

External Evaluation of the Special Education Support Service

Stakeholder request for submissions

This request for submissions is part of an external evaluation of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) that is being carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

SESS was established in 2003 and has the following key aims:

- To enhance the quality of learning and teaching with particular reference to the education of students with special educational needs;
- To design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel; and
- To consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development and support.

This external evaluation is being undertaken to:

- Understand the extent to which the aims of SESS (as detailed above) are being achieved;
- Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisational structure of the SESS; and
- Establish the impact of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) being provided by SESS. These impacts could include, for example, the impact of the CPD provided on teachers' classroom practice.

We are keen to seek the views of your organisation in each of the aforementioned areas. We would be grateful if you could complete as many of the questions as possible that are relevant to your organisation as the findings from a range of stakeholders will help inform and give depth to this important research.

This request is conducted in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, which guarantees confidentiality and anonymity.

When you have completed this form, please return it by Friday, 25 February 2011 in the enclosed prepaid envelope to:

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC)
Waterfront Plaza
8 Laganbank Road
Belfast
BT1 3LR

If you have any questions or queries, please contact Dr Richard Nugent on (0044 28 90) 415640.

Thank you for your help with this evaluation.

Introduction

1. What is the name of your organisation?

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)

2. Could you briefly describe your organisation's interest in, or involvement with, SESS to date?

COGG was set up under the terms of the Education Act (1998) and has statutory functions in relation to advising the Minister for Education and the NCCA on matters pertaining to Irish medium education and the teaching of Irish in all schools.

COGG also has statutory functions to co-ordinate the provision of textbooks and learning resources; to provide support services to schools and to research

COGG has had limited involvement with SESS- Translation of 'Signposts' resource and SESS attendance at one Learning Support teachers' meeting organised by COGG.

IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION

Approximately 38,000 children currently attend Gaeltacht or all-Irish primary schools outside the Gaeltacht. Some of the children in Gaeltacht schools are native Irish speakers and on starting school have Irish as their only or predominant first language. A small minority of children attending Gaelscoileanna come from Irish speaking families though Irish would not be the community language.

Gaeltacht Primary schools are the 'local' National Schools providing education to the community. All-Irish schools generally offer parents a choice of school as there would also be an English medium school in the locality.

Children in these schools must be viewed in different groupings as children whose first language is Irish have different educational needs to those whose first language is English (be they in Gaeltacht schools or not) but are receiving their education through Irish.

Currently, due to the lack of support and resources available in Irish, much of the learning support/resource teaching in these schools is provided through English only. This practice may have a detrimental effect on the progress of children as they are 'operating' through Irish without support in that language.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN PRIMARY IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004

Research study commissioned by COGG

Numbers of children in 125 Gaeltacht primary schools with Special Educational Needs

- Borderline General Learning Disability 19%
- Mild General Learning Disability 21%
- Moderate General Learning Disability 6%
- Severe/Profound General Learning Disability .8%

- Hearing Impairment 1%
- Visual Impairment 1%
- Physical Disability 3%
- Specific Speech and Language Disorder 14%
- Multiple Disabilities 3%
- Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Problems including ADD and ADHD 8%
- Specific Learning Disability 20%
- Severe Emotional Disturbance .8%
- Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders 3%

Mac Donnacha, Seosamh: *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004. Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí Tuarascáil don Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta*, COGG Deireadh Fómhair 2006, Caipitil 3, lch 31

The three most commonly identified SENs in Gaelscoileanna (primary schools) in the south of Ireland are; dyslexia, borderline mild general learning disability, and mild general learning disability.¹

Nic Gabhann, *Special Education Needs in Gaelscoileanna*, Master's thesis 2008

Publication is pending of a report on the findings and recommendations of research funded by COGG and carried out by POBAL into the pre-service and in-service educational needs of teachers in Irish medium schools in relation to Special Education.

The Special Education Support Service

3. Which of the following types of support are you aware of that SESS provide to schools in the Republic of Ireland? [Please tick all that apply]	
<u>ANSWERS REFER TO IRISH MEDIUM (IM) SCHOOLS</u>	Tick all that apply
In-school support	Yes, but support is not readily available through Irish for IM schools.
SESS designed and delivered CPD programmes	The CPD delivered to date does not appear to suit the needs of IM education. No recognition of needs of IM schools
SESS Support Scheme	SESS Support

	Schemes are not tailored to IM education. Not suited to IM schools
Teacher exchange/visits	Not available to IM schools
Conferences and seminars	Content not generally relevant to IM schools
Access to External CPD providers	Yes, but there appears to be limited expertise in the area of IM education available to Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools
Training the trainer courses	Available, but no specific training for IM education
Online Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Available, but no specific training for IM education
Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma	Available, but no recognition of IM education
Learning and teaching resources (e.g. DVDs, Booklets)	Very limited availability of resources in Irish.
Telephone support/email support	Yes, through English
SESS website	In English only

4. How successful do you think SESS have been in making their support accessible to schools? [Tick one box and then make any comments you wish in the space provided]

Low, in relation to Irish medium sector.

Moderately Successful

Very Successful

Extremely Successful

Comments:

SESS has not provided specifically tailored support to Gaeltacht children or children in

Irish medium schools. It would appear that there is a lack of recognition of the fact that children with Special Educational needs attend all-Irish schools (Gaelscoileanna).

Some psychologists and other professionals advise parents to remove children with Special Educational Needs from Irish medium schools or to request an exemption from the study of Irish. There are known occasions where psychologists have also recommended that parents speak English to their children instead of Irish. International research and best practice highlight the advantages of bilingualism to *all* children, regardless of learning disabilities.

5. What are your views on the levels of uptake amongst schools of the support provided by SESS?

The level of uptake amongst Irish medium schools is low due to the perceived lack of expertise among SESS personnel in relation to children whose first language is Irish or those who are being educated through Irish.

6. To what extent do you think SESS has been successful in relation to each of the following...

... **designing and delivering** a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel?

Very successful except in the case of the needs of Irish medium schools.
Training days deal only with English literacy and numeracy through English and do not take Irish medium education into account.

... **co-ordinating** existing professional development and support for teachers of students with special educational needs?

Very successful except in the case of the needs of Irish medium schools.

... **consolidating** existing professional development and support for teachers of students with special educational needs?

Very successful except for the needs of Irish medium schools.

7. Overall, what impact do you think SESS has had in terms of enabling students with special educational needs to access, participate and benefit from an appropriate education?

Very limited, if any, impact in relation to children whose first language is Irish or those in Irish medium education.

8. Which particular aspects of SESS provision do you think have had the most positive **impact** on how Continuing Professional Development is provided to teachers of students with special educational needs? And what areas might need further attention/consideration?

(a) Positive impacts:

Continuing Professional Education provided by SESS has probably had a very positive impact on teaching and learning in English medium schools but, unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the impact on teaching and learning in Gaeltachta and all-Irish schools.

(b) Further attention/consideration:

- Recognition of the existence of children whose first language is Irish and children in Irish Medium Education.
- Recognition of particular needs of Gaeltacht and Irish medium schools in courses provided by SESS.
- Visits to Gaeltacht and Irish medium schools to discuss with principal/teachers the particular needs of schools.
- Development of a greater level of practical support for children whose first language is Irish and those in Irish medium education.
- Diagnostic tests for children whose first language is Irish and those being

educated through Irish

- Speech and Language assessment and support through Irish
- Development of teaching and learning resources, with particular emphasis on on-line resources, for Gaeltacht and Irish medium schools.
- Articles/Advertisements in Irish in SESS magazine and other publications that are pertinent to the needs of teachers in IM education.
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9. Do you think that the activities or programmes that SESS provides duplicate any activities or programmes provided by other organisations? If so, could you provide further details below?

SESS was established in 2003 with the following key aims:

- To enhance the quality of learning and teaching with particular reference to the education of students with special educational needs;
- To design and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and supports for school personnel; and
- To consolidate and co-ordinate existing professional development and support.

10. What do you think are the key strengths, if any, of how SESS is...

...organised to deliver its aims

...managed to deliver its aims

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11. What do you think are the main areas for development, if any, of how SESS is...
...organised to deliver its aims
A deeper knowledge of the advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism could be explored by SESS personnel and taken into consideration when providing support.
An understanding of the particular challenges faced in minority language settings could also be further developed.
Greater access for teachers in IM schools for practical support in dealing with pupils with special educational needs.
Most schools have no access to educational psychologists who are qualified to assess children through the medium of Irish.
Psychologists who have Irish are not necessarily qualified to assess through Irish.
There is no standardised diagnostic numeracy assessment test available in Irish and very limited provision for literacy assessment.
Speech therapy is generally unavailable for Irish speaking children.
A greater range of resources in Irish for Learning Support and Special Needs education should be provided.
The practice of granting exemptions from the study of Irish to all children with any form of learning difficulty requires review and particularly with the expected publication of a new circular on exemptions .
...managed to deliver its aims
To address the needs of the children and teachers in Irish medium education.

Conclusions

12. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to the SESS and the extent to which it is meeting its aims?
Whereas SESS provides a satisfactory service to English medium schools, services should be developed and provided for children whose first language is Irish and children attending Irish medium schools with special educational needs.

It would be helpful if you could provide us with the following background information.	
Name of person(s) completing the request	Muireann Ní Mhóráin
Position(s) in the organisation	CEO

Contact telephone number and email address	0035316340831 muireann@cogg.ie
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We might want to contact you to clarify points raised in your response. If you would prefer that we did not contact you please tick here

Thank you for taking the time to complete this request. Please return it using the envelope provided to Dr Richard Nugent at PwC by Friday, 25th February, 2011.