

## Department of Education, Sport and Culture

### Summary of Responses to the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Stakeholder Survey

April 2021

#### 1. Background

The purpose of the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Code of Practice is to give relevant public authorities (principally schools, UCM and aspects of the Department) guidance on how to discharge their statutory duties with regards to AEN once the Education Bill 2020 became law.

Although the Education Bill 2020 was withdrawn in February 2021, two months after the AEN Stakeholder Survey closed, work on the AEN Code of Practice continues with potential amendments to existing legislation to follow, pending the creation of a replacement Education Bill.

Responses from the survey, summarised below, have given the Department much to consider. Every open text response has been read by central DESC Special Needs staff and colleagues drafting sections of the AEN Code of Practice.

Due to the wide range of issues raised in the survey responses, the Department will be mindful of the feedback when undertaking future strategic planning, devising a Special Educational Needs training programme for schools and developing business cases for additional resources.

The Department would like to thank respondents for taking time to share their views.

#### 2. Summary of responses

The survey received 504 responses, with just over half (54%) from parents / guardians. The majority of other responses came from DESC staff. A small percentage (< 5%) were received from third sector organisations and other government agencies.

Circa 60% of respondents feel that existing SEN provision within school is not particularly effective at meeting children's learning and development needs, with only 1.6% feeling provision is very effective. Most feel that support and interventions are not effective (27%) or sometimes effective (53%) at enabling children to make appropriate progress.

When asked what prevents interventions from being effective, typical themes include; lack of funding/resources across DESC and DHSC, insufficiently trained staff, and lack of flexibility/capacity within schools. Exemplar comments include:

*Not enough specially qualified staff to educate the individual disabled person, everyone is just helpers in the classroom with one teacher who seems to always be tied up with paperwork (Parent/carer)*

*It is not the interventions that are the problem it is the ability to deliver the interventions effectively that is the problem in most schools. Lack of funding, lack of support staff and too much responsibility placed on the class teacher to meet the needs of every single child mean that 'interventions' are often ineffective (Primary Teacher)*

Asked what could be done to improve SEN support and provision, increased funding, earlier intervention, training and enhanced multi-agency working were highlighted by circa 60% of respondents. Comments include:

*The most effective resource is people. Having more people working within the right roles within schools can only support the individual needs of students. Of course, this is a funding issue and while I have appreciation that this is an issue, we must now move towards building effective teams around the most vulnerable children within our community (Primary Teacher)*

*All staff need to have understanding of special educational needs for integrated learning frameworks to work (Parent / carer)*

Approximately 45% of respondents feel that schools are not successful at identifying SEN early. When asked what prevents early identification, responses include:

*Possibly class sizes, definitely the rest. SENCOs are all usually full-time class teachers in addition to their SENCO role and so cannot dedicate the time needed to efficiently support all staff and children. Waiting times can be over a year for certain specialists and the paperwork to get support is long and over zealous. Intervention needs to be put in place early and so EYFS and KS1 teachers need additional training (Primary teacher)*

*The role of family support workers and the link to Department of Health EHAS needs to be examined. A lot of work that could be done at an early stage or ongoing throughout a child's education would help some children make progress academically and socially and potentially improve outcomes for a significant group of young people (Primary teacher)*

Respondents are generally positive about opportunities to involve parents in decisions regarding SEN that affect their family, with circa 60% rating their response 3 - 5, with 5 meaning very well involved. However, 35% did not feel well involved. And only circa 15% felt that children and young people are particularly well involved in decisions that affect them, with almost 50% of respondents feeling that children and young people are not well involved.

Some 50% of respondents stated that it is not easy to understand current SEN processes and procedures, with only 10% agreeing that SEN processes are easy / very easy to understand.

Respondents generally feel that schools and UCM have high expectations of children and young people with SEN (circa 63%).

The survey asked stakeholders about transition planning from pre-school to primary and primary to secondary, and secondary to post-16 education provision. Most respondents (circa 60%) are broadly satisfied at each transition point, although only circa 10% felt that transitions were very well planned, and only circa 43% were satisfied or better with post-16 transition planning.

When asked what single change would positively impact on SEN provision for children and young people, 49% identified additional provision followed by multi-agency working by 14% of respondents. Comments included:

*There needs to be a vision from the department and development to support the system. No one seems to care. Parents are left fighting for their children. Health and Education should have better links (Parent/carer)*

*Additional staffing in order support pupils fully not try to slot them in to something available, education should be based on individual needs (Parent/carer)*

*The majority of students, staff and parents try their best. There needs to be significantly more investment in staffing and increased recognition of the intense workload required (UCM staff)*

Finally, respondents were asked what could make our education system more inclusive. Representative comments from schools include:

*Provision is already inclusive, inclusion is not the issue. The issue is that specialist advice, training, intervention, support and provision does not exist due to lack of funding, lack of staffing, and lack of training available for teachers. Children with SEN often require personalised interventions to help them succeed within their 'inclusive' environments however their class teachers are not given the resources that they need to be able to do this effectively (Primary teacher)*

*Early intervention is key. We need improved interagency working to support children with social and emotional difficulties. More training for key staff. More recognition of the needs of schools in areas of disadvantage where ACES [Adverse Childhood Experiences] can present with social and emotional difficulties (Primary teacher)*

*More specialist staff in school to cater for students with diverse needs. There simply is not enough staff to support the level of demand from SEN student needs; In mainstream class or in small group support set ups...Train staff up to deal with the increased levels of mental health issues eg self harming, anxiety and depression. More counselling services are needed - especially on site... (Secondary teacher)*

Representative comments from parents include:

*More staff and more funding to support children. Much more training for staff (Teachers, SESO, ESO, Lunchtime support) to understand the needs of the children coming into their class/environment. Much better communication with parents who have children on the SEN register (Parent / carer)*

*Flexibility and fluidity for SEN children so a bespoke education can be achieved which results in a needs led education system as opposed to trying to fit a square peg into a small round hole (Parent / carer)*

Other notable comments from respondents have involved praise for individual schools and practitioners, experiences of interaction with other agencies across government and issues concerning particular areas of SEN including autism and literacy difficulties.

### **3. Key themes arising**

Key themes arising from the AEN Stakeholder Survey are:

- **Funding / provision** - there is a broad consensus across stakeholders that there is insufficient funding for SEN / AEN support, which itself is linked to schools having sufficient capacity and flexibility to implement plans and provision to meet needs in mainstream.

- **Training / integrated working** - respondents generally feel there is insufficient specialist SEN related training available to teachers and support staff where mainstream is concerned. Some of this specialist training involves Health and Social Care related skills.
- **Engagement, involvement, advice and guidance** - stakeholders do not always feel well engaged and involved in matters regarding SEN/AEN, particularly due to a lack of information and opaque framework

#### **4. Next Steps**

The Department is:

- Integrating actions related to the AEN Survey feedback into the Department's new Strategic Plan, and within relevant Divisional Plans
- Reviewing SEN funding with a view to preparing a business case for additional resources, subject to Treasury approval
- Undertaking a Literacy review, with a view to creating a specific Literacy Strategy (a project which has overlapped with the AEN Survey)
- Devising a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (a project which has overlapped with the AEN Survey)
- Seeking to establish a multi-agency Complex Needs Working Group with DHSC (a project which has overlapped with the AEN Survey)

In the meantime, the Department will continue to draft the AEN Code of Practice, making specific reference to themes raised in the Stakeholder Survey.