

Editorial

Since the last issue of REACH, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published the much anticipated *Policy Advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Schools*. This makes important recommendations for policy and practice for pre-school and school-aged children including a call for teacher professional development and for tailored evidence-based models of support and interventions which take account of the unique characteristics of each learner. Recommendations are also made relating to the role and operation of special classes and it is to be hoped that this, together with the recent publication by the NCSE of *Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes*, indicates a renewed commitment to the maintenance of a continuum of support for all learners.

At the same time, Budget 2016 saw the announcement of additional investment in inclusive and special education support in schools. While many of the additional teaching and special needs assistants posts announced will simply meet rising demographic needs, the appointment of 900 additional resource teachers and 115 additional Special Needs Assistants is to be welcomed. Likewise, the additional investment in school leadership, recognised as a cornerstone of good practice in special and inclusive education is a welcome commitment. In this regard it is timely that this issue of the REACH journal features articles relating to inclusive policy and practice at the system (Norwich) and school (O’Riordan) level, as well as three articles focusing on supporting the social and communicative development of learners who are on the autism spectrum.

In a wide-ranging and thought-provoking paper based on his keynote address at the annual conference of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) in May 2016, Norwich considers the future of inclusive education, the concept of special educational needs, patterns in special school placement and the resulting tensions and dilemmas. Also focusing on inclusive practice, O’Riordan reports the findings of an audit of inclusion conducted in a small rural primary school, offering an important and often overlooked perspective.

Readers interested in designing the kind of tailored educational interventions for learners with autism which the NCSE recommends will find much to consider in the articles by Cullinan, Henry, and Tyrrell and Logan. Drawing on data from a recent study, Cullinan reports important findings regarding social inclusion in school from the perspectives of children with autism and their peers. Henry outlines how teachers might use peer mediated approaches

as a strategy to enhance the social skills of pupils with autism, while Tyrrell and Logan evaluate the extent to which iPads could be used as a support for oral narrative construction.

At the beginning of a new year, when many readers may be considering continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, the recently launched NCSE *Database of Teacher CPD for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs* is a useful development. Forthcoming events which may be of interest include the INTO Special Education Conference taking place at St. Patrick's Campus, DCU Institute of Education on Saturday 11th February. Readers will also find in this issue the call for papers for the annual IATSE Conference which takes place in Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Ave., on 26th and 27th May.

ANNA LOGAN
Editor

Tribute to Katherine Bennett

(Member of REACH Editorial Board: 1990-2007)

Katherine Bennet passed away in February 2016. Katherine was a highly valued member of the REACH editorial board for seventeen years, from 1990 to 2007. Her intellect, her common sense, and generosity with her time were invaluable in the development and running of the journal. As well as contributing to REACH through her editing expertise, she put in many long hours promoting the journal through her work on the patrons appeal and sales. Katherine had an absolute and sincere commitment to progressing the rights of children and young people with disabilities and those less well off in society. She was also a champion for teachers working in special education. Those who had the privilege of working beside Katherine on the board remember her with great fondness as a person of integrity and strength, who was also a woman of great warmth and charm.

MAURA SHARKEY
Reviews Editor

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