

Proposed New
Model for
Allocating
Teachers for
Students with
SEN in
Mainstream
Setting

IPPN Response

[September 2014]

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Irish Primary Principals (IPPN) accepts the rationale behind this proposed new model of allocating resources for students with Special Education Needs in mainstream school. 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 an appropriate level of support. IPPN believes that it is a step in the right direction when resources are allocated on a needs basis but cautions that a balance must be maintained. Educational needs should indeed take precedence over less scientific allocation models, but high performing schools must not become victims of their success in the roll out of any new model.

There is a very real fear amongst Principals and teachers nationwide that the proposed new model will be used as a tool to further reduce SEN allocations to primary schools. The survey that has recently issued to schools not only places an additional workload on the principal but also positions them in a space where they must assume the role of social interpreters and data collectors. Any assertion that the workload of the Principal is actually reduced through no longer having to make individual applications for support does not stand up in the short term. It is acknowledged that there should be a benefit in the long term.

The requirement on schools to record and report baseline information and submit an annual report to the National Council for Special Education negates any gains made in the area of administrative overload.

2. OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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

2.1. SCHOOL PROFILING

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. Resorting to estimations will not provide an accurate picture, particularly in relation to emotional and behavioural disorders. 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?
- ❖ Will the use of Standardised Scores prove a disincentive to these schools?
- ❖ Is profiling guaranteed to deliver a more equitable distribution of resources?
- ❖ Will profiling create 'ghetto' schools and reduce the ability of some schools to exercise autonomy in the utilisation of teaching staff in the best interests of the school?
- ❖ 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 acknowledges 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, loses any more than 40% of its' current 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. Clarity must also be provided in relation to the employment of teachers with restricted recognition.

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.

DEIS and SEN allocations should be reviewed together taking cognisance of the numbers of Low Incidence pupils and provision made for the small number of schools that experience extreme fluctuations in the enrolment of these pupils.

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. BENEFITS OF PROPOSED NEW MODEL

Streamlining the allocation process does bring benefits. In introducing greater equity to the system, large numbers of Traveller, Newcomer 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 agitating for the use of this descriptor 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.