



CPSMA submission in relation to the provision of ASD and Special Classes in mainstream schools throughout the State.

Introduction

1. CPSMA thanks the Committee on Education and Skills for its decision to consider the matter of the provision of ASD and Special Classes in mainstream schools and for the opportunity to provide input to its deliberations.
2. CPSMA wish to thank our member schools and principals who responded swiftly to provide input for this submission at such a busy time of year. The speed and scale of the response is a testament to the importance of this issue to principals.

Report on CPSMA survey for principals of mainstream schools with special class(es)

3. CPSMA conducted a survey for principals of mainstream schools with special class(es). The survey was circulated to member schools in the evening of Friday 1st June 2018 and closed on the morning of Wednesday 6th June 2018. The survey was held across the bank holiday weekend and was therefore, open for only one working day.
 - There were 164 respondents.
 - 20% of the respondents were teaching principals and 80% were administrative principals.
 - 65.24% of respondents indicated that there is a waiting list for places in their special class(es) whereas 34.76% of respondents indicated that there is not a waiting list for places in their special class(es).
 - 63.41% of respondents stated that they would recommend opening a special class to a colleague. 36.59% of respondents stated that they would not recommend opening a special class to a colleague.
4. Several concerns were highlighted by respondents to this survey, including:
 - Managing challenging behaviour
 - Difficulty accessing appropriate training for teachers and SNAs
 - Difficulty accessing external supports such as Occupational Therapy, NEPS, Speech and Language Therapy
 - Increased workload on principals, particularly teaching principals.
5. In addition to the survey, CPSMA consulted with a number of senior principals with experience in the area of special classes for their input.

Opportunities and challenges of a special class attached to a mainstream school, as identified by principals

6. More special classes in local schools would mean that pupils from those areas would be able to access an appropriate educational placement in their community and not have to travel long distances to access these placements in larger, usually urban, schools. This is true inclusion on a societal level.
7. For a teaching principal, the challenge is having to manage, what are in effect, two separate schools with very different needs, challenges and expectations under the one roof and make them all gel together to make one successful educational facility, while teaching full-time at the same time.
8. Behaviour management issues can be more challenging in special classes and principals are regularly called to become involved in these. For teaching principals, this means that they can be regularly called out of class to become involved in managing behaviour issues.
9. Significant management and time spent dealing with and professionals who deal with pupils in the special class: SENOs, OTs, psychologists, speech therapists, psychiatrists, play therapists, CAMHS etc.
10. There tends to be a need for increased communication between the school and parents of pupils in special class(es).
11. The principal is managing a much larger staff than that which is illustrated on their official designation from the Department of Education and Skills. Extra ancillary staff associated with a special class (SNAs, bus escorts) all must be managed by principal. Appointments, sudden absences, planned leave, replacement staff, Garda vetting etc. of these extra staff all falls to the principal. Managing transport issues to and from the special class are particularly demanding on the principal, especially at the start of the new school year as new routes are being established.
12. Creating and maintaining an appropriate physical environment for pupils that meets their particular sensory needs is very time-consuming. Establishing a Sensory Room, sourcing and purchasing appropriate educational equipment/technology, liaising with Occupational Therapists to gauge appropriateness of materials and over-seeing installation/maintenance/replacement of these takes time.
13. Increased administration is a feature of having a special class. Policies dealing with allocation of places in the class, IEPs, liaison with Bus Eireann, DES, bus escort reconciliations, payroll of bus escorts, letters to/from professionals, organisation of July Programme in the school, paperwork around transition to and from the special classes by pupils either to the next stage in their education or to another setting as appropriate etc. place a significant burden on principals.

14. Significant continuous professional development is needed for the staff of the school, both at set-up stage and on an ongoing basis – assessing this, planning around it, liaising with SESS and other providers and managing the practicalities of organising speakers, substitution and paperwork a challenge for principal.
15. The extra workload issues associated with being a teaching principal with special classes are not taken into account when calculating administration days for the year. One teaching principal currently has 15 administration days in the year to run both mainstream and two special classes.

Amendment to Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016

16. CPSMA argue that the recently passed *Amendment to Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016*, which gives the Minister for Education and Skills the power to compel a school to open a special class or classes where the National Council for Special Education has identified a need for such provision within an area, is not as necessary in the primary sector. It is acknowledged by principals of mainstream schools with special classes that their special classes have a positive impact on inclusion within the school. However, a number of concerns have been raised by our member schools regarding provision of training, management of challenging behaviour, difficulty accessing external support and increased workload on principals.
17. Addressing these concerns would encourage more schools to willingly open special classes. This argument is succinctly put by one of our principals who states:

I believe our school is a very good example of how pupils with ASD are successfully included holistically in school life. In 31 years of teaching, I believe setting up this unit was my greatest achievement. I am very proud of our school in its entirety and I believe we have all benefitted enormously from becoming a school that has an ASD unit. Our school community agrees. *However, it created a huge body of work for me that has overwhelmed me more than once. The workload is not sustainable and the personal toll it takes on the principal is, at best, unfair.* I believe schools like ours who agree to open special classes should be better supported and more schools would subsequently opt in as a result.

Recommendations:

18. Special classes are a positive addition to a primary school. Our member schools strive to ensure that all pupils in their schools are provided with equality of access. Given the increasing workload which this place upon principals and Boards of Management, CPSMA believe that serious consideration should be given to ensuring that every principal with a special class will automatically become an administrative principal.
19. Schools should, whenever possible, be encouraged and supported to establish special class(es), rather than compelled.
20. Adequate continuous professional development for teachers and SNAs working in mainstream schools with special classes must be made available on a whole-school basis.

21. CPSMA welcome the updated circulars, released by the Department of Education and Skills, relating to Assaults on Teachers and Assaults on SNAs. We call for a national, Department of Education and Skills' approved approach to dealing with challenging behaviour within special classes and whole-school training for such an approach.
22. The current system of management of bus escorts sees the Department provide a grant to individual schools, from which each bus escort is paid. We now call for bus escorts to be paid centrally, by the Department of Education and Skills, in a similar manner to SNAs.
23. Consideration should be given to ensure a fair geographical dispersion of special classes, thereby ensuring equality of access for pupils.

Appendix 1

Results of CPSMA survey for principals of mainstream schools with special classes

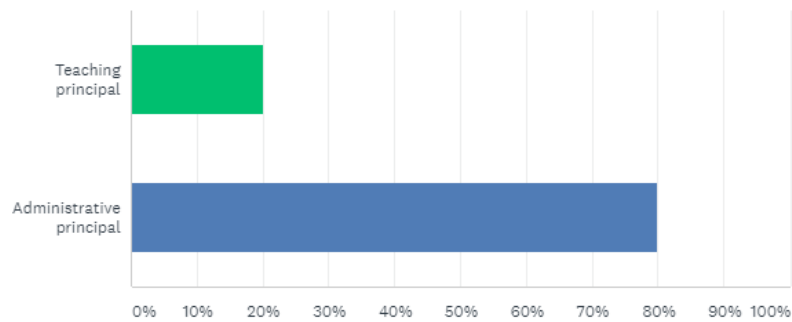
Survey was circulated to member schools in the evening of Friday 1st June 2018 and closed on the morning of Wednesday 6th June 2018. The survey was held across the bank holiday weekend and was open for only one working day.

There were 164 respondents.

Question 2

Are you a teaching or administrative principal?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Teaching principal	20.12% 33
Administrative principal	79.88% 131
TOTAL	164

33 of the respondents were teaching principals.

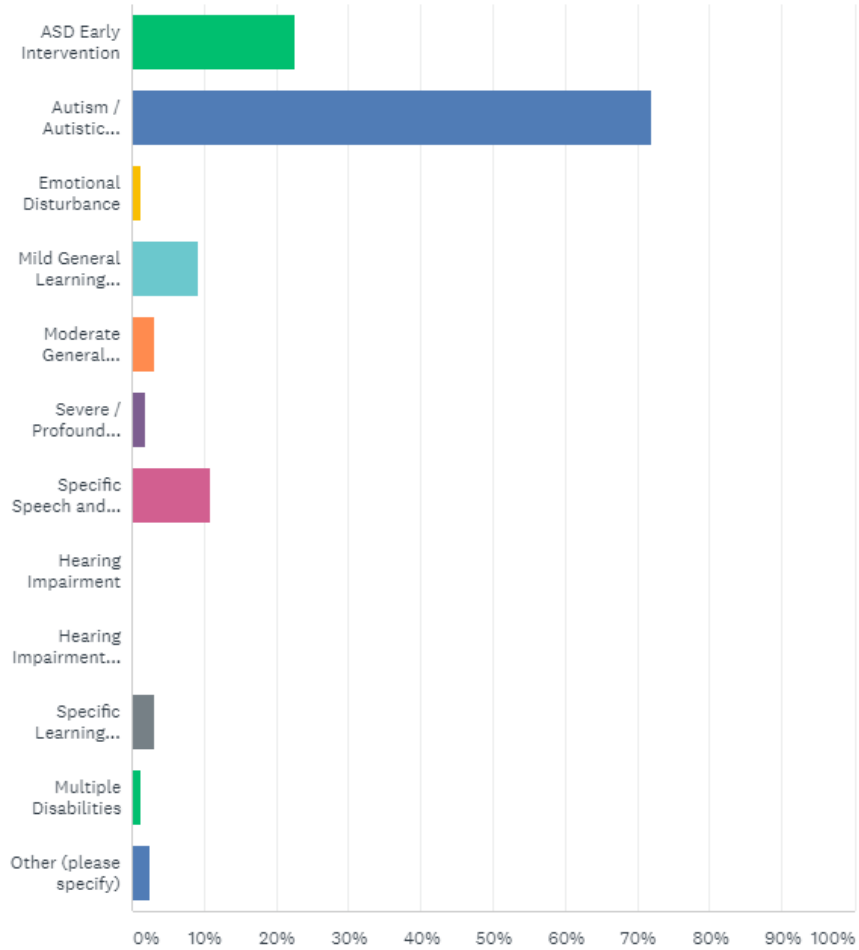
131 of respondents were administrative principals.

Question 3

There were a variety of special class types represented throughout the survey.

Category of special class(es) in your school

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
ASD Early Intervention	22.56%	37
Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorders	71.95%	118
Emotional Disturbance	1.22%	2
Mild General Learning Disability	9.15%	15
Moderate General Learning Disability	3.05%	5
Severe / Profound General Learning Disability	1.83%	3
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	10.98%	18
Hearing Impairment	0.00%	0
Hearing Impairment Early Intervention	0.00%	0
Specific Learning Disability	3.05%	5
Multiple Disabilities	1.22%	2
Other (please specify)	Responses 2.44%	4
Total Respondents: 164		

Question 4

This question queried the number of special classes per school.

73 respondents had only one special class in their school.

61 respondents had two special classes.

18 respondents had three special classes.

8 respondents had four special classes.

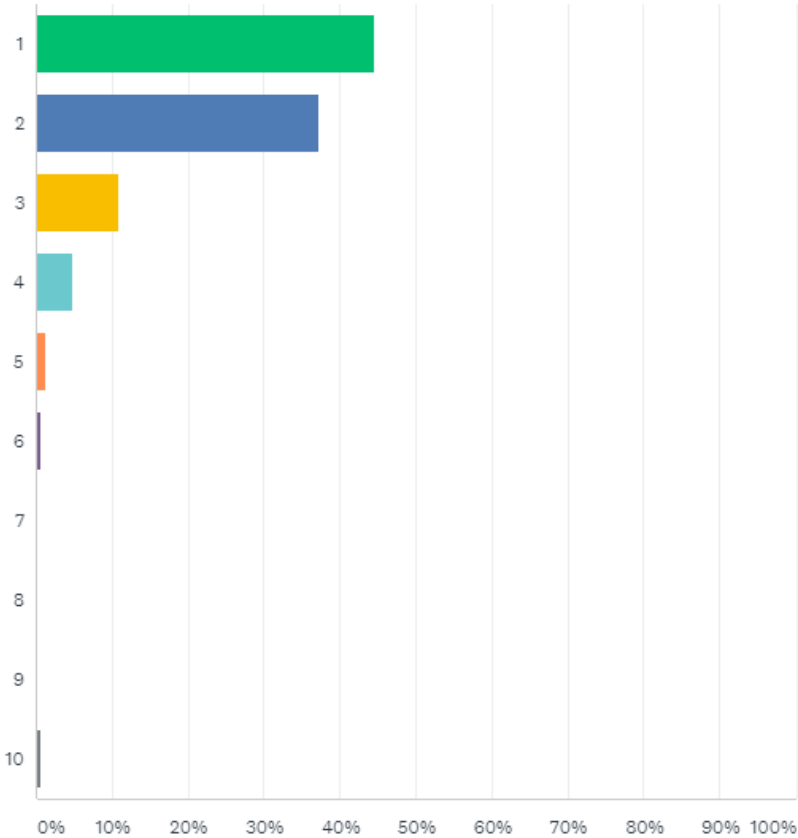
2 respondents had five special classes.

1 respondent had six special classes.

1 respondent had ten special classes.

Number of special classes in your school

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



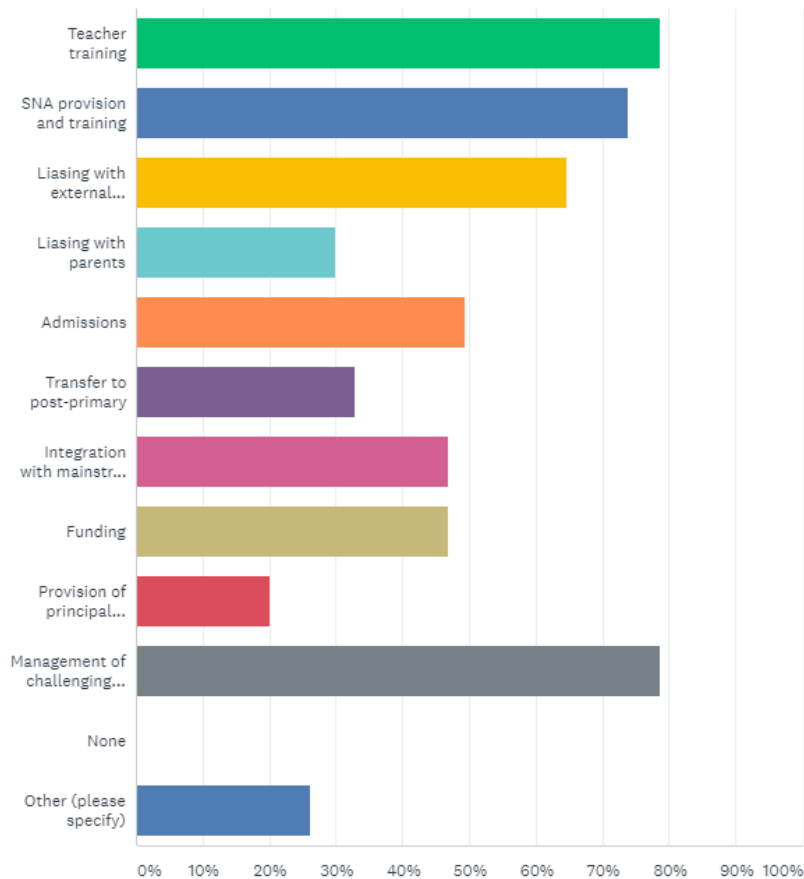
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ 1	44.51% 73
▼ 2	37.20% 61
▼ 3	10.98% 18
▼ 4	4.88% 8
▼ 5	1.22% 2
▼ 6	0.61% 1
▼ 7	0.00% 0
▼ 8	0.00% 0
▼ 9	0.00% 0
▼ 10	0.61% 1
TOTAL	164

Question 5

This question queried areas of concern for the management of the special class. This was a multiple choice question, respondents could indicate as many areas as they felt to be necessary.

Please indicate the areas listed below which you feel are areas of concern in the management of your special class(es)

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Teacher training	78.66% 129
▼ SNA provision and training	73.78% 121
▼ Liaising with external organisations	64.63% 106
▼ Liaising with parents	29.88% 49
▼ Admissions	49.39% 81
▼ Transfer to post-primary	32.93% 54
▼ Integration with mainstream classes	46.95% 77
▼ Funding	46.95% 77
▼ Provision of principal release days	20.12% 33
▼ Management of challenging behaviour	78.66% 129
▼ None	0.00% 0
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 26.22% 43
Total Respondents: 164	

The top two areas which schools find challenging are the management of challenging behaviour and teacher training.

Area of concern	Number of respondents	Percentage
Management of challenging behaviour	129	78.66%
Teacher training	129	78.66%
SNA provision and training	121	73.78%
Liaising with external organisations	106	64.63%
Admissions	81	49.39%
Integration with mainstream classes	77	46.95%
Funding	77	46.95%
Transfer to post-primary	54	32.93%
Liaising with parents	49	29.88%
Other	43	26.22%
Provision of principal release days	33	20.12%

The areas which were noted in the “other” category:

- Transport
- Suitability of children for placement in special class where integration will never materialise
- Difficulty accessing supports such as OT, NEPS, Speech and Language
- Lack of provision for substitute teachers for certain categories of absence
- Transfer to next educational placement (specifically mentioning transfer from ASD Early Intervention classes)
- Lack of purpose built facilities
- Training of staff to manage challenging behaviour and reduce the risk of harm to pupils and staff
- Increased workload on principals
- Willingness of teachers to teach special class without appropriate training

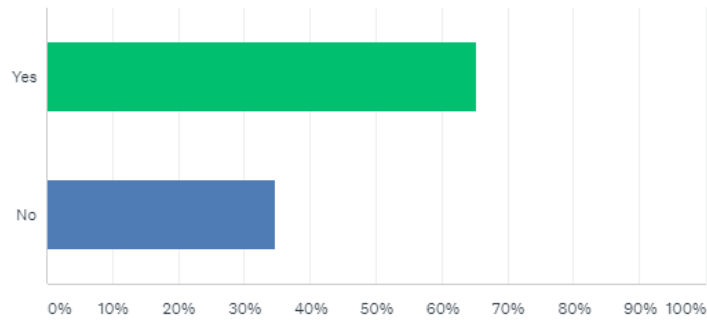
Question 6

65.24% of respondents (107) indicated that there is a waiting list for places in their special class(es).

34.76% of respondents (57) indicated that there is not a waiting list for places in their special class(es).

With regard to enrolment, is there a waiting list for places in your special class(es)?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	65.24%	107
No	34.76%	57
TOTAL		164

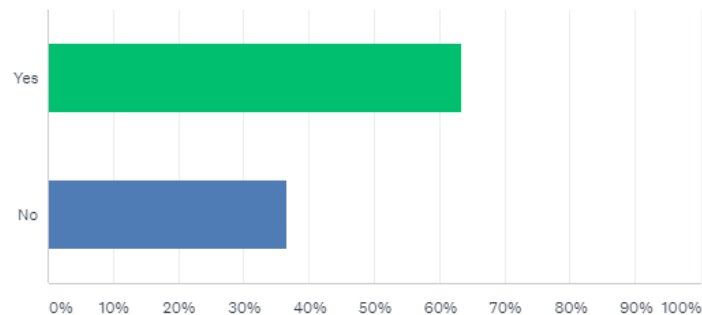
Question 7

63.41% of respondents (104) stated that they would recommend opening a special class to a colleague.

36.59% of respondents (60) stated that they would not recommend opening a special class to a colleague.

Would you recommend opening a special class to a colleague?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	63.41% 104
No	36.59% 60
TOTAL	164

Question 8

Question 8 asked for a reason for the respondents' answer regarding whether or not they would recommend opening a special class to a colleague.

The main reason given was inclusion of children with SEN, follow by the fact that the special class has had a positive impact on the school generally.

However, there were a number of concerns raised around the opening of a special class including:

- Managing challenging behaviour
- Difficulty accessing appropriate training for teachers and SNAs
- Difficulty accessing external supports such as Occupational Therapy, NEPS, Speech and Language Therapy
- Increased workload on principals, particularly teaching principals

Some quotes:

- The benefit it provides to the children and families involved far outweighs the workload attached to same. For many children, the only possible way they can attend school every day is because of the existence of a special class in a school.
- It is heartbreaking to see so many parents with no place [in a school] for their child. Despite the lack of funding, time, resources, training, time, time, time and time, I would open another 6 classes just to give the children places. Despite lack of training and lack of funds,

teachers and SNAs with empathy and passion to help children will do a better job than the child being put into a mainstream class where they cannot cope.

- Having special classes in our school allows a vision of inclusion to be truly implemented and celebrated. However, it is extremely hard work and does not receive the recognition, in terms of funding, support and resources, that is required.
- I would only recommend to a Principal to open if sanctioned two classes and therefore achieve Admin status. No administrative days given to establish class, meet parents, pupils, their external teams, purchase furniture, deal with builders, visit pupils current settings etc.
- There is no support with regard to enrolment policy, advice on school transport & bus escorts, and no additional allowance for the management of ancillary staff. While the inclusion of the children with ASD has been hugely positive for our school, it has been a very difficult & stressful time personally.
- It is almost like operating a separate school
- Violence in unit can be scary

Question 9

Question 9 was an open-ended question which asked “if there are any comments or observations which you wish to make regarding special classes, please indicate”.

The main issues raised related to:

- Difficulty accessing training for staff working in special classes
- Lack of support from outside agencies
- Management of challenging behaviour
- Funding for renovated buildings vs purpose-built settings
- Management of bus escorts
- Remuneration for principals who manage extra staff such as SNAs and bus escorts
- Increased workload for all principals, but particularly evident for teaching principals
- Parents’ experiences of public services, in general, in terms of seeking supports for their child, have often been quite poor and this leads parents to sometimes have a combative initial attitude to the provision of any public service for their child, including education.

Some quotes:

- I do not agree with the recent proposal to compel schools to take a special class as there is not an adequate support structure for schools
- The school as a whole has benefited from the ASD class. I feel we need more support for SNA's who are on the receiving end of a lot of physical assaults. This may become an issue in future times where I can see SNA's suing for injuries received eg broken nose, clot in arm due to bite, bang to the head, kicks and slaps to the face.
- The area of challenging behaviour must be addressed. Funding for training must be provided to schools in order for appropriate training to be given to Teachers and SNAs to deal appropriately and safely with instances of physical aggression.
- Huge additional workload for the principal given the needs of the pupils and the inevitable increase in personnel.
- I feel there should be financial remuneration for principals managing additional staff, ie SNAs, in special classes as there is a considerable workload attached to same.

- The area of challenging behaviour must be addressed. Funding for training must be provided to schools in order for appropriate training to be given to Teachers and SNAs to deal appropriately and safely with instances of physical aggression.