

# **A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Different Perspectives on Inclusion within one Post-Primary School in the North West of Ireland**

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**30<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

*The National Council for Special Education has funded this research. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with the authors. The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of opinions of the NCSE.*

## **Key words**

*Inclusion, post-primary education, phenomenology, discourses of inclusion, thematic data analysis, discursive psychological analysis*

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) who provided the funding for this research project. The views contained in the report do not reflect the views of the NCSE or of St. Angela's College, Sligo. The authors would especially like to thank the pupils, parents, special needs assistants, teachers and management who gave freely of their time and views about inclusion. A sincere thank you to several staff at St. Angela's College for their guidance and support including: Dr Anne Taheny (College President), Mr Eugene Toolan (Head of Education Department), Mrs Dolores McDonagh (Director of Special Educational Needs) and also members of the SEN lecturing team. The help provided by Mrs Andrea Mullen and Mr Nick O'Sullivan (library) as well as key secretarial staff is also much appreciated.

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## **Executive Summary**

# **A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Different Perspectives on Inclusion within one Post-Primary School in the North West of Ireland**

## **Introduction/Background**

The central purpose of this research was to examine views of inclusion from the perspectives of a number of key stakeholders within one large post-primary school. The key stakeholders in this research included the pupils, parents, and support staff, notably Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), teachers and management. The key research question was:

*Q) How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders including pupils, parents, support staff, teachers and management?*

It must be acknowledged that there is a movement towards more inclusive education nationally and globally (NCCA, 2007; Winter, 2006). This research examined the definition of inclusion which includes pupils assessed with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as defined in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, Ireland, 2004). Other broad definitions of inclusion suggest that pupils with a wide variety of needs such as: cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; and sensory and/or physical needs are considered (Ainscow, 2007; Head and Pirrie, 2007). Relatively little is known about the views of inclusion and inclusive practices occurring in Irish schools. Adopting a case study approach has enabled in-depth qualitative analysis of the views of a cross-section of the stakeholders within one post-primary school.

## **Method**

An in-depth phenomenological case study approach was adopted to explore the above research question. Focus group data were collected from a total of 72 participants which included pupils, parents, SNAs, teachers and management in one post-primary school in the northwest of Ireland. The focus group data were fully transcribed and two methods of qualitative data analyses were used to analyse these data. This involved using thematic data analyses and discursive psychological analysis (DPA). These provided a good method of triangulating the data analyses.

## **Main Findings/Data Analyses**

The thematic data analyses generated nine themes in regard to how inclusion was defined by the various stakeholders (pupils, parents, SNAs, teachers and management). These themes included: *Academic, Behavioural and/or Physical, Cultural and/or Historical, Economic, Emotional and/or Psychological, Ethical/Ideological and/or Moral, Holistic, Legal and/or Political and Social.*

Based on the nine themes generated from the data, the definitions of inclusion in this research support the previous research literature as evidence that inclusion is a multi-dimensional, complex and dynamic concept. Definitions of inclusion are viewed somewhat differently by the various stakeholders. Such differences are also influenced by historical, cultural, social, political and economic perspectives which underpin policy and practice within Irish post-primary education. In particular, the

nine themes are seen as being underpinned by various discourses on inclusion. These discourses can be described as those relating to equality, social justice, rights-based, needs-based, political, pragmatic, excellence/standards, pathognomic and interventionist.

The DPA of the Subject Teacher and Senior Management Group (SMG) focus groups also shows that discourses of inclusion are complex and diverse. Due to the complex discourses underpinning the definitions of inclusion, it is too simplistic to only consider changing teachers' attitudes from those that are negative to positive. Instead, the multi-dimensional aspects of inclusion as noted in the nine themes generated in the thematic analysis, need to be fully acknowledged and carefully explored in further research.

While the definitions of inclusion are perceived differently by some stakeholders, there is a notable but not exclusive focus on the social aspects of inclusion by pupils, parents and SNAs. In contrast, subject teachers and the SMG group focus more on the academic, behavioural and economic aspects of inclusion. This gives rise to some interesting discourses regarding particular subject choices and length of syllabi which may be an obstacle for students experiencing increased inclusion. The 'excellence versus inclusion' debate also exercises the minds of subject teachers who question inspectors' focus on numbers of students taking higher level exam syllabi. These aspects are seen to be contrary to those of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) in regard to how best, to 'pitch' the level of the class as well as creating challenges for teachers in differentiation of methods and assessments. Linked to this is the issue that the positive social benefits of being included in a mainstream classroom may serve to reproduce a sense of failure in academic terms in the broader context of an Irish educational culture which is 'exam driven'. This might give rise to the question 'what philosophy of education underpins the current system of education in post-primary schools?' Linked to this, teachers acknowledge the need for increased continuous professional development (CPD) in light of the changing role of teachers. The SMG group are also critical of the current formula driven method of allocating resources to schools and feel that cognisance of individual schools' needs are necessary.

The Junior Certificate Schools Programme/Leaving Certificate Applied (JCSP/LCA) teachers applaud the current Junior Certificate Schools Programme/Leaving Certificate Applied/Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (JCSP/LCA/LCVP) and Transition programmes for facilitating increased inclusion. Ironically, however, concern is expressed regarding the inclusion of the 'middle of the road' pupils who could be deemed to be excluded to some extent. This arises when pupils with behavioural difficulties or pupils at risk of leaving school early are given preferential treatment through certain activities within the school. This relates well to the issue of 'forced inclusion' especially when it has academic 'costs for the majority'. Finally, SEN/Resource teachers take a more holistic view of inclusion indicating their increased level of CPD in the area. However, as a group they also allude to the inclusion of staff in school as well as pupils. The SEN/Resource group along with parents, teachers and the SMG emphasise the necessity of having SNA staff in the successful inclusion of pupils but criticise the DES's limited role for SNAs in current policy.



### **Recommendations:**

- The current NCSE funding models of individual resource and general allocation models should be independently reviewed at regular intervals to ensure more flexibility in order to meet the complex and dynamic needs of pupils with SEN as well as the diversity of training, guidance and support needs of teachers in post-primary education.
- The DES Inspectorate should initiate an open dialogue with teachers and management in post-primary schools concerning the conflicting pressures on the schools to achieve high academic excellence whilst embracing the diversity of pupils with SEN.
- Both large and small-scale longitudinal NCSE/DES funded (quantitative and qualitative) research is needed to explore how ‘inclusion’ is working within post-primary schools in Ireland. Such research could focus on several issues including an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences of pupils with SEN as well as those of the teachers working with these pupils.
- Specific NCSE funded research is needed to explore the role, staff development training and also the academic qualifications of SNAs within post-primary schools in Ireland.
- A national discussion forum could be set up to review and/or advise the DES/Education Minister on inclusion policies and practice within Irish education. The discussion forum could include representatives from the NCSE, relevant third level institutions, teachers and management from primary and post-primary schools as well as other relevant experts from national or international disability organisations.

# 1 Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale and Context of the Research

The central purpose of this research was to examine views of inclusion from the perspectives of a number of key stakeholders within one large post-primary school. The school in question is a co-educational, multi-denominational one, located in a rural disadvantaged area in the north west of Ireland. However, despite its disadvantaged status nearly 80% of its students go on to complete Leaving Certificate Examinations and more than 91% complete Junior Certificate Examinations. The key stakeholders in this research included the school's pupils, parents, support staff, (notably Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)), teachers and management. The key research question was:

*Q) How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders including pupils, parents, support staff, teachers and management?*

It must be acknowledged that there is a movement towards more inclusive education (NCCA, 2007, Winter, 2006). This research examines the definitions of inclusion which also includes pupils assessed with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as defined in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, Ireland 2004). Other broad definitions of inclusion suggest that pupils with a wide variety of needs such as: cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and sensory and/or physical needs are to be considered (Ainscow, 2007; Head and Pirrie, 2007). Relatively little is known about the views of inclusion and inclusive practices occurring in Irish schools. Adopting a case study approach has enabled an in-depth qualitative analyses of the views of a cross-section of the stakeholders within one post-primary school.

It is hoped that this small scale research project will lead the way for larger scale (both quantitative and qualitative) research projects in Ireland. Such comprehensive research projects are highlighted by several key researchers in the UK and internationally (Ainscow, 2007; UNESCO, 2000; Booth and Ainscow, 1998). In particular, Ainscow (2007) argues that collaboration between groups of inclusion researchers around the world has resulted in projects in diverse countries such as Brazil, China, India, Romania, Spain and Zambia. Such projects have led to the formation of the Enabling Education Network (EENET, see <http://www.eenet.org.uk> for further details).

The possible outcomes of this research into inclusion are wide but are ultimately to guide policy and practice nationally. It is envisaged that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), all third level educational institutions and all schools will be interested in the findings. The outcomes of this research may be utilised by the NCSE in addressing some of its key functions as outlined in the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) including planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services, disseminating information on best practice and also advising educational institutions on best practice. This is directly related to the provision of advice for schools but also relates directly and simultaneously to service providers such as third level institutions educating teachers at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the area of SEN.

For the specific school involved, it is seen as an opportunity to aid its reflective and reflexive thinking on its own practice in the area of inclusion. It will also be of interest to other schools, while taking into consideration and acknowledging that this is a small-scale study. Therefore, as well as helping the stakeholders' school to move their organisation forward, it may also help other organisations in moving to more inclusive practices. Ainscow (1999) states that in helping schools to become more inclusive it is necessary to use existing practices and knowledge as starting points for development. In the SEN and inclusion debate, Rose and Garner (2006) believe that practitioners need a credible evidence base from which to argue, suggesting that teachers contributing to building such evidence makes the data more potent because of its 'groundedness'.

## **1.2 Background**

This section provides a brief review of the Irish second level education system, the concept of special education and developments of same in the Irish context, some philosophical, psychological and sociological underpinnings pertinent to the aims of education and finally some of the current issues in inclusive education.

### ***1.2.1 The Second Level Education System in Ireland***

The second level education system in Ireland comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. While these schools may vary in their type in aspects of ownership, management, ethos, tradition and sometimes pupil clientele, they have much in common (McCann, 2003). They largely teach the same subjects, take the same public examinations and are financed mainly by the state.

The Department of Education and Science (DES, 2007) fully explains the Irish second level education system. In brief, it consists of a three-year junior cycle where pupils study the Junior Certificate programme or in some cases the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). A Transition Year Programme, which is implemented between junior and senior cycle, is adopted in some schools. During senior cycle three programmes are available namely the Leaving Certificate Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The latter two can be described as programmes with strong vocational dimensions and are aimed at preparing pupils for adult and working life. The LCAP is designed for pupils who may not wish to proceed directly to third level education and is structured around vocational preparation, vocational education and general education. Pupils are encouraged to engage in active learning through the practical and pupil centred nature of the programme. The LCVP combines the virtues of academic study with a new and dynamic focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community. The certificates are used for purposes of selection into further education, employment, training and higher education. (Further details [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie))

In addition to subject teachers, specialist teachers, namely learning support and resource teachers, provide specific support for pupils with SEN in post-primary schools. Learning support teachers are appointed on an ex quota basis and provide a service for pupils who have difficulties in literacy and numeracy. In regard to resource posts, schools apply for and receive additional teaching resources in respect of pupils who have been assessed as having SEN and who require additional teaching support (DES, 2007). This additional support includes ex quota resource posts,

teaching hours for pupils with SEN and SNAs with the level of response dependent on the severity of the needs involved. Some of these posts are sanctioned on a permanent basis, while others are applied for on an annual basis and the role can vary from school to school, with some teachers teaching pupils on a one to one basis, in small groups or in other cases classes of not more than sixteen pupils. Some schools may also avail of particular schemes under the social inclusion programme, including programmes delivered within DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) (DES, 2007).

### ***1.2.2 Historical Development of SEN Education in Ireland***

This section discusses the concept of SEN and also traces the historical context of the development of special education in Ireland.

In Ireland, special education provision can be tracked through the 1800s where the religious orders made the initial provision for some groups of pupils with SEN (NCSE, 2006). The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (1965) provided some recommendations regarding identification, placement and care of pupils with general learning disabilities and as a result special educational provision was developed in special national schools and special classes established in mainstream schools. Other reports such as The Education of Pupils who are handicapped by Impaired Hearing (1972), Curriculum Guidelines for Pupils with a Moderate Mental Handicap (1980), the Education of Physically Handicapped Pupils (1982) and the Education and Training of Severely and Profoundly Mentally Handicapped Pupils in Ireland (1983) were also influential. More recently further classes that have been established for pupils with moderate learning disabilities, autistic spectrum disorder, specific speech and language disorder and specific learning difficulties. Until the 1990s it was commonplace to find most pupils of post-primary age with SEN being educated in special national schools up to the age of eighteen (NCSE, 2006).

As a result of increased global and national awareness and development of special education/inclusive education, the publication of the findings of The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (DES, 1993) reported that 'Ireland has a conspicuous lack of legislation governing most forms of educational provision but particularly covering education provision for pupils with special educational needs' (DES, 1993, p.56). This report was ground breaking in the development of special education, as the range of difficulties and disabilities it included were extremely wide. This became the guidance for present policy and provision and an increasing number of pupils with SEN remained in mainstream post-primary schools but without a structured system of provision being made.

The SERC Report (1993) saw the initial attempts in the Irish context to define SEN. Pupils with SEN were described as including:

*Those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education which is generally provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging (p. 18).*

In the same report, special education was regarded as ‘any educational provision, which is designed to cater for pupils with special educational needs and is additional to or different from the provision which is generally made in ordinary classes for pupils of the same age’ (p. 18). These definitions were adopted until both terms were legally defined in the Education Act (Ireland, 1998) and the subsequent EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). The Education Act (Ireland, 1998) defined SEN as meaning the ‘educational needs of pupils who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able pupils’ (p. 8). The EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) elaborated further by defining a pupil with SEN as anyone up to the age of 18 with ‘an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition’ which restricts the pupil’s capacity to ‘participate in and benefit from education’ (p. 6). However, the mention of exceptionally able pupils appears to be absent from the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) which is a potential cause for concern amongst some educators. The key principles of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) are in line somewhat with the description of pupils with SEN adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2000) which suggests three broad categories namely: pupils with identifiable disabilities and impairments; pupils with learning difficulties not attributable to any disability or impairment and finally pupils with difficulties due to socio-economic, cultural or linguistic disadvantage.

For the purpose of this research, the interpretation of the term SEN will be that taken from the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) where it is defined as:

*In relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (p. 6).*

### ***1.2.3 Philosophical, Psychological and Sociological Underpinnings in Education***

This section draws upon some relevant underpinnings from philosophy, psychology and sociology of education. The key argument postulated by these underpinnings is that education would benefit from further cross-pollination of ideas, theories and research from a broad spectrum of social sciences and especially from within philosophical, psychological and sociological writings. The diversity of discourses within these disciplines show how relevant theories of education can both co-exist and complement each other as well as creating important debate over areas of conflict. In particular, these theories and underpinnings provide a useful background to the fundamental question ‘What are the aims of Education?’

#### **A Sample of Philosophical Underpinnings in Education**

It is important that any research within education including ‘inclusion’ should have some reference to the philosophy of education underpinning educational concepts, policies and practices. The works of Dewey, Freire and Greene respectively provide a diversity of concepts which are relevant to exploring the concept of inclusive education. However, before discussing the research on ‘inclusive’ education, the question ‘What are the aims of Education?’ must be addressed.

In addressing the fundamental question “What are the aims of Education?” Winch (1999, cited in Carr, 2005) suggests that autonomy or rational autonomy should be the aim of education. One of the arguments proposed by Winch is that the purpose of education is to prepare children to be independent adults. He claims that “schooling has to make children literate, numerate, reasonably knowledgeable about a core of basic geographical, historical, political and scientific facts and has to give them the wherewithal for some degree of functional specialisation in employment” (p.66). This quote emphasises the interdependency of individuals within a complex society. In contrast to Winch, Walker (1999, cited in Carr, 2005) argues that students of all ages should be supported to become self-determined in their learning. He claims that young people who are self-determined will be more “capable of communicating their views and knowledge and awareness of the problems of our world and our societies” (p.74).

Pring (2001, cited in Carr, 2005) argues that the aims and practice of moral education (as inspired by Kohlberg’s work in the 1970s) are central to ‘educational practice’. He claims that “education itself is a moral practice, part of the ‘humane studies’ or humanities rather than the social sciences. Ideally, the practice should be in the hands of moral educators (who themselves should manifest the signs of moral development) rather than in the hands of managers, trainers or ‘deliverers’ of a curriculum” (Pring, cited in Carr, p.196). Hence, in this respect, the moral judgement of the teacher becomes evident in regard to what is seen as worthwhile and valued in learning. The moral aspects of education are discussed further by Barrow (2001) with reference to the concept of fairness. By this he refers to the contention that it is morally wrong to treat people differently without providing reasons for doing so. However, Barrow also highlights that ‘fairness’ does not mean the same as ‘full inclusion’ within education. This important factor should be kept in mind in the later sections which outline the historical and international adoption of the term ‘inclusion’ within the educational arena.

Thus, it can be seen that the question “What are the aims of Education?” generates a debate amongst philosophers of education. It is possible that the conflicting philosophical views of education are partly responsible for the hurdles and challenges that present themselves to teachers when they are asked to include pupils with diverse cognitive, physical and emotional needs. This issue will be further discussed after presentation of the data analyses chapters.

### **A Sample of Psychological Underpinnings in Education**

Following the interesting diversity in philosophical underpinnings of education, this section provides a small sample of psychological underpinnings of education to illustrate the usefulness of psychology to inform the ‘inclusion’ debate within education. Traditionally in Ireland, psychological theories and research have been used within pre-service and in-service teacher training and continue to offer invaluable insights into diverse areas such as learning, teaching methods, intelligence, assessment, motivation, behavioural problems to name but a few. The literature also provides a comprehensive coverage of all psychological theories of education including various models of cognition in childhood such as those of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. It is clear that such models of cognition are of vital importance to both pre-service and in-service teachers in their understanding of children’s cognitive abilities, especially in regard to understanding pupils with either specific and/or

general learning difficulties or disabilities. More recently, social psychological theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) have been used to assess teacher's and principal's attitudes towards inclusive education in Ghana (Kuyini and Desai, 2007). Other aspects of social psychological work relevant to the notion of inclusive education relate to the theories of group identity, stereotypes and prejudice (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). This area of work has a prolific history of tried and tested research which teachers could draw upon to enhance both their personal and professional development (see Hogg and Abrams, 1988 for original research in this area). Of course, these areas are also of interest to sociological theorists who focus on issues concerning inequality, poverty and class and their impact on the social dynamics within education and the work force (Tovey and Share, 2003). The final section now highlights some sociological underpinnings of education.

### **A Sample of Sociological Underpinnings in Education**

Most educational discussions on inclusion concentrate on curriculum, pastoral systems, attitudes and teaching methods, but there is a further dimension to inclusion that goes beyond these narrowly based school considerations (Thomas *et al.*, 1998). This wider notion of inclusion in society involves in formal terms a shift from the 'medical' 'deficit' model, to a social model, putting inclusion at the heart of both education and social policy (Mittler, 2000). In recent years, the deficit model has been subject to criticism in a number of countries, resulting in a shift in thinking that moves explanations of educational failure away from concentration on characteristics of individuals and their families towards a consideration of the process of schooling (Ainscow, 1999). Skidmore (2004) outlines how the social model stresses the educability and positive learning potential of all students, in the move away from the 'within child deficit' model which created dependency in the student.

Lipsky and Gartner (1999) note that in the development of inclusion, the voices of persons with disabilities are critical, yet they are too little heard. Slee and Allan (2001) suggest that inclusive education needs to deconstruct traditional forms of knowledge, to avoid re-runs of the old theatre, and this might be achieved in two ways. Firstly, this might be achieved by sponsoring critical research that deconstructs disability and disablement (Oliver, 1990) and exposes potentially oppressive educational settlements (Corbett and Slee, 2000) and secondly, by supporting hitherto silenced or marginalized voices to enter or lead the conversation about educational inclusion and exclusion (Booth, 1996; Clough and Barton, 1995).

Recent research on inclusion suggests that there are also other factors that might be influencing inclusive practices within schools. The concept of the hidden curriculum is a key aspect of the sociology of education. The hidden curriculum involves a wide range of factors which although may appear subtle can be extremely influential in their effect on the creation of inclusive practices in a school (Barry, 2007). The term 'hidden curriculum' is a term that is used to refer to those aspects of learning in schools that are 'unofficial, unintentional or undeclared consequences of the way teaching and learning are organised and performed in schools' (Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, 2003, p. 21). The physical organisation of space within a school, the buildings, the resources and materials are all aspects that can send positive and

negative messages about a school's attitude towards inclusion. However, more understated factors can tell a lot about the state of inclusion within a school and can include aspects such as: teacher attitudes and beliefs and the nature of the subject taught.

Related to the concept of inclusion are also issues of inequalities of power within education. These can take many forms including exclusion, marginalisation, trivialisation and misrepresentation (Lynch and Baker, 2005). Drudy and Baker (2007) highlight that inequalities of power exist in aspects of curricular, pedagogy and assessment as well as through the exercise of organisational authority and summarise that the equality of power in education involves both macro and micro levels of conceptual analysis. At the macro level, this involves the institutionalised procedures for making decisions about curriculum planning, school management as well as policy development and implementation. At the micro level, it focuses on the relations between students and staff, between staff themselves and all other aspects of the internal life of schools.

The above discussion has summarised briefly some relevant philosophical, psychological and sociological underpinnings and/or views on the aims and purposes of education. Consideration of this material should be kept in mind when considering the question "What is inclusive education?" as clearly the aims and purposes of education should also underpin those of inclusive education. The next section presents a summary of the key aspects within inclusive education.

#### ***1.2.4 Inclusive Education***

During the last decade, inclusion has emerged as a key international educational policy issue (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, and Monsen, 2004). When the idea was first mooted to include all pupils with SEN into mainstream schools, there appeared to be little effort to justify the philosophy behind it or have it based on well founded research. Stainback and Stainback (1990) refer to inclusion as being the 'right' thing to do aspect and that pupils had a moral right to be included in mainstream schools. Inclusion became a human rights issue and as a result inclusionists forgot at some point along the way that the focus should be on the pupil's needs and placement as opposed to just a philosophy (Block, 1999). Ten years ago integration or mainstreaming was the term typically used to describe the provision allocated to pupils with SEN. Likewise the concept of integration became more about actual placement in the mainstream setting as opposed to evaluating the quality of that placement (Lewis, 1995). Pupils in special schools were segregated and those in mainstream were integrated (Farrell, 2000). However, there were a whole range of ways in which pupils could experience integration, from the occasional visit to a special school to full time placement in the local mainstream school and hence the problematic nature of defining integration solely in terms of provision has been recognised (Farrell, 1997). In integrated settings, pupils were often expected to 'earn' their opportunity to be placed in a regular class and accordingly 'fit in' with the class in which they were placed. The quality of education within this integrated setting has been questioned where pupils have been placed in the mainstream class but in complete isolation from their peers.



The alternative term and concept 'inclusion' was introduced as a more accurate way of describing the quality of education offered to pupils with SEN within an integrated setting (Farrell, 2000). For full inclusion to be a reality it is perceived that pupils should take a full and active part in mainstream school life, be valued as members of the school community and be seen as integral members of it (Farrell, 2000). In an inclusive programme the classes are designed to fit all pupils regardless of their ability (Block, 1999). Stainback and Stainback (1990) also agree with this view and define an inclusive school as 'a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, and is supported by his/her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his/her educational needs met' (p. 3). They also add that the goal of inclusion should not be to erase differences but to enable all pupils to belong within an educational community that validates and values their individuality (Stainback, Stainback, East and Sapon-Shevin (1994, p. 489). In addition, Norwich (2002) states that inclusion is about mainstream schools accommodating a full diversity and in doing so leads inevitably to adopting dedicated or specialised support systems. Pupils with SEN in such a system would still receive an individually determined programme with supplementary services and supports to meet their needs within the regular classroom environment (Downing, 1996; Block, 1994).

However, Farrell (2000) urges caution in regard to inclusion as there may be a risk that the need for pupils with SEN to receive high quality education may be overlooked as people become immersed on the 'inclusion' bandwagon. He feels that to educate a pupil in a mainstream school is oversimplifying the issue as the overriding 'right' is for pupils to receive a good education and have their needs identified and addressed regardless of the type of school, mainstream or otherwise. Vaughan and Schumm (1995) argue about the need for 'responsible inclusion' and urge caution in campaigning for inclusion solely on human rights grounds. They define it as 'that which provides for appropriate resources, teachers willing to participate in the inclusive process, and consideration of pupil and family over placement (p. 156). Simmons (1998) suggests there may well be examples where this basic right to a good and quality education can only be met if a pupil is educated in a special school. Therefore, by placing a pupil in such a school, one is not, presumably, going to be accused of contravening a basic human right to a quality education. However, there is no empirical reason why this basic 'right' cannot be attained through pupils being educated in special schools (Simmons, 1998). This argument emphasises that real difficulties may arise if arguments for inclusive education are pursued solely in terms of human rights (Farrell, 2000). Perhaps a more empirical approach might be to consider the research evidence for and against inclusion. Even so, there are some researchers for example, Booth (1996) who question the value of research into inclusive education as it is perceived as a basic human right and therefore not open to research.

While most teachers support inclusion, they also identify many problems for its implementation (Winzer, 1999). The most cited explanation for resistance to inclusion is the lack of skills necessary to teach pupils with SEN (Minke, Bear, Deemer and Griffin, 1996). Garner (2000) also raises this issue regarding mainstream subject and class teachers and knowledge of SEN where there is an emphasis on all teachers being teachers of SEN. Florian & Rouse (2001) in their study of inclusive practice in UK secondary schools, suggest that because most secondary school subject departments have different histories as well as varying degrees of autonomy and

different priorities, they produce a range of subject and department 'cultures' that may impact on teachers' practice. All of these factors can influence views about what works in promoting inclusion. Evans *et al.* (2007) believe that educating students with SEN is an issue for the whole school and goes beyond just teaching curriculum subjects. He emphasises that an inclusive school should be giving equal and close attention to the social and affective side of pupils (Evans *et al.*, 2007).

Thus, taking into account the relevant educational underpinnings, research, policies and practice outlined in this introductory chapter, this research project aimed to explore how inclusion is defined by key stakeholders in one large post-primary school in the northwest of Ireland. In order to provide an in-depth exploration of the views of pupils, parents, support staff, teachers and management within the school, a phenomenological case study approach was adopted using focus groups. Further details of the research methodology are outlined in Chapter 2.

## 2 Chapter 2

### Research Methodology

#### 2.1 Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative phenomenological case study approach. The purpose of a phenomenological approach is to understand the issue or topic from the everyday knowledge and perceptions of specific respondent subgroups (Lindgren and Kehoe, 1981 cited in Vaughn, Schumm, Jallard, Slusher, and Saumell, 1986). In this approach, researchers have initial knowledge about the topic and are interested in developing a more in depth understanding or in clarifying potentially conflicting or equivocal information from previous data. It is not primarily concerned with explaining the causes of things but attempts instead, to describe how things are experienced first hand of the everyday world by those involved (Denscombe, 2004).

Yin (1994) suggests the case study as a particular style of educational research which may be appropriate for investigating the concept of inclusion. Stake (1995) stresses the benefits of qualitative case study methodology arising from its emphasis on the uniqueness of each case, and the educator's subjective experience of that case. Freebody (2004) also suggests a central design characteristic of cases studies concerns the levels of analysis, which is the framework for this study.

Within these approaches, Kershner and Chaplin's (2001) multi-levels of analysis for research in SEN were used focusing on a large post-primary school in the northwest of Ireland. Through the use of focus groups, interview data were collected from pupils, parents, SNAs, subject teachers, SEN/Resource teachers, administrative staff and management. The focus group transcripts were analysed in two stages. Stage 1 involved a thematic analysis and stage 2 used Discourse Analysis (DA) from within a Discursive Psychology Approach (DPA) to explore discourses underpinning the issues raised within the focus groups.

Throughout the remainder of this report, the use of the words pupil and student will be used interchangeably to refer to the post-primary school aged participants.

#### 2.2 Context of Research and Exploratory Research Question

The intention of this research was to explore the different perspectives of a range of individuals/stakeholders in a large post-primary school in their daily work adopting an inclusive approach to school. While most mainstream schools in Ireland are working towards being more inclusive, this post-primary school was selected because it has a longstanding commitment to developing inclusive practice. This research presents a snapshot of how inclusion is being progressed on the ground in one such post-primary school.

The key research question was:

*Q) How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders including pupils, parents, support staff, teachers and managers?*

In order to collect data from a diverse group of people, the focus group interview was used. This enabled an exploration of attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas about inclusion. In addition, the analytical procedures adopted gave opportunities to

compare and contrast interpretations, develop unforeseen findings and help explore findings that would either be anomalous to or disconfirming of original impressions (Freebody, 2004).

### 2.3 Participants

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the school and also the focus group participants (Punch, 2005). The large post-primary school selected for this research was chosen as staff at the school had a number of years experience working with pupils experiencing SEN. The school was also highly recommended by several SEN post-graduate teacher educators at a third level institution in Ireland.

This study involved ten focus group interviews and one fact-finding group meeting, each lasting one hour. A total of 72 participants took part in the eleven groups. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below show the details of the participants in each of the groups as well as the percentage (where it was possible to determine) in relation to the total relevant population. Focus group participants were selected on the basis of obtaining a cross-section of participants from within the school community. These included Junior and Leaving Certificate aged pupils, parents (one group comprised of parents representing different geographical areas and the other group were parents of pupils with learning difficulties and SEN in the school, SNAs, subject-specialist teachers, teachers involved in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), career guidance teachers, home school liaison officer (HSLO) and the schools completion officer.

#### **Table Key:**

**Junior** = in year groups preparing for Junior Certificate

**Senior** = in year groups preparing for Leaving Certificate or equivalent

**Parent Group A** = parents of pupils with learning difficulties and SEN

**Parent Group B** = Central Parents Committee (drawn from all parents of children with/without SEN within the school)

**SNA** = Special Needs Assistants +also includes one school administrative staff

**SEN** = Special Educational Needs/ Resource/ Learning Support Teachers

**JCSP/LCA** = Included Teachers for Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) & School Completion Officer (SCO)

**Subject Teacher 1** = Included teachers of Business, Maths, Metal Work, Music, Irish, History, Science. One of the teachers was also a guidance counsellor

**Subject Teacher 2** = Included teachers of Art, Construction & Woodwork, English, Home Economics, Technical Drawing & Graphics. One of the teachers was a guidance counsellor.

**SMG** = Senior Management group personnel

**FFM**= Fact-Finding Meeting included the Principal & two Deputy Principals

**Table 2.1 Focus Group Participants**

| <b>Focus Group Name</b>      | <b>No. of Females</b> | <b>No. of Males</b> | <b>Total No. in group</b> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Pupils (Junior)</i>       | 5                     | 4                   | 9                         |
| <i>Pupils (Senior)</i>       | 7                     | 3                   | 10                        |
| <i>Parent group A</i>        | 2                     | 1                   | 3                         |
| <i>Parent group B</i>        | 7                     | 2                   | 9                         |
| <i>SNA</i>                   | 6                     | 0                   | 6                         |
| <i>SEN Teachers</i>          | 6                     | 0                   | 6                         |
| <i>JCSP/LCA Teachers etc</i> | 5                     | 2                   | 7                         |
| <i>Subject teacher 1</i>     | 4                     | 3                   | 7                         |
| <i>Subject Teacher 2</i>     | 2                     | 5                   | 7                         |
| <i>SMG</i>                   | 2                     | 3                   | 5                         |
| <i>FFM</i>                   | 1                     | 2                   | 3                         |
| <b>Totals</b>                | <b>47</b>             | <b>25</b>           | <b>72</b>                 |

**Table 2.2 Focus Group Population**

| <b>Participants</b>           | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage of Total Population</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Pupils (Junior/Senior)</b> | 19            | 2.1%                                  |
| <b>Total Parents</b>          | 12            | 1.8%                                  |
| <b>Total SNAs</b>             | 6             | 60%                                   |
| <b>Total Teachers</b>         | 27            | 36%                                   |

#### **2.4 Procedure**

The school principal was initially approached via a telephone call to outline the proposed NCSE research project and to gauge his interest in the school being involved. The response was very positive and so the details of the proposed method were e-mailed to the principal for his full consideration before asking for his permission to access participants. A list of all the proposed focus groups was drawn up by the researchers for approval by the school principal. He was in full agreement that a broad section of the school community should be involved with the research. A list of all subject teachers at the school was sent by the principal to the researchers. From this list, the researchers purposefully selected teachers from all subject areas trying to ensure that a representative sample of the teachers were included within the sample<sup>1</sup>. There were more female than male teachers in the school, so the final sample selection reflects the gender balance within the school. This bias towards female teachers is unsurprising as there are traditionally more female than male teachers in post-primary schools within Ireland and indeed within the teaching profession as a whole (DES, 2005).

Guidelines were supplied to the school principal regarding the selection process which included obtaining a sample which was representative of a cross-section of parents from different socio-economic backgrounds, different geographical areas and parents of children with/without SEN/learning difficulties attending the school. The

<sup>1</sup> This school has an approximate teaching staff of 75 teachers.

Parents' Committee group was deemed a suitable sample for a focus group as they represented a sample of parents with/without children with SEN/learning difficulties in the school. The second group of parents selected represented a sample of parents of children with SEN/learning difficulties in the school. The final sample included two groups of parents who were willing and available to take part in the focus group interviews.

The school principal selected the pupils for the focus groups and was given specific criteria aimed to include a cross-section of pupils within the school. The criteria outlined by the researchers included: equal numbers of boys and girls, those with and without an assessment of SEN and those taking the JCSP, LCA and LCVP programmes as well as the traditional Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. It was agreed however, that at least half of the pupils selected would have some type of learning difficulty/SEN. The researchers did not perceive it necessary to identify individual pupils with SEN or their type of SEN within the focus groups to ensure complete objectivity. Of course, other issues such as the availability of the pupils on the day of the focus groups were a pragmatic factor. This influenced the final sample of pupils and as Table 2.1 indicates, the final focus groups contained more girls than boys.

In advance of the focus groups, the principal was sent written information sheets outlining the research project and acknowledging the school's and participants' rights to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. These sheets were used to record signed consent from all participants at the start of each focus group.

The ten focus groups and one fact-finding meeting took place from 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Each focus group was facilitated by one of two researchers from St. Angela's College, Sligo. With the permission of all participants, all focus groups and the fact-finding meeting were digitally recorded.

## **2.5 Focus Group**

The major assumption of focus groups is that with a permissive atmosphere, a candid normal conversation can be created that fosters a range of opinions that addresses in depth the selected topic and gives a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues to be obtained (Vaughan *et al.*, 1996). Indeed one of the major advantages of focus group interview is the 'loosening effect', experienced. In a relaxed group setting where participants sense that their opinions and experiences are valued, participants are more likely to express their opinions and perceptions openly (Byers and Wilcox, 1991).

Prior to each of the focus groups, the researchers spoke with individual and groups of participants to set the scene and also to act as an icebreaker in ensuring that participants felt relaxed and comfortable before the interviews were conducted. On seating, participants were alerted to the two digital recorders and were again reminded of the purpose of the research. The broad research question was stated and participants were allowed a few moments to consider quietly what the question meant to them. In instances where participants were reluctant to engage initially, the researchers rephrased the question and gave necessary prompts to initiate the discussion. However, once the conversation began and the group participants interacted with one another, a snowballing effect occurred and responses became

more spontaneous. The focus group interviews allowed and even encouraged individuals to form opinions about the designated topic through interaction with others and allowed the researcher to witness dynamic, interactive discussion about the designated topics (Morgan and Spanish, 1984). While the discussion centred on issues which were of interest to the researchers, it also involved exchange of opinions, personal reactions and experience among members of the group. The researchers' role became one of 'moderator' in most instances (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). However, when the discussion tended to take a divergent course, participants were discreetly reminded about the specific topic and this was done by repeating the research question. Where the conversation tended to be dominated by a particular individual/s, the researchers assertively invited other group members to offer their opinions. This ensured that illicit insightful contributions from all participants who might otherwise be reluctant to contribute were given the opportunity to be forthcoming in the group situation.

## **2.6 Ethical Issues**

A number of potential ethical issues were considered. These included how best to negotiate access to the school and participants as well as the possible disruption to individual participants and particularly students. Therefore, the principal organised the focus group interview schedules so that students did not miss core subjects. The consequences of the research for the participants were also considered as an important area of concern especially concerning any official reports or future publications. Hence, the name of the school and the participants remained anonymous and all data were confidential to the researchers. All participants were given verbal and written information about the research in advance of the data collection. Signed consent forms were collected at the start of the focus group interviews. All participants were advised of their rights to withdraw or refuse to participate in the research at any stage. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all participants within the limits of the law.

## **2.7 Introduction to Data Analyses**

This research project explored different perspectives in regard to the different stakeholders (pupils, parents, support staff, teachers, and management). Such multi-level perspectives facilitated the gathering of evidence not just about the day-to-day implications of inclusion, but rather, about the wider educational and social contexts and the structural and cultural features of inclusion. Thus the concept of inclusion moves beyond individual services and is pertinent to the development of society in a global context (Mittler, 2000). Allen (2003) suggests becoming inclusive means listening to what pupils and their parents have to say about what inclusion means to them and the different perspectives of stakeholders allows for these views to be heard. O' Hanlon (2003) suggests democratic participation encourages all participants to contribute and be respected and valued equally throughout the research process. Including multiple perspectives facilitated this democratic participation, which is a vital component of research in SEN.

In addition to using multiple perspectives, two stages of data analyses have been included in this project. The first stage uses Thematic analyses, which explores key themes emerging regarding how inclusion is defined and experienced by the participants. The second and more innovative level of data analysis involved using Discursive Psychological Analysis(DPA). In particular, DPA has been chosen from a number of other possible methods of Discourse Analysis (DA).

### **2.8 Rationale for Data Analysis**

This section outlines Phase 1 of the data analyses which used ‘Thematic’ coding as the first level of analysis of the focus group data. Phase 2 of the data analysis used DA (adopting a DPA) of the focus group data and is presented in Chapter 5. Both types of qualitative data analyses were chosen as the key research question was exploratory in nature and the generation of themes and discourses provide a useful method of analytical triangulation.

### **2.9 Procedure for Thematic Data Analysis**

The procedure for thematic analysis of the data involved several stages. Stage 1 of the data analysis involved a full transcription of the ten focus group interviews and one fact-finding interview. Where individual participant voices were recognisable, their responses were numbered to aid the analysis of data. In the two pupil groups, the task of identifying individuals proved difficult due to the increased noise levels of the groups as well as some individuals speaking out of turn. All of the transcriptions were then independently read (stage 2) and coded (stage 3) by both of the researchers who had facilitated the groups. Stage 2 of the data analysis involved the researchers familiarising themselves with the transcripts by reading and re-reading them a number of times. Stage 3 involved initial or descriptive coding of the transcripts. Langdrige (2004) suggests that such coding involves three levels. He refers to these as first order (descriptive); second order (combining descriptive codes) and third order (pattern coding) coding which forms the basis of thematic analysis. Once the transcripts had been independently coded, the researchers discussed their coding and produced a number of themes linked to the key research question.

Phase 2 of the data analyses used DPA as an analysis tool. DPA is a form of discourse analysis that focuses on psychological themes. It conducts studies of naturally occurring human interaction that offer alternative and innovative ways of understanding topics in social and cognitive psychology such as memory and attitudes (Potter, 2005). DPA takes the stance that when people’s views on a topic or issue are examined, full account should be taken of the context in which they express their views. When qualitative methods of data collection such as focus groups discussions are used, which enable people to speak relatively fully and in a largely unrestricted way about their views, it has been found that people usually vary in their views rather than expressing a more or less consistent attitude (Potter , 2005). A preliminary DPA was undertaken on behalf of the research team by an independent academic psychologist with expertise in this type of qualitative data analysis. The advantage of using an independent consultant was that the reliability and validity of the DPA (dependability and credibility in qualitative terms) can be viewed as more objective as she was not involved with either the data collection or with the literature reviewed for the project. Three of the focus groups were chosen (the SMG and two subject teacher focus groups) for the DPA due to the rich and varied nature of the data gathered.



### **2.10 Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Data Analysis**

The concepts of reliability and validity are of great importance to quantitative research, which is often used within a positivistic approach to explaining the world. However, this project uses a phenomenological approach which is qualitative in nature. Within qualitative research, quality and rigour are of vital importance. Qualitative researchers use different ways of explaining and measuring the quality and rigour of their research. Instead of referring to reliability and validity, they use concepts such as 'dependability and credibility' (Patton, 2002). These issues relate to the trustworthiness of the research in regard to the research design, data collection, analysis, interpretations and conclusions. In this research, the dependability and credibility of the research were assessed in two phases. During the thematic analysis, two researchers independently coded the focus group interview transcripts. The detailed coding was discussed through an iterative process until the final themes emerged. The same process was used for the DPA. Using both thematic data analysis and DPA provides analytical triangulation of the focus group data (Patton, 2002). This has enhanced the trustworthiness of the data analyses and also offers a method of data triangulation (Patton, 2002).

Due to the vast amount of focus group transcript data of approximately 250 pages and to clarify the analysis, the thematic analyses are presented in two separate chapters. Chapter 3 introduces a summary of the key themes and a sample of quotations from six of the focus groups. The focus group data presented in this chapter are from the two groups of Pupils (Junior and Senior level), two groups of Parents, one group of SNAs and one SMG group. The thematic analysis for the other focus groups (SEN/Resource teachers, subject teachers and LCA/JCSP teachers are presented in Chapter 4 and the DPA is presented in Chapter 5.

### 3 Chapter 3

## Thematic Data Analysis of Focus Group Interviews: Part 1 (Pupils, Parents, SNAS and SMG)

### 3.1 Overview of Themes of Inclusion

In regard to the key research question “*How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders?*” a number of diverse themes emerged. These are shown in alphabetical order in Table 3.1 below and include nine themes. These are: Academic, Behavioural and/or Physical, Cultural and/or Historical, Economic, Emotional and/or Psychological, Ethical/Ideological and/or Moral, Holistic, Legal and/or Political, and Social.

For each of the nine themes concerning ‘*What is Inclusion?*’, direct quotes are included in tables to illustrate comments made by focus group participants. These quotes are grouped according to the three key perspectives of the different stakeholders, notably pupils, parents and school staff. To clarify the data from the school staff, these are presented separately for subject teachers, SEN/Resource teachers, LCA teachers, SNA staff and Management. The following tables provide a summary of the key issues raised concerning how inclusion is defined by the focus group participants.

The table below (Table 3.1) shows an overview of the variety of themes generated from all of the focus group discussions. Later tables in this Chapter and Chapter 4 will show that not all of the focus group participants referred to all of these themes and this issue will be fully discussed later in Chapter 6. Some participants used a number of mixed descriptions of inclusion and so it was appropriate to include the ‘Holistic’ theme or category. However, it should be noted that some of the participants’ views could be coded (or categorised) as fitting more than one category. Where this arises, a justification for the choice of category has been provided. Table 3.1 is presented in alphabetical order and does not indicate the frequency or number of incidences of the themes arising within the focus groups.

**Table 3.1 Summary of Themes**

| <b>Key Themes</b>                       | <b>Examples to illustrate</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Academic</b>                         | e.g. accessibility of curriculum for all pupils (JCSP, LCA, Junior and Leaving Certs), exemptions, learning supports/resources etc. |
| <b>Behavioural &amp;/or Physical</b>    | e.g. including disruptive pupils within school, discipline policies, in-class/withdrawal etc  |
| <b>Cultural &amp;/or Historical</b>     | e.g. historical changes within Irish education  |
| <b>Economic</b>                         | e.g. Resources/Funding etc.   |
| <b>Emotional &amp;/or Psychological</b> | e.g. concerns self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, stereotypes, stigma, and prejudice.                                      |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Ethical/Ideological &amp;/or Moral</b> | e.g. ideals vs reality, barriers to total inclusion, forced inclusion, ethics of exclusion, personal rights etc |
| <b>Holistic</b>                           | e.g. participants using mixed/multiple definitions of inclusion   |
| <b>Legal &amp;/or Political</b>           | e.g. EPSEN (2004), Social Justice Legislation, Equal opportunities  |
| <b>Social</b>                             | e.g. peer friendships, being in the local community etc   |

Table 3.1 shows that there were a wide range of descriptions/themes used to define inclusion. Some of the themes of inclusion were mentioned by several stakeholders e.g. social issues, whereas other themes were specifically mentioned by only some of the stakeholders e.g. forced inclusion or funding models of inclusion etc. For example, it appears that many of the stakeholders had multiple views of inclusion, although some stakeholders had stronger preferences for specific views on inclusion e.g. social. Issues concerning the co-existing, conflicting or complementary views or attitudes to inclusion will be discussed in Chapter 6 with regard to previous research on inclusion.

### 3.2 Pupils' Views of Inclusion

This section focuses on the views of both the Junior and Senior pupil groups. Both of the pupil groups discussed a variety of factors concerning their experiences at the school. Not all of their discussions were directly relevant to the question of 'What is Inclusion', so Tables 3.2a - 3.2d below focus on comments or views made about inclusion. The tables below are presented in alphabetical order to enhance the clarity of the data presented.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Table Key: J = Junior Cycle, S=Senior Cycle, M= Male, F = Female</b> |
|---|

#### Table 3.2a Behavioural &/or Physical Theme

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| <p><i>"Allowing everybody in " JM</i></p> <p><i>"Getting everyone involved in doing the same thing" SF</i></p> <p><i>"Sport dominates and then you have a few other things and a lot of the time people aren't interested in activities and they're just left out. Like there's people interested in debating and other things and no chance" SM</i></p> |
|--|

#### Table 3.2b Emotional &/or Psychological Theme

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>"Make sure everyone feels welcome..." SM</i></p> <p><i>"Make everyone feel comfortable in a situation and not being forced to do anything that you don't want to do, so it's natural" SF</i></p> <p><i>"Make sure they don't feel isolated" SF</i></p> <p><i>"Be careful how you go about including everyone in certain activities because a lot of people just don't feel as if they want to take part, often forced into it" SM</i></p> |
|---|

### **Table 3.2c Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

|  |
|--|
| <i>“Accept people” JF</i>  |
| <i>“If they (Muslim girls) want to wear head scarves, they have the right to do that” SF</i>       |
| <i>“In 5<sup>th</sup> year, the teachers have treated me with the widest amount of respect” SF</i> |

### **Table 3.2d Social Theme**

|   |
|---|
| <i>“The opposite of being left out” JF</i>  |
| <i>“Like one person wouldn’t be left on their own” JM</i>   |
| <i>“Accepting people into the group without discriminating against their religion or race” JM</i>       |
| <i>“The more stuff you’re involved in, the more people you meet” JM</i>                                 |
| <i>“It’s not easy in the first year for some people to make friends” SF</i>                             |
| <i>“There should be stuff at lunchtimes, like different activities, to help people make friends” SF</i> |

Throughout both focus group interviews, the social aspects of inclusion were generally discussed more than other views on inclusion. In particular, the pupils were very focused on the importance of friends and forming friendships in the school as illustrated by their quotes. Whenever pupils referred to feelings of themselves or others, this was assigned to the Emotional and/ or Psychological theme.

### **3.3 Parents’ Views of Inclusion**

This section outlines the views of parents who attended the two parent focus groups. One of the parent groups was the Central Parents Committee (CPS), which is drawn from all parents (children with/without SEN/learning difficulties) within the school. The other parent group was a group, drawn from parents of pupils with SEN/learning difficulties attending the school. Not all of the parents provided examples of how they defined inclusion. None of the parents in the latter group provided explicit comments about how they viewed or defined inclusion despite being asked a direct question. Instead, they focused on specific issues or comments about different types of SEN (specific learning difficulties, behavioural problems etc). They also discussed examples of specific situations with their own children who had various assessments of SEN (e.g. Dyslexia, ADHD etc.). In particular, this latter parents’ group preferred to discuss issues concerning option choices, types of punishment used in the school, the different types of exam subjects (Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, JCSP, LCA), the workload of the different exam subjects, labelling of pupils taking JCSP/LCA, the important role of the SNA, mixed ability groups and the need for more SEN resources to help their children.

Several of the parents in the CPS group also used the focus group as an opportunity to discuss issues concerning timetabling of various subjects, subject choices and relationships between teachers, parents and pupils etc. Table 3.3 presents a compilation of the prominent themes that emerged from the parents’ focus groups.

**Table Key: M=Male, F=Female, CPS=Central Parents Committee**

**Table 3.3 Themes of Inclusion**

| Theme                                   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Academic</b>                         | <i>“Inclusive to me would mean to sort of take in everybody under the umbrella of picking out their strong points and trying to encourage them in that field and even the weaker ones, try and bring them on to the best of their ability” F3, CPS</i>  |
| <b>Emotional &amp;/or Psychological</b> | <p><i>“I think if you’re included you feel valued...I think that has an effect even on your child, you know what their perception of the school is” F2, CPS</i></p> <p><i>“You know things like trips away, the musical and other...even prize giving day. All those help towards giving a feeling of inclusion” F4, CPS</i></p>  |
| <b>Legal &amp;/or Political</b>         | <i>“The DES set the agenda, they tell you what to do...the school does the best they can with what they have. They do an excellent job but we’re not rewarded for it financially...The private schools that take in brighter kids, they’re at a huge advantage... But you know, we cater for a wide range so we have to take everything” F1, CPS</i>  |
| <b>Social</b>                           | <p><i>“I feel like as a parent starting out in secondary school, like it is good to get involved. That inclusion for me is very helpful you know and it’s enriching &amp; it’s educational for me as much as for the kids” F1, CPS</i></p> <p><i>“On school trips, sometimes a relationship develops between the child and the teacher that wasn’t there in a class room situation...helps one to feel included” F4, CPS</i></p> <p><i>“Well you see there’s a group...there’s a group that don’t seem to take part in nothing they’re the ones that’s being left behind” M1, CPS</i></p> <p><i>“And I think too if we can promote inclusion, which we try to do with the parents committee and with activities within the school to promote inclusion” F2, CPS</i></p> <p><i>“Everybody being catered for” F3, CPS</i></p> |

The definitions of inclusion provided by the CPS parent group are shown above in Table 3.3. On balance, the majority of the parents’ comments relate to social aspects

of inclusion. Several of the parents wanted to discuss issues regarding relationships between teachers and pupils etc, which also fit under the social heading. Hence, the emphasis on the social aspects of inclusion seemed very important to both parents and pupils. Economic issues were also discussed by both parent groups in regard to the importance of the SNA staff and SEN/Resource teachers. In particular, the parent group of children with learning difficulties/SEN emphasised their concerns about problems with DES/NCSE funding for additional support required to help their children to cope with mainstream education.

### 3.4 SNAs' Views of Inclusion

In addition to the five SNA staff, this focus group also included one other member of the support staff. There are currently a team of ten female SNAs employed in the school. Nine are employed full-time and one is part-time. Their role is to care for the physical, emotional and social needs of pupils with SEN within the school. The team work in small groups and individually as well as in the classroom. The subject areas that the SNAs are involved with are determined by each SNA's individual strengths and they often alternate between the different pupils. For example, they supervise pupils with SEN during practical classes such as metalwork and during other activities such as swimming and the Special Olympics. They also assist pupils with SEN with projects and computer work.

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| <b>Table Key: SNA=Special Needs Assistant, AS=Administrative Staff, F=Female</b> |
|--|

#### Table 3.4a Academic Theme

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|---|
| <p><i>"The children with Down's Syndrome in our school are...even the other children with learning difficulties are in the classrooms and we are there to enable them to access education like the other children in the class" SNA, F2</i></p> |
|---|

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>"Well, I know that we are all with these students and we sit beside some of the students in class because they need that – that assistance for getting notes down and just encouragement to do the work. They need that definitely!" SNA, F5</i></p> |
|--|

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>"But, then there's a lot of...now I suppose that's another part of inclusion. The school completion office next door (n.b. to the room where focus groups are). They would deal with a lot of that- trying to keep these kids at school. Last year they set up a Transition Year Two (TY2), you know for boys that probably would have been gone and they've actually set up this class that does I think does all mechanics and stuff like that" AS, F6</i></p> |
|--|

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>"So the aim of any SNA time or resource time it's very much looked upon as their physical or care needs. The intellectual side of it just seems to...I don't know...but then you put a student in special needs and you put them into the classroom and bring them to the bathroom or whatever the care need is, but they're excluded...academically, they're excluded. Academically, they're sitting in a room. They're lost! So that's not inclusion you know if they pull the resources. We need the resources" SNA, F1</i></p> |
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| <p><i>"We would work very closely with the resource teachers so even though we may not be in on the actual meeting (re Individual Education plans/ IEPs), they're very aware of all our opinions on what we think would be good or bad...They would definitely</i></p> |
|--|

*look for you definite input as to, I suppose we work on it together that much and everybody knows their own teachers that they're working with or whatever. It's just a relationship that's there. It's not formal" SNA, F3*

Table 3.4a shows that the SNA/AS staff raised a number of academic issues concerning inclusion. The SNA staff reported that they usually had an informal (often verbal) input into the preparation of the IEPs for pupils with SEN. Several of them agreed that despite the pupils with SEN being physically included in the school, they questioned whether these pupils were being included academically as they often struggled to keep up with the work in the classroom. However, they were in favour of most of the pupils with SEN being offered the opportunity to attend school in their local community.

#### **Table 3.4b Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

*"We usually get to know all the one's that aren't really good because they're always in the office. And, you know a lot of them aren't bad. It's just that there's some of these ones that come up. They just can't keep quiet when they're told...they can't bite their tongue and they answer back and then they're up and there everyday of the week nearly, you know...there are a few that would be in detention quite a lot and it's basically the same ones all the time. And when they go, there's always ones to replace them, isn't there?...And not bad kids. I mean we wouldn't say they're bad, they're just maybe disruptive and that" AS, F6*

*"No, usually try to, deal with (any problem behaviour) within that area rather than...I suppose the whole thing is to avoid getting it to the Principal...do you know what I mean? ...Normally you'd go to the teacher and then if it's not sorted, which it nearly always is sorted with the class, like to co-ordinator sorts it. But normally it's sorted within the class anyway" SNA, F1*

Issues concerning behavioural problems were not a key focus of the SNA/AS focus group. In the first quote in Table 3.4b, the administrative staff member is not referring specifically to any pupils with SEN, but her comments are more general about all pupils in the school. In contrast, the SNA staff seemed in general agreement that any behavioural problems by the pupils with SEN that they worked with were usually dealt with in the classroom. In particular, they referred to the pupils with ADHD as an example of where some of these pupils had problems with controlling impulsive behaviour. Hence, it was best to try to deal with it in the classroom in order to avoid the pupil being sent to the principal. However, they did suggest that it might depend on the seriousness of the incident. Overall, there was little discussion on behavioural issues amongst the staff in this focus group.

#### **Table 3.4c Economic Theme**

*"I think for inclusion in the school to work, we need kids in classrooms. They need to be in class and they need the resources with them to back them up and help them because they can't manage in the class without that so that's getting them into class and having that back-up, which is us and resource teachers also. So we need lots of resources" SNA, F4*

The issue of resources and the need for SNAs and SEN/Resource teachers was implicit within the comments made by the staff in this focus group. There was a

sense of anxiety concerning the possible reduction in future funding for pupils with SEN, which is not surprising as this might effect the jobs of the SNA staff. However, it is worth noting that this issue was discussed in more depth by the SEN/Resource teachers and several of the subject group teachers in other focus groups.

#### **Table 3.4d Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

*“You know we talk about inclusion. That everybody should be included and all the rest of it. In some cases it probably is but not everybody is able to be included and therefore that’s why you have special schools and so on and different institutes. It isn’t possible depending on the child’s profound difficulties, you know. You think of inclusion as in Yes! Everybody should be included. But in some cases, it just doesn’t...you know, it doesn’t apply. But for more percent than used to be, definitely” SNA, F2*

The above quote illustrates a number of similar issues that were often implicit throughout the focus group discussion. It is important to note that the SNA staff highlighted that the type of disability and the needs of the individual pupils should be key factors in deciding whether mainstream or special school education was the most suitable. This was especially in regard to academic and physical needs issues. The social issues were also important and these are outlined below.

#### **Table 3.4e Holistic Theme**

*“I suppose, it’s one thing to have them included, to actually have them physically within the school, but it’s kind of offering the opportunity to access the stuff, you know, it’s not just that they’re included in the ‘here’, it’s that they can benefit from it and learn and given the opportunity to do it – to join in” SNA, F3*

*“I think it’s important to say that just because they’re in the building doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s included and just their care needs are being taken care of you know, it’s every kind of need that needs to be looked at” SNA, F5*

Throughout the focus group interviews, it was apparent that the SNA staff often made implicit references to the multiple aspects of inclusion. In particular, they emphasised the importance of adopting a holistic viewpoint concerning the needs of pupils with SEN.

#### **Table 3.4f Social Theme**

*“I suppose to us it would probably mean including all the children that have special needs in the school. That they wouldn’t be left out, that they’d be involved in anything that takes part that the rest of the children are doing that they’re part of it as well, that there’s no exception made, you know, they’re included in it” SNA, F1*

*“ I suppose inclusion as well...is the inclusion that everyone, staff- all staff are included as well as part of a whole school team, that it’ll all work” SNA, F5*

*“I would be very aware that no matter what, we would put a lot of notices and things around for staff, you know, go around to the staff rooms, but there’s always one for the girls as well. We call them the girls, the SNAs. We would always, no matter what goes round, there’s always an extra one done for them...so that they’re aware of what’s actually going on as well” AS, F6*



*“(in the past) They really didn’t go out and walk about round the school, which happens now. All of the kids go through the school. They go with us or always a teacher or SNA is always with them which sort of isn’t inclusion because they’re not mixing with their friends. In a way I feel that they’re kind of miss...anybody in their class really doesn’t talk to them, not that much. So I think it’s not good in a way. But it’s brilliant that they’re through the school and they’re through class and they’re going into classes” SNA, F1*

*“We have two children with special needs in the TY group. The TY group have nearly adopted them, taken them as part of their group as well. So any functions that have been happening this year, they have been totally included” SNA, F2*

*“I would work with one little girl who’s Down’s Syndrome and she’s in Home Economics and there’s a lot of the girls there that were with her throughout primary school and they just work away with her. It’s just another person in the room and they just get things for her if they know she’s not able to do it. They’re absolutely amazing. They’re only first years but they are amazing with her. They’re really, really great and the majority of the class are fantastic” SNA, F4*

*“That’s a really big...you know to...that type of inclusion that you’re talking about, is a really big thing for this county. I have a niece who’s Cerebral Palsy, not very bad, she’s deaf and has a disability in walking, but mentally she’s fine. But I mean she had to go to school in D...but I mean she’s in L...now and she’s such a loner because there’s nobody...because she had to go away she doesn’t really know anybody either” SNA, F3*

*“But in a way then, I know one of the classes, it’s an adult. They really don’t get any interaction with the students” SNA, F2*

*“Because of the nature of the children we work with. Learning disability, their communication skills wouldn’t be great anyway. Therefore they may have the faults with things but they wouldn’t always have the language to speak to children. By that alone, they’re going to be isolated because children will try for a few minutes and if they don’t get something back you know, by nature they’re not going to hang around. They’re probably going to go onto the next person. So, that’s probably part of what they’re isolation would be anyway” SNA, F3*

*“One of our students has Asperger’s and one of the days I was in the class with him...inappropriate communication and behaviour. The same things happened in class. They would be just off the top of his head. That you would be encouraging him not to do. Because it would bring attention from other students. Because he would even walk over across the corridor and then walk straight into the door and bang his head off the door. Then he’s drawn so much attention to himself and we’re trying to help him blend into the situation” SNA, F1*

*“The more senior student with Asperger’s I think anyway..., he’s come on great...before he would kind of nearly grunt if you asked him anything, now he’s...it will be “please” and “thank you” and “can I have?” instead of “here take that!” or “give me that!”.He really has and that’s through everybody really encouraging him”*

SNA, F5

*“But again, inclusion allows children even with Asperger’s and that to observe how normal children behave” SNA, F1*

As with the pupil and parent focus groups, the social aspects of inclusion dominated the discussion within the SNA/AS focus group. The discussion emphasised the importance of allowing pupils with SEN the opportunity to experience mainstream schooling, whilst acknowledging that social inclusion meant more than just physical access to the school. Issues concerning the need for properly funded resources to support the social (and indeed academic and physical) aspects of inclusion were often implicit or explicit within the discussion.

### **3.5 Senior Management Group (SMG) views of Inclusion**

There were five staff in this focus group which consisted of members from the management. Like most of the teacher focus groups (see details in Chapter 4), the participants in this group provided much discussion on a broad range of important issues concerning inclusion.

#### **Table 3.5a Academic Theme**

*“We have worked with the National schools and we’ve carried out our own preliminary assessments to dove-tail with theirs to show what learning support or resource these children need...the value of that is now questionable, because if they don’t fit into, they can have various specific needs that we know that if they get a little bit of help, particularly a reading resource or a maths resource, that they will not get frustrated and fall aside. But because the bar has been lowered, they will not qualify”*  
P3

*“We are supposed to now as well, have differentiation in the classrooms for children with different ability levels and learning difficulties. But, yet as far as I’m aware, there has been no training for teachers to do that. I attended one course in D\*\* and S\*\*\* on it. There was about half an hour on differentiation in one subject and it would involve a huge amount of extra work for teachers to prepare, but I would, I honestly believe to have that system in place is nearly impossible, particularly without any in-service training”* P4

*“I was at a meeting of inspectors with my subject area (French) and they were talking about setting different homework for different levels within your class and I mean I’m sitting there saying “How could you...?” Like, if I can get the homework corrected at all! If they can find it first of all in some classes. If we can get it marked and move on to something else, that’s a brilliant day. And, they now want to have a different set of homework for maybe three different groups in the class! Nobody has ever told me how to do it. They didn’t tell me either”* P4

*“I would feel that the curricular change that has happened over the last ten years has ignored representations from teachers...I’m convinced that the Leaving Cert is unnecessarily long. ..there maybe one or two subjects that they’re fair in terms of the volume of work you have to get through. There isn’t a single leaving cert subject...if there was at least one or more sections taken off the course, it would produce a more holistic system and the teachers might have time to bring along the less able or the*

*kids that are challenged in a different way, without the other kids that want to progress at a really fast pace becoming casualties” P3*

*“But I’m looking at my fourth year class and I’ve two people in there who can barely read or write to do pass English...then you have people who could get an ‘A’ or a good ‘B’ and I spend my time sitting with the two boys who are getting bored because they can’t understand the task that I’ve given. So, a lot of my time is going into these two boys when I should be dividing my time equally with the whole class” P1*

*“With that small group of pupils that are very demanding and disaffected with school, we bring those parents in twice a week after school for a homework club. But you’re working with very small numbers so you can manage inclusion. But, it’s tiny, the numbers that you’re affecting like that” P2*

*“The added value that we are getting from the SNAs because of the way that they engage with the teaching and learning in the classroom – they can be a teaching aid – a tremendous boost to the confidence of the child and they’re being slapped down to a very narrow definition –that they sit there, mute! But they can take the child to the toilet. It’s such a restrictive, debasing role for anybody to have and these people are very well trained and pursuing all kinds of extra-curricular courses” P3*

As can be seen from the number of quotes in Table 3.5a, a large amount of time in the SMG focus group related to discussion of academic related items. Such issues covered a broad spectrum ranging from pupils who could barely read and/or write through to discussing the restrictive role of the SNAs. Other aspects related to problems with subject teachers not receiving sufficient time and/or training in the use of differentiation within the classroom, the after school homework club and strong views that the Leaving Certificate syllabus being too long.

#### **Table 3.5b Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

*“I think that you should mention the after school supports that are being offered in the school to try and help these children...the amount of time and generosity that the staff offer. But, we are sorely compromised in the eyes of some staff because they’re frustrated that all of our attention seems to be going on hard cases. And they will say and justifiably so “what about the rest?” “what about the ordinary decent run of the mill pupils?” P5*

*“One student who is very, very troublesome and who has been coaxed and cajoled and brought along and has made fantastic progress behaviour wise in particular. But, he cost a lot of people an Honour in that class. Because there’s so much time lost dealing with him. So, I don’t think...I think there’s a balance that needs to be struck somewhere and I don’t think we really have it right. Not just in this school. I mean in terms of the Department and what they allocate to this as well” P2*

It is clear that a small number of disadvantaged pupils within the school were causing great concern, anxiety and stress amongst both subject teachers, as demonstrated later, and the SMG alike.

### **Table 3.5c Cultural &/or Historical Theme**

*“Trying to up skill all of the staff at the one time is extraordinarily difficult because you have staff that are traditional in their methodologies. They are experiencing huge change in their methodologies in their own disciplines” P3*

*“I think that teacher training is fundamental as well...I would still be of the view that we are still tending to churn out subject specialists and expect them to be holistic teachers. You really need the education, the psychology of the child, the educational psychology elements built in from year 1. It shouldn't be an afterthought that “I've done my degree now in these subjects and I'll go for teaching” It should be from the outset” P5*

*“I think as far as we're concerned we've tried to be as inclusive as we can. We've embraced all the different programmes and I think the problem with the Irish system basically is that it's driven from the top down... None of the programmes when they're brought in are resourced properly...but we're the only profession in which we trained and that has to do us for forty years. Every other profession are re-trained...one day now and again isn't sufficient to train anybody. You have to take them out on a long term basis. Take them away for a month and give them proper training so that when they come back, they're energised” P1*

*“I feel that the fundamental role of the teacher has been changed and it's been changed without the teachers unions reading the fine print and they bought into it or they 'took the soup' – namely signed into it on a productivity agreement for a nominal pay increase and their members haven't woken up to what's happening” P3*

The Cultural and/or Historical theme includes a variety of issues concerning specific aspects of Irish Education such as the role of the teacher, teacher training, staff development and systems etc. Teachers are a vitally important resource within the Irish education system, but the quotes in Table 3.5c highlight that the history and culture of Irish education is an important factor in how inclusion is viewed and/or working within this specific Irish post-primary school. Of particular note is the comment by participant 1(P1) that the *“fundamental role of the teacher has been changed”*. The context of this comment was in reference to the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004), which was seen as changing the role of the mainstream subject teacher in post-primary schools. There is of genuine concern amongst this group (and indeed in the teachers' focus groups in Chapter 4) that mainstream subject teachers are not suitably trained or funded to develop their knowledge and understanding of how to teach pupils with a wide variety of academic, behavioural, emotional, physical, social and/or psychological problems.

### **Table 3.5d Economic Theme**

*“I feel very sorry for teachers because they haven't had, apart from those that have had real hands on, year long training. A lot of the other staff have been expected to 'go it alone' or to source their own up skilling to understand all the definitions now that children present with and I feel that we're in a kind of crisis here. But the expectation is so huge...but we haven't really invested in the teaching profession and I'm getting sceptical now that the will or the where with all isn't there to invest in the teaching profession to allow them to meet the expectations” P3*

*“So, we have children who got supports maybe up as far as Junior Cert, but they’re not going to get the same supports to carry them through to Leaving Cert” P3*

*“I always mention the strain on resources – management resources and there’s a strain as well on other students” P2*

*“Those boys (who can hardly read or write in English) fall into the category of getting learning support. The school has one learning support teacher for \*00 pupils. In the primary schools you have a learning support teacher depending on the number of students you have and the likelihood of having learning support needs. But we don’t have that so we can only give it to.. the learning support to pupils that are really in need....But how come the primary school system has a completely different system to what we have?” P2*

*“Expectations rise and yet there’s no support or no training to help that expectation” P4*

*“Teachers-They’re not supported and that ‘top down’ approach that the department has adopted isn’t working because they haven’t resourced it sufficiently... I think the resourcing has to come in two blocks...proper training and then keep the staffing as well...they come up with this formula on which your resources are calculated .The people who are...can decide where the resources need to go are the people on the ground. So, I maintain it should be ‘bottom- up’. You know, that we should be...we should be allowed to allocate the resources or apply to the Department for the resources where we see they’re needed. We’re the people who are seeing what’s coming in on the ground. We’re liaising with the primary schools. We’re liaising with all the different agencies” P5*

*“Resources have to be directed as well. But the only way that the NCSE engage with us at the minute is on a formula driven basis. They don’t engage with us as having any kind of competency to assess or determine the needs of children. So they get helicoptered in once every eight, twelve weeks and have a look around the place and apply their formula” P3*

*“We’re dealing with them on an hourly basis, on a daily basis, on a weekly basis and we are totally ignored. Even the resource teachers, the learning support teachers, we are just totally and utterly ignored which it comes to making suggestions about what the pupils need” P2*

The quotes in Table 3.5d highlight where specific explicit (and implicit) references were made to funding as an important aspect of supporting the inclusion of all pupils within the school. These issues highlight that investment of funds into the CPD of teachers is greatly needed. Such issues concerning the ongoing CPD of teachers and the avoidance of excessive stress and burn out within the teaching profession will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Other issues included in the Economic theme concern the problem with using a ‘formula-driven’ funding model for allocating resources to schools e.g. such as having only one Learning Support Teacher for \*00 pupils.

### **Table 3.5e Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

*“Because what you end up doing is destroying peoples’ good will as well. People who would be full of enthusiasm and full of energy just, as \* says, with the stroke of a pen they can just destroy all that good will” P4*

*“They (NCSE) have no idea or even less interest of the pupils as individuals. We’re dealing with them as individuals, whereas they’re dealing with them as ciphers that fit into a formula” P3*

It is interesting to note that sometimes different types of Ethical/Ideological and/or Moral issues are raised by the different focus group participants. In Table 3.5e participants P3 and P4 focus on different issues. For example, participant 4 (P4) focuses on the ‘goodwill’ of the teachers while participant 3 (P3) emphasises the importance of adopting a ‘pupil-focused’ model of funding inclusion. Chapter 6 will discuss how different ethical/ideological or moral views can co-exist, complement or conflict with one another in regard to inclusion.

### **Table 3.5f Holistic Theme**

*“We described ourselves as an inclusive school and I inherited a tradition here as Principal that anybody who applied to the school is generally accepted. I can’t think of anybody that was ever been turned away. So whether it be in terms of physical, learning, emotional or behavioural, we open the doors to everybody and we try to provide, as best we can, an education according to their need” P3*

The above quote by the participant 3 (P3) is a good example of an holistic view of inclusion. It incorporates several aspects of inclusion e.g. academic, behavioural, emotional, physical and social. Within this focus group, there was also some discussion about other post-primary schools who did not appear to have such an holistic or open policy concerning whether they accept pupils with a broad range of learning needs. A point was raised that such schools are eligible for SEN funding and this was seen to be an unfair aspect of the current funding model used by the NCSE.

### **Table 3.5g Legal &/or Political Theme**

*“They have multiplied all the expectation with regard to special educational needs...it’s created huge challenges because the burden of expectation on teachers has been enormous” P3*

*“The Education Act, the Welfare Act and now the EPSEN Act, they’ve put huge burdens on us” P3*

*“What I find absolutely appalling is that with the stroke of a pen – whereas the Department wouldn’t recognise anybody as being a qualified resource teacher (Unless trained on specific courses in Ireland), they have now turned round with the EPSEN Act and made every single teacher a resource teacher- without the training! I think that’s an insult to everybody! It’s certainly an insult to the people that have been delivering the training over a year. Because it took a year to become a resource teacher or a learning support – fully qualified. How can you do it over an 8 hour period over a year? I think they’re going to put in three days or eight hours over three years” P3*

*“The second thing is, and with respect to yourselves involved in the course in \*\*\*, the resource teachers – two of the resource teachers who actually trained in \*\*\*, said that what they were told on the course in \*\*\* is completely different to what’s happening here on the ground. They were told that all of these students who were coming here, who had a variety of difficulties would be treated fairly from the EPSEN Act and the NCSE and that’s not what’s happening” P2*

The SMG focus group discussed a number of issues concerning the Legal and/or Political issues concerning inclusion. In particular, issues concerning the new expectations of mainstream teachers since the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) were an area of potential concern. Participants were generally positive about the ideology behind the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) and appreciated that new policies had been created since the Act. However, there were several concerns about how various policies could be put into practice, especially based on the current NCSE funding model for meeting the needs of students with SEN/learning difficulties.

### **Table 3.5h Social Theme**

*“The other group that I would be a little concerned about is a group that has emerged in recent years and they are Irish national children from our own area here that belong to disadvantaged areas – both boys and girls...the range of difficulties that those children have and what we’re being left to deal with on a daily basis is extraordinary not to mention their education at all...And the system as it stands at the moment is not doing enough for them. What we do for them and how we include them is going outside the system, using for example, the \*\*\*partnership, the Health Board and Social Services. But even that is limited” P2*

*“Well, I could give you an example of a scenario like yesterday morning. When one of these pupils arrived into school at 10 o’clock in the morning for...she came for tablets because she had a dreadful headache..... She then admitted that she had a cut knee and the back of her head was split . When I took my hand down, my hand was covered in blood. So I said “Look I have to inform your mum”. She said, “No way!” She hadn’t gone home. This girl is 14. She had stayed in a friends’ house. She didn’t know what had happened. She had started drinking at 6 o’clock in the evening. She drank vodka and whiskey. She got up from the friends house, then came here. Her mother was working. Dad isn’t there, he’s in England....and, like all day, there were 3 or 4 of us dealing with that child.....Social services provided a taxi to bring her and her mother to \*\*\*hospital at a quarter to five...the night before she had been in the company of three girls and about 6 or 7 males and what really scared me was that two of these girls came into school yesterday with an awful lot of money with them...we have no resources to deal with that” P2*

*“Essentially, the DP was out of commission yesterday because she was doing social work...And there’s no recognition that there are exceptional circumstances prevailing in schools that require exceptional responses” P3*

*“I am getting a lot of those kids coming to me and I mean, with their admitting they’re doing and when we ring social services, there’s queries over “ what age are they?” They’re sixteen, ah well, if they’re seventeen, well at seventeen they’re not really our responsibility once they’re seventeen. And we’re here and we’re thinking...”will they*

*be here on Monday morning or what's going to happen to them over the weekend? We're doing our best to keep them at school, but I feel the services that are there are not supporting us enough. I don't know what the solution is. I can't give you that" P1*

The Social theme within the SMG group covers a number of very important, yet diverse aspects regarding the concept of inclusion. For example, it appears that on several occasions a large amount of time during the academic year was being spent on ensuring the health and safety of vulnerable and socially (and often educationally) disadvantaged pupils. This raises similar issues to those in the Cultural and/or Historical theme concerning the changing role of the teacher and particularly the role and workload of Year Heads and school management etc. Unlike other focus groups, which focused more on the social aspects of pupils within the school, the SMG group highlight that schools are unable to ignore the social aspects of pupils' lives outside of school hours as they have an impact on the pupils' education as well as their well being etc. These issues will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

### 3.6 Brief Summary of Part 1 of Thematic Analyses

Table 3.6 below provides a brief summary of the themes discussed by pupils, parents, and SNAs and SMG.

**Table 3.6 Summary of Themes**

| <b>Focus Group</b>                                  | <b>Themes discussed</b>  |
|---|--|
| Pupils (two groups)<br>N= 19                        | Behavioural &/or Physical,<br>Emotional &/or Psychological,<br>Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral<br>Social  |
| Parents (two groups)<br>N = 12                      | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical,<br>Emotional &/or Psychological,<br>Social  |
| SNAs (Special Needs Assistants, one group)<br>N = 6 | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical<br>Economic<br>Ethical, Ideological &/or Moral<br>Holistic<br>Social   |
| SMG (Senior Management group, one group)<br>N =5    | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical<br>Cultural &/or Historical<br>Economic<br>Ethical, Ideological &/or Moral<br>Holistic<br>Legal &/or Political<br>Social |



In summary, Table 3.6 above shows that the SMG covered a wide range of themes (eight) concerning inclusion, with the exception of the Emotional and/or Psychological theme which was only discussed by the pupils and parents focus groups. The SNA group covered six themes and the parents' and pupils' groups covered four of the possible nine themes. These summaries provide a possible insight into the issues that were important to each of these particular focus groups at one particular point in time during the 2007/2008 academic year.

The diverse views from the pupils, parents, SNAs and SMG focus groups provide a wide diversity of issues relevant to the concept of inclusion. For the pupils, the focus of their discussion mostly concerned the social, emotional, behavioural and ethical/moral issues of how they viewed inclusion. It is interesting to note that the pupils did not explicitly discuss the academic aspects of inclusion. The parents' groups also emphasised the social and emotional aspects, but they also briefly discussed the academic as well as the legal and/or political aspects of inclusion. Compared to the pupils and parents, the SNA group discussed the social aspects of inclusion in greater detail. They also focused more on the academic, behavioural and to a lesser extent, the ethical/moral issues regarding inclusion. Unlike the pupils and parents groups, the SNAs referred to the Economic and Holistic aspects of inclusion. Academic aspects were discussed in great detail by the SMG group. Similar to the pupils, parents and SNA groups, the SMG group also highlighted a number of social, behavioural and ethical aspects, although the issues raised were often diverse between the groups. The SMG group did not explicitly discuss the emotional and/or psychological aspects of inclusion in regard to the feelings of pupils at the school. However, in contrast to the pupils and parents, the SMG group discussed the Cultural and/or Historical and the Economic aspects. The SNA group did discuss the Economic issues, but not those under the Cultural and/or Historical theme.

Chapter 4 covers Part 2 of the thematic data analysis and includes the SEN/Resource teachers, subject teachers' and LCA/JCSP teachers' focus groups. The same thematic coding scheme is used in Chapter 4 as described at the start of Chapter 3.

## 4 Chapter 4

### Thematic Data Analysis of Focus Group Interviews: Part 2 (SEN/Resource Teachers, Subject Teachers and LCA/JCSP Teachers)

#### 4.1 Presentation of Data Analysis

This chapter presents the thematic analysis from the four teacher focus groups. These include one group of SEN/Resource teachers, two groups of subject teachers and one group of teachers working mostly on the LCA/JCSP programmes. The key themes (as appropriate) are listed in alphabetical order (Academic, Behavioural and/or Physical, Cultural and/or Historical, Economic, Emotional and/or Psychological, Ethical/Ideological and/or Moral, Legal and/or Political, Holistic and Social) and are further explained in section 3.3 in Chapter 3. Not all of the themes were relevant to all of the focus groups and this issue will be briefly explained throughout the chapter. As with all of the focus groups, the key research question is shown below:

*Q) How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders including pupils, parents, support staff, teachers and management?*

#### 4.2 SEN/Resource Teachers' views on Inclusion

This section focuses on views of the SEN/Resource Teachers. There were six female teachers in this focus group, which included the Resource Department Co-ordinator. Each of these teachers had other teaching roles which are indicated by the use of a key code system.

Some of the SEN/Resource teachers stated that there was resistance by some subject teachers to have a resource teacher in their class. Others suggested that there were a good number of subject teachers that welcomed them into the classroom. Hence, it appears that there is a diversity of experience for the SEN/Resource teachers in regard to this issue. The SEN/Resource teachers also raised the issue that some of the subject teachers did not seem to know or understand what the role of a SEN/Resource teacher was within the school. They explained that they tried to keep subject teachers up to date with outcomes of psychological assessments and recommendations for in-class support. This information was usually conveyed via a brief confidential letter and a copy of the pupil's Individual Education Plan (IEP), which might be followed up by talking to the teacher concerned. They commented that some of the subject teachers chose not to read the letters and would just put them away in a drawer. They suggested that often it was a one-way communication system whereby subject teachers rarely came back to them to discuss any written communications.

The key definitions from the SEN/Resource teacher group are shown in Tables 4.2a-4.2g.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Table Key: A &amp; C = Art &amp; Craft, E = English, FETAC = Further Education and Training Awards Council, F &amp; S = French &amp; Spanish, G = Geography, H = History, JCSP = Junior Certificate Schools Programme (Anchor Teacher/English), LS = Learning Support, LCA = Leaving Certificate Applied, M= Maths, RT = Resource Teacher, VI Resource teacher = Visual Impairment, F=Female</b> |
|---|

#### **Table 4.2a Academic Theme**

*“The JCSP students’ results...that’s one way where we see the value of inclusion. Absolutely, yes we do! It’s measured in a concrete way” F6,RT(E)*

*“We would have a big frustration with...not just the students with special needs on the lower end of the spectrum, if you want, but the ones at the upper end, the gifted, talented...I feel that we almost let them down & yet on a day-to-day basis, we’re doing what we can...but I just know that it’s not enough!” F6,RT(E)*

Academic issues were not discussed as often in the SEN group as in the subject teachers’ groups (see Section 4.3). Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that the SEN/Resource teachers seem to have a much broader definition of inclusion so the academic issues were seen as no more important than the social and/or emotional aspects of pupils’ experiences in school.

#### **Table 4.2b Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

*“And even the likes of...feeding themselves in the morning...I mean we know the kids cannot function properly in the mornings or throughout the day if they haven’t eaten a good breakfast. So, some mornings of the week there is breakfast provided for some of the kids that we know don’t eat before they come” F3, F and S, RT, JCSP (E)*

*“And I provide that out of class time. It’s out of their Maths class time. Because there’s nothing there for them. They haven’t eaten before they come in. There’s no hope in hell they’re going to do maths for me if they don’t...if they haven’t eaten. So we have breakfast first and then we do maths” F5 VI, JCSP A, M*

*“But then, we’ve nearly excluded ourselves by default from the staff. When I came in here first we were in the same staff room as everybody else. We worked alongside our colleagues, but when I went into classes with the student, I was accepted. It didn’t matter. It was just seen that he needed help and I was the person to give it. And it nearly saved them the job of having to do it, so you were more than welcome in and that has completely changed...we’re gone to a different staff room...exclusively ours and the SNAs...it’s not meant to be, but that’s how it’s turned out” F6,RT(E)*

*“He didn’t have to get on a bus and go to Dublin and all the rest of it. We were hugely inclusive. But the longer you spend looking in, you see that lunch times, as things have gone on, he’s much older than the other kids and in my opinion at this stage he’s nearly isolated because of that. Because he spends his time in classrooms where there is a power point socket because his laptop has to be plugged in. He has a particular seat in the classroom which is away from all the other kids. If he’s got an SNA or resource teacher with him, they sit beside him, it’s not another who child sits beside him” F5, VI, JCSP, A, M*

As shown in Table 4.2b in contrast to the academic issues, the SEN/Resource teachers spent some time during the focus group referring to the behavioural and/or physical aspects of pupils with SEN. In particular, SEN/Resource teachers raised the issue of the physical needs of the pupils with SEN in regard to ensuring that they had eaten breakfast. One of the quotes above shows that a Maths teacher from the SEN group provided breakfast for the pupils with SEN during one of her classes. This raised an interesting moral and/or philosophical issue (see quote in table below) concerning

whether it was fair to provide such ‘exclusive’ treatment for pupils with SEN when other pupils were not offered this opportunity. It was noted that this contradicted with the philosophy of inclusion as the pupils without SEN were being excluded from this benefit.

Two other key issues concern the physical aspects of inclusion which focused on one pupil with a visual impairment and a separate issue focusing on the SEN teachers themselves. The main issue concerning the pupil with the visual impairment was that he preferred to exclude himself from the other pupils during lunch breaks and even during class periods. For example, in order to plug in his laptop, he would sit in a specific part of the classroom and tended to avoid sitting near the other pupils. The SEN/Resource teachers queried whether his placement in the school was genuine inclusion or whether it was integration. In this respect, the SEN/Resource teachers thought that integration meant that he was physically located within the school, but that he was not really allowing himself to be fully included at a social level. However, they agreed that the alternative would be to travel to Dublin and stay in a boarding school which meant being far away from his family, friends and local community ties.

The issue of the physical location of the SEN/Resource teachers mostly concerned the location of their staff room. They discussed the reasons why they were located in a separate corridor for their teaching and how they had inadvertently acquired an exclusive SEN/SNA staff room. Other teachers within the school were not denied use of their staff room, except that they chose not to use it. They acknowledged that this situation had arisen due to the convenience of the staff room, but there were different views about whether the situation had an impact on the concept of inclusion within the school. Several of the SEN/Resource teachers noted that it was somewhat ironic that the SEN team, teaching corridor and staff room had become exclusive rather than inclusive.

#### **Table 4.2c Cultural &/or Historical Theme**

*“And there’s still a big overlap between and a lack of understanding and a lack of definition – a lack of clarity between the two words ‘inclusion’ and ‘integration’...it’s all becoming mashed up together now that all the boundaries are becoming very blurred and it’s very hard to say any more” F4,LS,JCSP and LCA (E, H and G)*

The quote in Table 4.2c indicates knowledge and understanding of the cultural and historical changes within education in regard to the change in terminology from integration to inclusion. The quote suggests that it is not easy to distinguish between the concepts of integration and inclusion, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **Table 4.2d Economic Theme**

*“I’m not sure that inclusion is possible in a mainstream school...not with the resources and time that we have to do it at the minute anyway” F2, A and C, RT, JCSP, FETAC*

*“There’s the whole social aspect of school and it’s all very well to place a child in a particular class, but without understanding there’s an awful lot in our classrooms where the teachers have not got the proper training” F5 VI, JCSP,A, M*

The quote above shows that perceived problems with resources/funding for inclusion was an issue raised in discussion within this focus group. Economic or funding issues were often implicit, if not explicit within their definitions of inclusion. For example, the number of SEN/Resource teachers and SNAs in the school was seen as fundamental to the amount and the quality of work that they could undertake with the pupils with SEN. The SEN/Resource teachers also agreed that more funding was needed in order to provide ongoing training or CPD for the subject teachers (in addition to the SEN/Resource or Learning Support teachers) in the area of SEN. In particular, this suggestion was linked closely with subject teachers being expected to fulfil their new responsibilities as placed on them by the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004).

**Table 4.2e Emotional &/or Psychological Theme**

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>“And I think that’s...our caring role...has gone further than it should” F3, F and S, RT, JCSP (E)</i></p> <p><i>“But, I think it’s a fact ...and it’s come up already...that we’re a disadvantaged school and a lot of our kids come from disadvantaged backgrounds, that if you don’t care you know, who’s going to?” F3, F and S, RT, JCSP (E)</i></p> <p><i>“Because as a human being you’re going to have feelings and emotions about I mean anyone who has kids of their own, are thinking “what if my kid was in that situation and...would someone actually stand in and care for them in that role?” If maybe, parents aren’t aware that they’re needing in this area?” F2, A &amp; C, RT, JCSP, FETAC</i></p> <p><i>“There is a prejudice when it comes to talking about things like inclusion, because they do think that inclusion for a lot of people means taking people from special schools or taking them from the travelling community or taking migrants or those people and taking them in and fitting them into the school...and that’s new territory and it’s scary stuff for a lot of people. People are being asked to move outside their comfort zone! And that’s hard!” F6, RT (E)</i></p> |
|--|

The SEN/Resource teachers highlighted the caring aspects of their roles in regard to the emotional and/or psychological needs of the pupils with SEN. This contrasts with many of the subject teachers (see section below) who focused more on helping students to achieve points in formal exams. This issue raised an interesting concern about the role of teachers and how much focus should be on the academic versus social aspects of school life. Comments from the pupils’ and parents’ groups also emphasised the importance of the social, emotional and/or psychological aspects of school life. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 6 in regard to the philosophy of education underpinning policy and practice within an Irish context.

**Table 4.2f Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>“You take that maths class and include breakfast in it, the word gets out “why are they having that? You can imagine where it goes and then we’re back to the prejudice again...and that’s exclusive, not inclusive” F4 LS,JCSP &amp; LCA (E, H &amp; G)</i></p> |
|--|

The above quote illustrates the irony of how attempts to address social disadvantage within the SEN pupil group might lead to a form of exclusivity. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6 as it links with some of the issues discussed by the subject

teachers in the next section concerning where they thought that some pupils were being advantaged too much under the remit of inclusive practices.

**Table 4.2g Holistic Theme**

*“To me it means that kids who do come into the school who are a little behind others, that we do as much as is possible to include them in all the activities, in academic and outside of that with all of the other kids” F3,F & S, RT, JCSP (E)*

*“I think it’s a really hard word to be really strict in your definition of – is inclusion, isn’t it? Because it means so many different things to different people”F1, LCA & JCSP*

*“I can think of two students, one is Down’s Syndrome and the other has Asperger’s Syndrome and again they’re integrated into the school, but again they’re isolated. They’re sitting at the side of the room with the SNA to do the work. Because the SNA either has to write or take notes from the board so that they can keep up or tell them what they have to write” F2, A & C, RT, JCSP, FETAC*

*“The evidence is that the needs that we see these children having - and most of them are social and behavioural” F6,RT(E)*

*“We have a policy you know, an SEN policy and everything, but a lot of things that we do are not in that policy...they’re not part of the official policy. But because of the nature of the job, particularly our core group, there would be a lot taken on, that would be well outside the remit of what a lot of people who look at teachers in schools would say it is what school is all about. And that’s difficult...I’m thinking of things like..basic things like hygiene, getting up in the morning, feeding one’s self, homework...liaison with the community out there to make sure these kids have somebody, somewhere to go in the evenings...and things like that” F6,RT(E)*

*“And as RTs tend to...spend more time with these students than anyone else and they see these things more than other teachers...especially in JCSP, the anchor teacher would have them for four subjects. And many of these kids would have learning difficulties or social or behavioural and so you’re seeing them more than anyone else” F4,LS,JCSP and LCA (E, H and G)*

*“Because they have the supports there and they’re going to get through. Like, in a JCSP class they’re going to get through their exams if they stay here...they’re in a small class...a lot of time there’s SNA support. There’s a small pupil-teacher ratio. You know you’ve got that. But, in the area of social and behavioural, you feel you’re kind of lacking” F3,F and S, RT, JCSP (E)*

In contrast to the most of the other focus groups, the SEN/Resource teachers provide several holistic definitions of inclusion. The holistic nature of the definitions are illustrated in the quotes above and show that social, behavioural, academic and emotional factors are closely intertwined within their definitions of what was meant by the term inclusion. There was also some discussion about the historical changes in definition from integration to inclusion. In this respect, there was an emphasis on the fact that inclusion should focus more on the social aspects whereas integration was more about physically locating a pupil in a mainstream school.

#### **Table 4.2h Social Theme**

*“Inclusion is different to integration. There’s the whole social aspect of school and it’s all very well to place a child in a particular class, but without understanding there’s an awful lot in our classrooms where the teachers haven’t got the proper training. They don’t understand the needs of the child...at lunchtimes, he (visually impaired pupil) he’s much older than the other kids and at this stage, he’s nearly isolated because of that. He spends his time in classrooms at lunchtime... he has excluded himself from other kids...he’s integrated, he’s in the school grounds but in a social aspect, in my opinion he’s not included” F5, VI, JCSP A, M*

*“I know myself that for some of the students that I’ve had in the past...that for inclusion, my yard stick is – have they got to 18, have they got to 19, have they got to 20 and are not in jail? I mean it’s as simple as that. To me, it’s as simple as that. That to me...is...is..kind of a measurement of inclusion and are they ok? But, I still couldn’t probably give you a black and white definition of inclusion” F6,RT(E)*

The complexities of the social aspects of inclusion are highlighted in the above quotes. The SEN/Resource teachers discussed whether some pupils with SEN could be truly involved in all the social aspects of the school and also within the local community.

#### **4.3 Subject Teachers’ Views of Inclusion**

This section contains quotations from both of the two focus groups of subject teachers from the school. There were eight male and six female teachers across the two focus groups. Tables 4.3a - 4.3h show a sample of quotes from the two subject teacher focus groups which are coded according to their gender (male or female) and the subjects taught (see the key below). Compared to some of the focus groups (e.g. the pupil and parent focus groups), both of the subject teacher groups provided a more in-depth discussion on different definitions of inclusion.

**Table Key: M= Male, F = Female, A = Art, B = Biology, Bus = Business, CS = Construction Studies, E= English, G = Geography, GC = Guidance Counsellor, H = History, HE = Home Economics, I = Irish, JCSP = Junior Certificate Schools Programme, M = Maths, MW = Metal Work, S = Science, TD = Technical Drawing & Graphics, T = Transition Year, WW = Woodwork**

#### **Table 4.3a Academic Theme**

*“I guess where everybody has the same chance at education” F1, A*

*“The way that History is organised in the school, you would have mixed ability in all the classes and that’s very, very difficult. I often feel that the weaker students in History get left behind because the better students are very focused on points and doing well and you’re moving along with them” F5, H, GC & T*

*“In Business Studies for Junior Cert, it’s quite text heavy and quite academic based and there’s lots of learning and a lot of theory involved. From that point of view, it would be quite difficult for children who have learning difficulties to cope with the material, especially at Higher Level...Inclusion is great in theory, but if they’re sitting in a class where they’re lost the whole time, there’s no benefit to them. They’re not experiencing success” F3, Bus, JCSP*

*“If you take a gifted child. I feel they are held back by being in a normal classroom and I feel the same philosophy would apply for the SEN child...the work in the class has to be tailored towards the average and towards the exams” M2, M*

*“In the JCSP classes, you can see that those kids have a real sense of achievement and they do...They have an anchor teacher, but when they go into the 4<sup>th</sup> year, they lose the anchor teacher and ...they can’t cope” F3, Bus and JCSP*

*“If an inspector comes to do a subject inspection, the first thing they’ll do is go to the Dept and get the list of results for the school...The meter stick by which we are judged by the Dept...it’s academic. It’s ‘How come he’s doing Higher level and he’s doing Ordinary level. Why have you some doing Foundation level?’” M7, M*

*“It’s the middle of the road ones. The kids that maybe would get a ‘C’ or ‘D’ on an Honours paper. With a bit of extra resources, might even get that ‘B’ or even an ‘A’. sometimes the reward for giving them that extra bit of resources would be so important to them for going to third level” F3, Bus and JCSP*

In contrast to the pupils’ and parents’ focus groups, the subject teachers frequently referred to the academic aspects of inclusion. At times, some of the academic issues were intertwined with other issues, such as when resources are mentioned in the last quote in Table 4.3a. Other academic issues that arose focused on the pressure from the DES Inspectorate to teach Honours level across all subjects. Many teachers commented on the dilemma they faced in trying to balance the demands of the DES Inspectorate with the difficulties of teaching pupils with SEN and mixed ability classes. This raises a number of issues concerning policy and practice which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **Table 4.3b Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

*“I think as a teacher you try to treat everybody equal but with difficult students, difficult behaviour, it’s hard to treat everybody equal. Some want to be included more than others” M1, CS, WW*

*“In Metal work, when you’re giving instructions and maybe giving stuff on safety and you have 3 or 4 that don’t really understand what you’re saying... then these characters arrive at the machine and they don’t really know what they’re doing or haven’t understood...they’re a danger to themselves and others and its really stressful to watch” M6, MW*

*“SEN staff and students are all housed in the third corridor and I think that’s a mistake” F2, HE*

*“That’s a comfort zone (referring to the third corridor) and that’s where they (SEN students) graduate towards – stand at the radiator there at lunchtime. They get nervous going to the canteen or anything” M5, GC*

*“Because we’re spending all our energies trying to get these six or seven kids to stay to Junior Cert level. Personally, and it’s my opinion, they don’t want to be here and they’re causing endless trouble” F1,A*



*“I would agree with you on that. I’ve first hand experience of kids being almost forcibly included – forced inclusion, which is ridiculous” M1, CS and WW*

*“And there’s definite benefits to playing the exclusion card...because they get extra consideration in exams... or to get exemption from Irish” M5, GC*

There were several comments from teachers concerning the time and energy that needed to be invested in dealing with students perceived to have difficult behaviour. There seemed to be consensus that often a lot of teacher time was spent dealing with a small number of troublesome students who in some cases did not appear to want to be included. The issue of forced inclusion and playing the exclusion card were raised by two male teachers in regard to bad behaviour from some students. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **Table 4.3c Cultural &/or Historical Theme**

*“We don’t have training...where basically, we were always taught it was academic achievement...now we’ve moved to the situation where it’s including everybody and I’m not trained to cope with the level they’re at” M2, E*

*“I think that nationally there’s an impetus to be seen to be inclusive for the sake of it. Maybe that’s through the ----- Act and whispers that each teacher now would be looked upon maybe as a resource teacher with eight hours training. You know, that’s on the pipeline as well. What can eight hours prove to you, or teach you to deal with kids with special needs” M*

Some teachers were concerned that they did not have sufficient post-qualification training to teach such a wide variety of SEN and/or learning difficulties within their classes. It was felt that the amount of in-service in the area of SEN was very inadequate.

#### **Table 4.3d Emotional and/or Psychological Theme**

*“Everyone feeling comfortable and involved in a setting or surrounding” F4, M and I*

Compared to the views of the pupils and parents, teachers made fewer explicit references to pupils’ feelings other than in regard to academic achievement. For example, there were some teachers who raised the issue of pupils needing to feel good about themselves in the classrooms. This generally focused around discussions of academic issues such as putting the less able students into the JCSP or LCA classes (see quotes in Table 4.3a).

#### **Table 4.3e Economic Theme**

*“ I had a SNA in my class. With the two of us it was brilliant. Most of them have done Hon Art for Junior Cert.. just seeing them come on so much, it’s brilliant to see...I don’t know if I would have been able to get them all working as well as they did if I had been on my own” F1, A*

*“Science is a practical subject, but for people with intellectual disability or special learning difficulties, there can be a problem with using instructions given and reading instructions. Science should have more back up, more resources in the form of Lab Technicians and stuff that could help along that line... although the SEN people and*

*SNAs are very good, they don't have the science in them to help as well as they could" M8, B and S*

*"If funding was available form the DES, from the Government as we all know in all our subjects, for all kids, that much more could be done with them. That's what it comes down to. It comes down to money at the end of the day" M8, B & S*

Throughout the teachers' focus groups, the issue of resources was clearly of great importance. This has been labelled as the economic aspects of inclusion and overlaps with the academic and behavioural themes of inclusion. This will also be further discussed in Chapter 6 in regard to Policy and Practice issues.

#### **Table 4.3f Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

*"I think inclusion is about providing an opportunity for everybody to experience the same experiences, basically. I also think it's great as an idea, but in reality in the classroom, it's not always practical" F3, B, JCSP*

*"I think it's supposed to include everyone, but if you're actually teaching a class, it's difficult to include the wide range of ability that's presented in front of you" M6, MW*

Two teachers discussed the issue of the ideology of inclusion as opposed to the reality of teaching a wide diversity of pupils in the classroom. It appeared that some of the teachers understood the ideology of giving all pupils the opportunity for mainstream education within their local community, but argued that for a variety of reasons e.g. class sizes, mixed ability levels, lack of training etc, the reality was very difficult to achieve.

#### **Table 4.3g Legal &/or Political Theme**

*"It's political correctness gone wrong within the school. To include people we literally are excluding groups. We have tried too hard to include some groups. I think, at the expense of the majority. That's as a parent and as a teacher" M2, E*

*"Since the EPSEN Act, each teacher now would be looked upon maybe as a resource teacher with only 8 hours training...what can 8 hours prove to you, or teach you to deal with kids with special needs?" M4, TD*

Some of the teachers questioned the philosophical and/or political rationale behind the concept of inclusion of all pupils being taught within mainstream schools. For other teachers, there was evidence of some concern about the new expectations imposed upon them by the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004).

#### **Table 4.3h Social Theme**

*"Everybody included – the word explains itself really. Everybody gets the chance to take part" M7, M*

*"For some students, there's still a stigma attached to the JCSP or LCA and there are probably kids who take the mainstream Leaving Cert that should be in the LCA, but because of the stigma...that's where inclusion comes in...One parent said to me her son was worried because he was going to be out in the 'stupid' class and that was what he perceived JCSP to be...the perception has to change because certainly, they*

*would probably do better in the LCA” F3, Bus and JCSP*

*“Maybe that different religions and every creed is accommodated in the school” F6,I  
“I would think they don’t even benefit socially. Because if you’re sitting in a class where you’re self-esteem is knocked everyday, it reinforces the feeling of exclusion”  
F4, I and M*

*“But also, I think there’s a core of kids there, mediocre kids, never cause any trouble but they’re not really involved in any way in school life. They’re not included really. They just kind of drift through the school” F5, H, GC and T*

Within the subject teachers’ focus groups, the social, academic and economic themes of inclusion were discussed. However, it is very difficult to separate these aspects of inclusion as often they are inextricably linked. For example, the issue of stigma was raised by a number of teachers in regard to how it seemed to deter some pupils from taking the JCSP and LCA programmes. Teachers commented that some parents also had very negative views of these programmes and that more work needed to be done to ensure that they were seen by all, as of equal importance and valued as much as the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificates.

#### **4.4 Junior Certificate Schools Programme/Leaving Certificate Applied/Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme/Post Leaving Certificate Programmes (JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC) Teachers’ views on Inclusion**

The JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC teacher group consisted of five female and two male teachers all working in different aspects of the JCSP, LCA, LCVP and/or PLC areas of the curriculum. The researchers agreed that it would be useful to get the specific views of subject teachers who spend a lot of their time working with pupils on these programmes within the school. Tables 4.4a - 4.4e evidence the themes covered in the focus group. The following key shows the gender of the teacher and which subjects/programmes they taught.

**Table Key: M=Male, F=Female, BUS=Business Studies, CSPE=Civic, Social & Political Education, E=English, H=History, HSC=Home School Co-ordinator, G=Geography, JCSP=Junior Certificate Schools Programme, PE=Physical Education, PLC=Post-Leaving Certificate, RE=Religious Education, SEN=Special Educational Needs, SPHE=Social, Personal & Health Education, LCA=Leaving Certificate Applied, LCVP=Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Mu=Music, TY=Transition Year, SCPC=School Completion Programme Co-ordinator**

#### **Table 4.4a Academic Theme**

*“We accept that we don’t have academic selection as a requirement to come into the school. I think if we accept that we’re going to take kids from all, every background, then we as a school have a moral duty to provide for them” M1, CSPE,E,PLC, RE,SPHE*

*“Well I think inclusion should be...also for the good students. And quite often good students get lost or get ignored or even in a weak class you haven’t a number of students who wish to learn & they can’t be catered for and aren’t being catered for due to the disruption of other students who also have needs. also bright kids as well,*

*that they need to be included and I think they get a bit forgotten in endeavouring to cater for, maybe disruptive people” F4, Bus, CSPE, LCVP, PLC*

*“It’s the middle of the road kids, I mean the average kids, who really get lost. It’s the real quiet ones you know that are just sitting there and you assume they know it because you’re dealing with someone” F3, CSPE, H, G, JCSP, SPHE*

*“And subject choices play a role in it too, because I think some students choose subjects and they don’t know enough about it and struggle through it and they’re out the other end...In my subject (Music) I just feel I would love to talk to students before they make their choices, which might help them feel better and me feel better in the classroom” F1, Mu, LCA, RE*

*“Well, we’ve had good success now at inclusion in our PLC programme because we’ve been taking in adults now this last few years in with school leavers and even kids who have left school early and it’s working very, very well. The adults are pulling along because they’re interested. They’re pulling along the other students with them and it’s working well” F4, Bus, CSPE, LCVP and PLC*

As with the other subject teacher focus groups, this group also spent a good deal of time discussing the academic issues involved with including a range of pupils with diverse learning needs. A discussion took place concerning the ‘middle-of-the-road’ pupils and how they might be inadvertently disadvantaged in an academic sense by more attention and/or resources being given to a small number of pupils with problem behaviour. They also highlighted the academic successes of the various programmes such as the JCSP, LCA, LCVP and PLC. All of these programmes were seen to produce good academic results for pupils.

#### **Table 4.4b Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

*“Another thing I want to say about inclusion is that you get a perception sometimes from kids who are middle-of-the-road, never get into trouble, just get their work done, they’re not academic or high-flyers that “If only I acted the maggot, I’d get lots of carrots and I don’t! I think Parents are under the perception as well, if you really play up in school and you’re disruptive...you’re taken away for the day” M1, CSPE, E, PLC, RE, SPHE*

*“I mean it’s the prodigal son all over again, isn’t it? You know that it’s the way-ward one who gets the attention” M1, CSPE, E, PLC, RE, SPHE*

*“When I started here there were two staff rooms, this staff room and unit 4 and there was definitely better relations between the staff, definitely” F2, HSC, RE, SEN*

The issue of the small number of pupils with problem behaviour being given preferential treatment was raised by a number of teachers in this group. It was suggested that such special treatment (such as days out and Christmas parties) was creating feelings of resentment amongst some of the teachers and pupils. This was seen as positive discrimination which resulted in excluding the middle of the road and/or the brighter or well behaved pupils.

A separate issue concerning the physical aspects of inclusion focused on the separate staff room for the SEN/SNA staff. This was seen as divisive of staff. There was a general discussion about the problem of having several staff rooms in the school and issues concerning potential problems with communications.

#### **Table 4.4c Economic Theme**

*“But to do that (accept all pupils and meet their needs) we need all of the resources to provide that education for them” F1 Mu, RE, LCA*

*“I feel that there should be more help for students at senior level....when they go into mainstream class in fourth year, there’s no help for them and they’re just thrown in” F3, CSPE, H, G, JCSP, SPHE*

*“This is the first year we had 26 first years with foundation. This is a foundation learning difficulties class. A JCSP for 26. Alright, there were 2 teachers assigned to those, but tough, tough going and a lot of autism, down syndrome, general learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, behavioural problems, ADHD...and all in one class and they’re telling us then, they’re going to take resources from us!” F3, CSPE, H, G, JCSP, SPHE*

*“In the JCSP class, to really feel like you have everyone included in a class like that where you have students with educational needs, you need resources. You need to have them there. You can’t really honestly put your hand on your heart and say you’ve included everybody when you physically can’t do it yourself” F2, HSC, RE, SEN*

Issues concerning funding were raised by most of the staff in this group. Such issues were often linked with academic factors and/or trying to cope with a broad range of pupils with SEN and especially those with behavioural problems. It was thought that more funding was required and that any potential reductions in funding would create unwarranted stress and anxiety for both pupils with SEN and teachers alike.

#### **Table 4.4d Holistic Theme**

*“Inclusion to me means, just means ‘\*\*\*\*\* School’... A broad community that has all types of pupils from every background, from every intelligence background, from every physical learning, emotional...that’s what a community is, it’s got. you name it, it’s got it. And to me, that’s what inclusion is, is that we accept and provide an education for all of that community, if we can, if we can have the resources to do it. That’s what inclusion means to me” F2, HSC, RE, SEN*

Only one of the teachers from this group offered a broad and mixed definition of inclusion. This teacher was also the only SEN/Resource teacher in the group, so perhaps it is not surprising that her views on inclusion matched more closely with those in the main SEN/Resource Teachers’ focus group.

#### **Table 4.4e Social Theme**

*“Inclusion to me means including everyone...parents, teachers and pupils. But the big thing that comes into it is the whole communication. There has to be communication between all of them. Some people they have more communication maybe than others” M2, SCPC*

Only one of the teachers in this group emphasised the social definition of inclusion. However, this teacher's main role was now as School Completion Programme Co-ordinator, so he was no longer involved with teaching a subject specialism within the school. This might explain his focus on social issues as his role would involve communication with parents, teachers and pupils.

Table 4.5 provides a summary of the key themes for the focus group data presented in this chapter.

#### 4.5 Brief Summary of Part 2 Thematic Analyses

The table below provides a brief summary of the themes discussed by each of the teacher focus groups (SEN/Resource, subject teachers and JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC teachers).

**Table 4.5 Summary of Themes**

| <u>Focus Group</u>                              | <u>Themes discussed</u>  |
|---|--|
| SEN/Resource (one group)<br>N = 6               | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical,<br>Economic<br>Emotional &/or Psychological,<br>Ethical/ Ideological &/or Moral<br>Holistic<br>Social   |
| Subject Teachers (two groups)<br>N = 14         | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical,<br>Cultural &/or Historical<br>Economic<br>Emotional &/or Psychological,<br>Ethical/ Ideological &/or Moral<br>Legal &/or Political<br>Social |
| JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC Teachers (one group)<br>N = 7 | Academic<br>Behavioural &/or Physical<br>Economic<br>Ethical, Ideological &/or Moral<br>Holistic<br>Social   |

The above table shows that the subject teachers discussed eight of the themes of inclusion, whereas the SEN/Resource teachers discussed seven and the JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC discussed six of the possible nine themes generated in this report. The JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC group did not refer to the Emotional and/or Psychological aspects of inclusion, although this was discussed by the participants in the other teacher groups. The subject teacher group discussed the Legal and/or Political aspects of inclusion, whereas this was not explicitly discussed by the other teacher groups. Discussion of the holistic aspects of inclusion was the main definition of inclusion within the SEN/Resource teachers' group. These teachers showed a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the different possible definitions of inclusion in comparison to all of the focus groups in both Chapters 3 and 4. None of

the individual teachers in either of the subject teachers' focus groups gave an Holistic definition of inclusion. However, there was great diversity of definitions offered by both of the subject teachers' groups. For the subject teachers' groups, the Academic, Behavioural and/or Physical as well as the social definitions of inclusion were prominent in the discussions. In the JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC focus group, the Academic and Economic aspects of inclusion took a large part of the discussion time. All of the themes of inclusion outlined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will be fully discussed in Chapter 6 in regard to the relevant research material in the literature.

The next chapter is Phase 2 of the data analysis and uses a DPA to DA. In particular, Chapter 5 explores the discourses within the subject teachers' groups and the SMG.

## 5 Chapter 5

### Discursive Psychological Analysis

#### 5.1 Rationale for Discursive Psychological Data Analysis

Due to the richness of the focus group data, a second form of qualitative data analysis - DPA - was carried out using some of the focus groups to examine the research question *How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders?* This question was addressed using the focus group discussions conducted with school management and teachers.

#### 5.2 Procedure for Discursive Psychological Analysis

The procedure for a DPA of the data involved several stages which follow on from the full transcription completed for the thematic analysis and the close iterative reading of the transcripts. These are examined so as to see how different construals of inclusion are drawn on and used. The preliminary analysis that follows builds on the thematic analyses outlined in Chapter 3 and 4 so as to centre around three specific points of interest:

- i) How the meaning of inclusion is constructed and used in the focus groups;
- ii) How various meanings of inclusion are used to discuss and evaluate the implementation of policies and practices of inclusion in school;
- iii) Some potential implications of constructing inclusion in these ways.

In response to the interviewer's question 'What does inclusion mean to you?', the focus groups of teachers and SMG were quick to formulate varying definitions of inclusion and these were often accompanied by a positive endorsement of inclusion as a progressive education principle.

#### Table 5.2a Sample Response(s)

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>"Whether it be in terms of physical learning, emotional, behavioural – we open the doors to everybody and we try and provide, as best we can, an education according to their needs"</i>M1, SMG</p> |
|---|

#### 5.3 Inclusion as construed in Abstract and Practical terms

The discussion of inclusion that develops in each group moves from an initial fairly abstract definition to a construal of inclusion as multi-faceted and complex to apply – as implicating social and academic agendas which cannot be practically disentangled. In this respect two key themes identified in the thematic analysis are drawn on simultaneously:

#### Table 5.3a Sample Response(s)

|  |
|--|
| <p><i>"I don't know maybe there's a thing to be weighed up in terms of the social benefits of inclusion on the one hand of the people as opposed to the academic benefits of how they do academically. I presume that the inclusion policy helps them in the sense that they feel more integrated right through their lives but is the academic achievement backed up then by that – I don't know?"</i> M2 Subject Teacher 1</p> |
|--|



The ‘weighing up’ of academic and social inclusion which implicates conflicting agendas is discussed explicitly in the lengthy extract that follows (note that this is the same teacher speaking at different points in the discussion). This illustrates some ways in which consideration about ways to implement social and academic inclusion is situated in a classroom context and within the broader context of the education system. It is evident here that while a strong positive endorsement is given to an ideal of inclusion, this is mitigated in relation to practical considerations.

**Table 5.3b Sample Response(s)**

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>“I think inclusion is about providing an opportunity for everybody to experience the same experiences, basically. I also think it’s great as an idea, but in reality in the classroom, it’s not always practical”...F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p>  |
| <p><i>“So, inclusion is great but maybe sometimes by excluding them from mainstream education to a certain degree is more beneficial for them in the end because they experience things that they might never have experienced otherwise. And, by putting them in a mainstream class you’re just reinforcing that whole thing - because you can’t set the standard for them” F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p> |
| <p><i>“You have to set the standard because at the end of the day we’re here to help kids pass exams and do well in their Leaving Cert., and that’s what we do. Ideally, you could be here to educate them and provide them with an education but at the end of the day we’re exam driven. It’s the culture of the education in the country and that’s what we do” F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p>           |
| <p><i>“I would think they don’t even benefit socially. Because if you’re sitting in a class where your self esteem is being knocked every day”... F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p>  |
| <p><i>“It almost reinforces their feeling of exclusion” F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p>  |
| <p><i>“ It reinforces the feeling, yeah!” F1 Subject Teacher 1</i></p>  |

The extracts above illustrate ways in which the meaning of inclusion is negotiated between teachers in relation to contextual concerns. The positive social benefits of being included in a mainstream classroom are discussed as serving to reproduce a sense of failure in academic terms in the broader context of an Irish educational culture which is ‘exam driven’. But what can be seen also is that in this broader educational context, inclusion in a mainstream class can also be construed as psychologically detrimental: ‘your self esteem is being knocked every day’. In this respect the theme of psychological inclusion (in terms of daily erosion of self-esteem due to not meeting the academic standard of the class), is undermined in the context of an over-arching exam focused agenda. In this broad context, being excluded from the mainstream so as ‘to experience things that they might never have experienced before’ is advanced as more beneficial for that individual. This shift from inclusion as an ideal to exclusion as better meeting individual needs is used to build a case for the merits of small group work outside the mainstream classroom as illustrated in the extracts below.

### **Table 5.3c Sample Response(s)**

*“I would feel that kids or pupils that, from my own experience, were withdrawn from class or maybe work in small groups and get one-to-one or one-to-five, their progress can be phenomenal compared to what they would have been doing if they had been still in my class” M2 Subject Teacher 1*

*“With large classes it’s much more difficult to include everybody. If you have smaller classes you have more time for students and it’s much easier to give students with special needs more attention” M Subject Teacher 2*

These changing meanings of inclusion and consideration of practical implementation are discussed further in relation to different subject areas in school. Once again a tension can be seen between different themes of inclusion in terms of the teachers’ discussion of different subject areas.

### **Table 5.3d Sample Response(s)**

*“In Maths, I don’t know about other subjects, but it suits – and probably they’re all the same – it suits people being reasonably near each other in ability. With inclusion you will [have] people who – especially in first year – they’re really, really good, with people who are very, very weak and I would have thought would benefit more from more one-to-one and more five-to-one ratio or something like that” M2 Subject Teacher 1*

*“Teaching both Music and Irish, I find music lends itself very well to inclusion – mixed abilities for the most part. Now, it’s not an idealistic picture but music with its practical side of things can include people and they are, for the most part very interested in the practical side of music -music making and percussion instruments and singing. But, there are the heavy parts of the course too and it can be very hard to carry everyone along – near impossible to carry everyone along at the same speed. But, over time and over practice it gets easier... But, the music experience, on the whole, I would say, is inclusive for all...Teaching Irish on the other hand ... like Female 1 said, heavy text load and for Leaving Cert, now there’s the oral aspect, which helps for a few but some – it’s very hard to include everyone at a language” F2 Subject Teacher 1*

Inclusion as beneficial is negotiated in these extracts according to the nature of different school subjects Maths, Music and Irish which are characterised in terms of whether they have a ‘heavy text load’, practical or oral aspects and whether or not the subject lends itself to teaching pupils with similar or varied levels of ability. In these different respects the teachers’ discussions of inclusion are grounded in relation to their experience and skills in teaching particular subjects within the constraints of the ‘Leaving Cert’.

The teachers drew on examples of ‘success stories’ of inclusion to argue how initially ‘difficult’ students could progress, giving them pride in their work because of the presence of a SNA in the classroom.

### **Table 5.3e Sample Response(s)**

*“I mean I’ve had one second year class especially last year. I mean I started last year and they were extremely difficult to start off with. I had a special needs assistant in with them. With the two of us working with them, they’ve just come on so much, it’s unreal, and they all have... are brilliant. Most of them have done Honours Art for Junior Cert and have a brilliant project handed in and are really proud of it as well. Just seeing them come on... You wouldn’t even know the class from the start of last year. They’ve come on so much and it’s brilliant to see. And, that’s because I had one of the girls in with me as well and we could give them that extra help. I don’t know if I would have been able to get them all working as well as they did if I had been on my own” F1 Subject Teachers 2*

However, the success story argued in the extract above can be seen to be further negotiated and contested in relation to issues of class size, the presence of a SNA in addition to a teacher, pupils with differing needs and to the usefulness of a SNA in helping pupils with different SEN within different subject areas. The extracts below follow on immediately from the extracts above.

### **Table 5.3f Sample Response(s)**

*“Is that a function arising from two teachers in one room? Could one teacher with half that size of that class have got the same results? Is it numbers or?” M1 Subject Teachers 2*

*“You have to remember, there is one teacher in the room and a special needs assistant. The girls aren’t there to stand up on front of a class or teach. That’s not their role” F1 Subject Teachers 2*

*“I know and in fact I know that because the girls have come down to the woodwork room to me as classroom assistants have no background. What I find there is that I thought that these kids were targeted for help. But if I ask an assistant, “Who are you in to look after?” They don’t know. There’s something going on there. I thought it was specific. It was at the beginning. Whether it be a wee lad on crutches or a wee Downs Syndrome... and that was the person for that. Is that a different [ ] classroom assistant? Now, it’s a case of an extra body in the room as far as I’m concerned. You’re lucky that the girls can... they wouldn’t be as good with woodwork and what I’m doing down there. But, they’re an extra pair of eyes in the room [ ] chisel going through somebody’s butt. At least they know who was holding it” M1 Subject Teachers 2*

## **5.4 Evaluations of Educational Inclusion**

While the practical implementation of inclusion was rendered more achievable in relation to some students in certain school subjects, under certain conditions, it was rendered problematic also in terms of the successful inclusion of a minority of pupils resulting in the exclusion of others.

### **Table 5.4a Sample Response(s)**

*“Sometimes by trying to include everybody, you can exclude the majority of the class. Because if you have three or four kids that are maybe that bit weaker or have specified learning difficulties and you are trying to suit things to them, you’re excluding the other people in a way, you’re not being fair to them, because if they*

*could be working at a higher pace, then I don't feel as a teacher that I have the right just to say, I'll ignore the majority. I'll treat these three or four" F1 Subject Teachers 1*

*"And, as well as that, when you have kids that have learning difficulties inclusion is great in practice, but if they're sitting in a class where they're lost the whole time, there's no benefit to them. They're not experiencing success" M Subject Teachers 1*

*"Other than the social thing being" –M Subject Teachers 1*

*"Yeah, the social thing. Whereas if they were in a smaller group and sometimes you see it with kids maybe in the JCSP programme, who might not have been there in first year are put into that class in second year. And, for the first time, maybe ever in their lives, they're passing exams, they're doing well because they've always been the weak ones and all of a sudden they're with kids of their same ability and they're succeeding" F1 Subject Teachers 1*

In the extract above the discussion engages with inclusion using social, academic and psychological themes as well as with issues about the diversity of students and potential benefits of including some individuals. Two arguments are advanced i) inclusion of a few can result in exclusion of the majority, ii) exclusion of that minority by placing them in a different programme e.g. JCSP can result in an 'experience of success'.

Some similar arguments can be found in the SMG discussion group where the consideration of inclusion of a minority of 'hard cases' is situated in relation to the majority 'ordinary decent run of the mill pupils'.

#### **Table 5.4.b Sample Response(s)**

*"I think you should mention the after school supports that are being offered in the school to try and help these children. And, of course the Department and the NCSE would be oblivious to all that. The amount of time and generosity that the staff offer. But, we are sorely compromised in the eyes of some staff because they're frustrated that all of our attention seems to be going on hard cases ----- . And, they will say, and justifiably so, "What about the rest? What about the ordinary decent run of the mill pupils?" M SMG*

This extract in its mention of some hidden costs of inclusion merits further attention. It is argued that there are costs not only to 'the decent run of the mill' of school pupils but also to teachers' job satisfaction. Further, this discussion is located in relation to the Department and the NCSE who do not 'see' these consequences in taking a more abstract policy of inclusion.

This consideration of some implications of academic inclusion not only for students but for teachers themselves played a key part in their questioning of the merits of 'all their energies' being directed at retaining students through to Leaving Certificate level. As can be seen in the following extract, this discussion was situated in the broader context of Irish educational policy with its evaluation of inclusion as successful in terms of student completion figures.

#### **Table 5.4c Sample Response(s)**

*“Sometimes I think we’re trying so hard to keep some of the kids at school that we’re the so called, to use the word ‘the good kids’ the kids who just get on with it and do their work and don’t cause hassle, that we’re ignoring them to a certain extent because we’re spending all our energies trying to get these six or seven kids to stay to Junior Cert level. Personally, and it’s my opinion, they don’t want to be here and they’re causing endless trouble. You’ve done... you’ve tried your hardest and you’ve done all you can for them. I don’t think we should be... I know the school completion programme would probably disagree with me on that but...” F1, Subject Teachers 2*

A further example of contestation around the benefits of academic inclusion can be seen in the discussion of some costs of inclusion in regards to the academic outcomes for the majority. In the extract below, although the success of academic inclusion is argued for a ‘very very troublesome’ student who did not want to be included, the cost for ‘a lot’ of students is said to be in terms of their attainment of ‘an Honour’.

#### **Table 5.4d Sample Response(s)**

*“When you’re trying to include people who maybe don’t want to be included or who have problems and I have a particular example of it in a third year class this year. One student who is very, very troublesome and who has been coaxed and cajoled and brought along and has made fantastic progress behaviour-wise in particular. But, he has cost a lot of people an Honour in that class. Because there’s so much time lost dealing with him. So, I don’t think... I think there’s a balance that needs to be struck somewhere and I don’t think we really have it right” F SMG*

Once again the situation is cast as being one where there is ‘a balance that needs to be struck’ and the current situation in this school is evaluated as one in which ‘I don’t think we really have it right’.

### **5.5 Some Implications of Constructing Inclusion in these ways**

The focus of this chapter has been on three of the discussion groups: two with subject teachers and one with the SMG. The remainder of this preliminary DPA will give consideration to potential implications of these various construals of inclusion. The successful implementation of an inclusive policy was discussed in these groups as dependent on certain conditions being met in ways that resemble some of the same conditions that are cited in the literature. Discussion included issues of the need for improved, dedicated teacher training and professional development programmes to better equip teachers for social inclusion, issues of resources, some part in deciding upon the range of diversity in the programmes offered by a school in addition to various pragmatics of inclusion relevant to the conditions specific to the teachers in this particular school.

#### **Table 5.5a Sample Response(s)**

*“I’m very disillusioned on what has been done to teachers over the last ten years” M1, SMG*

*“Sure it’s destroying... That’s what you’re saying. It’s destroying that good will and that energy” F, SMG*

*“They’re not being supported and that ‘top down’ approach that the Department have*

*adopted isn't working because they haven't resourced it sufficiently. They haven't... I think the resourcing has to come in two blocks. It has to come in proper training and then the other side of it then is - you keep the staffing as well. I mean the Department come up... Anything they do, it's all 'top down' stuff. They come up with this formula on which your resources are calculated. The people who are... can decide where the resources need to go are the people who are on the ground. So, I maintain it should be 'bottom up'. You know? That we should be... We should be allowed to allocate the resources or apply to the Department for the resources where we see they're needed. Because we're the people who are trying to become inclusive. We're the people who are seeing what's coming in on the ground. We're liaising with the primary schools. We're liaising with all the different agencies..."M, SMG*

In the extract above reference is made to the Department's formula for calculating resources. This resonates with the analytic point above regarding an abstract notion of inclusion as contrasted with discussions of inclusion situated in relation to practical considerations. In these discussions this abstracted and externally imposed formula is contrasted with the interest, involvement and knowledge that teachers have of their students and used to argue their place in best assessing student needs. This is argued again in the extract below where the treatment of pupils as 'ciphers' to be fitted into a formula is set against teachers treatment of them as individuals.

#### **Table 5.5b Sample Response(s)**

*"The only way that the NCSE engage with us at the minute is on a formula driven basis. They don't engage with us as having any kind of competency to assess or determine the needs of children. So, they get helicoptered in once every eight, twelve weeks and have a look around the place and apply their formula. They have no idea or even less interest of the pupils as individuals. We're dealing with them as individuals, whereas they're dealing with them as ciphers that fit into formula" M1, SMG*

While the extract below emphasises the efforts made by the stakeholders to fully endorse the changes required by a social inclusion policy, the importance of being able to decide which programmes to offer in a school was placed at the heart of teacher satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their changing role.

#### **Table 5.5c Sample Response(s)**

*"I think as far as we're concerned we've tried to be as inclusive as we can. We've embraced all the different programmes and I think the problem with the Irish system basically is that it's driven from the top down. And, that goes from the curriculum right through to inclusivity" M2 SMG*

### **5.6 Conclusion of DPA**

On the basis of these discussions it is not possible or useful to divide teachers or individual members of the SMG into those with positive as compared with negative attitudes towards inclusion. While this might allow for some straightforward measures to be taken regarding, perhaps, retraining for teachers with 'negative' attitudes to inclusion, it oversimplifies the issue. What these discussions do suggest is the usefulness of starting any understanding of inclusion by working with

stakeholders for individual schools and examining closely their discussions of inclusion as rooted in the context of their particular and changing circumstances and needs.

This DPA of inclusion shows that certain themes identified in the thematic analysis are used in these teacher and SMG focus group discussions to establish inclusion as complex and variable. Sometimes it is held up as an ideal and at other times construed as detrimental to an individual who might best be excluded from the mainstream classroom and taught in a small group setting and/or follow a different learning programme. This focus on education service providers shows inclusion is constructed differently according to school subject, in relation to particular student groups who are the focus for inclusion, with a concern for other pupils' and the teachers' education experience. These different uses of inclusion are framed within a broader context where there is said to be a tension between the implementation of social and academic policies of inclusion and when definition and assessment of the degree of success of that policy is most often outside the school's control.

## 6 Chapter 6

### Discussion

#### 6.1 Brief outline of chapter

The research question *How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders?* is discussed in this chapter drawing upon the data presented in the thematic analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 as well as the DPA in Chapter 5. The chapter discusses how different definitions or themes of inclusion can be seen to co-exist, complement or conflict with each other. In particular, philosophical, psychological, sociological and educational theories/underpinnings and research outlined in the introduction will be used to discuss the complex nature of the concept of inclusion as outlined by key stakeholders within an Irish post-primary school context. Part A of this chapter discusses the thematic analyses presented in Chapters 3 and 4. Part B discusses the discourse analyses from Chapter 5.

#### 6.2 Part A: Discussion of Thematic Analysis

During the thematic analyses of the ten focus group transcripts, a number of themes emerged concerning Academic, Behavioural and/or Physical, Cultural and/or Historical, Economic, Emotional and/or Psychological, Ethical Ideological and/or Moral, Holistic, Legal and/or Political and also Social aspects of inclusion. The themes represent the variety of issues discussed within the different focus groups when asked the question *What is Inclusion?* Within the focus group discussions, there were a range of issues and debates addressed by group participants. This broad spectrum of views on inclusion supports Ainscow (2007) and Head and Pirrie (2007) who emphasise that definitions of inclusion suggest that pupils with SEN have a wide variety of needs such as sensory, physical, social, emotional and behavioural, communication and interaction as well as cognition and learning needs. The nine themes highlighted in this research relate clearly to Sheehy's views (2005) who noted that the term had different meanings for different individuals. He argues that definitions of inclusion are constructed according to the diverse investments of individual stakeholders. This can be seen in the complex definitions discussed both within and between different focus groups.

Sheehy's (2005) notion concerning the diverse investment of the stakeholders can be seen by noting which themes are emphasised by which stakeholders. The pupils, parents and SNAs placed great emphasis on the social aspects of inclusion whereas the teachers and management discussed in more detail the academic, behavioural and resource issues (amongst other themes). However, it is too simplistic to discuss 'themes' as though they were always separate and distinct categories. At times, it was difficult to exclusively categorise some of the issues discussed e.g. issues concerning academic aspects overlapped with those concerning resources. In this respect, the concept of inclusion is multi-dimensional and dynamic and subject to changes dependent on the cultural, social and educational contexts and agenda of the stakeholders. In Lindsay's (2007) meta-review on inclusion research, he acknowledged that diverse international definitions of inclusion and SEN created challenges for reviewing research in this area. He referred to inclusion as a multi-faceted practice and argues that the education system needs to be more flexible in order to provide an appropriate educational experience for each pupil with SEN. Of course, this also applies to pupils without an assessment of SEN. Lindsay (2007) also emphasised the changing nature of schools and asked the question 'inclusion into



what?’ In particular, he noted that mainstream schools as well as special schools were quite diverse and subject to many changes in policy and practice. This issue was also raised within the focus groups when a participant of the SMG group discussed the changing role of the teacher. This participant claimed that “the fundamental role of the teacher has been changed” (see Table 3.5c for full quote). Hence, it could be argued that the concept of inclusion is rarely static and that it ebbs with the tide of changes within educational policy and practice. Taking each one of the themes in turn (alphabetically), they can be discussed in regard to the various philosophical, psychological, sociological and educational theories and research in the introduction.

### **6.3 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Academic Theme**

The Academic theme could be linked to a number of issues and discourses. In particular, the ‘needs-based’ discourse (Pirrie, Head and Brna, 2006) could be used to justify what type of academic education is needed by pupils with SEN. This could also be linked to the ‘deficit’ model which Mittler (2000) argues is often the basis for excluding pupils with SEN from mainstream education. Barton (1999) highlights that the ‘deficit’ model takes a narrow and individualistic ‘within-the-person’ explanation, which has informed policies and practices within education. Barton claims that this way of thinking fails to address the aspects of society which continue to maintain divisive inequalities and exclusionary practices leading to prejudices and discriminations. A further critique of the ‘deficit’ model can be provided with reference to Barrow’s (2001) philosophical argument concerning the concept of ‘fairness’. He argues that it is morally wrong to treat people differently without good reason. He contends that it is equally wrong to support inclusion within a mainstream setting when doing so might lead to unfairness. His key argument is that in some circumstances it might be beneficial to include some pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms, but in others it might not. This could be further implicated where students who do not wish to be included may have a detrimental effect on the majority of students in their acquisition of higher attainments. Thus, ‘fairness’ cannot be used interchangeably with ‘full inclusion’. This provides a strong argument for adopting a flexible approach to considering the academic (and indeed other needs) of pupils with SEN.

Another possible discourse underpinning the Academic theme is the debate highlighted by Daniels and Garner (2000). They refer to it as the ‘excellence-inclusion’ tension. These issues were raised by some of the subject teachers when they noted the dilemma between trying to meet the expectations of the DES inspectorate regarding students taking honours level and also meeting the expectations of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) in regard to students with SEN. In one of the subject teachers’ focus groups, a male Maths teacher commented “If an inspector comes to do a subject inspection, the first thing they’ll do is go to the department and get the list of results for the school...the metre stick by which we are judged by the department, it’s academic. It’s ‘how come he’s doing higher level and he’s doing ordinary level? Why have you some doing foundation level?’” Table 4.3 in Chapter 4 provides other examples where teachers discuss issues concerning the excellence-inclusion tension. This relates to issues where the academic expectations or goals of the Inspectorate/DES are seen as contrary to those of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) in regard to how best to ‘pitch’ the level of the class and the challenges posed in using differentiation of methods and assessments.

Dyson (cited in Daniels and Garner, 2000) notes the problem of summative assessment which is a feature of this tension. This emphasis on product over process is not just exclusively about SEN education, but has become a wider debate about key skills for successful learning. The increased emphasis on reproduction of accumulated knowledge (the 'metre stick' used by the DES), results in the difficulty of recognising and valuing students' progress in areas other than academic. The responses from the focus groups evidences that this is not only proving problematic for the students with SEN but also for the teacher in a mixed class, catering for all ranges of ability.

Academic issues were explicitly mentioned by all stakeholders except the pupils. The parents suggested that the school 'does an excellent job', 'takes everything – a wide range', 'does the best with what it has' and demonstrates parents' awareness of the school's limited resources. Parents alluded to the DES 'setting the agenda' with their centrally controlled policy and the situation in Ireland where the private schools may 'cream off' the 'brighter kids', thus showing an awareness of the marketisation of education and the challenges that inclusion brings within such a market system. Corbett and Slee (2000) suggest that in an education market where schools compete for 'customers', a high degree of competition between schools has led to patterns of selection, where some schools have disproportionate numbers of high achieving pupils and others of pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. In Ireland, Lynch and Lodge's (2002) study of 12 single sex and co-educational secondary schools evidenced how the micro-politics and practices of school and classroom life can work quietly and systematically to perpetuate inequality.

At first, it is difficult to see how the 'excellence/standards- inclusion' debate can be easily resolved without the DES Inspectorate (and indeed teachers and schools) reflecting more fully on the 'philosophies of education' underpinning the Leaving Certificate 'points race' in Ireland. However, the introduction of the innovative JCSP/LCA/LCVP and PLC programmes provide an important re-balancing of the aims of education by allowing pupils (who are not suited to the heavily exam-based Junior and Leaving Certificates) to have a broader type of academic assessment and sense of achievement. One of the subject teachers commented "in the JCSP classes, you can see that those kids have a real sense of achievement and they do...they have an anchor teacher, but when they go into fourth year, they lose the anchor teacher and they can't cope!" Also, a SEN/Resource teacher commented that "the JCSP students' results...that's one way where we see the value of inclusion. Absolutely, yes we do! It's measured in a concrete way". However, despite the mostly positive feedback about the JCSP/LCA programmes, there are still potential problems outlined in the above quote concerning losing an anchor teacher which is also a resource issue (see Table 4.2a in Chapter 4 for other related quotes).

#### **6.4 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Behavioural &/or Physical Theme**

This theme could be underpinned by the 'pathognomonic' discourse in which teachers assume that the problem is inherent within the individual pupil (Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich, 1997). This contrasts with the 'interventionist' discourse in which the teacher attributes difficulties to an interaction between the pupil and the environment. The 'pathognomonic' discourse is evidenced by one of the subject teachers when she stated "because we're spending all our energies trying to get these six or seven kids to stay to Junior Cert level. Personally, and it's my opinion, they don't want to be here

and they're causing endless trouble" (see Table 4.3b for further Behavioural quotes from subject teachers). For this theme, there is also a link here with O'Brien's (2001) discussion of 'hard case' learners. He used this term to describe learners that were hard to reach and include in school life. In particular, pupils with challenging behaviours or complex learning and/or medical needs were often described as 'hard case' learners. Previous research on teachers' attitudes to inclusion by Clough and Lindsay (1991) found that the majority of teachers ranked the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties as being the most difficult to meet. However, although not specifically referring to pupils with challenging behaviours, LeRoy and Simpson (1996) found that as teachers' experience with pupils with SEN increases, their confidence in teaching these pupils also increases.

### **6.5 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Cultural &/or Historical Theme**

Some of the issues raised under this theme included references to teacher training and staff development activities. In addition, references to the 'top down' approach to education within Ireland was also raised as well as the change to the fundamental role of the subject teacher following the introduction of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). However, the different themes on inclusion are also capable of being viewed as co-existing, complementary and conflicting. For example, the historical movement away from adopting a 'needs-based' to a 'rights-based' approach (Pirrie, Head and Brna, 2006) would underpin some of the different historical constructions of 'inclusion'. In particular, the 'needs-based' and 'rights-based' discourses could be viewed as conflicting as one emphasises meeting the specific needs of the pupils with SEN and the other emphasises the importance of the right to have the opportunity to be educated within a mainstream setting. However, it is also possible that these two approaches could be achieved within one setting. The evidence from the thematic analyses indicates that these two approaches or ideologies can be conflicting if the mainstream school is unable to fully support such a wide variety of SEN. The need to balance these two approaches or discourses is one way of understanding the many differing views regarding inclusion.

A number of the 'sociological' discourses could be related to the Cultural and/or Historical theme including the 'social justice' issues which underpin the 'rights-based' and equality discourses. Within these discourses can be seen the sociological views about equality and powerlessness as highlighted by Mittler (2000) as well as Lynch and Baker (2005). Based on the data from the focus groups, issues of 'powerlessness' can be applied to both the pupils with/without SEN as well as to the teachers and managers. In particular, the top-down funding model clearly created additional stresses and anxiety for the teachers and management as illustrated in the following quote from a SMG participant when he comments.

#### **Table 6.5a Sample Response(s)**

*"I think as far as we're concerned we've tried to be as inclusive as we can. We've embraced all the different programmes and I think the problem with the Irish system basically is that it's driven from the top-down...none of the programmes when they're brought in are resourced properly...but we're the only profession in which we trained and that has to do us for forty years. Every other profession are re-trained...one day now and again isn't sufficient to train anybody. You have to take them out on a long term basis. Take them away for a month and give them proper training so that when they come back, they're energised" P SMG*

The above quote highlights the important issue of staff development within the teaching profession. This can also be linked to the philosophical and psychological theories of education in order to question what philosophies of education are underpinned by the existing pre-service and in-service training on offer and hence what theories underpin the use of particular teaching methods and assessment within Irish education.

### **6.6. Issues and Discourses underpinning the Economic Theme**

It is apparent that both the ‘pragmatic’ and ‘political’ discourses underpin the economic theme. Dyson (2000) argues that the political approach to inclusive education explores the resistance to inclusive education. He contrasts this with the ‘pragmatic’ discourse which looks at the actual practice of inclusive education and how it can be brought about. The pragmatic discourse is illustrated by several of the stakeholders. For example, within the SMG a number of valid comments were made which included comments from one of the year heads (YH) “expectations rise and yet there’s no support or no training to help that expectation”. One member noted that “the school has only one learning support teacher for \*00 pupils”. Another participant added that “so we have children who got supports maybe up as far as Junior Cert, but they’re not going to get the same supports to carry them through to Leaving Cert”. This comment expanded the problem with resources, to those concerning the role of teachers and school management and the current funding model for SEN in Ireland.

#### **Table 6.6a Sample Response(s)**

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>“...I think the resourcing has to come in two blocks, proper training and then keep the staffing as well. They come up with this formula on which resources are calculated. The people who are, can decide where the resources need to go are the people on the ground. So I maintain that it should be ‘bottom-up’. You know, we should be...we should be allowed to allocate resources or apply to the Department for the resources where they are needed. We’re the people who are seeing what’s coming in on the ground...Resources have to be directed as well. But the only way that the NCSE engage with us at the minute is on a formula driven basis. They don’t engage with us as having any kind of competency to assess or determine the needs of children. So they get helicoptered in once every eight, twelve weeks and have a look around the place and apply their formula” P, SMG</i></p> |
|---|

The previous comment can be seen to be driven by both the political and pragmatic discourses. In addition, the philosophical theories of education also factor into the debate concerning the type of funding model used to resource inclusive education. For example, it is likely that decisions about how to allocate funding for inclusive education is based on particular discourses concerning ‘what is education?’ and ‘what is the role of teachers within education? If the key philosophical aim of Irish education is seen as achieving high points in state examinations, then this has different implications for how education is resourced. In contrast, if the philosophy of education underpinning the economic funding model is based upon developing ‘autonomous/ independent’ learners (Winch, 1999, cited in Carr, 2005) or ‘self-determination’ in learners and teachers (Walker, 1999, cited in Carr, 2005), then a different funding model is needed.

Equally, the psychological theories of learning can be seen to underpin the funding model currently used by the Irish education system. If the role of teachers is merely

to facilitate children's learning based on the original Piagetian social constructionist view, then the role of the teacher is different to that utilised by either the Vygotskian or Bruner's views of teaching and its role in pupil learning. Adopting the Vygotskian or Brunerian views of learning would highlight the vital importance of teachers having high level skills in understanding and enhancing the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky) or 'scaffolding' (Bruner) for all pupils including those with SEN. This requires comprehensive knowledge and understanding of learning which is perhaps beyond the basic theoretical material provided in pre-service teacher training. It suggests that CPD of teachers is needed to develop and support these higher level teaching skills.

Another aspect of the economic theme included the issue concerning the non-teaching support role of the SNA within the classroom. One SNA commented:

**Table 6.6b Sample Response(s)**

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|---|
| <p><i>"I think for inclusion in the school to work, we need the kids in classrooms. They need to be in class and they need the resources with them to back them up and help them because they can't manage in the class without that so that's getting them into class and having that back-up, which is us and the resource teachers also. So we need lots of resources" (see Table 3.6c) SNA F4</i></p> |
|---|

However, the above quote also incorporates the interesting national and international debate concerning the differing roles of SNAs in Ireland or Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the UK and Learning Support Assistants in the USA. In Ireland, the official role of the SNA is outlined by various DES Circulars (24/03 and 15/05) and is described as a 'care' role which is a non-teaching role. This has been challenged by Carrig (2004) and Lawlor and Cregan (2003) who found that the role of the SNA in Ireland had changed from one of care to predominantly one of an educational nature and perhaps a change in policy might be appropriate in this area.

**6.7 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Emotional &/or Psychological Theme**

It is interesting to note that the pupil focus groups highlighted the importance of this theme in several ways. Table 3.4b shows that the feelings of pupils were important aspects of inclusion. A pupil's comment illustrative of this includes, "make everyone feel comfortable in a situation and not being forced to do anything that you don't want to do, so it's natural". These quotes emphasise the 'feelings' of the pupils as being very important. Parents also commented on the feelings aspects of inclusion "I think if you're included, you feel valued".

Apart from the SEN/Resource teachers, parents and pupils, the other stakeholders did not explicitly focus on the emotional aspects of education. Evans *et al.* (2007) highlight that educating pupils with SEN is an issue for the whole school and argues that schools should be giving close attention to the social and affective side of pupils. Lynch and Drudy (2005) suggest that education is a type of human service work and therefore involves emotional work. This is underpinned by the works of Freire (1972, cited in Lynch and Drudy, 2005) who proposed that teachers who are deeply committed to their students are involved in a form of emotional attachment with them. Epp and Watkinson (1996, cited in Lynch and Drudy, 2005) argue strongly that the emotional needs of pupils should also be addressed as well as their intellectual needs.

The SEN/Resource teachers highlighted their emotional involvement with working with pupils with SEN. They emphasised that as well as a teaching role, that they were involved with a 'caring' role. They explained that feelings and emotions were heightened when working with pupils with SEN "...a lot of our kids come from disadvantaged backgrounds, so if you don't care who's going to". This suggests that the SEN/Resource teachers are emotionally committed to their pupils as suggested by Freire (1972, cited in Lynch and Drudy, 2005).

### **6.8 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Ethical/Ideological &/or Moral Theme**

This theme relates closely to the sociological discourses which underpin the 'needs-based vs rights-based' discourses within inclusive education (Pirrie, Head and Brna, 2006). The 'rights-based' discourse on inclusion was supported by the Department for Education and Skills in the UK when they stated that inclusion is about "the quality of the school experience and about how far they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school" (DfES, 2004, p.12). However, a comment from one of the SNA staff highlights the difficulty faced by those working on the ground with pupils with SEN. She comments "you know we talk about inclusion, that everybody should be included and all the rest of it. In some cases, it probably is but not everybody is able to be included and therefore that's why you have special schools and so on and different institutes".

One participant from the SMG made a strong moral argument about inclusion when he stated that "they (NCSE) have no idea or even less interest in the pupils as individuals. We're dealing with them as individuals, whereas they're dealing with them as ciphers that fit into a formula". This is a factor which should be carefully considered during all collaborations between the NCSE and schools.

Some pupils made some mature and insightful comments about the ethical and moral aspects of inclusion in their comments, "if they (Muslim girls) want to wear headscarves, they have the right to do that", "in 5<sup>th</sup> year, the teachers have treated me with the widest amount of respect", "accept people". Pring (2001, cited in Carr, 2005) argues that the aim of education is that of moral education. Hence, the quotes from these pupils indicate that they are indeed thinking in moral terms in regard to the concept of inclusive education.

The subject teachers gave interesting comments which highlighted the pragmatic discourse which underpins the dilemma between the rhetoric and reality of teaching a wide range of pupils within mainstream classes, "I think inclusion is about providing an opportunity for everybody to experience the same experiences, basically. I also think that it's great as an idea, but in reality in the classroom, it's not always practical". This quote reflects the dilemma highlighted by Dyson (2000) concerning the 'rights' and 'ethics' discourse. These discourses are justified by the right of children to have an education alongside their peers. Hence, it can be seen how the 'rights-based' discourse might at times conflict with the 'pragmatic' and indeed with the 'political' discourses underpinning inclusive education.

### **6.9 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Holistic Theme**

The SEN/Resource teachers provided the majority of holistic definitions of inclusion. It is likely that their intensive postgraduate training in SEN has equipped them with the knowledge, understanding and reflexive skills required to adopt a holistic discourse about inclusion. It is likely that they would be more familiar than other school staff with the national and international research and debates within education concerning inclusion. One SEN/Resource teacher commented “I think it’s a really hard word (inclusion) to be really strict in your definition...isn’t it? Because it means so many different things to different people”. Another SEN/Resource teacher commented “Inclusion to me means, just means\*\*\*\*school. A broad community that has all types of pupils from every background, from every intelligence background, from every physical learning, emotional...that’s what a community is... That’s what inclusion means to me”.

These holistic views on inclusion relate closely to Wedell’s (2003) interactional analysis approach which sees the pupil with SEN as having a complex interaction between the strengths and needs of the learner, the level of support available and the appropriateness of the education being provided. A holistic view of inclusion potentially taps into all of the underlying discourses be they political, pragmatic, excellence/standards based, needs-based, rights-based, pathognomic, social justice, interventionist or equality based. Those teachers holding this holistic view of inclusion are more likely to be aware of the complexity of trying to uphold the principles of inclusive education. It is important that all teachers should be fully acquainted with the ongoing national and international research on inclusion and which could greatly enhance ‘evidence-based’ practice in their schools.

The importance of ‘evidence-based’ practice is highlighted by Lindsay (2007) who argues that pupil diversity, curricular and assessment specifications and the education system require more flexibility in order to support inclusion. He argues that drawing upon psychological theories and an ecological approach to such research could include both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, ideally further cross-discipline collaboration between philosophical, psychological, sociological and educational researchers and teachers would further enhance research into inclusive education and indeed also in the broad area of education.

### **6.10 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Legal &/or Political Theme**

Of all the ten focus groups, only the subject teachers’ and the SMG focus groups mentioned issues explicitly relating to legal and/or political issues. For example, the SMG highlighted the implications and effects on teaching imposed by legislation such as the Education Act, (Ireland, 1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (Ireland, 2000) as well as the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). They viewed some of the legislation as a burden and the principal noted “they have multiplied all the expectations with regard to special educational needs...it’s created huge challenges because the burden of expectation on teachers has been enormous”. A vivid description of the effects of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) on teachers is described by the principal “what I find absolutely appalling is that with the stroke of a pen, whereas the department wouldn’t recognise anybody as being a qualified resource teacher (unless trained on specific courses in Ireland), they have now turned round with the EPSEN Act and made every single teacher a resource teacher without the training...!” This quote clearly illustrates the political and pragmatic discourses which underpin the rhetoric and reality of

inclusion within post-primary education. Dyson (2000) specifically addresses the political and pragmatic discourses within education by highlighting the need for further debate concerning the implications of these approaches to education. He argues that the political discourse concerns the resistance to inclusion whereas the pragmatic discourse focuses on how inclusive education can be brought about. Both of these tensions are noted within the thematic analyses of the focus groups.

A link can also be made between the legal and political aspects of inclusion in the thematic analyses and Murphy's (2008) concept of 'limit-situations'. Murphy (2008) refers to the current schooling situation in Ireland and draws upon the work of both Freire and Green. He highlights issues concerning democratic school practices. More specifically, Reardon (1994, cited in Murphy, 2008) suggests that pre-service teacher training could be used to enable learners to imagine their own preferred futures. This links with the social justice and equality discourses discussed by Lynch and Lodge (2002) as well as Lynch and Baker (2005) in regard to using education to empower disadvantaged groups such as pupils with SEN as well as ethnic and religious minority groups.

### **6.11 Issues and Discourses underpinning the Social Theme**

In the thematic analysis, the positive comments concerning the social views of inclusion appear to support the social justice views within sociology which underpin both the 'rights-based' and 'equality' discourses. Such views refer to the importance of pupils with SEN attending school in the local area in order to be fully involved in the local community. However, the issues addressed by various stakeholders (notably parents, teachers and managers) concerning whether disadvantaged schools are disempowered by the current SEN funding model should be further considered in regard to the 'equality' discourse as discussed by Lynch and Baker (2005). In particular, the SMG highlighted the fact that disadvantaged schools with an open access policy were more likely to have a higher number of pupils with SEN than those schools with a more selective entrance criterion.

Evidence from the focus groups indicates that there is potential conflict between the Academic, Emotional and Social needs of pupils with SEN. For example, this is illustrated when the SNAs and teachers discuss how pupils with SEN are sometimes in the mainstream class, but not are mixing with the other pupils or struggling to keep up with the academic work. Both the parents' and the pupils' focus groups emphasised the importance of the social aspects of inclusion. The SNAs also highlighted the social aspects of inclusion. The pupils' and parents' views on social inclusion were more linked to making friends, meeting people and being involved within school and community life. Similarly, the SNAs highlighted the fact that several pupils with SEN (notably those assessed with Asperger's Syndrome or ADHD) were still socially isolated despite being physically located within the mainstream class and within the school. In focusing on the social aspects of inclusion, they highlighted the practicalities of their role in trying to support pupils experiencing SEN in class e.g. assistance getting down notes etc.



### **6.12 Part B: Discussion of Discursive Psychological Analysis (DPA)**

The DPA provides an important and interesting source of data analyses which supports several of the key themes generated using the thematic data analyses. The use of DPA with the two subject teacher focus groups and the SMG constructs inclusion as multi-faceted and complex. The DPA provides a useful method of data triangulation with the thematic analysis in exploring the range of potential 'discourses' underlying stakeholders' views on inclusion. The DPA of the subject teachers' and SMG's focus group data provides evidence of all of the discourses (political, pragmatic, excellence/standards, needs-based, rights-based, equality, pathognomic and interventionist) outlined in the thematic analyses. These discourses can be linked to different educational, philosophical, psychological and sociological theories/underpinnings and research which underpin current policies and practices within Irish education.

In particular, the DPA highlighted the social and academic agendas within inclusion which are seen as closely entangled. The extract from one of the subject teachers "I think inclusion is about providing an opportunity for everybody to experience the same experiences, basically. I also think it's great as an idea, but in reality in the classroom, it's not always practical" (F1) illustrates how views about inclusion can be situated at the same time by the same person both within a classroom context and within a broader context of education. This 'dual' view of inclusion indicates that some teachers have mixed and perhaps co-existing as well as potentially conflicting views about the concept of inclusion. It is unsurprising that such co-existing and/or conflicting views are found as this reflects the diverse theories which underpin education.

The DPA also indicates that the meaning of inclusion is negotiated between teachers in regard to contextual concerns e.g. subject choices. In particular, subject teachers emphasised the exam-focused bias within the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes and the impact that this had on their ability to teach pupils with SEN. This view supports earlier research in the UK by Ellins and Porter (2005) who argue that the pressure of trying to raise standards, as measured by examination results and league tables might be adversely affecting attitudes towards SEN. The DPA also shows that different subject areas may influence how inclusion works within the school. For example, subjects perceived to have a high exam workload such as the core subjects of Maths, English and Science were seen to create unreasonable pressure for teachers and pupils to obtain high exam points. The drive for high points was seen as contrary to the concept of inclusion and pupils with SEN were seen as being 'excluded' when their self-esteem was being knocked by not being able to keep up with work in the exam-driven Junior and Leaving Certificate classes.

However, with the help of SNAs, some teachers thought that students were able to progress well in particular subjects such as Art. Hence, it appears that the subjects taken by pupils with SEN has a bearing on both their academic, emotional and social aspects of inclusion. Several researchers (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004 and Long, 2006) emphasise that despite the DES circulars stating that the SNAs should only have a care role, this type of job description is inadequate. In fact, Lawlor and Cregan (2003) found that SNAs, teachers and principals preferred the SNAs' role to

be concerned with some educational activities. In particular, 84% percent of the SNAs (N=200) in Lawlor and Cregans' (2003) study were involved in learning support or in the role of teaching assistant involving literacy and numeracy work.

Groom and Rose (2005) highlight the importance of teaching assistants in the promotion of inclusive schooling. For example, one of the SNAs in this research illustrates the pivotal role of the SNA in helping a pupil with Asperger's Syndrome to understand which behaviour is socially appropriate and inappropriate in the school. She discusses how she helps him to try to avoid bringing unnecessary attention to himself when he behaves inappropriately such as walking straight into a door and banging his head on the door. Another SNA points out that part of their role is ensuring that pupils with SEN are able to observe how 'normal children behave'. In this respect, they are referring to pupils without SEN. However, the SNA staff are aware that they need to ensure that their presence within the classroom does not interfere with pupils experiencing SEN having normal opportunities to mix with other pupils and this is also highlighted by the SEN/Resource teachers.

The other aspect of inclusion which emerged from the DPA is the issue of how successful inclusion of a minority of pupils could sometimes inadvertently lead to the exclusion of others. This was particularly in regard to pupils with challenging behaviours. These issues have been discussed earlier in section A under the Behavioural and/or Physical theme.

One of the most positive constructions of inclusion regarded the positive academic, emotional and social benefits of the innovative JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC programmes. These programmes were highlighted as important ways in which pupils with SEN could experience academic success within a mainstream setting. However, it was also acknowledged by parents, pupils and teachers that sometimes there were negative stereotypes attached to pupils undertaking these alternative programmes.

The DPA construction of inclusion further highlights the concerns of the SMG concerning the 'top-down' funding approach used by the DES and the NCSE. Problems with such a funding model were implicated in regard to how funds were allocated and to the resultant satisfaction or dissatisfaction that subject teachers experienced due to their changing role following the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). This relates to Halton's (2004) view that it is naive to expect teachers to commit to heavier workloads in times when morale is low and the school system is in a state of constant change. Mittler (2002) suggests that teachers' doubts and reservations should be taken seriously and not ignored. Garner (2000) supports this view by reference to the predicted shortfall in teachers by 2010. Linking this with the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) 2002 survey of disadvantaged schools which showed that 10% of teachers leave annually because of job pressure. Hence, teachers' constructions of inclusion are of great importance if the morale of teachers is to be raised in order to cope with profound reforms that are needed in the education system (Ainscow, 2000).

The DPA chapter concludes by arguing that it is too simplistic to view teachers as having either positive or negative attitudes towards inclusion. Instead, the DPA supports the thematic data analysis findings that show that the concept of inclusion is multi-dimensional, dynamic and complex. Various factors such as the subjects

taught, the exam workload, the availability of alternative programmes such as JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC programmes, class sizes, the role of SNAs etc. all influence how inclusion is defined by the subject teachers and the SMG as well as other stakeholders in this research. Academic and social aspects of inclusion are highlighted as specific areas of tension within the DPA of the subject teachers and senior management focus groups.

## 7 Chapter 7

### **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **7.1 Summary**

Research literature provides evidence that the concept of inclusion is complex, dynamic and influenced by both policy and rhetoric. The concept of inclusion continues to generate much debate both nationally and internationally within the field of education. A range of potentially co-existing, complementary and conflicting 'discourses' about inclusion/inclusive education can be found within the educational, philosophical, psychological and sociological theories/underpinnings and research reviewed. In particular, these discourses can be described as those relating to: equality, social justice, rights-based, needs-based, political, pragmatic, excellence/standards, pathognomic and interventionist.

Based on the nine themes generated, the definitions of inclusion in this research support the previous research literature as evidence that inclusion is a multi-dimensional, complex and dynamic concept. Definitions of inclusion are viewed somewhat differently by the various stakeholders. Such differences are also influenced by historical, cultural, social, political and economic perspectives which underpin policy and practice within Irish post-primary education.

The DPA of the Subject Teacher and SMG focus groups also shows that discourses of inclusion are complex and diverse. Due to the complex discourses underpinning the definitions of inclusion, it is too simplistic to only consider changing teachers' attitudes from those that are negative to positive. Instead, the multi-dimensional aspects of inclusion as noted in the nine themes generated in the thematic analysis, need to be fully acknowledged and carefully explored in further research.

#### **7.2 Conclusions**

Five main conclusions arise from the findings of this research. These include:

- 1) Additional resources are needed to fully support pupils with SEN within mainstream post-primary schooling. This was of great concern to parents, SNAs, all teachers and the SMG who felt that insufficient funding was currently provided by the NCSE for pupils with SEN. Inflexibility was seen as an important limitation of the current funding model especially in supporting pupils with SEN and/or their subject teachers.
- 2) Further funding, guidance, support and training are needed to provide and enhance CPD for all teachers in post-primary education. The issue of staff training (pre-service and in-service) was raised by all teachers and the SMG. In particular, it was highlighted that further in-depth training, support and guidance was needed in order to cope with including pupils with diverse SEN in mainstream classes.
- 3) The role of SNAs was seen as vitally important in supporting a variety of aspects of inclusion for pupils with SEN as well as supporting both mainstream subject and SEN/Resource teachers. The role of the SNA was discussed in regard to whether they should be involved with more of the

teaching support rather than just the ‘caring’ aspects of their work. Further CPD and supports should be considered for SNAs as well as an examination of policy regarding their current restrictive role in mainstream post-primary schools.

- 4) The positive aspects and benefits of the JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC and Transition Year Programmes were highlighted by teachers, management, parents and SNAs and hence their continued existence is necessary for ensuring higher retention rates of pupils in school. In particular, these programmes were seen as positive in regard to the academic success of many pupils with SEN as well as in regard to their sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Some of the parents and teachers noted that negative stereotypes of the JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC programmes might prevent some pupils from choosing these options.
- 5) Many of the stakeholders, especially the teachers (subject, JCSP/LCA/LCVP/PLC and SEN/Resource and SMG) emphasised the difficulty with balancing demands placed on them by the DES Inspectorate in regard to pupils taking Honours level subjects and achieving high exam grades whilst also trying to accommodate pupils with SEN and diverse learning needs. Linked to this is the ‘content heavy’ and associated workload in particular subjects which could be considered contrary to the concept of inclusion and teachers’ ability to include all. Hence, the DES should consider reviewing the length of course syllabi in some subjects and which also might facilitate increased number of students taking higher level subjects.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

Given that this research was a single case study of one post-primary school, it is important to take cognisance that the conclusions discussed and the recommendations that follow may not be generalisable to all post-primary settings. However, both the conclusions and recommendations may have implications for how the school itself perceives and thinks about inclusion as well as creating insights for the DES and the NCSE into how funding impacts on inclusion working on the ground. The recommendations include the following:

1. The current NCSE funding models of individual resource and general allocation models should be independently reviewed at regular intervals to ensure more flexibility in order to meet the complex and dynamic needs of pupils with SEN as well as the diversity of training, guidance and support needs of teachers in post-primary education. While it is acknowledged that many SEN/Resource teachers have been fortunate in obtaining CPD, the same opportunities have not been available to subject teachers.
2. The DES Inspectorate should initiate an open dialogue with teachers and management in post-primary schools concerning the conflicting pressures on the schools to achieve high academic excellence whilst embracing the diversity of pupils with SEN. Perhaps there is a need for subject specialist inspectors to liaise more closely with inspectors who have expertise in the area of SEN in acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by a heterogeneous group of pupils in a mixed ability classroom. This would create more inclusive classrooms where it is acceptable that all pupils work and achieve at their ability level rather than towards the traditional exam driven agenda.
3. Both large and small-scale longitudinal NCSE/DES funded (quantitative and qualitative) research is needed to explore how 'inclusion' is working within post-primary schools in Ireland. Such research could focus on several issues including an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences of pupils with SEN as well as those of the teachers working with these pupils.
4. Specific NCSE funded research is needed to explore the role, staff development training and also the academic qualifications of SNAs within post-primary schools in Ireland. In particular, consideration should be given to changing and/or broadening the role of the SNA.
5. A national discussion forum could be set up to review and/or advise the DES/Education Minister on inclusion policies and practice within Irish education. The discussion forum could include representatives from the NCSE, relevant third level institutions, teachers and management from primary and post-primary schools as well as other relevant experts from national or international disability organisations.

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## Appendix 1

4<sup>th</sup> May 2007

### **NCSE Research Project in conjunction with St. Angela's College**

#### **Project: Understanding the Concept of Inclusion**

The purpose of this research is to determine the views of a wide group of stakeholders regarding their interpretation of inclusion within a large post primary school. The style of educational research envisaged for this project is a case study where the researchers are interested in obtaining a wide range of views from a variety of groups/stakeholders involved in school life. All views are valuable to the researchers and may encompass both the positive and negatives aspects of inclusion as experienced by a broad range of stakeholders. This research is funded by the NCSE (National Council for Special Education) who are involved in supporting practice-based research in the special education/inclusive education areas. The tentative title selected for this particular research is the following:

#### **A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Different Perspectives on Inclusion within one Post-Primary School in the North West of Ireland**

It is proposed to carry out the research in the school during the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2007. The principal strategy utilised will be that of the focus group where it is envisaged that ten focus groups in total will form the sample. The definition of a focus group supplied by Morgan (1988) in Cohen, Manion and Morrision (2007) is a 'form of group interview though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewer and group. Rather the reliance is in the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher' (p. 288).

The ten focus groups will comprise of the following categories of stakeholders:

- One Board of Management group;
- Two groups of subject teachers;
- One group of SEN teachers;
- One group comprising of teachers involved in JCSP, LCA, PLC, Transition programmes as well as the HSCLO, career guidance teacher and School Completion Programmes teacher;
- One group incorporating a sample of SNAs, administrative staff, grounds staff and canteen staff;
- Two groups of parents;
- Two groups of students.

Each group will comprise of approximately seven participants and will be led by a researcher. It is estimated that the time necessary to conduct each focus group will be of maximum one hour's duration. If the situation arises where a participant selected is unable to contribute to the discussion at the time arranged but would like to contribute their views, the researchers will be happy to convene a discussion at a more opportune time.

The research question is as follows:

***Q) How is inclusion defined by various stakeholders e.g. school management, teachers, support staff, students and parents alike?***

The above information has given an outline regarding the research in as far as possible at this stage. As a prerequisite to conducting this research, it is necessary to obtain informed consent from the proposed individuals involved. Guidelines from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) have been adopted to ensure that individuals' rights have been given appropriate consideration. It is essential that if consent is gained that this has been given on a voluntary basis. A participant is free to withdraw or discontinue his/her participation at any stage without prejudice to him/herself.

All participants will be offered the opportunity to remain anonymous where the person cannot be identified from the data provided. All information gathered will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be accessible only to the researchers in this form. It is anticipated that the final report may be of benefit to the school and to those who participate in school life as well as being informative to the NCSE in their role as outlined in the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) on planning and coordinating the provision of education and support services, disseminating information on best practice and advising educational institutions on best practice.

If you are interested in participating in a focus group (group determined by which stakeholder you are categorised into) please sign the consent form.



I consent to taking part in the above detailed NCSE project on inclusion and agree to the focus groups being tape-recorded. I understand that the material will be confidential and anonymous and I have been advised of my rights to withdraw at any stage of the research.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please bring the signed consent form to the focus group on the relevant day)

Please tick the category of participant you are included in:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Senior Management Group   |  |
| Subject Teacher   |  |
| SEN teacher   |  |
| JCSP, LCA, PLC, HSCLO, Career Guidance, School Completion programme |  |
| SNA, canteen staff, administrative staff, grounds people            |  |
| Parents   |  |
| Students  |  |

Thanking you

Yours faithfully

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Researchers