

National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

**A Nationwide Study of Challenging Behaviour
in Special Schools in Ireland**

Executive Summary

Volume 1 of 2

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The report was commissioned by the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education.

The report is available as:

- A 25 page summary, *A Nationwide Study of Challenging Behaviour in Special Schools in Ireland, Executive Summary, Volume 1 of 2*, that highlights the core research findings and recommendations.
- A full report, *A Nationwide Study of Challenging Behaviour in Special Schools in Ireland, Volume 1 and Volume 2*.

Copies of the full report and executive summary are available from:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the completion of this research project, very little was known about the extent of challenging behaviour in special schools in Ireland. There was, however, general consensus, that challenging behaviour by pupils in special schools was an increasing problem.

This research was commissioned in order to establish factual data regarding the size of the problem posed by challenging behaviour in special schools. A research team was engaged to carry out extensive research over a 2 year time period. Input was received from 67% of special schools in Ireland. The team investigated the frequency and impact of challenging behaviour and also how schools are equipped to deal with it.

The findings from this extensive research project provide an excellent baseline from which to take steps to address the issues identified. The main findings arising from this research are:

- 31% of pupils in special schools presented with challenging behaviour in the school year September 2002 to June 2003;
- The incidence of challenging behaviour has risen in special schools over the past 5 years;
- Challenging behaviour interferes significantly with the education of both the pupil exhibiting the challenging behaviour and other pupils;
- 66% of Principals indicated that managing challenging behaviour was stressful. In particular, the time pressures involved (81%); additional workload (79%); trying to resolve the situation (80%); and worrying about the welfare of staff involved with challenging behaviour (73%);
- Teachers experience increased stress levels (92%), emotional exhaustion (79%), feelings of hassle and pressure (85%) and difficulty in carrying out job role (72%);
- Challenging behaviour causes injuries to significant numbers of pupils, teachers and special needs assistants on an annual basis;
- Challenging behaviour is creating a difficult atmosphere in classrooms and leads to concerns regarding safety, given the significant incidence of injury currently being sustained by pupils and staff;
- Challenging behaviour has the potential to lead to a significantly increased level of litigation with its associated impact in terms of costs and negative publicity;
- There is no general forum for Principals in special schools to share experiences and information on challenging behaviour or to develop strategies for its management;
- Many special schools in Ireland have pupils attending with a complex mix of special needs in addition to their designated disability category;
- Not only are many schools trying to meet the needs of a heterogeneous population of pupils, they are doing so without the support of clinical/specialist support services. 1 in 3 schools do not have the support of an educational/clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, or physiotherapist;
- Training of all staff including Principals has been identified as a key factor in the future management of challenging behaviour. However, only 40% of special schools offer training of any kind to their staff.
- The importance of parental involvement is a core finding of this research and the training of parents of young pupils in behaviour management would be of benefit.

These findings confirm that changes are urgently required to deal with challenging behaviour. The research team has identified a number of priority recommendations as follows:

- ⇒ A specific policy document on challenging behaviour should be mandatory in all special schools. This should outline accepted policies and strategies for responding to crisis situations, procedures to support staff following an incident, consequences for the pupil(s) involved and parental sign up to policy documents.
- ⇒ It is recommended that the way in which special schools deal with challenging behaviour be standardised in accord with evidence-based strategies. Further investigation into what strategies work with particular populations is required.
- ⇒ It is critical that further study is carried out to better understand the aetiology, development consequences and treatment of challenging behaviour.
- ⇒ Increased input is required from clinical and specialist support services which should focus on the most disruptive elements of challenging behaviour.
- ⇒ Further investigation and analysis is recommended in order to determine the exact nature and profile of staffing required to address the issue of challenging behaviour in special schools. It is critical that this work is given high priority.
- ⇒ In order to monitor the changing profile of challenging behaviour over time, standardised statistics on challenging behaviour should be collected by each school and collated centrally.
- ⇒ It is recommended that further investigation be carried out on how a home/school liaison service could assist in the management of challenging behaviour, particularly in the more difficult cases.
- ⇒ A national forum on challenging behaviour in special schools should be set up to enable the sharing of information, experiences, potential intervention strategies and approaches to training.
- ⇒ It is recommended that each school carry out an audit of training needs. It is vital that there is recognition and assessment within schools, boards of management and the Department of Education and Science of the training needs of special schools to ensure a safe and effective educational environment for all pupils. Further study is needed to assess the effectiveness of international training programmes in dealing with challenging behaviour and their adaptability to an Irish population and across a mix of pupils, behaviours and categories of school.
- ⇒ There is a need for ongoing review of the mix of pupils in special schools. This information needs to be compiled, both within each school and also at a regional and national level. Furthermore, the Department of Education and Science should desegregate their statistics for special schools in the Statistical Annual Report.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Challenging behaviour by pupils has become an increasingly prominent concern for teachers and Principals of special schools in Ireland. There is a general consensus that the frequency and severity of such behaviour has grown within the past several years. As a result, the boards of management of these schools have been faced with a range of problems, including responding to the impact of incidents on pupils and teachers, concerns for the health and safety of pupils and the effects of ongoing challenging behaviour on morale among teachers amongst others.

Recent and proposed changes in legislation and the outcome of several court cases have highlighted the necessity for boards of management to take action to address the issue of challenging behaviour. To date, however, there has been little systematic study of the problem in special schools in Ireland. Reliable and valid data about the nature, extent and impact of challenging behaviour is needed in order to provide a basis for systematic analysis and understanding of the problem.

This study is designed to provide data that will guide the process of developing effective and systematic interventions. It serves as a foundation for understanding the extent and impact of challenging behaviour in special schools and for identifying the resources that are needed to adequately address the issue. The study will enable further projects to be conducted that will examine specific aspects of challenging behaviour in detail and permit the formulation of definitive policy and resourcing recommendations.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 *Review of National Education Statistics*

Special needs education is delivered through special schools, through ordinary schools with special classes and through resource teacher services for children with special needs in ordinary classes.

In 2001/02, there were 16,358 pupils with special needs receiving education in the Irish Education System. This number has grown by at least 43% (4,886) over the past 10 years. (*Source: Department of Education and Science (2002) Statistical Report 2000/01*). It is likely that the number of primary school children with recognised special needs has grown even more since these data were compiled.

Over the past 10 years, the following trends have emerged:

- 42.6% increase in the total number of pupils with special needs
- 160% increase in the number of national schools with special classes.
- 6.8% increase in the number of special schools.
- 14.5% decrease in the number of pupils enrolled in special schools.

The Department of Education and Science has designated 13 categories of special schools. These were grouped into 3 broad groups for the purposes of this study. Table 1 below shows the 13 categories and the 3 broad groupings used as the basis for this research project:

Table 1: Selection of school categories

School Groups*	Number
Group 1: Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability	
1) Mild general learning disability	30
2) Moderate general learning disability	33
3) Severe/profound general learning disability	6
<i>Group 1 Total Number of Schools</i>	69
Group 2: Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance	
4) Severely emotionally disturbed children	15
5) Emotionally disturbed children	1
6) Children with autism	0
<i>Group 2 Total Number of Schools</i>	16
Group 3: Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability	
7) Hospital schools for physically disabled children	6
8) Physically disabled children	7
9) Multiply disabled children	1
10) Hearing impaired children	3
11) Visually impaired children	2
<i>Group 3 Total Number of Schools</i>	19
12) Children with Specific Learning Disability	4
13) Children of Travelling Families	3
<i>Total Number of Schools</i>	111

* March 2003. Department of Education and Science, Directory of Special Schools.

1.3 Aims and outcomes of study:

The aims of the study, which were discussed and agreed with the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) Executive Committee, are to:

- Identify the prevalence and extent of challenging behaviour in special schools in Ireland
- Explore the effect it has on pupils, teachers and management
- Investigate the current methods of intervention
- Establish the perceived needs of management in relation to the resources required to address the issue of challenging behaviour.
- Create a synthesis of recommendations emerging from the results of the study and from a national and international literature review. The aims of the study.

The outcomes of the study are detailed below:

- A profile of the incidence, prevalence and impact of challenging behaviour across all special schools in Ireland.

-
- A typology of challenging behaviour presenting in special schools.
 - A list of the current modes of intervention.
 - Details of the perceived needs of Principals in relation to the training and practical resources required to address challenging behaviour.
 - Rich descriptive data providing a meaningful understanding of the impact of challenging behaviour from a variety of perspectives.
 - Recommendations which will provide a framework for assisting in the development of challenging behaviour interventions in special schools.
 - A research report submitted to the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education.
 - Dissemination of results of the study, through publication conference presentation.

2 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Approach

The study was carried out in two phases.

Phase one consisted of distributing a questionnaire to all Principals of special schools (N=111) across the Republic of Ireland. Phase 1 was completed by June 2003.

In phase two a stratified random sample of 12 schools was selected to participate in detailed interviews and focus groups. These were carried out with Principals, school boards of management and individual teachers from the selected schools. The majority of interviews were conducted in the period January – March 2004.

The definition and categories for measuring challenging behaviour and the development of a questionnaire were guided by an extensive literature review. Development was carried out in three steps as outlined below.

2.1.1 Step 1: Definition of challenging behaviour.

A definition of challenging behaviour was selected from a variety of definitions existing in the literature. Harris, Cook and Upton's (1996) definition of challenging behaviour, was found to be the most relevant to studies of challenging behaviour in special schools and has been used by other studies in this field. This states that challenging behaviour is:

“Behaviour, within the context of your school, which prevents participation in appropriate educational activities; often isolates children from their peers; affects the learning and functioning of other pupils; drastically reduces their opportunities for involvement in ordinary community activities; makes excessive demands on teachers, staff and resources; places the child or others in physical danger; and makes the possibilities for future placement difficult.”

(Harris, Cook and Upton, 1996).

2.1.2 Step 2: Challenging behaviour matrix

A matrix of challenging behaviour types was developed (see Table 2 below) in order to categorise the incidence, prevalence and severity of particular types of challenging behaviour. The construction of the matrix involved compiling categories and definitions of challenging behaviour types presented in a number of research studies.

Table 2: The challenging behaviour matrix

THE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR MATRIX		
Categories		Examples of Behaviour Displayed
1	Self Injurious Behaviour:	Skin picking or peeling, scratching, pinching. Cutting, biting, head/body banging, punching, slapping, hitting, kicking self against others and objects. Digit chewing, eye gouging, hair pulling, stuffing fingers in body openings, mouthing, eating inedible objects, self induced vomiting, deliberate breath holding.
2	Aggressive behaviour that physically harms others:	Pinching, biting, scratching others. Punching/slapping/pushing or pulling. Kicking, Head butting people. Pulling hair. Choking/throttling. Using objects as weapons against people (e.g. knife or other hand held object). Throwing things at people. Tearing other people's clothes.
3	Non-compliance:	Lying down, disobedience, non co-operation, resistance to teaching or contact with adults. Refusing to do things.
4	Disruptive, Nuisance or Threatening behaviour to others:	Shouting, screaming, swearing, verbal abuse and curses. Gestures or threatens harm. Mocking, sneering, deriding, personal targeting. Distracts, teases, pesters (repetitive), argues, interrupts, obstructs, nonsensical verbalisations. Set off fire alarm, taking food and/or drink from others. Hyperactivity, unpredictable behaviour.
5	Absconding:	Wandering within internal environment or unsupervised area. Running away, trying to, or, absconding from facility.
6	Psychological Disturbance:	Emotional instability, low frustration tolerance, wants excessive praise and resents attention to others.
7	Ritualistic/ Stereotypical behaviour:	Ritualistic (e.g. closes/opens doors, rearranges furniture, hoards rubbish) and stereotypical behaviour (e.g. body rocking, finger tapping, hand waving).
8	Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour:	Stripping. Inappropriate exposure of body, masturbation, sexual advances. Unsafe sexual behaviour and practices.
9	Destruction of property:	Damage to property or school objects. Defaces, vandalises or destroys things e.g. tears, cuts, burns throws objects.
10	Socially Inappropriate behaviour:	Defecating, smearing and, deliberate urinating. Soiling, wetting or vomiting when upset, distressed or agitated. Self induced regurgitation. Stealing, spitting and inappropriate eating habits and eating things (eg rubbish, faeces, objects).
11	Substance and alcohol abuse:	Drinking alcohol-cider, beer, spirits on school premises and within school hours. Use of solvents (gas, glue), marijuana (grass, pot) or cannabis (hash, hash oil).
12	Temper tantrums:	Outbursts of bad temper or petulance.
13	Passive challenging behaviour:	Glaring, refusing to respond, averting gaze, isolating themselves, withdrawal.

2.1.3 Step 3: Questionnaire

A questionnaire, entitled '*Challenging Behaviour in Special Schools in Ireland Questionnaire*' (Kelly, Carey & McCarthy, 2003), was developed. Both the definition of challenging behaviour (Harris et al 1996) and the challenging behaviour matrix acted as a reference to help Principals answer questions that related to challenging behaviour types.

3 PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

A high response rate (67%) was achieved with 74 special schools out of the 111 schools listed in the Irish Directory of Special Schools, responding to the questionnaire (see Table 3).

Table 3: Number of special schools surveyed and response rates within each school category

School Groups	No. of schools surveyed (Irish Directory of Special Schools, March 2003)	No. of questionnaires Returned	% Response Rate
Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability	69	45	65
Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance	16	12	75
Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disabilities	19	11	58
Children with a Specific Learning Disability	4	3	75
Children of Travelling Families	3	2	67
Unknown Category of School ¹		1	
Total	111	74	67

Note 1: One school which responded to the questionnaire did not specify its' designated category of special school and therefore could not be grouped for presentation and analytical purposes.

Table 4: Numbers of special schools, direct staff employed and pupils enrolled.

School Groups:	No of schools involved in survey	No of direct staff employed*	Pupils enrolled
Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability	45	1,408	2,799
Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance	12	231	320
Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability	11	281	471
Children with a Specific Learning Disability	3	43	192
Children of Travelling Families	2	13	120
Unknown Category of School	1	3	13
Total	74	1,979	3,915

* Teachers, classroom assistants, special needs assistants, bus escorts, care workers, nurses

3.1 Profile: General characteristics of special schools

- It was found that 61% of special schools in this study were located in city and suburban areas, a further 22% in small towns and 17% in large towns.
- Most special schools (80%; n=59) surveyed have a pupil enrolment of less than 80 pupils and the remaining (20%; n=15) have 81-160 pupils.
- The majority of schools (68%; n=50) have a pupil population with a variety of special needs not officially catered for by the official designation of the school. Therefore most special schools are educating pupils who have special needs outside of their designated school category.

3.2 Profile: Pupils enrolled

- The total number of pupils enrolled across the 74 schools is 3,915 with 72% of these enrolled in *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*.
- Of the total number of pupils, 61% are male, with males predominating in all school categories except *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability*.
- 41% of pupils are aged between 3 and 11 years, while 59% are aged between 12 and 19 years. The largest numbers of pupils are between 16 and 18 years. *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* do not reflect this overall trend with the majority of pupils in this group aged between 3 and 11 years.
- 58% of Principals indicated that trends in enrolment have either increased or remained the same.
- 39% of Principals reported an increase in the number of male pupils in special schools, while 46% reported a decrease in the numbers of female pupils.
- Out of the 73 schools who responded, only 32% (n=23) indicated that the designated category described the special needs appropriately. This study found that 50 out of the 73 schools (68%) have some pupils attending with more than one type of special need.

3.3 Profile: Staff employed in participating special schools

Teachers, special needs assistants and classroom assistants together make up 78% of staff in special schools, with the vast majority employed on a full time basis (see Table 5).

Table 5: Number and percentage of staff employed in each position.

Employment Position	No of staff	%
Teachers	770	39
Classroom Assistants	127	6
Special Needs Assistants	658	33
Bus Escorts	326	17
Care Workers	29	2
Nurses	69	3
<i>Total Staff</i>	1,979	100

4 FINDINGS

The findings arising from this research project are grouped according to the outcomes agreed with the NABMSE Executive Committee at the outset. These outcomes were agreed as follows:

- A profile of the incidence, prevalence and impact of challenging behaviour across special schools in Ireland;
- A typology of challenging behaviour presenting in special schools;
- A list of current modes of intervention;
- Details of the perceived needs of Principals in relation to the resources required to address challenging behaviour.

4.1 A profile of the incidence, prevalence and impact of challenging behaviour across special schools in Ireland

Principals were asked to provide information on challenging behaviour over 3 time periods: (1) the school year Sept 2002-June 2003, (2) trends for the past 5 years [1998-2003] and (3) a 4-6 week time period. Findings here confirm that challenging behaviour is a significant issue for all special schools.

4.1.1 Incidence and prevalence of challenging behaviour

- It was found that 1,155 of the 3,694 pupils (31%) enrolled in the 70 participating schools presented with challenging behaviour from Sept. 2002-June 2003.
- In *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance*, the prevalence was 73% of pupils enrolled, while 37% of pupils in *Schools for Children of Travelling Families*, 29% in *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*, and 18% in *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability* and *Schools for Pupils with Specific Learning Disability* had displayed challenging behaviour in the preceding year.
- In *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance*, 74% (n=196) of males enrolled displayed challenging behaviour and 67% (n=38) of the females enrolled showed challenging behaviour. In *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*, 23% (n=226) of females enrolled and 51% (n=850) of males enrolled presented with challenging behaviour.
- Across all school groups at least 70% of the pupils who presented with challenging behaviour were male, with the exception of *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability* where 54% were male and in *Schools for Pupils with Specific Learning Disability* where only male pupils presented with challenging behaviour.
- Overall 57% of pupils who presented with challenging behaviour were aged between 12 and 19 years and 43% aged between 3 and 11 years. Variations in age and gender patterns of pupils displaying challenging behaviour were observed across all school groups.
- 56% of schools indicated that the number of pupils who presented with challenging behaviour had increased over the last 5 years, while only 4% reported a decrease.
- In terms of total pupil enrolment in special schools, the prevalence of challenging behaviour was estimated at 24% in the preceding 4-6 week period with the highest incidence (67%) in *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance*.

4.1.2 *Impact of challenging behaviour*

Principals rated how disruptive challenging behaviour was to school activities in the school year September – June 2003.

- Over 58% rated challenging behaviour as very disruptive or disruptive to the learning of pupils, personal development of pupils, school curriculum and carrying out of teaching duties.
- There were a total of 404 staff and 471 pupils physically injured as a result of challenging behaviour. The number of teachers injured was 117 (13% of all injured persons) and the number of special needs assistants injured was 241 (28% of injured persons). Serious injury was sustained by four teachers and three special needs assistants with one special needs assistant experiencing very serious injury. The remainder of injured staff sustained moderate to minor injury.
- There were 471 pupils injured as a result of challenging behaviour, 289 were ‘other’ pupils (33%) and 182 (21%) were pupils with challenging behaviour. Some 463 pupils suffered minor to moderate injuries. There were 6 serious injuries and 2 very serious injuries.
- Overall 66% (n=39) of Principals indicated that managing challenging behaviour was stressful.
- 73% (n=27) of Principals in *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability* indicated that managing challenging behaviour was stressful.
- 81% of Principals reported stress, due to the time pressure involved in dealing with incidents of challenging behaviour.
- A majority of Principals (92%, n= 66) indicated that incidents of challenging behaviour increased stress levels for teachers; 85% felt teachers were feeling hassled and under pressure; 79% felt emotional exhaustion was an effect of challenging behaviour, and 85% were concerned about classroom disruption affecting other pupils.
- Many Principals (88%, n=76) indicated that the loss of classroom learning hours, general upset, anxiety and engaging in similar behaviours were the effects of challenging behaviour on other pupils not presenting with challenging behaviour. In *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*, 93% of Principals indicated that loss of classroom learning hours was an effect on other pupils, 75% in *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* and 73% in *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability*.

4.2 **The most common and difficult challenging behaviours**

- In a 4-6 week period, three particular challenging behaviour types occurred in over 80% of special schools: (1) non-compliance, (2) aggressive behaviour that physically harms others and (3) disruptive, nuisance or threatening behaviour to others.
- These three behaviours occurred in at least 37 out of 42 *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*, in at least 8 out of 11 of the *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* and in 5 out of 9 *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability*.
- In *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* three additional behaviours occurred in 10 out of the 11 schools that responded. These are (1) self-injurious behaviour, (2) psychological disturbance and (3) passive challenging behaviour.
- The top five challenging behaviours rated as unmanageable or managed with difficulty were (1) aggressive behaviour that physically harms others, (2) disruptive, nuisance or

threatening behaviour to others, (3) temper tantrums, (4) self-injurious behaviour and (5) psychological disturbance.

- Principals rated the most difficult behaviours to manage in a 4-6 week period as follows: aggressive behaviour that physically harms others followed by self-injurious behaviour and disruptive, nuisance and threatening behaviour to others.
- The behaviours rated as least difficult to manage over the 4-6 week period were passive challenging behaviour, non-compliance and ritualistic/stereotypical behaviour.

4.3 A list of the current methods of intervention

Research in this area explored the following:

- Typical methods of reporting, recording and managing challenging behaviour;
- Adequacy of school policies and procedures that relate to challenging behaviour;
- Consequences for pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour.

Results show that there are differences in how special schools in Ireland report, record, and respond to challenging behaviour.

4.3.1 Typical methods of reporting and recording challenging behaviour

- Results showed that a third (n=25; 37%) of the schools that responded (n=68) reported all incidents of challenging behaviour to the Principal. Two thirds (n=43; 63%) of schools reported incidents only if the behaviour was of a serious nature, if the behaviour was disruptive or if the teacher could not cope with the behaviour.
- Analysis of the methods for recording incidents showed that two thirds of schools reported challenging behaviour in incident report forms or incident books. Details required in these incident reports varied across schools.
- Outlined in Principals' responses were the actions taken when a report is written, which included contacting parents, board of management, clinical support services, and devising recommendations and strategies to deal with the challenging behaviour.
- There was some variation in how the reports were written up.
- Responses indicated that where incidents are not written up formally, contact may be made with parents and discussions may take place with the pupil and staff involved and with other support staff.

4.3.2 Adequacy of school policies and procedures

- Results showed that the vast majority of schools (83%) have policies for dealing with challenging behaviour and that nearly two thirds of Principals indicated that policies were adequate or very adequate.
- 75% of Principals have guidelines or accepted strategies for responding to crisis situations. Two thirds of these Principals indicated that these strategies are adequate or very adequate, with 35% indicating that they were not adequate.
- 64% (n=44) have a set of procedures to support staff, following a challenging behaviour incident, with 56% rating these as adequate or very adequate.

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- Some 54% (n=38) have a documented set of consequences for students when they display challenging behaviour, with 69% rating them as adequate or very adequate.
 - Some 41% of Principals indicated that parents had signed up to these set of consequences/disciplinary policies while 58% of Principals indicated that parents had not signed up to them.
 - In the vast majority of schools, 90% of teachers; 97% of Principals and 74% of boards of management were involved in the development of policies on challenging behaviour.
 - In 32 (53%) schools, parents and clinical support staff were not involved in their development.

4.3.3 Consequences for pupils who present with challenging behaviour

- Analysis of the consequences for pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour showed that the majority of Principals (between 67% and 85%) indicated the following typical consequences for challenging behaviour:
 - Staff discussion about future strategy;
 - Consultation with clinical services;
 - Involvement of parents/guardians;
 - 1/1 time with Special Needs Assistants;
 - Loss of privileges;
 - Isolation from peers.
- Between 44% and 49% indicated the pupil was:
 - Put out of the classroom;
 - Sent to another classroom;
 - A further 29% reported suspension from school as a typical consequence.
- 34% of Principals found it necessary to exclude pupils from school, with a total of 127 pupils being excluded in the school year Sept 2002- June 2003. Over 85% were excluded on a short-term basis (that is for one week or less) and 17 pupils across 11 schools were excluded on a long-term basis (longer than one week).

4.4 Details of the perceived needs of Principals in relation to the resources required to address challenging behaviour

Findings in this section look at Principals' responses to the following:

- The current numbers of staff who provide direct support;
- Additional school staff required to deal with the management of challenging behaviour;
- The current availability of clinical /specialist support services and future requirements;
- Current and future training and practical resources required to manage challenging behaviour.

4.4.1 Current numbers of staff who provide direct support

Table 6: The overall number and percentage of staff in each employment position across school groups.

Employment Position	Schools Overall (n=74)		Intellectual Disability (n=45)		Emotional Disturbance (n=12)		Physical/Sensory Disability (n=11)		Specific Learning Disability (n=3)		Children of Travelling Families (n=2)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
N=no of staff	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers	770	39	530	38	79	34	129	46	23	53	7	54
Classroom Assistants	127	6	92	6	9	4	18	6	6	14	1	8
Special Needs Assistants	658	33	496	35	74	32	72	26	11	26	5	38
Bus Escorts	326	17	247	18	33	14	44	16	2	5	0	0
Care Workers	29	2	1	0	22	10	6	2	0	0	0	0
Nurses	69	3	42	3	14	6	12	4	1	2	0	0
<i>Total Staff</i>	1,979	100	1,408	100	231	100	281	100	43	100	13	100

One school did not specify its designated category of school, its staff (n=3, 2 teachers ft and 1 classroom assistant ft) are included in the figures for special schools overall only.

- The total number of staff employed in the schools surveyed was 1,979. Of these, 77% were employed on a full-time basis.
- Teachers (n=770), special needs assistants (n=658) and classroom assistants (n=127), together make up 78% (n=1,555) of the staff employed in special schools. Some 82% of teachers are employed on a fulltime basis, 92% of special needs assistants and 98% of classroom assistants are also employed on a full time basis.
- Bus escorts make up 17% (n=326) of the staff complement, with about half employed on a full-time and half on part-time basis.
- Care workers and nurses make up 5% (n=98) of the total staff employed. Of those within this group who indicated employment status, more than half, 52% (n=36) of nurses and 59% (n=17) of care workers indicated they are employed on a full time basis.
- There are more care workers (n=22, 10% of staff numbers) in *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* than any other school group. *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability* (n=6) and *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability* are the only other school groups who employ care workers.

4.4.2 Additional school staff required to deal with the management of challenging behaviour

- Principals were asked to indicate how many additional staff were required for the effective management of challenging behaviour. They estimated that 252 additional school staff are needed mostly on a full time basis as follows:
 - 83 more special needs assistants
 - 48 more classroom assistants are required.

- 51 more teachers are required as follows: 39 in *Schools for Pupils with Intellectual Disability*; 4 in *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance*; 5 in *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability*; 1 in *Schools for Pupils with Special Learning Disability* and 1 in *Schools for Children of Travelling Families*.
- 12 more care workers
- 15 more nurses
- 43 more bus escorts
- Principals also indicated the need for ‘other staff’ such as home school liaison staff, music, drama, art, play/sports teachers and behaviour therapists.

4.4.3 *The current availability of clinical /specialist support services and future requirements*

Table 7: Specialist/clinical support services available

Specialist/Clinical Support Services Available	
Social Worker	Physiotherapist
Educational Psychologist	Psychiatrist
Clinical Psychologist	Medical Officer
Speech & Language Therapist	Mobility Officer
Occupational Therapist	Other

- A significant number of special schools do not have any support from key clinical/specialist support staff, including:
 - 19 (35%) schools have no support from an educational psychologist;
 - 24 (39%) have no support from a psychiatrist;
 - 23 (38%) have no support from an occupational therapist;
 - 19 (31%) have no support from a physiotherapist,
 - 17 (30%) have no support from a clinical psychologist;
 - 14 (21%) schools do not have the support of a social worker;
 - 17 (24%) schools have no speech and language therapy support.
- Four *Schools for Pupils with Emotional Disturbance* do not have the support of an educational psychologist. Two *Schools for Pupils with Physical and Sensory Disability* do not have the support of a physiotherapist.
- 15 Principals indicated that there were sanctioned posts within their schools, which had not been filled.
- Results show a variation in the frequency of specialist/clinical support services that are delivered to special schools. Some professional support services are delivered at least once a week, while other services are delivered predominantly once a month or on a consultation basis.
- Principals indicated the need for more support (see Table 8), this includes the need for 40 more sanctioned posts, from all support services:

- 74% needed more support from Educational Psychologists;
- 65% needed more support from Psychiatrists;
- 55% needed more support from Speech and Language Therapists;
- 53% needed more support from Social Workers;
- 51% needed more support from Clinical Psychologists;
- 46% needed more support from Occupational Therapists.

Table 8: The number of special schools needing more support from specialist/clinical support services to manage challenging behaviour.

Specialist/Clinical Support Services (n=no. of special schools overall and in each group who responded) (N=no. of schools):	Special Schools Overall		Intellectual Disability		Emotional Disturbance		Physical & Sensory Disability		Specific Learning Disability		Children of Travelling Families	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Social Worker (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 2)	38	53	25	56	5	45	3	30	3	100	2	100
Educational Psychologist (n=72: 45, 11,10, 3, 2)	53	74	38	84	5	45	5	50	3	100	2	100
Clinical Psychologist (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 2, 2)	37	51	24	53	6	55	3	30	2	67	1	50
Speech & Language Therapist (n=71:44, 11, 10, 3, 2)	39	55	32	73	4	36	1	10	1	33	1	50
Occupational Therapist (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 3)	33	46	29	64	3	27	0	0	0	0	1	50
Physiotherapist (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 2)	23	32	23	51	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Psychiatrist (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 2)	47	65	34	76	6	55	4	40	1	33	2	100
Medical Officer (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 2)	14	19	12	27	11	100	2	20	0	0	0	0
Mobility Officer (n=72: 45, 11, 10, 3, 2)	5	7	4	9	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0

4.5 Current and future training and practical resources required to manage challenging behaviour

Principals were asked to identify the practical resources required to manage challenging behaviour. Principals' views were sought regarding the need for staff training, intervention programmes in challenging behaviour, parental involvement, equipment, and space in their schools. Principals were then asked to indicate the numbers of staff who had specialised training in the management of challenging behaviour and whether their school offered such training and how often it was delivered. Principals' perceptions of particular training techniques and strategies in the management of challenging behaviour were also sought. Finally, Principals were asked to describe the current enabling factors and barriers to providing an effective educational environment for children who presented with challenging behaviour.

4.5.1 Practical resources required to manage challenging behaviour

- 88% (n=64) of schools indicated that they required staff training in dealing with challenging behaviour and a further 82% (n=60) indicated the need for training in challenging behaviour intervention programmes.
- 49% (n=36) of Principals indicated the need for parental involvement. A further 47% indicated the need for time out rooms; 45% more spacious general surroundings and 36% more spacious classrooms. A school gym was requested by 16 schools (23%). 4 schools required more furniture, 6 schools required strengthened fitments and 8 schools required protective equipment.
- For 60%(n=41) of Principals, staff training in how to deal with challenging behaviour was ranked as being the most important resource needed, followed by challenging behaviour intervention programmes and parental involvement.

4.5.2 Training in how to deal with challenging behaviour

- Principals indicated that 20% of total staff had received specialised training in dealing with challenging behaviour.
- Analysis of the types of staff in special schools who have specialised challenging behaviour training revealed that only 53% or 36 Principals had specialised training; 30 schools (44%) had some teachers with specialised training and 30 schools had some special needs assistants and classroom assistants with specialised training.
- In contrast, 56% of schools did not have teachers or classroom/special needs assistants with specialised training in dealing with challenging behaviour. In over 90% of schools, no care workers or classroom assistants had training in challenging behaviour.
- Only 40% of special schools offer challenging behaviour training to their staff. Most of these schools deliver it on an occasional basis only.

4.5.3 Training required to benefit staff in managing challenging behaviour

Principals identified areas of training, interventions and strategies that would benefit their staff:

- Principals identified positive programming (78%), de-escalation strategy (78%), crisis intervention techniques (76%) and stress management techniques (76%) as being important.

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- Principals believed training in counselling techniques (58%), functional analysis (55%), physical restraint technique (49%) and collaboration between teachers and special needs assistants (47%) would benefit their staff.
 - Curriculum adaptations and breakaway techniques were viewed by about 35% of Principals to be of benefit.

4.5.4 A description of the training required to benefit Principals

Some 92% of Principals indicated that specific training would be of particular relevance and benefit to them including:

- Staff support, staff management, debriefing of staff and team building.
- Assertiveness training - particularly in building relationships with parents and dealing with aggressive and conflict situations with parents who do not understand the nature and effects of challenging behaviour on the child, school and community.
- Training in policy development including, challenging behaviour, discipline and restraint guidelines.
- Seminars linking Principals with other professionals in relevant fields.

4.5.5 Enabling factors and barriers to providing an effective educational environment for pupils who present with challenging behaviour.

Enabling factors identified by Principals are as follows:

- Adequate physical environment
- Adequate staffing levels
- Effective communication internally and with parents
- Appropriate and effective interventions policies and strategies.

Barriers were identified as follows:

- Inadequate physical environment
- Inadequate staffing levels
- School management issues, in particular lack of time for Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) and team meetings
- Lack of staff training
- Lack of parental involvement.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings above provide objective and systematic data about the nature, extent and impact of challenging behaviour. The main conclusions arising are:

- Challenging behaviour in special schools in Ireland presents a significant problem. The study indicates that 31% of pupils in special schools presented with challenging behaviour in the school year 2002-2003.
- The incidence of challenging behaviour in special schools has increased over the past 5 years [1998-2003].
- Challenging behaviour interferes significantly with the education of both the pupil exhibiting the challenging behaviour and other pupils.
- Significant numbers of pupils, teachers and special needs assistants are injured because of challenging behaviour on an annual basis.
- 66% of Principals indicated that managing challenging behaviour was stressful, in particular due to the time pressures involved (81%), additional workload (79%), trying to resolve the situation (80%), and worrying about the welfare of staff involved with challenging behaviour (73%).
- Teachers experience increased stress levels (92%), emotional exhaustion (79%), feelings of hassle and pressure (85%) and difficulty in carrying out their job role (72%). Principals are concerned that this may lead to burnout of staff faced with persistent challenging behaviour, with the potential for high levels of staff attrition.
- Challenging behaviour is creating a difficult atmosphere in classrooms and leads to concerns regarding safety given the significant incidence of injury currently being sustained by pupils and staff.
- Challenging behaviour has the potential to lead to a significantly increased level of litigation with its associated impact in terms of costs and negative publicity.
- There is no general forum for Principals in special schools to share experiences and information on challenging behaviour and develop strategies for its management.
- Many special schools in Ireland have pupils attending with a variety of special needs. Awareness of the variety of special needs of individual pupils and mix of complex needs within school categories must be taken into consideration in the allocation of resources by the Department of Education and Science.
- One figure of particular concern in the allocation of clinical and support services is that 1 in 3 schools do not have the support of an educational/clinical psychologist or psychiatrists. The implication of this finding is that many schools trying to meet the needs of a heterogeneous population of pupils without the support of clinical/specialist support services.
- Results show a severe dearth of training across 60% of schools. The finding that only 40% of special schools offer training of any kind to their staff is of particular concern. Training of all staff has been identified as a key factor in the future management of challenging behaviour.
- Special needs assistants are at particular risk of injury from challenging behaviour but the majority have no formal training in this area.
- Qualitative feedback from Principals indicated that a strategic 'whole school approach' to training would prove most beneficial in the management of challenging behaviour.

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- Principals themselves have identified the need to receive more training in managing challenging behaviour. The development of specific training courses is vital to address the concerns outlined by the Principals for the effective management of challenging behaviour and the management of staff, pupils and parents attending special schools. Male and Male (2001) found similar results and emphasised the importance of training for head teachers. Additionally, they found mentoring in the first two years of taking up a new post as Principal by an experienced Principal from a similar type school of considerable benefit.
 - The importance of parental involvement is a core finding of this research and the training of parents of young pupils in behaviour management would be of benefit. Mulrooney et al. (1998) comment on early training of parents, before the pattern of challenging behaviour has been established. Many programmes are currently on offer in health services across the country such as '*Incredible Years Programme*' and '*Parents Plus Programmes*'.
 - The Positive Behaviour Support Model for addressing challenging behaviour on a school wide basis seems particularly relevant for special schools and should be examined as a potential solution.
 - Concerns relating to maintaining a best practice model, its implementation involving all staff need to be addressed.
 - In addressing challenging behaviour, the importance of adequate home schools liaison resources was highlighted by many Principals.
 - Adequate physical environment was identified as one of the top enabling factors in providing an effective environment for pupils presenting with challenging behaviour. 45% of Principals indicated the need for additional physical resources (school gym, time out room, more spacious classroom).
 - The results of this study support studies carried out by IATSE (2000) and INTO (2002) in the need for more accessible and flexible access to special education needs training for teachers.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendation: Further study of challenging behaviour

Given the extent of challenging behaviour identified, it is critical that further studies are carried out to better understand the genesis, development, consequences and treatment of challenging behaviour. These would include:

- Longitudinal studies tracking the incidence of individual pupils who display challenging behaviour, focusing on the severity and type of behaviour and the success of interventions. Extreme behaviours, exhibited by pupils should be recorded and reviewed on a regular basis as often low incidence behaviour can be of a more threatening nature;
- Studies identifying the aetiology and development of challenging behaviours;
- Comparative studies reviewing international experience and successes in managing challenging behaviour;
- Further studies incorporating staff and family perspectives on challenging behaviour policies and procedures need to be conducted;
- In-depth studies focusing on particular sub-groups within special schools' system in Ireland;
- Studies that focus on low-incidence but high-impact challenging behaviour (e.g. assault with a weapon);
- A cost analysis of challenging behaviour should be conducted given the prevalence rates and the wide range of impacts on all aspects of school management. This could include costs of: the number of teachers, special needs assistants and Principal hours involved in managing incidences of challenging behaviour; the loss in hours due to injuries and hours lost in the education of other pupils etc. This would benefit future school planning and would be a good basis for conducting a cost-benefit as well as cost effectiveness analysis of training and intervention programmes.

6.2 Recommendation: Direct and support services

- Increased input is required from clinical and specialist support services and should focus on the most disruptive elements of challenging behaviour.
- It is recommended that further investigation and analysis be carried out to determine the exact nature and profile of staffing requirements to address the issue of challenging behaviour in special schools. It is critical that this work is given high priority.
- The mechanism for allocation of clinical/specialist support services to special schools is not currently well understood. This issue needs to be clarified and should in the first instance be brought to the attention of the National Council for Special Education and Special Need Organisers.
- Schools should carry out a yearly audit of their changing resource needs, with an emphasis on resources required to manage challenging behaviour. The audit should incorporate the findings of this study by collating data under the following headings:
 - Allocation of direct staff
 - Specialist clinical support services
 - Environmental resources
 - Types of training required.

6.3 Recommendation: Training

- The need for training of all staff has been identified as a key factor in the future management of challenging behaviour. It is vital that there is recognition and assessment within schools, boards of management and the Department of Education and Science of the training needs of staff in special schools to ensure a safe and effective educational environment for all pupils.
- It is recommended that school management devote time to building a culture of support among all staff members. Furthermore, it is recommended that the provision of Employment Assistance Programmes are made available to staff as required. This is supported by Mulrooney et al. (1998) who emphasised the need for staff support following incidents of challenging behaviour.
- It is recommended that the Department of Education and Science explore the development of a programme of training seminars on the new *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004* and also on the *Education Welfare Act 2000*.
- Further study is needed to assess the effectiveness of international training programmes in dealing with challenging behaviour and their adaptability to an Irish population and across a mix of pupils, behaviours and categories of schools.
- School boards of management, through the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education, should address the issue of in-service training for special needs assistants and classroom assistants. A basic training package developed in association with Principals and other management bodies would be of benefit. Mandatory training for all special needs assistants should be considered.
- The provision of on-going in-service training should also be considered for all staff in special schools in association with NABMSE and other management bodies.
- There is a need to provide training for teachers at initial, induction and in-career levels in dealing with challenging behaviour.
- Further studies on the role, qualifications, training and support of special needs assistants are required.
- NABMSE needs to bring the issues of lack of training and whole school approaches to organisations that can address these issues, such as; 3rd level colleges, National Council for Special Education, Special Needs Organisers, the DES In-Career Development Unit and Special Education Support Service.
- Wider consideration of professional development for Principals including mentoring, shadowing and buddy systems, which have been shown to be effective.

6.4 Recommendation: Parental involvement

- Principals identified parental involvement as one of the top three enabling factors in the provision of an effective educational environment. Most Principals commented on the importance of parental involvement and effective relations with parents.
- Home/school liaison services are not allocated to special needs schools in Ireland. It is recommended that further investigation be carried out into how a home/school liaison service could assist in the management of challenging behaviour, particularly in the more difficult cases.
- More training is required for all staff in dealing with and communicating with parents.

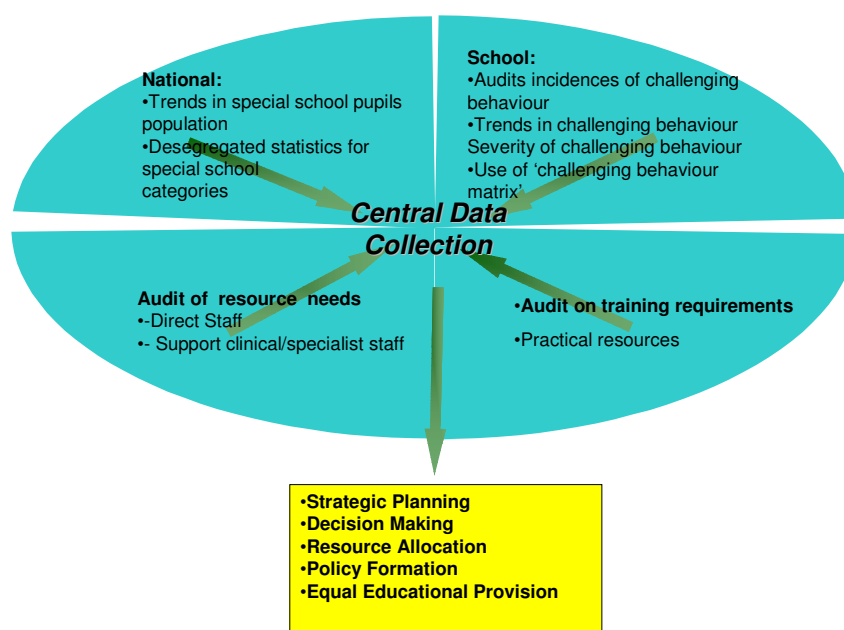
6.5 Recommendations: Nationwide statistics and curriculum

The majority of schools (68%) have a pupil population with a variety of special needs not officially catered for by the official designation of the school. Most special schools are educating pupils who have special needs outside of their designated school category. The following suggestions are recommended:

- Ongoing review of the mix of pupils in special schools. This information needs to be compiled both within each school and also at the regional and national level.
- The Department of Education and Science should desegregate their statistics for special schools in the Statistical Annual Report. This should include a breakdown for each special school category, detailing the variation in enrolment size, gender and age profiles across all categories of special schools in Ireland.
- The provision of a flexible school curriculum to meet the diverse needs of pupils attending special schools is critical. A review of the flexibility of school curriculum by the Department of Education and Science, in particular for moderate and severe and profound intellectual disability is recommended. It is equally critical that teachers are involved from the outset in the reform and redevelopment of curricula. Carpenter (1997) points out the necessity of the involvement of classroom teachers in these activities.
- Longitudinal studies of the pupil populations of special schools are required in order to monitor trends, to facilitate long term planning and evaluate interventions. This is also supported by (Male 1996).
- In order to monitor the changing profile of challenging behaviour over time, standardised statistics on challenging behaviour should be collected by each school and collated centrally.
- Consideration of systematic data collection particularly of audit data relating to the incidence of challenging behaviour (see Model 1 below).

Model 1 – Challenging behaviour data tracking system

Model 1 – Challenging Behaviour Data Tracking System



6.6 Recommendation: Standardised policies and guidelines

- A specific policy document on challenging behaviour should be mandatory in all special schools outlining, accepted policies and strategies for responding to crisis situations, procedures to support staff following an incident, consequences for the pupil involved and parental sign up to policy documents. This policy should include:
 - How schools identify and make provision for pupils with challenging behaviour;
 - How resources are allocated to and amongst pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour;
 - How schools enable pupils with challenging behaviour to engage in activities with pupils who do not show challenging behaviour;
 - How boards of management evaluate the success of the schools' work with pupils with challenging behaviour;
 - The boards of managements/Principals' arrangements for dealing with complaints from
 - Parents of other pupils affected by challenging behaviour
 - Parents of pupils with challenging behaviour
 - Staff affected by challenging behaviour.
- Best practice guidelines on reporting incidences of challenging behaviour should be identified. The method of writing up incidents should be standardised across all schools.
- Boards of management to develop systems and procedures for risk assessment particularly in relation to the management of challenging behaviour.
- The way in which special schools deal with challenging behaviour be standardised according to evidence-based strategies. Further investigation into what strategies work with particular populations is required. It is recommended that in devising intervention strategies to deal with challenging behaviour, attention be paid to the intervention strategies suggested by Harris (1995). These included:
 - Help the pupil to establish positive relations with one adult.
 - Formalise judgements about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour using a system of rewards.
 - Introduce planned activities matched to pupils' strengths and weaknesses.
 - Focus on teaching language and communication.
 - Encourage language and communication for meeting individual needs in everyday settings.
 - Help the child to anticipate the sequence of daily events and activities.
 - Provide opportunities for the pupil to opt out of activities.
 - Convey adult expectations clearly and provide consistent feedback.
 - Ensure that all staff are aware of new methods of working.
 - Provide a written protocol that describes how to respond to each challenging behaviour.
- A legal framework for developing a positive approach to challenging behaviours would benefit Principals and School Boards of Management.

6.7 Recommendation: Forum on challenging behaviour

At present there is no formal mechanism in place to share knowledge and experiences in the management of challenging behaviour. There are also no formal links in place with experts in other countries (e.g. UK) to keep Irish Principals and school boards abreast of latest research, training and new developments. This report identifies many gaps in the availability of supports and services to special schools. It is recommended that a national forum on challenging behaviour in special schools is set up to enable the sharing of information, experiences, potential intervention strategies and approaches to training.