



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

International Administrative Review

of Specialist Provision for Students
with Special Educational Needs

2024





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A report produced by the NCSE.

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1. Introduction

This report details the main findings of an international administrative review undertaken by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on the use of special schools and/or special classes for students with special educational needs. Following this introduction, section two outlines the methodology for the review while section three reports on the findings of the survey. The report concludes with some general observations on the findings.

2. Methodology

In October 2018, the NCSE designed a survey to examine the use of special schools and/or classes elsewhere in the world to educate students with special educational needs. The aim of the survey was to identify key aspects of specialist provision in operation in other administrations, including eligibility criteria, allocation processes, professionals working in specialist provision, and the impact and cost (see appendix 1 for the full survey).

There were four responses to the survey, from a potential 42 (see appendix 3 for a full list of administrations sampled). These were Sweden, Estonia, Malta and the Slovak Republic. A decision was taken to supplement these data with telephone interviews with representatives from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as seek input from representatives from Italy, Germany, France and Finland. Via telephone interviews and receipt of written information from these administrations, the number of responses increased to 12 (a response rate of 29%).

It should be noted that there are a number of limitations with the evidence presented here. The response rate and the Eurocentric nature of the evidence are obvious limitations. In addition, it is not possible to directly compare schemes or mechanisms that operate in surveyed countries/ jurisdictions which are aimed at supporting students with disabilities who have additional needs. There are a number of reasons for this, including the different types of states surveyed, the different levels at which responsibility of education policy is held (central and/or regional and/or local) and the different education contexts and systems. The varying quality and incomplete nature of some of the data provided by some respondents, also precludes anything other than a rudimentary reporting of the information provided. Unfortunately, this greatly limits what we can definitively learn from other countries about how they are providing for the education of students with complex needs.

3. Overview of Responses

3.1 Existence, Extent and Role of Separate Specialist Provision

Respondents were asked whether their education systems had special schools and/or special classes. All administrations responded to this question, but provided varying levels of detail.

Sweden reported having eight special schools for students with: visual impairment and additional disabilities; students who are deaf/hard of hearing combined with learning disabilities; congenital deaf-blindness; severe speech and language disorder; students who are deaf/hard of hearing; and students with intellectual disabilities.

Special classes exist in Sweden to meet the needs of students with special educational needs including EBD, ASD and ADHD, but also students with social problems (undefined) and those who have been out of school for a long time. These are organised at a local level.

Formally, **Italy** does not have specialist provision. Former special schools, for example for students who are deaf/hard of hearing, still enrol students with disabilities but also can and do enrol students without special educational needs as well. However, there are centres where students with complex special educational needs are educated away from, but connected to, the local mainstream school. Known as rehabilitation centres (RCs), they are for students who require almost continuous medical and/or therapeutic support. There are approximately 100 RCs in Italy currently.

Students who have needs without the requirements for the support of an RC are educated in mainstream schools. There are no special classes in Italy. Students who require additional support access it through the special education teacher. Universal Design for Learning is an increasing part of mainstream provision in Italy.

The **Slovak Republic** reported that there were 443 special schools for students with a range of disabilities. Special classes are provided for students with specific learning disabilities and for students with cognitive impairment. No data was provided on the number of special classes.

France provides both special schools and special classes at primary and post primary levels of its education system. As of 2015, there were over 2000 special schools, which provide schooling, education and therapeutic care for students who are assessed as not being able to attend a mainstream environment. These are broadly organised around categories of disability.

Since 2015, French mainstream schools also have Local Units for Educational Inclusion. The role of these is to support continuity in education and reinforce the inclusion of students in mainstream schools. There are seven categories of these units for particular types of disabilities. Students in these local units must take part in all activities organised for all learners, particularly extra-curricular activities. The reference class for students in these units is the mainstream class for their age (hence these forms of 'special classes' are viewed as temporary supports, and are not seen as distinct from ordinary classes). No data was provided on the number of units in existence.

Since 2018/19, specific School Teaching Units for Autism have opened on in primary schools, for students with ASD for whom the Local Units for Educational Provision are insufficient.

Estonia operates both special schools and classes for students with special educational needs. There are 39 special schools catering for students with a high level of need. There are also 238 special classes.

In **Finland**, the number of special schools has reduced significantly since 2000, when there were 270. Currently, there are approximately 70 special schools for about 4,000 students. Some of the special schools are labelled as hospital schools, and seek to meet the needs of students who are in-patients in hospitals, but they also enrol students who are not in-patients but who have an ongoing medical problem requiring medical support. There are also special schools for students who have an intellectual disability. Then there are five special schools nationally which also double as a resource to mainstream provision. Finally, there are municipal special schools, the number of which vary by municipality. No data was provided.

Finland also has special classes. These are within the competence of the municipality. There is no national data held on the number of these, but the Ministry is aware that eligibility criteria differ for these across municipalities. Finland has also seen the establishment of 'caring' classes for students specifically with chronic EBD, both in primary and post-primary settings. These classes have a psychiatric nurse, a teacher and an assistant, with five to six students in each class. In some municipalities, special schools are being closed and students are being moved into special classes in mainstream schools. It is viewed as arranging inclusion in a more flexible way.

Malta has five special schools only (termed resource centres locally), where a small number of students with complex special educational needs are educated. Some students attend on a part-time basis, or to access specialist services not available in mainstream schools, but there are fulltime students also. There are currently no special classes in Malta.

While education provision in **Germany** is the responsibility of Länder (regional authorities), it is framed by a series of national laws and policies. Germany operates both special schools and special classes, although the latter are described as a 'form of infrequent support' on which no data is available. Special schools are organised based on different categories of disabilities. Some of these schools (for students with speech, language and communication needs, and for students with emotional and social development needs) are described as transitional schools, the focus of which is to support them to eventually access mainstream education. Increasingly, there are also special pedagogical resource centres in some regions, which act as a support for inclusive teaching in mainstream schools as well as meeting the needs of some students directly. No data was provided on the number of special schools in Germany.

Northern Ireland has 40 recognised special schools which historically have met a range of special educational needs, but it is concentrating now on narrowing provision to mainly provide students with severe and profound general learning disability. It has a number of special classes catering to students with special educational needs such as ASD and SSLD. These are locally established and as such data is not available.

England has special schools which provide for students with more complex special educational needs (as defined locally and stated on a student's Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan). It also has special classes. Because both forms of provision are organised locally, it is difficult to get an overall sense of provision.

Scotland has both special schools and special classes. Some special classes in the Irish context can be categorised as special schools in Scotland. While these are small in number, it makes identifying the actual number difficult. There were 174 special schools in total. Schools in Scotland can also establish special classes from their own resources, and as a result there are no data available on the number of classes.

Wales has about 40 special schools for the education of students with more complex special educational needs. It also has special classes, organised on a local basis, and hence reliable data is not available.

The majority of respondents noted that specialist provision, where it existed either in the form of special classes or special schools were part of a continuum of provision for students with special educational needs.

The table below provides information on the percentage of students educated in special schools and special classes for the administrations featured in this report. The data is drawn from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education's Inclusive Education Dataset for the year 2016/17. While not without its problems regarding how students are classified across countries, and missing data, it provides a consistent snapshot of provision in the administrations included in this report across a defined time period.

As can be seen, students in special classes as a percentage of all students enrolled in recognised schools, the values range from 0.1% in England to 2.9% in Finland. In relation to students in special schools as a percentage of all students enrolled in recognised schools, the values range from 0.02% in Italy to 2.3% in Germany and Estonia.

Table 1: Number and % of students enrolled in formal educational settings, with an official decision of SEN, in special classes and in special schools

	England	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Malta	N. Ireland	Scotland	Slovak Rep	Sweden	Wales
Children/learners enrolled in all formal educational settings	6,626,466	143,713	702,156	10,289,966	9,983,488	916,114	7,186,607	38,330	317,706	684,348	667,046	1,384,371	403,011
Children/learners with an official decision of SEN in any form of education	197,525	9,149	64,330	288,977	411,702	60,220	226,228	3,795	16,768	170,442	84,041	16,504	12,278
Children/learners with an official decision of SEN educated in separate special groups/units/ classes in mainstream educational settings	6,598	2,436	20,476	66,725	NA	5,673	NA	NA	2,308	NA	9,513	NA	2,530
as a % of all students	0.1	1.7	2.9	0.6	NA	0.6	NA		0.7	NA	1.4	NA	0.6
as a % of students with SEN	3.3	26.6	31.8		NA	9.4	NA		13.8	NA	11.3	NA	20.6
Children/learners with an official decision of SEN educated in separate special (pre)schools	91,408	3,261	3,916	47,416	232,520	7,482	1,622	203	5,000	6,668	21,359	15,282	4,248
as a % of all students	1.4	2.3	0.6	0.5	2.3	0.8	0.02	0.5	1.6	1.0	3.2	1.1	1.1
as a % of students with official decision of SEN	46.3	35.6	6.1	16.4	56.5	12.4	0.7	5.3	29.8	3.9	25.4	92.6	34.6

Source: European Agency on Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Statistics on Inclusive Education, school year 2016/17

Key points:

- All administrations provide some form of specialist provision.
- Of all respondents, Malta and Italy do not provide special classes.
- Given the sub-national level of provision in many cases, there were issues accessing reliable data re. the number of specialist provision settings.
- The extent of enrolment in specialist provision as a percentage of the total school population ranges from 0.1%-2.9% for special classes and 0.02% – 2.3% for special schools.

3.2 Establishing Specialist Provision

Respondents were asked how special schools and classes were established or set up. All respondents answered the question.

In **Sweden**, special schools are provided for in law, and are nationally funded and resourced through the Agency for Special Needs Education. The establishment of special classes is a matter for individual schools, and are resourced by the local municipality.

In **Italy**, Rehabilitation Centres (RCs) are established by the Ministry of Health, via its regional offices and with local school input as well (the class(es) in the RC are connected to the local mainstream school).

In **Estonia**, special schools can be established by the state at a national or local level, or by private organisations. Special schools are established by schools, on the basis of engagement with regional advisory teams. The school principal decides in conjunction with the regional advisory team regarding setting up a special class.

In **Malta**, special schools can be established only by the direction of the Department of Education. Special schools are resourced by the Department.

In **Finland**, municipalities decide whether to establish special classes and special schools dependent on local need. There are ratios of students to staff in special classes, the maximum number being 10 students to teacher. The ratio reduces dependent on the type of disability (1:8 for multiple disabilities; 1:6 for students with the most complex disabilities). If students with special educational needs are included in the mainstream class, there can only be a maximum of 20 students in the class.

In **Slovakia**, national law supports the establishing and funding of specialist provision to ensure low student numbers.

In **France**, special classes are established by the Ministry of National Education. The ratio of students to teachers should not exceed 12:1 in primary education and 10:1 in secondary education. A teaching assistant is also in each special class. The ratio for special classes in vocational schools is 16:1, with no teaching assistant present. Special schools are in the main established by the Ministry for National Education, but some are also established by voluntary organisations under the authority of the Ministry for Social Affairs,. There are no prescribed ratios for special schools.

In **Germany**, the establishment of special schools are the responsibility of the municipalities within each region. The schools are broadly based on category of disability, although in recent years special centres have been established as a resource to support inclusive education in mainstream settings, as well as providing education to students directly. Where numbers of student with particular types of disabilities are small, there is cross-regional cooperation for the provision of special schools to meet their needs. Where they exist, special classes are the responsibility of schools within each municipality.

In **England**, special schools can be established by local authorities, by charities and by independent bodies (which may or may not be state funded). Establishing special classes is usually through negotiation between an individual school and the local authority.

In **Scotland**, special schools can be established by local authorities or by independent entities. The opening of special classes is determined by the local authority and the school.

In **Wales**, the opening of both special schools and classes was identified as a matter for local authorities. However, there were examples cited of cases where co-location of special and mainstream schools are encouraged through capital budgets held by the national government, but these are rare.

In **Northern Ireland**, the establishment of a central Education Authority has resulted in greater centralised planning regarding special schools and classes. Historical provision does prevail, however, with many special schools established by charities or voluntary bodies. Special classes are opened by schools, increasingly in conjunction with the Education Authority.

Key points:

- The data appears to show a difference between UK and non-UK administrations regarding the establishing of special schools:
 - In UK areas, special schools can be established by state or independent bodies.
 - In other countries, government departments or agencies appear to have authority in this regard.
- Where they exist, establishing special classes is a matter for local level decision makers: schools and/or local authorities or municipalities.

3.3 Accessing Specialist Provision

Respondents were asked how students access special schools and classes. All respondents answered the question, but with varying degrees of information provided.

In **Sweden**, placement in most special schools is determined by a social, psychological, pedagogical and medical assessment. In the case of all special schools with the exception of the special school for intellectual disability, a diagnosis in line with the designation of the special school is also required.

In the case of special classes, there are no official criteria. Placement is determined by the school principal according to the needs of the student.

In **France**, students need a diagnosis of disability to access both special schools and special classes. Once a diagnosis has occurred, each student's needs are assessed by a multi-disciplinary team from the Commission on the Rights and Autonomy of People with Disabilities, which can determine one of a range of assistance measures, including educational, therapeutic or orientation measures either in special classes or special schools.¹ Subsequently, an individual education plan is developed which sets out the proposed educational goals for the student, along with the additional actions (pedagogical, psychological, educational, social, medical and paramedical) to meet the student's needs.

In **Estonia**, a regional advisory team made up of a range of professionals supports the assessment of students and their placement in special schools and classes. In the case of special classes specifically, placement must be based on the needs of the student, limited in terms of time and supported by recommendations for the student from the external advisory team.

In **Italy**, the medical committee of the rehabilitation centre reviews the needs of the student to assess whether they meet the entrance criteria for the RC. This is a medical review assessing whether the student's needs are such that they match the entry criteria of the RC.

In **Finland**, state-owned or national special schools have certain eligibility rules regarding their focus (e.g. hospital, category of disability). Accessing municipal special schools is determined by the municipality itself, as is access to special classes in municipal mainstream schools. Eligibility can differ from municipality to municipality.

In **Slovakia**, students access special schools and classes through having a diagnosis of disability for which the school/class is designated. They must also have a professional report outlining the reasons why specialist provision is required.

In **Malta**, students access special schools on a part-time basis for specialist support not available in mainstream schools. This is done by way of assessment.

¹ Other assistance measures here which can be determined include specialised transport, a disability card and an educational allowance for learners with disabilities.

In **Germany**, the responsibility for determining the extent of a student's special educational needs in order to access the most appropriate setting lies with school supervisory authorities in the region. It may be the case that partial or full placement in special school is recommended. No information was provided on how the assessment for entrance to the special school is undertaken was provided.

No information was provided on how special classes are accessed.

In the **UK administrations**, statutory assessment of needs (which is a legal process) play a role in the placing of students in special schools. In **Scotland**, there is a staged planning process which is used to identify the level of need and the most suitable placement. This planning process can involve parents, teachers, the local authority and other professionals (e.g. health visitors if the child is 0-5 years of age). In **Northern Ireland**, placement is based on the statutory assessment process, with the Education Authority engaging with schools regarding the individual placement of students. In **Wales**, again it is based on the level of need identified in the student's statement or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, and this is also the case for **England**.

In relation to placement in **special classes in UK administrations**, some similar processes apply, but with more local level decisions. In **Scotland**, placement in a special class may also be as a result of the staged planning process. In **Wales**, placement in a special class is often negotiated between the school, parent and student. In **England**, placement in a special class can be as a result of a statutory assessment, but the needs of other children and the efficient use of resources also need to be taken into account. In **Northern Ireland**, placement is via the assessment process, with the Education Authority engaging with individual schools to place students.

Key points:

- Where information was provided, placement in special schools is generally as a result of some form of assessment and/or diagnosis.
- There is less clarity about how students access special classes, mainly due to the local level nature of provision.
- In the UK administration, respondents noted the role of a statutory assessment process as being a key driver of placement.

3.4 Reviews of Specialist Provision Placement

Respondents were asked whether there was a formal review process regarding individual students accessing special schools and classes. All respondents answered the question, but again data was limited in detail in some responses.

In **Sweden** and **Malta**, reviews were deemed to occur regularly or constantly and tied to a student's individual plan.

In **France**, review is by way of the student's individual education plan and this takes place at school level (for both special schools and special classes), with input from the multidisciplinary team.

In **Slovakia**, it was indicated that no reviews occurred.

In **Germany**, there is continuous assessment of performance by students in special schools, in a similar manner to students in mainstream schools where possible (via exams, curricular progress), and adapted where required. Special schools also "regularly" examine whether the needs of students can continue to be met in that setting, or whether those needs should be met in another specialist setting or in mainstream school.

In **Italy**, the rehabilitation centre committee reviews the medical needs of the student. There is also a 'functioning' review of the student (looking at autonomy, communication, social and emotional development) to inform/refine their IEP and participation in education. Teachers, families and medical professionals take part in this review.

In **Finland**, review processes can differ from municipality to municipality. The frequency of reviews (of placement, and also of other aspects of the student's education, such as IEPs, access to an assistant, individualised syllabus, home tuition) is set down in law; they are required to take place after second grade (approx. 8 years of age) and before seventh grade (approx. 13 years of age).

In the **UK administrations**, reviews were tied to the statutory assessment process in relation to placement in special schools. These reviews are principal-led, and involve other stakeholders as required. Data on reviews of special class placements was patchy. In Northern Ireland, reviews of special class placements were undertaken annually, but it was noted that some thought is being given to moving this to every two years. Elsewhere in the UK, reviews of special class placements were described as occurring regularly.

Key points:

- Reviews of special school placement in the UK take place annually and are tied to a statutory process.
- In continental countries, reviews of special school placement appear less tied to time, but are deemed to occur regularly.
- Reviews of special class placement are less clear.

3.5 Relationship with Mainstream Provision

Respondents were asked whether students can transfer from mainstream schools to special schools, and from specialist schools to mainstream schools. All respondents answered these questions.

In **Sweden**, school placement is viewed as a matter of choice, so theoretically transferring from specialist to mainstream provision is possible. However, it is noted that many students, especially those who are deaf/hard of hearing start out in mainstream but transfer on a full or part-time basis to special school. Students enrolled in the special school for intellectual disability can be integrated into a mainstream school but follow their own curricula in that school.

In **France** the movement of a student from a special school to a mainstream school is ultimately the decision of the student's guardians/parents. However, if the decision to move a child is against the advice of the Commission on the Rights and Autonomy of People with Disabilities, the child will not be able to access additional supports allocated by the Commission which may help them in a mainstream settings (e.g. a personal assistant, assistive technology).

In relation to movement from special classes to mainstream classes, special classes are viewed as part of a suite of supports, rather than a distinct separate class. Movement between the special class and the mainstream class is viewed as more fluid and managed at the local level,

In **Italy**, students who are educated in rehabilitation centres are viewed as requiring long-term support. However, they may access some education in their local mainstream school, dependent on their health.

In **Finland**, it was noted that transition from specialist schools to mainstream schools can happen, particularly if parents push for it. However, it was noted that such transition does not occur that often. In relation to students in special classes, the IEP needs to outline clearly how the student will maintain a relationship with the mainstream class, and how they will be integrated into mainstream lessons.

In **Malta**, students whose needs cannot be met in mainstream school transfer resource centres only when other options (e.g. providing additional supports or services in mainstream) are exhausted.

In **Germany**, it was noted that it was always possible for students from special schools to transfer to mainstream schools. The education authority in the region make the decision following a request from a parent/guardian or from the special school. There is increasing cooperation between mainstream and special schools to facilitate transfer of students to mainstream. This activity can include joint lessons, common learning objectives, and in many cases common curricula (except in special schools for learning and mental development). Some special schools also act as a resource to mainstream schools, promoting and advising on inclusive practices. Some students can also partly attend mainstream schools and partly attend special schools.

In **Estonia**, if as part of annual review school teachers, the external advisory team and parents are of the view that a student can study in a mainstream setting, then this can occur. The response also notes that students in special classes can and do move in and out of mainstream dependent on the subject being studied.

In **Slovakia**, transition from specialist to mainstream settings is described as being very rare in practice, with parents having the final say on whether a student moves or not.

In **England**, moving from special school to mainstream school is governed by the annual statutory review. While moving from a special school to mainstream school is possible, it is viewed as unlikely. Movement from special class to fulltime mainstream provision is expected, the data to show it is happening is poor.

In **Wales**, the findings were similar. While it was acknowledged that could happen, the needs of students in special schools were viewed as too complex for mainstream provision to meet.

The response from **Scotland** was similar, with transition from special school to mainstream school being described as unusual. In relation to special class transition to mainstream, the situation was described as being more fluid, but there was a lack of data in relation to this.

In **Northern Ireland**, it was noted that there have been isolated cases of students transferring from special schools to mainstream schools, but move transition was noted to be in the other direction. Parents are viewed as a key driving force in transition of students to specialist provision. This is reported being challenged more by officials.

Key points:

- Transition from special to mainstream school is reported as possible, but in some cases is noted as rare or unusual.
- Sweden and Germany offer examples of how students with certain special educational needs can be educated in a mainstream setting on a full or part-time basis.
- Transition from special class to fulltime mainstream class is noted as a more fluid process and expected to be happening.

3.6 Teacher Qualifications in Specialist Provision

Respondents were asked did teachers in specialist provision require particular qualifications or training. All respondents answered the question.

In **Sweden**, teachers in special schools are required to be qualified as a teacher and have a master's degree in special pedagogy.

In **Estonia**, specialist provision teachers are required to have a master's degree in teaching and competencies in special education.

All teachers in **Germany** are required to be fully qualified as teachers, and in their initial teacher training may take modules on special and inclusive education, or an educating students with particular types of disabilities. Further to this, special education teacher training requirements differ from region to region. In some regions, teachers are required to undertake a specific course in inclusion, while in others they are not.

In **Slovakia**, specialist provision teachers are required to have a master's degree in special pedagogy as well as their teacher training.

In **Finland**, teachers in special schools and classes are required to have a special education qualification, with additional qualifications required for those educating students with particular disabilities (e.g. students with intellectual disabilities).

In **France**, teachers with a professional certificate in inclusive practices can be assigned to special schools and special classes. However, there is not enough qualified teachers to cover all the special classes, with the result that some special class teachers have no specialised training.

Since 2017 in **Italy**, it has been compulsory to receive inclusive education inputs as part of Initial Teacher Education (it was part of primary ITE but not secondary school ITE before then). Teachers in certain special schools (e.g. school for the deaf) are required to have qualifications relevant to their role (e.g. sign language).

In **Malta**, there is no special qualification requirement for teachers in special schools/resource centres. However, there is a distinct job description for such positions.

In **Scotland**, the qualification and training requirements or specialist provision (beyond basic teacher qualifications) are at the discretion of the school. The respondent noted that special qualifications in special educational needs had become patchy, and more work was required in this area.

In **Northern Ireland**, no special qualifications are required. There are cases where newly qualified teachers are being placed in special schools. The Education Authority is seeking to address this by putting in place a small team to train specialist provision teachers, to promote positive practice, competence and confidence.

Similarly in **Wales**, no particular qualifications were required. There is concern here as well, and the respondent noted that it is being looked at as part of workforce planning.

In **England**, on teacher of students who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired require specific qualifications. It was noted, however, that there is a lot of training for teachers: short courses and long courses resulting in a qualification.

Key points:

- UK, France and Malta respondents noted that generally there are no special qualifications required to teach in specialist provision.
- In Sweden, Finland, Slovakia, Estonia and parts of Germany, some form of qualification or competency in special education is required.
- In Italy, the degree of specialist qualification may depend on the particular setting.

3.7 Other Types of Professionals in Special Schools and Classes

Respondents were asked to indicate the other types of professionals in special schools and classes. Seven respondents answered this question.

In **Sweden**, paraprofessionals were the only other type of professional listed as working in special schools and classes. However, it is also noted that schools access a school health service which can provide a range of health, psychological and other special education-related supports to all schools.

In **Estonia**, members of the regional advisory team can go into the school to provide supports through additional special education teachers, psychologists and speech therapists. Depending on the school, there may also be physiotherapists.

In **Malta**, learning support educators, nurses, speech therapists and physiotherapists engage with mainstream and special schools.

In **Italy**, given the focus of rehabilitation centres they are staffed by medical professionals.²

In **Germany**, in both mainstream schools and special schools management engage with external providers of medical, therapeutic and social support and assistance to access it as required for students.

2 In relation to mainstream provision in Italy, teachers are trained to administer medicines. Teachers and non-teachers (and students in upper-secondary) are trained in first-aid and the use of defibrillators. Schools make local arrangements with health authorities to access psychological staff support, doctors as required. Therapists cooperate with teachers so teacher can meet the needs of students, but direct therapy supports for students are delivered outside of school.

In **Finland**, legislation requires that different types of supports have to be available to all schools free of charge (social workers, therapists, health care, and psychological support).

In **France**, special schools have access to a wide range of health professionals, funded by the regional health authorities. For students in special classes, they may have access to a classroom assistant, but not to any medical, therapeutic or psychological support.

In **Wales**, all special schools will have a nurse, and may also have access to a speech therapist, an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist. In special classes, the only form of additional **support** noted was a teaching assistant.

In **Scotland** and England, a similar range of professionals was listed in special schools. Students in special classes may have access to visiting health support staff, dependent on their needs.

In **Northern Ireland**, again a similar range of health professionals were mentioned in relation to special schools. In relation to ASD special classes specifically, access to SLT support for students was noted as being provided on a trial basis by the Health and Social Care Trust. It was noted that there are gaps in the provision of therapeutic services to students with special educational needs as many services are provided by the health sector.

Key points:

- A range of additional professional services is generally available to students in special schools, and in mainstream schools in Malta.
- Additional services for students in special classes are less extensive, but in some cases may involve access to some form of health provision.

3.8 Impact of Article 24 of the UNCPRD on Policy and Provision of Special Schools and Classes

Respondents were asked to identify what impact, if any, article 24 of the UNCPRD was having on its administration's policy and provision of special schools and classes. All respondents with the exception of Germany answered the question.

Sweden noted that the UNCPRD generally is referred to in legislation as being a guide to the implementation of disability policy, but no further information was provided.

In **Slovakia**, it was noted that legislation as amended to reflect the Convention, but again no further information was detailed.

Malta noted its detailed process of exhausting other options before placing a student in a resource centre as illustrative of its adherence (as best it can) to the UNCRPD. However, the Department of Education there is actively exploring the possibility of setting up special classes for students with ASD in mainstream schools. It is aware that this may move Malta away from the spirit of the UNCRPD but there are an increasing number of students for whom fulltime mainstream education is a challenge.

Estonia simply noted that it ratified the convention in 2012.

The respondent from **Finland** noted that the Ministry was aware of the implications of article 24, but that the legislative steps required (at a national level) to close special schools and special classes (at a municipal level) are not on the agenda. The respondent noted that it is a political issue, and there are pressures from some stakeholders to maintain the status quo.

The respondent from **France** noted that it is currently transforming from a system of special education to a system of inclusive education. A number of measures were outlined as being indicative of this transformation, including the reform of training of specialised teachers, the establishment of ASD special units in primary schools, the development of local inclusive support centres to coordinate resources across an area, and the creation of medical-social disability teams in the health authorities, which will have a role in supporting students with special educational needs, and their teachers, in the school.

The respondent from **Italy** noted that, despite developments in the country, the UN committee found that the Italian system had issues regarding insufficient sign language coverage for students who are deaf/hard-of-hearing, and that families of students with disabilities were dissatisfied. The respondent noted that families were dissatisfied as their children cannot access employment after leaving school, which is a problem for all young people at the moment. The respondent noted Italy was broadly satisfied with its level of provision currently.

The respondent from **England** noted that the UNCRPD Committee was critical of its rising special school population. It was also noted that the Department for Education in England had recently announced plans to build approximately 40 new special schools, and that there is strong demand for special school placement amongst parents.

The respondent from **Scotland** noted that the education system there provided a continuum of provision, of which special classes and special schools were a part of it, and that they were very comfortable with such a continuum. The respondent noted that there has to be a clear rationale for specialist provision (e.g. better outcomes for the student), otherwise the presumption of mainstreaming continues to be the dominant force.

The respondent from **Wales** noted that while there was an awareness of article 24 of the UNCRPD, the mainstream education system was not adequately resourced to meet the complex needs of some students.

The respondent from **Northern Ireland** noted that it is moving to narrow the range of disabilities which special schools can cater for, and expand the role of special classes in mainstream schools to meet demand. It is seeking to challenge recommendations and parental demands for special school placement more, and enhance the voice of the student in the final decision about where they go to school.

Key points:

- Notwithstanding the implications of article 24 of the UNCRPD, some respondents noted the intention of the education system to at least maintain or increase current forms of specialist provision to meet need and/or demand.
- Other respondents noted the challenges to transforming their systems, or additional elements being put into the system alongside current features.
- Specialist provision is seen as legitimate if required, and special class provision required in some cases to meet the needs of students who cannot cope in mainstream fulltime, or for whom special school placement may no longer be an option.

4. General Observations on the Findings

As noted at the outset of this report, is not possible to directly or completely compare the experiences of providing specialist provision in administrations surveyed in this review. It is worth restating the main reasons for this, including the different types of states surveyed (unitary and devolved administrations), the different levels at which responsibility of education policy is held (central and/or regional and/or local) and of course the different education contexts and systems. The poor quality of much of the data provided by or indeed available to many respondents also precludes such comparisons. Unfortunately, this greatly limits what we can definitively learn from other countries about how they are meeting the needs of these students. The low initial response rate, as well as the need to administer a truncated form of the survey via telephone interview also impedes anything other than the most rudimentary analysis. Notwithstanding these significant limitations, a number of points can be noted:

- Firstly, all administrations surveyed provide some form of specialist provision to meet the needs of students with a range of complex special educational needs. This is done in the main by special schools (or settings akin to them in the case of Italy) and in some cases special classes. While the establishment of special schools is a national responsibility, establishing special classes is more of a local level/school level decision and response.
- Secondly, placements are generally accessed via some form of assessment and/or diagnosis. While reviews are undertaken, their frequency is not time-bound other than being 'regular' or 'as required'.
- Thirdly, while there is some evidence of teachers having competencies in inclusive or special education, specific specialist qualifications is not a common requirement across the sample.
- Fourthly, while transition of students from special to mainstream schools is possible, it is viewed as rare. In this review, the cases of Germany and Sweden offer ideas of how students can flexibly move between mainstream and special schools.
- Finally, while administrations appear aware of the UNCPRD and its implications for special education, there is evidence that plans are proceeding to increase forms of specialist provision in some countries/administrations, while maintaining the status quo in others.

Appendix 1: Survey on Specialist Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs with Response from Ireland Included as a Sample Answer

General Questions About Specialist Provision

1. Do you have separate special provision to support the education of students with special educational needs in your country/region/state?

Approximately 99% of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland are educated in mainstream schools. Less than 1%, with very complex needs, attend special schools.

Additional teaching and/or care assistance and/or assistive technology are available to support students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. Less than 1% of students with greater needs are enrolled in a special class in mainstream schools where there are smaller numbers of students in the class.

2. Is there a scheme, policy or programme in your country/region/state which provides for separate specialist provision for students with special educational needs? If so, what is it called? If so, could you forward a copy of the scheme, policy or programme or statement which guides such provision to liam.coen@ncse.ie?

The Department of Education and Skills (DES), is responsible for formulating policy on students with special educational needs. The policy is based on the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. Section 2 of this Act requires that:

"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:

- The best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under the ACT
- The effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated."

The National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) has developed a continuum of support guidelines and resource packs for teachers and schools. These guidelines are designed to assist teachers to identify student needs and to develop and evaluate interventions to meet these needs. See https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf.

3. Do you specifically have special schools? If so, what role do they play in the education of students with special educational needs?

Ireland currently has 116 special schools resourced by the National Council for Special Education for students with special educational needs/disabilities. These schools are self-contained institutions and completely separate from mainstream schools on their own campuses. They are managed by a number of different patron bodies which include both educational and health bodies.

These schools are considered suitable for a relatively small proportion of students where there is evidence that this kind of provision is required because of:

- The severity and complexity of the student's special educational needs and/or
- Poor educational outcomes being achieved by the student in and existing or previous early intervention, pre-school or school setting and/or
- The communication or socialisation needs of the student and/or
- The student's behaviour impinging negatively on other students in the class and/or
- The student finding the activity levels and bustle of mainstream schools to be very challenging and difficult

4. Do you specifically have special classes in schools (mainstream or special)? If so, what role do they play in the education of students with special educational needs?

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) provides funding for 1400+ special classes in mainstream schools. These classes offer a supportive learning environment for students with more complex needs due to a much reduced pupil/teacher ratio. For example, a special class for students with ASD will have six students, one teacher and two special needs assistants.

Special classes have their own structure and timetable. However, in line with the DES policy of inclusion, students in these classes are included in mainstream classes as much as possible with the intention that, where possible, they are eventually fully included.

5. **What are the types of needs and/or disabilities of students educated in separate special classes and/or special schools (could you answer each separately if possible)?**
 - Special classes and special schools cater for a range of disabilities, as listed below:
 - Mild General Learning Disability
 - Moderate General Learning Disability
 - Severe/Profound Learning Disability
 - Physical Disability
 - Hearing Impairment
 - Visual Impairment
 - Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems
 - Severe Emotional Disturbance
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Specific learning Disability
 - Specific Speech and Language Disorder
 - Multiple Disabilities
6. **Has the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) had an impact on your policy for and provision of separate special classes and/or special schools? If so, could you detail how?**

There has been no impact to date but we are currently considering the UNPRD in our review of special provision.

Establishing and Accessing Special Classes

7. **Are there eligibility/admission criteria for students educated in separate specialist provision (special classes and/or special schools)?**

Yes, there are specific admission criteria for enrolment in special classes. The student must have a diagnosis of the disability for which the special class/school is designated. They must also have a professional report which includes the student's diagnosis and outline the reasons why special provision is required.

- 8. Are assessments in place for students educated in separate specialist provision (special classes and/or special schools) (and are these multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, single professional)?**

Assessments are available from clinical teams funded by the Health Service Executive, Child and Mental Health Services, National Education Psychological Service (NEPS). These can be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or single professional. However, there may be long waiting lists and the access to these services is inconsistent throughout the country.

Parents, therefore, may opt for private assessment which can also be sourced in the areas of psychology, psychiatry, and other professions.

School based assessments by teachers are also considered to be an important element in planning for individual students. These guide how much, if any, additional special education teaching is accessed.

- 9. Are there criteria for setting up separate special classes/establishing special schools? If so, could you detail them? (For example must there be a certain number of students who require a special class before it is approved?)**

Yes, there are criteria and it varies depending on the designation of the class/school. When planning for special classes the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) consults with relevant stakeholders in the area, including parents, school principals, NEPS, visiting teachers for deaf/hard of hearing students and those who are blind/visually impaired, the Health Service Executive and relevant sections of the DES, including the section responsible for building schools.

Once it is established that a special class is required in an area the SENO approaches the appropriate school to establish the class. Under DES policy there must be a number of students within each class to retain the class. The retention figures are set by the DES and are available in these [NCSE guidelines](#).

In the case of special schools, a much wider analysis of the area is required to establish need. Once this analysis is complete a full report goes to the DES for further development. The DES funds buildings and equipment.

- 10. How are separate special classes and special schools resourced (e.g. funding, staffing, technology, adaptations)?**

The Department of Education and Skills centrally funds teachers and SNAs and the NCSE is responsible for allocation to schools. Schools apply directly to the DES for funding for grants for ICT, furniture and equipment.

11. Can students transfer (formally and/or informally) from a separate special class to mainstream class and vice versa? If so, could you describe how this happens?

Yes. There is a formal process through which students can transfer between special class to mainstream and vice versa. Decisions are based on the students' needs at the time and depend on a combination of in-school assessments, updated professional assessment and parental input.

Students in special classes are included in mainstream classes for as much of their time as is feasible. This is an internal and informal arrangement within schools.

12. Can students transfer from special schools to mainstream schools? If so, could you describe how this happens?

Students can transfer from special schools to mainstream following a review of their progress. As per the Education Act 1998, parents have the responsibility and right to decide on their child's educational placement but this choice is informed by professional reports/advice where a child is transferring to or from a special setting.

13. Is there a formal review process regarding individual students accessing/utilising separate special classes/enrolled in special schools? If so, could you describe it?

It is considered best practice to review progress on an ongoing basis through updating the student's education and care plans. This should involve school personnel, professionals, parents and students where appropriate.

The Staff Working in Specialist Provision

14. Is there a defined profile/job description for teachers working in separate special classes and/or special schools? (If so, could you please provide/attach a copy)?

Teachers in special classes/schools have the same role as mainstream teachers. They are responsible for the education and care of all students in their class. This includes continuous assessment, planning and ongoing review.

It is considered desirable that teachers in special schools and classes have a qualification in special education but this is not an essential requirement. The NCSE provide continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and principals e.g. if a new autism class is opening training will be provided to the Principal and teacher involved with the class.

The DES also funds teachers to attend a range of postgraduate programmes in special educational needs designed and delivered through colleges/universities.

- 15. Are teachers in separate special classes and/or special schools on similar terms and conditions to mainstream class teachers? Could you provide detail of their terms, conditions and employment structure (part-time, full time etc.)?**

Terms and conditions are the same for both mainstream teachers and those in special settings. Teachers can hold full time, part-time or job-sharing positions.

Primary and post primary teachers have different terms and conditions. Special schools are designated as primary schools so all the teachers will be on the same terms and conditions as primary school teachers.

There is a procedure for restricted recognition for teachers to teach in certain categories of special schools and classes where Irish is not a curricular requirement.

Teachers entitled to restricted recognition are:

- Teachers who trained outside the state
- Teachers with a Montessori qualification.

- 16. How is the work of teachers in separate special classes and/or special schools monitored and supervised? Is it different to the monitoring and supervision of mainstream class teachers?**

As with mainstream teachers, the work of teachers in special classes/special schools is monitored in the first instance by the school principal and through school self-evaluation. External inspection is conducted through the DES Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate has developed a quality framework for schools known as "Looking at our schools" (LAOS). Based on this, the Inspectorate has introduced a model of inspection for primary schools. A similar model is currently being piloted in Post primary schools.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Primary-Schools.pdf>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf>

17. How is the work of teachers in separate special classes and/or special schools supported from within and from outside school (e.g. information, advice, outreach)?

The work of teachers in special schools and classes is supported in the first instance by school management.

External support is offered by the NCSE which offers:

- Continuing professional development (CPD) in the form of seminars and courses for principals and teachers country wide.
- In-school support through school visits to provide advice and support on matters including identification of needs, individualised planning, managing challenging behaviours and so on.

The National Education Psychological service (NEPS) offers direct support to schools on a consultative basis and focuses on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with students whose needs range from mild to severe. In the event that the interventions do not result in improved student outcomes, the NEPS psychologist may carry out more intensive work with individual students.

18. Are there particular training and qualification requirements for these roles (in addition to any initial teacher education qualification)? If so, are certain requirements mandatory, and are certain requirements desirable/discretionary?

Any fully qualified teacher can teach in a special class/special school. It is however considered desirable that teachers in special schools/classes have some form of additional qualification in special education. Colleges and universities offer full and part-time courses leading to postgraduate qualifications in special educational needs and the NCSE also offers CPD to teachers and schools on request.

19. How many teachers (fulltime equivalents) work in separate special classes? How many teachers work in special schools?

Each primary school special class has one full time teacher. Each post primary class has 1.5 teachers. Each class in a special school has one full time teacher.

Currently there are:

- 1,061 teachers for 6,050 students in 1,061 primary special classes
- 598 teachers for 2,060 students in 400 post-primary special classes
- 1,222 teaching posts in 116 special schools.

20. How many students (number and as a % of total student population) are educated in separate special classes? What is the pupil teacher ratio?

2017/2018: 0.8% (n=7,390) of all students were educated in separate special classes. This is based on a total mainstream population of 920,957 students in primary and post primary in 2017/18.

Pupil-teacher ratios in special classes are governed by DES guidelines. Information on this can be found on p.21 of the [NCSE guidelines](#) for setting up special classes. The number of teachers per class, and the number of students per class is set by these guidelines. See table below Q.21 for convenience.

21. How many students (number and as a % of total student population) are educated in special schools? What is the pupil teacher ratio?

2017/2018: 0.88% (n=7,954) of all students were educated in special schools. This is based on a total primary, post primary and special school student population of 929,075 in 2017/18.

Pupil-teacher ratios in special schools are governed by the same DES guidelines which apply to special classes in relation to *primary level only* (special schools are classified as primary schools for this and other purposes). Information on these ratios can thus also be found on p.21 of the [NCSE guidelines](#) for setting up special classes (i.e. the special class ratios for primary apply to special schools). See table below for convenience.

Pupil: Teacher ratio:

Pupil-teacher-SNA ratio – Disability	Pupil-teacher-ratio Primary Special Classes and Special Schools	Pupil-teacher-ratio Post-Primary
Physical Disability	10:1	NA
Hearing impairment	7:1	7:1.5
Visual Impairment	8:1	8:1.5
Emotional Disturbance	8:1	8:1.5
Severe Emotional Disturbance	6:1	6:1.5
Mild General Learning Disability	11:1	11:1.5
Moderate General Learning Disability	8:1	8:1.5
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	6:1	6:1.5
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	6:1	6:1.5
Specific Learning Disability	9:1	NA
Specific Speech and Language Disorder.	7:1	NA
Multiple Disabilities	6:1	6:1.5

22. What other type of staff work in separate special classes and/or special schools?

Special needs assistants (SNAs) support teachers in mainstream and special classes and in special schools to include students with additional care needs.

Most special schools also have access to nursing supports for students with complex medical needs. Some special schools have access to support from speech and language, psychology, occupational therapists. Special classes for students with speech and language disorders are supported by a speech and language therapist.

In 2018/19 a new demonstration project has been introduced in one designated health area through which in-school support is provided from speech and language therapists and occupational therapists working together with teachers. This project is cross-sectoral and is supported by the Departments of Health, Education and Children. The project is being run in 75 schools and 75 pre-schools and involves 19 speech and language therapists and 12 occupational therapists working with the schools.

23. Do teachers in separate special classes/special schools collaborate with those in mainstream class/mainstream schools? If so, could you describe how they collaborate?

Teachers in special classes collaborate with mainstream teachers in the interest of including students from the special class into mainstream classes. Special school teachers collaborate with mainstream schools when students are transitioning from special schools to mainstream schools or vice versa.

Impact and Costs

- 24. Do you collect any information on the costs associated with the provision of separate special classes/special schools (per student, per setting, overall), or is it part of a broader allocation model? If it is the latter, what is the model?**

The costs associated are a matter for the Special Education Department in the DES. The NCSE continually provide the Dept. with statistics around special provision to enable financial planning e.g. projections of new special classes, new building requirements, expansion of special schools, requirements for teachers and SNAs.

Details of capitation grants for special classes are contained in the [NCSE guidelines](#). The grants for special schools are the same as for special classes.

- 25. Is there a monitoring scheme in place to assess the impact of this form of educational provision for students with special educational needs)? If so, could you describe it? Can you provide or link to the monitoring data?**

The Inspectorate has a role in monitoring the quality of educational provision in special classes and schools. Whole school and subject inspection reports are regularly published on the DES website. Reports are provided to the DES on the numbers of students in special classes/special schools who move to mainstream and vice versa. Generally, outcomes for students with special educational needs are not reported for special schools or special classes on an individual basis

- 26. Are you aware of any noteworthy reports published in English related to special class provision in your jurisdiction (value for money reviews, evaluation/review reports, inspection reports, guidelines, policy documents or research reports)? If so, could you list them?**

An Evaluation of Special Classes for Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder
DES National Report Published in 2005

An Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders
DES Report Published in 2006

Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland
Published in 2009
NCSE Research Report No 4

The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland
NCSE Policy Advice published in February 2011

The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland
NCSE Policy Advice Paper Published in 2011

An International Review of the Literature of Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Children with Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Difficulties
NCSE Research Report No 7
Published in 2011

The Education of Students with Challenging Behaviour arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Disorders

NCSE Policy Advice Paper No 3
Published in 2012

Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools
NCSE Policy Advice Paper No 4
Published in 2013

*Educational Experiences and Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs: A
Secondary Analysis of Data from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*
NCSE Research Reports No 17
Published in 2014

Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Schools
NCSE Policy Advice Paper No 5

Appendix 2: Questions for Telephone Interviews with Five Nations RBS/NCS Regarding Special Classes and Special Schools

Background

As you will be aware, the Minister for Education and Skills has asked the National Council for Special Education to provide him with policy advice on the future role of special schools and special classes. As part of this work, we are interested to find out what specialist provision is like in other countries/administrations.

In Ireland, special schools and special classes in mainstream schools form part of a continuum of support for students with special educational needs. Attached is information on special schools and special classes in Ireland, which you might be interested in reviewing.

We appreciate the time you have set aside to support us in this work. During our call, we would like to focus on the following questions/areas:

Role/Function

1. What role do
 - special schools
 - special classes
 - Resourced provision
 play in the education of students with special educational needs in your country?

 What percentage of students are educated in such settings?

Set Up and Organisation

2. How are
 - special schools
 - special classes
 - Resourced provision
 set up and organised (e.g. are there required ratios of student to teacher, minimum numbers of students per class/school)?

Access and Placement

3. How do students access
 - special schools
 - special classes
 - Resourced provision?
(e.g. eligibility criteria, particular needs, compulsory assessment etc)?
4. Is there a formal review process regarding individual students accessing separate special classes/enrolled in special schools? If so, could you describe it?

Relationship with Mainstream Provision

5. Can students transfer from special schools to mainstream schools? If so, could you describe how this happens?
6. Can students transfer (formally and/or informally) from a separate special class to mainstream class and vice versa? If so, could you describe how this happens?

Teachers and Staff

7. Do Teachers in
 - special schools
 - special classes
 - Resourced provisionrequire particular qualifications and training?
8. What other type of staff are in
 - special schools
 - special classes
 - Resourced provision

9. Are there job descriptions for teachers and/or other staff in
 - special schools
 - special classes
10. What other therapeutic supports are provided, how are they provided and funded?
(Psychology, speech and language, occupational therapy, behaviour support, psychiatry and so on...)

UNCPRD and Article 24

11. Has the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCPRD) had an impact on your policy for and provision of special classes and/or special schools? If so, could you detail how?

Appendix 3: States/Jurisdictions in the Sample

Proposed sample (n=42 in total)	European Agency states/jurisdictions (n=34):	States/jurisdictions in the sample (based on positive responses to previous survey for SNA review) (n=8):
	1. Austria	1. Australia (South Australia)
	2. Belgium (Flemish speaking community)	2. Australia (Tasmania)
	3. Belgium (French speaking community)	3. Australia (New South Wales)
	4. Bulgaria	4. Australia (Victoria)
	5. Croatia	5. Canada (Ontario)
	6. Cyprus	6. (Federal)
	7. Czech Republic	7. United States (Connecticut)
	8. Denmark	8. United States (Ohio)
	9. England	
	10. Estonia	
	11. Finland	
	12. France	
	13. Germany	
	14. Greece	
	15. Hungary	
	16. Iceland	
	17. Italy	
	18. Latvia	
	19. Lithuania	
	20. Luxembourg	
	21. Malta	
	22. Netherlands	
	23. Northern Ireland	
	24. Norway	
	25. Poland	
	26. Portugal	
	27. Serbia	
	28. Scotland	
	29. Slovak Republic	
	30. Slovenia	
	31. Spain	
	32. Sweden	
	33. Switzerland	
	34. Wales	

Appendix 4: Detailed Methodology

Introduction

In October 2018, the NCSE designed a survey to examine the use of special schools and/or classes elsewhere in the world to educate students with special educational needs. The aim of the survey was to identify key aspects of specialist provision in operation in other administrations, including eligibility criteria, allocation processes, professionals working in specialist provision, and the impact and cost (see appendix 1 for the full survey). A survey was drafted based on these themes and was completed from the Irish perspective. This served as a form of piloting, with the completed survey being reviewed by NCSE research and policy and practice staff. Some adjustments were made to the questions to finalise the survey.

Selecting Administrations for the Review

Target administrations for inclusion in the review were identified in two ways. Firstly, the 34 member administrations of the European Agency for Inclusive and Special Needs Education were included. Secondly, those administrations which responded to NCSE's survey on the use of paraprofessionals for the development of policy advice on the SNA scheme were also chosen. This gave a total potential sample of $n=42$. The total list of administrations included in the sample is listed in appendix 3.

Administering the Survey

The survey was administered via email in November 2018 to all 42 target administrations, with reminder emails sent in December 2018. The deadline for receipt of the survey was January 11th 2019.

In relation to the European Agency members of sample, the National Coordinators (NCs)³ were written to and asked to complete the survey.

In relation to non-European Agency administrations in the sample ($n=8$), contact details from those administrations who participated in the previous NCSE survey were utilised, with the survey forwarded to them to complete.

Initial Responses and Targeting Particular Administrations

The survey only yielded four responses. The four administrations which responded were: Malta; Slovak Republic; Estonia; and Sweden.

³ Each member of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education can nominate one Representative Board (RB) member and one National Coordinator (NC). Note there are four cases where member states only nominate an RB: Denmark, Lithuania, Portugal and Switzerland. In these cases the RBs were written to.

In discussion and agreement with colleagues, the research unit decided to contact the NCs of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to request them to undertake telephone interviews. These countries were chosen as a convenience sub-sample: European Agency RBS and NCS from the 'Five Nations' of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland were meeting in Belfast in February and this presented an opportunity for the research team to directly request participation. The purpose of these interviews was to try and supplement the response rate and gather some information in relation to these countries in particular. Representatives of all four counties agreed to telephone interviews. These were conducted jointly by the research unit and the policy and practice unit during the period March-May 2019, based on a shortened version of the full survey (see appendix 2). This increased the number of responses to eight.

Following review of the available data, a third round of purposive data collection was undertaken in November and December 2019 to identify elements of provision in larger European countries. This elicited responses from the four target countries: Italy, France, Finland and Germany. In two cases (Finland and Italy), phone call interviews were undertaken with the shortened survey being used as an interview guide. In the case of France, a completed version of the shortened survey was received. In the case of Germany, information on the German system was provided, with some information on the survey questions also included.

Inputs from these countries increased the number of responses to 12, resulting in a response rate of 29%.

Reporting the Data

Data received from each respondent was initially grouped under headings drawn from the survey questions. The collated responses under each heading were analysed to identify trends and patterns amongst them. These patterns formed the basis of the findings reported in this report.

Limitations

It is not possible to directly compare schemes or mechanisms that operate in surveyed countries/ jurisdictions which are aimed at supporting students with disabilities who have additional needs. There are a number of reasons for this, including the different types of states surveyed (unitary states (n=7) and devolved administrations (n=5), the different levels at which responsibility of education policy is held (central and/or regional and/or local) and the different education contexts and systems. The need to truncate the survey for those who participated in the latter rounds of data collection, along with the quality and incomplete nature of some of the data provided by some respondents, also precludes such comparisons and anything other than a rudimentary reporting of the information provided. Unfortunately, this greatly limits what we can definitively learn from other countries about how they are providing for the education of students with very complex needs.

The relatively low response rate, at 29%,⁴ is also a limitation, as is the Euro-centric nature of the data collected.

⁴ The response rate to the international administrative review to inform the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant scheme in 2018 was 57%.



**An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta**
National Council
for Special Education

