NCSE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PILOT PROGRAMME

SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY

School name: Walterstown NS

Practising teacher lead: Emer O'Shea, Leah Dineen, Laura O'Neill & Bríd Buckley

Research theme: INCLASS (Inclusive Classrooms for Learning and Achievement in School Settings: Accomplished Inclusive Learning Environments for students with AEN)

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Research aim: To study the Classroom Support stage of the Continuum of Support

Methods

I used a semi-structured observation involving 4 teachers working with a variety of students across mainstream, autism class and SET settings.

Research findings

The following common themes emerged as being key elements of classroom support in our school:

- Differentiated instruction/targeted support
- Station based learning/small group instruction
- Total Communication Approach & use of relevant resources
- Provision of social & emotional support
- Collaboration among class teachers, SNAS & SETs
- Structured learning environments
- Assessment for learning
- Promoting independence

My top three findings

1. Differentiated and Targeted Instruction as a Core Inclusive Practice

Differentiation was consistently observed across all settings, ensuring access and participation for every pupil. Teachers adapted content, methods, and resources to meet a wide range of learning needs from ability-based grouping in literacy and numeracy to tailored sensory and communication supports in autism classes. This practice allowed pupils to engage at their individual levels while promoting equity within mixed-ability classrooms.

2. Structured Small-Group and Station-Based Learning Enhancing

EngagementSmall-group rotations and station teaching as a form of classroom support were a defining feature of inclusive practice. These structures enabled personalised support, active engagement, and focused teacher–pupil interaction. Rotations (e.g. fine motor, yoga, or maths skill stations) also ensured all pupils experienced balanced, differentiated learning opportunities within limited time frames while also maximising available SET support.

3. Holistic Support through Communication, Collaboration, and Emotional Well-being

Classroom support extended beyond academic differentiation to encompass total communication, emotional and social support, and collaborative teamwork. Teachers and support staff worked cohesively to create predictable, emotionally safe environments that promoted independence and engagement.

Impact of my research

The research has reinforced the importance of a whole-school, structured approach to inclusion where differentiation, small-group teaching, and emotional support work hand in hand at classroom support level.

The insights have highlighted the scope to move from isolated strategies to a more cohesive model of inclusive practice across the school. It has also become clear that SNA support beyond complex care needs is essential in order for the Classroom Support stage of the Continuum of Support to be effective in practice.

The process has also fostered a greater awareness and understanding of the Classroom Support stage of the Continuum of Support among participating teachers.

Conducting the research has also strengthened inclusive practice across the school by promoting reflection on existing classroom support practices. It led to enhanced collaboration among participating mainstream class teachers, autism class teachers, SETs, and SNAs, leading to more coordinated and targeted interventions.