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RESEARCH BRIEFING

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THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF BILINGUAL (IRISH-ENGLISH) CHILDREN

KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ 17% of pupils in Irish medium (IM) primary and post-primary settings are recorded as experiencing special educational needs (SEN). 5% of children in IM at the pre-school phase are recorded as experiencing SEN. At just under 1%, the number of IM pupils across all phases with statements of SEN is around a quarter of the overall percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN in all sectors.
- ◆ As in all schools, IM schools rely heavily on teachers' professional judgement in the identification of SEN. IM teachers report that they feel uneasy about making judgements about pupils with SEN and particularly when they are not supported by standardised tests in Irish. The proportion of young, inexperienced teachers is greater in the IM than in any other sector. Some Educational psychologists indicate concern at the low level of referrals to them from the IM sector.

- ◆ There is a need for greater awareness of SEN across the IM sector but especially at the post-primary phase where half of all respondents reported minimal or no understanding of the Code of Practice.
- ◆ Overall, responses from the IM sector indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with SEN-related support services for pupils who require additional support with their learning. Most respondents (74%) from the IM primary phase indicated their dissatisfaction with current SEN provision, 38% of respondents from pre-school phase and 34% from post-primary phase indicated they are unhappy with the provision.
- ◆ There is an apparent lack of sufficient time for some SENCOs to address SEN issues. This is an area which schools should address as part of the school's capacity building and to enable SENCOs to identify and monitor pupil progress over time.
- ◆ Most of the educational psychologists interviewed believe that the assessment of cognitive ability and numeracy skills through the medium of English provides an accurate profile of pupils in the IM sector whose first language is English. The assessment of children whose first language is Irish is less straightforward. They are aware that care must be taken when assessing bilingual children using assessment tools designed for monolingual English-speaking pupils and report that the absence of standardised tests in Irish is a challenge for them.
- ◆ Almost three quarters of educational psychologists in this study said that they would welcome and benefit from training on the IM sector, a better understanding and awareness of IM sector in general, of pupils' needs, and improved understanding of approaches taken to literacy in Irish and English in IM schools.
- ◆ More guidance, based on research and best practice, is needed as to the timing of the beginning of formal study of English and the place of English in addressing the additional needs of SEN pupils.
- ◆ The most common source of SEN training reported to the research team was Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Given the relative youth and inexperience of the IM sector and the fact that teachers are expected to take on additional responsibilities at a much earlier stage than in other sectors, ITE providers for the IM sector must ensure that SEN is treated as a priority.

- ◆ A majority of respondents from the pre-school phase report that effective support is provided by early years agencies such as Altram, the Early Years Organisation and SureStart. Almost half rated SEN support from IM primary schools as effective, less than a quarter found speech and language therapy and educational psychology services effective.
- ◆ In the primary and post-primary phases, just over half of the respondents found SEN support from ELB Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and IM CASS effective. Primary respondents found SEN support from educational psychology, behavioural support and peripatetic support services to be effective.
- ◆ Respondents indicate a need for IM-specific support which takes account of the challenges and complexities of identification and assessment of SEN and teaching the curriculum through the medium of a second language in an immersion education programme.
- ◆ IM sector teachers generally have issues with services only delivered in English and feel that they don't fully meet the needs of the children. Non-teaching educational professionals hold that the language of delivery of courses ought not to prevent IM teachers from attending courses, which are generic and that strategies can be adapted to the IM situation. Course providers must ensure that resources are made available in Irish. IM teachers note a need for more, regular, IM-specific training to equip them to identify and make appropriate provision for pupils who require additional help in the context of the IM immersion education sector.
- ◆ Schools report a lack of literacy resources including a graded reading scheme in Irish. In particular they mentioned the need for resources designed to support teachers in all areas of SEN, especially for older pupils who experience difficulties with literacy.
- ◆ Classroom assistants (CAs) offer valuable support to children experiencing SEN. CAs need more training and development in the area of SEN to maximise this support. Some CAs employed specifically to support children with SEN feel they are used too often to carry out administrative and clerical duties and few of them are involved in lesson planning. Parents raised concerns about situations where children regularly had to be taken from school early when the CA was absent and reported that this had a negative impact on the children's self-esteem.

- Parents of children with SEN were generally satisfied with the efforts of schools to address their children's needs and valued the support of external agencies. However, the matter of home or hospital tuition for pupils from IM schools who have to spend long periods of time in hospital, or at home, as a result of health problems is causing concern. Additionally, parents whose children have transferred from the IM sector reported feelings of frustration that they were being dissuaded by health and education professionals from pursuing IM education for their child, as a result of the child's additional needs. Further, there is a need for IM schools to engage more purposefully with parents in order to support the children's learning.

INTRODUCTION

1. International literature highlights the cognitive, social and cultural benefits of bilingualism for children and young people who experience special educational needs (SEN). Researchers recognise the importance of the additional opportunities and skills which bilingualism offers children and young people who face certain challenges in life as a result of their additional needs (Döpke, 2005 and Cummins, 2000). However, in spite of a growing body of evidence in support of the advantages of bilingualism for children with special educational needs, international literature cites examples of parents of bilingual children experiencing learning difficulties who have been advised by professionals to raise their children monolingually (Baker, 2007).
2. Most children in Irish medium schools come from English-speaking families, with a small number coming from bilingual (Irish – English) and a few from Irish-speaking, families. It has been reported that some pupils in Irish medium (IM) schools have left IM education to be educated in an English medium (EM) mainstream or special education settings, as a result of SEN issues (Mhic Aoidh, 2004 and Nic Annaidh, 2005).
3. The publication of the *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (the Code of Practice) in September 1998 (Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 1998) and subsequent introduction of the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Order* (SENDO) in September 2005 enshrine in law the obligation on all schools and Education and Library Boards (ELBs), to meet the needs of pupils who require additional help and support with their learning, and reaffirm the role of parents as partners in the process of identification of, and provision for, their children's needs. In light of the responsibilities on mainstream schools to take reasonable steps to make appropriate provision for pupils with SEN, IM settings, equally, have a responsibility to provide inclusive education which takes account of the individual learning needs and styles of all pupils and makes mainstream immersion education through the medium of Irish accessible to all those who desire it.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

4. The aims of this research project are:
 - a. to identify the special educational needs of bilingual children;
 - b. to investigate the support needs of bilingual children and their parents;
 - c. to recommend the structures which need to be put in place within the appropriate sectors;
 - d. to inform future planning based on projections of growth in the IM education sector;
 - e. to raise awareness among professionals of the specific requirements of bilingual (Irish – English) children with special needs; and
 - f. to provide a benchmark for professionals within the appropriate sectors in their attempts to improve provision.

5. The project's original aims reflected POBAL's vision for a wide-ranging study on the specific requirements of Irish – English speaking children from 0 to 18 and their families, including those of Irish-speaking children with special educational and health needs. It was decided, in consultation with DE, to alter the focus of the research from children 0 to 18 to children 3 to 16 in IM education, and to identify the specific needs of Irish-speaking children who experience SEN, and the needs of their parents.

MAIN FINDINGS

(References to relevant paragraphs in the main report are included in brackets.)

IRISH-MEDIUM SECTOR'S CAPACITY IN PROVIDING FOR SEN CHILDREN

6. During data collection 55% of IM sector teachers had 5 or less years teaching experience. (4.9.44)

7. Around 17% of pupils in IM primary and post-primary settings are recorded as experiencing SEN and three most frequently reported SEN are: moderate learning difficulties (35%), mild learning difficulties (19%) and SEBD (15%). (4.1.4)

8. There is a greater diversity of needs in the IM primary phase than the post-primary phase. (4.1.7, 10)
9. Overall, just less than 1% of pupils in the IM sector have a statement of SEN which is around a quarter of the overall percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN in other sectors. (4.1.15)
10. Almost three times as many boys than girls in the IM sector have a statement of SEN (4.1.15) and ASD represents the most frequently cited category of need among those with statements. (4.1.16)
11. The percentage of key stage 2 IM pupils recorded on the SEN register is closest to the norm of the percentage recorded in other sectors however there is a lower percentage of IM pupils, in relation to the norm across all sectors, on the SEN register at pre-school, foundation stage and at years 10, 11 and 12. (4.1.2)
12. As is the case in other sectors, there are about ten times as many pupils recorded on stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice as there are recorded on stages 4 and 5. (4.1.3)
13. Just over half of IM sector pupils on the SEN register present with moderate or mild learning difficulties with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) being the other significant category of SEN recorded. (4.1.7, 10)
14. Speech and Language difficulties constitute 59% of the SEN reported in the IM pre-school phase. (4.1.14)
15. Cognitive and Learning is the largest SEN area reported in IM primary settings which resonates strongly with the picture for primary settings for all sectors. Areas of SEN not recorded in the post-primary IM sector are Communication and Interaction, Medical Conditions/Syndromes and Physical. (4.1.5-6, 8, 10)
16. A number of IM schools are proactive in providing additional support to pupils who require it through withdrawal arrangements with the SENCO, SEN teacher and, in some cases, a CA. (4.3.42-5)
17. A range of strategies and resources in use to support SEN pupils include Emotional Literacy (The School of Emotional Literacy, 2008), speech and language programmes, *Primary Movements* (Primary Movement, 2008), *Reading Recovery* (Clay, 2002) and *Jolly Phonics* (Lloyd, 2005.) Schools

also use resources in Irish such as *Fónaic na Gaeilge* (BELB, 2005), *Áis Mheasúnaithe sa Luathlitearthacht* (Clay and Nig Uidhir, 2007), and speech and language resources (Blacksheep Press, 2008). However with few SEN resources in Irish, IM teachers create their own resources including reading books and accompanying resources, worksheets and games. Most additional support focuses on literacy, through the medium of Irish or English or through both, as required. (4.3.39-40, 49)

18. The effective and valued additional support of CAs benefits SEN pupils' work and self-confidence and teachers' work, while offering an additional source of Irish but adequate training and professional development for CAs in SEN is vital in maximising support provided, since CAs are often young people with little experience or training in SEN support. Almost two thirds of CAs involved in this study who are not specifically employed to assist SEN pupils actually do so and need training in order to understand their role. (4.4.2, 6-10, 19, 24-5, 27, 29)
19. A small number of SENCOs expressed concern that the time spent supporting pupils is limited owing to other duties in the school. (4.4.23)
20. The vast majority of SENCOs in the study were not involved at all in lesson planning while the majority of CAs are involved to some extent in this work with a further 14% involved a lot. (4.4.30)

Specific issues in pre-school phase

21. Almost half of pre-school respondents claimed that additional assistance in the setting was needed but it is challenging to recruit suitably qualified staff with both childcare qualifications and Irish language proficiency. Those who are recruited with a less than desirable level of Irish proficiency can burden other staff. A high rate of turnover in staff exists which militates against long-term SEN plans. Their greatest needs are recorded as resources to support their work, funding for resources and appropriate accommodation. (4.11.3-8, 20, 23)

Specific issues in primary phase

22. Almost all respondents at primary level claim to have either a full or general understanding of the Code of Practice, the stages of the Code, and all in the case of the in-school referral process. There is a significant difference

between reported levels of understanding in IM primary and IM post-primary phases, where a significant proportion of respondents indicated little or no understanding of the Code of Practice and of in-school referral procedures. A much greater percentage of respondents from the post-primary phase (50%) reported having minimal or no understanding of the referral procedures involved when making a referral to educational psychology and for a statutory assessment, than those in the primary phase (16%). Some responses from educational psychologists give the impression that there should be more referrals to them from the IM sector. (4.7.13-8)

23. The vast majority (87%) of IM primary settings in the study have a SENCO with 27% of them having no Irish language proficiency (in IM units). The range of teaching experience of SENCOs in IM primary units is from six to twenty years with 60% of them classroom teachers and 70% of them serving on SMTs. In IM primary schools a third of SENCOs have fewer than five years teaching experience and three quarters of them are classroom teachers and serve on SMTs. A significant majority of SENCOs in IM primary settings have less than four hours per week for SEN duties. The majority (77%) of SENCOs received professional development for the post as SENCO and almost one third accessed additional qualifications in SEN. (4.6.2-3, 5-9)

Specific issues in post-primary phase

24. All IM post-primary settings have a SENCO, one of which is proficient in Irish, two of them are members of school management teams. Two of the three post-primary settings reported that the SENCO is a class teacher. Each SENCO had a particular timetable for SEN duties, one had 11-15 hours per week while another had 21-25 hours per week. The remaining setting did not detail hours spent on SEN duties. One SENCO had 6-10 years of teaching experience and the other two SENCOs had twenty-one years or more. Two SENCOs received training for the post and one SENCO had obtained additional qualifications in SEN. (4.6.11-3)
25. One IM post-primary setting established a SEN support centre operating in September 2008 appointing a coordinator and SEN staff. (4.3.50)

EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY FOR THE IM SECTOR

26. A high percentage of IM schools are currently accessing SEN support for pupils who require additional help with aspects of their learning. The most accessed service in IM pre-school settings were social worker services, in primary it was the educational psychologists' service and all three post-primary settings reported using the educational psychologists, outreach, educational welfare and social worker services. (4.5.2)
27. The percentage of CAs who reported that they had received SEN-related training is smaller than the percentage of IM pre-school staff and primary and post-primary teachers. (4.10.7)
28. While a significant majority (81%) of the educational psychologists in this study indicated that they had a full or general understanding of bilingualism, just over half of them claimed that they had a full or general understanding of the IM sector . While 31% of them received training in bilingualism, only 5% had minimal training on the IM sector and for the most part, believe that current assessment practices provide an accurate profile of pupils whose first language is English and that they generally understand IM pupils' needs. (4.5. 20-1, 23-4)
29. Educational psychologists are unable to assess pupils' literacy progress in Irish owing to the lack of assessment materials in Irish which may result in a delay in the provision of appropriate support. Three major challenges to their work in IM sector they cited included personal Irish language competence (24%), the lack of assessment material in Irish (20%) and accurate diagnosis of learning difficulties (12%) (4.5.27). They aim to minimize challenges to their work by: cooperating with members of staff, the use of non-verbal assessment instruments, considering theories of bilingualism and immersion. (4.5.29).
30. Responses indicate a need for further awareness raising among health and education professionals in respect of the ethos and pedagogies of the IM sector in order to improve provision for pupils who received some part of their primary education in an IM school and are now being educated in an EM primary or post-primary setting. A large majority of educational psychologists (72%) said that they would benefit from training on the IM sector in terms of: improved understanding and awareness of IM sector, improved understanding of pupils' needs, increased understanding of

assessment practices and improved understanding of approaches taken to literacy in Irish and English in IM sector. (4.5.22-3)

31. Recommendations to support the work of educational psychologists in the study included standardized assessments in Irish, improving their personal Irish language skills, training on IM pedagogy, a family liaison officer, afterschool support for children with no Irish at home, additional resources in Irish, and peripatetic and outreach support services through the medium of Irish. (4.5.30)
32. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the support provided by SEN-related support services in terms of providing appropriate support for pupils in IM education. Reasons offered include the current lack of: provision of support service in Irish, understanding of IM sector among professionals and, resources and assessment materials in Irish. (4.5.9)
33. In the primary and post-primary phases, a quarter of those who rendered SEN provision satisfactory (23% at primary and 35% at post-primary), quoted external support services, however 21% referred to the knowledge and expertise of teachers in schools and 21% to the availability of in-school support for pupils. (4.2.4)
34. Concerns regarding current SEN provision relate to professional development for practitioners at all levels, the provision of appropriate assessment procedures and support services for pupils who require additional support with their learning; assessment materials, and the provision of sufficient financial, human, and educational resources to meet the needs of pupils receiving their education through the medium of Irish. (4.2.4-5)
35. Aspects of current IM provision are deemed satisfactory namely: ethos; good relationships between pupils and teachers, between teachers and parents and between IM schools; access to support services; and the expertise, experience, and diligence of teachers in the IM sector. However, overall, a high level of dissatisfaction with current provision for SEN pupils in the IM sector is reported, especially in the primary phase. (4.2.2-3)

Findings in the pre-school phase

36. Of the 39% of those who rated SEN provision satisfactory, 67% referred to the availability of external support as a positive aspect. Of the 38% of those

who rated SEN provision unsatisfactory, the main reasons (among others) they quoted involved the lack of: appropriate provision (20%), qualified Irish-speaking staff (20%), external support (13%) and information (13%). (4.2.3, 6)

37. A large majority rated the support from other staff and the leader effective, support from early years agencies is deemed effective by a majority while 23% found SLT and educational psychology services effective. Almost half rated SEN support from IM primary schools effective but a significant minority reported no experience of support from that source or from Behavioural or Peripatetic Support Services. (4.9.2-5)
38. IM voluntary playgroups are not able to access ELB-based support services but would welcome information regarding where to access professional SEN support. (4.9.5, 24-5, 27-9)

Findings in the primary phase

39. 75% had received formal training on SEN and the most frequently cited professional development was during ITE. Training in Reading Recovery English and Irish should be available for more IM teachers. (4.10.10, 12, 30)
40. The vast majority rated SEN support of principal and other staff effective and 45% described SEN support from other IM schools in the same way. Less than half found SEN support from principals and teachers in EM schools effective and the same percentage indicated no experience of support from that source. Just over half found SEN support from CASS and IM CASS effective. 69% found SEN support from educational psychology effective, behavioural support (46%) and peripatetic support services (55%). The same percentage of respondents found SLT services effective as found it ineffective (32%) and 40% found Occupational Therapy services effective. (4.9.8-12)
41. Guidance, based on national and international research and best practice is needed as to the timing of the beginning of formal study of English and the place of English in addressing the additional needs of SEN pupils. (4.9.49)

Findings in the post-primary phase

42. Although 90% of them received professional development in SEN, primary teachers availed of a wider range of training providers than their post-primary colleagues. (4.10.11-2)
43. A large majority (71%) found SEN support from principal and other teachers in school effective while 70% of them reported that they have not experienced SEN support from other IM schools or that it was not available to them. 67% of them reported no experience or access to SEN support from principals and teachers in EM schools. (4.9.13-4)
44. Almost half found CASS services effective in SEN support and 24% found IM CASS who interweave SEN support into their work, an effective source of SEN support. 44% rated the support of behavioural support services effective, 34% for educational psychology and 27% for peripatetic support services. Over half (53%) had no experience of SLT services and 61% of occupational therapy services which is reflected in the percentages for rating them effective: SLT (17%) and occupational therapy (9%). (4.9.15-7, 23)

Issues across the primary and post primary phases

45. Although the principal outcome of SEN training for teachers was an improved understanding of the needs of pupils, training did not take the IM situation into account, was more theoretical than practical and was not followed up on. Need exists for training in early identification of SEN in IM education with the bilingual dynamic and in the range of complexities within the immersion context and in strategies for meeting the needs of pupils. (4.10.19, 27)
46. The biggest obstacles to professional development are finding substitute cover, time to attend training and availability of suitable courses and accessing professional development courses even after school hours is difficult due to need to travel sometimes long distances. (4.10.42-3)
47. A number of practitioners from the IM sector access the generic SEN support services available to them, for example, CASS, educational psychology, behavioural support etc. and indicated their appreciation of support services which take account of the IM sector and providers who are willing to work with IM practitioners to provide resources in Irish. However, indications are that the most frequently cited sources of SEN support come from within

school settings. IM sector may need to become more aware of the services available to them but, understandably, IM schools have issues with services delivered to the IM sector only in English. . (4.9.14, 4.9.19 – 4.9.23)

48. Other issues are around: advice and guidance regarding SEN in the IM sector, the identification of SEN, support for teachers in recently established schools, support for newly and recently qualified teachers, communication between teachers and external professionals, the issue of English language and literacy and bi-literacy for pupils with SEN in IM education and appropriate provision for pupils in IM settings in areas of social disadvantage. There is a need for IM-specific support which takes account of the challenges and complexities of identification and assessment of SEN and teaching the curriculum through the medium of a second language in an immersion education programme. (4.9.31-52)
49. Non-teaching educational professionals insist that the language of delivery of courses ought not to prevent IM teachers from attending courses, that courses are generic and that strategies can be adapted to the IM situation (4.10.14). Although training is in English, it is relevant in equipping teachers with holistic skills to help those who need specialised help. (4.10.33)
50. IM teachers want practical, appropriate resources in Irish which are ready for use in the classroom and one outreach centre provides tailored, appropriate effective SEN support for the IM sector. (4.9.19-22)
51. A high percentage of IM sector teachers have received some form of training on SEN. IM teachers need to be encouraged to avail of ELB opportunities for SEN training. (4.10.32-3)
52. While respondents found training useful, they highlighted a need for regular, IM-specific training to equip them to identify and make appropriate provision for pupils who require additional help. (4.10.7, 17-20)
53. Of the respondents who rated SEN provision unsatisfactory, the main reasons involved the lack of: resources in Irish (28%), assessment tools (21%), services in Irish (15%) and appropriate support (10%). (4.2.7)
54. Other issues cited were: equality of access to appropriate support for SEN pupils in IM, the unfairness of using English language assessment when formal study of English literacy only begins at year 4, the lack of formal support through Irish and of expertise in the support services (4.2.9); lack of parity of treatment and availability of services across both IM and EM

sectors, the 'one size fits all' approach in support services as far as suitability for the IM sector is concerned; the unfairness of the non-existence of assessment materials for IM pupils' contexts (4.2.10); the inappropriateness of current in-school provision for SEN pupils in IM sector; the tailoring of in-class teaching in addressing SEN pupils' needs; the enormity of the problem (4.2.11); SEN pupils are expected to engage with a wide range of learning areas, both at primary and post-primary phases, through the medium of a second language; SEN pupils with an additional learning area but without additional help (4.2.12-3); a planned, structured strategy is needed to bring about appropriate support system and close the gaps (4.2.15); frustration of teachers trying to meet the needs of SEN pupils in class with the resources available to them. (4.2.16)

55. The percentages of respondents satisfied with SEN services working in the IM sector were: pre-school: 11%; primary: 34% and post-primary: 22%. The percentages for no experience of using SEN services were: pre-school (54%); primary (12%) and post-primary (37%). (4.5.3)
56. Satisfaction at pre-school level stems, for half of the respondents, from the availability of support, at primary and post-primary, two thirds cited availability and one third were satisfied with contact kept with teachers. (4.5.6)
57. Of those who reported services as unsatisfactory, one third cited the lack of services in Irish and one fifth each cited the lack of contact with teachers and of appropriate resources in Irish. (4.5.9)

Classroom assistants

58. Few qualified CAs with Irish language proficiency are available. (4.11.12)
59. Responses from CAs and teachers indicate a need for SEN training in appropriate strategies for CAs, particularly those who are employed to provide specific support for SEN pupils. The data highlight access to SEN training as a key issue for CAs. CAs desire training in order to improve provision for SEN pupils, a point also highlighted about them by teachers and educational professionals. Nevertheless, the obstacles to them developing themselves in SEN issues include the availability of courses for CAs, the times and days of courses, school budget or personal financial matters. (4.10.35-8, 44)

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

60. IM Teachers still spend a significant amount of time and energy in creating resources including SEN resources and thus adequate and appropriate resourcing for SEN is seen as a significant need in the IM sector. (4.11.1, 34)

Issues across the primary and post-primary phases

61. Often adequate provision for SEN is heavily reliant on school budget, and this can cause problems in IM schools because they tend to be quite small. (4.11.17)
62. There still are significantly less support materials available in Irish for SEN than there are available in English. (4.11.27)
63. For the most part, satisfaction with generic resources in Irish was indicated however, the significant need for Irish language resources in SEN provision specifically and in terms of use in classroom and by professionals working with IM pupils who require additional help is highlighted. Additional hours and training for CAs, resources, peripatetic support and standardised tests/assessment tools are cited as the four major areas for improvement in respect of SEN. Nevertheless, budgetary issues and funding influence the type and quality of provision that schools can make for SEN pupils. (4.11.9, 10, 24-5, 27)
64. Those experiencing difficulties in their learning need to be considered in the level and type of language used in resources for the IM sector. There remains a need for a graded reading scheme in Irish to promote decoding, recognition of high-frequency words and word repetition and for materials to support older pupils who experience difficulties in the acquisition of literacy skills. (4.11.28, 30-2)
65. The computer was widely highlighted as a great motivator for SEN children in the IM sector. (4.11.33)

Education professionals

66. A quarter of non-teaching education professionals raised the issue of peripatetic or outreach support, through the medium of Irish, for pupils who require additional help with their learning. (4.11.18)

PARENTS AND THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN THE IM SECTOR

67. Parents are generally happy with the in-school support for their children including class teachers, CAs (when highly fluent in Irish) and external support and they recognise the additional skills that IM education gives SEN children but are anxious about the length of time in identifying and addressing additional needs, and in making referrals. (4.8. 2-3, 5, 7-8, 10, 21)
68. Parents of SEN children reported being dissuaded by non-teaching professionals from speaking Irish to them or sending them to IM schools and described the anxiety for both child and parents when a child leaves the sector. They also expressed the wish for greater understanding amongst health and education professionals of IM education and bilingualism and that Irish-speaking professionals should be assigned to IM schools and information should be shared across health and education professionals. (4.8.19, 20, 22)
69. Continuity in teaching children through the medium of Irish when sick at home or in hospital is desirable (4.8.14, 16).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

IRISH-MEDIUM SECTOR'S CAPACITY IN PROVIDING FOR SEN CHILDREN

Recommendation 1: Awareness of Code of Practice Procedures

70. SEN should be given an even higher priority across all phases in the IM sector. (4.1.2, 5-6, 8, 10)

Recommendation 2: Placing pupils on SEN Register

71. In consultation with SENCOs, IM teachers should ensure pupils are placed on Stage 1 of the Code of Practice at the point of concern, to ensure additional help, and a faster referral process to external support and in moving those pupils on who should move to Stages 4 and 5. (4.7-3, 15, 18; 4.7.18)

Recommendation 3: Cross-phase/sector collaboration in IM sector

72. There should be greater cross-phase and sector collaboration, liaison and sharing of information: for example in terms of expertise, approaches, strategies, planning, pooling of SEN resources, exploiting ICT as an excellent motivator in SEN pupils' learning and evaluating, on SEN issues on a cross-phase basis, among classroom assistants, CAs and SENCOs, teachers, SENCOs, heads of departments and principals in the IM sector. (4.1.2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10; 4.9.13; 4.11.33, 35)

Recommendation 4: SENCOs in IM settings

73. SENCOs should ensure effective dissemination of information on SEN issues and offer support to all staff. School structures should be established to ensure that SEN support in Irish is available in every IM setting, including the possibility of sharing SENCOs and SEN teachers. In those IM schools where the SENCO is not a member of the SMT, the SENCO should ensure, in cooperation with the principal, that SEN is given an appropriately high priority in the school (4.10.26; 4.6.2, 3, 4, 5).

EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY IN PROVIDING FOR THE IM SECTOR

Recommendation 5: DE policies on SEN in IM schools

74. DE should ensure SEN-related policies are fit-for-purpose for the Irish medium sector. These SEN policies should be informed by SEN research and practices in immersion education internationally, utilise best practice, ensure support for parents of IM SEN children and promote informed

decisions about IM SEN pupils' education. (4.2.9-16; 4.5.9; 4.8.20, 22, 19, 26).

Recommendation 6: The Review of SEN and Inclusion and further research

75. DE should ensure that the needs of the IM sector are reflected, and taken account of in DE's ongoing Review of SEN and Inclusion.

Recommendation 7: Ensuring informed decisions about IM pupils

76. DE should cooperate and collaborate on IM SEN issues with other governmental departments and service providers which influence the quality of IM pupils' learning and whose workers make or contribute to decisions on pupils with SEN, to ensure that those decisions are made on an informed basis. (4.8.14, 16, 19, 20, 22,).

Recommendation 8: Building capacity in support services

77. DE should encourage and collaborate with ESA, to conduct audits on Irish language proficiency and knowledge of bilingual education among all SEN service providers to IM settings. They should ensure their services are fit-for-purpose and should take action to ensure they have sufficient capacity and have regard for children taught through the medium of Irish. (4.5.9, 20-23, 30).

Recommendation 9: Dissemination of best practice across phases in IM sector

78. DE should encourage and collaborate with ESA to facilitate research-led CPD, communication and dissemination of best practice relating to identification and recording of SEN, referral and assessment procedures, among others, at all phases, through C2K and LNI including the utilisation of new media. (4.2.9, 10, 15; 4.5; 4.9.13-15; 4.10.).

Recommendation 10: Ensuring informed decisions in assessing SEN pupils in IM settings

79. DE should encourage and collaborate with ESA in ensuring that decisions made about IM pupils who present with SEN are informed using a broad profile of assessment, to ensure equity of response between IM and EM sectors (4.2; 4.5; 4.3.15-16).

Recommendation 11: SEN in Teacher Education and in Classroom Assistant Training

80. DE policy should collaborate with DEL in order to encourage HEIs to further develop 'SEN studies on IM pathways' in ITE programmes and in early teacher professional development.
81. There should be development of accredited development programmes for bilingual ancillary staff, to allow them to work alongside such providers as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists in IM settings; and for CAs to provide them with the necessary training in childcare, SEN, and the Irish language. (4.6.6, 8, 9; 4.3.39, 40, 49; 4.4.6-9, 19, 24-5; 4.10.16; 4.11.10,11,12; 4.3.33, 37, 50; 4.9.33, 35, 49; 4.10.31)

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Recommendation 12: Coordinating IM teachers' CPD with availability of Irish language SEN resources

82. ESA should facilitate and coordinate the development of professional resources in Irish for EPD and CPD for IM teachers. ESA should ensure that resource providers are appropriately equipped, through ring-fenced resourcing, to adapt and create fit-for-purpose SEN support resources in Irish. (4.11.9, 20, 23, 24-5, 27)

Recommendation 13: Providing Irish language assessment tools

83. DE should encourage resource providers to gather, assess and disseminate assessment materials currently in use in IM schools and should commission

research into: producing standardised Irish language literacy assessment and diagnostic tools, perhaps on an all island basis, to meet pupils' needs. These should include:

- a. curricular resources, including further development of a graded reading scheme in Irish and a spelling scheme in Irish;
- b. specialized SEN resources to support pupils with ASD, SEBD, ADHD, partial sight, SLT resources; and
- c. literacy and numeracy tools for the assessment of Irish language and literacy. (4.11.10,32; 4.3.5, 49; 4.2.7-18; 4.3.20, 25)

Recommendation 14: Creating SEN support materials for IM schools

84. Resource providers should ensure they respond to the needs of the IM sector, including for SEN resources.(4.11.1, 10, 20, 23, 27, 31,34)

METHODOLOGY

85. The research took place over a two-year period from September 2006 to September 2008 with data collection carried out in IM schools and other agencies from January 2007 through to May 2008. The collection of data was divided into two phases. The first phase involved the completion of a quantitative questionnaire in all IM pre-school, primary and post-primary settings in the north of Ireland. The second phase of data collection concentrated on the collection of qualitative data.
86. Qualitative questionnaires were completed by IM pre-school staff, primary and post-primary teachers, CAs, and parents in a sample group of IM settings and by educational psychologists.
87. A total of 27 structured interviews were carried out with representatives of the ELBs, agencies related to the IM sector, and representatives of IM settings, and 8 semi-structured interviews were carried out with SEN teachers and SENCOs, and representatives of the IM pre-school sector.
88. A series of four focus groups was organised by the research team and the research also had the opportunity to speak to, and record the viewpoints of IM practitioners at two cluster group sessions organised as part

of professional development for IM teachers by IM CASS, and at a training session on SEN for teachers from the IM sector.

89. Case studies were written to record data provided by parents of pupils who experience SEN, and to record examples of good practice in five IM settings.
90. An Advisory Group, made up of representatives from HEIs, SLT services, the ELBs, statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations was set up. It undertook the role of guiding, supporting and advising the researcher on all aspects of the design, implementation, and write-up of the research project, as well as providing expert advice on issues pertaining to the IM sector, and education and health-related support services. A Steering Group was also established, with membership drawn from relevant policy and research areas within DE and the Education and Training Inspectorate. Its principal roles were to monitor and evaluate the progress of the research project, and to advise the researcher on issues relating to educational policy, as well as carrying out an editorial role in the completed research report.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

91. The research project was carried out by POBAL, the umbrella organisation for the Irish-speaking community in the north of Ireland, for the Department of Education. The total cost of the project was £130,199.

FULL REPORT

92. The full research report entitled 'The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish – English) children 3-16 years' is available on the Department of Education website at <http://www.deni.gov.uk>

ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
CA	Classroom assistant
CASS	Curriculum Advisory and Support Service
CPD	Continuing professional development
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
EAL	English as an additional language
ELB	Education and Library Board
EM	English-medium
EP	Education plan
EPD	Early Professional Development
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IM	Irish-medium
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LNI	Learning Northern Ireland
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural disorder
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SENCA	Special Educational Needs Classroom Assistant
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order
SLC	Speech, Language and Communication
SLT	Speech and Language Therapy
SMT	Senior Management Team

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