

September 2012

4. Capacity Building for Inclusion: The Role and Contribution of Special Needs Assistants and Classroom Assistants in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

At A Glance

This paper provides an 'at a glance' summary of the fourth Report from the Children and Youth Programme which adopts a rights-based approach to examining the provision of education for children and young people with SEN in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Using the General Measures of Implementation as an elementary tool for good policy (CYP, 2011) together with the principles of best interests and voice of the child, the objectives of the Report are to:

1. identify the right to education for children and young people with SEN in Ireland and Northern Ireland with reference to policy and legislation;
2. analyse provision for SEN within a framework for inclusion;
3. consider research evidence in relation to the role and function of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) and Classroom Assistant (CA);
4. identify good practice to inform the capacity building potential of SNAs and CAs to support the rights of pupils with SEN and make recommendations for policy development and implementation.

The Report outlines the relevant rights instruments and standards for the education of pupils with SEN, provides an overview of provision for SEN in Ireland and Northern Ireland, considers the policy and practice of inclusion and documents the nature of classroom assistance in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Finally the Report draws concluding messages for policy in relation to capacity building to support the education of pupils with SEN.



Key Conclusions

Drawing on the evidence the following key conclusions have been identified.

1. The extent to which inclusive education is realised has implications for the full educational experience of children and young people with SEN.
2. Dedicated training for SNAs and CAs is essential to realise the rights and educational needs of children and young people with SEN, both to improve inclusive practice and enhance educational experiences.
3. The voice of children and young people with SEN is underdeveloped and needs to be progressed to inform inclusive educational policy development and implementation.
4. Collaborative partnerships between teachers and SNAs, CAs are crucial to the effective inclusion of children and young people with SEN in mainstream schools.
5. Other forms of expertise should be explored to inform and enhance inclusive education practice.

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The Children and Youth Programme

The Children and Youth Programme is an independent collaboration between the two UNESCO Chairs in Ireland at the University of Ulster and NUI Galway.



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