

Editorial

The publication of this 30th volume of REACH coincides with the roll out of the new model for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream primary and post-primary schools, first proposed in 2014 by a National Council for Special Education (NCSE) working group. In this regard, I am delighted that this issue features an article by Mary Byrne, Head of Special Education at the NCSE, outlining the rationale for this change and describing the key principles, features and implications of the new model. This development represents a sea-change in Irish policy relating to inclusive and special education. In line with the mission of the journal to provide a forum for fruitful dialogue and promote cooperation and understanding, the Editorial Board has also invited a range of stakeholders to respond to the model. The perspectives of a parent of a young person with SEN (Dempsey), teachers (McNamara; Walshe), principals (Devine; Dillon) and international (Rose) and national (Travers) teacher educators and researchers are included in this issue. Readers will be aware and the Editorial Board recognises that other key perspectives including those of individuals with SEN and other professionals involved in special and inclusive education are not represented here, and so interested parties are invited to consider submitting a short response from a different perspective.

Collectively, those responding to and commenting on the new model welcome the move away from a deficit and potentially discriminatory model requiring unnecessary labelling, and towards the provision of support based on assessed need rather than disability category. The potential of the new model to address existing systemic inequities is also acknowledged by several authors. Nevertheless, there is a strong recognition of the need for professional development and capacity building as an absolute priority, to maximise the benefits of implementation and to support educators in making informed professional judgements about how best to support all learners. Walshe also raises a critical concern about the implications of the language of the model which appears to subsume children and young people learning EAL under the term SEN. Arguably, at a minimum, policy documents relating to the provision of support need to clearly state as in UK legislation and the SEND Code of Practice that “Difficulties related solely to learning English as an additional language are not SEN” (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 85).

This issue also features two articles focusing on post-primary provision for learners with SEN. Reporting on her study of the use of an inclusive

group intervention to meet the social communication skills of students with autism in a mainstream post-primary school, Hayes identifies benefits for the students including the removal of barriers and greater participation in the school community. This study also illustrates the powerful impact of practitioner research in establishing and developing inclusive practices within schools. Coogan and Farrell's research reports the perspectives of adolescents transitioning to the secondary section of a special school for students with mild general learning disabilities. In privileging the voice of these young people, the authors share the experiences and views of the students who demonstrate powerful insight into their own school setting. The authors' conclusion that young people most impacted by policies must be consulted by those involved in policy making and implementation is particularly timely.

Thirty years on from its founding in 1987, *REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland* continues to act as a resource for teachers of pupils with special needs and for other professionals and to provide an opportunity for those involved and interested in special and inclusive education to publish articles based on their research, practice and experience. The Editorial Board welcomes submissions relating to any aspect of inclusive and special education to reach.editor.iatse@gmail.com Further details including information relating to forthcoming special issues relating to communication and language and to early intervention can be found online at <https://goo.gl/5wK7uy>.

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REFERENCES

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