

Why Change how Additional Teaching Resources are Allocated to Schools? The Possible Impact of the New Model on small Schools

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The introduction of the new SEN model for all schools from September 2017 has brought some welcome changes to its predecessor but has also some aspects which may potentially cause concern, particularly to small schools. The amalgamation of the Learning Support and the Resource Teacher role into one Special Education Teacher is welcomed and has been long called for by teachers, parents, management bodies and the INTO alike. It will avoid the unnecessary cross over of teachers and time wasted travelling between schools and will allow greater continuity for schools and students with SEN as support can be provided in the main by one teacher. While this separation of roles may have affected all schools to some degree, it had a greater negative impact on small schools who usually had part time hours to fill.

Small schools do not have the advantage of large SEN teams to allow for collaborative planning and team teaching opportunities where expertise can be built up and shared. It is difficult to rotate teachers within SEN in small schools particularly where the school is not the base school for the position resulting in them sometimes having very little say on who is appointed to the position. Where they do have the base post, that teacher is often in the SEN position for years. While this allows a teacher to build up experience and expertise in the area it also denies other teachers the opportunity to gain experience in the SEN setting. Small schools do not have that luxury of having a post of responsibility that can be specifically assigned to the coordination of SEN within their school. Small schools cannot use their time allocation as efficiently as larger schools as they may not be able to easily group pupils with similar needs. There may only be one or two pupils with specific and complex needs, yet they need the same allocation of time as a group would need. This can result in the narrowing of the role of the SEN teachers leaving them unavailable for early intervention initiatives and in-class support.

As a result of the issues outlined above, I believe small schools should all have been given a baseline weighting in the new SEN model to ensure they can adequately

cater for the enrolment of children with SEN in their schools and ensure that the role of the SEN teacher is not narrowed under the new model. Worthwhile initiatives such as *Literacy Lift Off* and *Guided Reading* which ultimately benefit all children cannot be continued in small schools where there are cuts in baseline allocation.

The new model proposes measures to increase accountability including monitoring how resources are utilised, linking these with pupil learning plans and identified needs, and assessing the impact of interventions on pupil outcomes (Byrne, 2017). However, increased accountability inevitably equates to increased workload for teachers and principals. Schools already plan using IPLPs and/or IEPs for the pupils in their school in receipt of additional support. These plans are available to DES inspectors, the principal, NEPS psychologists and SENOs for inspection. The new model proposes to reduce workload by eliminating the application process for pupils with low incidence needs. However, replacing this paperwork with paperwork where schools have to record the impact of interventions will not necessarily make the system any better.

Another area of concern is the very narrow definition for complex needs. It has been stated that under the new SEN model, complex needs will NOT equate to low incidence needs as understood to date. What has not been made clear, however, is where exactly these children will fit into the new model. Therefore, there are very genuine concerns that children with needs currently captured under low incidence disability may not be included in future allocations under the new profiling process.

REFERENCES

Byrne, M. (2017) Why Change how Additional Teaching Resources are Allocated to Schools? *REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, Vol. 30 (2), pp.76-84.

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