

DISABILITY, ACCESS to EDUCATION, and FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Access to education for disabled children is an emotive issue. Education policy advisors, the government, teachers, parents, and children themselves, often hold strong and, in many cases, principled opinions on how disabled children should be educated. Viewpoints are often conflicting with some favouring the separation of non-disabled and disabled children into a segregated system of mainstream and 'special' schools, and others advocating an inclusive education system where disabled and non-disabled children share the same school environment, although not necessarily the same classroom. The former position, that of separation, supplemented in the past couple of decades by remedial teaching, has been the traditional model in most Western countries, including Ireland.

The segregated approach has come under increasing criticism in recent years. Critics argue that segregated schooling does not prepare children well for life beyond school, it provides a narrow range of educational opportunities, it separates children from their peers both socially and geographically (due to economic rationalisation schools are often outside of the local community), it reinforces attitudes that disabled people are different, and it channels resources that need to be spread between children who have a range of abilities. In short the system is one of them and us, failing to recognise that there is a broad spectrum of educational abilities within Irish schools. As we report, to disabled people and their allies this segregated approach reinforces the social position of disabled people, and the narrowness of educational opportunity (particularly to those with physical and sensory, but not mental, impairments), denies access to well paid employment thus consigning them to relative poverty.

There can be no doubt that disabled people, in general, are disadvantaged through limited access to the labour market. Figures for Ireland are limited but work in the UK, where access to employment for disabled people is at least partially legislated by the Disability Discrimination Act, reveals a bleak picture. For example, Berthoud *et al.* (1993) estimate that 50% of disabled people and their families live below the basic standard of living. Disability Awareness in Action (1995) place the figure nearer 75%. This is a consequence of high unemployment rates. For example, the Equal Opportunities Review (1996) report that 76% of disabled people in the UK are unemployed. In Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association reports that 85% of its members are unemployed (IWA 1995). Whilst on average 8% of non-disabled people remain unemployed over a 2 year period, 26% of disabled people remain jobless over the same time frame (Labour Force Survey 1992).

The social and economic consequences of this exclusion are great. Berthoud *et al.* (1993) identify

three main consequences of exclusion from the labour market. First, disabled people are being denied the right to work and support themselves. Despite obvious economic consequences, this also denies access to the social experience of work and the attached social status. Disabled people are thus left isolated and bored, with reduced levels of self-confidence and self-respect (Lonsdale 1990). Where disabled people do gain access to the workplace they are often underemployed in manual, low-skilled occupations and relatively underpaid. For example, the UK Office of Census and Population Survey reports that only 18% of disabled men had managerial or professional jobs compared with 28% for non-disabled men (Martin *et al.*, 1989). Moreover, Murray (1994) reports that disabled people are more likely to be employed through informal arrangements that are not covered by formal contracts and employment legislation. Second, there are extra living costs for disabled people which have to be met either by the individual or the State. For example, despite some concessions many disabled people have to buy costly equipment such as wheelchairs, have their houses adapted for everyday living such as fitting a downstairs bathroom, and have to pay increased costs for mandatory items such as car insurance. Third, social security payments to support unemployed disabled people are expensive and in many cases are not adequate to maintain the basic, minimum standard of living. Murray (1994) reports that in Ireland in 1990, 93,214 people received disability benefit (renamed sickness benefit, October 1997), invalidity pension or injury benefit, with a further 26,000 receiving a disabled allowance (formerly Disabled Persons Maintenance Allowance). At present, the Disability Allowance is set at a basic IR£73.50 per week with increases for dependants.

Government in Ireland, following trends within the European Union has come to recognise the injustices of the education system. The new 1998 Education Act is designed to revolutionise the educational landscape for disabled people in Ireland, for the first time providing disabled children and their parents in Ireland the legal right to seek an education in their local community, and allocating provisions for schools to be resourced to accommodate local disabled children. The implications of this Act, if enforced, are therefore wide ranging.

In light of this Act, in this report we examine access to mainstream education for disabled children in County Kildare, Ireland. Our aim is to provide a bench mark of current practice and to assess the viability of 'mainstreaming' of all disabled children living in the county. This 'mainstreaming', we believe, is important to ensure that the criticisms of segregated education, including higher incidences of poverty, illiteracy, and reduced life opportunities, are tackled. We detail the findings of a partnership project which assessed disabled children's access to education in present-day Ireland. This project adopted a threefold research strategy, which provide the structure of this report. First, the evolution of Irish governmental policy in relation to the education of disabled children is charted. Second, we report the findings of a survey of all

schools in County Kildare designed to gauge how many disabled children currently attend mainstream schools and to assess levels of physical, educational, and social access. Third, interviews with ten school principals concerning their experiences and concerns of teaching disabled children in their school are reported. Finally, this threefold strategy is used to assess the viability of the 1998 Education Act.

The analysis we present suggests that without significant investment in school infrastructure, teaching resources, teacher retraining, and a commitment to enforce legislation, this Act will fail to deliver the inclusive education system sought by the disability movement. As such, disabled people will continue to be denied the education needed to gain well-paid, long-term, and secure work, and the negative aspects of segregation such as the perpetuation of stereotypes and divorce from peers and the local community, seems set to continue. In the final section of the report we detail a set of recommendations that if implemented should help to improve access to education, and therefore the life chances, of disabled people in Ireland.

EDUCATION AND DISABLED CHILDREN

Ruhl (1983) and Tomlinson (1982) note that segregated education can be traced back to the late 18th century when institutions were established near Paris, France (deaf, 1760; blind 1784; retarded, 1798) and in Scotland (deaf and dumb 1760) and England (blind, 1791). In other countries, segregated education grew out of the institutionalisation of disabled people throughout the 19th century. Many schools were started by voluntary organisations, often with well-founded, if misguided, humanitarian aims (Cole 1989), before later coming under state control (e.g., Elementary Schools Act of 1893 in England and Wales laid duty on local authorities to provide segregated schooling, Tomlinson 1982), and many were residential and not locally-based. Segregated education made sense to those who controlled the education system economically - specialised resources were more economically viable if concentrated; academically - segregating these students meant that those in ordinary schools were not held back through placing too many demands on teachers and resources; students would get specialised provision in small class sizes with material pitched at an appropriate level rather than being driven by an age-related curriculum (Jenkinson, 1997; Thomas *et al.*, 1998); socially - the eugenics movement was just starting at the time of most special education schools and many believed that keeping 'defective' and ordinary children apart a sensible strategy (Thomas *et al.*, 1998); and morally - it 'protected' disabled children, who were viewed as unable to cope with the wider world, within a humanitarian environment (Vlachou 1997). As Vlachou (1997) notes, the paternalistic stance of educational reformers in the 19th and early 20th century meant that the views of disabled people were little considered. In most Western countries special school provision grew dramatically post 1960s as educational systems assumed responsibility for students who had previously been in the remit of health services.

This segregated approach, labelled the withdrawal approach by Ainscow (1991a), has been supplemented in more recent times with the introduction of a remedial approach. This approach recognises that educational ability is variable along a continuum and there are many children towards the lower end of the spectrum who require additional, 'specialised' teaching (the often cited 1978 Warnock Report reports that 20% of children have special educational needs on top of that ordinarily obtained in mainstream schools). This additional teaching takes a number of forms (see Booth 1983) but more commonly takes place outside of the usual classroom, thus segregating its recipients from their classmates.

Both the withdrawal and remedial approach are still popular today. However, over the course of the past two decades or so, segregated schooling has come under increasing criticism. Critics contend that the strategy of segregated education is flawed in many respects. Segregated schooling, it is argued, is negatively perceived and reinforces attitudes and expectations of pupils, teachers and parents; the designation of specialists encourages teachers to pass on to others responsibility for children they regard as 'special'; resources are channelled into separate provision reinforcing divisions; educational experiences within segregated schools is

characterised by narrowness of opportunity and low levels of achievement; segregating schooling does not prepare disabled children well for life beyond school, in particular in relation to participation in mainstream community life (Hegarty 1993; Ainscow 1991a; Jenkinson 1997). Moreover, because the numbers of disabled children are small (typically 3-5% of children) provision is usually centrally located, meaning that children have to attend school outside of their community, often having to travel relatively long distances to attend, and in the case of some schools children are boarders (for example, deaf schools in Ireland where children board from the age of 5, McDonnell, 1983). This isolates disabled children from their peers and sets them apart. In the case of boarding, which has been increasingly phased out, it isolates children in institutional settings and limits their circle to other children with the same impairment. As documented by Rizvi and Christensen (1996) life in many residential institutions is/was harsh, disciplined and regimented. In rural areas many physically disabled children have to attend special schools for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This places them in an environment that holds them back educationally.

Ainscow (1991b) details that many involved in special education have slowly come to realise that whilst often well intentioned as a form of positive discrimination, providing a 'specialised' environment that concentrates solely on disabled children's education, 'special' schools often limit opportunities and helps perpetuate the discrimination of disabled children. In part, it perpetuates discrimination because it individualises educational provision, portraying the child as the problem, rather than the problem being the systems inability to be inclusive. Here, the stark differences between the medical model of disability and the social model of disability are revealed. In simple terms, the social model states that disabled people are disabled not because of their impairment but by the way in which society fails to accept and cater for their impairment. In other words, disabled children are disabled by the educational system because it does not provide an inclusive environment. The consequences of this 'medicalised' schooling system is the maintenance of long-term social and economic marginalisation. Disabled people generally have the highest rate of exclusion from the labour market, and where access is achieved it is usually in poorly paid jobs with few fringe benefits (e.g. company pension). As Kitchin *et al.* (1998) report disabled peoples' access to the labour market in Ireland is extremely limited, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the children caught between the 20% in need of some special educational provision and the 2-5% who attend 'special' schools are often poorly catered for, and are often abandoned within the system (Sayer 1994).

In contrast, inclusive education offers a number of educational and social advantages including: students allowed to perform at the level of their abilities (bright children are not held back in segregated schools); disabled and non-disabled children learn with their peers, thus helping those with developmental disabilities learn social skills and other disabled children grow in self-esteem, and help dismantle stereotypical views of disability held by non-disabled children and reinforced through segregation (Ruhl 1983). Here, it is important to note that advocates of inclusive education do recognise the need for exclusive teaching for specific cases. However, it is

contended that these exclusive classes should be based within certain mainstream schools, and where possible activities integrated (i.e. all activities outside of specific lessons). The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education reports that an inclusive school is one:

- that is community-based: an inclusive school reflects the community as a whole. Membership of the school community is open, positive and diverse. It is not selective, exclusive or rejecting;
- that is barrier-free: an inclusive school is accessible to all who become members - physically in terms of the buildings and grounds and educationally in terms of curricula, support systems and methods of communication;
- that promotes collaboration: an inclusive school works with, rather than competitively against, other schools;
- that promotes equality: an inclusive school is a democracy where all members have rights and responsibilities, with the same opportunity to benefit from and take part in the education provided by the school.

(cited in Thomas *et al.*, 1998)

As should be clear, the arguments for inclusive education are concerned with both the education received and social justice. In particular, the issue of social justice has come to the fore in recent years in tandem with the growing political voice of disabled people. Indeed, Booth (1983) contended that choosing an inclusive approach to education is a moral choice - it represents a choice of different kinds of society (inclusive or exclusionary). The morality of this choice is revealed when we consider the issue of rights. If all citizens have the same rights then they should have access to the same life chances. Segregated education, disabled people and many educationalists are arguing, goes against egalitarian principles and is exclusionary, denying civil rights by removing disabled children from their peers and their community (see Christensen and Rizvi 1996). It is with these sentiments of equity and justice that Gaden (1993) and Ó Murchú (1993) have been arguing for inclusionary schooling in Ireland, following the lead of countries, such as Italy and Spain, where special education provision has been discontinued with all students attending regular classes (Jenkinson 1997).

In the past two decades or so, most Western countries have reviewed and restructured the education they provide to disabled children, moving towards a more inclusive system where all children share the same school environment (for overviews see Ainscow, 1991; Christensen and Rizvi, 1996; Jenkinson, 1997; Thomas *et al.*, 1998; Vlachou, 1997). Ireland, similarly, has been involved in a continual process of reviewing its educational provision for disabled children in light of changing pedagogy elsewhere. This has recently culminated in the passing of the 1998 Education Act. Before assessing the viability of this Act we first document some opinions of the educational system in Ireland as expressed by disabled people themselves and their parents.

PREAMBLE: What Disabled People in Ireland Think

The research documented in this report formed the second part of a wider project concerned with assessing how research on disability issues is conducted (see Kitchin, in press). All phases of the research, including choice of topic, data generation, analysis, interpretation and writing-up, were conducted in partnership, linking the academy (National University of Ireland, Maynooth) with disabled people (Kildare Network) in an attempt to provide a research arena that was both emancipatory and empowering. As such, the topic of education for disabled children was chosen by disabled people themselves, who also helped to run and direct all aspects of the project. Education was chosen as a focus because in interviews with 35 disabled people, in the first phase of the research, it was consistently identified as an area of concern that needed to be researched.

To the interviewees, the education system in Ireland, particularly the use of 'special' schools, has not served disabled people well. It was perceived that special schools were more about keeping disabled children 'out of the way' of ordinary children than about educating them to their full capabilities; of filling their time until they reached the age of 18 when they become the responsibility of the welfare system and training centres. For example, Lisbeth (most names are changed, as requested by interviewees) stated:

Lisbeth: When I look at colleagues of mine - you know, the same age as me, who went - all it seemed to be at that time was if you could read and write and you could work out the change from a pound you were educated.

It was felt, that this perceived failure to educate disabled children to their full potential was, in part, responsible for the high levels of illiteracy amongst Irish disabled people - which one well-known disabled activist believed to be very high:

Frank: Of the 370,000 estimated disabled people in this country I would safely say that 50-60% of them have literacy problems because of the special school systems and the other systems they have been through.

As is well noted in the education literature, a consequence of poor educational attainment is a reduction in future life chances through reduced opportunities in the labour market. It was believed by many of the interviewees that current 'special' education provision reproduces this exclusion, and consigns many Irish disabled people to poverty by denying them the qualifications necessary to gain well-paid employment, as the following interview quote from another study demonstrates:

Anon: The system perpetuates this self-fulfilling prophecy - people with disabilities are given an inadequate education because they are believed to be 'inadequate' and this education fails to provide them with the skills necessary for adult life. Effectively this legitimises the original belief. This unequal educational opportunity leads, of course, to unequal employment opportunities. It has been consistently demonstrated that people with disabilities have experienced higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the adult population. Following on from this, most disabled people find themselves dependent on the social welfare system for their livelihood. In Ireland, this income does not cover the financial costs of living with a disability. Essentially, poverty is about exclusion from society, thus this lack of money further contributes to the poverty of the disabled individual (Turbridy 1995).

Indeed, as has been demonstrated elsewhere, the Irish labour market is replete with attitudinal, educational and physical barriers which seriously reduce the employment prospects of disabled people (see Kitchin *et al.*, 1998). The situation is exasperated by very weak employment legislation.

Further, many disabled people believe that negative attitudes and behaviours within society towards disabled people are reproduced through segregated schooling. To them, segregation denotes difference. By separating disabled and non-disabled children at an early age it signals to non-disabled children that disabled children are different, that they are not part of their group. Without contact with disabled children, in situations where they can get to know them as people, there is a danger that cultural representations/stereotypes concerning disability get reproduced and remain in place into adulthood. These arguments are illustrated in the following quotes:

Nuala: It is a societal thing - that's why I would like to get them at a young age, at the educational level and bring them together - because you won't make as many differentials. If you go to school with someone in a wheelchair they are a person - somebody.

Claire: I think a lot of attitudes towards disabled has to start with schools. I really think that these special places for disabled people, regardless of disability, should be placed in ordinary schools. I don't mean in the same classroom all the time, ... I would like to see from the ground-level, from when they are born, that they see people with disabilities ... in kindergarden, from, you know - the discrimination starts there. .. And there are some people that won't even encourage them because they say 'they are not going to come to anything, what's the point?' I would start definitely at school level and start from a very early age, getting people to mix with people with disabilities and not to be afraid of them.

Robert: That's where the problems stem from. If disabled people were in mainstream education

from the age of 4 other children would not be afraid of disability. You actually see - I've seen it myself - some mother and the child will stop and look at me and go 'look at that man' and the child has been pulled away, and that child is going to have a fear of disability - instead of turning around and saying 'that man has got a bad leg and he can't walk properly.'

These issues are not confined to the first and second-level education. The universities in Ireland are poorly equipped to accommodate disabled students, as illustrated by the following quote written by a person refused entry to university because of the lack of access, not his/her educational ability:

Anon: I am writing because I feel Ireland should be a more "Wheelchair Friendly" place. As a disabled person I am trying to live my life as independent as I can. I have applied for further education, training courses and employment but the answer to my letters is always the same: "buildings not accessible for wheelchair people." (Turbridy 1995).

These frustrations are shared equally by parents of disabled children, who find it difficult to comprehend an education system that has until recently legally enforced taking a child from a family setting to place in a residential school, often far from the child's home.

Anon: My daughter and her school have been disgracefully let down by the State whose various officials engage in a shameful game of 'buck-passing' which ensures that no State body ever accepts any responsibility for the child, her well-being and her education ...one of the most frustrating aspects of this whole business is that if I accepted defeat in my efforts to have my daughter educated with her peers she would follow so many other children from the West of Ireland to St Mary's School in the Orthopaedic Hospital in Baldoyle ... There seems to be unlimited money to send my child away from home but none to enable her to stay at home with her family and friends (Turbridy 1995).

Anon: In the area of education the handicapped child is discriminated against all the way. We have a fifteen year old child living forty miles west of Galway. There were no facilities in the local national school and the teacher was not trained to deal with a cerebral palsy child. There are no secondary schools for the physically handicapped so we send her to a special school in Dublin. This involves rising at 6 am on Monday morning and travelling 40 miles to Galway and linking up with other children to be taken by minibus to Dublin [another 120 miles]. There are a number of stops and detours on the way and the journey often takes 6 hours. The reverse journey is made on a Friday. There is no helper on the bus and nobody to give the severely handicapped a drink. If a dog was treated in this way, you could prosecute for cruelty to animals (Turbridy 1995).

Anon: It appears to us that the parents of a disabled child face a lifetime of fighting each and every agency and department for their rights and that of their child (Turbridy 1995).

The combination of these factors means that disabled people who did go through mainstream schooling consider themselves to be fortunate because they grew up in their local community, made life-long friendships with non-disabled children, and attained an education which provided more opportunities (e.g., access to third-level) than they would have gained from the 'special' education system:

Aisling: I've been **very lucky** in that I went to a normal stream school and got my exams, but I know a lot of people who didn't get their exams and so the move on to a job is quite difficult.

Lisbeth: I was extremely **lucky** when I was a child simply because you were put in a special school, you were sent to a special school. There was no provision in ordinary schools. My mother actually kept me from school until I went to an ordinary school.

DISABILITY AND EDUCATION POLICY IN IRELAND

O'Fiachra (1983) reports that special schools for sensory and physical disability have existed in Ireland since the last century, but were small in number. Schools for intellectual and developmental disabilities were started by religious orders in the 1930s but did not come under the remit of the Department of Education until 1953 (Government of Ireland, 1983). In the late 1950s special day schools were introduced in Cork and Dublin, a number of hospital schools and specific disability schools organised by voluntary groups established (e.g., National Association for Cerebral Palsy), a Special Education Inspectorate established in the Department of Education and a diploma for Teachers of the Deaf (1957) introduced. In the 1960s a Diploma in Special Education (1961) was introduced at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and home tuition for severely physically disabled children introduced in 1969 (Government of Ireland, 1982). From the 1950s until the late 1970s the number of special schools and the children they cater for grew quickly. For example, O'Fiachra reports that numbers of children attending special schools rose in this period from just over a 1,000 to 10,500 (this number is now falling and was 7,536 in 1997). The distribution of these schools by impairment category, however, means that access is limited or on a residential basis. For example, O'Fiachra reports that as of 1983 there were two schools catering for visual impairment, both in Dublin; five schools for deaf children (based in Cork, Limerick and Dublin) of which Dublin was also a residential school; and three residential schools for physically impaired (Cork, Limerick and Dublin), with 12 other special schools; 65 schools for mental impairment; and 653 remedial teachers serving 32,650 pupils (ratio 1: 50). The development of these schools was premised on the assumption that certain groups of children had identifiable educational needs which could not be met by conventional schools (Government of Ireland, 1982). Prior to these developments most people with disabilities were institutionalised in psychiatric hospitals, country homes, and hospitals for physical disability.

The above developments, according to McGee (1990) and Lynch (1995) were achieved on an ad hoc basis. Education policy tended to concentrate on educating 'ordinary' children within a state-funded school system that was administered by the church and shaped by limited legislation. Post-independence (1922) government policy towards education mainly focused on keeping the system running given the poverty of the State, and many schools were poorly resourced (McGee 1990). Special education was not a primary concern and any education provision that occurred was initiated outside the system by parents, friends and professionals (McGee 1990). The change in emphasis in policy away from ad hoc developments and residential care and schooling seems

to have started with the 1965, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap*. This commission accepted that, as a general principle, community care was more beneficial to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, that schooling should be provided between the ages of 6 and 15, and that these children should not be placed in psychiatric hospitals. However, policy continued to promote a segregated system of special care, arguing that while it was recognised in principle that disabled children should be integrated and valued in the same way as other children, there were a number of practical and pragmatic reasons for maintaining segregated schooling such as educational ability, medical needs, service provision (e.g., specialised transport), and the fact that significant financial investment had taken place in providing special schools (see Government of Ireland, 1982). Difficulties associated with segregated education, such as social isolation and limited preparation for later life, was to be mediated through parents, teachers, counsellors, and psychologists. Recommendations, then, favoured integration for those children the school system, as then run, could cope with, rather than wholesale restructuring of the education system.

The capacity for integration in reality, however, was very weak. For example, by 1982 only three post-primary schools nationwide had special facilities that would allow physically disabled and non-disabled children to attend the same classes (two in Dublin, one in Cork, catering for 46 physically disabled pupils). The situation in primary schools was better with 146 special classes in primary schools, though they only catered for 107 physically disabled children, 14 of which used wheelchairs. Moreover, in 1982, 903 physically disabled children were attending schools for intellectual and developmental disabilities, many of whom did not have mental impairments (Government of Ireland, 1982). Not only were these children segregated but they were in environments unlikely to adequately serve their educational needs. Remedial teaching was introduced in 1971 and has grown slowly (Government of Ireland, 1988). The limits of the system meant that in 1986, 2,000 severely and profoundly mentally impaired children were excluded from education altogether, although this figure had been reduced to a 1,000 by 1995 (Lynch, 1995).

Gash and Feerick (1995) detail that the path towards integrative education in Ireland really started with the meeting of EC Council of Ministers of Education in May 1990. Here it was recommended that 'mainstreaming' should occur as quickly as possible for all 'appropriate cases' as assessed by individual evaluation. The *Report of the Review Group on Mental Handicap Services*, in July of the same year, recommended that children with intellectual or developmental disabilities should not be referred to residential services if the only reason to do so was to facilitate attendance for special education, and that closer links should be forged between special and ordinary schools (Government of Ireland 1990). *The Report of Special Education Review*

Committee (1993), however, again reiterated the position that whilst integration was desirable it should only be implemented where feasible (i.e., in cases where significant restructuring and investment could be avoided). It was recommended that where possible pupils spend time in both special and ordinary schools to foster integration, and more special classes be introduced in selected (rather than all) schools. The centralisation of services would continue for reasons of economic rationalisation, meaning that pupils would continue to have to travel outside of their communities. This view was stereotypically rooted within the medical model of disability (see Oliver 1990) but on the positive side, it was recommended that any new schools should be accessible to allow attendance, that significantly more remedial teachers be employed and pupil-teacher ratios reduced, and that ordinary schools who enrol disabled children should be given adequate resources to support their education (the last being a significant step forward). The 1995, white paper on education, *Charting our Education Future*, reiterated the position of the *Report of Special Education Review Committee*, arguing for an inclusive education system that promotes equality, respect, personal development and awareness of others, and which is flexible to allow students to move between appropriate educational settings.

Despite the reluctance to move towards a truly inclusive education system, there are clear signs that integration is slowly starting to occur. As of 1997 there were 5998 pupils with special needs in ordinary schools, 3177 male, 2821 female (almost double that of 10 years ago (2,872)); 4842 were at infant/primary level and 1556 in secondary (although none above age of 14). However, these are matched by 7,536 pupils in special schools, 4678 male, 2858 female, with 3032 at infant/primary level (age 5-11), and 4504 in secondary schools. In total there were 119 special schools (Department of Education and Science, 1997).

Possibly the clearest statement of intent for inclusive teaching was the 1998 Education Act. Whilst reiterating the sentiments of previous reports in its advocacy of the system of segregated special schools, the Act does signal a clear intention to foster inclusion through legislation. Indeed the first statement starts:

‘An Act to make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the State, including any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs ...’

The Act is ground breaking in that it provides disabled children and their parents the *legal right* to seek an education in their local community and provides schools access to funds to acquire resources and undergo structural alterations to accommodate local disabled children (clauses 6a, 6b, 6c, 6e, 6g, 7(1)a, 7(2)a, 9a). The Act, if enforced, will radically alter the education landscape

in Ireland as desired by the majority of disabled people. The real question at this point, however, is whether there is the political and administrative will to implement and enforce the Act and if so, whether the financial resources needed to accommodate increased levels of disabled children in ordinary schools will materialise. In the study reported in the following pages, we seek to provide a benchmark against which to judge future developments as guided by the Act by determining current levels of school access (physical, educational, social, attitudinal) for disabled children in one county in Ireland.

SCHOOL SURVEY

A questionnaire survey was mailed to all first level (age 5-12) and second level (age 12-18) schools in County Kildare (self-addressed envelopes were included). The survey comprised of six short sections: (1) school details, (2) a census of numbers of pupils, including those with different disabilities, (3) school policy, (4) access and provision, (5) plans for the future, (6) further comments. Sections 3 through 6 concerned the schools' policy towards, and provision for, disabled children. Section 4 comprised the largest part of the survey with questions relating to disabled access in its broadest sense: physical, educational, social. Questions relating to physical access asked whether the school considered itself to be physically accessible to disabled children and included an access audit in which the school detailed its provision. Questions relating to educational access concerned whether the school considered itself to be educationally accessible and included an audit of education mediums/resources accessible to disabled children (e.g., specialist equipment, adapted software) and the levels of remedial teaching available. Questions concerning social access included questions concerning out-of-hours activities and disability awareness training for staff and pupils. Data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, except in the case of Section 6.

A total of 60 (66%) first-level schools and 14 (50%) second-level schools returned completed survey forms. These schools varied in catchment area (rural/urban), size (first-level, 17 to 635 pupils; second-level, 131 to 810 pupils), and form (mixed/ single-sex, state/private, Irish-medium). A total of 13,448 pupils (6369 boys, 7,079 girls) attended the first-level schools (total in county in 1997, 19,109) and 7,210 pupils (4315 boys, 2895 girls) attended the second-level schools (total in county in 1997, 14,272).

Numbers of Disabled Pupils

Just under half of the first-level schools (48.3%) reported teaching a child with a disability. In total, 184 disabled children (1.37% of all children) were taught by these schools, with 128 classified as having a learning disability. Only 46 children with sensory or physical disabilities (0.41% of all children) were taught in the mainstream, first-level schools surveyed (see Table 1 for a full classification). The picture from the second-level schools is slightly different with 64.3% reporting that they taught a child with a disability. In total, 170 children (2.35%) were classified as having a disability. A seemingly significant increase from first-level education. However, this rise can be explained by the re-classification of children, once at second-level, into the category of learning disability mainly through the identification of conditions such as dyslexia

and ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). This is illustrated by the fact that the proportion of sensory and physical disabilities remains stable (30 children, 0.40% of the total) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Disabled children in Kildare by disability category

Category	Disability	First-level	Second-level (11-16)	Second-level (16-18)
Perceptual	Visual impairment	6	1	1
	Hearing impairment	11	8	6
	Learning disability	80	104	36
Illness-related	Multiple Sclerosis			
Physical	Cerebral Palsy	7	1	1
Developmental	Down Syndrome	5		1
Psychiatric	Bi-polar			
	Chronic depression			
	Manic-Depressive Syndrome			
Mobility	Quadriplegia			
	Paraplegia	1	1	1
Other		10	5	4

Classification from Rauscher and McClintock (1997)

Admission

No second-level school and only one first-level school had refused admission to a disabled child in the past five years. In the case of the one first-level school, the parents of a child with Down Syndrome from outside the school catchment area was advised to seek admission to his/her local school. 25 (41.6%) of the first-level schools and 6 (42.8%) of the second-level schools stated that they had a school policy concerning the enrolment of disabled children. In only two cases (both at first-level), however, was this a written policy, and despite a written request neither policy was forwarded to us. Only in 8 first-level schools and 2 second-level schools were policies available to all prospective parents. From the interview data (see below) it was clear that the majority of schools did not have a specific policy concerning disability because their practice was to try and take all applicants, only dealing with particular issues as they arose. In cases where issues arose around specific disabilities, or where there was an *a priori* application procedure (e.g., Irish-medium schools with limited places), then a decision on applications were made in a variety of ways - by principals, teachers, board of management, using departmental guidelines, assessing facilities and resources. This ad hoc situation is likely to change under clause 15d of the 1998 Education Act, as all schools in future will be required to publish their admission policy. How application decisions are determined is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Determinates of applications by disabled children for enrolment

Determination of decision	First-level	Second-level
Principal	21	9
Teachers	16	4
Board-of-management	21	3
Departmental guidelines	12	2
Lack of facilities	7	5
Monetary considerations	1	-

Column totals exceed school numbers due to combinations of procedures.

Physical Access

55% first-level schools and 71.4% of second-level considered themselves to be physically accessible to disabled children. However, our analysis of the specific provisions made it is clear that this is not the case. No one school could answer yes to all the access provisions detailed in Table 3. As such, no one school can provide a school environment that would cater for independent attendance by *all* children, regardless of impairment. In the case of the first-level schools, in only one category did more than half the schools have that provision (accessible parking, 61.6%). In second-level schools the picture is a little better with four categories above 50%. These were parking, accessible staff room, accessible classrooms, and accessible toilet. In all cases, it is likely that schools are equating access with wheelchair access, as provision for visually impaired and deaf children is very poor with low use of large-print signs, tactile floorways and colour contrasted walls, and no school having Minicom or induction loop systems for deaf children (although one school who reported that the teacher 'wore a thing around her neck'). This lack of provision for visually and hearing impaired children is likely to be an historical reflection of these children attending specialist schools and a perception that they are uneducatable in mainstream schools (a view articulated by some school principals – see below). Focusing on wheelchair access, only 31.6% of first-level schools and 42.8% of second-level schools have a ramp at the main entrance (with a further 20% of 1st level and 35.7% having another accessible entrance). This means that 48.4% of first-level schools and 21.5% of second-level schools have no wheelchair accessible entrance. Moreover, only 37.5% of first-level schools and 50% of second-level schools with ramps met the gradient requirements of Part R of the Building Act 1985 (i.e., 1:12). At steeper gradients wheelchair users will become more reliant on help to climb the ramp. Even if provision inside the school is better, entry level access is critical in safety issues such as in the case of a fire. We also know from experience that a lay-persons assessment of what is a wheelchair accessible environment often deviates substantially from an assessment made by a professional access auditor. It is likely therefore that these self-

reported figures flatter the schools. It is clear from this survey that schools in Kildare (and by extension all schools in Ireland) need major structural investment to be able to meet the demands of the new Education Act.

Table 3: Access provision in Kildare schools (%)

	First-level			Second-level		
	Yes	No	DK/NA	Yes	No	DK/NA
Parking spaces	61.6	30	8.3	85.7	7.1	7.1
Accessible staff room	45	45	10	64.3	14.3	21.4
Accessible classrooms	45	45	10	64.3	14.3	21.4
Low counters/desks	35	51.6	13.3	14.3	57.1	28.6
Accessible sports facilities	28.3	60	11.6	42.8	21.4	35.7
Accessible toilet	26.6	66.6	6.6	71.4	7.1	21.4
Other accessible entrance	20	58.3	38.3	35.7	7.1	57.1
Colour-contrasted walls	10	75	15	7.1	64.3	28.6
Large print signs	8.3	75	16.6	21.4	50	28.6
Tactile floorways	5	65	30	7.1	35.7	57.1
Accessible lift	0	66.6	33.3	7.1	28.6	64.3
Automatic door	0	75	25	0	50	50
Minicom/induction loop	0	90	10	0	71.4	28.6
Acc. rooms plus Minicom	0	65	35	0	42.8	57.1

DK = Don't know, NA = Not applicable/ No answer

Educational Access

Only 40% of first-level and 50% of second-level schools considered their school to be educationally accessible to disabled children. These figures clearly indicate that both first-level and second-level schools are aware that, despite the commitment and efforts of teachers, they are not providing the best possible educational environment for disabled children. As the figures in Table 4 indicate this is largely due to inadequate provision of educational media, resources and teaching support. Whilst the vast majority of both first and second level schools have access to computers and a library these do not cater well for disabled children, particularly those with a sensory or physical disability. For example, only one first-level school and one second-level school had adapted software for visually impaired pupils, with similarly low rates for large-print media. Remedial teaching at first seems quite healthy. However, as Table 5 details, remedial teaching is patchy (schools often sharing teachers - in some cases one teacher covering five schools - as also noted by Lynch 1995) and for a very short time a week - in 30% of first-level schools pupils who need remedial teaching receive less than one hour a week. The picture is slightly better for second-level schools where remedial teaching is typically between one and three hours. This is a reflection of the relative scarcity of educational psychologists and, as such,

the late diagnosis of learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Many of the schools reported that they would like, or had requested, extra remedial teaching.

Table 4: Access to educational support/resources (%)

	First-level			Second-level		
	Yes	No	DK/NA	Yes	No	DK/NA
Remedial teaching	91.6	8.3	0	71.4	28.6	0
Computer (PC)	83.3	3.3	16.6	92.9	0	7.1
Library	81.6	15	3.3	71.4	28.6	0
Computer disk	38.3	38.3	23.3	21.4	42.8	35.7
Adapted PC/Software (learning)	25	61.6	13.3	14.3	78.6	7.1
Tape	23.3	66.6	20	7.1	50	42.8
Large print	21.6	53.3	25	7.1	64.3	28.6
Compact disk	16.6	73.3	26.6	14.3	42.8	42.8
Adapted PC/Software (physical)	3.3	83.3	13.3	0	92.9	7.1
Specialised equipment	1.6	88.3	10	21.4	64.3	7.1
Adapted PC/Software (sight)	1.6	85	13.3	7.1	85.7	7.1
Braille	0	76.6	23.3	0	57.1	42.8

DK = Don't know, NA = No answer

Table 5: Remedial teaching (%)

	No. of remedial teachers				Average hours of remedial teaching per pupil			
	≤ 1	$1 < x < 2$	> 2	n.s.	< 1	$1 < x < 2$	> 2	n.s.
First-level	95	5	-	-	30	31.6	16.6	21.6
Second-level	57.1	-	14.3	28.6	14.3	28.6	21.4	35.7

≤ 1 indicates shared teacher.

Social Access

Whilst many schools acknowledged that physical and educational access was poor, the majority of schools (70% of first-level and 85.7% of second-level) consider themselves to be socially accessible for disabled children. By socially accessible we mean that the children are treated equally by staff and pupils, and had the same opportunities to join in events beyond the curricula. As Table 6 highlights, clubs and events do not generally cater for disabled children and awareness of issues relating to disability is likely to be based on personal experience, anecdotal evidence and media portrayals rather than professionally administered disability awareness training. Awareness and an ability to teach children with a range of sensory access and educational levels is a vital component in restructuring schools into inclusive environments. Teachers themselves are not immune to stereotyping and discrimination against disabled people (Jenkinson 1997), and they should therefore receive adequate retraining.

Table 6: Social access (%)

	First-level			Second-level		
	Yes	No	DK/NA	Yes	No	DK/NA
DA training for staff	6.6	90	3.3	21.4	0	78.6
DA training for pupils	6.6	52	6.6	14.3	7.1	78.6
Accessible clubs/events	13.3	86.6	0	28.6	14.3	57.1

DA = Disability awareness, DK = Don't know, NA = No answer

Future Plans

As Table 7 illustrates, few of the first-level schools in the study had any future plans in relation to the admission of disabled children, improving access or providing disability awareness training, although the picture is slightly brighter for second level schools. This is surprising given the requirements of the 1998 Education Act. The fact that schools are not addressing these concerns tends to suggest that many expect the current hegemony to continue (as evident in the interviews below). In essence, the Act is little more than rhetoric, and will remain unenforceable without resources, which as yet, show little sign of materialising. As such, schools expect to continue catering for a disabled child on a demand basis. Therefore issues of access and awareness are only addressed once a child has been accepted by the school.

Table 7: Future plans in relation to disability (%)

	First-level			Second-level		
	Yes	No	DK/NA	Yes	No	DK/NA
Admission of disabled children	20	70	10	35.7	57.1	7.1
Improved access	20	48.3	31.6	42.8	21.4	35.7
Disability awareness training	8.3	53.3	38.3	14.3	28.6	57.1

DK = Don't know, NA = No answer

INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

To complement the survey data, a random selection of 10 school principals, who indicated that they would be willing to discuss further issues raised in the survey, were interviewed. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and were recorded and transcribed in full. An interview guide strategy was adopted. In this strategy topics and the issues to be covered are specified in advance in an outline form but the interviewer can vary the wording of the questions and the sequence in which the questions are tackled (Kitchin and Tate, 1999). As a result, the interviewer has much greater freedom to explore specific avenues of enquiry and logical gaps within the data can be anticipated and closed. The interview also takes on a more conversational feel while ensuring that all the topics of interest are explored. In the present case, the issues covered in the course of the conversation centred in particular on sections 3 (admission policy) and 5 (future) from the survey. Transcripts were sent to those interviewed for checking. Along with the comments expressed on the survey form, the interview data sought to shed light on, and provide a context for interpreting, the survey data.

It was clear from the interviews that many school principals are receptive to the idea of their school admitting and teaching disabled children. These principals felt that disabled children should be able to attend their local school and grow-up with the other children in their community, and that it would be healthy for the other children to be schooled in an inclusive environment:

Sch10: I would say it certainly is good for the other children. I think its good for awareness, its good for life skills.

Sch3: ... the classes that those [disabled] kids are in are, you have some of the most caring kids in the school.

Sch9: I would think it would be very good for the children here ... They would learn tolerance and respect for people with disabilities.

When queried about admitting a disabled child to their school, initially principals replied that they would take all applicants regardless of disability. However, on further probing it became apparent the picture was not so clear. Whilst the school might not refuse entry, some principals revealed that they would encourage the parents of the child to consider other options. Here, we encounter the 'but' clause identified by Ó Murchú (1993): 'I accept the principle of education, but ...'. As the following quotes reveal, this is largely because most schools in Kildare lack the appropriate physical access, educational media and teaching support:

Sch3: I couldn't see them being turned away anyway, you know, it would be with full discussion with parents. ... when I say with consultation with parents my normal line is, 'I have no problem in the world taking your child here but I feel you have to know our limitations, before you send him or her.'

Sch10: ... we don't refuse anybody. Certainly not on the grounds of disability. ... The only reason I would not take a disabled child, well I would never refuse a disabled child, but my policy on it would be that I would sit down with the parents and say to them that we welcome their child to the school, however, I would have to point out to them that our resources and that ... we may not be able to cater for all the child's needs and that they should know that before the child comes.

In some cases, principals revealed that, despite their wishes, they *would* have to refuse admission to the school because access was so poor they would not be able to facilitate the child attending:

Int: Are there any reasons why your school would not accept a disabled child?

Sch6: None whatsoever.

Int: Would it therefore be feasible for disabled children to attend your school? ...

Sch6: I could not take in a child in a wheelchair at present. We use pre-fabs and there is a gravel substance between the buildings. It would not be possible for them to move around and into or out of the pre-fabs.

Int: So it would be feasible for a disabled child to attend the school?

Sch7: Personally speaking, I think that for wheelchair access now it would not be a particularly good school for that.

In other cases, admission *would* be refused because the school could not provide the specialist teaching needed:

Sch8: Definitely we would want a lot of back ups. We would want of course ... every teacher here would say they have a large class size. ... If say a disabled child came in with a severe learning disability or with severe physical handicap we wouldn't be able to cater for such a child at the moment.

Sch4: I suppose it would be quite impossible really, come to think of it, that way, you know. Up to now I have been thinking more of physical disability.

Int: Yeah?

Sch4: I don't know how a blind child could learn in a school like this, or a deaf child.

The paradox then is that while most principals were receptive to disabled children attending their schools, the reality is that in some cases schools would only take the child with parents in full

knowledge that the education they would receive would not be as good as it could be, and in other cases schools would refuse admission because they lacked the resources to be able to facilitate attendance. A number of concerns which produce this paradox were documented by the principals.

At one level, principals were aware that their primary remit is to provide an education for the children in their catchment area. They therefore have to ensure that all children are receiving the attention they deserve. There was a perception amongst some principals, based on first and second-hand experience, that the inclusion of disabled children might well disrupt the classroom balance because the teacher might have to spend a disproportionate amount of their time with disabled children, as the following quotes from the principals of Schools 1 and 3 illustrate:

Sch1: We have taken 2 back. That is why I have to worry about it. My instinct always told me to take anyone who came to the door, no matter what their problems are. But then I realised that the teachers always have to deal with these problems and they cause difficulties in class. Do you understand? ... For years I have been going to the INTO Annual Conference and hearing teachers calling for us to take everyone in and also hearing lads putting the other side of the story. Where they have taken children who are blind, disabled or have Down Syndrome and their lives can be nightmares for the year in which you have them. So we would have to establish that the child could come to the school without disrupting other pupils otherwise it would not be feasible.

Sch3: Now I had this lovely computer in a classroom - that the child couldn't write at all, except he could work a little bit on a computer. A class teacher that had babies, senior infants, first and second, in the one room - 35 in the room, including him, and she just didn't have the time. She could give her 3 minutes or 4 minutes here and there. So I had the school secretary going into the classroom for 2 half hour periods in the day trying to give a bit of extra help to this child.

Moreover, as the principal of School 7 noted, without teaching support, access to appropriate resources and specialist teaching knowledge, a strategy of coping is adopted which does not serve the disabled child well:

Sch7: Well I know that one of them is meant to have glasses and everything but you just ... well I have one of them in my own class at the moment and you just manage and cope, you know.

Int: Yeah?

Sch7: Well, you just plod along and hope for the best.

Some of the principals argued that it was unreasonable of the Department of Education to expect schools to take disabled children, who need extra resources such as more teaching attention or

specialist educational media, without providing the financial resources to provide an adequate education.

Sch2: ... in the mainstream school we get absolutely no credit for having that child in the school - in terms of extra resources, or in terms of an extra teacher or an extra helping hand.

Sch3: But one thing the Department will have to do, and I mean that - I am not getting on my bandwagon now, is while they every child has the right to go to whatever school their parents so wish, they will have to put, we'll say, the structures in place - you know to make that, to make the child who is who has a disability, not have an extra one by going to mainstream education. Well, I'll tell you now, Michael Martin [Minister for Education] at the moment, well I thought he was a grand man and he has done a lot for education. But when he comes on television before Christmas and says that from the 1st January every child that has any kind of a disability will be catered for in school, and I have parents coming to me saying my child is dyslexic and you have done nothing and the Minister said you can - there is nothing out there. I have written to Special Education about 3 children I have, seeking help, on 5 or 6 occasions since last September alone. Each time I send a copy of the previous letters. They have yet to acknowledge one of the letters.

In those cases where there are extra resources these are invariably seen as being inadequate and in need of improvement. The pressure of extra workloads without substantial, equivalent investment would effectively bring the system to the point of collapse:

Sch2: The resource teacher is absolutely 'panned out' trying to deal with her brief. She is covering the whole town which is about 6 or 7 schools. ... It is absolutely ludicrous, and yet, if the Minister was asked a question, 'this town has access to a resource teacher.'

One useful strategy for aiding the present system, that all the school principals were in agreement with, was the introduction of disability awareness training for teachers, as illustrated by Schools 5 and 6:

Sch5: I think it would be a great idea and one worth following up on. It would help the teachers to understand a lot more and therefore be able to help the children.

Sch6: I am sure that the teachers will need no encouragement to attend such a course. I think it is very necessary and would help to develop our teachers. We all need such information at regular intervals and it would help us all to be more at ease and relaxed about disability and also show us how we can assist disabled children better. And why stop at teachers. Parents and the schoolchildren could also do with this type of training. It is very badly needed.

Some principals, however, felt that courses should be on a needs basis:

Sch3: I would encourage it all right. But you see the way things work with teachers, as you probably know, or at any level, people will go to that if there is a need within their class;

and some that the courses should be optional unless the fees were paid for by the Department of Education:

Sch2: Yes, of course I would encourage them to go on it and it is fantastic that they should go, but I mean, as you know yourself, teachers do all these things at their own expense.

In addition, some principals felt that disability awareness training should be a compulsory component of teaching training courses:

Int: Do you think then that such a course is necessary as a part of teacher training from here on in?

Sch3: I would definitely say so. I would definitely say so because you have more and more and more people, you know, coming into mainstream education with difficulties or with disabilities of various kinds and they are not taught that.

—Whilst a clear paradox exists between the desire of the schools to be inclusive and their capabilities to fulfil these desires, it should be noted that there have been recent improvements in terms of access. For example, Schools 3 and 5 both report that they are receiving improved access in the near future, and School 5 indicates that the local school inspector is also trying to improve access:

Sch3: Obviously we have limitations, to a degree. Every level can be got into we'll say without using steps. It can be difficult at times, it could mean the back of the school as opposed to the front of the school, you know. But we are getting an extension built on during the summer and ah, part of, part of the extension will consist of a ramp plus a disabled toilet which we don't have at the moment, you know.

Sch5: As I said on the form we have just been granted a refurbishment grant from the Department of Education. The Inspector for this area is very aware of the needs of disabled children and is very encouraging. We have had the architects out and they are doing their best to get rid of the steps around the school.

There is a long way to go, however, before the paradox is completely removed.

DISCUSSION

The educational landscape of disabled children in Ireland is clearly changing. The new, as yet unimplemented Education Act, in conjunction with rising numbers of disabled children attending ordinary schools, means that the educational opportunities for disabled children are slowly improving. As the results from this research demonstrate however, there is clearly a long way to go before a truly inclusive school system exists in Ireland. At present, the vast majority of schools are inaccessible, physically, socially and educationally. This is clearly shown in the findings from the school survey. There does, however, exist a paradox, which is that schools often feel that they are more accessible than they really are. For example, many schools rated themselves as physically accessible and then completed an audit which proved that they were not! In part, this perception of good accessibility is based on conflating disabled people with wheelchair users. As the survey shows, schools are much better equipped to deal with wheelchair users than visually impaired or deaf students, for which very few resources currently exist.

Whilst schools, on the face of things, seem willing to accept any disabled children who apply, the survey and the interviews reveal another paradox. When probed it was clear that school principals would, because of structural constraints, be forced to turn away disabled children, particularly those requiring large amounts of remedial and specialised teaching. Moreover, despite the requirements of the new Act, schools had limited plans to include disabled children in school plans, improve access, or provide disability awareness training for staff and students. In part this is due to a belief that the current hegemony will continue, but also due to issues of cost and a perceived lack of need. The fact that teachers believed that they would pay their own costs for disability awareness training does not aid the situation.

Our perception is that schools can state that they have not turned away any disabled children who have applied to attend because they have been intercepted by State and voluntary agencies, such as social workers, ahead of their application. As such, children are being intercepted before getting to schools, allowing schools to duck out of a difficult decision - the reality, as revealed by the interviews, is that schools would discourage and in some cases refuse admission. This is not to deny that there is a lot of good will amongst teachers and principals but that in practice the situation is more complex than many would wish to publicly acknowledge. This situation is set to change when the new Education Act is implemented. Schools will no longer be able to refuse admission with approval from the Minister for Education. Under clause 15d schools will need to publish an admission policy statement in regards to children with disabilities, and in accordance

with clause 21(2) publish a school plan stating the objectives of the school in relation to equality of access and participation in the school by disabled students. As revealed in the survey such practices are at present limited.

How extensively and rapidly the new Act will become effective is debatable. Our research has highlighted that schools at present represent a landscape of exclusion for disabled children, and unless there is significant structural investment they will continue to do so. The reality of the situation is that, despite the ground-breaking qualities of the Act, schools are ill-equipped to teach disabled children and are likely to be for sometime. This is partly due to school structuring/resourcing (e.g. 40% of schools have less than 3 teachers, and 70% of classes consist of 30 or more pupils, McGee 1990), but also attitudes and perceptions. This is not to deny that the Act will significantly change the educational landscape but that this change will be achieved very slowly without funding to match rhetoric. This means that disabled children will continue to be denied their right to an inclusive education in the near future and means that another generation will lose out in relation to employment opportunities and access to third-level education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study has led us to draw-up a number of specific recommendations that need to be implemented to make inclusive education a success in Ireland. These essentially follow those proposed by the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (paras 162-217). In particular:

- The Act needs to be implemented and *enforced*. It is likely that economic pressures will work to maintain the status quo. We recommend the setting-up of an agency or government department devoted to ensuring that the provisions of the Act are adhered to, in particular this agency should encourage inclusive education strategies in all suitable cases (rather than least-cost or most easily implemented).
- Community as opposed to residential or segregated schools should be encouraged. Isolated special schools should be phased out, with new units attached to existing schools where children share the same space with the possible exception of the classroom.
- School infrastructure needs to be made physically and educationally accessible with investment made on a needs basis to help stagger costs.
- Remedial teaching needs significant investment to ensure that children with special educational needs receive suitable help. At present, remedial teaching is poor, particularly at first-level.
- More provision should be made to the early detection of learning difficulties such as dyslexia and ADD and appropriate action taken.
- There needs to be significant improvement in the levels of information provided to parents about options, with clearly demarcated roles and lines of enquiry that stop them being passed from 'pillar to post'.
- Disability awareness training should be provided for all staff on a continuing basis and it should be a mandatory component of teacher training. Costs should be met by the Department of Education. In addition, disability awareness should be made available to all pupils, regardless of whether their class contains a disabled child.

CONCLUSION

Our threefold analysis of policy, current provision, and interviews with school principals, suggests that whilst current Irish governmental policy favours a shift in educational practice from a segregated approach to an inclusive approach, this shift is unrealistic without significant investment in adapting school infrastructure, providing more teaching resources, and funding teacher retraining. Teachers and schools are under increasing pressures due to budgetary constraints. Without extra resources, having to deal with new pupils, some of whom will need extra attention, will create logistical problems for teachers (Ó Murchú 1995). As such, it should be realised that although the new Education Act has potentially far reaching and important consequences it requires a significant changes in mind-sets (government, management and teachers) to move beyond rhetoric, as well as significant, new resource allocation to ensure success. As Slee (1991: 43, 44) notes 'change in education is not simply an issue of redrafting legislation', and a change as large as the introduction of inclusive schooling requires much thought if it is to be a success and not a 'concealment of interests' - i.e., cosmetic changes where the traditional system continues with a new vocabulary. Without a full commitment inclusive education is likely to slip back to the present model of integrative education, where the emphasis is upon the child to fit into the school system as is rather than the school to change to welcome and educate all. Our analysis suggests that without significant investment in school infrastructure, teaching resources, teacher retraining, and a commitment to enforce legislation, the new Education Act in Ireland will fail to deliver an inclusive education system as desired by disabled people, their parents and their allies. As such, the educational opportunities available to disabled people will remain limited, thus reproducing attitudinal, social and economic conditions and perpetuating their position as one of the poorest groups in society.

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