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A Qualitative and Quantitative Study Investigating Staff Attitudes to Special Educational Needs Pupils attending Second Level Education in Ireland

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CARL Research Project



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Date completed:	October 2013

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A Qualitative and Quantitative Study Investigating Staff Attitudes to Special Educational Needs Pupils attending Second Level Education in Ireland

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 SEN Context

At the beginning of the 1980s children with special educational needs started to be given a greater opportunity to attend mainstream primary and second level schools. Because of this change in direction, schools saw a large increase in supports for mainstream teachers. The effective implementation of this inclusive policy was largely dependent on mainstream educators being positive towards it. Webster (1999) believes that for inclusion to be effective, teachers must feel confident in their own ability to cope and they must have positive expectations about the learning potential of the student. There has been a great deal of international research conducted examining teachers' attitudes towards the integration and inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream schooling environment. However, in Ireland relevant research has yet to be conducted on the attitudes of educators towards special educational needs students in the mainstream classroom. According to King (2006) the major problem is that most teachers have a very limited level of training or expertise in special education. Teacher training has been considered an important aspect in improving teacher attitudes toward inclusive practice (Linsay, 2007). The transition from a 'withdrawal' model of teaching towards an inclusive model of education poses many challenges for teachers. One Irish report written on behalf of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) entitled 'Project Iris' (which is yet to be completed) shines some light on what is happening in Irish schools. This research is novel in that it is searching for the causes of negative attitudes towards integrating special needs and mainstream education and the possible solutions required to enhance positive teacher attitudes towards students with special educational needs in mainstream education.

Not surprisingly, the implementation of this policy shift in the 1980s heralded the recruitment of significant numbers of resource teachers and special needs assistants as teaching staff in mainstream schools and there were significantly more children with special needs in mainstream classes and in special classes attached to mainstream schools. According to

Westwood (2007), there is opposition to this integrated approach from parents of both disabled and non-disabled children which is fuelled by concerns that classrooms containing a very wide range of abilities may end up failing to meet the needs of any of the children (Westwood, 2007*)*. Considering these concerns which are harboured by parents of students, it is hardly surprising that educators would have similar reservations. According to Griffin & Shevlin (2007), creating an inclusive school environment, as outlined in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 ('EPSEN Act'), represents a considerable challenge for the whole school community. Meany et al (2005) point out that the EPSEN Act 'imposes very specific obligations on principals/teachers in the area of special educational needs.' A proper consideration of these arguments poses a number questions, as follows.

- Was adequate or appropriate knowledge and training given to the teachers encountering these students either in the special class or in the mainstream class?
- Have the attitudes towards children with special needs changed at all staff levels since implementation of the policy?
- Are these children benefiting from the correct attitude in class to aid them in their educational needs?

These questions and many more like them remain to be answered. We therefore have to wonder if these students can benefit to the fullest from the mainstream Irish education system and, if not, what changes are needed to the existing regime.

1.1.2 Objectives and Need for this Research

The overriding objective of the research is to establish the current attitudes of educators towards special educational needs students with a view to identifying what changes in training and resourcing would result in more effective education of both mainstream and special educational needs students. It is hoped that this will highlight the experiences of educators and that it will reveal how their attitudes have been impacted by dealing with special needs students in mainstream classes. The principal concern of the research is twofold. Firstly, an effort will be made to reveal the existing attitudes of educators. Armed with this information, consideration will be afforded to whether or not the correct training programs and practices are being provided to staff either outside or within the school and, if they are, how effective are they? It is hoped that the answers to these questions will yield

practical recommendations which could aid not only the educators, but the students and parents alike.

This dissertation seeks to explore the attitudes that principals, teachers, special class teachers and higher diploma students of second level secondary schools adopt in their training and teaching of special needs pupils. Principals obviously have a pivotal role to play in the implementation of the practices and procedures required to educate special educational needs students. This study will endeavour to determine the level of training principals receive to implement these practices in their schools and also whether or not they provide and encourage appropriate staff training in this area of education. For mainstream and special class teachers the purpose of this research is to explore their level of qualification and knowledge in the context of the teaching of special needs students and whether they have undergone sufficient official teacher training in this area. For trainee teachers, the research explores what is taught and how much time is given to training in this field. In addition to this, a certain emphasis is placed on whether or not trainee teachers are monitored in the course of their training to determine the extent to which they include special needs pupils in their classes.

The National Parents and Siblings Alliance (NPSA) is a voluntary association which works in the support of special needs pupils and their families. They feel that this is an area in education that has been overlooked and they were anxious to have this research undertaken with the object of securing a broader understanding of what can be done to alleviate the pressures on both families and teachers in this setting. For example if this research was to discover more training is needed within second level schools in order for educators to have positive and inclusive attitudes towards children with special educational needs, then the NPSA could use this information to recommend more training for second level schools

The accurate interpretation of the research is therefore imperative as its results could be used to campaign for further support (and possibly reform) for special educational needs pupils and their families. Griffin & Shevlin (2007) state that it is clear that Ireland is facing a considerable challenge in developing inclusive provision for children with disabilities and/or special educational needs. Some pieces of the complex jigsaw are in place, such as enabling legislation and substantial increases in resources. However, fresh challenges remain. If this piece of research aided in any way in addressing one of the many outstanding challenges, it would be extremely rewarding for the author.

The researching of the data collected should throw some light on what the current attitudes towards the teaching of special educational needs in the classroom are and the reasoning behind those attitudes. According to Watkins & Meijer (2010) the factors of the educational environments that appear to support inclusive assessment can be grouped into two aspects of inclusion policy and practice. These include: 1.) the infrastructure such as the structures, policies and support systems for inclusion; and 2.) the shared value systems which include the attitudes, professional values and beliefs that underpin a school's educational culture and approach (Watkins &Meijer, 2010). The wider body of literature already available in the area provides indicators of the possible conclusions that may be derived from the collected data, and once analysed it will be interesting to compare the findings to the literature which has already been considered. The increased number of children with special needs attending mainstream post-primary schools in Ireland warrants considerable investigation into whether key workers are both willing and able to effectively include and educate these children. There are a number of potential outcomes that this study can expect to find, but of course this will not be completely dependable until the data is collected and the research conducted. However, one might expect that poor teacher training and experience could come up as a potential reason for hostility towards the inclusion of special educational needs pupils in mainstream education as this seems to be the case from the wider literature we have looked at.

Overall one would hope that this research will highlight the current attitudes towards special educational needs students held by each of the distinct groupings of educational professionals. This should consequently highlight the experiences of the educators and determine the impact on their attitudes from experiencing special needs students in their mainstream classes. While the primary objective of the research is revealing the attitudes that pertain, attention should also be afforded to whether or not the correct training and practices are currently being provided to staff either outside or within the school environment and, if it is, how effective it is. The answers to these questions may result in practical recommendations to aid not only educators, but also students and parents, in developing an educational system that caters for everyone. According to Kisanji (1999) change will be more painful to those of us who have made a living out of, and wield some power in, special education. However, if we believe in education for all, we need to surrender the power we hold and work collaboratively to create effective schools and inclusive education.

1.2 Special Needs Education: a Literature Review

1.2.1 The overall concept and how it has evolved

In 1974 the Warnock Committee (UK) was established to conduct an inquiry into the education of handicapped children (as they were then referred), leading to the publication of the Warnock Report in 1978. The Warnock Report was instrumental in advocating for the rights of students with special education needs ('SEN') and led to further legislation in the area of SEN in both Ireland and the UK, such as the passing in the United Kingdom of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the introduction of the Education Act 1998 and the EPSEN Act in this jurisdiction. These acts reinforced commitments to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools as well as increasing the rights of parents who wished to appeal against decisions to place their children in special schools. However, in 2005 Warnock reflected on earlier decisions made regarding SEN and called for a new commission to look into the whole area of SEN provision (Warnock & Norwich, 2010). She noted that policies previously adopted had become "the greatest obstacle to good provision" and went on to observe that "it has ceased to be about what the child needs and has just become a battle for resources" (Warnock, 2005, p136).

1.2.2 SEN in the Irish context

In Ireland in the eighteenth century people with disabilities and special needs were traditionally assigned to asylums and workhouses and labelled as idiots, imbeciles and lunatics (Gillard, 2000, Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). Provision for pupils with SEN was typically provided by benevolent individuals and organisations. The first special school, St Vincent's Home for Mentally Defective Children, was set up in 1947. Currently Ireland has 108 special schools with 7,178 students (DES, 2010). Along with this, however, children with special educational needs have been afforded a greater opportunity to attend mainstream primary and second level schools over the years. This commenced in earnest in the early 1980s due to international trends and the introduction of applicable legislation. The integration of SEN students into mainstream educational facilities saw a large increase in supports for mainstream teachers. However, according to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation's report entitled Supporting Special Education in the Mainstream School (2000)

the movement towards the integration of children with special needs in mainstream schools has continued throughout the 1990s. We have to wonder why this policy is still being implemented today and has yet to be completed. Davis and Kemp (1995) report that schools should adopt whole school, collaborative models of practice to support children with special needs and that the whole school approach should be one of shared commitment, responsibility and accountability for outcomes. Implementation of this inclusive policy was largely dependent on educators being positive towards it. Webster (1999) believes that for inclusion to be effective, teachers must feel confident in their own ability to cope and have positive expectations about the learning potential of the student.

There has been a great deal of research carried out internationally which examines teachers' attitudes towards the integration and the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream school. However, in Ireland we have yet to conduct any relevant research on the attitudes towards special educational needs students in the mainstream classroom. According to King (2006), the major problem is that most teachers have little training or expertise in special education. Teacher training has been considered an important aspect in improving teacher attitudes toward inclusive practice (Linsay, 2007). The transition from a 'withdrawal' model of teaching towards an inclusive model of education poses many challenges for teachers.

According to Westwood (2007) the policy shift in the 1980s which saw the introduction of SEN students to the mainstream education environment met with hostility from parents of both disabled and non-disabled students arising out of concerns that attempting to teach a group of students with dramatically different ability levels could result in a poor education outcome for all concerned. It is not difficult to imagine how similar misgivings would be held by educators. According to Griffin & Shevlin (2007), creating an inclusive school environment, as outlined in the EPSEN Act, represents a considerable challenge for the whole school community. Meany et al (2005) point out that the EPSEN Act 'imposes very specific obligations on principals/teachers in the area of special educational needs'. A proper consideration of these arguments poses a number of questions, as follows.

- Was adequate or appropriate knowledge and training given to the teachers encountering these students either in the special class or in the mainstream class?
- Have the attitudes towards children with special needs changed at all staff levels since implementation of the policy?

- Are these children benefiting from the correct attitude in class to aid them in their educational needs?

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN Act 2004) is Ireland's most recent development in education legislation. It was brought in to bring about major developments in practice concerning special education. However this act has yet to be implemented fully, leaving room for error in the settings that are trying to implement its content.

1.2.3 The Role of Staff

The teacher, in this inclusive context, plays a key role in the delivery of an inclusive education. Corbett (2001) posits that schools must be willing to work consistently on improving and adapting their pedagogy. Pedagogy needs to become 'connective' in terms of relating to individual rights, institutional resources and community values. Effective pedagogy is essential to achieving progressive inclusion whereby education should involve 'learning from the learner' and focusing on the interaction between the student and the environment. There also needs to be an awareness of school policy and cultural values (Corbett, 2001).

In order to achieve greater inclusivity in the classroom staff training and development will be required (Ainscow, 2005; Skertic, 1995). Teachers will need opportunities to consider new approaches along with support for experimentation and reflection (Ainscow, 1995). Problem solving should be approached at a team level and teachers should be involved in critical reflection with their colleagues. Differentiation should be practiced at a level which values difference and employs a wide range of pedagogies (Corbett, 2001). Furthermore, the teacher should be committed to working with all students regardless of their needs (Oliver, 1995). This research will consider whether the above approaches and resources have been on offer to staff of second level education and what attitudes educators have towards the area of special educational needs in mainstream settings.

1.2.4 International Research

In many countries throughout the world, children with special needs are increasingly being educated in mainstream school environments. In this context, research focusing on factors that may facilitate or impede efforts to include children with special needs is salient. In particular, researchers over several decades have concluded that teachers' attitudes are one of the most crucial variables in the success of inclusion schemes (Chow & Winzer, 1992; Hayes & Gunn, 1988; Williams & Algozine, 1977).

There have been numerous theoretical concepts developed internationally in this area. This study will draw on a number of them to argue that such research is worthwhile in Ireland. By exploring these theories one would hope that it will provide clues to the potential outcomes expected from research in the area. The journals which have been considered are from different countries all over the world. This is beneficial because we can compare and contrast our own attitudes with those of educators elsewhere to consider whether the correct approach to SEN is being adopted. By looking at how other countries have previously tackled the issues now facing the Irish education we may find instructive solutions. For example, according to King (2006), only 22% of Irish teachers questioned in recent research use 'team teaching' (where two or more teachers are involved in teaching a group of pupils at the same time), whereas 88% of teachers in the USA surveyed use this technique. These statistics are so diverse that it will be assess how other regions manage the whole special educational needs area. According to King, the learning support guidelines (2000) place a high priority on enhancing classroom based learning through the provision of alternative groupings and shared teaching approaches in the pupils' classroom (2000).

Dean (1989) stated that the success with which a school is able to work with pupils who have special needs depends a great deal on the attitudes of the teachers. In a more current study conducted by Avramidis & Norwich (2002) in the United Kingdom they explored the reasons behind the diverse attitudes of teachers towards special educational needs students, observing that the effective implementation of any such policy was completely dependent on positive attitudes of teachers toward it. Also, in a study carried in the United Kingdom by Clough and Lindsay (1991) they investigated the attitudes of 584 teachers. This research provided some evidence that attitudes had shifted in favour of integrating children with special educational needs in the last ten years. According to Gibson & Haynes (2009), however, inclusion

necessitates the teacher critically evaluating his/her role as that of facilitator to the mixed ability group and appreciator of all his/her individual pupils and their achievements.

In their study, Center et al (1985) explored the attitudes of head teachers. They found that attitudes towards integration were very much influenced by the nature of the disabilities and/or the educational problems that the pupils were presenting with. According to Dean (1989), the head teacher should normally delegate the day-to-day responsibility for making arrangements for children with special needs to a designated specialist teacher or head of department (1989). According to Stevens & O'Moore (2009), the need for committed school leadership is perceived as a crucial ingredient in the creation of inclusive schooling combined with a positive attitude to inclusion on the part of the principal.

Dean (1996) reiterates this point by stating that the attitude of the principal teacher towards children with special needs is very influential on how staff will respond to the 'professional challenge' of maximizing the benefits of inclusion for the special needs child. Principal teachers must ensure teachers plan and create an effective learning environment, and mediate a differentiated curriculum.

In a follow-up study (Center and Ward,1987) explored the attitudes of teachers and administrators. The results concluded that the most enthusiastic group was that of the administrators, with the classroom teachers being the most negative, and the head teachers being in between. In a similar study conducted by Forlin (1995) similar results were arrived at, with classroom teachers having the most negative attitudes. However, special class teachers were found to be the most positive. A Greek study carried out by Padeliadou & Lampropoulou (1997) yielded similar results.

According to Dean (1989) the successful teaching of pupils with special needs also depends upon the relationships developed between the subject teachers and the special needs teachers, with the special needs teachers representing a resource on which the subject teacher could draw.

This research should hopefully provide an interesting oversight of how teachers, management and special class teachers aid each other and whether this then has a contributing factor in the forming of attitudes towards dealing with SEN students. According to Alexander et al. (1992), teachers must plan together to ensure consistency and progression across classes and year group. They found that formally structured short and long-term plans were essential to achieve effective classroom teaching. Hanks (2011) draws similar inferences in stating that a positive outlook is essential, observing that teachers must inculcate this into their classroom assistants and technicians also (if they are lucky enough to have them).

This research should be informative in this respect as it will provide a sample of results of the attitudes of principals, teachers, special class teachers and trainee teachers towards special educational needs in mainstream education.

1.2.5 The Role of Policy

In a very interesting study carried out by Bowman (1986) in which the attitudes of approximately one thousand teachers drawn from fourteen different countries were explored the results contrasted greatly across the different countries covered. These countries ranged from all over the world but included the European countries of Italy, Norway and Portugal. Bowman noted that in the countries which had laws requiring integration, teachers were more positive in their views of special educational needs in their classroom. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) posit that Bowman's study indicates that teachers tend to favour children with certain types of special educational needs over others with different needs for integration and that they regard some students as easier to manage in the classroom. Controversially, in a more aged statement, Tomlinson (1982) stated that teachers' attitudes depend on the nature of the special need: teachers may be willing to accommodate the "ideal" child with special needs in their classrooms – the bright, brave child in a wheelchair – but they will still want to be rid of the actual "average" child with special needs – the dull, disruptive child (1982). Soodak, Powell, and Lehman (1998) also report that: "teachers' attitudes toward integration appear to vary with their perceptions of the specific disability as well as their beliefs about the demands that students' instructional and management needs will place on them" (1998). Lastly, Avramidis et al. (2000) report that regular teachers' attitudes reflected a lack of confidence in their own instructional skills and in the quality of support personnel available to them. They were positive about integrating only those whose disabling characteristics were not likely to require extra instructional or management skills from the teacher (2000). In a consideration of the same topic carried out by Leyser, Kapperman and Keller (1994) a cross-cultural study of teachers' attitudes in the USA, Germany, Israel, Ghana, Taiwan and the Philippines was performed, with differences in attitudes between these countries being observed. Teachers in the USA and Germany were found to have the most positive attitudes. Although it was law in the US, what made this study interesting was that at the time of this investigation Germany had no special education legislation and their teachers were not provided with special educational training, yet according to Leyser, Kapperman and Keller their results showed that these teachers were found to be more positive in their attitudes.

Avramidis & Norwich (2002) claim that the majority of research in this area has been undertaken in Australia and that there is a vast amount of information about professional attitudes towards special educational needs in mainstream education in that country. For this reason a study carried out in Melbourne was relied upon to aid this literature review.

Subban & Sharma (2005) carried out an empirical study to investigate the attitudes of regular education teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education of pupils presenting with special educational needs. They were guided by Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. According to Subban & Sharma the State of Victoria is viewed as a strong and active advocate for inclusive education due to its implementation of policy. They quote a number of policy documents that have aided this transition and state that 'it is because of these government initiatives that there are now more than 12,000 students with disabilities attending regular schools compared to less than 6,000 who attend special schools' (2005).

This research identified a number of factors that influenced teachers' attitudes towards special educational needs students. These included training related to the teaching of these students. They suggest that teachers may feel unprepared due to inadequate training. Teachers who have not undertaken training regarding inclusion of students with disabilities may exhibit negative attitudes toward such inclusion (Van Reusen et al., 2001).

Florian and Rouse (2010) also state that most mainstream teachers do not believe that they have the skills and knowledge to do this kind of work because they have not completed any specialist course. Other factors included gender, class size, age and teaching experience. A similar study by Vaughn et al. (1996) derived similar results. They examined mainstream and special teachers' perception of inclusion through the use of focus group interviews. The majority of the teachers who were not currently participating in inclusive programmes had strong negative feelings about inclusion and felt that decision makers were out of touch with classroom relations. The teachers identified several factors that would affect the success of inclusion, including class size, inadequate resources, the extent to which all students would benefit from inclusion, and adequate teacher preparation (Vaughn et al., 1996). The techniques used in this body of research are similar to those relied upon by Vaughan in using a mixed method approach including interviews. It is therefore possible that similar attitudes may be identified to that of Vaughn's research.

1.2.6 Research Specific to Ireland

According to Forlin (2010) one of the most difficult challenges in preparing teachers for working in diverse classrooms is ensuring that they have a positive attitude towards learners

with different backgrounds and special educational needs and that they are willing participants in the inclusion movement. A review undertaken in Northern Ireland focused on student teachers' perceptions about inclusive classroom teaching prior to teaching practice experience (Lambe and Bones, 2006). The results of this study show that while many student teachers claim to support inclusive policies, they believe that lack of appropriate preparation, concerns about class size, resources, managing other adults and coping with increasing numbers of pupils with diverse special educational needs are key issues (2006).

Research, however, is divided on how actually to promote positive attitudes among educators towards inclusion. Some research studies assert that teachers with more experience teaching students with disabilities in their classes show more favorable attitudes toward inclusion (Leyser et al., 1994). Lambe & Bones (2006) carried out a quantitative study primarily asking these trainee students what the benefits and challenges were for trainee teachers in inclusive education post 2008 in Northern Ireland. Participants were also asked what key issues they felt needed to be addressed to ensure that they could become effective teachers in an inclusive classroom. The results of the survey indicated some contradictions in student attitudes towards inclusion. For example, while 82.2% agreed that all teachers should experience teaching pupils with special educational needs, 44.9% stated they would personally prefer to teach in a selective educational system if given the choice. There was also a considerable number who did not feel ready either to agree or disagree with some of the statements (Lambe & Bones, 2006). This research will aim to get a clearer view of what training higher diploma students receive in this area, and whether this promotes or hinders positive attitudes in the teaching of special educational needs.

A similar study by Hastings and Oakford (2010) in the United Kingdom entitled the Impact of Inclusion Questionnaire (IIQ) involved ninety-three student teachers in completing a new measure of attitudes towards inclusion. The results showed that student teachers were more negative about the impact of children with emotional and behavioural problems on other children, teachers, and the school environment than they were about children with intellectual disabilities (Hastings & Oakford, 2010).

In the event that this research is to show negative attitudes, provision should then be made to promote a more positivist attitude in this area of education in Irish society. There has been such an amount of study carried out in this area of education abroad that research specific to Ireland seems very worthwhile. The NPSA certainly feels that this area needs to be

researched if society is to accelerate the special educational needs plan in Irish education. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 1994 ('EPSEN Act') espouses the aspiration that children with special educational needs should be educated, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment and that those with special educational needs should have the same rights to appropriate education as children without special educational needs. The terms of this Act apply to both primary and post-primary education. Only some provisions of the Act have been implemented and there has been a significant delay in introducing the remainder. Stevens and O'Moore (*2009)* stated that one of the 2008 budget measures for the educational sector was the deferral of the EPSEN Act until further notice (Stevens & O'Moore, *2009).* Surprisingly, the integration has taken place in fact and the Act would appear to be following. One must wonder whether, if the EPSEN Act was fully implemented, attitudes towards the teaching of special educational needs students would change dramatically. At one point or another every teacher in this country will come across special needs students in their classroom, making it essential that the applicable guidelines and provisions should be very clear to avoid injustice to students, their parents and indeed teachers and school management. An OECD report on inclusive education states that it has been widely accepted in many countries that 15 to 20 per cent of students will have special needs at some time in their school careers (OECD, 1999). In addition to this, if the correct provisions and procedures are not in place in schools to educate special needs students, this can equally affect the other students in the classroom. As has been stated previously, according to Westwood (2007), there is opposition to integration from parents of both disabled and non-disabled children arising out of concerns that classrooms containing a very wide range of ability may end up failing to meet the needs of any of the children (Westwood, 2007*).* To avoid this, every school should have a clear policy on special educational needs in place to dispel confusion for each of the teachers, parents and students themselves. The aims of education for students with special educational needs are set out in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities.* These guidelines have been developed to assist teachers and others in meeting the needs of students with general learning disabilities. According to the guidelines they can be used in mainstream primary and special primary schools, post-primary schools, and other educational settings. It is fantastic these guidelines are laid out in a colourful appealing fashion, however without schools using these guidelines it's wasted on its intention. If these guidelines provide for suitable learning experiences and support, development and learning

will be achieved, however schools and school personnel have to be made aware of these guidelines.

With all of the above points in mind one has to wonder whether Ireland had implemented the inclusion of SEN students in mainstream education too quickly without adequately preparing and planning the procedures needed to ensure the success of this form of education. One has to wonder whether teachers in special schools possessed more positive attitudes towards special needs student because the right training and provisions were provided to them. Critics will argue that special schools do not push the children as much academically, have lower expectations, and that mixing with other children with the same needs does not create a model or even comprehensive peer group (Aspinall, Badham et al, 2007, p 127). Westwood (2004) argues for integration from another angle, stating that there are two obvious benefits to placing a child with a disability in a mainstream class which these being immersion in a naturally enriched language environment and the increased need for the student to communicate with others (Westwood, 2004, p22). Conversely, Thomas & Vaughan (2004) refer to a study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which found that special school staff fear that the systems of support they have built up will be dismantled and pupils' special needs may go unmet, while many teachers working in ordinary schools feel that they lack the competence to educate these pupils.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design

Methodology and Research Design

2.1 Methodological choice

2.1.1 Design

The sample involves a combination of principals, special class teachers, mainstream teachers and higher diploma students in order to get an idea of the training, practices and overall attitudes towards special educational needs pupils. At the NPSA'S request the research was conducted in the Cork region with the hope that this would provide an overview of what geographical factors may apply to the issues under consideration such as, for example, whether any differences pertain in urban schools as opposed to schools with a rural hinterland.

A mixed research method involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques has been employed. The initial phase of research relied upon a quantitative design. A survey methodology was utilised to gather data in order to explore the attitudes of each of the subgroups being asked to partake in the study. The survey consisted of a series of themes which will be used to represent the sample used in this study.

The second part of the design incorporated a qualitative research design in the style of interviewing candidates who had agreed to be participate in an interview when completing the survey. These interviews were unstructured in nature with the intention of ascertaining whether any common or recurring themes or issues were raised by interviewees and to ascertain whether any factors not obvious from previous studies affected the attitudes of those interviewed.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

2.2.1 Participants

For the quantitative aspect of this research the sample comprised 446 people, the final valid result coming to 402 people, with 44 surveys being found to have been spoiled or incomplete. All incomplete surveys were discarded from the analysis. The final analysis was broken down according to each of the subgroups the survey looked at. This included management,

mainstream teachers, learning support/resource/special needs teachers and lastly H Dip students.

- Each second level school in the Cork region was contacted with a total of 32 schools out of 84 taking part.
- The total number of management candidates was 46. The number of mainstream teachers was 253.
- The number of learning support/resource/special needs teachers was 49. The number of Higher Diploma students was 19.
- The number of participants who were management and mainstream teachers was 6.
- The number of participants who were both mainstream and learning support/resource/special needs teachers was 27.
- Lastly there was one candidate who came under the category of management, mainstream and learning support/resource/special needs teacher.

The qualitative aspect of this study focused on interviewing one individual from each of the subgroups from the survey. A total of 4 interviews (2 male and 2 female) were conducted.

2.2.2 Sampling

The quantitative data gathered a sample which was obtained from the 32 schools who agreed to participate with the survey. A mixture of management, administrative staff and special needs co-ordinators agreed to distribute the surveys to the relevant staff members.

The qualitative data resulted in 4 participants out of 83 agreeing to be available for interview. These were selected at random from the 83 surveys. The interviewees were initially contacted by email and then telephoned with a view to arranging times and venues for the conducting of the interviews.

2.3 Consent

Initially, the schools were contacted by email explaining the nature of the study. This communication was then followed up by a telephone call in which permission was sought from the management of the schools to conduct the research. Both the purpose and procedure

of the research were explained and fully informed consent was obtained prior to conducting the study. After the consent of management had been obtained, packages of 50 surveys (see Appendix 2) were distributed amongst the schools. The packages contained a detailed letter explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix 1).

For the interviews, the 4 participants who were selected at random from the 83 individuals who had agreed to be interviewed were contacted by telephone and asked if they were still willing to contribute to the research by ways of an interview. The four participants who agreed were met and interviewed separately. Each participant was provided with an informed consent which detailed the aims of the study and the procedures involved with the data collection. The informed consent also provided information on their right to confidentiality, their right to withdraw without consequence from the study, and data protection consideration (see Appendix 3).

2.4 Measures

2.4.1 Survey Themes

The survey sought to address a number of questions in relation to staff attitudes towards special educational needs students in mainstream second level education in Ireland. The following themes will be looked at, at a quantitative and qualitative outlook:

1) Staff Involvement
2) Knowledge, Training & Development
3) Staffs need for Information
4) Staff Attitudes
5) What Type of Education

Staff Involvement

The first theme to emerge from the survey was 1) the category of staff that answered the survey, 2) the frequency of which each staff member engaged with SEN pupils in their school and 3) their familiarity with the schools SEN policy.

Knowledge, Training & Development

Our second theme consists of our largest collection of data which is in the area of knowledge, training and development. Four questions were on the survey that came under this theme and they are the following;

- Training days or information provided in schools.
- Specific training or information on individual students.
- More training is necessary to provide best education.
- The major problem is too little training and expertise in special education.

Staffs need for Information

This theme consists of two parts. The research is interested if staff would like access to pupil's information regarding their special educational need and if so who do they think would be best to deliver this information to them.

Staff Attitudes

The fourth theme the research has looked at is attitude of staff toward the whole area of SEN. Firstly we looked at the participant's view of whether they thought their school had a positive attitude towards special educational needs. The second asked the participants what their attitude was on who they thought had the main responsibility for the education of special educational needs students.

What Type of Education

The last and final theme was made up of two survey questions, opinions from the survey and interview data to provide the researcher with information on what type of education staff think SEN pupils should be given.

2.4.2 Interview style

The interview style adopted for the research was one of unstructured open-ended questions. The rationale for conducting the interviews was to explore some of the issues that arose from the survey. This required a qualitative research method which would lead to an understanding of key themes which arose from the questionnaires. Hence this interview style was best suited to exploring these topics.

Interviewees were selected at random from the 83 survey participates that were willing to contribute further to the research by being interviewed. The researcher was conscious that the ratio was 2 male to 2 female participants. Interviewees were contacted via email initially and then telephoned to confirm a time and a place suitable for the participant to conduct the interview.

2.5 Procedure

2.5.1 Pilot Study

Prior to conducting the main quantitative study a pilot study was completed in order to verify that: (1) the survey was clear so that the participants found it relatively understandable to fill in; and (2) that the feedback that was given was clear and capable of being easily interpreted. Two teachers were employed for the pilot study, one a mainstream teacher and the other a special class teacher. Feedback from the participants indicated that the questions on the survey were understandable and that they could fill them in adequately.

Prior to the qualitative study a pilot study was also completed in order to verify that: (1) the open-ended questions gave the researcher the right sense of direction; and (2) that the participant did not feel uncomfortable by the way the interview was being directed. One mainstream teacher was used for the pilot study. Again, feedback by the participant indicated that the questions being asked for interview were clear, concise and did not cause stress or confusion to the participant.

2.5.2 Main study

At the beginning of the study all schools in the Cork region were selected at the NPSA's request. Initially, all 83 schools in the area were emailed with an outline of what the research was aimed at and the details of the one-page survey that would be delivered if management agreed to participate. Several schools' responses to this email were positive, with 16 schools replying with a favourable response. The remaining schools which did not respond to this initial email were contacted by telephone and after approximately three weeks the researcher managed to secure the participation of 32 schools.

Once the number of participating schools was determined preparations were made to compile 32 packages, with each containing 50 surveys together with a cover letter explaining the research in more detail (amounting to 1,600 surveys and 32 cover letters in total).

With the help of the NPSA, volunteers were put in place for delivery and collection of packages. Four volunteers in total delivered and collected the packages. The researcher met with each of the volunteers to provide details of the participating schools and the corresponding packages to be delivered within the week. The intent was that delivery and collection would take a total of two weeks. However, there was significant variation in the time taken by schools to complete the surveys and the last package to be retrieved was returned six weeks following delivery. Once the data had all been accounted for work got underway in sorting through the data for inputting into Windows Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

2.6 Ethical Issues

2.6.1 Participants

All participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the aims of the study and the procedures involved with the data collection. This information sheet also provided information on confidentiality and data protection.

Where any interviews took place after the survey data was collected it was important that the participants were made aware that their responses remained confidential. Furthermore, appropriate follow-up care was provided if the need for it arise, such as giving contact

numbers for support if the interview caused the participant to become upset by any of the questions posed.

The participants were assured that they could contact the researcher if they had any questions or problems. It was stated that the participant had the freedom to withdraw from the process at any time without needing to account for their actions. The participant was asked to sign an informed consent form and was also asked if they would like to receive a copy of the results. Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to take part in the study, and that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were also given a full verbal debriefing and were thanked for their participation following the data collection. It was stressed to the participants, both before and after the study, that the data would be treated strictly confidentially. For the interviews, confidentiality was ensured by giving each participant a participant code.

2.6.2 Data Protection

In accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003 electronic data was stored in password protected files on a personal computer. Any hard copies of relevant information was locked in a filing cabinet, access to the data was restricted to the researcher and her supervisor. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through these procedures.

2.7 Analysis Procedure

2.7.1 *Analysis*

For the quantitative part of this research data was analysed using Windows Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This entailed inputting all of the data into SPSS which consisted of the 13 questions which were grouped together under the 5 themes. Once the variables and results from the candidates were recorded, the researcher could analyse the data by looking at the frequencies of the results.

There was equally a qualitative aspect to the surveys. Participants were offered the opportunity to write opinions after certain survey questions. As with the interview analysis,

each opinion was written down and the researcher was therefore in a position to identify any reoccurring themes stated by the various participants.

From the qualitative part of this research, data was analysed by recording and transcribing the interviews with the candidates that were selected randomly. By going through each interview, and noting possible themes or particular quotations or examples etc, the researcher was in a position to conduct thematic analysis to discern key patterns to contribute to the initial survey analysis.

2.7.2 Reflexivity

Having the support of the NPSA for this research dramatically assisted in undertaking the significant amount of work required to complete this dissertation. In particular, the delivery and collection of the sheer volume of surveys was made much easier. It is also highly probable that the participation rate was enhanced by the physical attendance of representatives of this respected organisation at the premises of the schools involved. However, it was found to be a considerable challenge to try and commit 83 second level schools, collect and compile 32 schools surveys of both qualitative and quantitative data and conduct interviews. Therefore the time and expense that the researcher undertook should not be overlooked.

Having regard to the researcher's personal circumstances of being both a special needs assistant in a second-level mainstream school and the mother of a special needs child, a concerted effort was taken to ensure that subjective considerations did not influence the outcome of the research.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis & Discussion

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis and Discussion from the Surveys and Interviews

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed on a Windows 7 computer to analyse the quantitative data. Both the qualitative data from the survey and the qualitative data from the interviews were thematically analysed for the purpose of the research.

The results are presented in five parts consisting of themes which arose from both the quantitative and qualitative survey analyses and the qualitative data from the interviews which were carried out. This analysis will be presented on each theme first representing the quantitative results and analysis and then containing the qualitative results and analysis where applicable.

The following themes emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis and will be presented and discussed in further detailed sub-sections as follows:

1) Staff Involvement
2) Knowledge, Training and Development
3) Staff Need for Information
4) Staff Attitudes
5) What Type of Education

3.1) Theme: Staff involvement

The first theme to emerge from the survey was:

- The category of staff that answered the survey;
- The frequency of which each staff member engaged with SEN pupils in their school; and
- Their familiarity with the schools SEN policy.

3.1.1 Category of Staff

1)

Staff Category

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management	46	11.4	11.4	11.4
Mainstream	253	62.9	62.9	74.4
Learning support	49	12.2	12.2	86.6
H-Dip	19	4.7	4.7	91.3
Management and mainstream teacher	6	1.5	1.5	92.8
Mainstream teacher and learning support	27	6.7	6.7	99.5
Other	1	.2	.2	99.8
Management and mainstream and learning support	1	.2	.2	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

The table above shows the percentages of categories of who contributed to the survey. 11.5% of those who answered the survey were **management**. 62.9% came under the category of **mainstream** teachers. 12.2% regarded themselves as being in the category of **learning support**. 4.7% were **higher diploma** students. 1.5% of people that participated described themselves as both **management and mainstream teacher.** 6.7% selected both **mainstream teacher and learning support teacher.** 0.2% regarded themselves to be part of the three categories of **management, mainstream and learning support.**

The above results show that by far the largest percentage of staff to answer the survey came under the category of mainstream teachers at 62.9%. This is not surprising given that, generally, schools are predominantly populated by mainstream teachers. The other three main subgroup categories have near equal representation, with 12.2% in the special education category, 11.5% in the management category, and 4.7% in the higher diploma student

category. The remainder of participants were in a mixture of categories which were all in a very significant minority.

3.1.2 Frequency of Engagement

Under this theme each participant was then asked to confirm the frequently with which they engaged with students presenting with a special educational need. The options for this answer were either:

- on a daily basis,
- on a weekly basis,
- occasionally, or
- never.

The results from the surveys are presented in the following table.

2)

Frequency Of Engagement (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily basis	258	64.2	64.2	64.2
Weekly basis	99	24.6	24.6	88.8
Occasionally	41	10.2	10.2	99.0
Never	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 above shows the percentages of staff answering how frequent their interaction with special educational needs students is. 64.2% answered that they engaged with SEN students on a **daily** basis. 24.6% answered on a **weekly** basis. 10.2% answered **occasionally**. 1.0% answered that they never interacted with SEN students.

The table shows the frequency at which the mixture of staff that completed the survey meet special needs students in their schools. As we can see, it shows that the majority at 64.2% meet SEN students on a daily basis, with 24.6% encountering these students on a weekly basis. Just 10.2% of staff selected occasionally and 1% who confirmed that they never interacted. Of the 64.2% of participants who answered 'daily' to this question, we can now state that the category with a majority percentage of 71.4% were in fact special educational teachers.

2.1)

Frequency of Engagement (Special Education Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	35	71.4	71.4	71.4
Weekly	14	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.1 shows that 71.4% of special educational teachers encounter SEN students on a daily basis. The group with the lowest incidence of engaging with SEN students on a daily basis was management at 45.7%. By contrast, management ranked as the largest category that interacted with SEN students occasionally, with a percentage of 28.3%.

2.2)

Frequency of Engagement (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily Basis	21	45.7	45.7	45.7
Weekly Basis	12	26.1	26.1	71.7
Occasionally	13	28.3	28.3	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.2 shows that 45.7% of management meet SEN students on a daily basis and that 28.3% interact with them on an occasional basis.

This was then followed by Higher Diploma students, with 15.8% confirming that they interacted with SEN students on an occasional basis.

2.3)

Frequency of Engagement (Higher Diploma students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	12	63.2	63.2	63.2
Weekly	4	21.1	21.1	84.2
Occasionally	3	15.8	15.8	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.3 shows that 15.8% of H-Dip students meet SEN students on an occasional basis.

3.1.3 SEN Policy

The next issue to be considered under the theme of 'staff involvement' was the familiarity which staff had with their school's SEN policy. Corbett (2001) stated that there needs to be an awareness amongst staff of schools' policies and cultural awareness in relation to special education. The option for staff to answer this question was ticking either a 'yes' or 'no' box. If participants ticked 'no' they were asked to give a reason. This is our first question from the survey that has a qualitative aspect to it also. The results from all staff are as follows.

3)

Familiarity with SEN Policy (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	338	84.1	84.1	84.1
No	64	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 above shows whether the staff who were surveyed felt that they were familiar with their school's SEN policy. 84.1% felt that they **were familiar** with the policy as opposed to 15.9% who felt that they **were not familiar** with the policy. Varying opinions were given from the 15.9% of people who answered 'no' and these are considered further under the qualitative analysis section.

The results above show that whereas 84.1% of those surveyed confirmed that they were familiar with their school's SEN policy, nearly 16% of staff felt that they were not. This is a significant finding from the survey as we have broken it down further to show what category of staff selected 'yes' or 'no.' The figures suggest that the majority of those who answered 'yes' to this question were management, at 86.2%. This can be seen in the following table.

3.1)

Familiarity with SEN Policy (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	218	86.2	86.2	86.2
No	35	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.1 shows that 86.2% of management selected 'yes' when answering whether they were familiar with their school's special educational needs policy. We would expect such figures from management as the construction and implementation of policies within a school would be within their remit. Interestingly, the majority of staff who answered 'no' to this question were in the special educational teacher category, at 32.7%. This is a surprising finding as one would imagine that this staff category in particular would be familiar with their school's SEN policy given the nature of their jobs. The results of this are shown in the following table.

3.2)

Familiarity with SEN Policy (Special Education Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	33	67.3	67.3	67.3
No	16	32.7	32.7	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.2 presents data showing that 32.7% of special education teachers answered 'no' when asked if they were familiar with their school's SEN policy.

From the qualitative analysis of the surveys to determine the reasons for individuals answering 'no' to this question, thematical analysis showed that 58% commented that they had never seen the policy or that it was simply not available to them. A further 11% claimed that the policy was in the process of being produced. We can see the significance of this finding as it is pertinent to the previous study of Avramidis & Norwiches (2002) in the United Kingdom, which showed that the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is largely dependent on educators being positive about it.

Further to this analysis of the staff's familiarity with policy, as part of the interview section participants were asked their opinion on the Government's current policy that special needs children should be included with their mainstream peers where possible (Government of Ireland, 2004). The respondents all had the similar view that this was positive for students with special educational needs and that they should be included, where possible, in mainstream education.

*"I think this is the right approach to take. For real inclusion SEN students need to mix in regular classroom settings with their peer*s." (Alan, Line 1).

The conclusion which may be arrived at from the interviews conducted is that each participant agreed with, and had a positive attitude towards, this element of government policy.

3.2) Theme: Knowledge, Training and Development

The second theme consists of the largest collection of data which is in the area of knowledge, training and development. Four questions contained on the survey came under this theme. They were as follows:

- Training days or information provided in schools.
- Specific training or information on individual students.
- More training is necessary to provide best education.
- The major problem is too little training and expertise in special education.

3.2.1 General Training and Information

The first data to be considered is whether or not training days or general information had been provided in schools to staff. The participants either had the option of selecting a 'yes' or a 'no' answer. The following were the results of this section of the survey.

4)

Training days/General information provided (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	311	77.4	77.4	77.4
No	91	22.6	22.6	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

As may be seen from the figures contained in table 4, **311** of the participants said that training/information had been provided in their school. **91** people, however, answered 'no' to this question on the survey.

This equates to 77.4% of participants answering 'yes' to being asked whether there had ever been training or information provided to them. However, a significant minority, at 22.6% of staff, had not received any training days or information on special educational needs. This is

concerning as we know from Florian and Rouse's study (2010) that most mainstream teachers do not believe that they have the skills and knowledge to perform this kind of work because they have not done the necessary specialist courses.

When we break these figures down to what category the participants were drawn from, interesting results follow. Of the 311 people who answered 'yes', the majority of these came from the mainstream teaching category. 83% of mainstream teachers said that there had been training days or information provided in their schools. This result is demonstrated as follows.

4.1)

Training days/General information provided (Mainstream Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	210	83.0	83.0	83.0
No	43	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

As we can see from table 4.1, 83% of mainstream teachers answered 'yes'. For the results later in this section, this data is interesting. But the percentage of 22.6% must be analysed with equal vigour. This result was made up of 57.9% of Higher Diploma students who answered 'no' to the question. However, given that trainee teachers would not be present in schools from year to year, or not even be in attendance for a whole academic year, this result is perhaps not surprising. The next highest category at 40.8% to answer 'no' to this question were the special educational teachers. This data is shown as follows.

4.2)

Training days/General information provided (Special Ed Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	29	59.2	59.2	59.2
No	20	40.8	40.8	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

As we can see from table 4.2, 40.8% of special education teachers answered 'no' to the question as to whether or not there had ever been training days or general information in the area of SEN. This is a significant finding as one would think that some form of in-service

training or information would be provided to staff working directly with special needs students. Although 59.2% answered 'yes', it is suggested that it is not acceptable for the remaining 40.8% of staff working in a specialised area not to be given up-to-date training.

3.2.2 Specific Training and Information

A further element under this theme of knowledge, training and development was contained in the next survey question. This involved answering the question: where one would have been made aware of a particular student's special educational need, would the teachers then have been provided with specific training or information on how best to educate the pupil concerned. This is of interest to this research as previous findings suggest that the teacher needs to possess information on individual students in order to have a positive attitude towards the teaching of the child in question. A teacher's attitude would be more negative if they did not have a guide to aid the teaching of the student with the special educational need. The results of this question were as follows.

5)

Specific Training/Information to individual SEN students (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	217	54.0	54.0	54.0
No	58	14.4	14.4	68.4
Sometimes	127	31.6	31.6	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that 54% of participants answered **yes**, 14.4% of participants answered **no**, and 31.6% of participants answered **sometimes**. The results at table 5 are from the participants answering the question as to whether or not they have been made aware of a student's individual SEN and had they then been offered training/information on how best to educate the pupil.

With further analysis we can show a breakdown of each of the categories. Of the 54% of staff that answered 'yes', the majority of these candidates were management, at 58.7%. The following table shows this result.

5.1

Specific Training/Information to individual SEN students (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	27	58.7	58.7	58.7
No	4	8.7	8.7	67.4
Sometimes	15	32.6	32.6	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 5.1 shows that 58.7% of management answered 'yes' to this survey question. Referring back to the previous table, of the 14.4% who said 'no', the majority were Higher Diploma students. 26.3% of these students answered 'no' to getting information on how best to deal with specific individual needs in their classroom. This can be seen in the following table of results.

5.2)

Specific Training/Information to individual SEN students (HDip Students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	10	52.6	52.6	52.6
No	5	26.3	26.3	78.9
Sometimes	4	21.1	21.1	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 5.2 shows that 26.3% of H-Dip students answered 'no'. This is a substantial proportion and it is concerning as we know from previous literature that teachers may feel unprepared due to inadequate training. Teachers who have not undertaken training regarding inclusion of

students with disabilities, may exhibit negative attitudes toward the inclusion (Van Reusen, 2001).

The next set of results that need to be looked at are the 31.6% of staff who answered 'sometimes' to receiving information on individuals with a specific special educational need. Surprisingly, the majority in this category was the special education teachers, at 42.9%. This is represented by the following table.

5.3)

Specific Training/Information to individual SEN students (Special Ed Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	23	46.9	46.9	46.9
No	5	10.2	10.2	57.1
Sometimes	21	42.9	42.9	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 5.3 shows that almost half of the special education teachers who participated in the survey received specific information/training on students they encountered. It is surprising to note from these findings that almost half of educators specially dedicated to SEN students were not in receipt of specific training or information relating to the students they dealt with.

3.3.3 More training is necessary

The next question under this theme asked if teachers believed that more training was needed within this area of education. The second part requested staff to agree or disagree with statement that teachers are at a disadvantage because of the lack of training and expertise in the area of special educational needs.

The results of the first component are as follows.

6)

More training is necessary to provide the best education (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	246	61.2	61.2	61.2
Somewhat agree	132	32.8	32.8	94.0
Neither agree/disagree	17	4.2	4.2	98.3
Somewhat disagree	7	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

The above table is a representation of what participants answered as to the extent of their agreement to the proposition that 'more training is necessary to provide the best education possible to special educational needs students.' 61.2% **strongly agreed**. 32.8% **somewhat agreed**. 4.2% **neither agreed/ disagreed**. 1.7% **somewhat disagreed**.

This question provided the most universal answer from all of the subgroups which is an interesting finding in itself. Of this 61.2% of people who strongly agreed, 79.6% of this percentage was drawn from special education teachers category, followed closely by the management category at 76.1%.

These are exceptionally high percentages from both of these categories, evidencing that they strongly agree that more training is necessary. The results of these two subgroups are shown in the following two tables;

6.1)

More training is necessary to provide the best education (Special Ed teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	39	79.6	79.6	79.6
Somewhat agree	10	20.4	20.4	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.1 shows that 79.6% were special education teachers.

6.2)

More training is necessary to provide the best education (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	35	76.1	76.1	76.1
Somewhat agree	10	21.7	21.7	97.8
Neither agree/disagree	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.2 shows that 76.1% of management strongly agreed with the proposition. It is remarkable to find that both special education teachers and management were in such strong agreement that there needs to be more training in this area. It is also noteworthy that no one strongly disagreed with this question.

Of the 32.8% who somewhat agreed, the majority of this percentage were mainstream teachers at 39.1% followed by Higher Diploma students at 31.6%. These results can be seen in the following two tables.

6.3)

More training is necessary to provide the best education (Mainstream teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	134	53.0	53.0	53.0
Somewhat agree	99	39.1	39.1	92.1
Neither agree/disagree	14	5.5	5.5	97.6
Somewhat disagree	6	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.3 shows that 39.1% of mainstream teachers somewhat agree with more training is necessary.

6.4)

More training is necessary to provide the best education (Higher Dip Students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	11	57.9	57.9	57.9
Somewhat agree	6	31.6	31.6	89.5
neither agree/disagree	1	5.3	5.3	94.7
Somewhat disagree	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.4 shows the extent that 31.6% somewhat agree with the fact that more training is necessary.

These results are in keeping with the results from the interview with our Higher Diploma student. The **higher diploma** student was asked a specific question in reference to the training being provided in her college, whether or not there was a sufficient amount of information/ training given on how to deal with special needs student. The following information was recorded.

….."*No, we completed one module in the four years…..I feel inadequate when it comes to teaching students with special needs. It is through the classroom experience and attending in-services that I hope to gain more of an understanding"* (Aine, Line 66)

This is in keeping with Lambe and Bones study (2006) on student teachers where their results claim student teachers believe that lack of appropriate preparation, concerns about class size, resources, managing other adults and coping with increasing numbers of pupils with diverse special educational needs are key issues.

Overall the findings from this section of the research have proved to be one of the main findings. The fact that collectively 94% of the large staff surveyed either strongly agreed with the proposition or somewhat agreed signals the extent that more training is needed in this area of education.

3.3.4 Problem is little training/ Expertise

Further to this question the next finding sought confirmation that the major problem is that most teachers have 'precious little training or expertise' when it comes to special education again staff were asked do they strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree/disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. The results of this section are as follows;

7)

Little training or expertise in Special Education (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	221	55.0	55.0	55.0
Somewhat agree	138	34.3	34.3	89.3
Neither agree/disagree	28	7.0	7.0	96.3
Somewhat disagree	11	2.7	2.7	99.0
Strongly disagree	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows the following, 55% of participants **strongly agreed** with the notion. 34.3% **somewhat agreed**. 7% **neither agreed nor disagreed**. 2.7% **somewhat disagreed**. 1% **strongly disagreed**.

The results of this table show that 89.3% of staff asked either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed to the quote 'the major problem is that most teachers have precious little training or expertise in special education. Teachers training has been considered and important aspect in improving teachers attitudes toward inclusive practice'. At further analysis of which subgroup took up the majority position of strongly agreeing with this proposition the results are as follows.

7.1)

Little training or expertise in Special Education (Special Education teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	36	73.5	73.5	73.5
Somewhat agree	10	20.4	20.4	93.9
neither agree/disagree	3	6.1	6.1	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 7.1 shows that 73.5% of special education staff strongly agreed with the proposition. Again like the last section the majority components to strongly agree were the special education teachers.

Likewise with the 'somewhat agreed' answer the majority of these came from management. This is displayed as follows.

7.2)

Little training or expertise in Special Education (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	26	56.5	56.5	56.5
Somewhat agree	17	37.0	37.0	93.5
Neither agree/disagree	1	2.2	2.2	95.7
Somewhat disagree	2	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table7.2 shows that 37% of management somewhat agreed with the proposition.

To conclude this our management participant in interview was asked the question "what do you believe would help schools become more confident in educating SEN students?" The following answer was given to the researcher:

……"training really, proper training.. by and large a lot of teachers don't have training on how to specifically deal with certain special educational needs students… as a principal you can give people information but to actually have sat down and get a proper training course on how to deal are few and far between" (Alastair, Line 56)

The importance of this can be linked to Linsay (2007) report of teacher training has been considered an important aspect in improving teacher attitudes toward inclusive practice.

3.3) Theme: Staffs need for Information

This theme consists of two parts. The research is interested if staff would: 1) like access to pupil's information regarding their special educational need and, if so, 2) who do they think would be best to deliver this information to them.

3.3.1 Access to Information

The first question was if they would like to know specific information on SEN students. The results of the first part are as follows;

8)

Access to Information of Pupils with SEN (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	377	93.8	93.8	93.8
No	25	6.2	6.2	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Figure 8 shows us that 93.8% of participants surveyed **agreed** that as teachers they would benefit from having access to specific information regarding SEN students. 6.2% of participants answered **no**.

The above table shows a large percentage of staff who answered yes to wanting access to information on pupils with a special educational need.

Of the 93.8% who answered yes to this question, the majority of this percentage was 94.7% which came from the higher diploma students. The results of this are displayed as follows.

8.1)

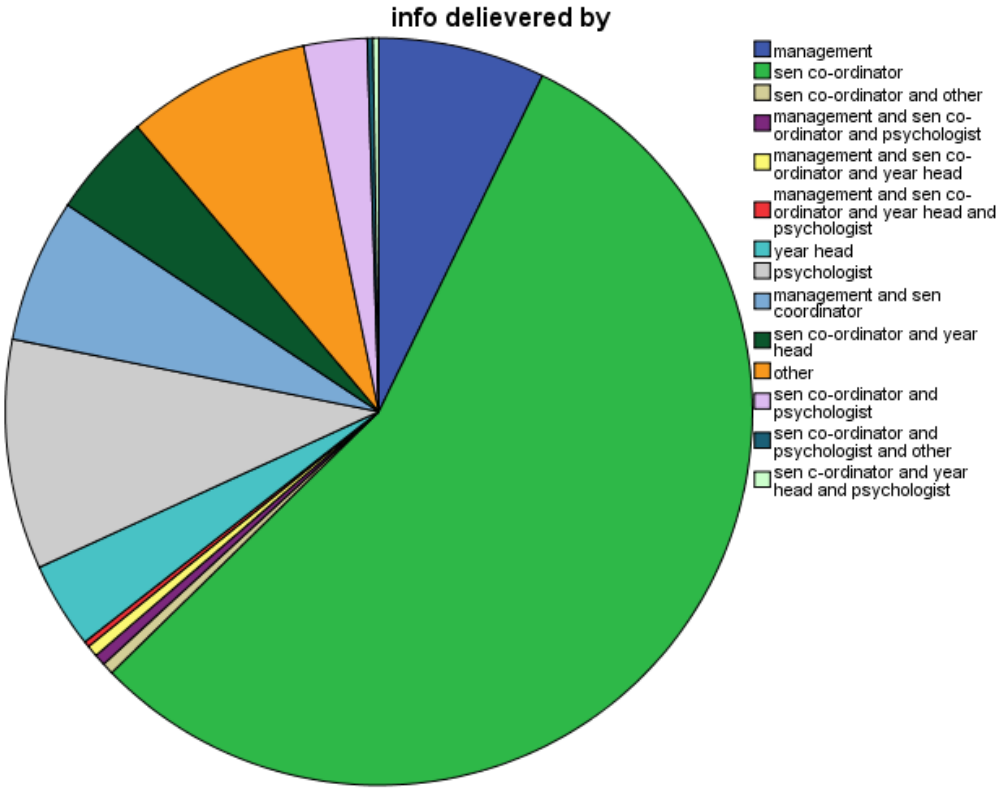
Access to information of Pupils with SEN (HDip Students)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	18	94.7	94.7	94.7
	No	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Overall this is a large percentage to want access to information on specific individual pupils needs. If this is something that educators require in schools, the next most obvious question is how they think this sensitive information should be delivered.

3.3.2 Delivery of Information

There was a wide variety of answers and opinions to this question. The qualitative section shows how the participants thought this information should be delivered. The results are shown in the following pie chart as there were many results, a frequency chart was not suitable.



The above pie chart shows that 55.5% of participants believe that the **SEN coordinator** should be responsible for the delivery of information on SEN students. 10% believe that **psychologists** should be responsible for the delivery information on SEN students. 8% wrote opinions on how best they thought this information should be delivered which will be looked at under the qualitative analysis. 7.2% of participants believed that **management** should be responsible for the delivery information on SEN students. 6.2% of participants selected both **management** and the **SEN coordinator**. 4.5% of participants selected both the **SEN coordinator** and **year head**. 3.7% selected only the **year head**. 2.7% ticked both **SEN coordinator** and **psychologist** for the delivery of information. 0.5% of participants chose **management, SEN coordinator and psychologist**. 0.5% of participants chose **management, SEN coordinator and year head.** 0.2% opted for **SEN coordinator, psychologist and commented in other.** 0.2% elected for **SEN coordinator, year head and psychologist**. 0.2% chose **all** options.

As we can see from the collection of results from the pie chart this seems to be somewhat divided area on who staff think would be best to deliver this sensitive information. Although the majority of participants of 55.5% thought the SEN coordinator should be the person responsible to deliver information near 45% of the remainder had very different answers. Of the 55% of participants who believed that the SEN coordinator be solely responsible the

majority at 63.2% were HDip students followed closely by mainstream teachers at 58.1%. The following table show the majorities verdict;

9.1)

Information on SEN students delivered by whom (HDip students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management	2	10.5	10.5	10.5
SEN Co-ordinator	12	63.2	63.2	73.7
Psychologist	1	5.3	5.3	78.9
Sen Co-ordinator and Year Head	3	15.8	15.8	94.7
Sen Co-ordinator and Psychologist	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 9.1 shows 63.2% of H-Dip students thought the SEN coordinator to be the best person to deliver information.

The next most favourable answer at 10% felt the psychologist be solely responsible for the delivery of information. The psychologists are the ones who write this information on students with special educational needs therefore I am not surprised this was the second favourite category. The majority of staff who answered psychologist came from the special education teaching subgroup at 30.6%. The results of this can be seen as follows.

9.2)

Information on SEN students delivered by whom (Special Education Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
SEN Co-ordinator	24	49.0	49.0	51.0
Year Head	1	2.0	2.0	53.1
Psychologist	15	30.6	30.6	83.7
Management and SEN Co-ordinator	2	4.1	4.1	87.8
SEN Co-ordinator and Year Head	1	2.0	2.0	89.8
Other	3	6.1	6.1	95.9
SEN Co-ordinator and Psychologist	2	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 9.2 shows that 30.6% of special education teachers felt psychologists should deliver information.

Of the results of this theme on staffs need to know information on special educational needs students, the second option on the survey for participants to write their opinions on was how they though sensitive information about a SEN student should be delivered/accessible to staff. 194 people made comments out of this number the top 3 most popular comments were as follows:

- **25%** felt that a file should be available either in the staff room, office or on request.
- **17%** felt that the information should be delivered through a meeting either with the SEN department or by year group.
- **15%** felt a one to one basis would be the most favourable method.

From the opinions given, thematical analysis was employed to provide the above percentages.

We know the importance of information being shared between staff from Alexanders' study (1992) which stated in relation to the education of SEN, teachers must plan together to ensure consistency and progression across classes and year groups and that formally structured short term plans are essential to effective classroom teaching. Therefore it is essential that schools have a good system in place for important information regarding students with special educational needs to been known in a professional manner.

3.4) Theme: Attitude

The fourth theme the research has looked at is attitude of staff toward the whole area of SEN. We know from previous findings that researchers over several decades have concluded that teachers' attitudes are one of the most crucial variables in the success of inclusion schemes (Williams & Algozine 1977, Hayes & Gunn 1988 and Chow & Winzer 1992).

Firstly we looked at the participant's view of whether they thought their school had a positive attitude towards special educational needs. The second asked the participants what their attitude was on who they thought had the main responsibility for the education of special educational needs students.

3.4.1 Positive Attitude

The first set of data we will look at is the answers to the question whether or not the participants felt their school had an overall positive attitude towards the inclusion of SEN students in their school the results from all staff are as follows.

10)

Positive Attitude towards SEN (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	358	89.1	89.1	89.1
No	2	.5	.5	89.6
Sometimes	42	10.4	10.4	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Figure 10 shows the following: 89.1% of participants ticked **yes** when asked if their school had a healthy attitude. 10.4% ticked **sometimes.** 5% ticked **no**.

Of the above results 89.1% of participants answered 'yes' to their school having a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students presenting with a SEN. This is good for according to Dean (1989) the success of working with pupils with special needs depends a great deal on the attitudes of the teachers. With further analysis of these figures we found that the highest

percentage came from the subgroup HDip students at 100% this is displayed in the table that follows.

10.1)

Positive Attitude towards SEN (HDip students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	19	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10.1 shows every HDip student answered yes to the question.

Interestingly, the only percentage of people who ticked 'no' to this question came from the management category. 4.3% of management ticked this box. It is positive that it's a small percentage from management who answered 'no' as we have read from previous literature Dean (1996) states that the attitude of the principal towards children with special needs is very influential on how staff will respond to the 'professional challenge' of maximising the benefits of inclusion for the special needs child. The results of this are shown as follows.

10.2)

Positive Attitude towards SEN (Management)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	35	76.1	76.1	76.1
	no	2	4.3	4.3	80.4
	sometimes	9	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 10.2 shows the figure that 4.3% of management answered 'no'.

Lastly the category that ticked the option 'sometimes' were the special education teachers. 36.6% of special educational teachers answered the question 'sometimes' in response as to

whether or not their school had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of SEN students. The results of this area again shown in the following table of results.

10.3)

Positive Attitude towards SEN (Special Educational Teachers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	31	63.3	63.3	63.3
	Sometimes	18	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 10.3 shows that 36.7% of special educational teachers answered 'sometimes'

This is another main finding in this research. The fact that 36.7% of teachers who are involved on a daily basis with special educational needs students answered that their school only some of the time had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of SEN students is significant. As we know from previous literature that for inclusion to be effective, teachers must feel confident in their own ability to cope and have positive expectation about the learning potential of the student (Webster, 1999).

Further to these results, the staff were given the opportunity to expand on this question if they so wished. The following findings were found from thematical analysis of the opinions staff gave.

- **66%** of staff that gave an opinion said that some teachers are not as accepting as others for special educational needs students to be in their class.
- **33%** of staff who gave opinions felt that some teachers had a negative attitude because the curriculum has to be altered to cater for the special needs students to be in mainstream education.

These are interesting findings as they are relatable to a study we looked at previously where they found that attitudes towards integration were very much influenced by the nature of the disabilities and/or the educational problems that the pupils presented with (Center et al, 1985).

3.4.2 Main Responsibility

The second set of results under this theme wanted to see the attitudes of participants on who they felt had the main responsibility for the education of these students. This data is presented as follows from all the staff asked;

11)

Who is responsible for the education of special educational needs students (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management	21	5.2	5.2	5.2
SEN department	126	31.3	31.3	36.6
Mainstream teachers	55	13.7	13.7	50.2
Management and SEN department	14	3.5	3.5	53.7
Management and mainstream teachers	4	1.0	1.0	54.7
SEN and mainstream teachers	70	17.4	17.4	72.1
Management and SEN department and mainstream teachers	112	27.9	27.9	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Figure 11 displays the following;
31.3% ticked only the **SEN department** for the responsibility for the education of students with SEN.
27.9% ticked **all three** boxes.
17.4% felt the responsibility was to the **SEN department and mainstream teachers**.
13.7% felt the **mainstream teachers** had the responsibility.
5.2% felt **management** were responsible.
3.5% ticked both **management and the SEN department**.
1.0% ticked both **management and mainstream teachers**.

The two most popular answers as we can see from the table previously were 31.3% ticked only the SEN department for the responsibility for the education of students presenting with a special educational need and 27.9% ticked all three boxes.

Of the 31.3% the majority of this result was from the special educational needs teachers, 51%

in fact ticked only the SEN department as being responsible for the education of special needs students. This result can be seen as follows;

11.1)

Who is responsible for the education of special educational needs students (Special Ed Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management	2	4.1	4.1	4.1
SEN Department	25	51.0	51.0	55.1
Mainstream Teachers	4	8.2	8.2	63.3
Management and Mainstream Teachers	1	2.0	2.0	65.3
SEN and Mainstream Teacherss	8	16.3	16.3	81.6
Managment and SEN Department and Mainstream Teachers	9	18.4	18.4	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 11.1 shows that 51% of special education teachers felt the SEN department is responsible for the education of students presenting with a special educational need.

This is a key finding for this research as we can see from our previous literature that according to Dean (1989) the successful teaching of pupils with special needs also depends upon the relationships developed between subject teachers and the special needs teachers, the special needs teachers represent a resource on which the subject teacher can draw. Therefore we can conclude that the responsibility of the education of these students should not come down to one group of people interacting with these students. It is up to everybody in a mainstream setting to be responsible and provide the best education possible.

In a further breakdown of these results, the biggest percentage to tick all three groups of Management, SEN department and Mainstream teachers were the Higher Diploma students at 31.6%. This is an interesting find as it collaborates with the findings of ……

The results of this are shown as follows;

11.2)

Who is responsible for the education of Special Educational Needs Students (HDip students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
sen department	2	10.5	10.5	10.5
mainstream teachers	6	31.6	31.6	42.1
management and mainstream teachers	1	5.3	5.3	47.4
sen and mainstream teachers	4	21.1	21.1	68.4
managment and sen department and mainstream teacher	6	31.6	31.6	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

As we can see from table 11.2, 36.2% of Hdip participants ticked all three groups as responsible for the education of special educational needs students.

After the quantitative data being shown, the following qualitative data was provided from opinions given by staff. The following opinions were written after this question.

- **71%** felt that parents had a responsibility also in the education of SEN.
- **14%** commented that it is a whole school approach by management, implemented by the SEN department and supported by teachers.

This is an interesting find as 71% of staff felt that parents had an equal amount of responsibility to the education of SEN pupils. This was a theme that was reoccurring from the opinions so therefore the research must acknowledge it.

3.5) Theme: What Type of Education

This theme was made up of two survey questions. The first asked the participants what classroom they felt best suited for the education of students with special educational needs. The second part of this theme asked whether or not participants believed mainstream education was the best place for these students to be educated in. The classroom options were:

- mainstream,
- streamed,
- one-to-one or
- special class.

3.5.1 Is Mainstream Best

The participants were asked if they thought mainstream education was the best place for special educational needs students to be educated in. There was a 'yes' and a 'no' option, but also an option to select 'other' and explain. This will be looked at in the qualitative data analysis of the survey. The results of this measure are as follows.

12)

Is Mainstream Education the best place (All Staff)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	247	61.4	61.4	61.4
no	39	9.7	9.7	71.1
other	116	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 shows that 61.4% of respondents answered **yes**. 28.9% ticked the box **other** and gave and explanation. and 9.7% of people surveyed ticked **no**.

This was an extremely noteworthy question to ask the staff that answered this survey. 61.4% of respondents answered ‘yes’, 28.9% ticked the box ‘other’ and gave an explanation and lastly 9.7% of staff surveyed answered ‘no’.

Of the 61.4% of participants who answered ‘yes’, the highest percentage group for this answer was the higher diploma students at 84.2% followed by mainstream teachers at 63.6%. Both of these sets of data can be seen in the following tables;

12.1)

Is Mainstream Education the best place (HDip students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	16	84.2	84.2	84.2
No	2	10.5	10.5	94.7
Other	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 12.1, shows 84.2% of HDips answered ‘yes’ to mainstream being the best place for SEN pupils.

12.2)

Is Mainstream Education the best place (Mainstream Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	161	63.6	63.6	63.6
no	32	12.6	12.6	76.3
other	60	23.7	23.7	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

Table 12.2, shows that 63.6% of mainstream teachers answered ‘yes’ to mainstream being the best place for SEN pupils.

The 28.9% of staff who answered ‘other’ and gave an opinion the highest percentage from a subgroup were 49% of special educational teachers, followed interestingly by management at 41%. This is shown in the following tables;

12.3)

Is Mainstream Education the best place (Special Educational Teachers)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	23	46.9	46.9	46.9
No	2	4.1	4.1	51.0
Other	24	49.0	49.0	100.0
Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 12.3, shows 49% of Special Ed. teachers answered ‘other’ and made a comment to mainstream being the best place for SEN pupils.

12.4)

Is Mainstream Education the best place (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	25	54.3	54.3	54.3
no	2	4.3	4.3	58.7
other	19	41.3	41.3	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 12.4, shows 41.3% of management answered ‘other’ and made a comment to mainstream being the best place for SEN pupils.

This is again another key finding to the research undertaken. There is a discrepancy among some staff as to whether or not SEN pupils should be in mainstream education following the quantitative results of the data, we will now look at the qualitative results from the survey to

sum up the reasoning for this divergence.
By ticking the box 'other' the following opinions were noted as the 3 most popular attitudes that the staff gave. The following results were noted to be reoccurring from the 139 participants that made comments;

- **28%** answered that it depends on individual circumstances, educational needs included.
- **16%** answered that not always is it the best place as they can get lost in mainstream and feel isolated as a result.
- **8%** felt that it is hard with current resources, that more help and training is required.

This is really a key finding for the research as there is such a diversity of answers and opinions from staff however there is a link to previous findings of concerns from staff.

From the interview data there is again backing of the concerns staff may have in relation to SEN pupils being included in mainstream classroom. Each of the four subgroups were asked the question whether they thought there were any disadvantages of inclusion of SEN pupils in mainstream classroom on peers, teachers and special needs teachers. The results were similar with some discrepancies as follows;

For Peers

The participant who was interviewed from the **management** category stated that it could be a disadvantage for peers if allowed to become a disadvantage. The candidate felt that this came down to classroom management.

....."I wouldn't think there's any significant disadvantage…I mean it can be a disadvantage if allowed to become a disadvantage, for example if you have a teacher giving a student with special needs a huge amount of attention then the others can suffer but that's down to how a class is taught"(Alastair, Line 65)

The **mainstream teacher** who partook in the interview was coming from the classroom itself stated;

...."You do find as a teacher that there now is less time for individual student attention and more time given to the special needs student in the classroom"(Alan, Line 82)

However on the contrary, the **special educational needs teacher** answered quite differently in stating;

…..” I don’t see any disadvantages for special needs students or for their peers” (Aileen, Line 35)

The **HDip student** had two points when answering this part of the question on peers stating the following;

……”I suppose they may feel that special needs students get special treatment in class…or like students may not understand the special needs students disability and may mock the student” (Aine,Line 45)

For Teachers

Again each of the participants were asked if they felt there could be any disadvantage for teachers the following was noted;

The participant from **management** spoke that he could not see a disadvantage for teachers on having special needs students in the classroom but the only slight disadvantage for teachers was the actual challenge involved in altering their teaching methods to suit the inclusion;

……”there is probably a bit of a challenge in it…..I’m a believer in instructional leadership, group teaching and activity based learning in the classroom, once you engage with that I think special needs students and all students benefit. That’s more challenging for a teacher to do”(Alastair, Line93)

The above is interesting as we know from previous literature according to King (2000), the learning support guidelines place a high priority on enhancing classroom based learning through the provision of alternative groupings and shared teaching approaches in the pupils’ classroom.

The **mainstream** teacher spoke of the challenge it can be to have the time to give to all the needs in a classroom, and that it can be pressure on the teacher involved particularly in subject with a large course content to be covered;

…..*"I do think teachers find it difficult to have the time to actively promote inclusion and still cover their subject material"*(Alan, Line 90)

The **special educational needs teacher** answered this question with a similar stance to the mainstream teachers view. The following was noted;

…..*"I do think that teachers find it difficult to have the time to actively promote inclusion and still cover their subject material"*(Aileen, Line 36)

Lastly the **Higher Diploma** student reflected on that the fact that students with special needs may be focused on solely and that as a consequence students with learning issues may be overlooked;

….*"it's difficult to cater to students learning needs when your also trying to teach students with special needs*"(Aine, Line 51)

For the Special Needs Student

The final part of this question answered what the participants answered when asked if there was any disadvantage for the special needs students themselves to be included in mainstream education. The following was recorded;

The contributor from the **management** category stated the following information;

…..*"I suppose it varies…..you do get a student who genuinely needs one to one and may feel stigmatised in mainstream"* (Alastair, Line 97)

The participant from the **mainstream** teacher section felt that there are minimum disadvantages for the special needs student to be included in mainstream education, he stated that;

…..*"the only thing I can think of is that perhaps special needs students would be discouraged if they were underachieving in class"*(Alan, Line 97)

The **special educational needs teacher** answered this question when giving answer for peers (see page 58).

The **H-Dip student** made two points when answering this question this included the following information;

…*"well I suppose they may notice that their different to the rest of the students in the classroom and this might impact on their self-confidence, and maybe {pause} they might put themselves under more pressure in the classroom and…be more anxious as a result"*(Aine,Line 61)

From the quantitative data and the 2 sets of qualitative data we can see that there are varied opinions across each of the four subgroups of people. It is similar to the findings of…….

3.5.2 Type of Classroom

The next and final part under this theme looks at what type of classroom staff feel that SEN pupils should be educated in. The following are the results displayed in a bar chart:

Table 13

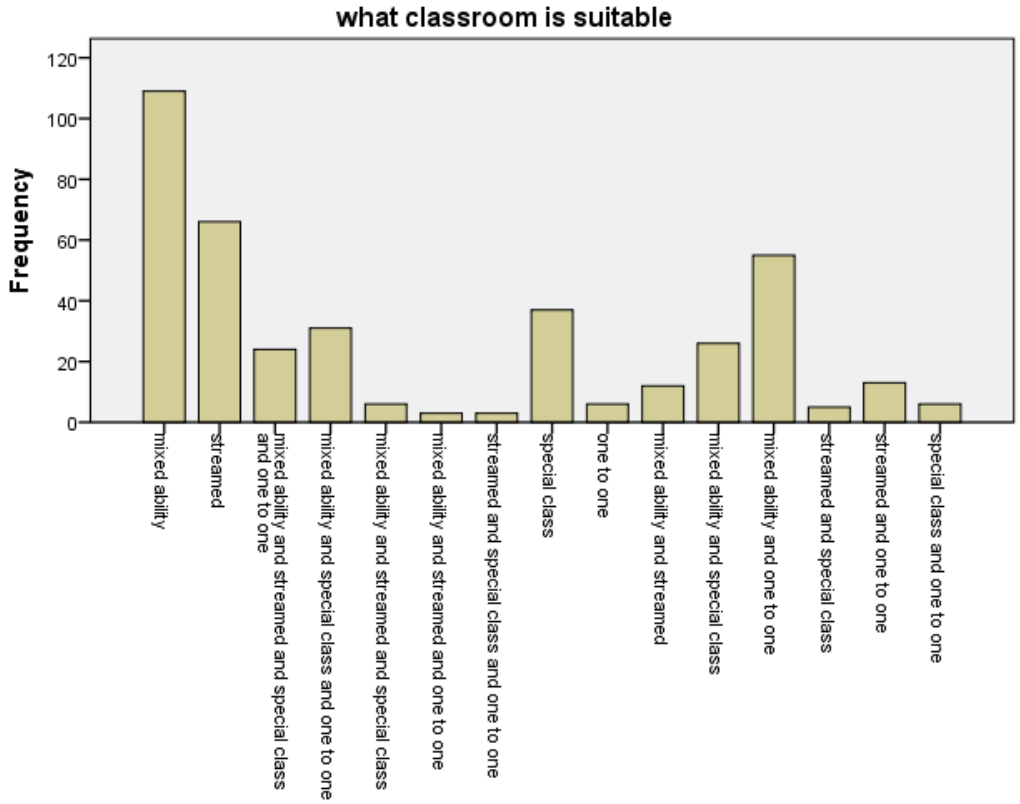


Table 13 shows the data from the second part of this measure, what participates thought of what type of classroom setting is most suitable for those with special educational needs: 27.1% felt a **mixed ability** classroom was best for these students. 16.4% answered **streamed classes** would be best. 13.7% felt that a mixture of **mixed classes** and **one to one** would benefit these students. 9.2% of participants answered **special class**.7.7% ticked 3 options of **mixed**, **special class** and **one to one**. 6.5% ticked **mixed ability** classroom and **special class.** 6.0% ticked **all 4** options of mixed ability, streamed, special class and one to one. 3.2% ticked **streamed** and **one to one**. 3% ticked **mixed** classroom and **streamed.** 1 ½ % felt that these students would benefit from **mixed ability, streamed** and **special class**. 1 ½ % also felt that the best place would be a mixture of a **special class** and **one to one**. 1.2% ticked both **streamed** and **special class** boxes. 0 .7% ticked **mixed ability, streamed** and **one to one.** 0.7% ticked **streamed, special class** and **one to one.**

Table 13 is made up of various different answers from the staff who contributed to this research. There is such a mixture of results that the research will just focus on the top two favourable responses. 27.1% of staff felt a mixed ability classroom would be best for SEN students where as 16.4% answered streamed classes to be the most suitable.

Of the 27.1% of respondents who answered 'mixed ability' as there answer, the biggest percentage of a group came from the Higher Diploma students at 57.9%. The result of this is displayed as follows:

13.1)

What Classroom is best suited for pupils with a SEN (HDips Students)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
mixed ability	11	57.9	57.9	57.9
streamed	1	5.3	5.3	63.2
mixed ability and special class and one to one	1	5.3	5.3	68.4
mixed ability and one to one	5	26.3	26.3	94.7
streamed and one to one	1	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Table 13.1, reflects that 57.9% of Higher Diploma students felt students with a special educational need should be in a mixed ability classroom.

This is important because it collaborate with Lambe and Bones (2006) study of student teacher claiming to support inclusion with 82.2% agreeing that all teachers should experience teaching pupils with special educational needs.

The next most favourable result was the 'streamed' classroom. This is interesting, as it is an on-going debate amongst educators, students and parents. The following shows the results of the highest percentage to answer 'streamed' was in fact management at 30.4%.

13.2)

What Classroom is best suited for pupils with a SEN (Management)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mixed	16	34.8	34.8	34.8
Streamed	14	30.4	30.4	65.2
mixed ability, streamed, special class and one to one	1	2.2	2.2	67.4
mixed ability, special class & one to one	3	6.5	6.5	73.9
special class	2	4.3	4.3	78.3
mixed ability & streamed	1	2.2	2.2	80.4
Mixed ability & special class	2	4.3	4.3	84.8
Mixed ability & one to one	7	15.2	15.2	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0	

Table 13.2 shows that 30.4% of management suggest that SEN pupils should be in streamed classes.

This is a finding for this research and it is even currently topical in the media. In a recent study into the effects of 'streaming' it has shown that students left in a mixed-ability environment actually do better than those who have been grouped according to the hierarchy of test results. The new study, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and

Assessment (NCCA), shows that if you take a student out of mixed-ability education and put them in a 'slow' stream they tend to reach the level of underachievement they feel is expected of them, rather than strive to grasp the topic and re-join the mainstream (Independent.ie29/09/13).

Further to these results it must be worth mentioning that this question found that the special education teachers' most favourable answer to this question was 'special class' at 28.6%. In addition to this quantitative data, the research asked the participants to elaborate if possible after this question. It was important for the research to find the qualitative data to this question as it could collaborate or argue previous literature in this area. The following was noted as the most common opinions that were written down from the contributing staff:

- **43%** commented that it really depends on the ability of each individual student what classroom situation they should be in.
- **15%** felt that inclusion in mainstream classes' and one to one tuition is better for the SEN student.
- **15%** also felt that just mixed classes is better as they benefit more from this environment socially.
- **7%** made the comment that streamed classes are better as they are able to cope more academically.

Overall it is hard to make any concluding comments to this area of the research as seems to be such a divided area. From both the quantitative and qualitative data that was recorded from the survey, The researcher felt it was appropriate to then ask in interview our participants from management, mainstream and special education teacher the following question. Do you believe that some special needs students could be more suited elsewhere either with regards to a different class or perhaps school. The following answers were given:

The participant from the **management** category commented that

……"If I go back to when I started first as a principal there was far more time and resources being given to students…. The problem now though is their clawing those resources back or trying to claw them back"(Alastair, Line 102)

This attitude from the principal interviewee is related to Warnock's (2005) comment of it has ceased to be about what the child needs and has just become a battle for resources.

The **mainstream teacher** spoke of the reality of the situation and how some special needs students are put into mainstream class which is not suitable or effective for the special needs student themselves, their peers and the teacher involved;

….."*I think some students with special needs in classes have very extreme individual needs that are beyond educational needs and would benefit from help outside the school…..I also think a reduced curriculum for some special needs students is a good idea where help can be given with literacy and numeracy"*(Alan, Line 90)

The **special educational needs** teacher came from the point of view of the lack of support been given to these students is making it harder every time resources are cut. She stated the following;

….."*Special needs students in mainstream need to be supported greatly, with some of the cutbacks that are happening this support is being eroded. If this continues then yes I could see a time when a special needs student might do much better in a different setting"*(Aileen, Line 40)

3.6 Other Findings

In addition to all the previous data and findings one issue kept arising from the interviews which does not seem relatable to the main themes looked at, but should be reported all the same as an important finding.

Note- *Certain limitations and obstacles that can make it difficult to implement inclusion.*

Of the four interviews that took place there were views of a similar nature regarding limitation and obstacles that sometimes occur making it challenging to implement inclusion of special educational needs students in the mainstream classroom. The following was noted from each subgroup being asked this question;

Time management

The four candidates that were interviewed mentioned this as an obstacle making it difficult to implement inclusion for SEN students. However even though the word 'time' was used they differed somewhat in their answers in their own specific role.

Taking **management** first, the interviewee felt that management are given a certain allocation of time to cater for students with special educational needs and that because of cutbacks of recent years it is a challenge for management to divide up the hours allocated.

…….'your not using the time to assist them to cope with the subject your using the time just to provide the subject for them because of cutbacks '(Alastair, Line 28)

The **mainstream teacher** who was interviewed spoke somewhat differently in that it depending on each individual SEN student. However the general understanding was that it came down to extra time being needed to prepare the class to involve the special needs student effectively.

*……'I guess for the most part it just requires much more time in the preparation for my lessons…..this as teacher can be hard sometimes'(*Alan, line 31).

The **special education teacher** referred equally to time being an issue. That inclusion of these students will not just happen straight away.

……..'Time and manpower limits inclusion……schools are very busy, classes are large and this is limiting' (Aileen, line 18)

Lastly the **Higher Diploma student** mentioned time in answering also, however it was again slightly different views to the other category of staff. The HDip student felt that due to the lack of training in the course to know how to deal with SEN students in the mainstream classroom there is a sense of pressure to then get the course covered within the school year.

…….'I often get very frustrated with special needs students and I am not sure how to deal with these students in an appropriate manner…..I feel then that I lack in confidence in my ability to teach these students within the given timeframe' (Aine, line 20)

Chapter 4: Conclusion & Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this research was to investigate staff attitudes to special educational needs pupils attending mainstream second-level education in Ireland. Without doubt, the creation of an inclusive learning environment is a challenging task for any school. Participants in this research study have shown us that, while significant progress has been achieved, there remains on-going challenges to implementing fully this type of inclusion in our schools.

There were many key findings that emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative data. The areas which these findings related to included the following:

- Under the Theme Staff Involvement: Policy
- Under the Theme Training, Knowledge & Development: Training
- Under the Theme Staff Need For Information: Information
- Under the Theme Attitude: Overall Attitude
- Other Findings: Time Management Issues

4.1.1 Policy

Taking schools' policies first, our research revealed that although a certain percentage attested to being familiar with their school's individual SEN policy, there was a significant minority of 64 participants who claimed ignorance. The research shows that while some schools had developed policies supportive of inclusion, others appeared to be in the process of developing policies or, worse still, gave the impression there was no policy either in being or in the making. This is an important finding from our research as every school should have a fully developed and coherent SEN policy, having regard to the fact that previous research has shown that this information is vital in encouraging positive attitudes towards inclusive SEN education amongst staff members. A clear written policy disseminated amongst all staff members is the only way of dispelling ambiguity and confusion as to what is expected of all staff members in achieving the education of special needs students.

We know from previous findings that the putting in place of SEN policies aids staff in schools to be positive about the inclusion of SEN students. The lack of a widespread availability to staff members of such policy statements in the schools surveyed tends to suggest that the guidelines for implementing SEN policies are not adequate or, if they are,

that they are not properly in place. There should be a proper structure in place for management to ensure their schools have formulated a comprehensive SEN policy that all staff can readily access and benefit from. Policy is a vital element in enhancing the inclusion of SEN pupils.

4.1.2 Training

It is obvious from our research that there is a serious lack of training and information being provided to our educators on how to teach and include SEN pupils effectively in the mainstream classroom setting. From our findings this seems to be at every level of second level education encompassing management, mainstream teachers, special education teachers and H-Dip students. We can see from the data that staff attitudes suggest that there is not enough training of either a general or specific nature and this is a shortcoming that clearly needs to be redressed.

From previous literature we see the importance of proper training and the implications of how its absence leads to frustration and negative attitudes towards the inclusion of SEN students at every level. Across both the qualitative and quantitative data the findings are linked. We see from the survey data where very high percentages strongly agree that there is not enough training and the qualitative data backs this finding up and provides more context. A key recommendation to flow from this research is therefore that teaching staff should be facilitated in partaking in training days/in-service training sessions focussed on how to deal with SEN students in the classroom. An adequate level of training is not being provided to the educators of students with special educational needs at any level.

A continuous culture of upskilling is present in mainstream teaching, with teachers being expected keep apprised of developments on an ongoing basis. Students with special educational needs deserve no less. Their educators should be provided with the appropriate training and information on best practice in SEN education. The failure to provide these supports to educators will of course lead to frustration and negative attitudes inclusive SEN education.

It was remarkable to observe from the data that a higher diploma student only took one module in SEN education in the entire of the four years that they were in training. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a feeling of total inadequacy when it came to them being placed in classrooms which included SEN pupils.

It is therefore recommended from these findings that staff at every level should be provided with proper training days to ensure that educators know and have confidence in how to address specific issues associated with special needs education and that students with the SEN believe that the staff who are educating them know what they are doing and have a positive attitude towards inclusivity.

4.1.3 Information

Another key finding from this research was the lack of specific information being given at a staff level. The data showed that a majority of staff felt that they were uninformed on specific information regarding students that they encountered in their classrooms. Our results show that staff would welcome access to such information as it could help them in understanding and educating students with a particular SEN. Staff were asked who they thought should deliver this information and the results provided should be considered by schools if efforts are made to implement a greater dissemination of information. Whether it is the SEN co-ordinator or the student's psychologist, someone should be responsible for relaying specific information on individual SEN students to the staff who engage with these students regularly.

4.1.4 Overall Attitude

We can conclude from our findings that staff attitudes towards the inclusion of SEN students are varied. When staff were asked if they felt their school had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of SEN, the majority answered 'yes'. However, looking at the bigger picture and the results of the other findings, we can see how staff would not be totally positive about having students with a special educational need in their classroom, as they feel under trained, uninformed and lacking in directive of policy. Although we cannot say from the results that certain staff have a negative attitude towards the inclusion of SEN pupils, it is reasonable to infer from the findings that staff most likely feel unnecessary pressure from the lack of knowledge on how to include SEN pupils effectively in their classrooms.

4.1.5 Time Management Issues

Lastly, the research threw up the significant finding that time management is a very real issue impacting on the effectiveness of the inclusion of SEN students in the classroom. This appeared to be an area of concern for every member of staff interviewed. It seems to be an obstacle at every staff level in different ways. Any recommendation for resolving such issues would obviously be principally resource based, which is admittedly a tall order in the present climate of ongoing cutbacks in the education sector. It would seem that if the resources and help were given to management and teachers of every discipline, this would alleviate the pressures currently being experienced. The adequate provision of resources and support for both the students and their teachers is essential in order to ensure there is minimum disruption to the school's provision of education to both mainstream and SEN students.

4.1.6 Final Thoughts

The final recommendation arising out of this study is that more research needs to be done in the area, preferably with a geographical spread covering all of Ireland. The fact that over 400 staff members from a limited regional area took the time to participate in this survey clearly evidences a keenness on the part of frontline educators to make meaningful improvements in this area of education. It is clear that the stated government policy of introducing students with special educational needs into mainstream education has not been fully and effectively implemented and that much more work at departmental and local level requires to be undertaken before this objective can be said to have been fully secured.

However, once again, if we believe in education for all we need to surrender the power we hold and work collaboratively to create effective schools and inclusive education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



To whom it may concern

Firstly, we would like to thank you on behalf of the NPSA for your agreeing to participate in this important study relating to special education. The response from most schools in the Cork region has been extremely positive and will be highly beneficial by assisting the NPSA to move forward in improving conditions in the area of special educational needs.

As we are all aware, the ever increasing work load on schools has grown on a yearly basis. Since the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, there has been significant evidence to suggest that the correct training and understanding in the area of SEN has not been given to management and teachers across the country.

Although resource teachers and special needs assistants were hired to aid the process of education for persons with special educational needs, as we know, these resources are being cut back on a weekly basis. The result of this has been that management and mainstream teachers are being left to pick up the additional workload.

We have reason to suspect that, as a consequence of this on-going paring back of resources, parents of SEN students are looking at reverting back to the old model of certain schools being dedicated solely to the provision of special education for their children. Is this the best way forward?

We wish to reassure you that the data collected from this survey will be treated with absolute confidentiality. With the results we hope to prepare proposals as to how to improve the current situation, with the project intended to be completed by this coming November.

By participating in the study, we believe that your school will have contributed to a worthwhile exercise which will hopefully yield dividends for all stakeholders in the educational system and we would again like to thank you and your staff for making the effort.

Warmest Regards.

Moira O'Sullivan. BA, MA.
Dr. Eluska Fernandez. BA,MA, PHD

Appendix 2

1. To which category in your school do you belong:

Management ☐ Mainstream teacher ☐ Special class/Learning support/Resource ☐ H Dip student ☐

2. From the category you come under, please indicate the frequency with which you engage with Special Educational Needs (SEN) students:

Daily basis ☐ Weekly basis ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never ☐

3. Are you familiar with your schools SEN Policy?

Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'no', please give a reason……

4. Have there ever been training days or speakers in the school in relation to SEN?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. In cases where you have been made aware of a student's SEN, have you then been offered/given training/information on how best to educate the pupil?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

6. Most pupils who come under the category of SEN have a psychological report with information and recommendations. As a teacher, do you think you would benefit from access to this information?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'yes', how do you think this information should be delivered?

Management ☐ SEN Co-Ordinator ☐ Year Head ☐ Psychologist ☐ Other ☐ Specify……

7. In your opinion, do you think your school has a healthy attitude towards the inclusion of SEN students?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

If your answer is 'no', what do you believe to be the shortcomings which exist at present?

……

8. Who do you think has the main responsibility for the education of students with a special educational needs?

(you may tick more than one)

Management ☐ SEN department ☐ Mainstream teachers ☐ Other……..

9. What classroom situation do you believe pupils with SEN should be educated in?

(you may tick more than one)

Mixed ability ☐ Streamed ☐ Special Class ☐ One to one ☐

Please elaborate if possible:……

10. Please signal the extent of your agreement to the proposition that 'more training is necessary to provide the best education possible to these students.'

Strongly agree ☐ Somewhat agree ☐ Neither agree/disagree ☐ Somewhat disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

11. Do you believe that mainstream education is the best place for SEN students to be educated in?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☐ Explain why **……**

12. 'The major problem is that most teachers have precious little training or expertise in special education. Teacher training has been considered an important aspect in improving teacher attitudes toward inclusive practice' (Linsay, 2007). Do you:

Strongly agree ☐ Somewhat agree ☐ Neither agree/disagree ☐ Somewhat disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

13. To contribute further to this research, would you be willing to participate in an interview?

Yes	No
☐	☐

If 'yes', please fill in the following details:

Name: **……**

Email: **……**

Tel: **……**

Thank you for your contribution.

Appendix 3

Consent Form

Masters in Social Policy-Mental Health & Disability

School of Applied Social Studies

University College Cork

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. My name is Moira O'Sullivan and I am currently completing my Masters in Social Policy at University College Cork. For my thesis, I have chosen to investigate on behalf of the National Parents and Siblings Alliance, A Qualitative and Quantitative study investigating; Staff Attitudes to Special Educational Needs pupils attending Second Level Education in Ireland. Your part in this study will involve participation in a semi-structured interview regarding your personal views and experiences on this topic. Interviews will last approximately 20-30 minutes and will be recorded for the purpose of accurate transcription. This research has been approved by the School of Applied Social Studies and the NPSA for who the research is being conducted on behalf of. The content of your interview recording and transcript will be held in complete confidence and anonymity in compliance with the Data Protection Act. Please be aware that you are under no obligation to partake in this research study and should you wish to withdraw your participation at any time, you are free to do so. Having read the above information and are willing to proceed with the experiment, please sign your consent below. One signed copy should be kept for your own record. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at the following email address, moira_mos@yahoo.ie or Dr. Eluska Fernandez (supervisor) at efernandez@ucc.ie.

Thank you in advance for your participation and interest.

I _____ (name in block capitals) hereby consent to take part in this study.

The study's goals and purpose have been explained to me and I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Signed _____ Date_____

Appendix 4

Questions for Management:

1) Statement of policy of inclusion: Policy at the moment is that special needs children should be included with their mainstream peers where possible (Government of Ireland, 2004). What's your opinion on that?

2) What does 'inclusion' mean to you?

3) In your opinion, is inclusion implemented effectively?

4) What are the limitations/obstacles in implementing inclusion in terms of your role as management?

5) What do you feel are the disadvantages of inclusion for peers, teachers and special needs students?

6) What do you believe would help schools become more confident in educating SEN students?

7) As management, what do you feel your main role is in the education of SEN students?

8) The majority of management who were surveyed agreed that more training is needed to educate SEN students. Do you agree? And if so how best would training be given?

9) Do you feel management would benefit from a different style of training to teachers?

10) Lastly, do you believe the Irish educational system is doing the absolute best to provide services and support to special needs students?

Questions for Mainstream teacher and special Ed teacher

1) Statement of policy of inclusion: Policy at the moment is that special needs children should be included with their mainstream peers where possible (Government of Ireland, 2004). What's your opinion on that?

2) What does 'inclusion' mean to you?

3) In your opinion, is inclusion implemented effectively?

4) What are the limitations/obstacles in implementing inclusion in terms of your role?

5) What do you feel are the disadvantages of inclusion for peers, teachers and special needs students?

6) How does your teaching style differ when dealing with a child with an SEN compared to children without?

7) Do some special needs children have a more negative impact on your class and your teaching than others?

8) How would you view your relationship with the S.N children that you encounter? What influences this relationship?

9) With regard to the S.N students that you encounter/attend your class, do you believe some would be more suitable elsewhere (different class/or school)?

10) Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt unable to cope with a special needs student? If yes, how do you think this could have been avoided?

Questions for HDip Student;

1) Statement of policy of inclusion: Policy at the moment is that special needs children should be included with their mainstream peers where possible (Government of Ireland, 2004). What's your opinion on that?

2) What does 'inclusion' mean to you?

3) In your opinion, is inclusion implemented effectively?

4) What are the limitations/obstacles in implementing inclusion in terms of your role?

5) What do you feel are the disadvantages of inclusion for peers, teachers and special needs students?

6) How does your teaching style differ when dealing with a child with an SEN compared to children without?

7) Do some special needs children have a more negative impact on your class and your teaching than others?

8) In your training in college do you feel there was sufficient amount of information/training given on how to deal with special needs students?

9) In your work placements, did schools provide adequate information and help on how best to deal with special educational needs students in the classroom?

10)Lastly, as a HDip student do you feel confident teaching SEN students in the future?