



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

NCSE Annual Report 2023



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NCSE Chairperson's Report to Ministers

June 2024

Ms Norma Foley, TD
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 RC96

Ms Hildegard Naughton, TD
Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion
Department of Education
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Dear Ministers,

As Chairperson of the National Council Special Education (NCSE), I am delighted to present you with our annual report for 2023, in line with the requirements of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

The annual report covers the first year of a new four-year term for the NCSE Council for the period 2023 to 2026. I was honoured to be appointed to serve as the new Chairperson, along with six new ordinary members joining the existing six other members who were reappointed for a second term. I am delighted to lead the NCSE Council in this transformational period for the organisation, with significant additional investment of €13m provided by the Government as part of Budget 2023 to meet the increased need in our education system. The NCSE is grateful to you and the work of your Department in providing this additional funding. Throughout 2023, we engaged in an extensive organisational review and commenced a series of changes within the NCSE. This included organisational restructuring and implementing new ways of working, in line with the NCSE's vision to create a world-class inclusive education system for Ireland. We look forward to outlining further progress in this area in 2024.

Our key focus at the NCSE is on planning and coordinating the provision of education supports for children with additional needs so that children and adults are supported to achieve better outcomes in their education. At the end of 2023, there were a total of 2,549 special classes in mainstream schools with places available for 15,844 students, and over 20,700 SNA posts, up from 19,000 at the end of December 2022. Over 8,400 students were enrolled in special schools supported by the NCSE at the end of 2022/23 school year, supported by over 1,300 teachers and over 2,900 SNAs. The NCSE continued to work on exceptional reviews of SNA and SET allocations, with almost 400 schools receiving increased allocation for SNAs and 61 schools allocated an increase in SET hours.

A range of materials and supports were provided by the NCSE to support parents, teachers and schools. These included parental information seminars, leaflets for parents and students, revised booklets to support parents and children on starting primary school and transitioning to post-primary settings, and a suite of resources for schools in an online Padlet under the Summer Programme 2023. Professional learning opportunities for teachers continued to be delivered in-person and online; more than 4,200 teachers participated in these seminars in 2023.

The School Inclusion Model (SIM) pilot continued over 2023, with the provision of a wrap-around support service in pilot schools including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and behavioural practitioners. Almost 1,000 teachers were supported through 113 Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) events with schools participating in In-School Therapy Projects as part of SIM. Over 500 teachers were supported through Enhanced Regional Teams via seminars delivered by therapists and behaviour practitioners. The national training programme for SNAs continued to roll out, with 961 students completing the training programme in 2023 (cohort 3) and a fourth cohort of 903 students commenced their studies in September 2023. A National Nursing Pilot that commenced in October 2022 also continued to support children with complex healthcare needs, with 9 applications approved for support and further applications under review.

Advising the Minister through independent, expert and evidence-informed policy advice is one of the key strategic goals of the NCSE. The NCSE published its policy advice paper *An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society* on special schools and special classes in January 2024, after engagement with your Department. This policy advice was informed by extensive research and consultation undertaken by the NCSE. The NCSE welcomes the establishment of the Department of Education and NCSE Working Group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations contained within the advice paper along with the support and expertise of the Technical Support Group.

Our research programme progressed throughout 2023, with fieldwork on several commissioned projects advancing over the year. A study commissioned to externally evaluate how the NCSE delivers its frontline services completed its data collection in 2023 and initial findings were presented at our research conference in November. The project mapping and tracking students after they leave school collected the final round of data from students and schools as they left school and submitted the draft report in December 2023. Final preparations for a first report from the study on the impact of COVID-19 for students with special educational needs was undertaken and will be published in 2024, with a second report due later in 2024. We look forward to sharing the outcomes of these reports arising from the studies with your Department.

A new study was commissioned in 2023, to externally evaluate the pilot programme on supporting young people with disabilities to improve access to, and opportunities for, post-school options. The pilot, working with a cohort of students in schools in Galway and Dublin, is overseen by the NCSE and DE, supports schools to build capacity and develop individual transition plans for each student. The evaluation will consider the impact of the pilot programme on students' experience in leaving school, highlighting good practices and areas for improvement, incorporating feedback from a range of stakeholders.

The annual research conference was held in November 2023 at Croke Park, with over 110 delegates attending in-person and 84 registered delegates for the online livestream. The themes 'NCSE and Inclusive Education Service Provision in Ireland' and 'Universal Design for Learning (UDL)' were discussed by a range of national and international experts. The presentations were well-received, and included contributions from Irish, UK and US academics and from NCSE CEO John Kearney outlining progress with the NCSE's expansion and our vision for a world class inclusive education system for Ireland.

In addition to providing you with an annual report under the EPSSEN Act, I am also required under the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies to report as follows:

- ▶ The NCSE is not a commercial State body. We have no subsidiaries, joint ventures or shareholdings. No commercially significant developments affected the NCSE in 2023. We do not anticipate any such developments.
- ▶ The financial position of the NCSE is as disclosed in our 2023 annual accounts which are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. These accounts, when audited, are submitted separately to you under Section 29 of the EPSSEN Act and include, as required, my confirmations to you regarding the NCSE System of Internal Controls and the required governance statement and board members' report.
- ▶ The NCSE adheres to Circular 25/2016 for standards and timelines in responding to Oireachtas members' queries. In 2024, the NCSE will publish responses to Oireachtas members' queries that do not pertain to individual students or contain personal information.
- ▶ The NCSE has an agreed policy and procedures for dealing with protected disclosures in line with Protected Disclosures Act (2014), with the policy to be amended in early 2024 in respect of the Amendment Act 2022. No issues were raised under this procedure in 2023.
- ▶ The NCSE Council completed an evaluation of NCSE performance by reference to the annual plan and budget in December 2023.
- ▶ The NCSE has adopted the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and continues to be fully compliant with all aspects of it following an internal review of our compliance with the Code in 2023. In this context, I confirm that:
 - All appropriate procedures for financial reporting, tax compliance, internal audit, travel, property acquisition, and asset disposals have been carried out.
 - The NCSE is adhering to Government policy on public procurement and implementing our current Corporate Procurement Plan, and plan to revise this in 2024. We identified non-compliance with guidelines with 3 suppliers in 2023 and have disclosed this detail in our Statement of Internal Control in our annual accounts.
 - The NCSE is adhering to the relevant aspects and procedures of the public spending code.
 - The NCSE carried out an appropriate assessment of principal risks, including a description of these risks and, where appropriate, associated mitigation measures and strategies.

- NCSE Council members comply with the NCSE Code of Business Conduct for Members of State Boards.
- NCSE employees comply with the Code of Behaviour for Civil Servants.
- Salaries payable to the chief executive and all employees comply with Government policy.
- No directors' fees are payable to NCSE Council members. Individual Council members' expenses are detailed in the governance statement published separately to this report.
- The NCSE complies with the guidelines for the appraisal and management of capital expenditure proposals.
- The NCSE complies with Government travel policy requirements.
- The NCSE expects no significant post-balance sheet events.
- As at 31 December 2023, the Council has 6 (46%) female and 7 (54%) male members. The gender balance of the Council is in line with the requirements outlined in the EPSEN Act, and meets the Government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards.
- The NCSE is committed to the promotion of diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

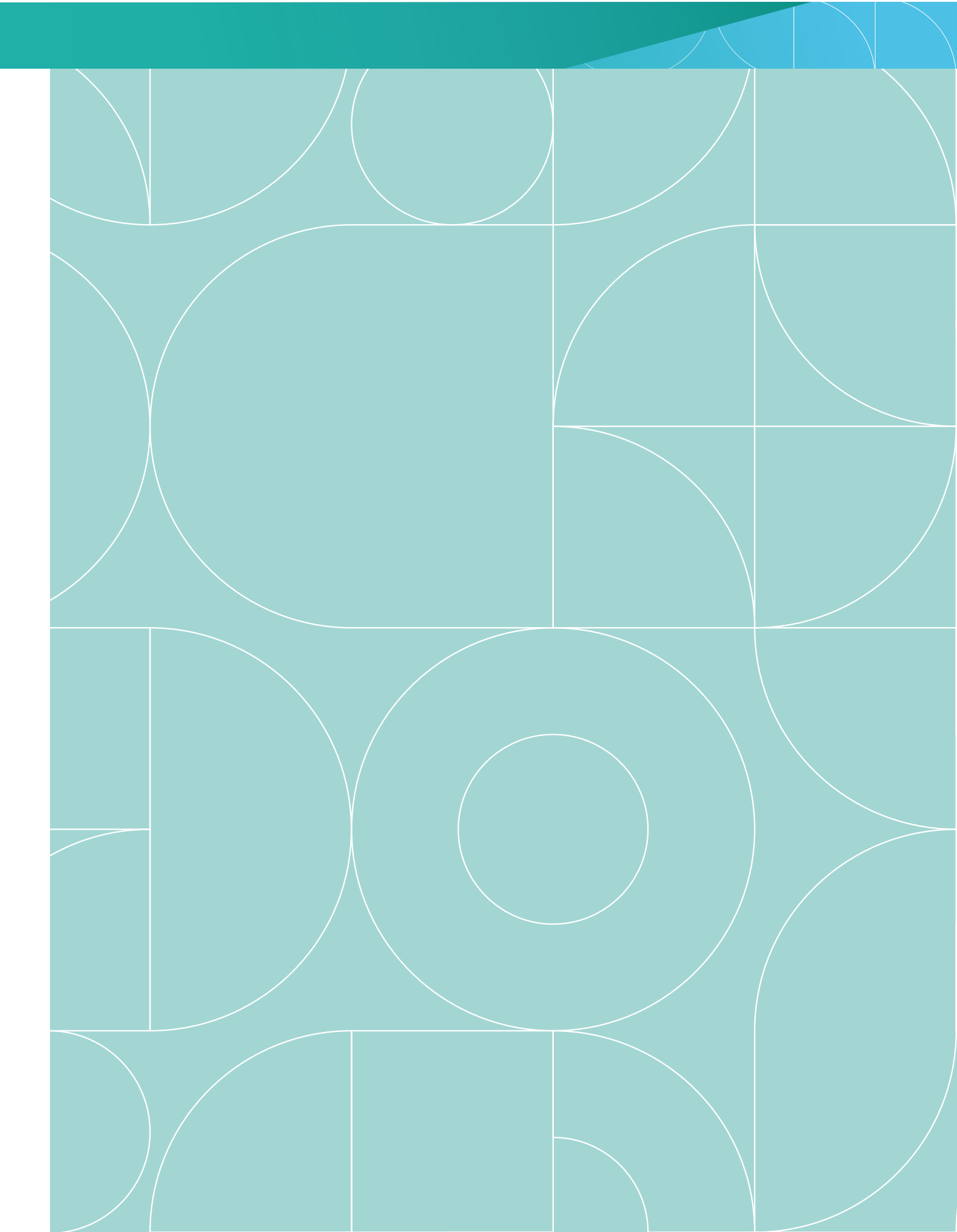
Further confirmations of compliance with the requirements of the Code are set out in Appendix 1.

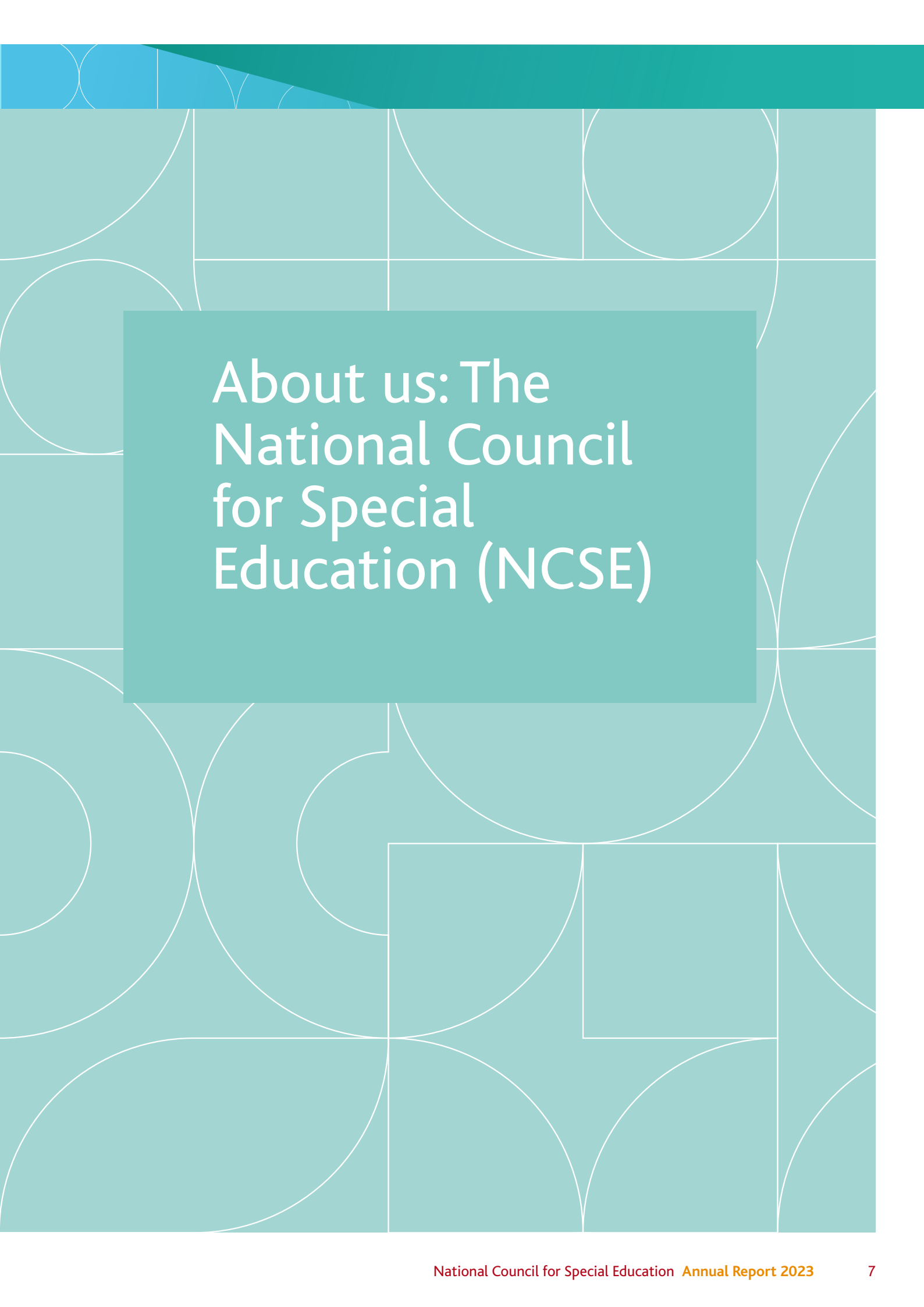
Our annual report identifies the main achievements for 2023 and the activities undertaken in pursuance of our three strategic goals for the year. The NCSE can, if required, provide any further information or clarification to you or your officials.

Yours sincerely

Dr Fergal Lynch
Chairperson,

National Council for Special Education





About us: The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

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Our vision

The NCSE's vision is for a world class inclusive education system for Ireland, where children and adults with special educational needs are supported to achieve better outcomes in their education to enable them to reach their potential.

Our mission

We will drive the realisation of an inclusive education with integrated research, policy and practice. Our skilled and committed staff will work with students, schools and communities to provide access to quality learning and opportunities.

Our values

1. Person-centred: Children and adults with special educational needs and their families are at the centre of what we do.
2. Inclusion-focused: Inclusion guides our beliefs and actions.
3. Equity and equality-focused: We allocate existing and additional resources equitably and fairly to schools in line with the needs of students and within Department of Education policy.
4. Evidence-informed: We base policy advice on research evidence, national and international best practice, consultation with our stakeholders and expert input.
5. Expert-led: We are an expert source of valuable information, guidance and support for parents and schools as well as supporting continuing professional development for education practitioners.
6. Consultation-focused: We engage in regular and meaningful consultation with our stakeholders.

Our function

In striving to achieve this vision, we have a number of activities arising from our functions as set out in Section 20 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004. Specifically, these include:

- ▶ Planning and coordinating the provision of education supports for children with special educational needs.
- ▶ Conducting and commissioning research.
- ▶ Advising the Minister for Education on policy for special education.
- ▶ Disseminating information, including best practice, on special education to parents, schools and other interested persons.
- ▶ Consulting voluntary bodies to ensure their knowledge and expertise inform the development of NCSE policy.
- ▶ Reviewing and advising on educational provision for adults with disabilities.

The NCSE Statement of Strategy 2022-2024 was approved by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, in December 2022. Three strategic goals guided our work in 2023 and are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: NCSE Statement of Strategy 2022-24¹, Strategic Goals

- ▶ **Goal 1:** Support students, parents and schools to enhance the educational participation, learning experience of and outcomes for students with SEN.
- ▶ **Goal 2:** Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy advice to the Minister for Education that is underpinned by a comprehensive research programme
- ▶ **Goal 3:** Develop and maintain an effective organisational culture that complies with all corporate governance and regulatory requirements and support the delivery of services

The structure of this Annual Report is guided by the Statement of Strategy, with the related actions under each goal presented in this report.

¹ NCSE Statement of Strategy (2022-24) was approved by Council in 2022. With the Government announcement of additional funding to support the expansion of NCSE services in November 2022, the NCSE prepared a new Statement of Strategy and was approved by the Minister in March 2024.

Main Achievements in 2023

Some of our main achievements during 2023 are summarised below.

- ▶ The NCSE prepared for the early 2024 publication of the Policy Advice paper on special schools and special classes (mid-January 2024). This included two additional supporting documents, a literature review and an administrative review.
- ▶ A major organisational review and transformation programme got underway in 2023, which saw the commencement of significant expansion and critical changes to the operating structures of the NCSE. These changes introduced the departure from a 5 region base to that of a 2 national region base structure, underpinned by 20 Team Manager areas, an increase of 10 areas on the previous organisational structure.
- ▶ At the end of the 2022/23 school year, there were a total of 2,549 special classes in mainstream schools with places available for 15,844 students.
- ▶ Over 8,400 students were enrolled in special schools supported by the NCSE at the end of 2022/23 school year, supported by over 1,300 teachers and over 2,900 SNAs.
- ▶ There were over 20,700 SNA posts supporting students care needs up from just over 19,000 posts at the end of Dec 2023.
- ▶ At the end of the 2022/23 school year, over 13,000 applications for additional supports for students with special educational needs were processed under two allocation schemes:
 - Almost 6,000 new applications for school transport
 - Over 7,200 new applications for assistive technology/special equipment.
- ▶ Under the SNA exceptional review process, over 600 schools applied for a review of the allocation by the end of May 2023, with almost 400 schools receiving an increased allocation, equivalent to almost 300 SNA posts.
- ▶ The NCSE provided a comprehensive programme of TPL seminars (a mix of online and in-person) from September 2022 to June 2023. Over 200 seminars were held and attended by over 4,200 school staff from around the country.
- ▶ The NCSE continued to provide a national SNA training programme in conjunction with UCD. A third cohort of 961 students graduated in 2023, while a forth cohort of 903 students commenced their studies in September 2023. In 2023, the course was accredited as a Level 6 diploma in Inclusive School Support, with students graduating with a Level 6 award on the NFQ.
- ▶ A National Nursing Programme Pilot was launched, with 24 applications received and by the end of 2023, 9 applications were approved for support.
- ▶ The In-School Therapy Project (ISTP) held a range of events working with the SIM pilot schools. In 2023, ISTP TPL events were held supporting 46 individual schools and 996 teachers, while ISTP interventions (teachers and therapists working in partnership) engaged 34 schools and 378 teachers across 70 interventions.

- ▶ In 2023, the Visiting Teacher Service provided support to over 1,300 blind/visually impaired children (14 WTE teachers) and over 5,300 deaf/hard of hearing children (29 WTE teachers).
- ▶ The Transition Study Pilot under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy began in January 2023, and continued with students in their sixth year preparing to leave school in two pilot sites in Dublin and Galway. The NCSE externally commissioned the evaluation in spring 2023 and is well underway in both sites, preparing for the post-school phase of the pilot in 2024.
- ▶ The annual NCSE research conference was held in Croke Park in Nov 2023 considering two themes: 'The NCSE and Inclusive Education Service Provision in Ireland' and 'Universal Design for Learning (UDL)'.
- ▶ Publication of the updated NCSE's Customer Charter and Action plan, 2023-2025.
- ▶ Commencement of a project to develop a new data strategy for the NCSE.

NCSE transformation programme

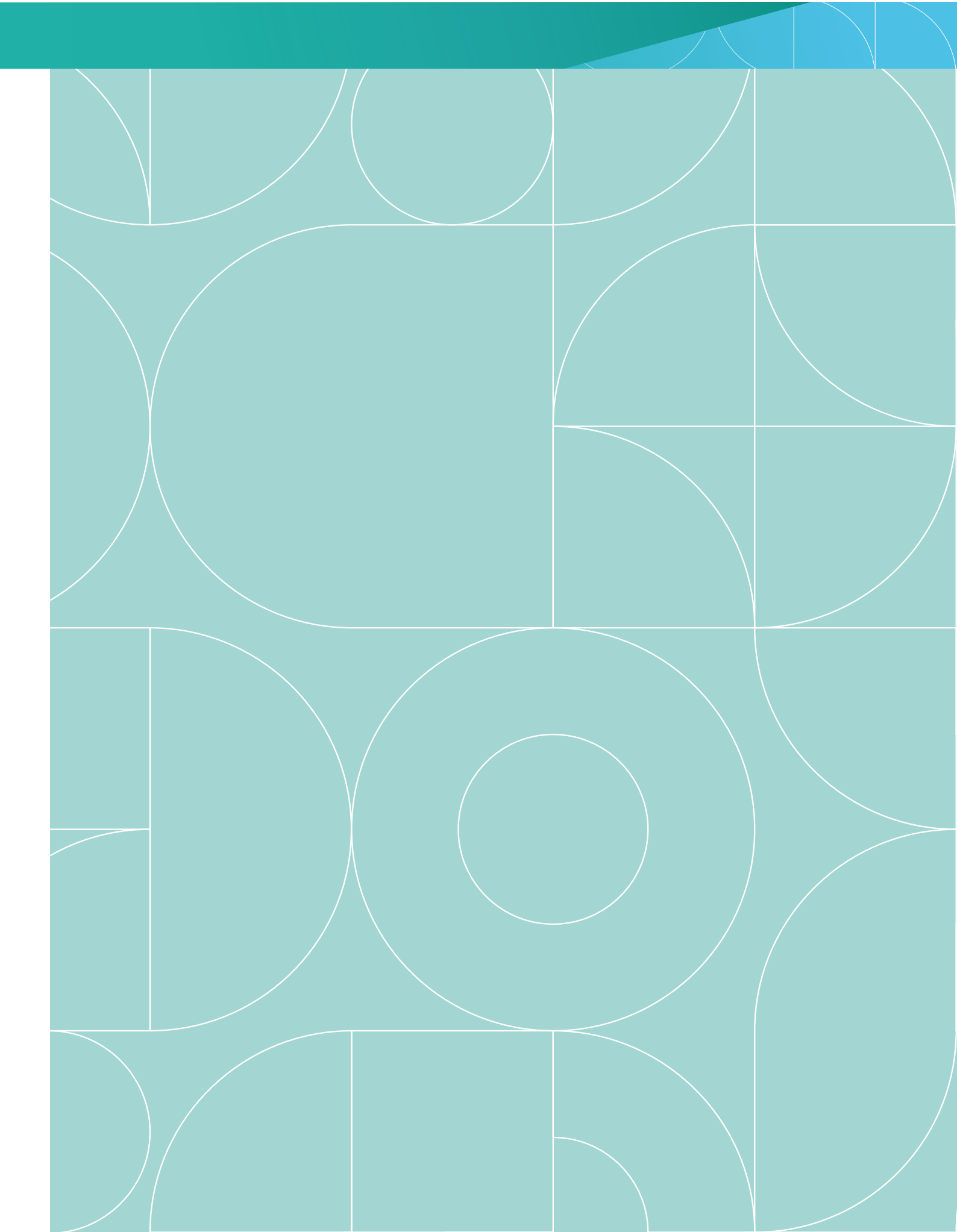
In addition to the main achievements outlined for 2023, the NCSE Senior Leadership Team has undertaken a number of key developments related to a transformation programme entitled 'Vision 26'. 'Vision 26' will give effect to a revised and expanded organisation supported by the additional funding allocation of €13 million in Budget 2023.

A Strategic Workforce Plan for the NCSE is complete, and a new detailed organisational design is in place that has significantly changed the structure of the organisation, increasing from 4 divisions to 5 pillars (see Section 3.2). This process has involved engagement and input from staff across the organisation and alignment key functions to primary and secondary/support activities.

Throughout 2023, recruitment campaigns in line with the new organisational design moved at pace, including the appointment of two new Principal Officers in August 2023. This will continue into 2024.

In 2023, planning and preparations were put in place for an expansion and reconfiguration in the frontline teams, with an increased number of staff in frontline local teams, led by the appointment of two new National Coordinators in 2024. Extended recruitment campaigns were initiated to expand the number of Team Managers and Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS) working closely with schools at a local level.

Additional staff have been recruited at all levels across the organisation to ensure that head office administrative and frontline teams have the resources available to meet the increased need in our education system and provide schools, parents and students with special educational needs with a more responsive, coordinated and integrated range of services.



Strategic Goal 1:

Support students, parents and schools to enhance the educational participation, learning experience of and outcomes for students with SEN

Strategic Goal 1

Support students, parents and schools to enhance the educational participation, learning experience of and outcomes for students with SEN.

The NCSE set out nine key actions related to strategic goal 1 in the NCSE Statement of Strategy 2022-2024.

Actions

1. Review and allocate supports to schools under DE schemes.
2. Provide information, advice and support to schools and education stakeholders on including students with SEN.
3. Provide professional development based on models of best practice to enhance the education and inclusion of students with SEN.
4. Provide advice, information and support to parents and students on education matters including resources and supports, transition planning and pathways.
5. Provide a wrap-around support service in schools including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and behavioural practitioners as part of the School Inclusion Model.
6. Identify the need for and plan the establishment of special classes and special schools.
7. Review the impact of the supports, advice and professional development provided to schools and parents.
8. Maintain data on provision of SEN resources, analyse data and trends to inform planning and review.
9. Work with the HSE to comply with statutory obligations under the Disability Act.

1.1 Introduction

The NCSE plans, coordinates and reviews provision of additional education supports for schools that enrol students with special educational needs in line with Department of Education policy.

Each year over 4,000 school communities can apply to their locally based NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) for a variety of resources depending on the needs of students in the school. These resources include the following:

- ▶ SNA (special needs assistant) support through the SNA Exceptional Review (SER) process
- ▶ Assistive technology/specialist equipment, and/or
- ▶ School transport arrangements for students with additional needs.

Most students with special educational needs are now educated in mainstream classes. However, provision ranging from full-time enrolment in the latter to full-time enrolment in special schools is available for students. The range of placement options includes:

- ▶ **A mainstream class** where the student with special educational needs may receive additional support from the class teacher through differentiation of the curriculum, the application of Universal Design for learning adaptations and/or additional teaching support provided by a special education teacher.
- ▶ **A special class in a mainstream school** with 6 to 11 students in each special class, depending on the particular special educational need.
- ▶ **A special school** for students with complex special educational needs with classes ranging from 6 to 11 students, depending on the designation of the special educational needs of students enrolled.

Furthermore, the Visiting Teacher Service provides advice, teaching and guidance to support educational provision for children and young people who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired. This service is available from birth through to pre-school, primary and post-primary levels.

A comprehensive programme of Teacher Professional Learning seminars and webinars offers professional learning opportunities for teachers to enhanced teacher capacity in the education of children with special education needs. This programme covers a range of topic areas including, autism, behaviour, assessment preparation, deployment of SNAs, leadership, sensory and therapy interventions to respond to the diverse learning needs of students in inclusive learning environments.

The NCSE provides in-school support for whole staff, group and individual teacher supports. Supports may be in the form of telephone support, email support, video conferences, a school visit or a whole school seminar. Applications can be made via the NCSE School Support Portal, and can requested throughout the year.

The Assessment of Need (AoN) team, established in September 2022, coordinates the process of organising an assessment of a child's or young person's education needs as part of the Health Service Executive's (HSE) AoN process. Under the Disability Act (2005), the NCSE is responsible for nominating an appropriate person to carry out the assessment of education needs, when requested by the HSE.

This section outlines our:

- ▶ Resourcing of schools in 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years,
- ▶ Teacher Professional Learning events, provision of in-school support/advice,
- ▶ Assessment of Need process,
- ▶ Implementation of the School Inclusion Model pilot,
- ▶ Developments on the Transition Study pilot under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) and
- ▶ Updates on a range of activities, resources, advice and information provided by the NCSE.

1.2 Allocating supports to schools

Action 1.1 Review and allocate supports to schools under DE schemes.

1.2.1 Resourcing Schools in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 School Years²

This section outlines the resourcing of schools in 2023, with information on a range of supports and resources applicable to the 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years.

Special Classes

15,844 places available in 2,549 special classes in mainstream schools at the end of 2022/23 school year.

Special classes in mainstream schools – NCSE SENOs sanctioned the establishment of an additional 397 special classes in the school year 2022/23.

By the end of the school year there were 2,549 special classes in mainstream schools with 15,844 student places available. This is a net increase of 2,380 places on the previous school year.

Special Schools

In the 2022/23 school year, 8,424 students were enrolled in special schools supported by the NCSE. The NCSE allocated 1,340 teachers and 2,971 SNAs to special schools in 2022/23. The corresponding figures in the previous school year 2021/22 amounted to 1,282 teachers and 2,775 SNAs respectively.

Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocation Model

Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocations for schools were re-profiled during 2022 and came into effect in September 2022 for two years. The Department of Education re-profiled schools SET allocations for September 2022/23 with additional allocations being provided to developing schools.

The NCSE has continued to support the model's implementation in 2023 through its local staff engaging with schools. Further information about the SET review process is set out in Department of Education Circulars 0013/2017, 0014/2017, 007/2019, and 008/2019, 0020/2022.

NCSE Guidelines 03/2022 sets out the exceptional review application procedure.

² The 2022/23 school year was from September 2022 to June 2023. The 2023/24 school year is from September 2023 to June 2024.

14,551 special education teachers allocated to mainstream schools by end of 2023.

Schools continued to have access to a review of their SET allocation in light of exceptional circumstances. In 2023, 153 schools applied for an exceptional circumstance allocation review during the calendar year.

Of those, 61 schools were allocated an increase in SET hours (see Table 1).

At the end of December 2023, the total number of special education teachers in mainstream schools was 14,551, while 3,358 special education teachers were in special classes and 1,384 were in NCSE supported special schools.

Table 1: Summary of applications for the SET Exceptional Review Process, 2023

Outcomes	Numbers
Schools awaiting an outcome at the end of 2023	50
Schools that were reviewed by Advisors and the recommendation that there should be no increase to their SET Allocation	12
Schools that are currently awaiting outcome of review from DE	3
Schools that received an increase in their SET allocation	61
Schools that applied for a review but did not progress (includes incomplete applications/application for a different resource)	27
Total	153

SNA support

SNA allocations to the majority of primary and post-primary mainstream classes were maintained at their current level for the 2023/24 school year from the date of Department of Education Circular 0018/2023.

However, schools can apply for a review of their mainstream SNA allocation in the event of exceptional circumstances, where a school believes that primary care tasks are not being met by the existing SNA allocation. This is provided for by the Department of Education via the NCSE, application for additional SNA posts through the exceptional review process.

An exceptional circumstance is an unanticipated, unusual, or sudden event, beyond the school's control, which has had a significant impact on the primary care needs in the school, and as a consequence primary care tasks are not being met by the existing SNA allocation. In particular, applications from schools with no SNAs and developing schools are prioritised under this process.

Under the SNA Exceptional Review process established for the 2022/23 school year, 619 schools applied to the NCSE for a review of their 2021/22 mainstream SNA allocation by 31st May 2023 (see Table 2). 394 schools received an increased allocation. This equated to an additional 290.3 SNA posts being allocated to those schools during the 2022/23 school year.

Table 2: Outcome of SNA Exceptional Review process, for 2022/23

Outcome	No of Applications
Total applications	619
Increased allocation	394
Number of additional SNA posts	290.3

The number of SNAs allocated to schools at the end of the 2022/23 school year and as at the end of December 2023, is set out in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Number of SNA posts

	End 2022/23 School Year	End December 2023
SNA Posts	19,480.72	20,787.76

SNA Exceptional Review appeals

Schools that wish to appeal the outcome of their SNA Exceptional Review could do so by submitting an application for appeal. By the end of 2023, 17 schools had submitted an appeal, of which 14 were concluded by that date. Table 4 provides an overview of the outcomes to those appeal applications.

Table 4: Outcome of SNA Exceptional Review Appeals processed by NCSE as at 31st December 2023

Outcome	No of Appeals
Not Upheld	12
In process	3
Upheld	2
Total	17

Applications for Additional Supports

In the 2022/23 school year, SENOs processed over 13,000 applications for additional supports for students with special educational needs under two allocation schemes – school transport and assistive technology/specialist equipment. Table 5 below outlines the number of applications processed under each scheme.

Table 5: Summary of Applications Processed by NCSE for School Year 2022/23

Scheme	No of Applications
School transport	5,991
Assistive technology/specialist equipment	7,241
Total	13,232

Supports for Ukrainian children with SEN

In collaboration with the Department of Education, the NCSE continued to engage with schools as required on the revised SNA and SET allocations to schools in relation to the arrival of Ukrainian students. These allocations are specifically aimed at supporting Ukrainian students with special needs in 2023/24.

Recognising that a proportion of Ukrainian children will require special education support, the NCSE continue to providing a Ukrainian/Russian written translation services to schools and families of children with SEN as needed.

At the end of December 2023, 18,003 Ukrainian pupils had been enrolled in schools across Ireland. Out of that figure, 11,165 of these pupils had been accommodated in primary schools while 6,838 pupils had enrolled in post-primary schools.

1.3 Identification and planning for establishment of special classes and schools

Action 1.6 Identify the need for and plan the establishment of special classes and special schools.

Action 1.8 Maintain data on provision of SEN resources, analyse data and trends to inform planning and review.

The NCSE continued to plan for the establishment of special class and school planning in collaboration with the Department of Education throughout 2023.

Special schools

The Department and NCSE continue joint work on special school demand for the school year 2024/25 and forward planning for the 2025/26 school year. The creation of new special schools and expansions of a range of existing special schools are under consideration.

Two new special schools announced in April 2023 by Ministers Foley and Madigan in Dublin 7 and in east Cork are set to commence in 2024.

In December 2023, four new special schools in counties Kildare, Limerick, Meath and Wexford, were announced by Ministers Foley and Madigan, for establishment in the 2024/25 school year. It is anticipated that these schools will initially enrol around 120 students in total in September 2024 and gradually increase numbers over the coming years.

Strategic engagement continues to focus on ensuring high pressure areas based on known trends, local demand, suitable current accommodation and urban centres are factored into likely school locations.

Special classes

NCSE and DE collaboration continued throughout 2023 on the provision of special class placements in the current school year and in relation to forward planning for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 school years.

The initial list of new Special Classes was published for the 2023/24 school year with 329 additional new Special Classes. NCSE SENOs worked with schools to finalise the complete list for additional Special Classes; the number of additional classes reached 370 ahead of the new school year.

There is ongoing strategic engagement by the NCSE to ensure demand is met with provision and the identification of pressure points at local and regional level are identified as early as possible. Geo-mapping software is in place to support identification of demand for special schools and classes, with all SENOs accessing this system. There is ongoing engagement with priority locations for the opening of special classes for the coming school year. Looking ahead, the NCSE continues to engage with the Department of Education, stakeholders and parents regarding intensive and ongoing analysis on demand.

Collaboration with the Department of Education on the forward planning in respect of special schools and classes was ongoing throughout 2023, to support long term planning for students who require specialist places.

The NCSE facilitating a 4-Day Introduction to Autism for teachers in schools opening their first special class for autism in September 2023 in Galway and Dublin.



1.4 Provision of information and support to students and parents

Action 1.4 Provide advice, information and support to parents and students on education matters including resources and supports, transition planning and pathways.

1.4.1 Information and Support for Students

Summer Programme 2023

In 2023, the NCSE continued to provide support to primary and special schools and tutors by developing a flexible, child-centred approach to planning and implementing the summer programme, which prioritised key learning needs, physical and emotional well-being, and the development of resilience and confidence among students.

In collaboration with the DE and NEPS, the NCSE facilitated an online information training webinar on the Summer Programme for primary and special schools. A total of 1,000 teachers and school leaders attended the online webinar. The NCSE facilitated an additional face-to-face seminar for 25 special school teachers and school leaders to explore a range of resources to support the Summer Programme 2023.

Figure 1: Summer Programme National Training Seminar for Special Schools

Summer Programme Training for Primary & Special Schools 2023
'Building Confidence and Connections'

The training event will highlight practical resources and strategies that will support school staff in planning for a playful, engaging and successful experience for children and young people participating in the Summer Programme.

The training event will be facilitated by a NEPS Psychologist and two NCSE Advisors. Attendees will have access to a NCSE Padlet with accompanying resources and links to support the delivery of the Summer Programme.

Tuesday 23rd May 2023 **7 pm - 8.30 pm**

In addition, the NCSE created a Summer Programme padlet for primary and special schools containing a comprehensive suite of online resources for teachers and tutors. Resources were created in line with the Summer Programme 2023 theme, *Building Confidence and Connections*, and were organised under five guiding principles:

- ▶ Sense of Safety
- ▶ Sense of Calm
- ▶ Sense of Connectedness
- ▶ Sense of Self and Community Efficacy
- ▶ Sense of Hope.

Home-based resources were made available for students with complex needs who could not participate in the school-based programme. To support the process, the NCSE provided an overview document for schools, application forms and a listing for parents to find available tutors.

Figure 2: A selection of resources provided on the NCSE Padlet to support the Summer Programme



Summer Creations

The NCSE hosted the third iteration of its online art competition, *Summer Creations*, in 2023. The competition is open to all students participating in the home-based and school-based summer provision programme. This year's theme was 'connections' and participants were invited to create artworks celebrating the people who inspire them most. To ensure there was awareness of the event, a leaflet detailing the competition was created and distributed to Education Centres.

Participants were encouraged to express themselves through their preferred artistic medium, and this resulted in a range of entries showcased within our online gallery. The NCSE would like to extend its appreciation to our external judge, Richie Healy, for lending his expertise in selecting the most exemplary entries.



In 2023, we had winners in to two categories, with all participants receiving a certificate with an image of their entry.

The winner of our solo entry category was Jake, a student in St. Brigid's National School, Clonegal, Co. Carlow. Jake was awarded a package of art supplies to recognise his achievement. The winner of our small group category, was the Junior Infant Group from St. Ita's National School, Loughrea, Co. Galway and they also received a package of art supplies.

Thank you to all of the students who participated in Summer Creations. We hope the competition continues to inspire students to express themselves creatively.

Figure 3: Having fun baking with Nanny by Jake, St. Brigid's National School, Clonegal, Co. Carlow



Figure 4: Contributions from the Junior Infant Group from St. Ita's National School, Loughrea, Co. Galway



Science Blast

The NCSE participated in ESB Science Blast – a free, non-competitive educational programme for primary schools (3rd to 6th Class). Science Blast involves the whole class investigating the science behind a simple question. It aims to support the development of core science and maths skills in primary school children as set out in the primary school curriculum. The NCSE have been involved in the Judging of Science Blast from its inauguration in 2018.

Students' presentations were judged by a panel including STEM professionals, who discussed the investigation with the students and provided feedback on their project. All participating schools are presented with a school trophy to acknowledge the work that has gone into their investigation.

In 2023, NCSE was involved in the judging of two projects:

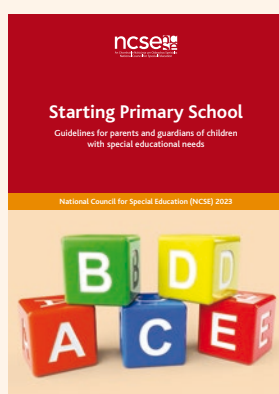
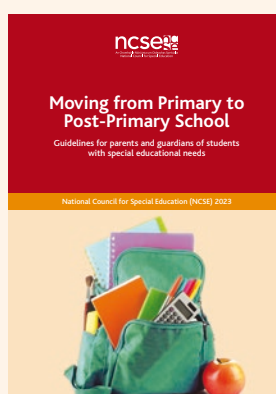
1. 'Is it quicker to read print or braille?' by students from St. Joseph's For Blind NS, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
2. 'High Five for Science' by students from St. Patrick's NS, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

1.4.2 Information and Support for Parents

One of the key roles of the NCSE is to provide information to parents, schools and all our stakeholders on special education matters. Each year SENOs deliver the NCSE's parental information programme which aims to inform parents and guardians of children starting school of the educational services and supports available in their areas.

To support parents through the transitional phases of their child's education, the 2016 transition booklets were revised in 2023. These resources, titled Starting Primary School and Moving from Primary to Post-Primary School have been updated to provide comprehensive support and practical guidance for parents and educators. They emphasise early preparation, active involvement of students in decision-making, and the importance of communication and sharing relevant information to ensure a smooth transition for students with special educational needs.

Both publications have been awarded the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) plain English mark, and translated into Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian, ensuring accessibility to a wide audience.



1.5 Provision of information and advice to schools and stakeholders, and teacher professional development

Action 1.2 Provide information, advice and support to schools and education stakeholders on including students with SEN.

Action 1.3 Provide professional development based on models of best practice to enhance the education and inclusion of students with SEN.

Action 1.7 Review the impact of the supports, advice and professional development provided to schools and parents.

1.5.1 NCSE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL)

The NCSE provides a comprehensive programme of TPL seminars offering professional learning opportunities for teachers to support the teaching of children with special education needs. From September 2022 to June 2023, NCSE held 213 seminars, including 80 online seminars. NCSE seminars were attended by 4,230 educational teachers and principals, including 2,699 participants in our online seminars.

Teacher Professional Learning 2023-2024			
Topic	Presented Dates	Format	Number of Participants
Primary and Post-Primary Courses	15th September 2023 15th October 2023 15th November 2023 15th December 2023 15th January 2024	Online	4,230
Special School Courses	15th September 2023 15th October 2023 15th November 2023 15th December 2023 15th January 2024	Online	2,699

To increase awareness of NCSE's Teacher Professional Learning programme, the NCSE produced a booklet and poster to enable better dissemination of the broad scope of learning opportunities for schooling communities. The booklet contained a concise but detailed schedule of both seminars and webinars for the upcoming school year. The TPL booklet and its accompanying poster were distributed every school nationwide at the commencement of the academic year.

In October 2023, the NCSE filled new roles of Education and Curriculum Specialist Leads, in the areas of primary, post-primary and special school contexts. These new roles will strengthen the role of NCSE in developing teacher capacity in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy which is critical to the inclusion of students with special needs in their classrooms. Strong collaboration between the NCSE and the newly formed OIDE has been established. OIDE support service is the national body, working on behalf of the Department of Education that support the professional learning of school leaders and teachers.

NCSE is now involved in two deliverables for the Digital Strategy:

1. OIDE engaged with NCSE to ensure that all students with additional needs can benefit from digital technologies to support an inclusive education system
2. OIDE supported the NCSE with a view to providing relevant supports and guidance for the use of technology to support inclusive practice

Further engagement and collaboration with OIDE Technology in Education is planned for 2024.

1.5.2 In-School Support

The NCSE provides in-school support for whole staff, group and individual teacher supports. Supports may be in the form of telephone support, email support, video conferences, a school visit or a whole school seminar.

In 2023, 3,118 applications were received from 1,577 schools for in-school support via the NCSE School Support Portal. The most frequently requested in-school supports were related to behaviour (1,247 applications) and autism (1,173 applications). Support was provided to individual teachers, small groups of teachers and to whole school staff.

Commonly requested areas of support included:

- ▶ Training and support for staff to identify and manage behaviours of concern.
- ▶ Support around social behaviour, emotional behaviour, mental health and language after the return to school post-Covid school closures.
- ▶ Difficulties with social interactions with peers.
- ▶ Newly diagnosed children and/or newly enrolled children.
- ▶ Newly established special classes/staff training for autism
- ▶ Support visits for PGSEN students
- ▶ Support for inclusive education in school.

1.5.3 Visiting Teacher Service

Throughout 2023, NCSE visiting teachers (VTs) supported children who are deaf/hard of hearing and who are blind/visually impaired and their families. This support was provided both in the home and in schools. The VTs are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss and/or visual impairment. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from time of referral through to the end of post-primary education. Visiting teachers support children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual student's needs and requirements. Central to the core work of the service is liaison with other professionals and agencies including audiological scientists, ophthalmology services, speech and language therapists, low vision specialists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staffs and with parents.

In 2023, 14 Visiting Teachers for the blind/visually impaired provided support to nearly 1,400 children, and 29 (whole time equivalent) visiting teachers for the deaf/hard of hearing provided support for over 5,000 children (see Table 6).

Table 6: Number of Children Supported by Visiting Teachers by Setting, 2023

Setting	Blind/Visually Impaired Children	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Children
Babies/pre-school/other	85	635
Primary school	623	2,405
Post-primary school	434	1,721
Special school	241	547
Total children	1,383	5,308

1.5.4 Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)

The Primary Curriculum Framework published in 2023 provides the foundation for high-quality learning, teaching and assessment for all children attending primary and special schools. The Framework underpins the work of the NCSE Primary Curriculum team in providing curricular advice and support to primary and special school teachers and school leaders.

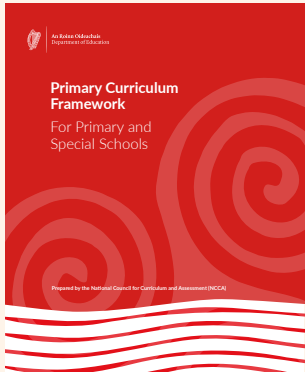


Figure 5: NCSE Primary Curriculum Team attending official launch at Dublin Castle, March 2023

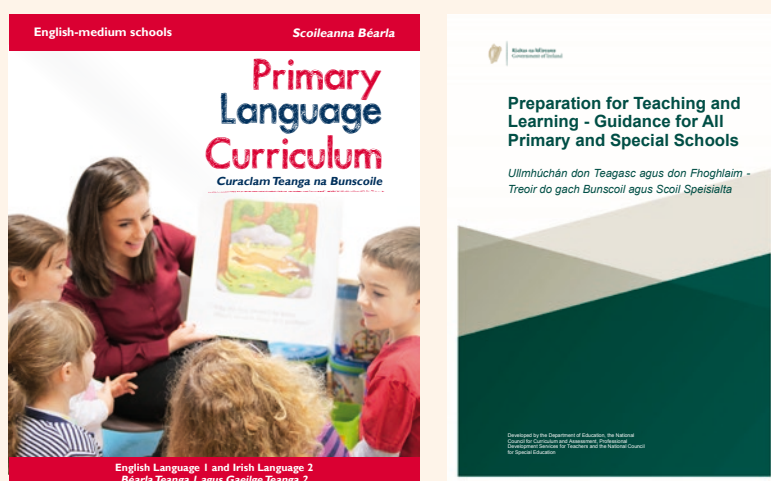


1.5.5 Primary Language Curriculum (PLC)

Primary Language Curriculum Sustained Support for Special Schools 2023

The Primary Language Curriculum published in 2019 is an inclusive language curriculum for all primary level children attending primary and special schools. In 2023, a team of five NCSE Primary Curriculum Advisors provided sustained support to teachers and school leaders in 50 special schools with the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum, in addition to the Preparation for Teaching and Learning Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools.

Figure 6: Primary Language Curriculum (2019). Preparation for Teaching and Learning Guidance (2021)



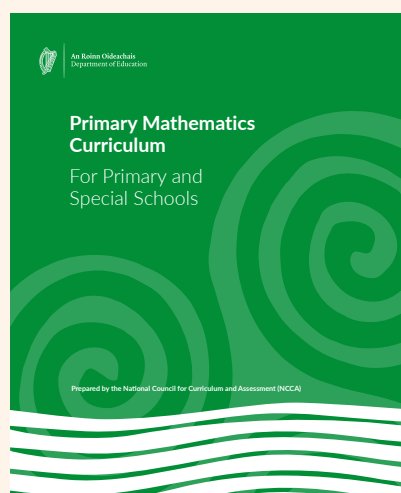
Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) TPL Seminars and School Support 2023

In 2023, three Teacher Professional Learning evening seminars were provided online for teachers and school leaders in primary and special schools to support implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). The NCSE Primary Curriculum Advisors also responded to requests for in-school support for PLC submitted by primary and special school teachers. Two seminars on implementation of the PLC were provided for teachers enrolled in the Post-Graduate Diploma in Continuing Professional Development programmes for Special Education Teachers, provided by the School of Education, University College Dublin and the School of Special and Inclusive Education, Dublin City University.

1.5.6 Primary Mathematics Curriculum (PMC)

The Primary Mathematics Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 2023) is an inclusive mathematics curriculum for all primary level children attending primary and special schools. In 2023, the NCSE facilitated the delivery of national CPD to support the introduction of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum (2023) in special schools. A team of five NCSE Primary Curriculum Advisors facilitated 12 professional learning seminars for 206 school and curriculum leaders in 112 special schools.

Figure 7: Primary Mathematics Curriculum (2023)



1.5.8 NCSE Supports Schools with Special Classes for Autistic Students

A resource leaflet titled "NCSE Supports Schools with Special Classes for Autistic Students" was developed by NCSE Autism Advisors. The leaflet, accompanied by an informative poster, provides insights to the Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools, a collaborative effort between the NCSE and the Department of Education. It also details the supports and resources available to schools that are provided by the NCSE.

A copy of the leaflet and poster were sent to all schools in September 2023, at the start of the new school year.

Figure 8: Information supports for schools – special classes for autistic students



Figure 9: A selection of resources available on the NCSE Padlet for schools with special classes for autistic students



1.5.9 Every Moment Counts

On October 26th, 2023, the NCSE hosted a seminar titled Every Moment Counts at the Lyrath Hotel in Co. Kilkenny. Dr Susan Bazyk, a professor at the University of Cleveland hosted the seminar which aimed to equip educators with practical strategies for promoting positive mental health in educational settings.

The seminar was attended by 80 principals and teachers, who discussed how to promote emotional resilience, functional well-being, and effective coping mechanisms among students. Focusing on practical approaches the seminar empowered its audience to shape a supportive and inclusive school environment.



Dr Brian Fitzgerald, NCSE, Dr Susan Bazyk, Carol Conway, NCSE CEO John Kearney.

1.6 Assessment of Need

Action 1.9 Work with the HSE to comply with statutory obligations under the Disability Act.

In accordance with Section 8.3 of the Disability Act, (2005), extensive engagement with education stakeholders, schools, the Department of Education and the HSE has been ongoing during the operation of the NCSE response to the HSE Assessment of Need (AON) process. When requested by the HSE, the NCSE is responsible for assisting in an assessment of a child's or young person's education needs as part of the HSE AoN process, by nominating an appropriate person to complete a report of education needs. This is based on current education policy and best practice. Working to coordinate the process, the NCSE dedicated AoN Team was expanded during 2023, in response to the growing number of HSE AON referrals received. By October 2023 a similar AON process and associated resources applicable to referrals relating to pre-school aged children had been trialled, following engagement with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Both the school and pre-school processes are subject to continual review.

At the end of December 2023, the NCSE had received 6,266 referrals from the HSE, with 1,714 of these resolved across a range of school settings (see Table 7).

Table 7: Record of AoN referrals recorded by NCSE from January 1st to December 31st 2023

Setting	Referrals received from HSE	Report sent to HSE AO	Referral resolved
Primary school	3,919	1,170	1,275
Post-primary school	609	223	245
Special school	52	15	16
Early Learning Childcare	1,285	121	135
Other	401	19	43
TOTAL	6,266	1,548	1,714

A number of legal challenges were made against the AoN process, to which the NCSE was added as a respondent. Two test cases were subject to High Court proceedings in mid-July 2023. The DE administered the defence of the test cases through the CSSO and Office of the Attorney General. The NCSE continued to await the outcome of two AON test cases (initially expected in October 2023). It was recognised that outcome would likely have further implications for the NCSE's AoN related responsibilities and processes. In the meantime, the NCSE continued to work with the HSE and DE to review and develop the various processes required in order to address obligations related to the AoN processes.

The judgements on the cases were released on 12 January 2024. Following on from the judgements, the DE issued a circular to schools (Circular 0025/2024 - Report of Education Need for the Purpose of the Assessment of Need Disability Act 2005, published on 15th April 2024). This reflected the legal advices provided by CSSO and Attorney General's Office.

The NCSE will continue to monitor how our role in the assessment of education needs process is working, including revisions to processes, resources and communications in respect of all settings for AoN, including schools, in order to comply with the full court judgement.

1.7 Implementation of the School Inclusion Model Pilot

Action 1.5 Provide a wrap-around support service in schools including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and behavioural practitioners as part of the School Inclusion Model.

Following the publication of the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme³ by the NCSE, in 2019 the Department of Education established a pilot of a new School Inclusion Model (SIM) for children with special educational and additional care needs.

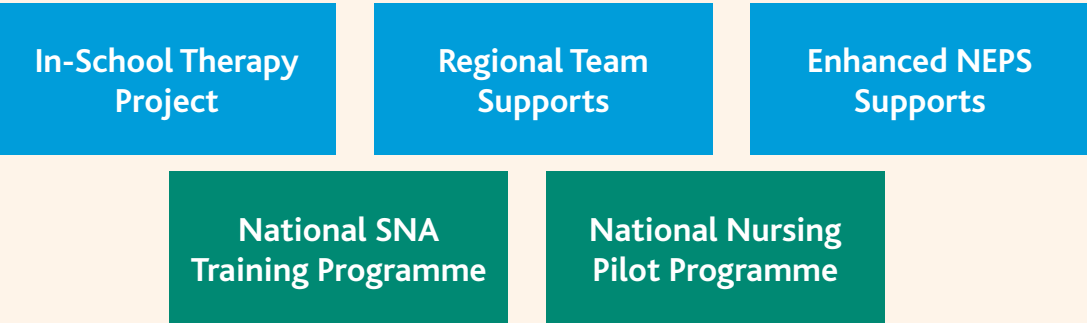
The SIM project involves a number of supports for schools to help all students, particularly those with special educational and additional care needs, to have a better school experience. Building teacher capacity has a key role to play in implementing this model. The model supports effective collaboration between professionals working together by developing the skills set of all staff to support students with additional needs.

There were five active project strands to SIM in 2023⁴ – see Figure 10. Four of these are under the responsibility of the NCSE: the In-School Therapy Project; Regional Team Supports; the National SNA Training Programme; and the National Nursing Pilot Programme.

Two of these strands – the In-School Therapy Project and Regional Team Support – are located in South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and parts of Wexford. Two more strands – the National SNA Training Programme and the National Nursing Pilot Programme – involve the delivery of programmes nationwide. Developments in these four stands are outlined further below.

A fifth strand sits under the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which, under SIM, had its resources expanded in some pilot schools. Since 2022, NEPS psychologists have been invited to join school leaders and NCSE therapists at Inclusion Team meetings, with a view to planning collaborative practice in schools.

Figure 10: The Five Strands of the School Inclusion Model Pilot



3 <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NCSE-PAP6-Comprehensive-Review-SNA-Scheme.pdf>
4 A sixth SIM strand to pilot the frontloading of SNA allocations is no longer active as this model is now operational nationwide.

An important practice goal of SIM therapists and behaviour practitioners is to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines and organisations to build knowledge, skills and confidence to support students and build inclusive school environments. For example, therapists and behaviour practitioners co-deliver seminars with NCSE advisors (who are seconded, fully qualified teachers) to ensure a teacher’s perspective is an integral part of training.

In-School Therapy Project (ISTP)

In 2023, the In-School Therapy Project continued to support 75 SIM pilot schools in the areas of Dublin South, Kildare and West Wicklow. Under ISTP model, NCSE occupational therapists and speech and language therapists work in partnership with teachers, alongside students and with the support of parents/guardians, to build the capacity of the school and its staff to plan, implement and evaluate educationally relevant, evidence-informed structured programmes or strategies to support all students, including those with additional needs, to participate in school life.

NCSE therapists primarily build teacher capacity in three ways: Teacher Professional Learning events, ISTP interventions and school visits.

Teacher Professional Learning events are training and support events for teachers that can involve drop-in clinics and extend to events that include coaching, practice and implementation. Events of this nature can be held with individual schools or groups of schools. In 2023, ISTP TPL events were held across a range of primary, post-primary and special school contexts, supporting 46 individual schools and 996 teachers (see Table 8). An additional number of schools were supported in multi-school events.

Table 8: ISTP TPL events, 2023

	Number of ISTP TPL events held	Number of SIM pilot schools participating in TPL events	Number of teachers supported
Total	113	46	996

Figure 11: ISTP event – Showcasing Practice, Naas, Co. Kildare, February 2023



ISTP Interventions are focused on teachers and therapists working in partnership to plan, implement and evaluate strategies to influence the inclusive educational experience for students within their learning environment. Interventions can be designed to impact the whole school, whole class, or identified groups of students of larger or smaller size. The implementation of an intervention usually takes place over a prolonged period, often involving the combination of multiple methodologies or approaches, for example, a specific piece of training followed by in-class coaching, modelling and student consultation. Table 9 below provides details of ISTP interventions in 2023, with 34 schools taking part in 70 interventions with a total of 378 participating teachers.

Table 9: In-School Therapy Interventions, 2023

	Number of interventions	Number of teachers	Number of students supported
Completed in 2023	54	296	2,308
Ongoing at end 2023	16	82	158
Total	70	378	2,466

As part of the ISTP model, therapists working in the SIM pilot regularly visit their assigned schools. During these visits therapists may provide advice, coaching, and tools to teachers in the implementation of universal learning strategies to support inclusion in the classroom and whole school environment. In 2023, 562 school visits were made involving contact with teachers and/or school leadership.

At the end of 2023, In-School Therapy Project supports to the SIM pilot schools came to a tapered close, to allow therapists to transition the provision of in-school support to a new group of schools. The pilot schools are now supported through NCSE regional team supports, and will have an opportunity further consolidate their practice by attending therapy-led seminars and follow-on implementation support.

Supports through Enhanced Regional Teams

A team of behaviour practitioners, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists work within two NCSE regional teams as part of the SIM pilot. These teams work to build teacher skills and capacity in schools through a range of seminars, post-seminar workshops, teacher resources and in-school support.

In 2023, Enhanced Regional Teams delivered 29 seminars and workshops to 511 teachers.

These TPL events delivered by behaviour practitioners and therapists are in addition to the many training events and supports delivered by NCSE advisors during the year. The TPL events are delivered by behaviour practitioners and therapists.

Over the course of 2023, the team delivered 29 seminars and workshops to 511 teachers in the two SIM pilot regions⁵ (see Table 10). The courses aimed to build teacher capacity to support their students in areas such as speech, language and communication needs; sensory needs; organisational skills and promoting positive behaviour. Where appropriate, schools and teachers received follow up in-school support visits to further build their capacity to embed the learning from the seminars and workshops in the classroom.

Table 10: Enhanced Regional Teams (ERT) TPL Events, 2023

	Number of TPL events held	Number of teachers supported
Total	29	511

National SNA Training Programme – Level 6 Diploma in Inclusive School Support

Delivery of the national SNA training programme, which commenced in 2021, continued. The course is delivered by the UCD School of Education in conjunction with UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems.

The online programme consists of five modules delivered over a ten-month period covering inclusion, communications and language, and a range of special needs and information on caring for students with additional care needs. The training emphasises the need for students to develop independence and resilience. Feedback gathered from students indicates there has been a very high level of engagement and satisfaction with the course.

Between 2021 and 2024 the programme will facilitate up to 3,500 SNAs employed in all recognised schools (primary, post-primary and special) to avail of training, with costs covered in full by Department of Education.

In 2023, following a process of accreditation, a new course title was approved, 'Level 6 Diploma in Inclusive School Support'. Students graduating from the programme will receive a Level 6 Special Purpose Award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

A third cohort of 961 SNA students completed the training programme in 2023, with a fourth cohort of 903 students starting in September 2023.

⁵ Schools in South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and parts of Wexford

National Nursing Pilot Programme

A pilot national nursing scheme to support children with complex healthcare needs was launched⁶ on 21 October 2022, based on the recommendations of a cross agency planning group. The purpose of the pilot is to provide nursing supports to allow children with complex healthcare needs attend school. It will complement current provision provided through community-based services.

The scheme operates as a partnership between NCSE and HSE Primary Care, with NCSE managing the applications process, and HSE responsible for clinical matters. Funding is provided by the Department of Education. The nursing support for students in the school environment is delivered through pre-established paediatric support contracts for the children, with clinical supervision from HSE Primary Care.

Many schools, in particular special schools, currently have nurses on-site funded through a variety of arrangements. The pilot service does not displace existing nursing services or supports in schools.

Between late 2022 and over the course of 2023, there were 24 applications for the scheme. Nine of these were approved for support; seven did not meet the eligibility criteria. A further eight applications were still underway at the end of the year. An appeals process is available for cases that are not accepted.

The pilot will be evaluated to inform the provision of nursing support for students with complex healthcare needs into the future.

Visiting Teacher Planning in Limerick, June 2023



6 [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) – National Nursing Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs Pilot Scheme (www.gov.ie)

1.8 Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) – Transition Pilot Study

Action 1.10 Support access to transitions programmes for young adults requiring specialist supports in pilot sites as part the Comprehensive Employment Strategy.

In October 2015, the Government published a ten-year strategy, The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024. This is a cross-Government initiative that sets out a coordinated approach to support persons with disabilities to progress into employment. The Strategy identified a number of actions to be implemented to achieve its objectives.

A project arising from one of the actions of the Strategy was announced by Minister Foley and Minister Madigan on the 10th November 2022, a pilot programme to support the transition for young people with disabilities to improve access to, and opportunities for, post-school options. This project will help young people with disabilities to plan for their future options when leaving school.

A coordinated effort to address the obstacles and difficulties affecting the employment of people with disabilities is being made by various Departments and State agencies, including the NCSE, under the umbrella of the Adult Education and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES). Published in 2015, the ten-year strategy outlined several steps that needed to be taken in order to accomplish its goals.

At the NCSE Annual Research Conference on 10th November 2022, Ministers Foley and Madigan made the announcement of the CES Pilot project.

The pilot aims to identify key areas of transitions and how students can be supported through their educational transitions. The schools will plan for these transitions on a group and individual basis, ensuring that it is strengths based and student lead. Post school options that cater for the interests and motivations of the individual are promoted with due diligence given to financial burdens or locations of these courses.

The aim of the pilot is to identify skills gaps and supports that students require for a positive transition after school to enable schools to differentiate a transition plan that will target the specific key skills required. The resources assigned are to be used to identify and support specifically those with the greatest level of need to improve the transition opportunities into post-school life. After school, the young person may have to make decisions about using day services, accepting an apprenticeship placement, continuing their education beyond high school, finding work, and making other decisions about their personal lives that they may want to plan for. This work focuses on the needs of the youth in the chosen schools and is organised around two main themes: Making Informed Decisions and Skills for Post-School Life.

The pilot began in January 2023, with 20 schools selected geographically (see Tables 11 and 12). 10 schools are in North Dublin and 10 are in county Galway. There are a variety of schools involved, Special Schools, DEIS Schools, Single sex schools, Rural schools etc.. to garner the widest scope of data possible to inform future practice.

Table 11: Schools participating in the Transition Study Pilot, North Dublin

Dublin	18763F	SMH Ballymun	Special School
Dublin	19373U	SMH Raheny	Special School
Dublin	19757P	SMH Skerries (withdrawn)	Special School
Dublin	60291D	Ardscoil La Salle	Post Primary
Dublin	60511O	Beneavin College	Post Primary
Dublin	60741I	St. Michael's Secondary School/Holy Faith	Post Primary
Dublin	60871V	Mercy College Coolock	Post Primary
Dublin	70120F	St. Finian's Community College	Post Primary
Dublin	76098W	Colaiste Pobail Setanta	Post Primary
Dublin	91318U	The Donahies Community School	Post Primary

Table 12: Schools participating in the Transition Study Pilot, Co. Galway

Galway	19201O	Lake View School	Special School
Galway	20329B	Tigh Nan Dooley Special Sch	Special School
Galway	20371A	Abalta Special School	Special School
Galway	62870G	Presentation College Athenry	Post Primary
Galway	63090I	Holy Rosary College	Post Primary
Galway	71390Q	Tuam Voc School/Arch Bishop	Post Primary
Galway	76096S	Colaiste Mhuirlinne/Merlin College	Post Primary
Galway	81012N	Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiarain	Post Primary
Galway	91414Q	Dunmore Community School	Post Primary
Galway	91498C	Gort Community School	Post Primary

There are 92 students participating in the pilot, with needs varying from very complex to mild/moderate intellectual disabilities. Each school has the ability to draw down 12 hours per week to use with the students. The NCSE specialist lead has directed the pilot since May 2023.

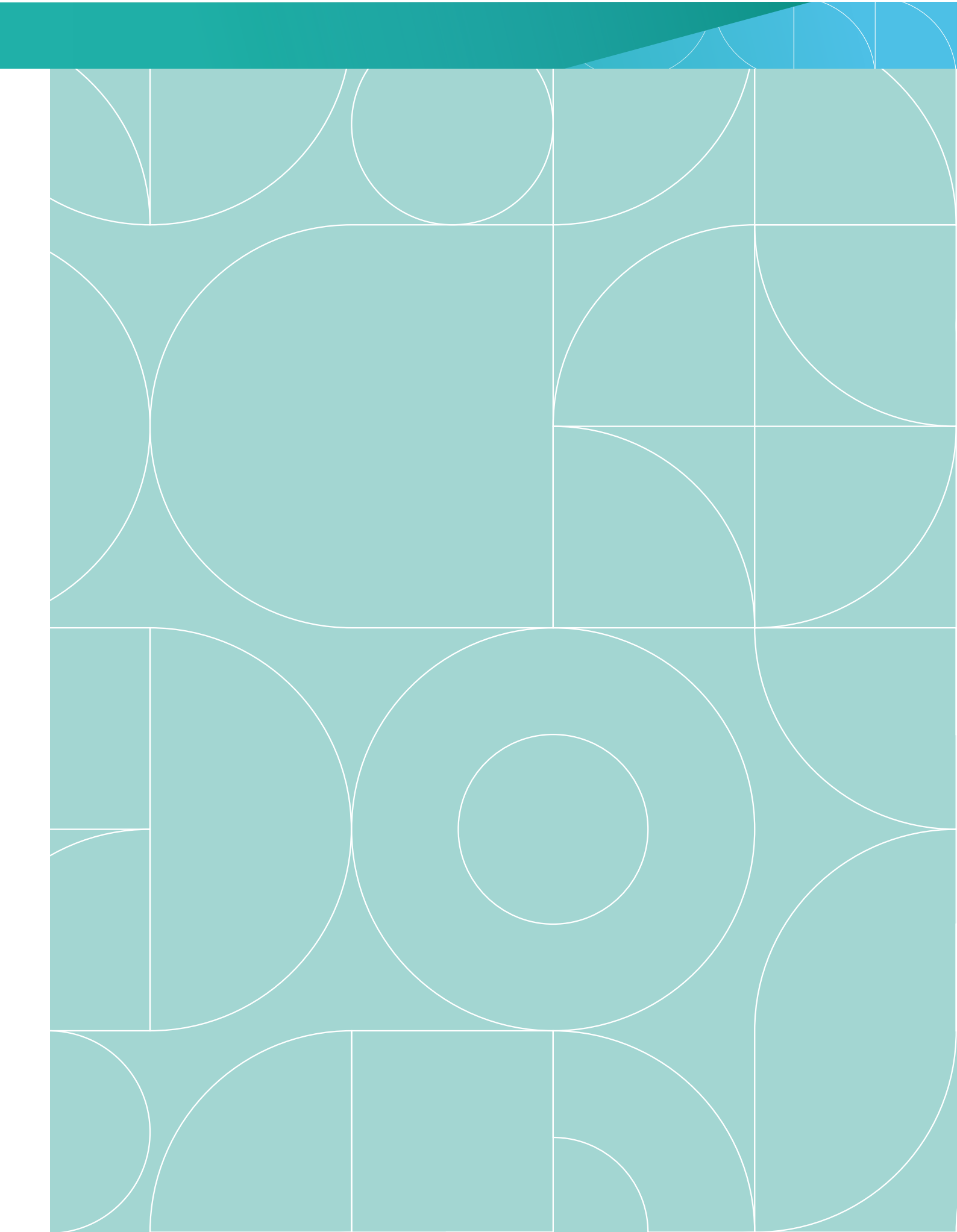
Key focus areas identified within the remit of the pilot and its implementation included:

- ▶ Transition planning
- ▶ Using the allocated hours for direct contact time with the students
- ▶ Building relationships with the students, parents and others
- ▶ Teaching, learning and assessment as the core business of schools; transition hours used to enhance learner experiences
- ▶ Successful transition planning for major life events being built on a succession of smaller transitions within the student's life.

An externally commissioned evaluation of the pilot commenced in autumn and is further outlined in section 2.5.1. The evaluation phase will continue until early 2025 tracking the students post-school to evaluate the impact of the pilot.

The NCSE hold the first in-person 5-day Division TEACCH training since COVID-19 in March 2023





Strategic Goal 2:

Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy advice to the Minister for Education that is underpinned by a comprehensive research programme

Strategic Goal 2

Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy advice to the Minister for Education that is underpinned by a comprehensive research programme

The NCSE set out six key actions related to strategic goal 2 in the NCSE Statement of Strategy 2022-2024.

Actions

1. Produce an annual programme of commissioned and in-house research.
2. Scope and review current provision and the most recent national and international research evidence and maintain our work with the European Agency.
3. Disseminate research findings through an annual research conference and the publication of reports.
4. Engage in extensive consultation with our education stakeholders, including our Consultative Forum, parents, students and advocacy groups and draw on expert knowledge and advice.
5. Identify and advise the DE on key areas for policy review and advice.
6. Develop independent policy advice as requested by the Minister for Education and support the implementation of advice as required.

2.1 Progress on Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes

Action 2.5 Identify and advise the DE on key areas for policy review and advice.

Action 2.6 Develop independent policy advice as requested by the Minister for Education and support the implementation of advice as required.

The NCSE published its seminal policy advice paper, *An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society* in January 2024. The aim of this policy advice was to examine the current state of special educational provision and to chart a path towards a more inclusive education system.

The policy advice is informed by extensive research and consultation, which were documented in the Literature Review and the International Administrative Review which were published separately.



The policy advice was informed by:

- ▶ 40 consultation sessions with stakeholders
- ▶ Commissioned legal advice on the implications of Ireland's ratification of the UNCRPD
- ▶ 13 school visits, seven of which were special schools
- ▶ Three international visits to New Brunswick, Canada, Portugal, and England.

The policy advice found that, over the last decade, special educational supports for students in Ireland have substantially expanded. In 2023, annual investment totalled €2.6 billion, approximately a quarter of the Department of Education's budget.

To realise an incremental realisation of an Inclusive Education system, this landmark NCSE policy advice outlined key significant consideration critical to its success.

The key policy recommendations include:

- ▶ The progressive realisation of the inclusive education system for Ireland
- ▶ The provision of psychological, therapeutic, and behaviour Supports for students and schooling communities
- ▶ A consideration of both Professional Learning programmes for teachers and the standards required by teachers to educate all learners.
- ▶ A structured framework to support a shared decision-making process on student placement, provision and review
- ▶ Guidance and Advice for Schools and school leaders
- ▶ A comprehensive engagement by all relevant stakeholders on inclusive Curriculum and Assessment frameworks
- ▶ The Implementation of an Inclusive Education Reform Programme.

2.2 Consultation and Engagement with stakeholders

Action 2.4 Engage in extensive consultation with our education stakeholders, including our Consultative Forum, parents, students and advocacy groups and draw on expert knowledge and advice.

The NCSE engages and consults with a wide range of bodies, agencies, organisations and groups as part of the provision of services and resources for students with special educational needs.

2.2.1 The NCSE Consultative Forum

The NCSE engages with the Consultative Forum, appointed under the EPSN Act, on special education matters. The Council appoints up to 17 members following a prescribed consultation process. In addition, three members are appointed by the Minister.

The term of the last Consultative Forum ended on the 31st December 2022. An appointment process was undertaken in spring 2023 for a term of office to December 2026. Table 13 below outlines the members appointed to Consultative Forum in May 2023. The deputy chairperson of the Council, Pat Goff, acts as the Chairperson of the Consultative Forum.

The forum met twice in 2023 – on September 19th and November 28th (attendance is outlined in Table 13). At the September meeting, the Forum members were inducted into their role and an overview was provided on the Consultative Forum, the operations of the NCSE. A wide and varied number of topics were considered across the meetings: a review of special class placements; the new practice-based research pilot programme; NCSE behaviour framework; website redevelopment and NCSE data strategy; and draft quality standards for the work of the Visiting Teacher Service.

Table 13: Membership and attendance at the 2023 meetings of the Consultative Forum

NCSE Consultative Forum		
Council-appointed Members		Attendance
Dr James Casey	Independent Living Movement of Ireland	1
Dr Miriam Colum	Lecturer in Special Educational Needs, Marino Institute of Education	1
Marina Cusack	Special Educational Needs Coordinator in a Post-Primary School	2
Paddy Greally	Retired children's services manager, Brothers of Charity	2
Miriam Jennings	Special Needs Schools and Classes	2

NCSE Consultative Forum		
Council-appointed Members		Attendance
Patricia McCarthy	Inclusion in Education and Society Research Team, Trinity College Dublin	1
Catherine Moynihan	Research and Development Officer, Joint Managerial Body (JMB)	2
Dr Finn Ó Murchú	Head of School of Education (Post-primary), Mary Immaculate College (MIC) Thurles	2
Brian O'Doherty	President, Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)	1
Sheila Murphy	Acting Assistant General Secretary, Irish National Teacher's Organisation (INTO)	2
Derval McDonagh	Chief Executive Officer, Inclusion Ireland	1
Gerry Maley	National Disability Specialist, HSE	2
Matt Melvin	Director, Catholic Primary Schools Management Association, CPSMA	2
Darren Murphy	Team Leader, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)	2
Anna Ní Chartúir	Special Educational Needs Coordinator, Gaeltacht Primary School	1
Maureen Smith	NCSE Staff Representative – Team Manager	2
Dr Joe Travers	Associate Professor in the School of Inclusive and Special Education Dublin City University	2
Members Appointed by Minister for Education		Attendance
Pauline Kerins	Senior Psychologist, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	2
Lisa White	Senior Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education	2
Andrina Donovan	Assistant Principal Officer, Special Education Section, Department of Education	2

2.3 European Agency (EASNIE)

Action 2.2 Scope and review current provision and the most recent national and international research evidence and maintain our work with the European Agency.

2.3.1 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The NCSE continued to support the work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE). This independent organisation, facilitating collaboration for departments of education in its member countries, supports the progression of more inclusive education systems. This is facilitated through key areas of policy, practice and research – providing an evidence base for the implementation of inclusive education.

During 2023, the NCSE both benefited from and contributed to the work of EASNIE, including:

- ▶ Continued engagement with representative board members and national coordinators on research work to support the development of our policy advice on special schools and classes;
- ▶ Provision of information on special and inclusive education in Ireland to EASNIE and individual member-states;
- ▶ Publication of key inclusion data with the European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education;
- ▶ The approval of a multi-country Technical Support Instrument between Finland and Ireland, supporting the implementation of the Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes.



EASNIE biennial meeting in Belgrade in May 2023 and a breakout workshop on 'Voices into Action' where the NCSE's Gerard Hogan supported a young learner in delivering a presentation.

2.4 Development of the NCSE Behaviour Framework

Action 2.5 Identify and advise the DE on key areas for policy review and advice.

Work progressed on the NCSE Behaviour Framework throughout 2023, this included the refinement of the framework and the development of associated tools and resources. These were presented to the NCSE Consultative Forum in November 2023 following a series of stakeholder engagements were held with teachers, principals and advocacy groups.

Over 100 schools are currently evaluating the Framework's tools and resources, whilst a pilot of full implementation is underway in a DEIS Band 1 school in Limerick. The inclusion of student voice in the pilot is informed through the use of 'Talking Mats', an evidenced informed therapeutic communication tool. It is envisaged that the NCSE's Behaviour Framework will be published for implementation in early 2024.

The Department of Education guidelines on 'Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations' are also due to be published in early 2024. In conjunction with the publication of these guidelines, the NCSE has been asked to procure training to support schools with special schools being prioritised in the initial phase. A tender was launched in late 2023 and it is envisaged this will be in place in mid-2024.

2.5 Research Programme

Action 2.1 Produce an annual programme of commissioned and in-house research.

Research into special education is one of the NCSE's core statutory functions. Our research programme expands our knowledge and understanding of best practice and actively contributes to the work plan of the NCSE. Research gives us an insight into complex processes, involves relevant stakeholders from across the education system and can highlight what works best in other jurisdictions. Deriving knowledge from research provides us with a strong evidence base to inform our policy advice to the Minister for Education and we continue to disseminate our work through our website, publications and our research conference.

In 2023, we commissioned a new study evaluating the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Transition Study Pilot Programme.

This section provides an overview of our ongoing work as well as highlighting newly commissioned research.

2.5.1 New Research

Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) Transition Study Pilot Programme Evaluation

A new research study was commissioned to externally evaluate the CES Transition Study Pilot Programme, a project arising from one of the actions of the strategy announced by Minister Foley and Minister Madigan on the 10th November 2022. This project, running in two pilot areas of Galway and Dublin, helps young people with disabilities to plan for their future options when leaving school – further information on the pilot programme is set out in Section 1.8 of this Annual Report.

The study team commenced the evaluation in September 2023, after a project initiation phase. The evaluation period runs from 2023 to early 2025 for a cohort of post-primary students in twenty schools. There are two phases – in-school phase covering students in their sixth year, and a post-school phase when students transition to their post-school options.

The evaluation team collected data from participating students via a survey using Sensemaker software in December 2023, and all schools were visited by the project team over December 2023 – January 2024. The evaluation framework includes for interviews with school staff and other stakeholders, a second student survey and a parent survey in early 2024. Planning for the post-school phase is underway with NCSE and Department of Education colleagues coordinating the implementation of the pilot.

2.5.2 Ongoing Research in 2023

Evaluation of the NCSE's Frontline Services

The evaluation of the NCSE's Frontline Services was commissioned in 2022 to externally evaluate how the NCSE delivers its frontline services to determine the impact it is having in classrooms on school staff, students and parents. The aim of this evaluation is to understand what benefits and impact our services are having and to highlight areas for improvement.

The evaluation deployed a mixed methods approach and by the end of 2023, the data collection and engagement with a range of stakeholders, was complete. This included a surveys of parents/carers and school staff, in-depth interviews with stakeholders (parent/carers, school staff, NCSE service deliverers), and in-depth case studies of 9 schools and 9 pupils with special educational needs who attended the schools.

The draft report is due to be submitted in early 2024 and it is anticipated the evaluation will guide the NCSE in developing a framework for the future and on-going measurement and evaluation of the impact of the services we provide. Initial findings were presented by the research team at the NCSE's annual research conference in November 2023.

Mapping and Tracking of Students with Special Educational Needs after They Leave School

This research project was commissioned in 2020 to examine the experience and destination of young people with special educational and learning needs leaving the school system. The objective is to enhance our understanding of the experiences and destinations of young people leaving school with a view to supporting the NCSE's role in planning and coordinating education services for adults with disabilities.

The research firstly mapped relevant data sources to identify gaps in current knowledge of where students go to. The Covid-19 pandemic delayed the commencement of the second phase of the study tracking the range of pathways taken for young people with special educational needs after they leave school, to identify and examine the reasons for their post-school destinations and their experiences of them. Work began on this in the spring of 2022, to coincide with decision-making on transitions from schooling. A draft final report was submitted for review at the end of 2023 and will be published later in 2024.

Research Relating to the Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes

Work was completed on a second phase literature review in 2022 to update the research evidence relating to policy advice on special schools and special classes initially completed in 2020. The literature review will be published alongside the Policy Advice on Special Schools and Special Classes in early 2024.

The literature review covered different aspects of educational provision in special and inclusive settings to identify evidence of outcomes and experiences for students with and without special educational needs.



Impact of COVID-19 on Students with Special Educational Needs

During 2023, work progressed on the study commissioned to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the education of students with special educational needs. This research explores the impact on students' academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes in the short and longer term. The research objectives are two-fold; how best the needs of students after the pandemic can be addressed; and how to design and prepare for a more resilient education system in the future.

The study involves three core elements: a review of international literature on the impact of school closures on children with special educational needs; a quantitative component involving analysis of data from primary and post-primary schools and special schools; and a qualitative component, involving case study primary, secondary and special schools. The study draws upon both primary and secondary data sources, primary surveys of principals in all school contexts and post-primary school interviews. Secondary data analysed for this study was initially collected as part of the Children's School Lives (CSL) study commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) involving primary and special schools.

The study was extended in 2023 to include a second phase of data collection, allowing for further exploration of the impact of the pandemic on this cohort of students and the system response for current students and in terms of future planning.

The review process for the first report was completed in 2023 and will be published in early 2024. The second report was prepared and submitted for review in late 2023.

Documenting the History of Special Education in Ireland over 100 Years

The NCSE commissioned documentary book on a century of special education in Ireland, 1922-2022. The book was approved by Council in 2023 and has progressed to final design and is set to be formally launched in the spring of 2024.

The project has involved a systematic review of data sources and features interviews with a range of key stakeholders. The book will provide an engaging overview of the special educational landscape over the last 100 years to the current day, including key dates, statistics, legislative frameworks and milestones. The book focuses on primary and post-primary levels, with an emphasis on provision in recent decades and includes reflection on the current context.

2.5.3 New practice-based research initiative

During 2023, the NCSE initiated a new practice-based research programme (PBR) on a pilot basis that will support practitioners within schools to engage in research on topics relating to inclusion and special education. The programme has a number of aims that will:

- ▶ build the research capacity and skills of practicing educators
- ▶ enhance inclusive and special education teaching and learning experiences for teachers and learners through exploring, reviewing, conducting or applying research/ research evidence
- ▶ build and enhance relationships between Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and schools
- ▶ develop a repository of practice based research evidence and share learning and experiences.

The NCSE engaged with four Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) as part of the pilot to provide training to practitioners to support them in conducting or using research within their school. Training sessions will be provided by the HEIs and will cover some of the following elements – ethics, research methods, developing and administering research instruments, data analyses and interpretation.

By the end of 2023, a number of information sessions were held by the NCSE and HEIs with possible participating schools, with many schools signing up before the end of the year. It is expected there will be between 12-20 schools in the pilot and that following an evaluation of the programme in 2024 and 2025, other HEIs and schools will be invited to participate in the expansion of the programme.

2.6 Dissemination of research

Action 2.3 Disseminate research findings through an annual research conference and the publication of reports.

2.6.1 Research Conference 2023



NCSE Chief Executive Officer John Kearney; NCSE Head of Research Jennifer Doran; Minister for Special Education and Inclusion Josepha Madigan; NCSE Chairperson Fergal Lynch at the NCSE Research Conference 2023.

The NCSE Research Conference 2023 took place on the 9th November at the Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin. The event was primarily an in-person event, with an online livestream available for delegates to attend virtually. The conference looked at two themes: 'The NCSE and Inclusive Education Service Provision in Ireland' and 'Universal Design for Learning (UDL)'.



NCSE Chairperson Fergal Lynch shared a conference introduction and welcome and Minister for Special Education and Inclusion Josepha Madigan provided the conference welcome address.



NCSE Council chairperson Fergal Lynch and Minister for Special Education and Inclusion Josepha Madigan addressing the NCSE Research Conference 2023.

Session 1 on the NCSE and Inclusive Education Service Provision in Ireland included presentations from three speakers. Professor Emer Ring of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, reflected on the last two decades and major reform agenda for the special education system in Ireland. Professor Deborah Robinson, University of Derby and Dr Lisha O’Sullivan, Mary Immaculate College presented the initial findings focused on stakeholder views on the NCSE, from an independent evaluation of the NCSE’s frontline services. NCSE CEO, John Kearney, addressed the delegates on a world class inclusive education system for Ireland, outlining progress with the NCSE’s expansion and our vision for 2026.



Clockwise: NCSE CEO John Kearney, Professor Deborah Robinson and Dr Lisha O’Sullivan, and Professor Emer Ring presenting at the NCSE Research Conference 2023 The session was chaired by Dr Peter Archer, NCSE Council member and Chair of the Research Committee.

The afternoon session on Universal Design for Learning included a range of presentations on UDL from different perspectives. Lindsay Jones, CEO of CAST shared insights on how UDL can be utilised to help us design more engaging, efficient and equitable systems. Billy Redmond, Principal and Fiona Keilthy, Deputy Principal of North Wicklow Educate Together Secondary School shared their school's experience of introducing and embedding UDL in a post-primary setting.



Lindsay Jones, CEO of CAST and NCSE Council Chairperson Fergal Lynch, and Fiona Keilthy, Deputy Principal and Billy Redmond, Principal of North Wicklow Educate Together Secondary School

The conference closed with a panel discussion on UDL, with inputs from Fiona Byrnes, Principal of St. Anthony's Special School, Castlebar, on secondment with Oide, Marion Wilkinson, Senior Policy and Public Affairs, National Disability Authority, Cathy Goss, Acting Specialist Lead – UDL, NCSE Sharon Healy, Specialist Lead – Behaviour, NCSE and former Primary Deputy Principal.



Fiona Byrnes of St. Anthony's Special School, Castlebar, Sharon Healy, NCSE, Chair of Session 2 and Member of the Research Committee Catherine Cross, Cathy Goss, NCSE, and Marion Wilkinson, National Disability Authority at the NCSE Research Conference 2023.

Over 150 people registered to attend the event with over 110 attending on the day. Good attendance was also noted online, with 84 online delegate registrations and a total of 351 active online streams across the day. The majority were in Ireland, the rest came from the UK, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Conference delegates included principals and teachers, researchers, parents, educational psychologists, advocacy groups, departmental officials, access officers, teacher union representatives and therapists.



Strategic Goal 3:

Develop and maintain an effective organisational culture that complies with all corporate governance and regulatory requirements and support the delivery of services

Strategic Goal 3

Develop and maintain an effective organisational culture that complies with all corporate governance and regulatory requirements and support the delivery of services

The NCSE set out six key actions related to strategic goal 3 in the NCSE Statement of Strategy 2022-2024.

Actions

1. Put in place appropriate organisational structures to underpin the delivery of services within available resources.
2. Enhance staff engagement and professional development for staff to support the effective delivery of our services.
3. Support the ongoing modernisation of our service delivery by a programme of digitalisation and process improvement.
4. Maintain governance and control processes in line with statutory regulations and The Code of Practice, provide training on matters as appropriate and engage in the public sector reform programme.
5. Annual reporting on compliance with all business, corporate and budget requirements. in line with the Performance Delivery Agreement.
6. Disseminate public information on special education issues through our website and engaging with the media.

3.1 Introduction

Throughout 2023, the NCSE continued to develop our organisation to ensure we were operating effectively to deliver services and in compliance with all our statutory, regulatory and governance requirements. This section outlines our activities in these areas across the year.

3.2 NCSE Organisational Review and Expansion

Action 3.1 Put in place appropriate organisational structures to underpin the delivery of services within available resources.

On foot of an additional investment in excess of €12 million announced in Budget 2023, which included provision for an additional 161 staff, the NCSE commenced an Organisational Expansion Programme of Work. This presented a unique opportunity for the NCSE to evaluate both its structure, operating model and resource requirements in order to identify an organisational design that will deliver on its strategic objectives and is responsive to the needs and demands of students, parents and schools.

3.2.1 A new organisational structure

A new detailed organisational design has significantly changed the structure of the organisation which has increased the divisional structure from 4 to 5 divisions, as well as aligning key functions to primary and secondary/support activities. A summary of the new pillars is outlined in Figure 12.

Figure 12: The new operating structure of the NCSE

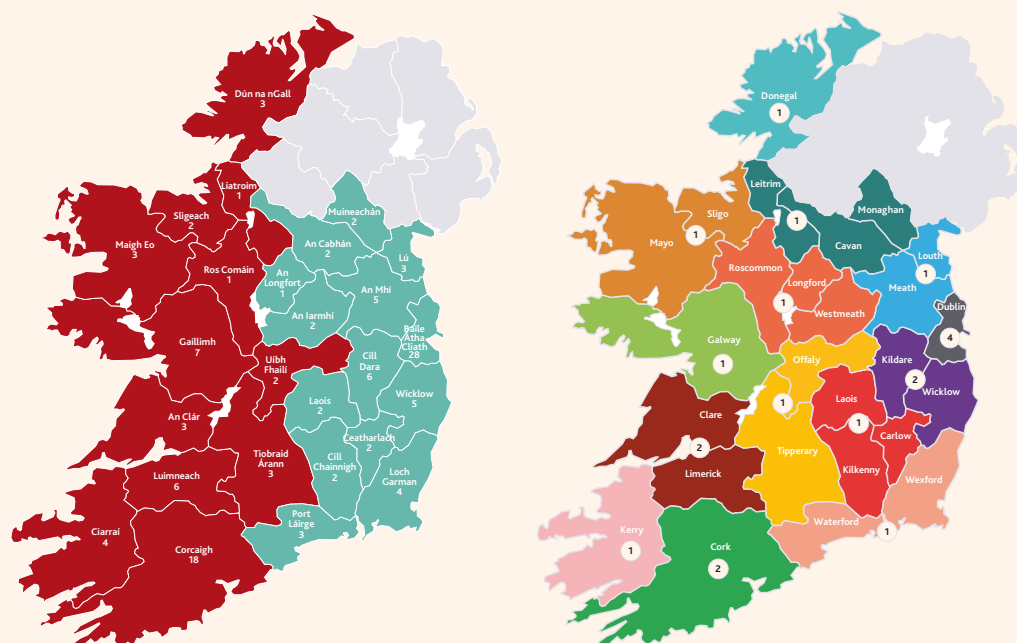


- 1. Inclusion and Education Support Services:** This division will ensure the delivery of a professional and co-ordinated service aligned with students, school communities and parents. The division will provide evidence-based advice to the staff and broader organisation relating to special education service provision, and will ensure that any programmes delivered are reflective of both student and school needs and facilitate the continuous support of students, school communities and parents throughout their education journeys.
- 2. Service Delivery Support (SDS):** This division will support the implementation of Inclusion and Education Support Services (IESS) and thus allowing the Division above to focus efforts on frontline service delivery. To achieve this, SDS will manage administrative support to IESS and will also manage and oversee the AON process and any litigation that NCSE may become involved in.
- 3. People Support, Development and Transformation:** Previously the Business Support Services Division, this function has been realigned to focus solely on people activities of the organisation. Its purpose is to ensure NCSE staff are provided with professional support services to deliver a positive 'people experience'. It will maintain consistent and coherent engagement at appropriate strategic levels and ensure that the workforce has the required skills and resources to deliver the business strategy going forward.
- 4. Finance, Governance and Research:** The continued purpose of this division is to ensure financial decisions and budgeting requirements are managed effectively for both the internal and external affairs of the NCSE. The Division will continue to manage the corporate governance framework for the NCSE and compliance across the organisation. This division also manages the commissioned and in-house programme of research and evaluation and will be responsible for developing a new practice-based research programme for teachers.
- 5. Systems and Innovation:** This is a new Division which has been established in response to needs identified in areas such as data management and analytics. The purpose of this division is to ensure that the NCSE is equipped with the capability to properly manage organisational data activity. The division will manage data and provide oversight for records management, manage data analytics as well as forecast, plan and innovate in order to meet the future needs of the organisation and the future demands of the sector.

Pillar 1 Inclusion and Education Support Services – New Frontline services structure

One of the key changes to the operating structures of the NCSE is within Pillar 1, Inclusion and Education Support Services and the structure of the frontline services. There is a departure from a 5 region base to that of a 2 national region base structure, which involves the assignment of 2 National Co-ordinators who will oversee national operations. The National Co-ordinators will be underpinned by 20 Team Manager areas, an increase of 10 Team manager areas on the previous organisational structure. This will facilitate a more county-based approach, to offer more concentrated and focused supports in each geographical/county area. Work was ongoing through 2023 and into 2024 to recruit and train staff in line with the new structures to be rolled out in September 2024.

Figure 13: Map of Regional teams, Team Manager and SENO Allocations by County.



The NCSE transformation programme "Vision 26", which will give effect to a revised and expanded organisation supported by the additional funding allocation in Budget 2023, was launched on 19th October 2023.

3.2.2 Workforce planning

In terms of deliverables, the NCSE has completed a Strategic Workforce Plan (SWP), and a detailed organisational design. The fundamental objective of the SWP is to ensure that the new organisational structure is resourced in the most optimum way possible. This was achieved through a robust assessment of the demand for NCSE services has taken place under the SWP. This robust assessment of demand outlines both the level of resources required in a geographical area and on a county basis and importantly, will ensure that SENO grades are assigned clearly identifiable county caseloads.

The above will also ensure that resources are matched more appropriately with current day demands which will in turn ensure an equitable distribution of caseloads across all SENO grades and will allow management to plan for future projected increases in demand to ensure resources are assigned in a timely way to address demand arising which will help ensure any time lag between demand increases and the increase in staff numbers is minimised.

3.3 Staff engagement and professional development

Action 3.2 Enhance staff engagement and professional development for staff to support the effective delivery of our services.

People Plan

A central tenant of the NCSE's transformation programme Vision 26 is the support and development of staff, both through the organisational restructuring and in respect of staff carrying out their duties on an ongoing basis. Throughout 2023, NCSE management undertook a significant process of staff engagement to establish the necessary supports staff required. On foot of these engagement, the NCSE is developing a "People Plan" for our organisation in order to fulfil its vision and continue to grow which will be launched in Q2 2024.

The goals of the "People Plan" are fundamentally connected with our overall strategy. Our "People Plan" for 2023-2026 highlights four priority areas that are linked with our overall strategic objectives:

- ▶ How we will support leadership and define our culture
- ▶ Enhance our people experience
- ▶ How we will support and develop our people
- ▶ How we will strive to have a diverse, inclusive and supportive work environment within the NCSE.

The four priority areas are described in the summary below:

Leadership and Culture

Within the NCSE, we are putting an increased focus on developing our leaders, with particular emphasis being put on developing leaders who prioritise inclusivity and diversity, foster a culture of openness, collaboration, and respect. Our leaders will ensure that all voices are heard and valued and create an environment where differences are celebrated and leveraged for innovation and growth. By promoting a culture of inclusivity, our leaders can help us attract and retain diverse talent, enhance our employee engagement and drive organisational performance.

Support and Development

The support and development initiatives will contribute to a culture of continuous learning, adaptability and innovation. We want to encourage employees to stay up to date with sectoral developments, expand their skill sets and contribute fresh ideas and perspectives to the NCSE. This will help us foster a growth mind-set and enhance our creativity.

People Experience

This considers the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of work and strives to create an environment where employees feel valued, supported and empowered. A positive People Experience creates a sense of belonging, purpose, and fulfilment, leading to higher levels of employee engagement, productivity and loyalty – all of which we aim to achieve for our colleagues within the NCSE. This will also include opportunities to access family friendly work practises for all grades in the organisation.

Inclusion and Community

This refers to creating an environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique skills and perspectives. It involves embracing diversity in all its forms, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural background. By promoting inclusivity, we can harness the power of various identities to drive innovation, creativity, and collaboration

The “People Plan” will be launched in Quarter 2, 2024.



NCSE Chairperson Fergal Lynch, Minister Madigan and NCSE CEO John Kearney attend the NABMSE Conference in October 2023

3.4 Digitalisation and process improvement

Action 3.3 Support the ongoing modernisation of our service delivery by a programme of digitalisation and process improvement.

Given the NCSE's transformation programme under Vision 26, the NCSE is committed to modernising our service delivery through digitalisation and process improvement. It is of particular import that our online services to schools and parents use appropriate and well-managed IT platforms.

Development of a new NCSE Data Strategy

In October 2023, a new project commenced to develop a new data strategy for the NCSE under Pillar 5, Systems and Innovation. The overall aim of this project to ensure the NCSE and staff are well equipped to appropriately and efficiently manage organisational data activity. The NCSE procured support from specialist external consultants and established a Steering Group consisting of senior staff across all five pillars. Several phases of work will follow including a data inventory and maturity assessment in Q1 2024. Pillar 5 staff, external consultants and members of the steering group will continue to meet through the development of a data strategy and in rolling out key changes in strategic data management throughout 2024.

NCSE Website redesign

The NCSE currently has a website which provides a large amount of information for teachers, schools and parents including resources and supports relevant to these different groups, information on special classes, research, policy and publications pertaining to the special education sector

The work on the redesign of the NCSE website commenced in November 2023 after the review of the website by the NDA. Several recommendations were set out including that the website should be accessible on all devices and meet website content accessibility guidelines (WCAG). This project involves a review of the current website, the mapping of all content and cataloguing a range of user experiences in preparation to tender for a new redesigned website, based on international best practice.

Total Quality Management – Operational Excellence

In 2023, the NCSE identified Total Quality Management (TQM) as a vehicle to promote operational excellence, underpinning a cycle of continuous improvement and delivery of quality frontline services. Planning and preparations were put in place at the end of the year to commence work in this area, complementing ongoing work on the organisational transformation under Vision 26.

A project was initiated in late 2023 on the development of an NCSE TQM framework, the creation of a centre of excellence model to drive continuous improvement in the organisation and within this, the development and implementation of three pilot projects in key areas of service delivery. The project and development of a framework and centre of excellence model should be completed by mid-2024.

3.5 Dissemination and engagement on special education issues

Action 3.6 Disseminate public information on special education issues through our website and engaging with the media.

NCSE senior management and staff across the organisation engage on special education issues in the course of their work, attending external events, conferences, participating in a wide range of advisory, steering and working groups across the five pillars of the organisation.

As noted in section 3.4, the NCSE website redesign process commenced in 2023. The NCSE maintains a presence on Twitter/X to ensure dissemination and engagement on key issues and publication of guidelines, resources and notifications about upcoming events.

The NCSE communications team in Pillar 2 coordinate responses to parliamentary questions, REPs and Minister enquiries, in addition to media queries, freedom of information requests and customer complaints and feedback (see section 3.7.9).

The NCSE's annual research conference plays a key role in the dissemination and engagement on special education issues at a national and international level. An update is provided in section 2.6.1.

The publication of the policy advice on special schools and classes in January 2024 involved an extensive dissemination and engagement process that will continue into 2024.



NCSE staff attending a Universal Design for Learning Symposium in Maynooth on the 9th June 2023.



NCSE CEO and staff attending the 2nd Rehabilitation Conference for Hearing Impairment in Birmingham, 9th October 2023.



NCSE staff attending the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) Conference in Killarney, November 2023.

3.6 The Council of the NCSE

Action 3.4 Maintain governance and control processes in line with statutory regulations and The Code of Practice, provide training on matters as appropriate and engage in the public sector reform programme.

Action 3.5 Annual reporting on compliance with all business, corporate and budget requirements in line with the Performance Delivery Agreement.

Our governance authority is the Council of the National Council for Special Education. It is appointed by the Minister for Education under Section 21 of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

The Council, whose functions are set out in section 20 of the EPSEN Act, is accountable to the Minister for Education and responsible for ensuring good governance. Its work and responsibilities are set out in the EPSEN Act and Corporate Governance Guide for Council Members, which specifically set out matters reserved for the body. Its business and duties are further outlined in the Council Terms of Reference and Standing Orders. Standing items considered by Council include:

- ▶ declaration of interests
- ▶ reports from committees
- ▶ financial reports/management accounts
- ▶ performance report
- ▶ reserved matters, and
- ▶ review of risks associated with NCSE.

The term of office of this Council commenced on the 1st January, 2023, for a term of four years to 2026. Seven Council members from the previous Council were reappointed for a second term. The Council's new Chairperson and remaining ordinary members were appointed during 2023.

The chief executive generally manages and controls staff, administration and Council business as set out in section 24 of the EPSEN Act. Regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the NCSE are the responsibility of the chief executive officer and senior management team.

The Council is responsible for preparing the annual plan and financial statements. Confirmation that the latter provide a true and fair view of the NCSE's financial performance and position in 2023 is provided in our audited annual accounts which are published separately.

As required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Council reviewed its performance and that of its committees during the year.

The Council met on seven occasions during 2023 and Table 14 contains details of individual members and their attendance.

Table 14: Membership of the Council of the NCSE during 2023

Name	Details	Attendance ⁷
Dr Fergal Lynch, chairperson	Senior Lead in Government and Public Policy Engagement, University of Galway	2
Pat Goff,* deputy chairperson	Former President and Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)	7
Dr Peter Archer*	Former Chief Executive Officer of the Educational Research Centre	7
Eamon Clavin*	Former divisional inspector in the Department of Education (DE)	4
Catherine Cross	Services Manager, National Parents Council	5
Eileen Daly*	Further and higher education disability officer and career guidance practitioner	7
Diarmuid Dullaghan	Divisional Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education	4
Dharragh Hunt*	Senior policy and public affairs adviser, National Disability Authority	7
Dr Yvonne Kennedy	Regional Director, National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)	3
Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith*	Former Assistant general secretary and director of education and research with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)	7
Angela O'Neill*	Head of Disability Service, HSE Community Operations Team	6
Caroline Quinn	Retired Principal, Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS, Johnstown, Killiney, and member of IPPN National Council	7
Dr Michael Redmond	Assistant General Secretary for Research, Development, and Training, Joint Managerial Body (JMB)	6

Those members whose names are denoted with an asterisk * are serving a second consecutive term on Council.

⁷ Note. Fergal Lynch, Chairperson, was appointed to the position in August 2023, and thus was in place for 3 meetings. New Council members Caroline Quinn, Catherine Cross, and Dr Michael Redmond were appointed in January 2023 and were in place for 7 meetings. Three further new members were appointed by the Minister in April 2023, and were in place for 4 meetings – Dr Yvonne Kennedy, Eamon Clavin and Diarmuid Dullaghan.



Members of the NCSE Council:
 Back row (L-R): Caroline Quinn, Eamon Clavin, Diarmuid Dullaghan, Peter Archer, Dharragh Hunt, Angela O'Neill.
 Front row (L-R): Pat Goff, Yvonne Kennedy, Fergal Lynch, Deirbhile NicCraith, Michael Redmond, Eileen Daly.
 Inset: Catherine Cross.

Council Committees

The Council created five Committees (Audit and Risk Committee, Finance Committee, Chief Executive Performance Committee, Research Committee, Strategy and Policy Committee) under Section 33 of the EPSEN Act. These Committees report in accordance with their terms of reference and governance guidelines as determined by the Council. Members each serve on one or more Committees. In the case of the Audit and Risk Committee, Council has appointed an external chairperson with relevant experience.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Committee comprises three Council members and includes an external Chairperson. The role of the Audit and Risk Committee is to support the NCSE Council in its responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Council's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances. The Committee is independent in the performance of its functions and responsibilities and in the determination and monitoring of its work programme. It is not subject to direction or control from any other party which could impair the carrying out of its functions. The Committee meets at least four times a year and minutes are circulated to all members of Council. The Audit and Risk Committee reports to the Council after each Committee meeting. A new committee was established in 2023 with Lisa Campbell (Chair) and Peter Archer being re-appointed, while Pat Goff and Deirbhile Nic Craith were new appointments to the committee. There were six meetings of the Audit and Risk Committee in 2023.

Audit and Risk (six meetings)	Attendance
Lisa Campbell, chairperson	6
Deirbhile Nic Craith	5
Peter Archer	5
Pat Goff	5

Note. Deirbhile Nic Craith, Peter Archer and Pat Goff were appointed to the ARC at the February Council meeting.

CEO Performance Committee

The Committee's role is to review the performance of the CEO in relation to the organisational Business Plan. There are at least two meetings each year. A new committee was established in 2023 with Peter Archer being re-appointed, while Fergal Lynch (Chair) and Pat Goff were new appointments. There were three meetings of the CEO Performance Committee in 2023.

Chief Executive Performance (three meetings)	Attendance
Fergal Lynch, chairperson	1
Peter Archer	3
Pat Goff	3

Note. Fergal Lynch was appointed to the committee at the October meeting of Council.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee comprises four Council members. The role of the Finance Committee is to update and advise the Council on its financial position. The Committee's role is advisory, to report and make recommendations, in order to support Council financial decision making. A new committee was established in 2023 with Deirbhile Nic Craith (new chair) and Eileen Daly being re-appointed and the new appointments were Caroline Quinn and Diarmuid Dullaghan. There were five meetings of the Finance Committee in 2023.

Finance (five meetings)	Attendance
Deirbhile Nic Craith, chairperson	5
Caroline Quinn	5
Eileen Daly	5
Diarmuid Dullaghan	4

Note. Caroline Quinn was appointed to the Committee at the February meeting of Council. Diarmuid Dullaghan was appointed to the Finance Committee at the June meeting of Council.

Research Committee

The Research Committee comprises four Council members. The Research Committee advises Council on the research policy and programme and makes appropriate expert inputs into the strategic development of the Council's research policy including its multi-annual research programme. A new committee was established in 2023 with Peter Archer (remaining as Chair) and Dharragh Hunt being re-appointed and Catherine Cross and Yvonne Kennedy being the new appointments to the committee. There were four meetings of the Research Committee in 2023.

Research (four meetings)	Attendance
Peter Archer, chairperson	4
Dharragh Hunt	4
Catherine Cross	4
Yvonne Kennedy	0

Note. Yvonne Kennedy was appointed to the Research Committee at the June Council meeting and was therefore not appointed for three of these meetings.

Strategy and Policy Committee

The Strategy and Policy Committee comprises four Council members. Its role is to make appropriate inputs into the development of policy advice and ongoing NCSE strategic activities. A new committee was established in 2023 with Angela O'Neill being re-appointed while Pat Goff (new chair), Eamon Clavin and Michael Redmond were new appointments to the committee. There were two meetings of the Strategy and Policy Committee in 2023.

Strategy and Policy (two meetings)	Attendance
Pat Goff, chairperson	2
Angela O'Neill	2
Michael Redmond	2
Eamon Clavin	0

Note. Eamon Clavin was appointed to the Strategy and Policy Committee at the June Council meeting, no further meetings were held after this date.

3.7 Governance and Code of Practice

Action 3.4 Maintain governance and control processes in line with statutory regulations and The Code of Practice, provide training on matters as appropriate and engage in the public sector reform programme.

Action 3.5 Annual reporting on compliance with all business, corporate and budget requirements in line with the Performance Delivery Agreement.

3.7.1 Performance Management

The NCSE Statement of Strategy covers the period 2022-24⁸. An annual work plan for 2023 based on the strategy was developed and approved by Council in December 2022 with progress reviewed quarterly, alongside associated risks. A Risk Register for 2023 was agreed by Council, on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, after the annual review of our 2022 Risk Register.

3.7.2 Annual Accounts

The NCSE annual accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and, following audit, are submitted to the Minister and then laid before the Oireachtas and published on the NCSE website. The annual accounts are presented and published separately from this report. The 2022 Accounts were published on our website in 2023.

The 2023 annual accounts are expected to be presented to the Minister in 2023 pending the audit's completion.

3.7.3 Confirmation of Compliance with Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

The NCSE adopted the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016. All agencies are required to comply with the code's full requirements, including recent annexes, remuneration and gender balance, diversity and inclusion. Appendix 1 details the confirmations of NCSE compliance with the code.

In 2023, the NCSE undertook an internal review of compliance with the Code, which was noted by the Council. The NCSE continues to be compliant with the Code. There is one item that requires an update – the current Corporate Procurement Plan was due for renewal in 2023. We are working on a new Corporate Procurement Plan that will be published in early 2024, which will reflect the ongoing work in this area in line with revised circulars (see Appendix 1).

⁸ NCSE Statement of Strategy (2022-24) was approved by Council in 2022. With the Government announcement of additional funding to support the expansion of NCSE services in November 2022, the Statement of Strategy was reviewed during 2023 and a new version will be published in early 2024.

3.7.4 Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015

The NCSE's chief executive is a designated public official under this Act.

3.7.5 Data Protection

Eight data subject access requests were processed by NCSE in 2023, in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the NCSE Data Protection Statement at <http://www.ncse.ie/ncse-data-protection>. The NCSE data protection policy and procedures were updated in 2022, and are currently subject to ongoing internal audit.

Five data incidents were reported to the NCSE Data Protection Officer. The majority related to inadvertent emailing of data to an unintended recipient: mitigating steps were taken and the risk level was deemed low to minimal. Data Protection is now a prominent feature of our induction programme and will be addressed as part of a staff training session during our 2024 staff conference.

3.7.6 Climate Action Mandate

The Climate Action Plan was published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in 2019, set out a series of wide-ranging and significant actions to tackle carbon emissions. The Climate Action Roadmap provides an opportunity for the NCSE to embrace change and continue to lead by example to our commitment to a 51% reduction in our carbon emissions by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050.

The Climate Action Roadmap 2022-2030 outlines National Council for Special Education's vision for increased sustainability and environmental focus across all aspects of the organisation. This will be achieved through optimisation and modernisation of our real estate and innovation in the ICT space.

This 51% reduction is an ambitious target for each public sector body. It is measured against a benchmark of KgCO₂ (Kilograms of CO₂) taken as an average of the carbon output from 2016-2018. In 2022, the gap to target stood at 47,883KgCO₂ compared to NCSE's 2016/18 baseline figures. Further information on the NCSE's annual energy efficiency reporting is outlined in Appendix 1.

Governance

The NCSE are committed to the assignment of an Energy Performance Officer (EPO) to accelerate the implementation of NCSE's climate action strategies. The EPO will have responsibility for our SEAI Energy Partnership, monitoring and reporting, implementation and oversight of staff led Green Teams, development and implementation of green and sustainability solutions. The EPO, overseen by NCSE's Facilities will ensure alignment of our Climate Action Roadmap with the Climate Action Mandate and update in line with organisational changes. The NCSE's Head of People Support, Development and Transformation, acts as the Climate and Sustainability Champion.

Adaptation Action Plans:

Initiatives under the Climate Action Plan are being modelled using facilities provided by the SEAI and the development of internal green practice goals:

- ▶ Cycle and Walk to work
- ▶ Green Travel Policy
- ▶ Integration of green procurement
- ▶ Green Teams
- ▶ Optimising the office network
- ▶ Ensure staff have the necessary training and support
- ▶ Include green practice actions as part of annual goal setting under PMDS.

3.7.7 Annual Energy Efficiency Reporting

The NCSE continues to review its energy usage as an organisation and is actively working towards the 2030 target as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) provides a detailed plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as committed to in the Programme for Government and legislation.

The NCSE reported a reduction of 31% energy savings for 2021, and in 2022, there was an 8.2% increase in energy consumption. Whilst the NCSE is listed as on target with significant reduction recorded in 2021, the reference period was during the COVID-19 pandemic and hence not reflective of true status from the return to offices etc. Furthermore, the NCSE is expanding with additional staff joining across head office and local teams.

The NCSE continues to liaise and work together with our colleagues in the OPW and the SEAI to achieve this target.

The energy usage data for 2022 is provided below and is compared with the previously reported 2021 and 2020 figures.

Table 15: Overview of NCSE Energy Usage 2020-2022

Energy Type	Units	2022	2021	2020
Electricity	MWh	359	317	192
Thermal	MWh	193	193	210
Renewable	MWh	0	0	0
Total	MWh	552	510	402

The energy-related CO₂ emissions for 2022 and 2021 are also reported in Table A1.2, with an increase of 2.9% over the period.

Table 16: Overview of NCSE Energy-related CO₂ emissions

Units	2022	2021
kgCO ₂	100,967	98,118

3.7.8 Green Procurement

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is a process where public bodies seek to source goods, services or works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle. The NCSE has a responsibility to promote and implement green procurement processes in relevant procurement of goods and services and where possible follows the guidance published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in September 2021 and incorporates the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) GPP Criteria Search, an online tool identifying relevant criteria for inclusion in procurement specifications.

In 2023, the NCSE incorporated green procurement criteria into 11 procurement processes for goods and services over €25,000. These procurement activities related to IT consumables, software, professional services, cleaning and courier services, stationery suppliers and electricity supply.

3.7.9 Parliamentary Questions and Representations

As a state body, the NCSE provides information to members of the Oireachtas and maintains standards and principles in processing requests. Parliamentary Questions (PQs) and Representations (Reps.) are referred for direct reply to the Oireachtas member in accordance with DPER Circular 25/2016.

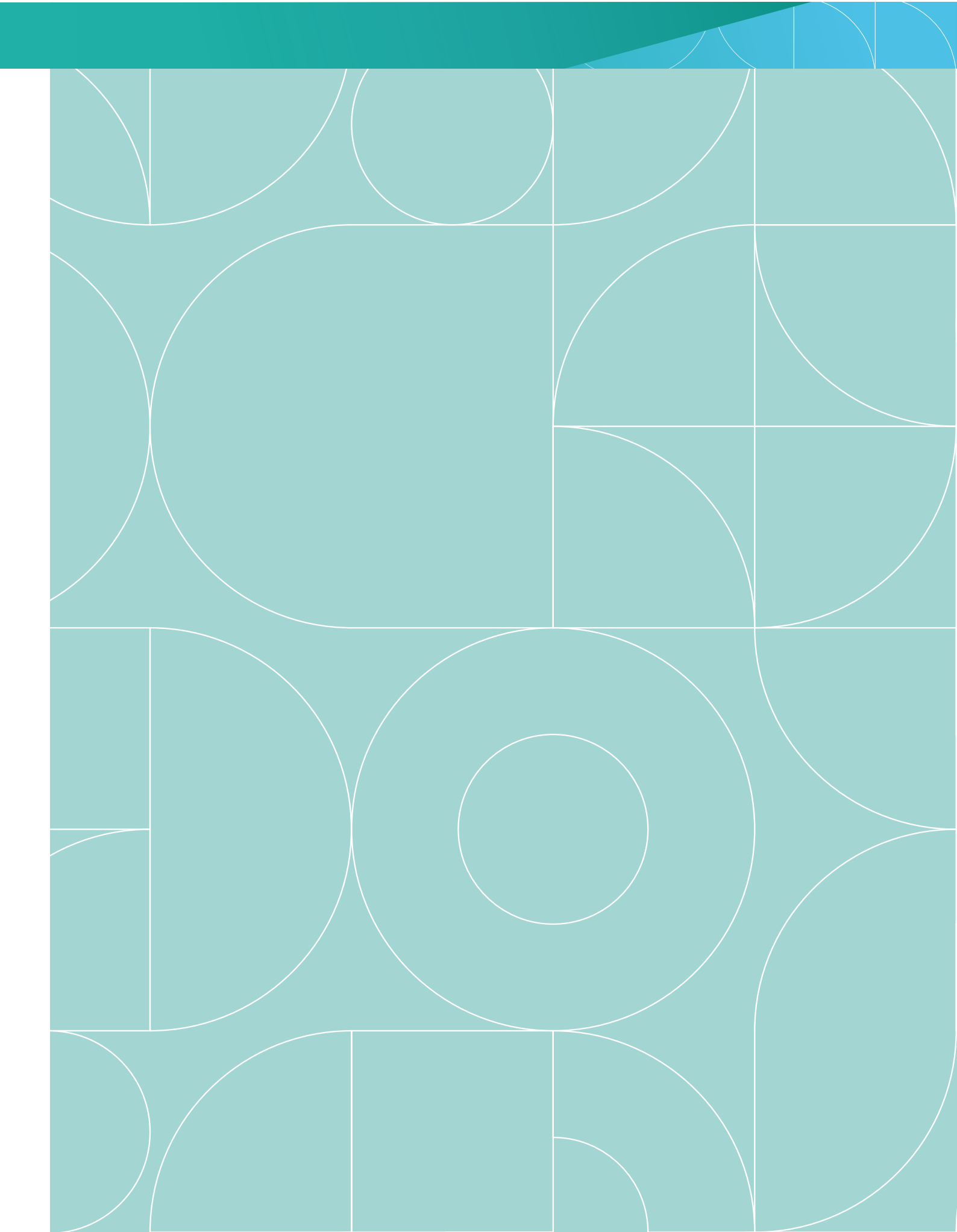
Table 17: Parliamentary Questions processed by the NCSE in 2023.

Parliamentary Questions	Number processed
Advisor/Visiting Teacher/Therapist	4
Assistive Technology	1
Class/School Placements	39
NCSE Vacancies	8
Policy	4
SET Review	1
SNA and SET Support	1
SNA Review	1
Statistics	7
Status of Special Classes	27
Other	10
Total	103

Table 18: Representations processed by the NCSE in 2023.

Representations	Number processed
Advisor/Visiting Teacher/Therapist	1
Assistive Technology	5
Class/School Placements	124
NCSE Vacancies	4
Policy	1
School Transport	7
SET Review	4
SNA and SET Support	5
SNA Review	13
SNA Support	6
Statistics	5
Status of Special Classes	40
Other	11
Total	222

In 2024, the NCSE will to publish responses to PQs and Representations that do not pertain to individual students or contain personal information on our website, in accordance with DPER Circular 25/2016.





Appendices

Appendix 1

Confirmation of Compliance with Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016

NCSE System of Internal Control (SIC)

The Council is responsible for ensuring that an effective system of internal control is maintained and operated in accordance with Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 and for reviewing annually the effectiveness of the internal controls, including financial, operational and compliance controls and risk management processes and procedures.

The system of internal control, which accords with guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is in place in the NCSE for the year ended 31st December, 2023. Confirmation of the annual review of effectiveness of the NCSE System of Internal Control in 2023 is provided in the NCSE audited accounts that are published separately.

Schedule of Reserved and Delegated Functions

The Council has agreed a formal schedule of specific matters specifically reserved to it for decision to ensure its appropriate direction and control of the NCSE. Council has also agreed a schedule of delegations to the Chief Executive.

These schedules were updated in 2022; more detail is available in the Corporate Governance Guide Appendices for Council members available on the NCSE website.

Tax and Regulatory Compliance

There have been no communications concerning non-compliance with requirements of regulatory or tax authorities regarding any matter. The NCSE is not aware of any actual or possible non-compliance with laws or regulations that could affect our financial statements.

NCSE Travel Policy

Government policy on business travel is being complied with in all respects. The NCSE has developed and maintains its travel policy and procedures in accordance with Government requirements.

Procurement Policy

Government policy on public procurement is being applied in the NCSE together with adherence to the rules and procedures of the public spending code. Updates are incorporated in respect of relevant legislation and circulars – including Circular 05/2023 and eForms using in eTenders, as set out under new Regulation (EU) 2019/1780, subsequently amended with (EU) 2022/2303. In 2023, an updated process of internal monitoring of procurement activities was put in place, along with a review of procedures; furthermore, updated guidance was provided at induction and training provided for staff in procurement-facing roles.

The NCSE avails of shared service arrangements and central drawdown contracts, including where possible those established by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO).

The NCSE's Corporate Procurement Plan will be updated in early 2024.

Disposal of Assets

Disposal of assets by the NCSE fully complies with requirements set down by the Code of Practice.

Protected Disclosures

The NCSE has an agreed policy and procedures for dealing with protected disclosures in line with the Protected Disclosures Act (2014). The guidance and procedures was last updated in December 2021. The policy will be amended in early 2024 in line with the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022. No issues were raised under this procedure in 2023. An anonymous report was received in March 2023 containing a number of allegations; no documentary evidence was provided with the report. The allegations in the report were independently assessed by a third party and determined not to meet the criteria of a protected disclosure.

Child Protection

The NCSE has developed procedures and guidelines for staff on child protection and welfare matters as part of the requirements enacted in 2017 under the Children First Act, 2015. The NCSE guidelines are available on our website at www.ncse.ie. Any matters drawn to our attention in 2023 were processed in accordance with our procedures. The Child Safeguarding Statement and procedures will be updated in 2024.

Audit

The NCSE has established an internal audit function and has agreed an internal audit charter. Council has appointed an Audit and Risk Committee with agreed terms of reference including oversight of the internal audit function, risk management and review of the draft annual accounts.

Gender Balance of Council

In 2023, 6 of the 12 Ordinary Members of the NCSE Council were female. This is in accordance with the 40% gender balance requirement, as set out in the new Annex on Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion (2020), supplementary to the existing Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016).

Government Pay Guidelines – NCSE staff and Council

The salaries payable to the chief executive officer and all employees comply with government policy. No directors' fees are payable to NCSE Council members. Individual Council members' expenses are detailed in the financial statement for 2023, published separately to this Annual Report.

Appendix 2

NCSE Staffing

Grade	Staff in Post End 2023
Civil Servants	
Chief executive	1
Principal	5
Regional managers	4
Specialist lead	8
Assistant principal	7
Team managers	10
Behaviour practitioners	4
Occupational therapists	6
Speech and language therapists	9
Therapist Manager	2
Special educational needs organisers (SENO)	69
Higher executive officers	12
ISL Tutors	2
Administrative officer	1
Executive officers	14
Clerical officers	29
Intern	0
Sub-total (civil servants)	183
Advisors	51
Visiting teachers	45
Sub-total (public servants)	95
TOTAL	279

Appendix 3

Statistical Information on Allocations and Special Classes for School Years 2011/12 to 2022/23

Statistical Information for 2012/13 to 2022/23

Tables A3.1-4 provide the trend data for school years 2012/13 to 2022/23, in respect of NCSE resource allocation activity.

- ▶ Data on special school enrolments have been provided by the Department of Education Primary Online Database (POD).
- ▶ Data on SET allocations have been provided by Special Education Section, Department of Education.
- ▶ All other data is provided by the NCSE Special Education Administrative System (SEAS).

Table A3.1: Applications received from schools for access to additional resources

Type of Applications	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Transport	2,520	2,787	3,289	3,423	3,460	3,597	3,847	4,302	4,366 ⁹	5,417	5,991
Assistive Technology	2,721	2,882	2,928	3,564	4,686	4,157	4,453	5,510	5,481	6,572	7,341
Total Applications	5,241	5,669	6,217	6,987	8,146	7,754	8,300	9,812	9,847	11,989	13,332

Table A3.2: Special education resources allocated to schools by the NCSE

Type of Posts	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
SNA	10,503	10,671	11,174	11,984	13,006	14,063	15,030	16,125	17,117	18,113	19,481
Special Education Teaching	–	–	–	–	–	13,395	13,436	13,529	13,620	13,765	14,396
Special school teachers	1,078	1,060	1,135	1,159	11,979	1,205	1,223	1,231	1,240	1,282	1,340
Special class teachers	695	823	956	1,136	1,304	1,480	1,663	1,865	2,103	2,456	2,919

⁹ A small number of applications for school transport for the 2020/21 school year were recorded for the 2019/20 school year. Therefore, the applications for transport are to a small extent over-reported in 2019/20 and under-reported in 2020/21. This also applies to data reported for the 2019/20 school year in the NCSE Annual Report for 2020.

Table A3.3: Numbers of students supported in Special Class and Special School placements

Students	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Special classes	3,684	4,353	4,706	5,472	6,393	7,390	8,410	9,259	10,436	12,289	14,352
Special school ¹⁰	7,135	7,240	7,283	7,468	7,561	7,656	7,722	7,856	7,900	8,158	8,424

Table A3.4: Primary Special classes by Type

Primary Schools	Number of Special Classes by Year					
Class Type	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<i>Autism Early Intervention</i>	21	71	135	133	151	157
<i>Autism</i>	214	482	1000	1217	1463	1698
<i>Emotional/behavioural disorders</i>	1	4	7	6	5	5
<i>Deaf, Hard of Hearing</i>	7	9	13	14	17	16
<i>HI Early Intervention</i>	0	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Mild General Learning Disability</i>	28	35	39	39	37	37
<i>Moderate General Learning Disability</i>	7	11	23	25	24	28
<i>Multiple Disabilities</i>	8	13	19	23	24	20
<i>Severe/Profound General Learning Disability</i>	5	7	9	9	8	8
<i>Specific Learning Needs</i>	13	13	13	13	13	14
<i>Developmental Language Disorder¹¹</i>	52	59	63	64	64	64
Total	356	705	1,322	1,544	1,807	2,048

10 The figures presented for special schools in Table A3.3 differs from earlier Annual Reports, with students for two schools resourced by the NCSE in the period 2012/13 to 2017/18 = now included in the annual totals.

11 Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) was previously known as Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD).

Table A3.5: Post-Primary Special Classes by Type

Post-Primary	Number of Special Classes by Year					
Class Type	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
<i>Autism</i>	65	189	435	524	653	780
<i>Emotional/behavioural disorders</i>	2	2	3	3	3	3
<i>Deaf, Hard of Hearing</i>	2	5	5	5	7	8
<i>Mild General Learning Disability</i>	9	11	14	14	14	14
<i>Moderate General Learning Disability</i>	11	25	45	46	49	51
<i>Multiple Disabilities</i>	3	5	12	13	13	14
<i>Severe/Profound General Learning Disability</i>	0	0	1	1	1	1
<i>Other</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Blind/Vision Impaired</i>	0	0	2	2	2	1
Total	92	237	517	608	742	873

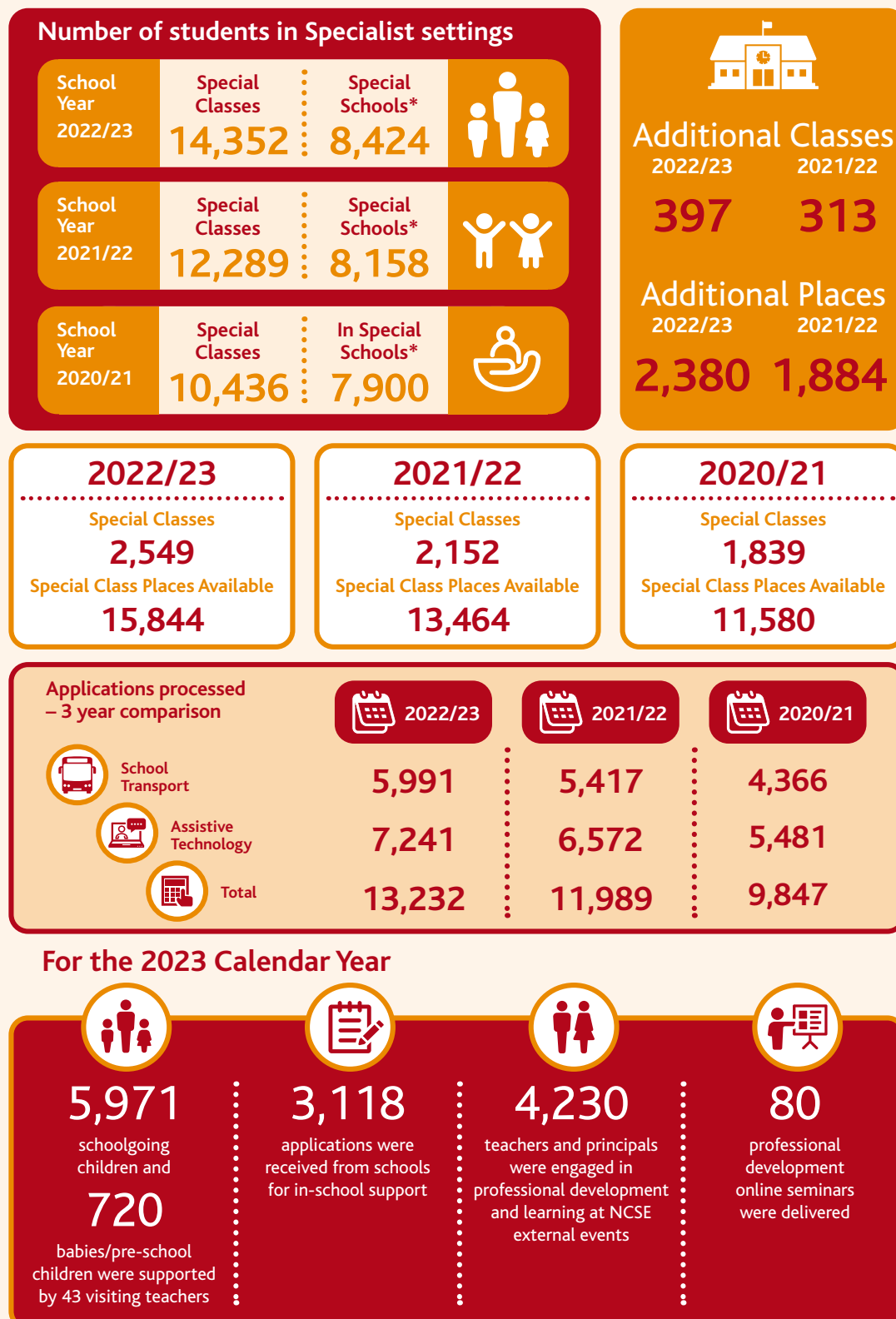
Appendix 4

Glossary of Acronyms Used

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
AoN	Assessment of Need
CES	Comprehensive Employment Strategy
CPD	Continuing professional development
DE	Department of Education
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EASNIE	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EBD	Emotional disturbance/behavioural disorder
ELC	Early learning centre
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
ERT	Enhanced Regional Teams
HSE	Health Service Executive
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ISTP	In-School Therapy Support
ITE	Initial teacher education
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OT	Occupational therapist
PCF	Primary Curriculum Framework
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
PMC	Primary Mathematics Curriculum
SENO	Special educational needs organiser
SER	SNA Exceptional Review
SET	Special Education Teacher
SIC	System of Internal Control
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SNA	Special needs assistant
SLT	Speech and language therapist
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
VT	Visiting Teacher

Appendix 5

Infographic on main NCSE statistics



*Data included for NCSE supported Special Schools

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