

**Teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards the
benefits and challenges of the new inclusion model for
Special Education Teaching**

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Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes towards the Benefits and Challenges in the New Inclusion Model for Special Education Teaching

Abstract

The new inclusion model for special education teaching has brought significant change in the epistemology of SET and the roles and responsibilities of the mainstream class teacher. This study examines current literature pertaining to 'Inclusion' and the delivery of SET in post-primary schools. It seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET inclusion model. Possible benefits of this research include the enhancement of teaching practices in terms of differentiation of teaching and learning and the promotion of a culture of inclusion in the mainstream classroom. It is hoped that this research will provide information on best practice in planning, implementing, and reviewing the new model for educators and management teams.

Based on the literature review a case study approach was used as the best way to answer the research questions. A mixed methods approach was adopted for the study. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using a questionnaire administered to qualified, practicing post-primary teachers. The questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis, (Braun and Clarke, 2006), establishing 5 key themes for a focus group interview. The study was carried out in four post primary schools in the north west of Ireland.

The research found that participants believed the new inclusion model has many benefits for SEN pupils. The findings imply that teachers are somewhat familiar with the new model but are unsure of their roles and responsibilities within that model. The results highlighted the need for significant, consistent, targeted continuous professional development to implement the new inclusion model. Recommendations include the need for training, the establishment of a SET core team, consistency of teacher and timetabling and the allocation of planning time to allow for collaborative practice.

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List of Abbreviations

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Classroom Based Assessment (CBA)
- Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
- Department of Education and Skills (DES)
- Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)
- Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD)
- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act)
- General Allocation Model (GAM)
- Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Looking at our Schools 2016 (LAOS)
- Management Leadership and Learning (MLL)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- Reasonable Accommodations for Certificate Examinations (RACE)
- School Self Evaluation (SSE)
- Special Education Need (SEN)
- Special Education Support Service (SESS)
- Special Education Teacher (SET)
- State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
- Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

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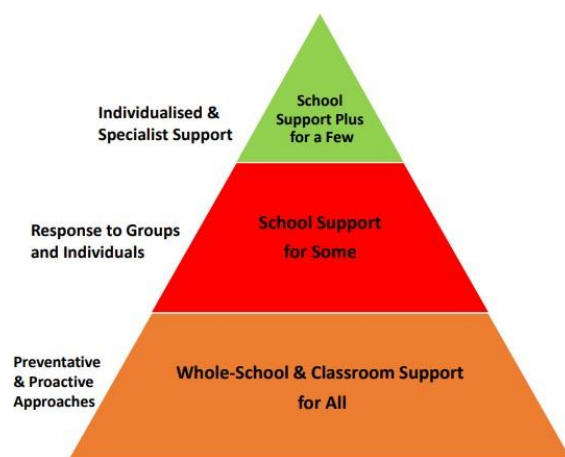
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Background to Research

In 2014 The National Council for Special Education Report on ‘Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs’ highlighted numerous shortcomings associated with the old system for allocating special education teaching resources to schools. These shortcomings included unequal allocation of resources for schools with similar educational profiles, long waiting lists or financial implications when awaiting professional diagnosis to access supports, health and education professionals under pressure to meet the diagnostic requirement to access resources, allocation of teaching supports was out-dated and based on dated school profile data and no systematic attempt to assess outcomes achieved by those to whom resources were allocated. Another alarming finding suggested a risk that students were being diagnosed as having SEN to access resource allocations rather than having a diagnosis for health and educational reasons. Based on the findings of this report a revised allocation model was designed, piloted and subsequently introduced in September 2017.

Under the revised model, special education teaching hours are allocated to schools based on their educational profiles including staffing, student cohort and geographical area. Schools now have the flexibility to allocate teaching resources based on students’ identified needs rather than the previous requirement of a professional diagnosis of disability. NCSE research findings indicated that this is a better way to allocate additional resources because it allocates according to students’ needs rather than disability category (Desforges & Lindsay. 2010). Student support is provided in line with the continuum of support framework which is endorsed by the National Educational Psychologists of Ireland (NEPS).

Fig. 1.1. NEPS Continuum of Support Model



The Continuum of Support is a model of assessment and intervention which demands schools to gather, assess and analyse student data within their own school context. Identification of need is central to the new model. Primary student transfer passports, entrance assessments, specific diagnostic testing and parent and teacher observations are all collated and analysed to build a student profile and identify specific need. If a specific need is identified a support plan followed by evidence-based interventions are put in place for a specific length of time. These interventions should reflect the priority learning needs of an individual student or group of students. If students are grouped, they must have identified similar needs rather than mixed groups based on e.g. students being exempted from the study of Irish. Support plans should include agreed targets, resources needed, strategies for implementation and timeframe for review. The concept of SMART goals is designed to make best use of SET hours allocated. SMART is a well-established tool that can be used to plan and achieve learning goals for students. The acronym states that goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, attainable, realistic, relevant and time specific. A review process allows for tracking and evaluating individual student progress. This continuum involves the subject teacher, special education teachers, parents, the student, school management and other relevant professionals and outside agencies.

Another key concept under the new model is ‘inclusion’ for all students irrespective of special educational need. These changes in policy and legislation have resulted in an increase in the number of SEN students accessing education in inclusive school settings at post primary level. The culture of Irish education has evolved from a somewhat segregated system to a predominantly inclusive model.

The new SET inclusion model has brought significant change for teachers, students, parents and school management systems. Creative planning and assessment present a continuing challenge for schools and teachers. The class teacher is now clearly on centre-stage as the main broker for teaching and learning of all students in their class irrespective of academic attainment. The cultural and professional changes required to meet the needs of a more diverse student population present a challenge to teacher education, training, continued professional development and for school management systems in the areas of timetabling and staffing. Key stakeholders in assisting in the implementation and review of this new model include:

- Department of Education and Science (DES)
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- National Education Psychological Service (NEPS)

The Looking at our Schools document (LAOS) published and endorsed by the inspectorate in 2016 uses terminology including 'meaningful dialogue between all members of the school community', 'professional development and collaboration', to 'engage actively and productively', 'holistic approach' and 'building professional relationships'. On foot of this school culture, organisation and academic expectations are identified as influential factors when implementing a change in established practice. This pleads the question 'who is responsible for inclusion?' and 'How will this new model work?'

1.2. Rationale

As a Special Education Teacher (SET), I have worked in the education sector for 22 years. I am trying to embed and implement change as per the Department of Education Circular 0014/2017. School leaders play a key role in creating a positive school climate and empowering educators within the school community to build on existing good practice. (DES Circular 003/2018)

I believe the new Inclusion model can work and deliver positive benefits for both students and teachers but in transition to the new model we are facing challenging times. It is important that this research begins to inform and make a positive contribution to the further development of effective planning and implementation of the SET inclusion model and intervention strategies pertaining to teaching and learning in the classroom. Meaningful inclusion implies that all students are taught in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued. As educators we must endeavour to enable students to become successful, independent learners and strong proactive citizens with values and life skills to contribute to family, community, and society. The information and research from this study is very relevant and important for current and future teaching communities. The findings intend to shed some light on whether it is necessary to reshape how teachers interpret 'inclusion', and whether they place sufficient value on the development of inclusive teaching and learning environments for their students.

1.3. Research Aim

The purpose of this research is to examine current literature pertaining to 'Inclusion' and the delivery of Special Education Teaching (SET) in schools. It seeks to investigate post primary teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new inclusion model for special education teaching.

1.4. Research Objectives

The main objectives of the research have emerged from the literature and the ethnographic experience of the researcher as an SET coordinator and have led to the following research questions:

- How familiar are teachers with the new inclusion model of special education support?
- What are Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the new model?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the challenges of the new model?
- What supports do teachers believe they need in order to implement the new model?
- What recommendations can be made for training and delivery of SET into the future?

1.5. Scope

This research study involved an investigation into second level SET teachers' knowledge and understanding of the SET Inclusion model and the insight they have pertaining to the benefits and challenges with regard to implementation.

The focus of this research was based on a research questionnaire administered to all teachers in four post primary schools. The collated results formed the basis for themes for a focus group discussion with SET teachers.

1.6. Research Approach

Completing the study across four schools is a comprehensive task but the results obtained are representative of the region rather than trying to offer a national picture. Time constraints restricted the research from expanding beyond the North West. While the research may not be generalizable beyond the catchment area, it provides reliability for colleagues in teaching or in carrying out research in the future. I feel that recommendations and findings as a result of data collected will help deliver and inform better decision making practices and implementation of special education timetabling, teaching and learning going forward. This will provide a quality framework for school self evaluation (SSE) and future department of education inspections.

The research data was collected using a mixed methods approach (Cohen et al 2007). Questionnaires included both open ended questions and Likert scale responses. The participants in the study were all practicing post-primary teachers from four schools in the catchment area.

1.7. Outline of Chapters

Chapter One has provided the rationale for and the content of the study. In Chapter Two, the current and seminal research in the area will be discussed. Chapter Three will then focus on the Methodology for the study. Chapter Four will discuss the research findings, highlighting the salient themes arising from the data generated. The concluding chapter will provide recommendations to individual teachers and also more systematic recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Inclusive education is now seen as a basic human right for an equal opportunities' society. Ireland committed to promote children's rights when it signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. The Children's Rights Alliance uses the convention as a framework to change Ireland's laws, policies, and services so that all children are protected, nurtured and empowered. This brings children's rights to the top of the agenda of our Government, legislators, and key decision makers. Article 28 recognises the rights of the child to education. It encourages the development of different methodologies within education making it accessible to every child from preschool to higher education. Article 29 states the aim of education is to prepare children equipping them with 'life skills' for a responsible life in a free society.

The education of children and young people with special education needs and disabilities is an established key policy objective in many countries (Lindsey 2007). Schools have a statutory obligation to provide education with a clear move away from the trend of segregated education and a move towards inclusive learning environments in established mainstream classroom settings. In Ireland the Education Act 1998 states that schools should provide education to all students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs. Internationally the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 is a milestone in education legislation. This Act makes provision for students with SEN. The purpose of this act is to ensure inclusive education unless there is a specific reason why a specialised placement is necessary for a child. School provision is now required to be inclusive and informed by the principles of equality and rights. The EPSEN Act 2004 requires that "A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act or the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated"

Inclusion and education reform are the subject of debate when defining best practice (Slee, 2001 a). There is considerable debate on whether or not meaningful inclusion is achievable and how can it be attained. Thomas et al. 1998 suggest research should focus not on whether inclusion works but on ways of making it work. There is substantial agreement in international literature regarding key practices which support the implementation of inclusion (Florian,1998; Lindsay, 2003)

In the past decade, educational policy and practice in Ireland has undergone considerable change as schools strive to adapt to a policy of inclusion. Legislation has been enacted (Ireland, 2004), support structures established, for example, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and policy documentation promoting inclusion has been published by the Department of Education and Science (DES), 2007; DES and National Educational Psychological Service, 2010; NCSE, 2011a). There has been significant investment and improvement in resources to support children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools including deployment of special education teachers (SETs) and special needs assistants (SNAs). 1000 additional special education teachers (SETs) have been provided for schools since 2017, while the total number of SETs has increased by 37% since 2011 from 9,740 in 2011, to over 13,300 at present. There is currently an average of approximately one special education post in place for every 6.75 mainstream class teaching posts across the post primary school sector. The allocations for each school are completed in line with the principles of equality and fairness which underpin the new model which is designed to be responsive to identified need (DES Circular No 008/2019). The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPs) was established in 1998. NEP's psychologists work with both primary and post primary schools. They are concerned with the learning, behaviour, social and emotional development of children and young adults. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools and works in partnership with teachers, parents, and children in identifying educational and behavioural needs. NEPS encourages schools to use the 'continuum of support' model whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning, and intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

This significant departure within education is a positive step towards inclusion for all. There has been an increased understanding among policy makers and educational theorists that the types of children needing additional supports goes far beyond those traditionally thought of as having SEN and includes those from marginalised societal groups and areas including travellers, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those for whom English is a second language and other vulnerable disadvantaged groups. Meaningful inclusion is significant as it affords opportunities for all people to participate fully in all facets typical of everyday society including educational, employment, consumer, recreational, community and domestic activities. (Florian,2005, p 32).

2.2. The New Inclusion Model

The revised allocation process for Special Education Teaching (SET) in mainstream post primary schools has been enacted through the DES circular 0014/2017. From September 2017, a revised process for allocating special education teachers was introduced for post primary schools. This allocation model replaced the Learning Support (LS) and English as an Additional Language (EAL)

support schemes, whereby a general allocation of resources had previously been allocated to post primary schools annually. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process also previously provided additional resource teaching supports to schools for students with specific assessed needs. The term allocation stands for designated hours assigned to Special Educational Needs (SEN) students to assist teaching and learning to help them access the curriculum at post primary level. The new SET inclusion model provides allocation hours for SET needs to each school based on the schools' educational profile. It is the duty of the school management and the SET team to decide how or who will access these allocation hours through the continuum of support. The continuum encompasses all students, including those with SEN. Students whose needs may fall within the remit of the EPSEN Act are included in the continuum. Procedures for schools are outlined in line with the expectations of the EPSEN Act.

2.3. Teachers' Role in the Development and Delivery of the 'Inclusive' Classroom Environment

Inclusion is an 'elusive concept' (Ainsow, 1999; Ballard 1999; Slee 2000). The new inclusion model aspires to support true inclusion for students with special educational needs in Irish schools. Throughout the literature reviewed, similar themes and success criteria have been identified. Visionary school leadership is paramount, and inclusion is most successful where school management and staff make a commitment that all students are welcome regardless of need. Sustainable leadership is nurtured, nourished and developed. This style of leadership is people rather than organisation orientated and requires a leadership approach that transforms the feelings, attitudes and beliefs of others. In other words, it transforms 'school culture'. These transformational leaders have dynamic and outgoing personalities with high levels of commitment to their role. (Hargreaves et al, 2013). The development of support teams to assist with academic, social, emotional, and medical needs contribute to encompassing whole school inclusive communities. (Evans, Lunt, Wedell and Dyson, 1999; Idol, 1997; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, Mc Laughlin and Williams, 2000; Booth). School culture, organisation and academic expectations are also identified as influential factors (Butler and Shevlin, 2001; Emanuelsson, 2001; Rose, 2001). In an effective school everybody works as a team building an educational environment that promotes cross fertilisation of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development.

2.3.1. Classroom Teacher

It has been strongly documented that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are key components for the successful implementation of any inclusive policy and are translated in their practice (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Shevlin, Kearns, Ranaghan, Twomey, Smith and Winter, 2009; Florian and Rouse,

2010). According to Poulson et al (2001), teachers' knowledge, values and beliefs have an important influence on students' learning. In addition, it has been stated that ignoring teachers' beliefs can result in disappointing results (Westwood et al 1997; Richardson et al 1991). O' Brien, 2000 states that the classroom teacher is the key to success. Mainstream teachers who take ownership of inclusion and believe in their own competence to educate students with SEN are identified as supporting effective inclusion (Thomas et al. 1998). Measures to enhance effective teaching for students in an inclusive setting include using a variety of teaching strategies and approaches including scaffolding the learning, modelling effective feedback and having a contingency plan for classroom management (Flem et al, 2004). Lindsay, 2007 attributes collaboration and teamwork as instrumental to success. Critical to the success of teamwork is time for planning and reflecting (Hunt et al, 2003). Support through withdrawal from mainstream classes is no longer viewed as best practice. In-class support where possible aligned with curriculum adaptation, co-teaching, whole school staff training and trained support staffs are identified as key components to inclusion and implementation of any new initiatives.

While teacher stress and anxiety can be a natural outcome of a significant change in the system, this can be somewhat alleviated by access to training, resources and additional supports (Lindsay, 2007). Research states that when inclusion is carefully managed and planned, mainstream teachers gradually become more familiar with the model. This promotes enthusiasm towards planning and collaboration as part of a teaching and learning cooperative team. Teacher education and continuous whole-staff in-service for professional development are essential to develop the skills necessary to teach successfully in inclusive classrooms. Teachers who participate in effective training programmes increase their knowledge of what should be going on in an inclusive classroom and acquire the teaching skills and confidence leading to a more positive attitude to inclusion.

Under the new model, the mainstream class teacher must now differentiate the curriculum for their subject so that it can be accessed by all students in class relative to their learning abilities within the mainstream inclusive classroom environment. Effective, targeted continuous professional development assists teachers with this new approach.

2.3.2. SET Team

The SET team in a school is responsible for the following:

- Identification of students with Special Education Needs
- Setting Learning Targets that will be the focus of classroom planning and teaching
- Planning teaching methods and approaches with class teacher in accordance with need

- Early intervention and targeted, time-specific prevention programmes to assess student progress
- Organising and deploying resources
- Tracking, recording and reviewing student progress
- Ensuring the availability of accurate information on policies and practices that is accessible and relevant within the school context for pupils, parents, staff and support staff.

2.3.3. Teachers Beliefs

There has been considerable research conducted investigating the relationship between the beliefs of teachers and their teaching practices (Fang 1996; Richardson 2003). Research has highlighted how the beliefs held by teachers in relation to the teaching and learning within their subject play an important role in relation to the development of their students (Ball et al 2001; Pajares 1992; Prawat 1992). Subsequently the way that teachers plan and teach within their subject and their school environment are impacted by their beliefs they and their own theory of practice.

2.4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that some mainstream teachers have reservations on the feasibility of inclusion. These attitudes originate from their classroom experience. The severity of student difficulties, the inability of the school to cope with and manage these difficulties for example emotional behavioural problems in the same class as high achievers and a high stake examination at leaving certificate contribute to teacher stress and anxiety. How can they meet the needs for all students?

While the literature review highlights issues surrounding the new SET inclusion model, there is still a void in literature examining teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs' in relation to the Irish context. In Ireland an analysis of attitudes to SEN listed in the NCSE database of SEN research and policy show that fifteen out of forty-six studies look at teacher attitudes and only three focused on post primary teachers. This study hopes to contribute to this body of research.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the chosen research methodology and outlines the necessary steps taken in carrying out this research. According to Bell (2014), before planning and conducting investigations it is helpful to consider the main features of well-established styles of research. Saunders et al (2009) define the choice of research methodology as the use of either quantitative or qualitative or a combination of both in the research design and implementation. Quantitative research is described as data and procedures that are numerical while qualitative research deals with data and techniques that are classed as non numerical (Saunders et al, 2009). The main purpose of my research was to investigate teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET model in Irish Post Primary schools in the North West region. When conducting research into teacher education, it is important to look beyond teacher training and question the thinking and beliefs of experienced practicing teachers (Theriot and Tice, 2008).

3.2. Research Questions

School improvement and inclusive education literature reviewed outlined similar themes. Inclusion is a continued dynamic and evolving process which emphasises the role of the school in building learning communities through strengthening and sustaining the participation of all stakeholders in the work of the school. Cultures, policies, and practices in schools must be restructured to respond to the diverse needs of pupils in the locality. Curriculum adaptation and examination criteria must be fit for purpose and meet the needs of diverse learners. Educational settings that focus on identifying and reducing barriers to teaching and learning must be explored, shared and exemplified as best practice. Identifying and providing the necessary support for teachers and other staff to engage in appropriate training and professional development ensures best practice.

The following research questions emerged from the literature reviewed:

- How familiar are teachers with the new inclusion model of special education support?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the new model?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the challenges of the new model?
- What supports do teachers believe they need in order to implement the new model?
- What recommendations can be made for training and delivery of SET into the future?

3.3. Research Methodology

In order to best answer the research questions in this study it was decided that a Descriptive Case Study was the most appropriate approach.

3.3.1. Case Study

Research entails systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. (Stenhouse, 1975). Research goes beyond description and requires analysis. It looks for explanations, relationships, comparisons, predictions, generalisations and theories. These are the ‘why’ questions. (Phillips and Pugh, 2009, p.48)

3.3.2. Rationale for using Case Study

There were a number of critical factors which led to the choice of a case study approach as the best way to answer the research questions outlined above. This study is interested in constructing the perceptions of teachers of the new inclusion model for Special Education Teaching in post primary schools. It is interested in ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. Yin, states that ‘In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed’ (Yin, 1994, p.1).

A second factor in choosing the case study is that the purpose of the research study is to offer a description of how the participating teachers articulated their perceptions and attitudes.

The case study is also capable of recognising the differing viewpoints or experiences of the participants (Bassey, 1999). It allows for a variety of rich and varied responses.

A third factor which contributed to the choice of case study is that the use of a variety of methods of data collection is possible (Bassey, 1999, Gomm et al., 2000). Since the research questions here were best answered through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data, this approach is suitable.

3.3.3. The Case

When defining a case study, it is important to identify the case to discuss its ‘distinctiveness’ (Stake, 1978, p. 7). This research was carried out as a case study where the ‘case’ was the set of attitudes and perceptions of teachers who work in second level schools in the North West of Ireland.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

In order to address the research questions, a mixed methods approach was utilised to collect research data (Cohen et al 2007). Using a mixed method approach has several benefits. This viewpoint is supported by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004. Combining data from several sources can lead to a more substantial conclusion (Creswell, 2013). Combining data from several sources can help lead to a more substantial conclusion (Cresswell, 2013).

3.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are often used for their versatility, time efficiency (Ruane, 2005, p.143) and their facility for the provision of data for the purposes of triangulation. There is also less possibility of researcher bias (Gorard, 2001, p.83) since the participants can answer the questions in private.

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire administered to qualified, practicing post primary teachers to glean teacher attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge around the subject area of SET and inclusion. The design of the questionnaire was guided by current literature on research methodology (Robson, 2002; Connolly, 2007), literature on teachers' attitudes to inclusion and the new SET model and my own professional observations.

3.4.2. Questionnaire Design

Designing a questionnaire “requires discipline in the selection of questions, in question writing, in the design, piloting, distribution and return of the questionnaires” (Bell, 2005, p. 136). The questionnaire was designed to glean information about teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges in the new inclusion model for special education teaching. The questions covered topics such as inclusion, benefits, and challenges of the new inclusion model for SEN pupils, mainstream pupils and teachers and the significance and implementation of CPD training.

The questionnaire consisted of four closed questions with only one possible answer, eleven Likert scale rating questions alternated with six open ended questions where the participant had freedom to write from their own experience or point of view.

The closed questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire and were designed to form a profile and understanding of the participant population. A series of Likert scale questions were used throughout the questionnaire. These stand-alone statements were followed by a rating scale of 1-5. The Likert scale responses help to ascertain the teachers' knowledge, attitude and belief to a given question. Each question measured only one item as this is of critical importance when using these

scales. The use of this type of scale provided for a level of differentiation and flexible response while still providing the potential to discover frequencies and patterns.

Open ended questions were used at a variety of stages within the questionnaire. These were placed after each Likert scale question to provide an opportunity for the participant to provide additional information to support their answers to the Likert scale questions.

3.4.3. Pilot Study

A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted in four neighbouring post-primary schools in January 2020. As described by Munn and Drever (2004), piloting allows the time for completion to be estimated and enable the researcher to identify and correct any lack of clarity or ambiguity in the questionnaire. It was necessary that every question was carefully designed and that the questions were easily understood. 'If respondents are confused or irritated, they may leave the item blank or even abandon the questionnaire' (Bell, 2005, p140).

Responses were collected from six practicing teachers. After the pilot study, it was noted that some questions were being interpreted incorrectly. It was necessary to separate questions 4 and 5 into two separate questions as some teachers may not be aware a new 'inclusion' model exists and decide not to continue with the questionnaire. The terms 'inclusion' has a different meaning for individual subject teachers. This question was included to encourage all participants to write something about what inclusion means within their classroom. Questions were softened, personalised, and reworded to ensure all participants felt their opinion was valued and important to the research study. Phrases such as 'in your opinion', 'valuable to you', 'benefits/challenges for teachers' were included. All responses were completely anonymous further encouraging rich feedback from a cross section of all teaching staff in each of the schools surveyed regarding their experiences and observations within their subject area.

3.4.4. Participants

Denscombe (2007) emphasises the importance of contact where possible in conducting a questionnaire to maximise the response rate and to put the study into context.

The participants in this survey were qualified practicing teachers from four schools across the northwest. Respondents were reminded that participation was entirely voluntary. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. As stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) it is hoped that the anonymity afforded by a questionnaire would encourage participants to be more honest in responding than in an interview. The questionnaire was administered to approximately 150 teachers across four schools in the North West of Ireland. An information letter pertaining to the research was

sent to the Principal of each participating school. Teachers also received an information letter and consent form prior to the completion of the questionnaire.

3.5. Focus Group

There are many definitions of a focus group throughout literature featuring common language like organised discussion (Kitzinger,1994), collective activity (Powell et al, 1996), and interaction (Kitzinger,1995) to identify the contribution that focus groups make to research. Focus group research involves organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences on a given topic (Anita Gibbs, 1997). Focus group interviewing is particularly beneficial for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic or when the researcher wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic (Morgan & Kreuger, 1993). The researcher can gain insights into people's shared understanding of a specific topic and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. Problems encountered when conducting focus group research may arise when attempting to identify the individual view from the group view. The role of the facilitator is very significant. Leadership and good interpersonal skills are required to navigate the focus group successfully to achieve the required objective.

The benefits for participants of a focus group should not be underestimated. The opportunity to be involved in the decision making processes (Race et al,1994), to be valued as experts, and to be given the chance to work collaboratively can be empowering for many participants (Goss & Leinback, 1996). If a group works well, trust develops and the group may explore solutions to a particular challenge as a unit rather than as individuals (Kitzinger,1995).

To choose the participants in the focus group, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling is 'a sample that is handpicked for the research on the basis of relevance and knowledge' (Denscombe, 2010, p 35). This research will draw on a purposive sample of SET teachers forming part of the focus group to gain insight into their experiences in their own school context. The participants will be deliberately selected to produce the most valuable data. The purposive selection of participants also allows for those who are geographically close to meet each other easily. This is important in order to work within the timeframes of the current study. Data generated will be used to inform findings and recommendations for school structures moving forward. It will provide a forum for discussion of intrinsic school difficulties encountered when meeting the needs of students paralleled with effective school management.

All participants for the focus group were practicing teachers working with students with SEN. All four participants regularly attend a quarterly SET cluster meeting in the local education centre. Each

participant in the focus group signed a consent form stating their entitlement to withdraw from the study at any time. In that event the information provided by them would be destroyed. Focus group participants could ask at any time for clarification or further explanation. The researcher asked for permission to record the focus group discussion and cease recording when requested if participants preferred not to be recorded for parts of the responses. Each participant in the focus group had a Special Educational qualification and was involved at school level along with school management systems in implementing the new SET inclusion model. All data recorded through focus group interviews was audio recorded, stored, and transcribed. Data was stored on a password protected laptop. It will be kept and stored until after the submission date. It will then be permanently deleted.

The focus group was facilitated by the researcher. Initially the meeting was scheduled in the local post-primary school. Due to the onset of the Covid 19 restrictions, the meeting was postponed and held remotely using Microsoft TEAMS. The focus group involved discussions around five key themes which emerged from the questionnaire data. The emergent themes were:

- Benefits of the new model
- Challenges of the new model
- Core SET team
- Time
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

It was important to prepare well prior to the focus group meeting. The researcher was conscious of the time involved for participants. In order to ensure the focus was on the themes which emerged from the questionnaire, the themes were given to focus group participants prior to the meeting. This was to allow respondents time to think and formulate answers and theories pertaining to best practice during the focus group interview. This supported participant engagement where discussions gave rich organic responses. The researcher used prompt questions to facilitate the discussion. Where discussions veered off the subject, the researcher gently guided the discussion back to the theme at hand.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

A researcher must be aware of ethical issues involved in any research study so that they can make informed decisions about the implications of certain choices (Bryman, 2001). Denier and Crandall 1978 (cited in Bryman, 2001) identified four main areas with regard to ethical consideration. *Harm to participants* was avoided by ensuring the identity of all respondents and schools were coded,

anonymised and confidential. *Lack of informed consent* was prevented by issuing a formal letter to the school Principal and Board of Management of all participating schools requesting permission to survey staff and work with the SEN team as part of a focus group for the purposes of this research study. An information leaflet was also submitted detailing the purpose of the study including some background about the researcher and their school setting.

Following approval from the Principal/Board of Management, a consent form was given to each of the participants from all the participating schools. Each participant signed a consent form indicating their individual consent to take part in the survey. An information leaflet was given to those who decided and consented to take part in the online survey using Microsoft forms. Respondents were reminded that participation was entirely voluntary and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Research data is stored and held securely by the researcher on a password protected computer. Under GDPR guidelines respondents can view the data. Every effort was made by the researcher to avoid deception throughout the study by informing the stakeholders of what the research data was to be used for, my background and the exact procedures which would be followed in the study when conducting both the questionnaires and focus group interview. Confidentiality was also a concern in this study as the education community is relatively small. A commitment to analyse, disseminate and collate the results of the research in an honest and truthful manner to all was imperative to the success and 'buy in' from all participants. The researcher was not in a power position in relation to any of the respondents. Any possible risks which could reasonably be expected by the participants along with the expected benefits of participation were also outlined.

Informed consent was conducted according to the ethical guidelines as set out by the British Educational Research association. This researcher was at all times mindful that the research procedures must not unduly impact on the workload of teachers participating in the surveys or the focus group.

All research was carried out in accordance with the ethical procedures and policies of Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT). I applied to the LYIT ethics committee for ethical approval to carry out the proposed research and approval was granted.

3.7. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important considerations when designing data collection for both qualitative and quantitative research. They are necessary prerequisites to ensure that research findings have merit. Cohen et al (2007) state that research is reliable if it produces similar findings when carried out in a similar context or within a similar group of participants. Strategies used to

improve reliability included explaining the importance and benefits of the research to participants (Hudson and Miller, 1997). Questionnaires were carefully designed with all elements piloted and amended in order to ensure clarity of questions and responses. Piloting the questionnaire aided the design and wording of the questions to be used. It also highlighted any ambiguity or misunderstanding. This contributed to more accurate responses thus easing the completion and conduction of the study. Rigorous adherence to the written and spoken word of the teacher contributed to validity. Anonymity encouraged greater honesty. This means responses given were more valid and reliable. This research has striven for validity by first collecting sufficient information through questionnaires and interviews to ensure that the data gathered was as representative as possible of the teaching population of second level schools in the North West. Triangulation was made possible using both quantitative and qualitative data. Those themes and broad topics which formed the basis of the focus group themes stemmed from the responses of the participants to the questionnaire survey. This weaving of themes from one stage of the research to the next ensured the triangulation of the data and the findings. This use of data for triangulation was one of the key attempts to ensure validity and a fundamental reason for selecting a case study approach. The researcher was mindful not to demonstrate bias when conducting the focus group interview through body language, tone of voice and interpretation of responses.

The goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study (Yin, 1994, p. 36). The use of two forms of data collection have allowed for greater confidence in the findings and the knowledge that some form of triangulation has taken place has increased confidence that the research questions have been answered and reported with validity and reliability. While the aim of the study was not to prove some unquestionable facts, the research did strive to be 'reliable' though possibly more accurately understood in terms of 'dependability' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 108-109)

3.8. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. It organises and describes your data in rich detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data being analysed. Analysis is not a linear process where you move from one phase to the next but rather it is a recurring process where you move back and forth throughout the phases. It is a process that develops over time (Ely et al, 1997). The data generated was thematically analysed using the Braun and Clark six stage framework. Phase one recommends familiarising yourself with all aspects of your data including questionnaires' and focus group interview. Verbal data from the focus group interview

was transcribed manually which helped initiate the thematic analysis process. Transcription is time consuming, frustrating and at times boring but is an excellent way to start familiarising yourself with the data (Riessman, 1993). The transcription process helped develop a more thorough understanding of the data and helped to generate an initial list of ideas about what information is in the data collected and what is interesting about it. Repeated reading was also conducted for total immersion in the data. This led directly into phase two which involved the production of initial codes and identifying features of the data that appear interesting to the research. The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and helped to organise data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). This was completed systematically through the entire data and an initial set of codes was generated. Step three commenced when all the data was initially coded and involved searching for potential themes from the initial codes. Essentially the researcher analyses the codes to consider how different codes might combine to create overarching themes. Step four involved the reviewing and refinement of those themes. At the end of this phase the researcher had a good idea of what the different themes were and how they tallied together, and the overall story they tell about the data. The fifth phase involved defining each theme and naming them. It was vital that the researcher did not just paraphrase the content of the data presented but sought to identify what was interesting about the data findings and why. It is important to consider how each theme identified fit into the broader overall 'story' in relation to the research questions posed. The sixth phase involved reproducing the data in the write up of the findings. The task of the write up of a thematic analysis is to tell the story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis and make an argument, finding or recommendation in relation to the research questions presented.

The emerging themes from the questionnaire were further informed by the ongoing literature review for the dissertation. The themes for the focus group discussion were informed by data generated from the questionnaire. Within the focus group the researcher hoped to keep the discussion semi structured to attain organic deep rich responses and grasp a true understanding of the expertise in the room (Bell and Water, 2014., p 181,182).

3.9. Limitations and Challenges to the Study

Completing a study across four schools was quite comprehensive. The geographical limits of the research study must be acknowledged. This was not a national representation of Ireland and the findings may be limited as the data was only collected from four schools in the North West of Ireland. It was decided that questionnaires followed by a focus group interview was the most suitable method for collecting data for this Case Study research.

One of the criticisms levelled at Case Study research is that its findings are not generalizable. The results cannot necessarily be applied to all other members of the population. Universal generalizability was not an aim of this study. In fact, this research hoped to provide knowledge of teachers' perceptions and attitudes, not currently available in an Irish context.

Although the use of Likert scales is very common within questionnaires, it is important to be cognisant of the range of limitations which apply to the use of these scales. There could be a range of interpretations which could apply to any given question, for example one participant's 'agree' may correspond to another's 'strongly agree'. There was no way of measuring the differential between a 'disagree' and a 'strongly disagree'. Furthermore, there is no way of knowing whether the participants were being honest. All that can be hoped is that the questionnaire was well designed and carefully structured. There was nothing therein to upset, offend or irritate the respondent. Respondents could complete the questionnaire in the privacy of their own home so there would be no reason to suspect a dishonest response.

These limitations have been addressed by ensuring that the findings and reported results of the questionnaire do not make claims which could not be substantiated. All that has been deduced are patterns and frequencies and no conclusive evidence has been claimed based on these questions. Schools are busy places. Work overload for teachers can also impact engagement in research through questionnaires and focus groups as time and time constraints are evident. School closures as a result of Covid-19 meant teachers were working remotely from home trying to fulfil their professional teacher roles as well as juggle their respective home situation. One school who had initially been involved in the research received notification of a Whole School Evaluation inspection and therefore could not take part in the study.

Additional methods such as interviews and observations could have been utilised to further investigate teachers' beliefs and knowledge surrounding the benefits and challenges of the new inclusion model for special education teaching. Additional focus groups could potentially unearth more comprehensive findings, but it was not feasible given the time frame.

Chapter 4 Research Findings and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the qualitative and quantitative data collected in relation to teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET model in Irish Post Primary schools in the North West region. The data was collected using a questionnaire survey. The quantitative measures were used to determine how familiar participants were with the new 'Inclusion Model' for special education teaching and with the term 'Inclusion' in post primary school. The qualitative methods sought to provide a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges in the new inclusion model for special education teaching. The emerging themes from the analysis of the questionnaire were used to facilitate a focus group discussion.

4.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

This section discusses the findings from the quantitative data generated from the questionnaire survey.

4.2.1. Demographic Information – Profile of Respondents

The closed questions asked at the beginning of the questionnaire were designed to form a profile and understanding of the participant population. More than 50 % of respondents had 20 or more years' experience. SET teachers are very experienced, coming from a wide range of subject areas. They understand how current changes must be applied to ensure best practice is achieved. The experience of the classroom teacher is essential for collaborative practice, practical planning, and implementation of the 'new inclusion' model in different subject areas. Among the 35 respondents there was great diversity in terms of subjects taught. This is very positive as teachers from across the spectrum of subjects gave full and varied responses in relation to their subject area, levels taught and the benefits and challenges for all stakeholders.

4.2.2. SEN Experience

Out of 35 respondents only one had no experience of teaching students with SEN. This is very positive that respondents were experienced in SEN. They could therefore provide rich comments based on their practice of Inclusion and knowledge of the student body. This may also pose the question why teachers who have no experience of SEN did not contribute? Some may have felt they could not respond or that the questionnaire was only directed at SEN teachers. Alternatively, some might support the theory that the job of the SET teacher is to help the SEN students bridge the gap towards Inclusion where possible while the job of the subject teacher is to cover the curriculum.

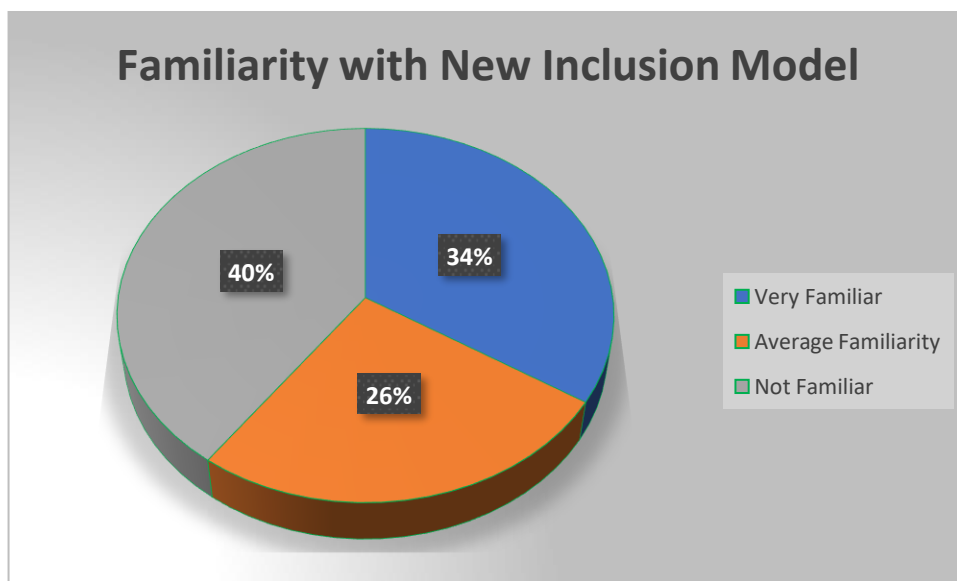
Fig. 4.1. Experience of Teaching Students with SEN



4.2.3. Familiarity with the New Model and the term Inclusion

Participants were required to rate how familiar they considered themselves to be with the new inclusion model. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires revealed that across all 4 schools involved in the study, 34 % of teachers said they considered themselves to be ‘very familiar’ with the new inclusion model. 26% gave an average rating and 40% rated themselves as being not ‘very familiar’.

Fig. 4.2. Familiarity with New Inclusion Model

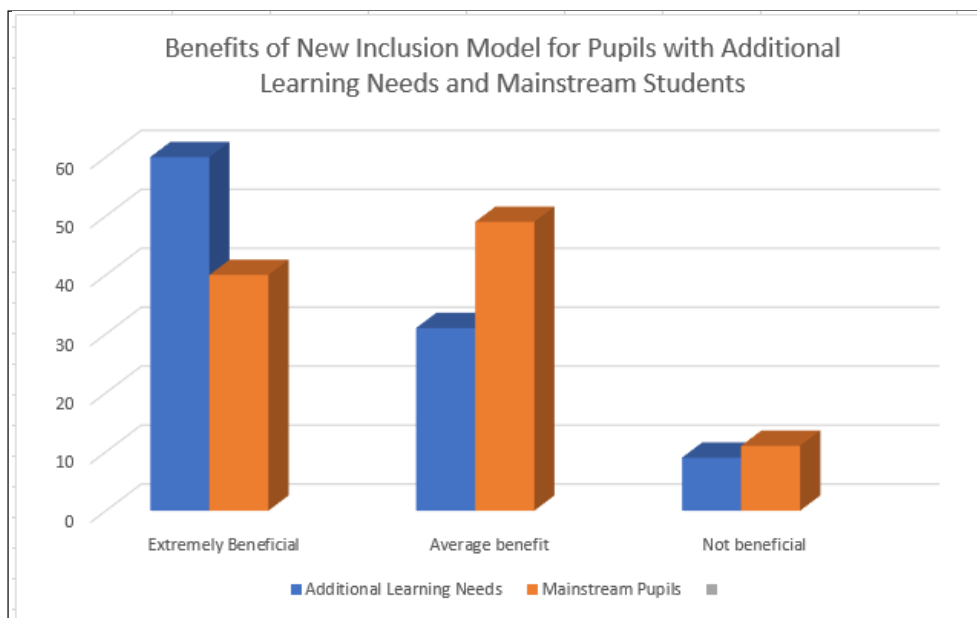


4.2.4. Benefits of the New Inclusion Model

60 % of respondents considered the new inclusion model to be ‘extremely beneficial’ for pupils with additional learning needs with 31% believing it was of average benefit. 9 % had the opinion that the new inclusion model was not beneficial for pupils with additional learning needs. It is encouraging that 60% of teachers see clear benefits for SEN students but also queries that 31% were undecided.

40 % of respondent agreed that the new inclusion model was extremely beneficial for other pupils in the mainstream classes. 49% suggested that possibly only some benefits were evident and 11% expressed the opinion that inclusion was not beneficial for other pupils.

Fig. 4.3. Benefits of the New Inclusion Model



4.2.5. Challenges of the New Model

The new inclusion model inevitably presents some challenges Respondents reported on what they saw as student difficulties with the transition to the new model. 40% of respondents felt that it was extremely challenging for students with additional needs to be integrated into the mainstream class. 49% indicated average challenge and 11 % suggested the inclusive classroom was not challenging for pupils with additional needs. When asked about challenges for other pupils 14% of respondents voiced the opinion that it was extremely challenging for other pupils. 57 % indicated average in terms of level of challenge for other pupils. 21% of respondents suggested that other pupils were not unduly challenged or displaced by the new inclusion model.

4.2.6. Continuous Professional Development

School provision of CPD rated highest as an issue of concern for practicing teachers. 97% of respondents felt that CPD was extremely important for teachers in terms of provision, planning and allocation for students with SEN. Many teachers want to progress to the new inclusion model but are unsure about the ‘how’? What are their roles and responsibilities in the provision for SEN students?. Participants were required to rate whether they thought there were sufficient opportunities for CPD training in the area of SEN for post primary teachers. 57% of participants surveyed strongly disagreed that there was not sufficient

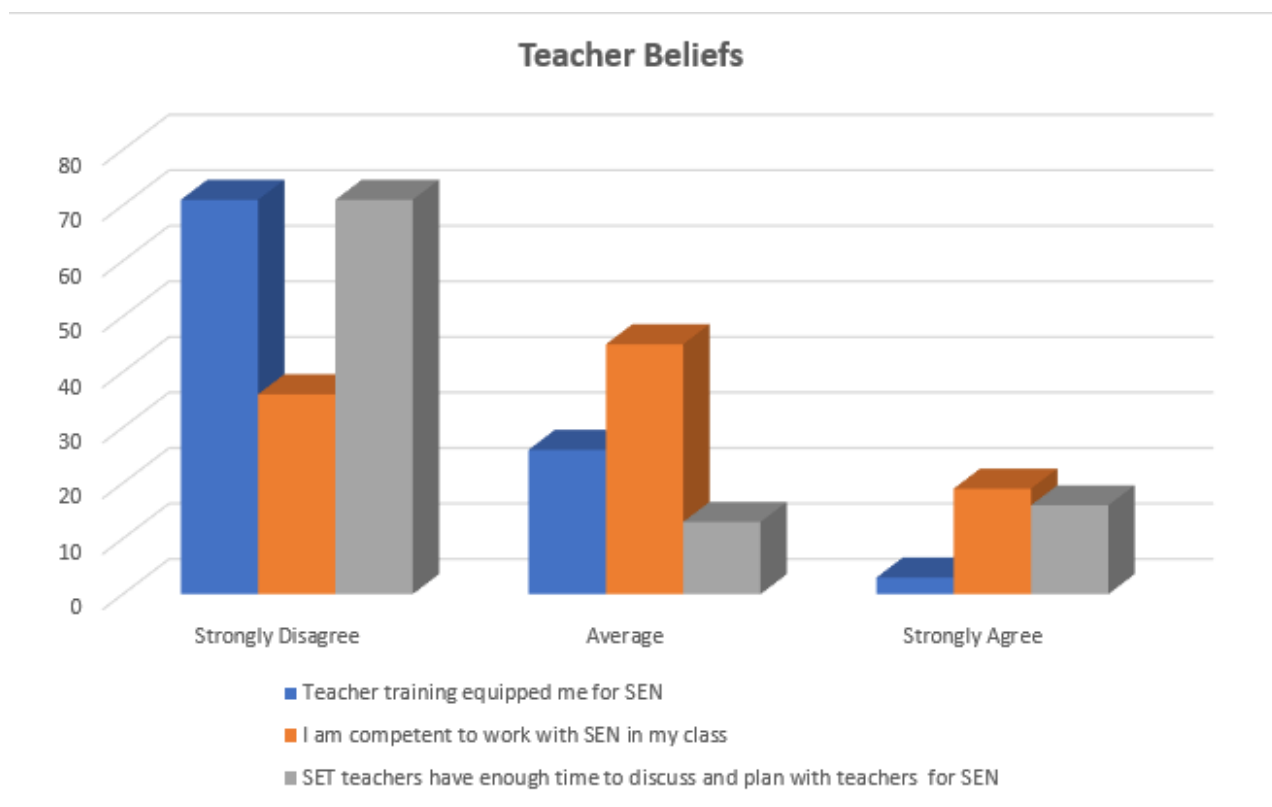
opportunities for CPD training for teachers in the area of SEN. 32% rated average as having sufficient CPD and 11% agreed there was sufficient CPD opportunities in the area of SEN.

4.2.7. Teacher Beliefs

71 % of respondents strongly disagreed that their preservice training gave them sufficient knowledge to work with pupils of SEN. 26% said they had an average idea and 3% agreed that they had sufficient knowledge to work with pupils of SEN from their preservice teacher education. 36% strongly disagreed that they considered themselves competent to work with pupils with SEN in their mainstream class with 45 % of the opinion they had average competency. 19% strongly agreed that they felt competent to work with SEN pupils in their mainstream class.

71% strongly disagreed that SET teachers had sufficient time to meet with mainstream teachers to discuss and plan for pupils with SEN. 13% gave an average rating and 16% suggested they felt that time was not an issue for SET teachers.

Fig. 4.4. Teacher Beliefs



The quantitative data highlighted that the majority of teachers considered themselves to be experienced in working with SEN students. The results highlighted that teachers were not as familiar with the the new inclusion model as they considered themselves to be. There was uncertainty surrounding roles and responsibilities. There was a consistent response from the teachers across all four school surveyed that

intensive CPD was 'extremely important' in the provision, planning and allocation for students with SEN and the transition to the new model.

4.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

This section describes the data generated from the qualitative section of the questionnaire.

4.3.1. Familiarity with the New Model and the term Inclusion

When asked about their familiarity with the new inclusion model, 34 % rated themselves as being very familiar. 40 % said they were not familiar, with 26 % being undecided or with an average familiarity. A large majority of the participants in the study showed a lack of concrete knowledge surrounding their familiarity. This would have implications for the roles and responsibilities of the class teacher in the planning and implementation of the new model which was introduced to post primary schools through circular 0014/2017 and further updated by circular 008/2019.

In relation to the term 'Inclusion' most respondents felt they had sufficient knowledge of the term. Twenty one out of thirty five respondents viewed inclusion as students being taught alongside their peers in the mainstream class with no withdrawal for support by the SEN team, 'SEN students are educated with other "mainstream" students in the same classroom'. Four respondents had the opinion that an SEN teacher would help support inclusion for SEN students in the mainstream class. These findings indicate that despite teachers believing that they had a well developed and clear understanding of the term 'Inclusion', it is evident that the majority of teachers surveyed have a narrow view of what the term actually means in terms of our practice and responsibility in the classroom. From the questionnaires completed it is interesting to highlight that three out of thirty five respondents referred to the class teacher 'using differentiation to meet the student needs. This may raise the question, do teachers believe it is only the responsibility of the SET department to differentiate the curriculum for SEN students?

4.3.2. Benefits for Students

Teachers identified three main benefits for pupils with additional learning needs. Firstly, 43 % of teachers suggested that the new inclusion model would ultimately promote positive self esteem, confidence building, stronger peer relationships and better social skills. The 'stigma' which might be associated with extra help or being withdrawn for learning support was lessened. Students were participating with their peers in the same classroom setting. This is a very positive step towards the promotion of student well being as it normalises learning at ones own individual pace. Students gain confidence in their learning ability with a stronger student voice to access support or ask for help.

Secondly, many teachers referred to the 'supports' targeting students for intervention based on specific identified need as a more effective use of SET hours. 14% voiced the opinion that students with the greatest level of need would have access to the greatest level of support. This model supports students in becoming independent, responsible learners instilling in them skills for lifelong learning. The support or intervention applied may be short term giving students a sense of ownership and responsibility in relation to their learning experience. In terms of allocation, benefits vary from school to school depending on school allocation profile and the level of student identified need. Schools have more flexibility and discretion in tailoring teaching to specific pupils so as to meet the identified pupil needs. Targeted support and intervention on specific topics within subjects reinforce understanding.

Thirdly, one language teacher voiced the opinion that pupils who stay in the classroom setting learned more from their peers and teacher as language acquisition is achievable through the use of repetition and being spoken to in the target language. Students would be immersed in the language of the class rather than be withdrawn for support or alternatively exempted from the language. One respondent felt that the new inclusion model when worked well should support and challenge students to become independent learners and take responsibility for their learning, 'the support may be short-term and this may give pupils a sense of ownership over their learning experiences'. Two respondents also referred to students not falling behind or missing out on activities and topics covered in class.

Teachers also spoke about benefits for other pupils in mainstream classes. Inclusive environments within the mainstream class promote tolerance amongst students as stated by 20% of those surveyed. Students may have a better understanding of diversity. They learn understanding, respect and compassion for students with different learning needs. This concept will facilitate future social interaction, emotional intelligence and friendship possibly in a working environment. Students may have an opportunity to enhance their own confidence and sense of purpose. They could display and nurture qualities and learning techniques which could be applied by the student with additional learning needs. Students would experience equality of opportunity for all academic abilities. 40% of participants cited the provision of team teaching and extra resources as 'allowing for better learning opportunities for all students.' The exposure to a variety of teaching methodologies and strategies paralleled with a variety of assessment methods would also benefit other students in the class. Some teachers felt that students were very adaptable to different teaching and learning styles including team teaching or station learning given they experience the positive effects within the class. It would take time for students to adapt to the new model. One respondent noted that class planning and effective differentiation were important to minimise the challenge for other students. Respondent 14 had the

opinion that the new model should not present any difficulty for other students but this depended on the degree of SEN that the 'included' student presented with. .

Five respondents reported that the only benefit for other pupils in mainstream classes was that they would be exposed to recognising and working with others who have different learning styles and needs. Inclusivity challenges students to be more aware of the needs of others and may furnish them with a greater understanding of SEN needs.

4.3.3. Challenges for Students

Where many respondents reported on the benefits for both students with additional learning needs and other mainstream pupils, they also spoke of the challenges for students within the new inclusion model. There were mixed feelings amongst educators when discussing the possible trials which might be encountered.

31% of teachers felt 'inclusion' would prove very challenging for pupils with additional learning needs depending on the extent and level of need. These students tend to have short attention spans, be overwhelmed by the amount of work, possibly be afraid or have a laissez-faire approach to asking questions or class engagement. 20% had the opinion that there could be a sense of intimidation as SEN students might be self-conscious about being highlighted in front of their peers. Targeted students were sometimes too embarrassed or significantly less engaged. Two teachers involved in team teaching recounted 'helping academically more able students who were proactive in seeking assistance'. In subjects where discussion or opinion is required, students may feel anxious based on opinions formed by their peers. One respondent highlighted SEN student awareness of the ability of the mainstream students which may trigger feeling of inadequacy or inferiority when taking part in groupwork or pairwork. The students' own individual output could be problematic

In a large class it is hard to have your student voice heard and receive adequate attention unless students remain after class to highlight the relevant issue. Many teenagers prefer not to receive any extra attention or have their personal issues addressed in the public area of the classroom. One respondent felt that some students may lose interest in the subject or in school life because of feelings of inadequacy. This could lead to negative behaviours resulting in class disruption for others or a lack of engagement.

The learning divide is not as apparent at junior cycle. Common level papers supplement equal opportunity in a low stake exam. One respondent replied 'I can try and differentiate classwork and use modified marking schemes but this is not beneficial to students as it won't happen in the state exam or for classroom based assessments (CBA's). Two teacher respondents on the questionnaire

reported evidence of SEN students having problems completing the mandatory classroom based assessments (CBA's). These assessments are completed independently by each student under direction from the teacher as part of the new junior cycle profile of achievement.

The 'inclusive classroom' becomes more challenging for students with additional learning needs especially at senior cycle. With bigger class sizes, in one case 26-30 pupils, it is difficult to meet all the identified needs. Differentiated classwork and modified marking schemes are not an option in the traditional state examination process unless students are following an alternative examination such as Leaving cert applied (LCA) or have been granted a reasonable accommodation (RACE), for example a waiver in spelling and grammar. Students may experience difficulties with the language of the subject curriculum or the volume of theory related to many leaving certificate subjects.

Two respondents indicated the new inclusion model was a disservice to SEN pupils who may have received more specific hours allocated to their individual learning requirements under the previous model. These needs were met by the SEN teacher who helped support student access to subject curriculums. The trained SEN teacher supported needs around specific disabilities including Dyspraxia, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD) and Specific Speech and Language Disability (SLD). As students no longer need a professional report to qualify for support, fewer assessments will be carried out. Without a diagnosis, difficulties may arise for students wishing to be considered for Reasonable Accommodations for Certificate Examinations (RACE) or Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) or for the teacher trying to differentiate work for a specific difficulty. One teacher felt the lack of diagnosis might lead to confusion for the student as to why they are finding work difficult when their peers are not.

Challenges identified for other pupils hinged on the class dynamic, the student group and the experience of the teacher. 29% of respondents reported that other pupils may find the new model disruptive in terms of learning opportunities or distraction causing loss of focus. High achievers may experience neglect if a lot of 'tuition time' is directed at the students with additional learning needs commanding teacher instruction, time or attention when in some cases also exhibiting negative behaviours. Two respondents had the opinion that 'it was difficult to see how students in mainstream would benefit in the long term due to the slower pace and the teachers' attention being divided'. Concerns and dissatisfaction among senior/higher level students re class pace or having to 'babysit' students with additional learning needs during groupwork were identified by one respondent. This may lead to 'frustration', difficulty staying on task or demotivation to achieve at their full potential.

Teacher/student and parental expectations are often high. One respondent used the term ‘frustration’ as students may feel the student teacher contact time is reduced as those with additional learning needs may require or demand more assistance which can cause ‘disruption to learning opportunities’.

4.3.4. Benefits for Teachers

When asked for their thoughts on the benefits for teachers, respondents wrote from their individual classroom experience. 43% of respondents welcomed the opportunity for collaborative practice and sharing of expertise and resources with their colleagues. Class teachers would work in consultation with the SET team. The SET team would identify needs within the school or address concerns from the subject teacher in relation to specific students. Once the needs have been identified, a plan for learning would be put in place. Teachers can differentiate class material and get support from SEN expertise within the school rather than waiting on a professional report or diagnosis. Teachers can plan and teach towards student strengths and areas for development. Respondent 16 mentioned ‘less guilt for the lack of one to one time in class’ as students needs were being appropriately met. This respondent referred to the importance of ‘collaboration and hearing and seeing’ another professional at work. The shared experiences and resources are beneficial as you are working as part of a team rather than in isolation.

Another benefit identified by the respondents to the questionnaire survey was the exploration of alternative teaching methodologies and adapting teaching practices. If educators are willing to embrace collaborative practice and new learning strategies this will inevitably improve the quality of teaching and learning and create awareness of different learning styles. It will create awareness of SEN and pupils with different needs and provide a better understanding of how these needs could be met. One respondent had the positive opinion that the new model would ignite change by ‘forcing teachers to adapt and take on new practices that they may not ordinarily do’. Some respondents felt that this shift in practice would reinforce teachers’ sense of achievement as students with additional learning needs triumph at their learning level. Success is not always based on academic grades or points. One teacher reported being more mindful of how learning objectives are achieved, the content of their class and how best to deliver it. The class teacher plays a valuable role in contributing to a nurturing inclusive school environment.

Team teaching was viewed as a welcome support for the class teacher by 23% of respondents. If implemented appropriately this method has a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning for pupils with additional learning needs. It would allow the class teacher to continue with the lesson without trying to balance the needs of the mainstream student with the needs of the SEN student. Class disruption is minimised as SEN students are less likely to be withdrawn and therefore do not

miss out on work or homework given in class. Team teaching might also benefit other pupils as they would have access to another teacher in the classroom if they required assistance. Students who do not have a professional diagnosis or identified need may benefit from the presence of another teacher to provide extra guidance and one to one support within the classroom.

One respondent felt there were no benefits for teachers. Another wrote ‘the more support a class teacher has will dictate the benefits for him/her’. Respondent 12 thought the changes reinforced the reality of the classroom and life. There is a heavy emphasis on examinations, points and college entry rather than working towards ones strengths to gain valuable lifeskills which enable students with additional needs to live and work independently and be actively part of society.

4.3.5. Challenges for Teachers

Respondents recognised many challenges for educators pertaining to the new inclusion model for pupils with additional learning needs. Concurrent themes throughout the questionnaire identified CPD, planning time, team teaching and timetabling as supports that were necessary to successfully implement the new inclusion model.

An effective inclusive classroom requires an understanding of special educational needs. It is unmistakably evident from the voice of teachers through the questionnaire that insufficient training is an issue. 29% of classroom teachers felt ill equipped to implement the new model of support. Lack of CPD training on the implementation and planning coupled with a lack of knowledge of SEN difficulties were challenges verified by many. One respondent stated that teachers are still ‘reliant on didactic teaching which does not promote inclusive teaching or learning’. Effective ongoing training would ensure the SET inclusion model is implemented and understood by all teachers within schools particularly those occupying leadership roles.

Differentiated tasks, resource development and professional collaboration mean careful planning is required. 29 % of respondents cited time constraints were an issue within schools. Teachers felt the lack of designated structured collaboration time would impact greatly on the implementation and success of the new model. Teachers required time to liaise with the SEN teachers with view to planning for differentiation in the mainstream class. Time was also required to meet with team teaching colleagues to plan for collaborative practice to ‘ensure successful learning outcomes’. Teachers are under enormous pressure to cover lengthy curriculums under current state examinations procedures. Six respondents commented on ‘class pace’, ‘workload to be covered’, ‘juggling’ and ‘HUGE added pressure to be all things to all men’. It is extremely challenging for teachers to give individual support to students with SEN. It is frustrating for the teacher who cannot give as much attention as they ‘want’ to both the student with additional needs and also to other students who

require extra help. High academic demands from student ‘high flyers’, coupled with parental expectations were also an issue for one respondent. Dissatisfaction concerning class pace and curriculum content were also referred to by some teachers ‘trying to meet the needs of the pupil whilst trying to teach the rest of the class’.

Team teaching is advocated as the way forward in terms of change in practice. The presence of another colleague in the classroom posed a concern for 17% of respondents. Some reported feeling ‘under scrutiny’ or ‘under inspection’. One teacher found it difficult to utilise the co teacher to the benefit of the students. One respondent had the opinion that team teaching may suit some subjects more than others, for example maths or practical subjects like home economics. . Two teachers cited feelings of inadequacy or ‘guilt’ that you are not making a significant difference to those students in need. One respondent said ‘I just couldn’t communicate the way I would in the mainstream classroom situation’. Consistent timetabling was cited by one respondent as significant to ‘make real progress’ and facilitate team teaching.

One respondent discussed the physical environment of the classroom as a challenge to classroom management. Lack of space, shortage of desks and chairs coupled with large class sizes would inhibit movement and modelling of teaching methodologies, for example station learning or groupwork. Some students might have emotional behavioural difficulties which may pose a ‘health and safety’ issue for both teachers and other students. One respondent discussed the ‘inequality’ within the system which takes greater account for the student who struggles rather than those who excel or are gifted.

4.3.6. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

All respondents identified extensive CPD as imperative to the implementation of the new inclusion model. Teachers voiced the opinion that their depth of knowledge around SET and the new inclusion model was not adequate

Teachers wanted to understand the various types of SEN needs and how these presented in the classroom. They wanted to know how to adapt their teaching methods to facilitate and meet the needs of students. Specific evidence based strategies and classroom interventions which exemplify best practice were required to support struggling students. Teachers voiced a need for resources, lessons and templates which were subject specific especially at senior cycle. Presenting and sharing of assessment information also presented as an issue. Teachers felt that they needed sufficient training to understand what the results of screening and diagnostic testing represent in terms of student learning ability and differentiation in the classroom.

Many teachers felt that CPD training on the implementation of co teaching as an approach was necessary to clarify and facilitate discussion on roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and co teacher. Respondents also expressed the opinion that CPD on the new SET inclusion model was essential for all stakeholders so that it was understood by all teachers in the school.

4.3.7. A Core SET Team

A core team of willing participant teachers was cited by 30 % of respondents as essential if schools are to progress and transition into the new model. The importance of an established consistent core team was identified as important in terms of best practice. The core team would advise on resources and suitable interventions. Consistency would see training and expertise stay within the core team with skills and areas of strength being suitably timetabled.

4.4. Qualitative Data from Focus Group

It is evident from the qualitative and quantitative data documented and analysed in the questionnaires that five main themes arose for further discussion within the focus group. The themes identified were as follows:

- Benefits of the new model
- Challenges of the new model
- Core SET team
- Time
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Four participants took part in the focus group interview. Each member was embedded in SET within their own school. The discussion yielded sufficient clarity and information to answer the research questions. It was evident from the responses that all teachers identified time, timetabling and effective targeted CPD as areas that could be addressed that would enhance the successful implementation of the new inclusion model.

4.4.1. Benefits of the New Model

The findings from the questionnaire data were clearly reflected in the focus group interview. All respondents agreed that the new SET inclusion model had many benefits. Respondent C referred to the 'effective and efficient' use of SET time and teacher professionalism. Respondent D talked about equality and the 'level playing pitch' for SEN students to achieve their individual goals the same as their peers in the mainstream class. This comment was followed by respondent A who mentioned the lack of withdrawal would possibly mean 'no labelling' as students aged thirteen or fourteen could

be very self-conscious. Respondent A also had the opinion that the concept of team teaching would benefit all students. It may encourage students to be proactive and 'speak up' if they were experiencing difficulty in class. The idea of two professionals working together lent itself to being more creative and broadening teaching perspectives on foot of collaborative practice. Respondent B noted the benefits of team teaching in a practical subject. Students follow the instructions given, produce a product by themselves with assistance from the team teacher. The student will experience a sense of achievement and accomplishment and yet has not been allowed to 'sit back' or 'opt out'.

4.4.2. Challenges of the New Model

Challenges were also evident within schools and school systems. Respondent C discussed the 'extra onus of responsibility on the teacher that was not so magnified before'. It has now been clearly identified as a responsibility for all class teachers to know and target support for all students. Respondent A spoke about a recent inspection where the inspector expected a knowledge of each student in the class in terms of targeted need and SEN diagnosis. Respondent A also cited time and curriculum overload as issues that needed to be addressed.

Respondent D noted one challenge that caused her difficulty. Interventions that are timetabled sometimes do not align with the student in front of you that needs help 'today' with a specific subject. Respondent C went on to discuss 'buy in' from teachers who felt they lacked the knowledge required or were possibly 'afraid of change'. Respondent D referred to team teaching which was 'not welcomed' by all teacher participants. This mirrored the views of teachers in the questionnaire where the presence of another colleague in the classroom posed a concern for 17% of respondents. It was also noted that team teaching was an 'onerous task on both teachers' and required strategic planning prior to the class. Possibly this teaching methodology may lend itself to practical based subjects where it was easier for the co-teacher to understand their role in the class. Respondent B raised the notion of team teaching etiquette where any classroom based incident would not be mentioned outside the classroom setting. All respondents agreed that some teachers would have issues with team teaching. Respondent A voiced the opinion that teachers should 'rethink the way they think' and reevaluate the purpose of new teaching methodologies. These are not to highlight teachers practice but to enhance the learning experience for the students and ensure 'that the student is happy and flourishing' and learning. Respondent A also cited planning and timetable as 'big issues' that needed to be addressed. Respondents all agreed that consistency within the timetable rather than SEN used as a 'filler' onto an existing timetable was a challenge in schools.

4.4.3. Designated Scheduled Planning Time

Due to the organic nature of the focus group discussion designated scheduled planning time was discussed next. Designated scheduled planning time could allow for collaborative meetings between the SET team and mainstream class teachers, team teaching colleagues and subject departments. This structured time could allow transfer of relevant information, specific student target setting and agreed shared objectives, resources and planning relevant to team teaching and review of targets and interventions.

Respondent C noted that this was a challenge for schools in terms of consistent timetabling and planning time. They went on to say that this matter should be addressed as a ‘must’ as SET and timetabling become ‘completely ineffective’ if there is not consistency of teacher and class allocation from week to week. Respondents all agreed. Respondent B suggested that professional collaboration time could be allocated weekly on teacher timetables. Respondent A said that sporadic timetabling fuels the need for more planning time – ‘if managers can allow for consistency, it will save them on the planning time’. Respondent C articulated that ‘there needs to be the same teachers where relationships are built up’ and fostered. The issue of time was also discussed in relation to liaison with other teachers’ and transfer of important relevant student information. Both respondents C and D referred to a consistent SET team ‘working and teaching’. If this were the scenario it would be less time consuming to share information. This concept was agreed to by all respondents. Respondent B mentioned that in another school, information pertaining to incoming 1st year students was shared at two scheduled staff meetings at the beginning of the school year. Respondent D went on to say that school technology such as vantage was a good forum to share information confidentially, but it did not guarantee that teachers would read or access the information. The respondent went on to say that during inspection every teacher is supposed to know the information pertaining to each student in their mainstream class. This would mean appropriate time should be allocated to sharing that information. Respondent C said ‘something practical such as going through every 1st year would be a very effective use of time’. Respondent A agreed, and noted ‘when teachers have the student information, it makes teaching more personable’. All respondents agreed. Respondent D suggested that if school staff meetings could be focused to include SET input, a lot of information could be covered in terms of student welfare and well-being in a short space of time.

4.4.4. SET Core Team

The data in relation to the establishment of an SET core team came as a result of the teacher questionnaires rather than as a question that was posed within the questionnaire. All respondents strongly agreed with this suggestion. Respondent B had the theory that ‘if we have a focused SET

team, the new model will be implemented and delivered properly'. Training of willing participants in a specific intervention or as a SET qualified teacher means the school is investing in the future. Respondent A referred to 'consistency' within the core team and 'best practice' citing the need for a teacher cohort who have the up to date information and can liaise with school management to advise on student SEN needs and the new SET model.

4.4.5. Continuous Professional Development

Continuous professional development (CPD) was viewed as being of paramount importance to 70% of those surveyed in the teacher questionnaires. The question posed to those selected for the focus group interview was who, what and when? Respondent C felt that 'the person facilitating the CPD matters as much as the content of the CPD itself. Respondent C went on to say that 'CPD courses must be adequately researched and targeted' in alignment with the needs and vision of the school. Respondent C also suggested before engaging in CPD it was important to ascertain 'buy in' from school management to avoid investing time in training that may not be suitable for the school dynamic. Respondent D referred to the 'timing' and 'time allowed' for CPD. Appropriate time allocation allowed for engagement and processing of the course content covered during CPD. It was noted by respondent D that up to three CPD sessions are sometimes scheduled back to back for the same day covering three different topics. It was suggested that more time could be afforded to process, question and reflect on the CPD covered. Respondent D voiced the opinion that some CPD was a missed opportunity as it was too rushed. Respondent D also felt that the beginning or early part of the school year was most suitable time for training. Respondent C felt that expression of interest in SET and subsequent timetabling as a result of this would make CPD more relevant. Respondent C went on to say 'CPD must be provided at a time when people have put their names forward for timetabling. Facilitators can be very motivational and inspirational which ensures 'buy in'. Respondent A agreed staff need time to talk, reflect and process how the CPD concept delivered could work in the classroom. If that is not facilitated 'that is where it ends'. Respondent A had the opinion that CPD delivered to a group of people 'teachers' who have consented to teach SEN, with SET implemented on their timetable, they will benefit from directed focused CPD. Respondent A also said that CPD delivered by both 'inhouse' facilitators and outside agencies had a place in schools. They went on to say that inhouse facilitators know the reality within their school but may have a slight bias leaving them not as open to trying something new.

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments in relation to any of the themes discussed. Respondent A noted class size, curriculum overload, inconsistency in teachers timetables and lack of planning time as issues relevant to teachers surrounding the introduction of the new SET inclusion model. All respondents agreed. Respondent A went on to say that if these issues were neglected this

would lead to ‘disgruntled teachers’ who saw SET as a ‘stressor’ or a ‘headache’. Respondent D referred to the terms ‘Integration’ and ‘Inclusion’. They went on to say that integration is easy because a student just has to be present. Inclusion means as teachers we must change our content and our teaching methods. It requires structures and strategies. All respondents agreed. Respondent C stated that ‘if we are serious about inclusion and implementing the new SET inclusion model we must have a level playing field for all students, making whatever efforts we can’. Respondent A reiterated the importance of repetition and reinforcement in relation to best practice within the new model until it is ‘engrained’. Respondent A also noted inclusive environments must be demonstrated from the top down and should encompass all stakeholders.

To end the interview, the facilitator asked for clarity of opinion on the possibility of a slower class pace due to the inclusion of SEN pupils in the mainstream class. The facilitator sought clarity as four teachers surveyed made reference to class pace and possible student or parent dissatisfaction. What would the vocabulary sound like to back up inclusion and the new SET inclusion model? Respondent C had the opinion that ‘the idea behind the new inclusion model was not to slow down class pace but to address both the talented student, the gifted student and the SEN student by recognising their different needs through differentiation. Respondent A agreed with this opinion stating that the new model would make students more self aware of their learning style and give them the skills to communicate with the class teacher if they felt their needs were not being met. Respondent D stated the foundation of the new model was ‘rooted’ in consistency of teachers and timetabling. Respondent B reiterated the importance of planning time. Designated planning time will allow teachers and subject departments to plan for inclusion for all students.

4.5. Conclusion

Having presented and discussed the findings of the research, the next chapter will now discuss the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Inclusive practice is a whole school approach. Teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively as part of a team, share learning experiences and good practice. The new inclusion model is a milestone advancement in the area of SEN and school development planning. Teachers are apprehensive about the expectations of the new inclusive model for special education teaching. It is a learning curve which will present challenge.

Throughout the new model, the concept of Inclusion now has a statutory footing. Inclusion involves a range of changes and modifications in curriculum content, teaching approaches, classroom strategies and managerial structures with a common vision covering all children. It is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2005, pg 13). Significant change is required when implementing inclusive practice. Changes must be made to content, delivery, and organisation of mainstream programmes. This change must be a whole school plan aiming to accommodate the learning needs of all students (Ainsow et al, 2006, pg2).

Many teachers have an in-built capacity for change as no two schools or school days are the same. They want to support all students to the best of their ability. Many are willing and enthusiastic to be teacher leaders embracing change with appropriate support, guidance and CPD. Bolam et al 2005 refer to learning enriched schools where robust collaborative learning communities reign with teachers taking on the role of change agents within the school. School management systems must drive change and improvement within the school.

There are many obstacles within current practice in terms of the new model and the reality of school systems. Comprehensive lengthy curricula at senior cycle do not align with new junior cycle curricula. Time constraints coupled with timetabling issues present a continuous challenge for school leaders. Our current school system is focused on preparation of students for state exams. Lack of 'buy in' from some teachers is prevalent due to lack of CPD/whole staff training in relation to SEN. Many teachers are willing to embrace the new model with proper meaningful training and timetabling.

CPD and training are important elements to successfully introduce the new model. Otherwise we risk having a new model where, yes students are included as they are present in class, but teachers are not well enough trained or equipped to cater for their needs. This aligned with SEN timetabled as a 'filler' rather than through an expression of interest in being part of the SEN team. Provision of planning time is seen as a priority for teacher goodwill as part of discretionary hour allocation or Croke Park hours. Core teams consisting of trained SEN teachers must be established to share the

identification and assessment of student needs paralleled with the setting of student targets and delivery of tried and tested intervention programmes.

Research has highlighted how the beliefs that teachers hold in relation to teaching and learning in their subject play an important role in the development of their students (Ball et al 2001; Pajares 1992; Prawat 1992). The way that educators plan and teach is impacted by the beliefs they hold forming an embedded theory of practice (Genishi et al 2001). Teachers hold strong beliefs in relation to meeting the needs of students and participation in professional development.

Teachers' believe in the concept of 'inclusion' but lack knowledge and understanding on what the new inclusion model relates to. The solution to invest in training and scheduled planning time may be a good starting point but may not be appropriate to address the situation entirely. It may be necessary to question the education system and the allocation of croke park hours, timetable constraints, administration documentation and lengthy senior cycle curriculums.

Strategic planning helps to improve a schools decision making procedure. The process of decision making through 'reflective practice' improves when school management teams focus on crucial issues and challenges which may be encountered. This serves to guide decision making in the hope of achieving effective outcomes. This planning would help build a shared vision of 'inclusion' and enthuse pupils, staff and parents. Bell (2001) states that reflective practice is displayed by successful teachers and is an integral element of professional development but must be carried out with sensitivity and sincerity. If time is invested to focus on the priority changes and challenges this will develop the necessary vision and direction. Through time schools can plan interventions, evaluate strategies and make appropriate changes where necessary. This will make the new SET model effective, efficient and improve the teaching and learning for all stakeholders.

It is evident from the research that there are many benefits in the new inclusion model for students and teachers. Collaborative practice and shared expertise will enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Team teaching allows for better learning opportunities for all pupils by providing group learning opportunities within the base classroom – groupwork, role play, station learning. Extra teaching resources in the classroom mean support is implemented and received by a greater student population. Mainstream pupils can be supported where difficulties arise, or the teaching can be split to allow students to work on more challenging work as part of a smaller group. A greater variety of teaching methods, different ways of presenting information and alternative modes of assessment benefit the whole class group.

Where there is change there is challenge. The need for ongoing CPD for class teachers and SET teachers will promote a more positive attitude towards inclusion. The rationale for school

improvement and inclusive education is also about optimising learning environments for all learners to be successful. This provision can be made within the mainstream setting. Lipsky and Gartner, 1997 cited that where inclusion was flourishing there is adaptations in curriculum and instructional practices, support for staff and students and collaboration between all concerned.

5.1. Recommendations

The following research questions emerged from the literature reviewed:

- How familiar are teachers with the new inclusion model of special education support?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the new model?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the challenges of the new model?
- What supports do teachers believe they need in order to implement the new model?
- What recommendations can be made for training and delivery of SET into the future?

These research questions mirrored the emergent themes from the questionnaire data which were comprehensively discussed at the focus group interview.

- Benefits of the new model
- Challenges of the new model
- Core SET team
- Time
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

In order to assist teachers and school managers to further develop and embed the new inclusion model at post primary level this study has several recommendations based on the findings.

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation resulting from this study is that schools need to consider having a core team of staff who look after SET teaching across the school. This is important because it invests in sustainable leadership. It builds on an educational environment that promotes cross fertilisation of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and shared responsibility. The establishment of a core SET team would be a benefit for SET teachers, school management, SEN students and mainstream teacher colleagues. Their expertise and training would facilitate identification and assessment of student needs, the setting of student targets and delivery of tried and tested intervention programmes. The core team could also include teacher colleagues who have expressed an interest in being part of the SET team and put their names forward for timetabling within the SET department. CPD could be provided on a specific interventions or programmes which could

be delivered year after year. Facilitators can be very motivational and inspirational which ensures 'buy in'. Investing in training and transferable skills with willing participants ensures future success. The foundation of the new inclusion model is entrenched in consistency of teacher and timetable. Strategic timetabling of teachers who are trained in SEN or who have expressed an interest in being part of the SET team would be timetabled.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation resulting from this study is that schools need to consider provision of designated scheduled planning time which was a priority for teachers. This is important because it would allow for collaboration between the SEN team and class teachers. It could be designed for discussion and advice on interventions, direction on where to find resources, training and strategies on SEN needs relative to the student cohort. Subject colleagues could agree shared aims and objectives, review interventions with the SET team, identify roles and responsibilities for team teaching and model best practice. The subject teacher must adapt or modify either the activity, the teaching methods, resources and classroom environment in order to ensure all students are 'included'. This approach aims to make classroom activities or tasks accessible or possible for all students. This agreed time would facilitate meaningful communication, consultation and collaboration between school management, class teachers and SET colleagues. It would ensure engagement from all subject departments and teachers, common best practice throughout the education facility and ultimately access for all students to an inclusive educational environment. It would allow for reflective practice involving "reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice" (Reid, 1993). Bell (2001) states that reflective practice is displayed by successful teachers and is an integral element of professional development but must be carried out with sensitivity and sincerity.

Recommendation 3

The third recommendation resulting from this study is that schools need to invest in quality CPD courses which are adequately researched and targeted. This is important because CPD and training are both important elements to successfully introduce the new model. Otherwise we risk having a new model where, yes students are included as they are present in class, but teachers are not well enough trained or equipped to cater for their needs. Teachers hold strong beliefs in relation to meeting the needs of students and participation in professional development. Appropriate time must be allocated to give basic training on the new model including the roles and responsibilities to all mainstream classroom teachers. Teaching staff want to fully understand the complex nature of the new model to ensure they can adequately comply with their role. They can also further advise parents

regarding what the changes mean for their child in the classroom. Teachers require teaching strategies and training associated with different SEN diagnosis'. These strategies and methodologies must be appropriate to post primary students. The use of technology in the classroom has become very common. Teachers require specific training on apps or programmes that would best support students with SEN.

5.2. Conclusion

The limitations of this study must be considered as the findings may be narrow as data was only collected from four schools. Due to time constraints it was not feasible to use additional research methods or expand the study beyond four schools. SET teachers are very familiar with the new inclusion model, further studies might try to discover the familiarity and beliefs of non SET teachers.

Adopting a whole school approach may encourage teachers of all subjects to incorporate activities to develop the skills of inclusion. It is important for lifelong learning that we have and encourage inclusion and work equality and accept all learning abilities and capabilities. Academic competency is not the only talent. As a society we must learn empathy and support so every human being can be an attribute to the society in which we live.

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Appendix 1

Research Timeline

The research study will be undertaken between January and July 2019. The proposed schedule is outlined below.

Task	Week	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and review literature Formulate and finalise questionnaire Pilot Questionnaire 	1-4							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend Questionnaire as a result of the Pilot Test Distribute questionnaires to participating schools Send reminder email Analyse and collate quantitative data collected from Questionnaires 	5-8							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate focus group interview questions Conduct Focus Group Interview 	9-12							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcribe recorded information from focus group Write up Literature Review – Chapter 2 	13-16							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write up research methodology 	17-20							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write up Research Findings – Chapter 4 Write up Conclusions and Recommendations – Chapter 5 	21-24							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Format Document – References, Appendices, Tables Submission 	25-28							

Timeline for illustration purposes only

Appendix 2

Permission Letter – Principal/Board of Management

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

Mobile: XXXXXX

XXXXXX

January 2020

To whom it concerns,

My name is Julie Anne Conaty. I am a XXXXXX teacher in XXXXXX completing an MA in Leadership and Management in Letterkenny Institute of Technology. As part of this course I am required to complete a Dissertation and I have chosen to complete on the topic of the Special Education Inclusion Model, in particular focussing on ‘Teachers Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges in embedding the new SET model at Post Primary’.

I am seeking your permission as Principal of the school, to complete a short survey/questionnaire with some of your teachers who have experience in this field? The survey/questionnaire will focus mainly on what supports and training are available for educators in relation to implementation? And the benefits and challenges for teachers’ and school managers in mainstream post primary settings? Having the expertise and experience of a member of your teaching body would aid the progression of my dissertation. As per the college’s ethics and confidentiality requirements, all participants will be asked to complete a consent form and will be made aware that they can withdraw from the interview at any time until the dissertation is completed.

If you grant permission, I would appreciate if you can contact me by telephone or email. If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanking you in advance for your valuable time and co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Anne Conaty

Appendix 3

Teacher Participation Information Sheet

Teachers Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges in embedding the new SET model at Post Primary

Dear Teacher,

As part of my Research Project for the Master in Learning and Teaching in Letterkenny Institute of Technology, I am carrying out an investigation into ‘Teachers Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges in embedding the new SET model at Post Primary’.

What is the study about?

The main purpose of my research is to investigate teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET model in Irish Post Primary schools.

What will I have to do?

Survey/Questionnaire

This will involve the teacher participant to complete an online questionnaire taking approximately 10 minutes in teachers’ own private time. Subsequently the information collected will be used to inform questions for a SET focus group.

Focus Group

Themes for discussion at the focus group will be determined from the analysis of the quantitative data generated from the questionnaire. Questions for the focus group will be semi structured to allow respondents the opportunity to expand and develop their own points and opinions. The focus group will be comprised of qualified Special Education teachers who are leaders in the SET department in the schools surveyed. These teachers will be invited to participate as they have specific insights and expertise in this area.

What are the benefits?

The findings of my research will give an insight into teachers’ attitudes towards the benefits and challenges in the new inclusion model for special education teaching at post primary level. The research hopes to identify best practice and inform future practices for the development of strong inclusive environments’ in second level schools.

Appendix 4

Research Participant Consent Form for Questionnaire

Title of Project:

Teachers Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges in embedding the new SET model at Post Primary

Name of Researcher: Julie Anne Conaty

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Patricia Slevin

I, _____ agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

1. I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised.
2. I understand (*Outline requirements of project participation e.g. taking part in focus group, interview, questionnaires etc. and how data will be recorded e.g. by audio*) e.g. that I will participate in a 1 hour focus group which will be audio recorded.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way.
4. I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data on me.
5. If I withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences
6. I am aware that should I at any time I feel uncomfortable with being recorded, I can request that the recording equipment be turned off.
7. I am aware that I am permitted to view all research and transcripts that have taken place concerning my involvement. I can request a copy of the report from the researcher
8. All information will be confidential and used only for the purposes of the research study
9. I understand that ID codes will be used to protect my anonymity and confidentiality and names of people and places will be changed
10. I agree that quotations may be used for the research.

I agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

Signature of participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 5

Research Participant Consent Form for Focus Group

Title of Project:

Teachers Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges in embedding the new SET model at Post Primary

Name of Researcher: Julie Anne Conaty

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Patricia Slevin

I, _____ agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

1. I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised.
2. I understand (*Outline requirements of project participation e.g. taking part in focus group, interview, questionnaires etc. and how data will be recorded e.g. by audio*) e.g. that I will participate in a 1 hour focus group which will be audio recorded.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way.
4. I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data on me.
5. If I withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences
6. I am aware that should I at any time I feel uncomfortable with being recorded, I can request that the recording equipment be turned off.
7. I am aware that I am permitted to view all research and transcripts that have taken place concerning my involvement. I can request a copy of the report from the researcher
8. All information will be confidential and used only for the purposes of the research study
9. I understand that ID codes will be used to protect my anonymity and confidentiality and names of people and places will be changed
10. I agree that quotations may be used for the research.

I agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

Signature of participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher 's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 6

Research Questionnaire

Teachers' Perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET model in Irish Post Primary schools

1. How many years teaching experience do you have?
0 - 5 years
5-10 years
10-20 years
20 or more years
2. Please list all the subjects you teach in the menu box below.
3. Have you any experience of teaching student with special education needs (SEN)?
Yes
No
4. On a scale of 1-5, (1=not familiar at all, 5= very familiar) indicate how familiar you are with the new 'Inclusion Model' for Special Education teaching in post primary school.
5. What do you understand by the term 'Inclusion'? Please comment below. Enter your answer
6. On a scale of 1-5, (1= not beneficial at all, 5 = extremely beneficial) how beneficial is the new inclusion model for pupils with additional learning needs.
7. Please comment on the benefits for pupils with additional learning needs based on your rating score for question 6 above.
8. On a scale of 1-5, (1= not beneficial at all, 5 = extremely beneficial), how beneficial is the new inclusion model for other pupils in mainstream classes?
9. Please comment on the benefits for other pupils based on your rating score for question 8 above.
10. On a scale of 1-5, (1= not challenging at all, 5 = extremely challenging), how challenging is the new inclusion model for pupils with additional learning needs?
11. Please comment on the challenges for pupils with additional learning needs based on your rating score for question 10 above.
12. On a scale of 1-5, (1= not challenging at all, 5 = extremely challenging), how challenging is the new inclusion model for other pupils in mainstream classes?
13. Please comment on the challenges for other pupils based on your rating score for question 12 above.
14. In your opinion what are the teacher benefits of the new inclusion model for pupils with additional needs? Enter your answer
15. In your opinion what are the teacher challenges of the new inclusion model for pupils with additional needs? Enter your answer

16. On a scale of 1-5, (1=not important at all, 5= extremely important), do you feel the provision of CPD training for teachers is important for the implementation of this significant change in the provision, planning and allocation for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)?
17. In the comment box below can you indicate or comment on what CPD training might be most valuable to you. Enter your answer
18. Please rate the statements below, 1 -5 (1=strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree)
 - Pre-service teacher education gave me sufficient knowledge to work with pupils of SEN.
 - I feel competent to work with pupils with SEN in my mainstream class.
 - SET teachers have sufficient time to meet with mainstream teachers to discuss and plan for pupils with SEN.
19. There are sufficient opportunities for CPD training in the area of SEN for post primary teachers. Please rate 1 -5 (1=strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree)
20. What supports do you believe are necessary for teachers to implement the new Inclusion Model?
21. Do you have any other comments/suggestions that might support this study?

Appendix 7

Focus Group Interview Questionnaire

Teachers' Perceptions and attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of the new SET model in Irish Post Primary schools

Themes

- Core Team
- CPD for all teachers
- Planning Time
- Resources/Interventions/Strategies/use of IT

Questions for the focus group interview

1. What have been the benefits of the new inclusion model for Special Education teaching?
2. What have been the challenges of the new inclusion model for Special Education teaching?
3. The idea of a core SET team within schools came up in my research. What do you think of that idea?
4. SET involves close liaison with other teachers. How could this best be managed in schools?
5. What about CPD? Is it necessary? What areas are needed? How or When might it be best scheduled? What are your thoughts?

Appendix 8

Focus Group Interview Transcript– Microsoft Teams