Irish Medium Education &
Special Educational Needs
SEN in Irish Medium Education (IME)

Children in IME schools are the same as children in any other school, come from similar backgrounds, have similar likes and dislikes, have the same curriculum as any other child, and have similar needs, however IME practices immersion in the Irish language from beginning school until Year 3 when English is introduced.

Leading and Managing SEN in IME

Providing effectively for all the children in school is fundamentally crucial in realising individual children's abilities. If a culture of success is not prevalent then some children will not succeed. Invariably, it will be the children with the most complex needs who suffer the most.

Schools can only develop a success culture if each and every partner is committed to it, including the governors, leaders, staff, parents and the children themselves. There is outstanding practice in schools that develop rounded, talented and confident citizens. Measures such as economic and social deprivation do not determine success in these schools. School leaders can embed a belief that schools can open doors to success instead of accepting that some children face insurmountable barriers.

*The first barrier is in the mind.*

Leaders with highest expectations of their pupils coupled with a zealous commitment to success can move mountains, and bring about an atmosphere that the school community thrives on.

*Focus on the doors to success not the barriers*

School leaders must plan methodically to set the agenda for success and should invest in their staff where this is needed. Teachers may need additional professional development to support effectively children with special educational needs. In building capacity for the full range of learning needs
within the school team, leaders can future proof the school. This means that all needs can be catered for through fluid, responsive and adaptive provision.

**Strategic thinking**

Leaders must resource the SENCO. In doing so, the work the SENCO does with the staff, and with individual children and groups, influences all pupils. In enriching the school environment and in building the school’s overall teaching capacity, teachers gain expertise in SEN, particularly in early identification of need, planning intervention, monitoring and evaluation. The SENCO becomes the active agent in creating success within the SEN plan and provision and is the key component in linking the effective school team.

**Having an IEP is good, having a good IEP is brilliant.**

*You may wish to consider the previous section on IEPs.* The IEP should not become the piece of paper filled in before the SENCO or Principal comes around. An IEP should work well for the teacher and the pupil by being specific and manageable. It needs to be evidenced by progression and it needs to be understood and useful to all. It needs to be reflected upon, changed if necessary and discussed regularly. There should be at least one detailed IEP at the beginning of the year, with targets set and reviewed at least twice a term.

School leaders should listen to any concerns their colleagues may have about a child. When a school leader timetables discussions every term, asking for qualitative and quantitative evidence of the children’s progress, agreeing and authorising a timed response to children's needs, the very fabric of the school is permeated. It becomes the mission statement of the school and brings life to the ethos of the school.

The school’s procedures must be manageable, and save time instead of consuming time. If the SENCO spends too long creating reports and gathering evidence, then the procedures become simply a bureaucratic task. Effective use of software, and teacher observations, used in a collective manner, can contribute greatly to the data required. Members of staff should accept that the collection and collation of data is the first step in the process. The second step
is the analytical element of the available data and the third step is the effective use of the data. Everyone has a role in this systematic process.

**Operational element of SEN in Irish Medium Education.**

**Identification**

Most IME schools have a very close working relationship with their local pre-school providers. This has many advantages and in terms of SEN, it means that teachers in the primary sector have at least a year, if not two, to work alongside their pre-school colleagues in early identification of need. When this practice is developed, it will further advance provision for children with additional need.

IME schools use a variety of means to identify underachievement and additional need, including initial teacher observation, MIST, BVPS, PiE, PiM, NFER, InCAS, AU, NRIT, reading assessments and spelling tests. SENCOs are becoming more adept at dyslexia screening, and recognising signs and symptoms of need.

One school reports that it requires the teachers to level children in each year group from P3-P7, this informs moderation, and adds to the knowledge base of the SENCO. It also focuses the teacher’s mind in terms of individual and whole class progression.

One school has developed an amalgam of assessments that are carried out each year from P2 to monitor and track all pupils. As a consequence, the SENCO reports that progression can be seen as a direct result of the intervention which followed.

**Use of data**

The effective use of data and assessment technologies reflects good practice in the IME sector, and in the most effective practice, IME schools have collated years of data and are using it effectively to monitor and track individual and groups of children. Such effective use of quantitative data has resulted in the
SENCO planning effective individual intervention strategies, and helps guide classroom practice.

**Intervention**

Once an identification of need has been made, IME schools offer a variety of intervention strategies. Most commonly, schools offer withdrawal classes, cooperation with Outreach and Peripatetic Services, Occupational and Speech and Language therapists, Educational Psychologists, and the use of IEP’s for in-class support. Schools vary in the amount of time they can give to the SENCO to support SEN within the school, commonly, IME schools have teaching SENCOs with limited opportunity for whole school work. Examples of good practice for SEN include team teaching, training parents/classroom assistants in reading partnerships, employment of part time teachers or classroom assistants to support children with SEN.

Resources used to support children with SEN in IME include Literacy Activity Builder, Numeracy Activity Builder and Maths Catchup programme.

A range of these resources can be found in Comhad achmainne do scoileanna chun tacú le páistí le Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais.
CASS Support for SEN in IME

The following resources are provided by the IME CASS team working from the BELB, NEELB, and WELB.

1. General handbook on Inclusive practices
2. Parental support
3. Pupils decoding skills
4. Bingo games
5. Have a go spelling support
6. Talking and listening support for parents
7. Reading
8. Writing
9. Positive Attitudes
10. Self learning

These resources were mostly created from University of First Age material, ‘Learning How to Learn’.

The CASS Officers concur that the Reading Recovery methodology is most effective in providing for additional need, and teachers report that the phonics schemes are delivering positive results. They also report that teachers are using intervention materials produces by CCEA.

Copies of the above resources can be found in the IME Resource File for Children with Special Educational Needs.
IME Case Studies

An IME Primary and Post Primary school were asked to reflect on their SEN provision.

**Primary school**

**Transitions in**

- There should be assessment, planning and evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative, at every stage.

**Transitions through**

- Monitoring procedures to ensure the progression of children through the stages.

**Identification**

- Early intervention in Nursery setting
  - Use of data to assess and analysis pupils’ needs on three levels:
    - Individual
    - Group
    - Whole Class
  - Use of data to inform planning -
    - Individual – I.E.P
    - Group - differentiation
    - Whole Class – focus
The use of data to contribute to raising standards on a whole school level.

Teacher / parent observation

Formal testing

Educational psychological testing

Training on identification procedures

**Intervention**

- Using assessment and observation to plan and implement intervention whether 1-1 sessions, Group support sessions or whole school support

- On-going follow-up classroom support

- Close and effective liaison between class teacher and support staff

- Team teaching with teacher and implementation of intervention strategies in class. [individual and group].

- The 4 ‘E’s - early, effective, evaluated and expertise - needed to carry out intervention.

**Strategies**

- Clear definition of responsibilities and role of all involved in promoting SEN in school.

- Strong leadership that promotes and champions SEN throughout the school.

- Detailed curriculum planning.

- Effective Timetabling – being creative with time and with the personnel that you have.

- Assessment calendar – developing an effective assessment calendar.
- I.E.P’s – monitoring, evaluation and review procedures.
- Annual training and revision on the principles of the Code of practice.
- Creating and fostering effective partnerships.
- A range of effective strategies for children’s learning and teacher’s teaching.
- Effective methods for teaching children with dyslexia; innovative methodology and flexibility in the use of multi media assessment procedures.

**Obstacles/barriers to learning/progression**

**Child:**

- Personality
- Loss of confidence
- Lack of home support
- Lack of praise
- Lack of social support
- Talents and interests ignored

**Trends**

- Using data from various forms of assessment both standardised and non-standardised to track and monitor pupils’ progress.
- Using data to analysis trends in progress on 4 levels:
  - Individual – I.E.P
  - Group - differentiation
Whole Class – focus
Whole school level – raising standards
Research, resources and renewal

**Professional Development and training:**

- In-service sessions within school: assessment methodology, effective strategies.
- Informing parents – initial consultation, regular contact.
- Training from outside agencies.
- Opportunities for lesson observations – dissemination of good practice.

**Partnership In Action:**

**Parents:**

- Communication with parents – home/school communication procedures, for example home / school diary of support.
- Support resource for parents.

**School staff and additional needs support:**

- Regular contact between class teacher and support staff.

**Outside Support:**

- Strong partnership established between school and outside agencies, for example BELB, Peripatetic Service.
Post Primary School

Transitions in

Smooth transition from primary – secondary is crucial and most pupils take a term to find their feet in their new school. Children with additional learning needs need a great deal more support and can have a trying year. We interview the primary schools in May-June. We build up a profile of each child by speaking directly to principal/SENCO/P7 teacher. We bring the children to school in June to carry out PiE, PiM tests during an Induction Day where parents meet with tutors to relay relevant information. We then meet the children for taster days in August where they are put in small groups and work through a 3 day programme covering transition issues, healthy eating, friendship circles etc. By this stage, we have identified pupils who may need a little more support during Year 08 and they are assigned a buddy. A Prefect is assigned to each year 08 class so that they have a peer influence and someone else to support them. Class in most need of support is divided in 2 to allow for smaller pupil-teacher ratio. A core learning class, consisting of 6 pupils, learn 6 subjects in LSC.

Transitions through the school

The SENCO will meet with the year head in May with relevant information to year group. The year head passes information on to form tutors. Buddy and prefect support continues from year 08-10. The school is initiating a mentoring system where members of staff are assigned to children through traffic light system on assessment manager (not yet in place). Statemented pupils have an annual review and the school is supported by the Transition officer in the BELB who begins planning for transition from school from year 10. Careers modules are done in each class.

Identification. There is a referral system in school; teachers refer and pupil's information is kept on database of special needs register. All pupils' information is stored in Leabhráin Eolais and each teacher is given this booklet which details additional learning needs in generic form, and specific needs of pupils. Learning support staff review IEPs.
**Intervention.** Additional adult assistance is available to a number of classes throughout the school. Whilst assistants may be attached to a particular child, we ask that they facilitate the learning of other children. Assistants are trained in reading support and courses on ASD / Asperger Syndrome. Once a child is placed on the special needs register, staff are asked to differentiate the support in class. There are 2.5 teachers in LSC and in addition to teaching English, Irish and Maths to large classes; they teach a redefined curriculum to the core learning team. Pupils with a recognised diagnosis of dyslexia also have an individual learning lesson with one of these teachers.

**Strategies.** Many of the traditional reports and sanctions do not suit our children as they have no positive focus. A very useful tool for us has been the target diary. Two realisable targets are given to pupils and they receive points per tick received. They have to report to the SENCO at the end of each day to review progress and they receive a great deal of encouragement. This creates a sense of self-belief that many of our students lack. Our LSC acts as a sanctuary to those students who cannot tolerate the social constraints of the school yard and they come here instead. We have board games, chess and Warhammer clubs where some children can enjoy a more settled and structured environment. This is a great comfort for them and boosts them for their afternoon lessons.

**Attainment**

We are delighted with the progress of 85 pupils at GCSE, AS and A2. This is as a result of the reader support they receive in their examinations. We need to plan for greater expectation and success, earlier at KS3. We believe that many of our ASD children would not cope in any other environment other than this one, where success is measured in a child becoming settled and happy to be at school as much as it is in receiving A grades.

**Trends**

**ASD:** A larger number of children have difficulties in coping in the whole school environment. The associated behavioural difficulties are becoming more
difficult to manage and we need to develop teachers’ understanding of triggers and specific intervention strategies.

We need to develop a Social Skills Programme for pupils with ASD as this is as prevalent to their curriculum as individual subjects.

**Literacy/Numeracy support.** A bespoke service of in-house and peripatetic support must be advanced. We have an amalgam of students, some of whom have received excellent support interventions in primary schools, and most who have not. This makes for a very differentiated classroom, but also a confusing one for those children who are dealing with literacy/numeracy difficulties in both languages.
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