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Introduction

Educate Together is the representative body for 117 equality-based schools in Ireland. A registered charity, Educate Together is the management body for 96 national schools and patron (or joint patron/trustee partner) of 21 second-level schools, including voluntary secondary schools, community schools and community colleges. As a growing school patron in Irish education, Educate Together is committed to working closely with the Department of Education (DE) and other partners to ensure the smooth running and ongoing improvement of the education system.

This submission responds to the Department of Education's consultation on the review of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004), with particular regard to the provision of education in primary and second-level schools. Educate Together recognises the right of every child and young person to an education that meets their needs and takes seriously the commitment in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: *to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

The Educate Together Charter¹ requires schools to be equality-based, co-educational, child-centred and democratic and we strive to ensure that every one of the 37,000 children and young people in our schools are supported to achieve their full potential. To this end, we are working to support quality and build capacity across our school network and to lead on important system reforms, including those which address inequalities and promote inclusion for all children, including those with additional² educational needs.

The model of inclusion envisaged in the Educate Together charter is one in which children 'Learn Together to Live Together' in schools where 'No Child is an Outsider'. Our vision of inclusion is broad, encompassing all aspects of a student's background and identity, and reflecting a human-rights based approaches to education:

An inclusive approach to education means that each individual's needs are taken into account and that all learners participate and achieve together. It acknowledges that all children can learn and that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.

(UNESCO 2020 – Education for All)

Recommendation 1: This review should have regard to United Nations Conventions on Human Rights.

In particular:

- United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, Education for All (2020) warned that education opportunities continue to be unequally distributed and that barriers to quality education are still too high for too many learners. The failure to fully commence all the provisions of the EPSEN Act since 2004, combined with a failure to resource schools properly to meet every student's needs, have contributed to these inequalities and these barriers in the Irish context.

For many families and teachers of students with additional needs, the system simply does not work as it is

¹ <https://www.educatetogether.ie/app/uploads/2019/01/Educate-Togethers-Charter.pdf>

² Educate Together prefers to use the term 'additional' rather than 'special' educational needs. (see 'Language' below)

currently configured and resourced. This not only leads to breaches of people’s fundamental rights, it restricts the capacity of people with additional needs to participate fully in society, and deprives society of the benefits that result from full participation of all. Resources currently provided to schools, families and support services fall far short of what is required, and the government and policy-makers need to be prepared to invest in inclusion, whatever the specific provisions of the revised legislation.

Recommendation 2: This review must be completed without delay, and its findings fully resourced.

The remainder of this submission is structured as a response to the questions proposed in the Department of Education consultation:

1. What works well in the provision of education to children and young people with special educational needs in Ireland?
2. What changes do you see as important to ensure that children and young people receive an appropriate education that supports them to achieve their potential?

1. What works well in the provision of education to children and young people with special educational needs in Ireland?

1.1 Educate Together’s equality-based and inclusive ethos

Educate Together is proud to have a reputation as an inclusive school network, welcoming students from a range of backgrounds and striving to support every child to reach their full potential, whatever their background, identity and educational needs. Our comprehensive Ethical Education curriculum supports students to challenge stereotypes, to reflect critically on inequalities and difference within an atmosphere of equal respect, and to take action to promote and support human rights.

Research published by the ESRI in 2020 showed a higher proportion of students with additional needs in Educate Together post-primary schools than the national average³ and this pattern is also reflected at primary level. This is particularly the case in developing schools that have not yet become oversubscribed, and therefore present fewer barriers to access that are often experienced in securing school places in longer established schools.

Educate Together schools have a higher proportion of specialist Autism classes than other sectors - 57% of our primary schools have autism classes compared to 22% national average. At second-level, 71% have classes, compared to 39% average. This can be linked to the commitment to equality of access and esteem for all children in the Educate Together Charter, and is particularly impressive when we take into account that a

³ In research conducted by the ESRI in Educate Together second-level schools, 15.7% of ETSS students indicated they have a ‘special educational need’ or disability and 22% of students indicated that they received extra help with school subjects in the last 12 months and some school staff suggested the level of need at their school is higher than 30% of the student body. By comparison, 13% of 13-year-olds in the child cohort of the Growing Up in Ireland study indicated they received extra help in some subjects in the last 12 months.’ (ESRI 2020)

significant proportion of these schools (30% at primary and 76% at second-level) are operating in temporary accommodation.

Research suggests that some students with additional needs have had negative experiences of mainstream schools, and some parents and students are reluctant, as a result, to trust that their children can be happy and properly supported in a mainstream setting. However, as a sector whose vision and aims centre on equality-based and child-centred provision, Educate Together schools are keenly sought after by many families of children with additional educational needs.

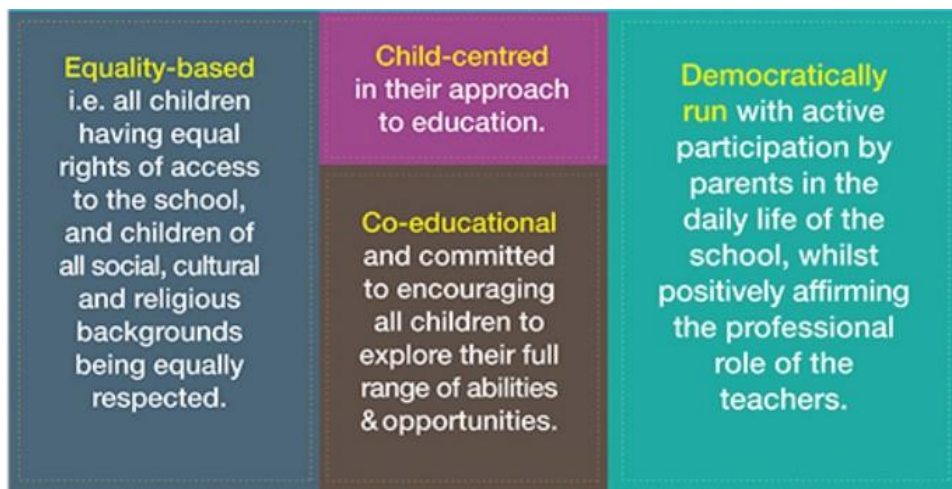
Most Educate Together schools, however, are oversubscribed, so many students are turned away every year. Educate Together does not believe that access to equality-based education should depend on where you live, and a core objective is to expand access to Educate Together schools so that families everywhere can access this ethos.

Recommendation 3: Expand the network of Educate Together schools to provide greater access to this effective equality-based and child-centred ethos.

Notably, the ESRI research showed a strong sense of belonging for students of all backgrounds and abilities in Educate Together second-level schools, as compared to national data which suggest that levels of belonging are generally lower for students with additional needs and students from minority backgrounds.

The ESRI study linked this inclusivity to the implementation of Educate Together's equality-based and student-centred ethos, identifying as particularly effective the strong culture of respect at the core of relationships between students and teachers, and the use of restorative practices to behaviour.

Educate Together's Charter requires its schools to deliver education which is:



Our schools therefore strive to be inclusive and equitable, and our national office works to ensure they can do this through providing CPD and other supports, and through identifying barriers to inclusion in the system, and advocating for change where this is required.

Examples of supports that we currently provide are:

- Ethos Self-evaluation Tool
- Ethos Guidance Platform

- Comprehensive Ethical Education curriculum
- A range of Continuing Professional Development supports for school staff, including: the Educate Together ethos, Ethical Education, Restorative Practice, the Nurture Schools approach, Trauma-informed Practice and Socially and Culturally Responsive Practice (in development)
- Nurture Schools Programme

A recent evaluation of Educate Together’s ongoing Nurture Schools project⁴, which was funded by Salesforce and Rethink Ireland, showed significant potential of the Nurture approach to promote inclusion. The project works with students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in schools to get them back on track and engaged in their education. This is achieved through innovative and inclusive interventions that are teacher-led and evidence-based, complemented by a whole-school approach.

Recommendation 4: Fund the provision of ethos tools and CPD which support inclusivity at school and patron level.

1.2 Building an inclusive culture in a new school

Research internationally has identified many challenges in moving from a more segregated system to one which sees children of all abilities and needs educated together. Teachers who have had limited experience of diversity often express a lack of confidence in supporting students with additional needs, and this can act as a barrier to inclusion.

Fifty-two of Educate Together’s 117 schools have been opened in the past ten years, meaning that many of our schools have had the opportunity to create an inclusive culture from day one in a ‘blank slate’ environment. Although there are many challenges associated with the current system for start-up schools, the capacity to build a staff team centred on an equality-based ethos from day one is one factor which can facilitate inclusion.

Educate Together schools have always led the way in providing specialist facilities for autistic students: North Kildare ETNS and Lucan ETNS were two of the earliest schools to open such facilities, and there are many pioneering school leaders, teachers and ANAs in our network. The most recent school, Sallynoggin Killiney ETNS, which opened in 2022, opened with an infant autism class alongside its first mainstream Junior Infant class from day one. This was facilitated by the earlier than usual sanction of the school (the previous year) and early appointment of the principal teacher, enabling them to work with the patron, the NCSE and the buildings unit of the Department of Education, and to build a strong team with a clear inclusive vision in good time before the school opened.

Recommendation 5: Facilitate new schools to cater for all students in their local community by confirming appropriate accommodation in good time and enabling the early appointment and induction of staff.

Properly resourcing new schools should be part of a wider plan to ensure all schools have the specialist provision necessary to cater for students in their local community, and it is important to take concrete steps to address the imbalance that is emerging between new and established schools (see below).

1.3 Inclusive Language

Educate Together welcomes the commitment given to review the language used to describe ‘special educational needs’ as part of this review. Our member schools recognise the importance of language, and

⁴ <https://www.educatetogether.ie/campaigns/nurture-schools-project/>

various motions have been passed at our AGM over the years to move away from terms that have been identified as problematic.

Terms currently avoided include 'special educational needs', 'special needs unit', 'special class' and 'special needs assistant'. Alternatives have been chosen following consultation, and include terms like 'autism class', 'specialist class for autistic students' and 'additional needs assistant' (ANA). Guidance on using appropriate language is provided on our Ethos Guidance platform and updated regularly. Reviews of language provide important opportunities for dialogue at school and network level and the process of review can be as valuable as the outcome is important.

Recommendation 6: Consult with students with additional needs and their families to ensure the use of respectful language.

1.4 System Improvements

There have been many positive developments in the education of children and young people with additional educational needs in recent decades. Increased research and understanding in the areas of equity and inclusion, as well as in psychology, teaching and learning, coupled with moves towards more inclusive models of provision, require the resourcing of education to be ever-evolving, responsive and flexible.

Effective models of inclusion ensure that schools have access to high quality psychological, speech and language and other supports and therapists on site. Educate Together welcomes moves towards this, as demonstrated by the trialling of the School Inclusion Model. First introduced in 2017/18, this model sought to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy within educational settings⁵. Also introduced at this time was a front-loaded model of allocating Special Education Teachers (SETs).

This model has many merits in theory as it envisages all schools having the necessary resources in advance, based on their size and profile, so that all children can be enrolled and access supports from the outset of their education, regardless of their needs. The model set out to do away with the requirement for expensive diagnoses and categorisation of learners in order to lever supports. It also aimed to provide schools with the autonomy and capacity to allocate resources to the children with greatest need.

Educate Together was pleased that some of our schools were engaged in the piloting of this model. However, participating schools have serious concerns that the levels of these supports currently available fall far short of what is required. It is likely that considerable additional investment in therapeutic supports will be required. As of yet, this pilot has not been fully evaluated and most schools do not have access to therapeutic supports. Despite this, the new allocation model was rolled out to all schools, and this has left many schools without sufficient staff to meet the needs of their student body. This is particularly the case for growing schools and schools with significant enrolment of children with complex needs (see below).

Recommendation 7: Complete the evaluation of the School Inclusion Model pilot and make therapeutic and psychological supports available to every school.

⁵ <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NCSE-Press-Release-5-August-2020-Pilot-SIM.pdf>

2. What changes do you see as important to ensure that children and young people receive an appropriate education that supports them to achieve their potential?

Research in Ireland and internationally shows clearly that school ethos is vital for the inclusion of children with additional needs, and it is our experience, as outlined above, that a vibrant equality-based ethos can make a significant positive difference. However, school ethos alone cannot ensure that the educational needs of all children are met and the current model for allocating resources is not working for many children and young people. Many schools are left without the necessary staffing allocation to support students' needs and there is insufficient access to therapeutic, psychological and other supports.

Educate Together has identified a number of systemic issues which currently inhibit schools from ensuring that every child feels an equal sense of belonging and can reach their full potential.

2.1 Re-balancing the system

Educate Together welcomes current reforms that are aimed at ensuring that all schools can meet the needs of all children. In order for the system to be equitable, children with additional needs should be able to attend schools in their local area, along with their siblings, and all schools should be provided with the necessary resources, training and support to enable every student to feel welcome and reach their full potential.

Historically, however, provision for children with additional needs has been focused in a small number of schools in Ireland. Demand for places in autism classes in mainstream schools has risen dramatically in recent years, and there are currently insufficient places to meet demand in many areas. The opening of new schools presents an opportunity to ensure the provision of autism classes in an area where there are insufficient spaces, and this is one of the reasons why such a high proportion of new and developing schools offer such classes. We are aware of many situations where new and developing schools are asked to open multiple autism classes, for example, while established schools in the area do not offer this provision. This is just one of a range of 'push' and 'pull' factors, which together are leading to an imbalance in provision.

Recommendation 8: Develop a detailed roadmap to re-balance the system and support schools with limited numbers of children with additional needs to develop capacity in this area.

Educate Together welcomes changes in admissions legislation which require all schools to enrol children without regard to their needs or abilities. However, concerns remain around 'soft barriers' to enrolment, which may include underdeveloped SEN provision in some schools compared to others, as well as cultural factors and discrimination. Increasing awareness among parents of their children's rights and of schools' responsibilities under the new Admissions Act would also be an important element of such a roadmap.

Recommendation 9: Raise awareness of children's rights and schools' responsibilities under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

The current staffing allocation model envisages a system where children with additional needs are spread evenly throughout the system. While this may be the aim of current reforms, the reality right now is very different. Allocating resources equally among schools right now, therefore, effectively disadvantages children in schools with high proportions of students with additional needs, as well as placing huge pressure on school

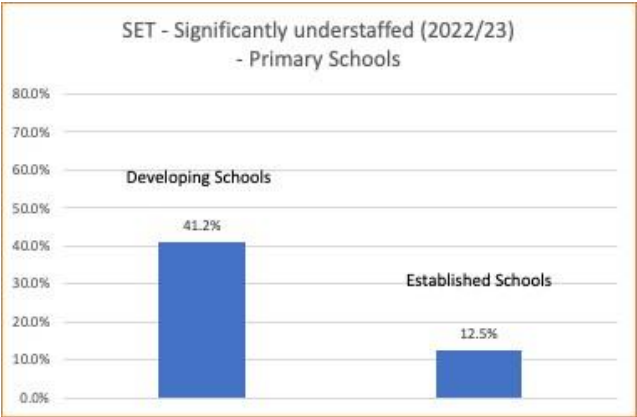
staff and school leaders. Greater flexibility to respond to the changing needs of schools in interim is vital, so that resources can be allocated where they are needed.

Recommendation 10: Urgently review the current staffing allocation model to enable a more flexible response that enables students with additional needs to be supported wherever they are.

2.2 Staffing and developing schools

As outlined above, developing schools cater for significant numbers of students with additional needs, for a range of reasons. Since the introduction of the new ‘front-loaded’ allocation model, new and developing schools have reported significant deficits in staffing to support students with additional needs at both primary and second-level. These deficits are particularly stark for schools that are growing quickly, and for growing primary schools in particular, whose situation has worsened in the five years since the new model was introduced.

In a survey of Educate Together schools last June, 41% of developing primary schools reported being significantly understaffed in terms of Special Education Teachers (SETs).



Detailed **analysis of 2022/23 SET Allocation figures** nationwide show that the national average Pupil:SET ratio is 57:1 (down from 62 in 2021/22). However, 15% of primary schools have ratios of greater than 80:1, and 26% of these schools are growing, developing schools. While this ratio on its own does not reflect the varying profiles of schools, nevertheless the consistent difference between developing schools (of all types) and established schools points to growing inequalities across the system.

SET Stats		Percentage
Average Pupil:SET (across 3124 schools)	57	
Number of schools with Pupil: SET > 80:1	461	15%
Number of developing schools with Pupil: SET > 80:1	120	26%
Number of Educate Together NS with Pupil:SET > 80:1	27	28%

Recommendation 11: Review staffing levels in developing primary schools and urgently address under-resourcing.

Educate Together has called repeatedly for a review of the current allocation model so that the reasons for the inequitable distribution of resources can be fully understood, and we welcomed a commitment given by the Department of Education in 2021 that this would happen. From our analysis, these reasons for the inequitable distribution of resources are likely to include:

Model of Allocation - Issues with the algorithm:

There is a lack of transparency in how SET staffing allocations are calculated.

Analysis of the allocation of SETs shows huge discrepancies between schools in similar areas with similar profiles for both the *Baseline* element and the *Complex Needs* element. The methods used to calculate both the *Baseline* and *Complex Needs* element are flawed.

Analysis of the *Baseline* element of a number of schools in one area last June showed significant differences in *Baseline* ratio (baseline/enrolment) across established and developing schools:

School	Enrolment (2022)	SET hours	SETs	Ratio	Baseline	Baseline ratio	Baseline if each school got best ratio	Additional hours
Developing ETNS	454	135	5.4	84.07407	36.34	0.080044053	49.68991525	13.34991525
Local School A	472	167.5	6.7	70.44776	51.66	0.109449153		
Local School B (ETNS)	463	223	8.92	51.90583	40.24	0.086911447	50.67495763	10.43495763
Local School C	360	160	6.4	56.25	34.42	0.095611111	39.40169492	4.981694915
Developing ETNS	380	105	4.2	90.47619	26.65	0.070131579	41.59067797	14.94067797

The NCSE have also confirmed that the *Complex Needs* element is the main determining element for a school's SET allocation, and this element is calculated by the local Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT). The experience of schools is that there are inconsistencies across different areas and teams. So ultimately a school's SET allocation is dependent on the effectiveness of their local CDNT.

Examination of a number of schools last June showed wildly varying *Complex Needs* elements:

School	Enrolment (2022)	SET hours	Complex Needs Element
Developing ETNS Cork	454	135	39.39
Developing ETNS Cork	51	22.5	11.69
Developing ETNS Dublin 8	380	105	28.39
Developing ETNS Dublin 9	283	87.59	7.73

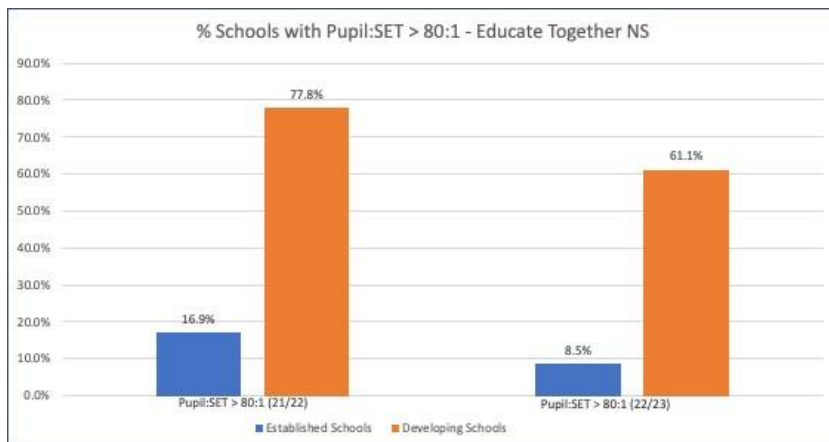
Recommendation 12: Ensure that all Children's Disability Network Teams are resourced and supported to provide consistently high-quality services in all areas.

Partial re-profiling every two years only:

The current allocation model was developed based on a full re-profiling of schools every two years and a full re-allocation of resources. In practice there has not been a full re-allocation of resources since the model was introduced, leaving schools where numbers and needs have increased year on year, with significantly less resources than schools where needs have remained static or decreased.

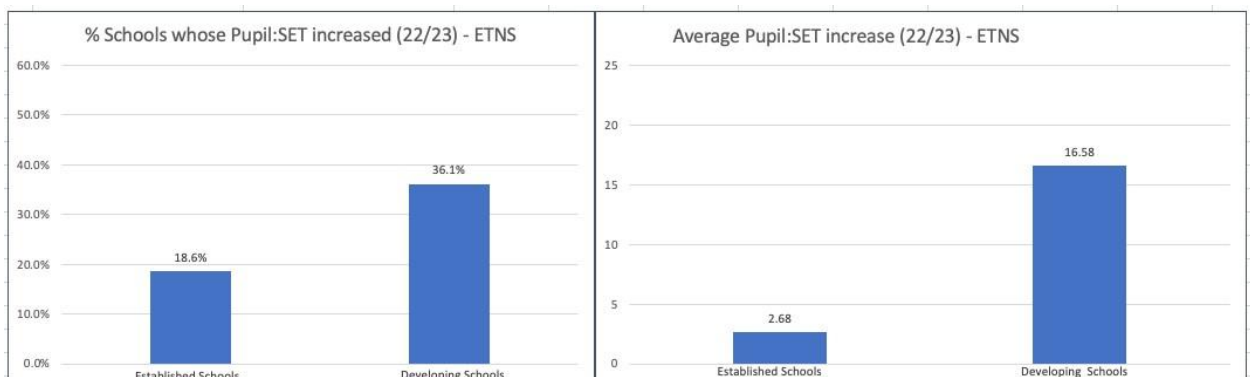
The partial re-profiling that took place in 2022, when combined with additional posts that were allocated to developing schools, did acknowledge some of the staffing shortfalls for developing schools. Two Educate Together schools, for example, received almost 4 x additional SET posts, thus demonstrating just how under resourced they were.

However, analysis shows that this re-profiling, even with the additional allocation, has still not addressed the full re-distribution of resources required to ensure that children in developing schools have the supports they need. Further detailed analysis of **developing Educate Together NS**, indicate that 61% of Educate Together developing schools have Pupil:SET of greater than 80:1 in 2022/23.



It should be noted that this significantly high (poor) ratio has persisted *after* the allocation in 2022 of a number of ring-fenced posts to developing schools, over and above re-profiling plus bridging hours. And whilst the number of developing schools impacted in 2022/23 by Pupil:SET > 80:1 has fallen, 36% of Educate Together developing schools still saw their Pupil:SET increase (worsen) further from the 2022 reallocation, with an average Pupil:SET increase of 16.58.

Most worryingly, **18% of developing Educate Together schools now have a Pupil:SET >100:1.**



The impact of these inequities for developing schools is that a sustained model of intervention cannot be facilitated, and pupils' needs are simply not being met. And whilst schools are constantly innovating and trying new and different models of support to target the children with greatest needs, the reality is that in many schools the majority of children who need intervention are on classroom support plans, as they do not have the capacity to support these children in the way they deserve.

This is just not good enough - for the children, or for the SET teams who are experiencing stress and burnout, or for the parents who do not understand why the school cannot adequately support their children.

Recommendation 13: In developing a new staffing allocation model, ensure schools' needs are assessed annually, and allocate resources based on current enrolment.

Use of previous year's enrolment numbers & Bridging Mechanism:

Allocations are currently based on previous year's enrolment numbers and profile. There is a small 'bridging mechanism' for developing schools, but this is grossly inadequate. Schools that increase their enrolment and/or enrol new entrant children with additional needs are therefore left without sufficient resources year on year as they grow.

We welcome the granting of Projected Enrolment SET allocation to schools from the start of the school year for 2023/24, but this bridging mechanism of +3/+8 SET hrs is still far from adequate to meet all the needs of entrant children.

The majority of growth in enrolments in developing schools occurs in infant classes, a time when the provision of support for pupils with additional needs is critical. It is also the case that many students joining developing schools in more senior classes are those with additional needs. It has proved impossible for developing schools to assess the needs of their newly enrolled pupils and provide adequate supports with the minimal bridging mechanism currently in place.

In addition, where mainstream staffing based on projected enrolment numbers is initially not sanctioned, and thereafter appealed by a school, the necessary additional SET hrs are currently only sanctioned/retained where the post has been appealed on grounds of *Criterion C – Projected Enrolment Post based on Additional Enrolments after 30th Sept*. SET hrs are removed for all other Project Enrolment post appeals, even where these appeals are successful based on other valid criteria. Also, schools that are then granted that same post permanently from the following September based on enrolments, never subsequently get the additional 3 hrs SET, since they are only awarded for Projected Enrolment posts.

Recommendation 14: If the 'bridging allocation' is retained it must be increased and allocated based on projected enrolment.

Allocation of Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs / SNAs)

Initial plans were to roll-out a similar new 'front-loaded' allocation model for Additional Needs Assistants as part of the School Inclusion Model. Educate Together would be extremely concerned if a similar model for allocating ANAs were implemented without first addressing the significant issues with SET allocations for developing schools.

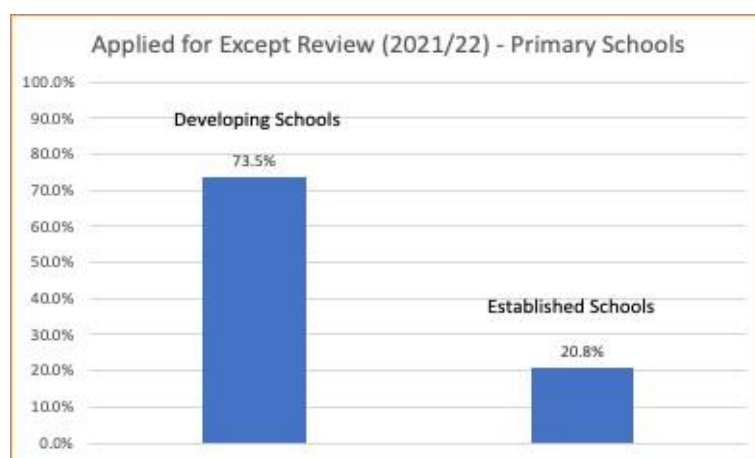
In a survey of Educate Together schools in June 2022, 56% of developing schools surveyed reported that they are significantly understaffed in relation to Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs/SNAs) and that this limited their capacity to meet the needs of their students.

Recommendation 15: Review levels of Additional Needs Assistants and develop a transparent, flexible and equitable allocation model based on need.

Inadequacy of the review / appeal processes

The only route currently open to a school that finds itself without the necessary resources to meet students' needs is the 'exceptional review' process. The NCSE have recently confirmed to us that the Exceptional Review process was never designed to, *and cannot*, fix the understaffing issues of developing schools, and this confirms our schools' experience of the process.

Yet developing schools have no other option but to apply for exceptional reviews each year to try to re-balance their staffing requirements, which is extremely time consuming and, even if lucky enough to not be denied a review, too often results in no additionality.



Example: One developing school spent 120 hours applying for an exceptional review. When the review was completed, towards the end of the school year, the school was allocated two additional teachers, such was their need. However, because the same algorithm was applied the following year, the allocation provided by the review was erased in the next allocation round, despite significant additional enrolments, forcing the school to start the review application process again.

A very high number of applications for exceptional reviews are denied on the grounds that their circumstances are not 'exceptional'. For example, in the 2021/22 school year, 20% of Educate Together national schools had their review denied - 12% of developing schools had their review denied, despite a public commitment that developing schools would be prioritised for reviews. This was an improvement on 2020/21 school year where 29% developing schools were not granted a review.

One developing school which has been seeking to address their AEN understaffing reported seeking 5 reviews from 2019 to December 2022, with 4 of those not meeting the criteria for a review.

The application process is hugely time consuming and requires considerable documentation adding to the already overburdened administrative demands on principals, many of whom are also teaching principals. In order to be responsive to the real and urgent needs of children, the grounds for exceptional reviews need to be flexible and less restrictive.

Recommendation 16: Introduce a new staffing review mechanism which is simple and accessible.

Principals require greater transparency in how allocations are made. Transparency in relation to the specific methods and formulae employed by the DE / NCSE to arrive at allocations would serve to increase clarity and understanding of the model and reduce the number of appeals.

With responsibilities increasing steadily as new initiatives have been introduced, the workload of school principals and deputy principals has also increased. The impact of this has been highlighted in recent surveys that show worrying levels of stress and burnout among principals, especially teaching principals. Catering for increased numbers of children with additional needs in mainstream schools, both in mainstream classes and classes for children with specific identified needs, such as autism, requires considerable additional staffing, including both SETs and ANAs, the purchase of specialist resources and equipment, and ongoing liaison with other services (SENOs, NEPs, SLTs, etc.). There is considerable administrative and HR work involved in recruiting, supporting and managing these additional staff members, monitoring timetabling and use of resources, and evaluating provision, and the increased impact on principals' workloads needs immediate review. As we move towards greater inclusion of children with additional needs across the system, schools need to be resourced at management level so that school leaders can properly manage and support this transition.

Recommendation 17: Provide additional management and administration capacity to enable school leaders to manage and support change.

2.3 Teacher Capacity

Improvements in teacher education have a lasting improvement on the provision of inclusive education for children and young people with additional and complex educational needs.

- In a recent submission⁶ to NCSE, Inclusion Ireland report that many teachers feel 'ill equipped' and 'thrown in at the deep end' by not having the expertise or training to adequately support children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The report expresses serious concerns about the extent to which young, newly qualified teachers are being placed in special classes with students who, because of their very complex needs, require the most experienced and trained teachers. The submission cites an Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland study which revealed that only 5% of teachers in specialist classes have a SEN qualification, while just 1 in 5 had participated in SEN training in recent years.
- The DE-funded post-graduate diploma in SEN which is currently provided in different third-level institutions is excellent, in its content and outcomes and in terms of its funding, which makes it accessible to teachers in all parts of the country. However, the number of places available falls far short of the system's needs. Requiring teachers to already be in special education posts means that the system is set up to have inexperienced teachers catering for the needs of children and young people with additional and complex needs. This, along with current rules which limit participation to one teacher per school, communicates the message that only teachers in dedicated special education roles require expertise in this area, which is contrary to the principles of inclusive and integrated education reflected in current

⁶ Inclusion Ireland. *Submission to the NCSE on inclusive education* (June 2020).

<http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1651/ncse-submission-final.pdf>

policy changes. A strong measure of support for inclusive education would be the widening of access to this course, and the provision of enhanced ITE and CPD to support teachers in responding effectively to students with emotional, behavioural and additional educational needs.

Recommendation 18: Increase the number of available places on the post-graduate diploma in SEN and widen access to funded CPD for teachers not currently in SEN roles.

Research in Ireland and internationally points to a lack of diversity in the teaching profession, so that the diversity of the student body is not reflected in staff rooms. Barriers to entry to the profession have been identified for people from a range of backgrounds, including people with disabilities. Increasing the diversity of the profession offers potential for improved understanding of the needs of students with disabilities, as well as providing role models for students with additional needs.

Recommendation 19: Provide supported pathways into the teaching profession for school graduates with disabilities.

The Migrant Teacher Project has identified large numbers of teachers with strong qualifications and experience in the area of inclusion who face significant barriers in registering with the teaching council and securing employment. Whereas it is not possible to qualify as a specialist SEN teacher in Ireland, it is in many other countries and teachers qualified in this way currently have no way to become registered in Ireland. If the Migrant Teacher Project were resourced to provide a specific bridging programme for these specialist teachers that could lead to registration and employment, this would enhance the capacity and confidence of the teaching workforce to meet the needs of all students.

Recommendation 20: Develop pathways for overseas qualified specialist SEN teachers to become registered and employed in Irish schools.

3. Other views that are relevant to the review of the EPSEN act.

3.1 Sharing expertise and resources

The UNESCO⁷ report on Inclusion and Education *All Means All* recommends a sharing of expertise and resources. Educate Together as a sector is well placed to lead developments in this area due to several interrelated factors:

- Our ethos is centrally focused on inclusive equality-based education for all;
- Staff in Educate Together are highly motivated to deliver inclusive education;
- Educate Together schools have higher than average numbers of children and young people with additional and complex educational needs;
- Educate Together schools tend to be early adopters and involved in innovative and pilot programmes. An example of this is the Educate Together Nurture Schools project, which is seeing significant impacts on schools' capacity to respond to students with a range of challenges and needs;

⁷ Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, Inclusion and Education: all means all.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373721.locale=en>

- The Educate Together sector is relatively small but diverse, ranging from well-established primary schools to newly established primary and post-primary schools and different school types, with a national spread. In effect the sector represents a microcosm of the wider primary and post-primary school system.

Educate Together is committed to sharing the experience and expertise in our school communities in the area of inclusive education for the benefit of all. As a relatively small sector we are well placed, if resourced, to provide support in engaging in meaningful consultation with students, staff and parents so that future developments are informed by the experience on the ground.

Recommendation 21: Resource Educate Together to continue to innovate in this area and to share learning across the system.

Summary List of Recommendations

1. This review should have regard to United Nations Conventions on Human Rights.
2. This review must be completed without delay, and its findings fully resourced.
3. Expand the network of Educate Together schools to provide greater access to this effective equality-based and child-centred ethos.
4. Fund the provision of ethos tools and CPD which support inclusivity at school and patron level.
5. Facilitate new schools to cater for all students in their local community by confirming appropriate accommodation in good time and enabling the early appointment and induction of staff.
6. Consult with students with additional needs and their families to ensure the use of respectful language.
7. Complete the evaluation of the School Inclusion Model pilot and make therapeutic and psychological supports available to every school.
8. Develop a detailed roadmap to re-balance the system and support schools with limited numbers of children with additional needs to develop capacity in this area.
9. Raise awareness of children's rights and schools' responsibilities under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.
10. Urgently review the current staffing allocation model to enable a more flexible response that enables students with additional needs to be supported wherever they are.
11. Review staffing levels in developing schools and urgently address under-resourcing.
12. Ensure that all Children's Disability Network Teams are resourced and supported to provide consistently high-quality services in all areas.
13. In developing a new staffing allocation model, ensure schools' needs are assessed annually, and allocate resources based on current enrolment.
14. If the 'bridging allocation' is retained it must be increased and allocated based on projected enrolment.
15. Review levels of Additional Needs Assistants and develop a transparent, flexible and equitable allocation model based on need.
16. Introduce a new staffing review mechanism which is simple and accessible.
17. Provide additional management and administration capacity to enable school leaders to manage and support change.
18. Increase the number of available places on the post-graduate diploma in SEN and widen access to funded CPD for teachers not currently in SEN roles.
19. Provide supported pathways into the teaching profession for school graduates with disabilities.
20. Develop pathways for overseas qualified specialist SEN teachers to become registered and employed in Irish schools.
21. Resource Educate Together to continue to innovate in this area and to share learning across the system.