%	11%	6%

- Circular and letters– reductions hadn't happened for some time
- Communication and Re-deployment
- NCSE Duty to get posts to schools that need them
- There are surplus posts in schools today
- SNA workforce planning suspended

Key Dates

Application Window Opens	Application Window Closes
Monday 07th December 2026	Friday 11th December 2026 at 5pm

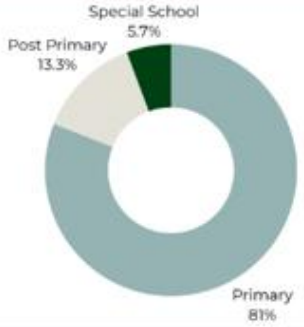
Data

- NCSE has received 263 SNA reviews for 2026/27
  - Pre SNA review meetings are not complete in 253 schools
  - Over 129 reviews are complete and issued to panel

Schools Continue to Report Challenges with

- Timelines of Outcomes
- Administration Burden
- NCSE is committed to improving this

Type of Schools



Number of Schools:

- Primary: 213
- Post Primary: 35
- Special Schools: 15

Total number of Tickets: 263

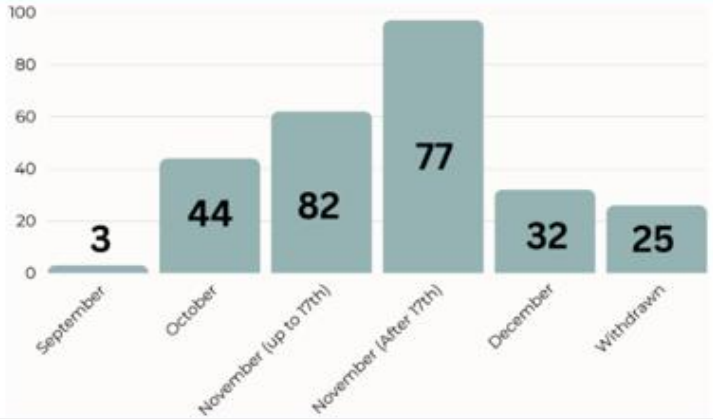
Current Status of Pre SNARs

There are 253 completed pre SNARS and 10 pre SNARS outstanding for the remainder of November.
Total: 263 items, with approximately 96.2% completed and 3.8% outstanding.



Current Status of SNA Reviews

There are 263 SNA Reviews within the SNA Review cycle which covers September 2026 to December 2026



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- Meeting growing demands for specialist support while strengthening inclusion in mainstream schools.
- Not competing priorities but two parts of the same goal

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CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Towards a More Inclusive Education System

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1. VISION & UNDERSTANDING

- Lack of clarity on how full inclusion can be implemented
- Does "All" mean All?
- Lack of a shared definition of inclusion

2. SYSTEM CAPACITY

- Restricted budgets
- Class sizes and proportion of students with SEN in a class
- Limited physical space
- Workable day-to-day implementation

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Building an inclusive education system together

3. WORKFORCE & PRACTICE

- Appropriate child-centred pedagogies
- Teacher expertise
- Professional learning and development

4. CULTURE & RELATIONSHIPS

- Attitudes and beliefs
- Parental perspectives on segregated provision and supports they fought for
- Place versus appropriate education

OPPORTUNITIES

- Shared understanding of inclusive education
- Stronger teacher confidence and capability
- Sustainable resource planning
- Enhanced collaboration with families
- Improved learner outcomes and progress
- Greater participation and belonging for all

Belonging

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Erik Carter 2026

"For every student who remains educationally segregated there are other students with similar attributes, abilities, and needs who are successfully included.

This simple fact suggests that whether a student with a disability is meaningfully included may have less to do with his or her characteristics and more to do with the attitudes, skills, structure, and practices of the adults responsible for providing education."

Michael Giangreco

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Questions

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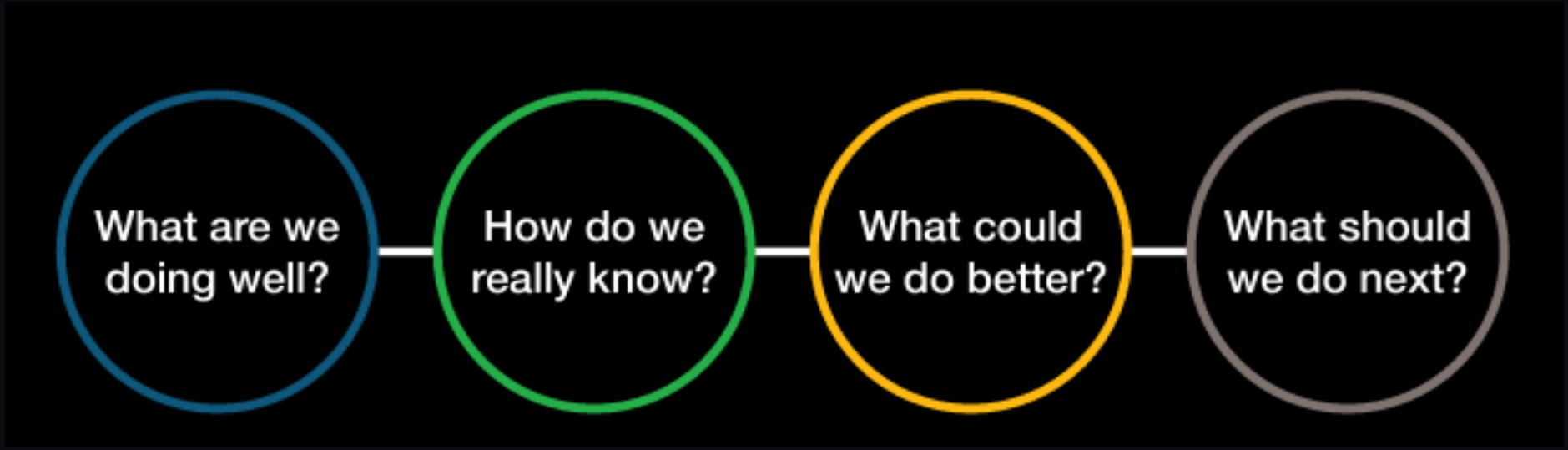

NCSE CONNECT

Because We are All Different and We All Belong



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NCSE CONNECT

- From Individual to Universally Targeted Approaches for every classroom
- An Informed & Layered Easy-to-Use Strategy-Based Framework
- Quality Practice Benchmarks
- Digital Interface Designed as a School Resource for Inclusive Practice
- Mapped into School Self Evaluation Targets and school improvement
- Accompanied by an NCSE Incremental Roll-out Program
- NCSE Scope of Practice
- Sustained Support by NCSE interdisciplinary professionals
- Self Directed or NCSE Supported

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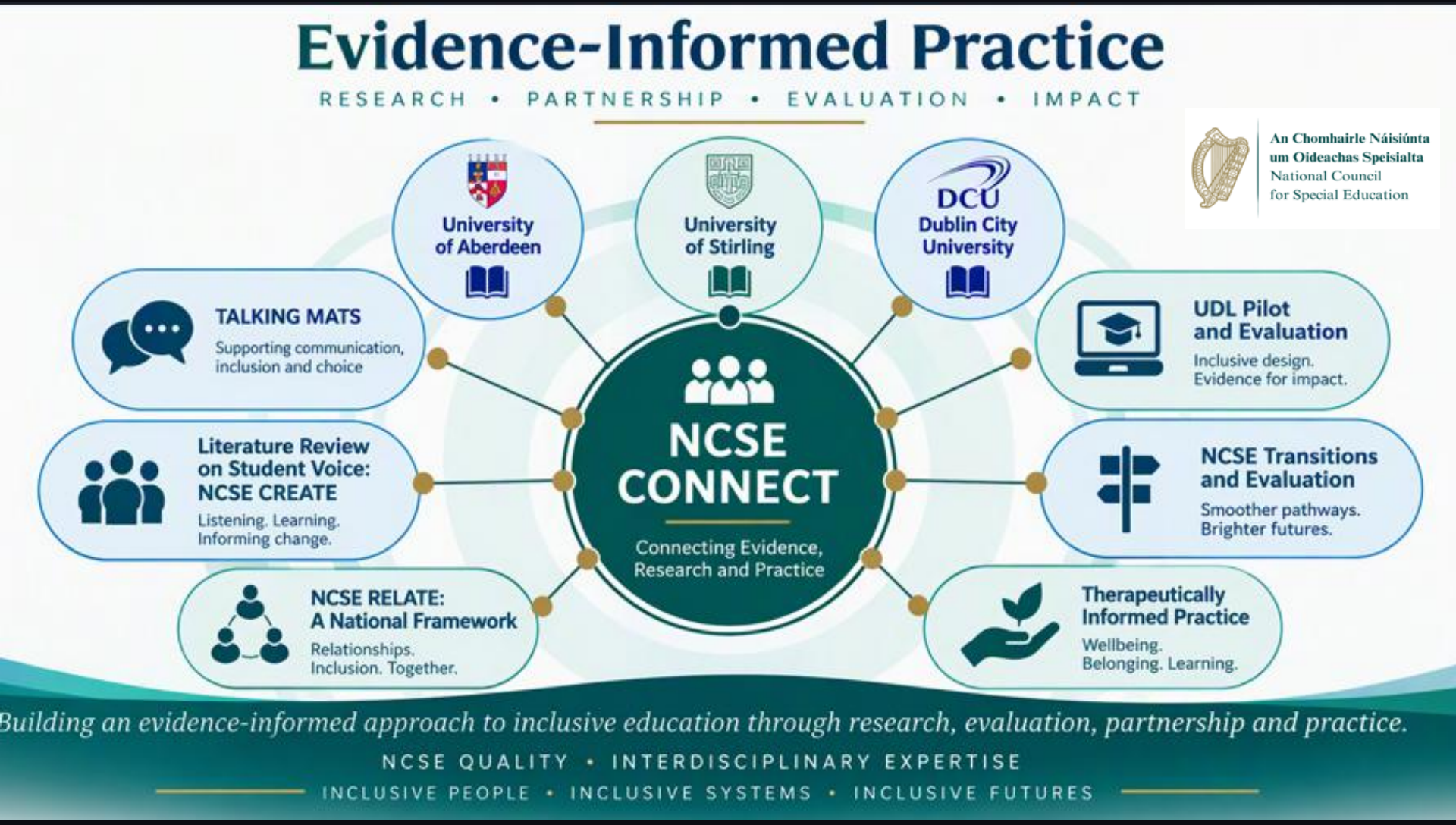
Frameworks for Practice



Do we feel safe, valued, understood and regulated enough to learn, participate and contribute?



NCSE Relate – A Regulation First Approach to Re-framing Behaviour

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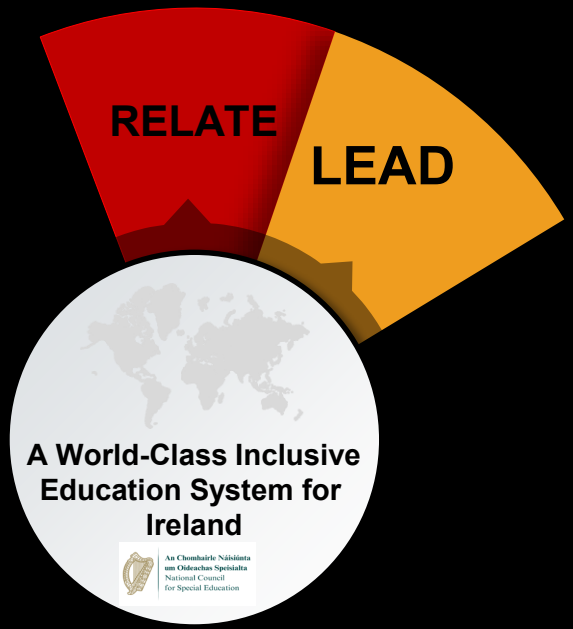
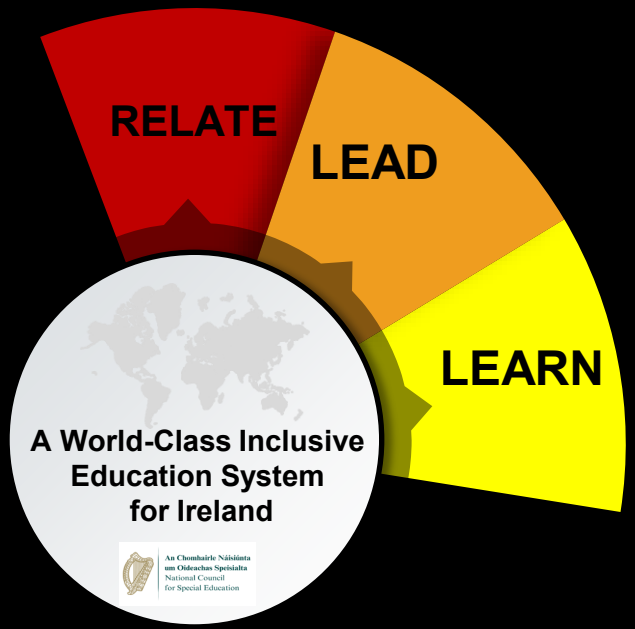
How can leaders build a Culture where the Membership, Participation and Collaboration of all are Co-constructed?



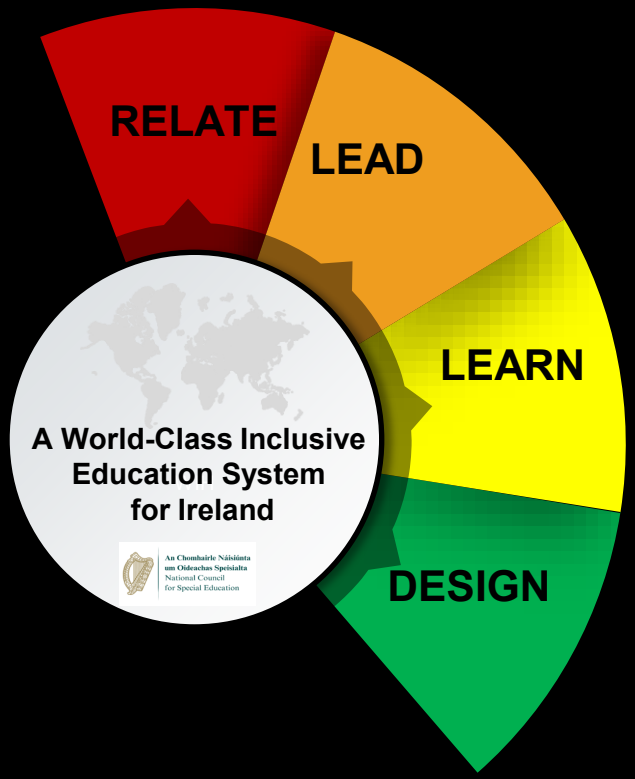
NCSE LEAD – Culture, Collaboration, Sustain

Are Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Collaboration designed so that All can learn?



NCSE Learn – Universal Pedagogy for Diverse Learners

Does the Physical, Sensory and Social Environment help us participate, engage and thrive?



NCSE Design – Sensory, Physical and Social Environment

Is Diversity Valued so that we All belong, Participate and are Equal Members ?



NCSE BELONG – Neuro-Affirmative Practice

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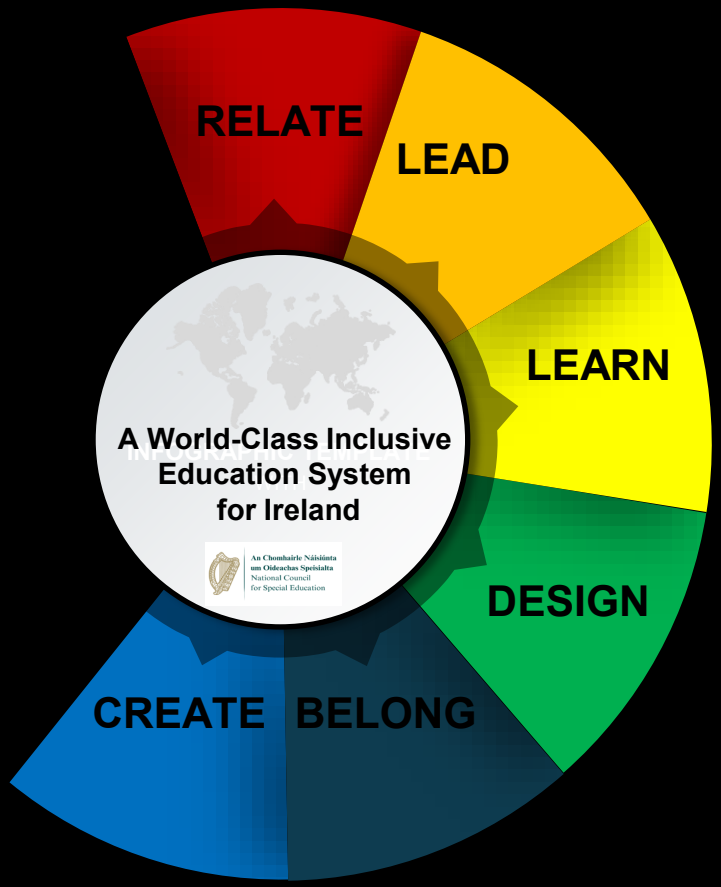
Are the voices of students, families and the school community sought to build membership and affect positive change?



NCSE CREATE – Membership and Participation

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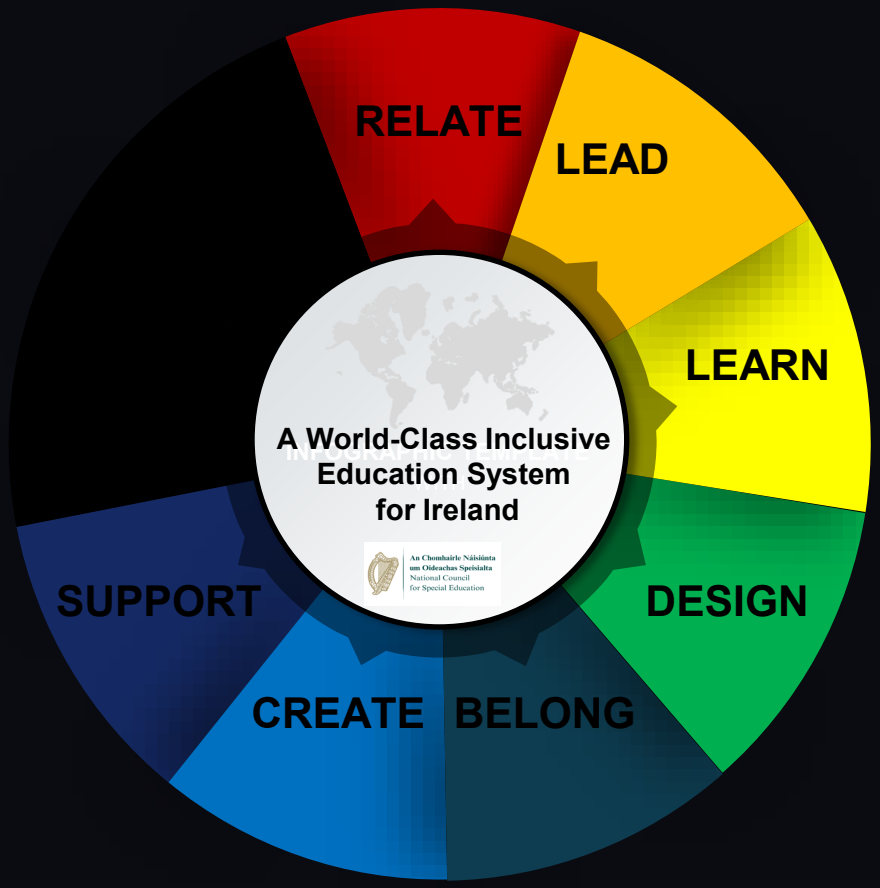
Are the Right Supports, Resources and Personnel available when, where and how we need them?



NCSE SUPPORT – Deployment, Resources and Provision

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Can we access learning, the environment and communication without sensory, acoustic or other barriers getting in our way?



NCSE ACCESS – Barriers, Communication and Acoustics

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Will we be Enabled to Reach our Potential Into, Through and After School?



NCSE PROGRESS – Transitions into, through and after school

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NCSE Moodle

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Catalogue

English (en_wp)

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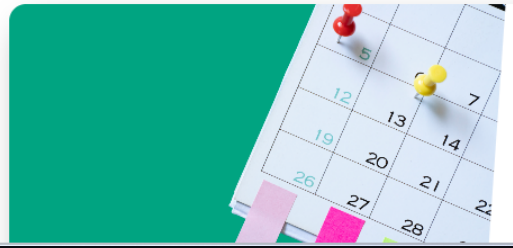

Catalogue

View the TPL Catalogue and book your place.

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Thank You



Thank You

