

**An Exploration of Factors Influencing the Transfer of Pupils
with Mild General Learning Disabilities from Mainstream
Schools to Special Schools for Pupils with Mild General Learning
Disabilities.**

Pauline Kerins

B.Ed; B.Sc (Psych); HDip SEN; M.Ed

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education,

St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.

A College of Dublin City University

December 2011

Supervisor: Dr. Therese Day

Auxiliary Supervisors: Dr. Zita Lysaght

Dr. Margaret O'Donnell

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Pauline Lewis

ID No: 56272821

Date: 21/5/2012

Table of Contents

List of appendices	vi
List of tables	viii
List of figures	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Emerging trends	1
1.2 Chapter overview	1
1.3 Problem statement	2
1.4 Research aim and questions	3
1.5 Rationale for study	4
1.6 Focus and purpose of this research	5
1.7 Overview of policy development	8
1.8 Special schools for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities – recent trends	12
1.9 Scope and limitations of research	14
1.10 Structure of thesis	14
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 An Interpretive paradigm	15
2.2.1 Relativist ontology	16
2.2.2 Subjectivist epistemology	17
2.2.3 Naturalistic methodological procedures	17
2.3 Positivist and post-positivist paradigms	18
2.4 Dilemmas of difference	21
2.4.1 Macro-level analysis	22
2.4.2 Micro-level analysis	24
2.5 Summary	27
2.6 Conclusion	28
Chapter 3: Literature Review	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Inclusion and dilemmas of difference - setting the context	30
3.3 Mild General Learning Disabilities – identification and categorization	33
3.3.1 Mild General Learning Disabilities and additional needs	33
3.3.2 Mild General Learning Disabilities and socioeconomic status	36
3.3.3 The purpose of Mild General Learning Disabilities as a category	37
3.3.4 Summary	38
3.4 Inclusion of pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities - issues of placement	39
3.4.1 Profile of pupils in special schools for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities	39
3.4.2 Educational provision in mainstream schools	41
3.4.3 Issues of placement in the context of a policy of inclusion	42

3.4.4 Summary	45
3.5 Curriculum and pedagogy	45
3.5.1 Curriculum issues at primary level	46
3.5.2 Post-primary curriculum provision	47
3.5.3 Access to the curriculum for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities	49
3.5.4 Curriculum reform at junior cycle level	51
3.5.5 Pedagogy for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities	52
3.5.6 Teacher education and professional development	53
3.5.7 Policy and change in mainstream schools	55
3.5.8 Summary	56
3.6 Parental perspectives on educational provision in mainstream and special schools	57
3.6.1 Parents' views on special educational provision in Ireland	59
3.6.2 Access to mainstream schools	61
3.6.3 Parent-professional relationships	62
3.6.4 Summary	64
3.7 Transfer from mainstream to special schools	65
3.7.1 Pupils' perspectives on educational provision in mainstream and special schools	65
3.7.2 Reasons for transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools in Ireland	67
3.7.3 Summary	70
3.8 Summary and Conclusion	70
Chapter 4: Methodology	73
4.1 Introduction	73
4.2 The researcher	73
4.3 Interpretive paradigms and perspectives	74
4.4 Strategies of inquiry	75
4.4.1 Ethical issues	76
4.4.1.1 Initiation	77
4.4.1.2 Benefits	78
4.4.1.3 Representation	79
4.4.1.4 Legitimation	80
4.4.1.5 Accountability	81
4.5 Data collection and analysis	82
4.5.1 Selection of the case	82
4.5.2 Description of cases	82
4.5.2.1 Case A	82
4.5.2.2 Case B	83
4.5.2.3 Case C	84
4.5.2.4 Case D	84
4.5.3 Description of mainstream schools	85
4.5.3.1 Mainstream primary schools	86
4.5.3.2 Mainstream post-primary schools	87
4.5.4 Research participants	88
4.5.4.1 Criteria for selection of participants	89
4.5.5 Stages in data collection	89

4.5.5.1 Stage 1 – Piloting the study	90
4.5.5.2 Stage 2 – Data collection for case study	92
4.5.5.3 Procedure for data collection in special schools	92
4.5.5.4 Procedure for data collection in mainstream schools	95
4.5.6 Analysis of data	96
4.5.6.1 Phase 1 – Generating categories and initial themes	97
4.5.6.2 Phase 2 – Comparison and merging of categories and themes across cases	98
4.5.6.3 Phase 3 - Generating proposition statements (memos)	98
4.5.6.4 Phase 4 – Merging of themes	99
4.5.6.5 Cross-case analysis	99
4.6. The art, practices and politics of interpretation and evaluation	101
4.7. Summary of chapter	102
Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis	103
5.1 Introduction	103
5.2 Theme 1: Additional special educational needs	104
5.2 .1 Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	105
5.2.1.1 Emotional and behavioural difficulties	105
5.2.1.2 Social difficulties	107
5.2.2 Summary of findings in relation to theme of additional needs	108
5.3 Theme 2: Curriculum	109
5.3.1 Difficulties with curriculum in primary schools	109
5.3.2 Differentiation of curricula in mainstream and special schools	111
5.3.3 Life and social skills development	114
5.3.4 Curriculum and assessment in mainstream post-primary schools	115
5.3.5 Certification for pupils in special schools	118
5.3.5.1 Certification in cases A, C and D.	118
5.3.5.2 Certification in case B	120
5.3.6 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of curriculum	121
5.4 Theme 3: Supports for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities in mainstream and special schools	122
5.4.1 Supports and resources in mainstream primary schools	123
5.4.1.1 Access to resources	123
5.4.1.2 General Allocation Model	124
5.4.1.3 Support in mainstream classes	125
5.4.2 Access to resources in mainstream post-primary schools	126
5.4.3 Supervision in post-primary schools	127
5.4.4 Resources and supports in special schools	129
5.4.4.1 Expertise in special schools	129
5.4.4.2 Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support in special schools	130
5.4.4.3 Placement at 18 years of age	131
5.4.5 Theme 3 – Sub-theme 1: Difficulties arising from SNA support in mainstream schools	133
5.4.5.1 Dependence on resource teachers and SNA	

support in mainstream primary schools	133
5.4.5.2 Resentment of special needs assistant support in mainstream schools	134
5.4.6 Theme 3: Sub-theme 2: Support for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	135
5.4.7 Summary of findings in relation to supports and resources in mainstream and special schools.	137
5.5 Theme 4: School structure and organization	139
5.5.1 Class size in mainstream primary schools	139
5.5.2 School structure in mainstream post-primary schools	140
5.5.3 School structure in special schools	141
5.5.4 Summary of findings in relation to schools structure and organisation	143
5.6 Theme 5: Choice	143
5.6.1 The decision-making process	144
5.6.2 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of choice	148
5.7 Theme 6: Transition to special schools	148
5.7.1 Pupils' experience of the transfer process	149
5.7.2 Difficulties experienced by parents in the transfer process	150
5.7.3 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of transition to special schools	151
5.7.4 Subtheme – Stigma	151
5.7.5 Summary of findings on the sub-theme of stigma	152
5.8 Summary of findings	153
Chapter 6: Discussion of findings	155
6.1 Introduction	155
6.2 Summary of theoretical framework	155
6.3 First key finding – additional needs	157
6.3.1 Support for pupils experiencing Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in mainstream and special schools	157
6.3.2 Social isolation of pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities in mainstream schools	158
6.3.3 Policy dilemmas – the placement dilemma	160
6.4 Second key finding – Access to curriculum	161
6.4.1 Access to curriculum in primary schools	161
6.4.2 Access to the curriculum for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities at post-primary level	163
6.4.3. The curriculum dilemma	165
6.5 Third key finding – Supports and resources in mainstream and special schools	166
6.5.1 General allocation of resources in mainstream primary schools	166
6.5.2 Identification dilemma	167
6.5.3 Resource allocation in mainstream post-primary schools	169
6.5.4 SNA support in mainstream and special schools	170
6.5.4.1 Difficulties arising from special needs assistant support in mainstream schools	171

6.5.5 Post-school outcomes for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities	171
6.5.6 Dilemmas of difference	172
6.6 Fourth key finding - school structure and organisation	173
6.6.1 The placement dilemma	174
6.7 Fifth key finding – choice	174
6.7.1 The parent-professional dilemma	175
6.8 Summarising dilemmas and policy frameworks	177
Chapter 7: Reflections, summary and implications	179
7.1 Introduction	179
7.2 Reflections on the research process	179
7.2.1 Reflections on the theoretical framework	180
7.2.2 Reflections on the research design	181
7.2.2 Reflections on the data collection process	182
7.2.3 Reflections on data-analysis	182
7.2.4 Limitations of research	183
7.3 Summary of key findings	184
7.4 Implications of findings for policy	187
7.4.1 Resource allocation for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities	187
7.4.2 Curriculum and policy implications	189
7.4.3 Pedagogy, teacher education and policy implications	190
7.4.4 Policy implications for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities and additional needs	191
7.4.5 The role of parents and pupils in decision-making processes	192
7.4.6 Dilemmas of difference and a policy of inclusion	193
7.5 Future research	195
7.6 Concluding remarks	196
References	198
Appendices	216

List of appendices

<i>Appendix A:</i>	Interview Schedule Principal Special Schools	216
<i>Appendix B:</i>	Interview Schedule for Teachers in Special Schools	217
<i>Appendix C:</i>	Interview Schedule Pupils	218
<i>Appendix D:</i>	Interview Schedule-Parents	220
<i>Appendix E:</i>	Schedule for Interview (Principal Mainstream Primary School)	221
<i>Appendix F:</i>	Schedule for teacher's interview (Mainstream Primary)	222
<i>Appendix G:</i>	Interview with principal/deputy principals in post-primary schools	223
<i>Appendix H:</i>	Letter to Board of Management of Special school seeking consent to conduct research	224
<i>Appendix I:</i>	Consent Form	226
<i>Appendix J:</i>	Letter to principal of special school requesting consent to conduct research	228
<i>Appendix K:</i>	Letter requesting principal of special school participation	230
<i>Appendix L:</i>	Criteria for pupil participation	231
<i>Appendix M:</i>	Letter requesting participation of teacher in special school	232
<i>Appendix N:</i>	Letter requestion parent participation in interview	233
<i>Appendix O:</i>	Letter to parents requesting pupil participation	234
<i>Appendix P:</i>	Letter to pupils requesting assent to participate	235
<i>Appendix Q:</i>	Pupil's Consent Form	236
<i>Appendix R:</i>	Imported Transcripts	237
<i>Appendix S:</i>	Initial Coding	238
<i>Appendix T:</i>	Emerging categories and themes within each case	239
<i>Appendix U:</i>	Merging and comparison of categories and themes across cases	240
<i>Appendix V:</i>	Themes linked to research questions	241

<i>Appendix W:</i>	Generating proposition statements	242
<i>Appendix X:</i>	Merging themes across cases	243

List of tables

Table 1:	Six Normative Models of Administrative Justice	24
Table 2:	Age range of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD	40
Table 3:	Summary of cases	85
Table 4:	Description of mainstream schools	86
Table 5:	Number of participants involved in study by group	88
Table 6:	Stages in the data collection process	90
Table 7:	Data collection from parents according to school and location	94
Table 8:	Summary of qualitative terms	101

List of figures

Figure 1:	Conceptual Framework	28
Figure 2:	Template for coding in this multiple case-study approach	100
Figure 3:	Themes and sub-themes	104

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Therese Day, for her support, advice and guidance throughout this research process. Her encouragement and direction is greatly appreciated and I have learned a great deal which I hope will guide me in future research and also in my own role as supervisor to others engaged in the research process.

I would also like to thank my auxiliary supervisors, Dr. Zita Lysaght and Dr. Margaret O'Donnell, for their guidance, support and the benefit of their experience of this process.

I am indebted to the schools, including teachers and principals, who agreed to participate in this research and to the parents and pupils who kindly gave of their time to share their stories with me.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues in St. Angela's College, Sligo, without which I would not have been able to undertake this study.

I would like to thank my family and friends, particularly Therese Ryan, for their support. I wish to thank you, Micheál, for your love and support and for living every moment of this with me over the past four years.

Abstract

A policy of inclusion is based on values of equality, participation and the right of all pupils to an education appropriate to their needs. However, a values-based policy such as inclusion can prove problematic when values appear to contradict one another and tensions, or dilemmas, arise. Policy based on equality of access and participation, and on the provision of an education appropriate to the needs of the individual, can create difficulties in terms of its implementation. The increase in the number of pupils with special educational needs enrolling in mainstream schools over the last ten years demonstrates a desire by parents to have their children educated in a mainstream environment with their peers. However, a trend has developed in recent years whereby some pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) are leaving mainstream primary and post-primary schools and transferring to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

The aim of this study is to explore factors which influenced the transfer of a cohort of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD, from the perspectives of key stakeholders in the transfer process. These include teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools, as well as pupils with MGLD and parents. The study also aims to identify differences in educational provision between both sectors. The role played by the stakeholders in the transfer process is also examined in order to explore issues related to power in decision-making processes with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. A multiple case study design was employed, with four special schools for pupils with MGLD participating as cases in this study. All participants were interviewed and a theoretical framework, incorporating macro and micro levels of analysis, was designed to guide interpretation of data.

The findings indicate that a number of factors influenced the transfer of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. These included social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools, dissatisfaction with resources and supports in mainstream schools and issues relating to school structures and organisation. Differences in provision between mainstream and special schools for pupils with MGLD were identified in each of these areas. The findings also indicate that parents and pupils played a subordinate role in the decision-making process regarding the transfer to special schools.

This study is timely in light of recent policy developments in special education. Inconsistencies in policy with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD are identified and the findings illustrate how conflicting policy frameworks create confusion and uncertainty for teachers, pupils and parents.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Emerging trends

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream primary and post-primary schools has been one of the key policy aims of education in Ireland from the latter stages of the twentieth century to the present day. Inclusion represents a broad and significant social and political value commitment (Norwich, 2008a) whereby pupils with SEN, who in the past were excluded from mainstream educational provision, have the right to receive an education appropriate to their needs. While successive governments, both nationally and internationally, have demonstrated their commitment to furthering inclusive educational policies, a new trend has emerged in the Irish context which warrants further investigation. This new trend is evidenced in the increasing numbers of pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) leaving mainstream schools and enrolling in special schools for pupils with MGLD, at approximately twelve years of age.

1.2 Chapter overview

This chapter sets the context for this study by describing the problem statement and the rationale for undertaking research in the area of educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The research aim and questions are stated and this is followed by an outline of the purpose and scope of the study. An overview of policy development in this area provides the background to the study. Limitations of the study are then addressed and the chapter concludes with a guide to the structure of remaining chapters.

1.3 Problem statement

In Ireland, pupils with MGLD represent over two-thirds of all children with SEN in mainstream primary schools (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). While there is no current database of pupils with MGLD in mainstream post-primary schools, statistics, provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2010a), indicate that approximately 20% of all pupils allocated additional teaching hours in mainstream post-primary schools in 2010 were pupils with MGLD. A recent study of the transfer of pupils aged 12 and over, from mainstream to special schools, found that 75% of pupils who enrol in special schools for pupils with MGLD are in this age range (Kelly & Devitt, 2010). This suggests that many of these pupils are transferring to special schools rather than going to mainstream post-primary schools and raises a number of questions in relation to the reasons pupils are transferring at a time when educational policy advocates inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. It may be considered a surprising development given the context of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (Government of Ireland, 2004), which enshrined in law the right of all those with SEN to be educated in an inclusive environment with their peers.

A report by the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies (NFVB, 2006) highlights concern over the prevalence of transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools and identifies two key recurring factors in these instances, including a lack of appropriate support in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and the challenges posed in the transition from primary to post-primary schools. The report suggests that pupils with SEN receive inadequate levels of social, behavioural and academic support in mainstream schools. Among the challenges identified in relation to the transition from mainstream primary to post-primary schools are difficulties finding placement, social exclusion and issues relating to structures

and curriculum at post-primary level. Similarly, Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study of the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools indicates that there is a number of reasons pupils transfer, including academic difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and difficulties related to physical and health issues. Kelly and Devitt's findings in relation to social difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream schools echo those of Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008). Shevlin et al.'s exploratory study of special educational provision in Ireland indicates that some pupils transfer from mainstream to special schools to foster and develop social inclusion which is not always successfully achieved in mainstream schools. It would seem therefore, that there are a number of potentially complex and interacting factors which may influence the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools. These factors warrant further investigation in relation to the transfer of pupils with MGLD.

1.4 Research aim and questions

The aim of this study was to investigate factors which influenced the transfer of a cohort of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD from the perspectives of pupils, parents, principals and teachers in mainstream primary, post-primary and special schools. This study also aimed to examine perspectives on aspects of educational provision in mainstream primary, post-primary and special schools which contributed to the decision to transfer. The role of parents, pupils and the professionals involved in the decision to transfer pupils to special schools for pupils with MGLD was interrogated in order to explore power relations between these groups. In order to provide an in-depth study on the perspectives of parents, pupils, principals and teachers on reasons for transfer and the context in which this occurs, a qualitative multiple case study design was employed. Four special schools for pupils with MGLD participated, as cases, in this study. The research questions

which frame this study sought to identify reasons why pupils transferred from mainstream to special schools. The four broad questions underpinning the study are as follows:

1. What factors influence the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD?
2. What are the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers and principals on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools?
3. What are the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers and principals on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in special schools for pupils with MGLD?
4. What role do parents, pupils and professionals play in the decision-making process regarding the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD?

1.5 Rationale for study

Pupils with MGLD represent a significant proportion of the population of pupils considered to have SEN. Despite this, a recent audit of research in the field of special education in Ireland highlights a lack of research in relation to this group in comparison to other categories of learning disability (Travers, Butler & O'Donnell, 2011). Norwich and Kelly (2005) suggest that this may be partly due to issues relating to the definition and categorisation of MGLD, which has proved to be contentious (Fletcher-Campbell, 2005; Tomlinson, 1982). Stevens and O'Moore (2009) conducted research on the inclusion of pupils with MGLD in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes in Ireland over the past twenty years. In their nationwide exploratory study, they identify some of the challenges and difficulties associated with educational provision for these pupils including the increasing isolation of special schools and poor levels of inclusive practice in mainstream primary schools.

The current study addresses issues specifically related to the reasons why pupils transfer from mainstream to special schools. This study is timely and significant in light of recent policy developments in special education in relation to the inclusion of pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools, including the decision by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to close over 100 special classes for pupils with MGLD (Travers, 2009). Moreover, this study is linked to broader issues of inclusion and the role of special schools in that process.

My interest in this area of research stems from my experience as a teacher in a special class for pupils with MGLD, in mainstream classes and in resource settings in mainstream primary schools. More recently, my experience has been in teacher education as a lecturer in a college of education. This role has allowed me to support teachers in their professional settings in special and mainstream schools. It is hoped that this study raises awareness of the experiences of pupils, their parents, and their teachers with regards to present educational provision for MGLD.

1.6 Focus and purpose of this research

Two key Irish studies have been identified in this chapter which are particularly relevant to the context of the present study. Of these, Stevens and O'Moore's (2009) longitudinal study is the only nationwide study which focuses solely on educational provision for pupils with MGLD. Their study presents evidence based on insights from resource and learning support teachers in mainstream primary schools and teachers in special schools for pupils with MGLD. Stevens and O'Moore (2009) argue that mainstream primary schools are ill-prepared to cope with the implementation of a policy of inclusion. A number of barriers to inclusion of pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools are identified as systemic shortcomings within the system and these include a lack of appropriate structures, absence of

policy in relation to the role of special schools and classes and a lack of knowledge and professional development amongst teachers in mainstream and special schools. Stevens and O'Moore (2009) are particularly critical of the General Allocation Model (GAM) of resource allocation in mainstream primary schools, as there is currently no record of the number of pupils with MGLD receiving support under this model. Resources are allocated directly to primary schools rather the previous system of resource allocation to individual pupils based on category of need.

While Stevens and O' Moore's study represents the views of resource teachers, learning support teachers and teachers in special classes for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools, the views of teachers, or principals, in mainstream post-primary schools are not represented. As the majority of pupils who transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD do so at the end of their mainstream primary education, this highlights the need to examine issues relating to the educational provision for pupils in mainstream post-primary schools in order to identify reasons pupils are not continuing their education in the mainstream system. The views of mainstream class teachers in mainstream primary schools are also particularly relevant as they are at the very centre of the inclusion process. The current study offers a further contribution to the literature on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in Ireland by investigating the views of principals and/or deputy principals in mainstream post-primary schools and those of class teachers and principals in mainstream primary schools.

The second key study identified is Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study of the reasons pupils, aged 12 and over, leave mainstream schools and seek enrolment in special schools. Their study examines this phenomenon based on a sample representing ten different categories of special school. 54 special schools participated in their study and 17 of these were special schools for

pupils with MGLD. Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study provides a comprehensive insight into the reasons why pupils aged 12 and over transfer from mainstream to special schools and identifies academic and social difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream schools among these reasons. The perspectives of parents, pupils, principals and teachers in special schools were sought in their study. However, the perspectives of teachers and principals in mainstream primary and post-primary schools were not sought and, as key stakeholders in the provision of education for pupils with MGLD, their perspectives on the transfer process are crucial.

The inclusion of mainstream schools in research in this area is particularly important as the transfer process is initiated in the context of the mainstream school attended by pupils. Teachers and principals in these schools are central to the decision-making processes involved. Teachers and principals in mainstream schools also provide an insider perspective on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools which enables comparisons to be made between both sectors. While the findings of Kelly and Devitt's study represent ten different categories of special school, the current study focuses on the transfer process in the context of special schools for pupils with MGLD only. The perspectives of teachers and principals in mainstream primary, post-primary and special schools are investigated, as well as those of the parents and pupils involved. The current study asks not only why pupils transferred, but seeks to identify the key players in the decision to transfer a pupil from a mainstream to a special school for pupils with MGLD.

The findings of the two studies discussed here (Kelly & Devitt, 2010; Stevens & O'Moore, 2009) highlight challenges in relation the inclusion of pupils with MGLD in the areas of curriculum, placement and categorization. Questions are raised in relation to the reason pupils

with MGLD transfer to special schools and in relation to educational provision for these pupils, and these questions form the basis of the current study. A policy aim of inclusion in mainstream schools appears to be failing for those pupils who leave the mainstream system in favour of special schools. In order to set the context for this study on the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream to special schools, it is necessary to trace the development of policy with regard to educational provision for this group.

1.7 Overview of policy development

Up until the latter part of the 20th century, there was no discernable state policy in relation to provision of special education and it was left to religious orders to provide services. In 1965, the Report of the Commission of Enquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) made recommendations that education for pupils with MGLD should be provided mainly in special schools and special classes. There was a subsequent increase in the number of special classes established in mainstream schools and this recommendation marked the beginning of a policy shift, particularly in relation to pupils with MGLD, influenced by a new discourse on special education which was emerging internationally. In the U.K., the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science, 1978) and the subsequent 1981 Education Act, provided a framework for the integration of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The practice of integration was officially addressed in an Irish policy document for the first time in a White Paper on Education (DES, 1980) and one of the more significant outcomes of policy development at this time was the decision that no further special schools were to be established for pupils with MGLD (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009).

The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established in 1991 to review, and make recommendations for, the provision of education for children with SEN. The Committee outlined seven principles which it stated should serve as basic guidelines for the future development of the system and which should be considered in the development of an Education Act (DES, 1993). These principles included the right of all children to an appropriate education, the importance of individual needs as the basis for provision, the right of parents to be involved in the decision-making process, a continuum of provision and the requirement that the state provide adequate resources to ensure appropriate provision. The SERC Report (DES, 1993) estimated that 5,500 pupils with MGLD were enrolled in primary and post-primary special classes and special schools in the school year 1990/1991. In the absence of an official database, the Report estimated that a further 699 pupils were attending mainstream primary schools in ordinary classes. The Report identified gaps in provision, curriculum development and teacher education. It made specific recommendations regarding the education of pupils with MGLD, including a recommendation to expand special class provision in mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

Internationally, a policy discourse was emerging which reflected the principles and values of a rights-based movement towards inclusion. Article 28 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child referred to the right of all children with disabilities to an education responsive to their individuality (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2004). However, it was the powerful impact of the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994) which stimulated change at an international level. Representatives of 92 governments, including Ireland, agreed the Salamanca Statement on the education of disabled children and adopted a new Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994). This rights-based perspective signalled the emergence of a

policy of inclusion which would have a significant impact on services provided by special schools.

The 1998 Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) represented a legally binding recognition of the right of all children to receive an education appropriate to their needs in the school of their parents' choice. A policy of inclusion was developing at an unprecedented rate, the consequences of which were beginning to impact on special schools, including those for pupils with MGLD. According to the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), the profile of pupils attending special schools began to change with pupils presenting "with a variety of secondary difficulties or with multiple difficulties" (INTO, 2002, p. 8) and schools were concerned about their capacity to meet their obligations under the Education Act to provide an appropriate education to these pupils. The INTO also referred to a lack of development of the SERC (DES, 1993) recommendations in relation to a continuum of provision. Rather than developing links between mainstream and special schools, policy development seemed to be focused on inclusion in mainstream schools. Stevens and O'Moore (2009) highlight the fact that in the period from 1999 to 2003, no DES circulars were issued to special schools while mainstream primary schools received a number of circulars in relation to allocation of resources, including teachers and special needs assistants (SNA). During this period the number of pupils attending special schools for pupils with MGLD continued to decline while there was an increase in those attending mainstream primary schools. According to the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD), the number of pupils with MGLD receiving the support of resource teachers in mainstream schools increased from 26 in 1996 to 283 by 2004, while the numbers attending special schools decreased from 2813 to 2039 during the same period (Kelly, Kelly and Craig, 2007; Mulvany, 2000).

In 2004, the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) enshrined in law the right of all children with SEN to be educated in “an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs” and their right to “avail of and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers” (p. 5). This rights-based legislation was significant in the context of special schools for a number of reasons. Firstly, inclusion was defined in terms of the right to placement in mainstream schools and the role of special schools was unclear in the context of this interpretation. Secondly, the recommendation of the SERC Report (DES, 1993) for a continuum of provision seemed to be at odds with the direction policy was taking with the emphasis on right of access to mainstream schools. The Act provided a statutory basis for the NCSE, which assumed responsibility for the allocation of resources. The Act also enshrined in law the right of parents to be actively involved in the assessment process and subsequent formulation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which signalled the introduction of a policy of individualisation. The introduction of an individualised approach to provision marked a change from a system of labelling, or group categorisation of children, in order to receive resources (NCSE, 2006).

The DES introduced a new system of resource allocation in 2005 (DES, 2005a) to mainstream primary schools which was of particular significance to pupils with MGLD. A system of general allocation of resources, commonly known as the GAM, replaced the previous system of individual allocation based on category of need. MGLD was described as a high incidence disability, along with borderline MGLD and specific learning disabilities. Schools were empowered to allocate additional teaching resources to pupils in the high incidence category in a flexible manner based on each pupil’s individual needs. Because schools no longer needed to apply for resource allocation for pupils with MGLD, the need to seek the categorisation of these pupils through psychological assessment no longer existed,

resulting in a decrease in the number of pupils registered in this category. The number of pupils with MGLD registered as receiving additional support in mainstream primary schools fell from 283 in 2004 to 116 in 2007 (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). Currently, the NCSE no longer accepts requests for the individual allocation of resource teaching hours for pupils with MGLD. However, as the GAM only applies at primary level, post-primary schools continue to apply to the NCSE for additional teaching support for pupils with MGLD. In 2009, 19% of applications granted by the NCSE for additional teaching support, and 9% of applications for access to an SNA, at post-primary level were allocated to pupils with MGLD (NCSE, 2009).

More recent policy development has been heavily influenced by economic considerations. In 2008, the implementation of sections of the EPSEN Act (2004) relating to assessment and IEPs was deferred indefinitely as a result of budgetary cutbacks across the education sector. There was a decrease in the number of pupils in special classes for pupils with MGLD between 2004/2005 and 2008/2009 (Kelly & Devitt, 2009) and, in February 2009, the DES indicated its intention to close 128 special classes for pupils with MGLD. This development would seem to indicate that preference towards a two-track system of educational provision is developing rather than a continuum of provision for pupils with MGLD. The choice of provision for many pupils with MGLD is now between special schools and mainstream classes, with the majority opting for mainstream provision.

1.8 Special schools for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities – recent trends

The development of a policy of inclusion has impacted on all special schools including those for pupils with MGLD. The concerns of teachers working in special schools in Ireland are highlighted in a 2006 report entitled *Special Schools in Transition* (McCarthy

& Kenny, 2006). These concerns relate to the increase in numbers of pupils aged 12 and over attending special schools. Concern was also expressed about the lack of clear policy in relation to the future role of special schools, which resulted in a fear amongst staff that schools would close, and a feeling of isolation and unease in terms of future policy development. Although this report did not focus specifically on special schools for pupils with MGLD, the results were representative of the views of teachers across the sector. The recommendations of the report include the need for a broad interpretation of inclusion and clarity in relation to the role of special schools in the context of policy development.

Currently there are 30 special schools for pupils with MGLD in Ireland, the majority of which are situated in urban areas (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). There is evidence that many pupils attending have complex or additional needs. A study of challenging behaviour in Irish special schools (Kelly, Carey & McCarthy, 2004) found that 68% of schools, which responded to the survey, had some pupils attending with more than one type of special need. Similarly, Stevens and O'Moore (2009) report that 71% of teachers in special schools surveyed in their study felt that either all, or most, of their pupils had additional needs. These studies indicate that special schools for pupils with MGLD are now catering for pupils with MGLD of predominately post-primary age, the majority of whom transferred from mainstream schools. It would also appear that many of the pupils attending special schools in Ireland have complex or additional needs. This raises questions about the ability of mainstream primary and post-primary schools to provide adequate support for these pupils and highlights the need to identify factors which influence the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream primary and post-primary schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The aim of the current study was to identify these factors.

1.9 Scope and limitations of research

This study was limited by the time frame allowed for data-collection and completion of the research. While the perspectives of the key stakeholders in the transfer process were investigated in this study, this is not to say that there are not other stakeholders who have information to contribute including SNAs, psychologists, speech and language therapists, or other groups involved in educational provision for pupils with MGLD. However the groups chosen were deemed to represent the key stakeholders in decision-making processes regarding educational provision for pupils with MGLD.

1.10 Structure of thesis

This chapter has set the context and outlined the purpose, aim and research questions underpinning this study. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework which acts as a lens for analysis in this study. In Chapter 3, a review of the literature on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and specials schools is presented which draws on a wide range of national and international studies. The research methodology is described and justified in Chapter 4. The findings of the study are presented and analysed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents a summary and discussion of the key findings of the research while Chapter 7 concludes with some reflections on the research process and also considers the implications for future policy in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe all research as interpretive as it is guided by the researcher's beliefs and assumptions about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Research techniques emerge from a theoretical position which reflects values and dispositions towards the social world (Gray & Denicolo, 1998). This chapter is concerned with the construction of a theoretical framework which is informed by an interpretive research paradigm. Elements of critical theory are also drawn upon in order to construct a framework which highlights the tensions and complexities within the field of special education. This framework is designed to guide interpretation and analysis at different levels. In relation to the current study, macro-level analysis is conducted within the context of ideological tensions, or dilemmas of difference (Norwich, 2002), in special education. Micro-level analysis is conducted within the context of tensions at a more pragmatic level which relate to competing policy frameworks. This micro-level analysis is necessary to draw attention to the complexities of the context in which these dilemmas of difference occur and to interrogate issues of power and dominance with regard to policy in special education. Drawing on these two theoretical perspectives allows for the construction of a broad conceptual framework based on the relationship between these two perspectives, the identified research problem and an interpretive paradigm. A conceptual model incorporating both ideological and pragmatic perspectives is presented to act as a lens for analysis.

2.2 An Interpretive paradigm

The central tenet of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. In this study, the experiences and perspectives of pupils with MGLD,

their parents, teachers and principals are the focus of inquiry. There are a number of underlying assumptions which guide the study in terms of theory, methods and analysis. These include a relativist ontology, a subjectivist, or transactional, epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

2.2.1 Relativist ontology

A relativist ontology is based on the belief that there are multiple constructed realities which can only be studied holistically. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the case study methodology is particularly suited to the description of multiple realities encountered at any given site. The study is set in its natural setting as context is implicated in meaning. However, the theoretical framework underpinning this study asserts that understanding of special education is itself a construction of historical and social influences, and as such, a theoretical framework based on a relativist view should acknowledge these influences. It is not enough to interpret individual constructions of experience, it is also necessary to interpret why individuals construct the interpretations that they do. The perspectives and understandings of pupils, principals, teachers and parents are shaped by their experiences in specific contexts and the discourses used to describe these experiences are both socially and historically influenced. The notion that interpretation is guided by social forces and is influenced by the dynamics of power-relations is a central tenet of the critical hermeneutic tradition. Kincheloe and McClaren (2005) identify one of the basic assumptions of this tradition as being that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constructed. One of the underlying assumptions central to this study is that interpretation is not value-free and that any research which claims to contribute towards an understanding of phenomena in the area of special education must acknowledge the complexity in nature of the social and historical forces which have helped shape policy and discourse in this area. While not claiming to be overtly transformative, or emancipatory, in terms of the empowerment of

any individuals or groups, this study attempts to give voice to the interpretations of principals, teachers, parents and pupils with MGLD with regards to the reasons some pupils with MGLD leave mainstream schools to enrol in special schools for pupils with MGLD. In this way, the interpretative paradigm which is presented here draws on elements of the critical hermeneutic tradition in order to provide a broader analytical lens which recognises the complexity of the research problem identified.

2.2.2 Subjectivist epistemology

A subjectivist epistemology is based on the assumption that the knower and the knowing co-create understandings to construct transactional knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Research is an interactive and transactional process whereby the history and biographies of both researcher and participants shape the research process. The process of research is hermeneutic and the researcher is the research instrument. As the researcher, I elect to use myself as a primary data-gathering instrument while acknowledging that past experiences, both as a teacher and lecturer in the area of special education, influence interpretations. Research techniques emerge from a theoretical position which must be acknowledged and made known from the outset.

2.2.3 Naturalistic methodological procedures

Qualitative research involves study in the natural setting in which phenomena occur in order to interpret these phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Context and meaning are inseparable and cannot be studied in isolation from each other. Conducting research in the context in which phenomena occur is crucial if findings are to have meaning in similar contexts. A multiple case study design was chosen as a strategy of inquiry as it allowed the special schools for pupils with MGLD to become the focus of inquiry. The special schools also represent the context in which the research problem

was situated. A multiple case study design is concerned with the identification of common characteristics, or differences, between individual cases which facilitates an understanding of a particular phenomenon in the context in which it occurs (Stake, 2006). There is recognition that each case, or special school, represents a complex entity embedded in a number of contexts including the social, historical and political contexts which underpin the chosen theoretical framework guiding this study. The interview was chosen as the main data-collecting method as a means to obtaining the perspectives of parents, teachers, principals and pupils with MGLD on the reasons pupils transferred from mainstream to special schools. Research methods are outlined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

In order to construct a theoretical framework within this interpretive context, shifts in understanding, or knowledge, of special education and the underlying values which have influenced these are outlined. A number of theoretical perspectives, which may provide an analytical lens for research, have been identified in the field of special education. Clark, Dyson and Millward (1998) suggest that such theories reflect the values, assumptions and priorities of their time. In an attempt to characterise some of the developments that have taken place in the theorising of special education towards the end of the last century they offer two broad paradigms, positivist and post-positivist, which reflect differing views of learning disabilities.

2.3 Positivist and post-positivist paradigms

The positivist paradigm was the driving force in shaping policy, discourse and practice in special education throughout the course of the last century and was characterised by a psycho-medical view of learning disabilities (Clark et. al., 1998). Based on the assumption that learning difficulties were due to pathological impairment, or deficit, the positivist approach relied on methods of the natural sciences to investigate learning

difficulties. This perspective, which shaped discourse and policy in special education, has been criticised in recent years for its emphasis on within-child factors, or individual impairment, as a means of explaining and addressing learning difficulties.

Other perspectives, or theories, have emerged which focus not on the individual but on the context, including social, cultural and educational, in which these difficulties occur and are described. Included among these perspectives is the social constructionist view (e.g. Tomlinson, 1982) which describes disability and special education as social constructs which have been devised as a means of disempowering and marginalising certain groups in society. Other perspectives (e.g. Slee, 2008) focus on social institutions, such as schools, claiming that a system of special education has been developed in order to manage failure on the part of schools to meet the educational needs of all pupils. Clark et al. (1998) suggest that this perspective marked the emergence of a new post-positivist paradigm which is underpinned by a particular values orientation. Analysis of special education is underpinned by the assumption that those with learning difficulties have been disempowered, disadvantaged and excluded by a system which, heretofore, was dominated by a psycho-medical paradigm. Perspectives within the post-positivist paradigm do not claim to be value-free; on the contrary, they adopt a stance which argues that special education has served as a means of oppression and disempowerment. Principles of rights, equity, inclusion and participation are values which shape the nature of inquiry and the interpretation of findings of any inquiry. Clark et al. acknowledge that the post-positivist paradigm has given a new vitality to the field of special education while at the same time alluding to the same misgivings identified by Thomas and Loxley when they referred to the “simplifying tendency of theory” (2007, p. 10) in the social sciences. Theoretical frameworks may distort and misconstrue social worlds when they dominate thought and permanently dictate the direction of analysis. In other

words, there is a danger that a chosen theoretical framework may not actually represent the phenomena under investigation and in an effort to 'fit' findings into a particular theory, interpretation may not reflect the context and meaning represented in the data.

Clark et al. (1998) suggest that the critique and deconstruction of special education in terms of its underlying social processes has been the concern of inquiry within the post-positivist paradigm. While this is deemed reputable and necessary, there are a number of issues which arise as a result of this. The first is the assumption that special education is a socially constructed phenomenon. This implies that the function of critique is to deconstruct special education until it no longer exists. Attempts to deconstruct the special education knowledge tradition are seen as necessary in order to reconstruct it in a way that avoids its unintentional negative consequences (Skrtic, 1995). Among these negative consequences, Skrtic includes theories of human pathology and organizational rationality which underpinned discourse and practice in special education in the latter half of the twentieth century. The second issue identified by Clark et al. (1998) is the assumption that the values of inclusion, equity and participation become the lens through which special education is critiqued, regardless of the mode of enquiry.

The problem arises in relation to the issue of values. While values, such as rights, equality, justice and participation need to be considered, they are not unproblematic especially when tensions arise. Clark et al. refer to the complexities of educational values, highlighting the fact that educational systems are charged with realising multiple values which may result in contradictions and tensions. Equity, for example, as a value, may be seen to contradict the right of the child to educational provision based on individual needs. Stone (2002) also highlights the difficulties surrounding the notion of equity, and uses this term to denote

distributions regarded as fair, even though inequalities may be necessary to ensure fairness, or distributive justice. Clark et al. (1998) stress the need to acknowledge that the values of equity and inclusion have to be realised in ways which are imperfect and often contradictory. Understanding how this process is realised must be done through a lens which acknowledges the complexity of the field of special education, the historical forces which have helped shape it and the power structures involved in its production. Therefore, the theoretical lens through which interpretation and analysis should occur is one which recognises the dilemmas and tensions within special education and its complexity. Any discussion, or analysis of issues relating to inclusion, must identify the values on which it is based and recognise the dilemmas and tensions which arise when these values appear to contradict each other.

2.4 Dilemmas of difference

Norwich (2002) presents a case for a dilemmatic perspective of educational provision for children with SEN, which recognises the links and tensions between social and individual values and models. Norwich argues that, due to these tensions or dilemmas, there can be no coherent set of values, or ideological purity, which justifies policy and practice at all levels in education. Tension arises between the educational values of meeting individual needs and promoting inclusion for all. Just as Clark et al. argue for an alternative framework, Norwich criticises the “false opposition of individual and social models” (2002, p. 494) and proposes a perspective which acknowledges that SEN cannot be conceptualised without consideration of how institutions and society respond to, and accommodate, diversity. This is not to suggest that these perspectives cannot contribute to the analysis of the field of special education, rather it recognises that they do so at different levels of analysis. The social values underpinning policy may be socially constructed and analysis at this level may be guided by the underlying assumptions of a social constructionist perspective. However, analysis of

educational provision must also include recognition of individual needs and differences which are based on the interaction between within-child and environmental factors (Norwich & Kelly, 2005). What is required then, is a theoretical framework which recognises the dilemmas posed by ambiguous values underpinning special education provision and which provides a lens that embraces “the complex and recursive relationships between multiple and competing values and the complex contexts within which they may or may not be realised” (Clark et al., 1998, p. 171). This framework is constructed, in this study, within the broader context of an interpretive paradigm.

The theoretical framework chosen as a set of thinking tools for this study is one which attempts to acknowledge the need to address the complexities of special education at different levels of analysis. The theoretical framework endeavours to incorporate analysis at macro and micro levels. Macro level analysis examines findings in the context of the dilemmatic perspective outlined by Norwich (2002). This perspective is concerned with issues in special education as ideological dilemmas. Micro level analysis uses a model of policy frameworks which allows analysis of the complexities, referred to by Clark et al., to take place, with particular focus on the “workings of power in special needs education” (1998, p.171). These complexities focus on how policy problems and issues are resolved at a pragmatic level, by whom and for whose benefit.

2.4.1 Macro-level analysis

The conflicting ideological perspectives, outlined in this chapter, which have led to “dilemmas of difference” (Norwich, 2002, p. 496) in special educational provision act as a framework for analysis at macro-level in this study. According to Norwich, the social values which shape educational provision include the values of equity, individuality and power-

sharing. Difference may be conceptualised in positive or negative terms. In negative terms, it may be perceived as representing lower status, or value, which leads to inequality in the way people are treated. Viewed positively, difference represents a recognition and celebration of individuality. Recognising difference in the context of special education means acknowledging individual needs and the need for educational provision to meet these needs, which may differ from regular provision. Not recognising difference may lead to inadequate educational provision. This is where the tension lies between values of inclusion and individuality. These tensions are highlighted when one perspective dominates over others.

Norwich (1993) identifies four areas which are relevant to the social values of equality, individuality and power-sharing as the basis for analysis of dilemmas of difference in special education. These areas include curriculum, identification, parent-professional influences and placement. Curriculum includes questions about commonality and difference in relation to what children should learn. If a common curriculum, in terms of learning content, is offered to all pupils, are these learning experiences relevant to those with SEN? This issue reflects a more general tension between equality and pluralism. Identification includes issues such as assessment, labelling and categorisation. Norwich (1993) suggests that this issue represents a tension between recognising individuality and maintaining respect for the person. Parent-professional influences include issues which reflect the tension between choice and power, provider and user interests. Finally, placement refers to issues about where children should learn and with whom. This issue reflects tensions around segregation and inclusion.

These four areas are addressed in this study in relation to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The concept of dilemmas of difference provides a framework for analysis of the perspectives of parents, pupils, principals and teachers on the issue of transfer of pupils from

mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. Norwich (2008a) describes policy and practice as “the attempted resolutions to these dilemmas, which can turn out to be unstable” (p. 27). This dilemmatic perspective provides a framework which embraces the history and complexities of special education at an ideological level. However, at a more pragmatic level, resolution of policy tensions are also determined by how problems are defined (Riddell, 2002) and various interest groups, with often competing discourses, will endeavour to influence the construction of policies. Analysis at a micro-level examines these issues in the Irish context in terms of how they influence policy for pupils with MGLD at the level of practice.

2.4.2 Micro-level analysis

Analysis at micro-level in this study focuses on policy in special education and how competing policy models, or frameworks, impact on provision for those with SEN. Policy frameworks are also useful tools for analysis of the balance of power in the production of policy in special education. This includes analysis of how policy implementation is subject to power held by different stakeholders, at different times. Analysis of policy is based on Kirp’s (1982), and more recently Riddell’s (2002), model of administrative justice, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: *Six Normative Models of Administrative Justice*

Model	Mode of decision-making	Legitimizing goal	Mode of accountability	Characteristic remedy for user
Bureaucracy	Applying rules	Accuracy	Hierarchical	Administrative review
Professionalism	Applying knowledge	Public Service	Interpersonal	Second opinion: complaint to professional body
Legality	Argument	Fairness	Independent	Appeal to court
Managerialism	Managerial autonomy	Efficiency	Performance measures	sanctions
Consumerism	Active participation	Satisfaction	Charters	Voice/compensation
Markets	Price mechanism	Private sector-profit/Public sector – efficiency	Commercial viability	exit

Source: Riddell (2002)

Table 1 illustrates different policy models, or frameworks, which compete to achieve dominance in special education. Policy frameworks reflect policy choices, or responses to policy problems (Kirp, 1982). A policy framework is characterised by specific forms of decision-making, legitimizing goals, nature of accountability and characteristic remedy for the user (Riddell, 2002). A bureaucratic policy framework reflects a concern for consistency and internal accountability, whereas a professional policy framework reflects a view that policy problems are best settled by recourse to professional expertise. A legal policy framework is concerned with equity and rights, and provides dissatisfied users with recourse to appeal through the courts. Managerialism reflects an attempt to achieve greater efficiency and value for money from public services, while consumerism allows for a greater contribution and participation for the public in terms of policy formation. Marketization is a policy model based on the belief that market forces should determine the viability of services. Policy frameworks often coexist and conflict with each other as few policy problems are defined in terms of one or other framework (Kirp, 1982). Kirp maintains that these frameworks are not merely descriptive; they represent alternative values such as equality, rights, fairness and expertise. Conflict occurs when coexisting frameworks represent different values and this is reflected in policy development in the area of special education in Ireland.

A professional policy framework dominated special educational provision for the latter half of the 20th century. Professionals, particularly the medical and psychological professions, dominated in the decision-making process. Decisions in relation to the assessment, identification and placement of those with SEN were the preserve of these professionals and their influence did, and continues to, wield considerable power. However, following the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), a rights-based policy of inclusion was advocated, resulting in a power-shift in terms of decision-making and practice in special

education. An entitlement for all to education, which is enshrined in legislation, has resulted in greater numbers of children with disabilities seeking access to mainstream schools. A system of resource allocation by categorisation was an attempt to ensure equity in provision and, as such, bureaucratic and legal policy frameworks dominated in the decision-making process. However, the absence of specific legislation regarding the entitlement of pupils with SEN led to the emergence of a stronger bureaucratic framework whereby resource allocation was determined by category of SEN rather than individual needs. A reliance on professionals, usually psychologists, to provide this categorisation resulted in the coexistence of bureaucratic and professional frameworks.

Legislation regarding entitlement for pupils with SEN came in the form of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) which enshrined in law the rights of those with SEN to be educated in an inclusive environment with peers who did not have such needs. This framed the concept of inclusion firmly in the context of location, that location being the mainstream school. The EPSEN Act gave legal entitlement to parents, as consumers, to be involved in the decision making process and provided them with an appeals procedure which was an effort to empower them. However, failure to fully enact this legislation meant that the legal policy framework which it represents has been severely weakened. Professional and bureaucratic frameworks continue to dominate in special education. The introduction of the GAM in primary schools, as a system of resource allocation, has resulted in the increased professionalization of special education with regard to policy for pupils with MGLD. As resource allocation is no longer based on categorisation for this group, the consistency which is a characteristic feature of a bureaucratic framework no longer applies. Resource allocation is determined by professionals, mainly teachers, for these pupils in mainstream primary schools.

While bureaucratic, professional and legal frameworks have predominately featured with regard to policy in SEN, more recently a managerial framework has come to the fore with the demand for efficiency and value for money in the public service. The recent reduction in number of special classes for pupils with MGLD is an example of the power of this type of framework. Where the service being provided is deemed to be ineffective, or no longer economically viable, then that service may be withdrawn. The dominance of any particular framework is a highly political activity where proponents of different frameworks are in competition with each other (Riddell, 2002). The importance of the distinctions between frameworks is that they determine what will be provided, by whom, and on what terms. Choices amongst frameworks “embody choices about the allocation of power” (Kirp, 1982, p. 139). They embody conceptions of policy in special education.

2.5 Summary

Theoretical perspectives with regard to special education were outlined in this chapter. The experiences of parents, principals, teachers and pupils are analysed, in this study, using both ideological and pragmatic levels of analysis which acknowledge the complexity of special educational provision, not only in terms of the historical forces and power struggles which have shaped it, but also in terms of the policy frameworks which interact to determine the outcome of these struggles. Four areas are identified by Norwich (1993) as the basis for analysis of dilemmas of difference in special education. These include curriculum, identification, placement and parent-professional influences. The theoretical perspective which acts as a lens for analysis is situated within a broader conceptual framework underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which is central to this study. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

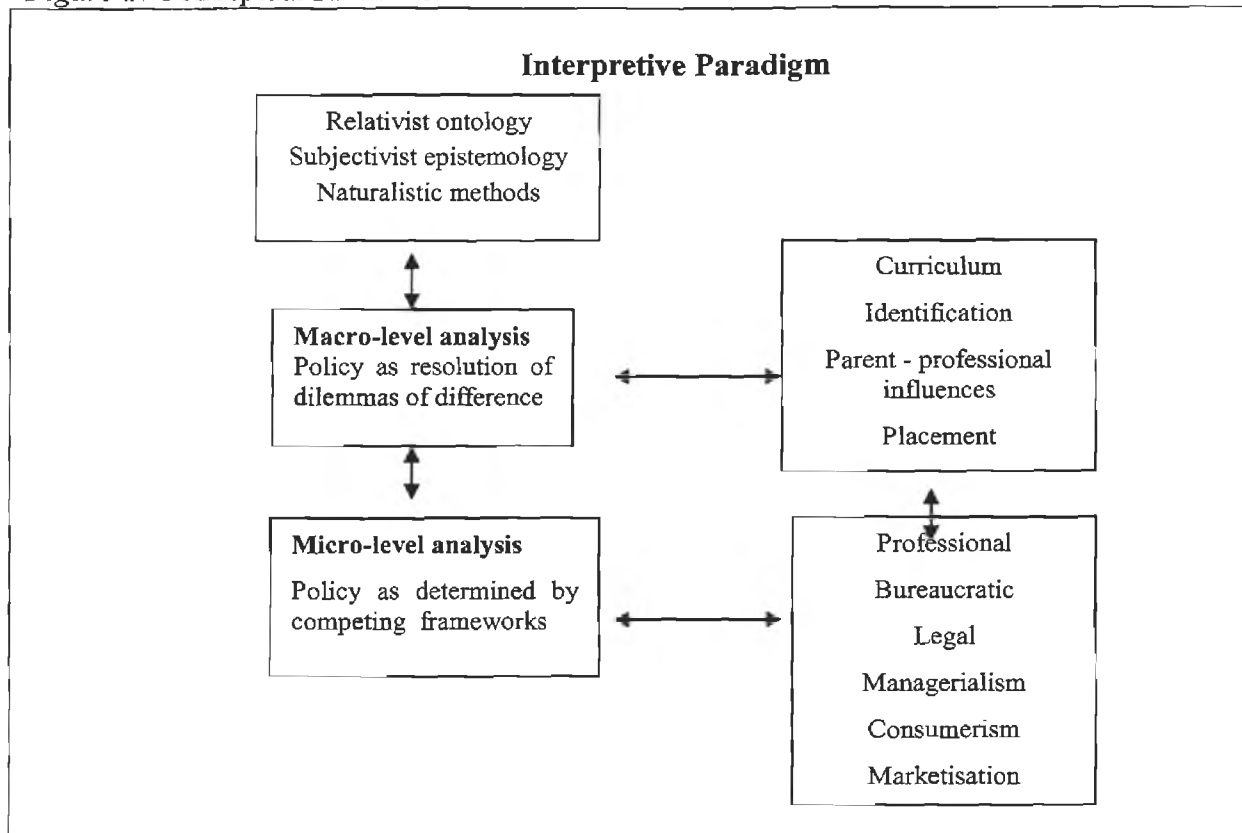


Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework, underpinned by the basic assumptions of the interpretive approach, which guides this study in terms of theory, methods and analysis. These assumptions include a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures. Interpretation and analysis is conducted at both macro and micro-levels which represent ideological and pragmatic perspectives on dilemmas within the field of special education.

2.6 Conclusion

The theoretical lens for analysis of findings in this study was outlined in this chapter. A broad conceptual framework was constructed which illustrates the relationship between the interpretive paradigm, theoretical perspectives at both an ideological and a pragmatic levels of analysis, and the identified research problem. Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate factors which influenced the transfer of a cohort of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. This chapter presents a review of the literature on educational provision for pupils with MGLD, drawing on a wide range of studies conducted in an international and Irish context. While this literature review draws attention to research on educational provision in mainstream and special schools, the intention is not to develop an argument for or against either form of provision, but to highlight issues pertaining to inclusion and inclusive practice across both sectors. Slee (2008) is critical of what he describes as “academic skirmishes” (p. 100) which involve arguments between traditional special education and inclusive education. Slee argues that the problem, in the context of inclusion, is not with the special school but with the co-dependence of mainstream and special school systems in the concealment of failure. In other words, both forms of provision are struggling with the implementation of a policy of inclusion as more pupils are presenting with a greater complexity and diversity of needs. Lindsay (2007) argues that inclusion should not be conceptualised as the opposite of segregation and highlights the lack of a research base for inclusive education to support whether it is a preferable approach in terms of educational outcomes. Therefore any policy that stipulates that pupils with SEN should be facilitated in mainstream schools is a values-based rather than empirically-based position. In the previous chapter, a theoretical framework based on a concept of dilemmas of difference was outlined. The following section attempts to situate this study within current international debates on inclusion and special educational provision.

3.2 Inclusion and dilemmas of difference - setting the context

Based on the values of human rights and social justice, a philosophy of inclusion underpins educational provision for pupils with SEN in many countries (Winter and O’Raw, 2010). Recent legislation in the Irish context, including the EPSEN Act (2004), enshrines in law the right of pupils with SEN to be educated in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs. Inclusion in Ireland is, therefore, firmly linked to placement in a mainstream school. However, in their analysis of debates with regard to inclusion, Kavale and Forness (2000) argue that the emphasis on special education as a place deflects attention away from the fact that special education is a more comprehensive process whose dynamics are major contributors to its success or failure. In other words, a system of special education cannot act independently, as a separate system, but must formulate policy in response to the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of general education. These attitudes include those of teachers, principals, pupils and parents in mainstream schools and classes towards inclusion of pupils with SEN.

Inclusion has also been described as a process, rather than in terms of a particular location. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) define inclusion as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners” (2005, p.13). Inclusion is thus concerned with responding to the needs of all learners rather than any particular group. This raises questions in relation to the nature and purpose of special education particularly where it is seen as a parallel, or separate, system of education to that provided to pupils without SEN. Thomas and Loxley (2007) assert that one of the most enduring features of special education is the construction and management of difference. By identifying a group of pupils as special they are afforded a new identity within

the school system. This may be viewed positively as recognising difference, or diversity, is part of the underlying philosophy of inclusion.

However, there have been many criticisms of special education as a means of accommodating the diversity of learners, including those with disabilities (Skrtic, 1995; Slee, 2008; Tomlinson, 1982). Florian (2007) also questions the legitimacy of special education and suggests that the idea of special education as a separate system to that which is provided to the majority has been challenged by an understanding of inclusion as accommodating all learners within one education system. She argues that special education can never be considered a good thing as long as it remains focused on difference. Assumptions about difference and normality interact in ways which reproduce dilemmas of access and equity. As a result, special education reinforces the exclusionary practices of the general education system.

While recognising difference may be considered necessary if the individual needs of learners are to be met, Artiles (1998), in his discussion of overrepresentation of minority groups in special education in the US, also argues that the way difference is treated raises complex dilemmas. Artiles refers to the work of Minow (1990) to support his argument, as Minow suggests that dilemmas of difference exist because of the link between difference and abnormality, or stigma. The centrality of dilemmas of difference to special educational provision is also recognised by Nilhom (2007) who argues that dilemmas will arise as a result of the contradiction between the provision of something similar to all children at the same time as individual differences are taken into account.

These issues form the basis of Norwich's (2008) study of international perspectives on dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability. Norwich argues that the basic dilemma is whether to recognise and respond to differences, as there are negative implications associated with stigma and devaluation. His study focuses on dilemmas of difference in three related areas including identification, curriculum and placement. Educationalists from three countries, including the US, UK and the Netherlands participated in his study. While the US and UK are identified as having continuum-oriented systems of special educational provision, the Netherlands was chosen as it operated a two-track system of separate or general educational provision for pupils with SEN. Participants in Norwich's study were asked whether or not they recognised dilemmas in the three areas outlined. The findings indicate that the majority of participants in all three countries recognised dilemmas in all three areas. The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 of the current study draws on the different understandings of the complexity of inclusion reflected in the literature internationally, and in particular, on the concept of dilemmas of difference as a lens for analysis.

The structure of this literature review follows the areas, identified as part of the theoretical framework, as relevant to the social values of equality, individuality and power-sharing. These include issues relating to identification and categorization of MGLD, placement, curriculum and finally, parent-professional influences (Norwich, 1993). Each of these areas represents a dilemma in terms of policy and practice in the field of special education and in terms of educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The final section in this chapter presents a review of literature, which is central to the focus of this study, on the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

3.3 Mild General Learning Disabilities – identification and categorization

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1996) provides a clinical description and set of diagnostic guidelines for MGLD. It describes MGLD in terms of a delay in understanding and use of language and states that difficulties usually manifest themselves in academic school work, with many having particular problems in reading and writing. The diagnostic guidelines indicate an approximate IQ range of 50 to 69 which is similar to that identified in the SERC Report (DES, 1993). The SERC Report defined MGLD as significantly below-average ability in general intellectual functioning and impairment in adaptive behaviour which manifests itself in “delayed conceptual development, slow speech and language development, limited ability to abstract and generalise, limited attention span and poor retention ability” (1993, p. 118). It is important to note that there are differences in terminology used to describe pupils with MGLD in Ireland and the UK. While pupils with IQ scores within the range of 50 to 69 in Ireland are categorised as having MGLD, in the UK, pupils with IQ scores within the range of 55 to 70 are described as having moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Because of similarities in IQ range, comparisons can be drawn despite differences in terminology. Fletcher-Campbell (2005) cautions against relying on IQ scores as the sole identifying criterion, as children within this category have unique individual profiles and may have other special educational needs (SEN).

3.3.1 Mild General Learning Disabilities and additional needs

According to the WHO (1996) diagnostic guidelines, associated conditions such as autism, other developmental disorders, epilepsy, conduct disorders, or physical disabilities are found in varying proportion amongst those with MGLD. Male (1996), in a study of pupil characteristics in special schools for pupils with MGLD in England, found that all schools surveyed considered that at least some of their pupils had SEN that were additional to

MGLD. The additional needs most frequently reported were language and communication difficulties (LCD) and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Similarly, Norwich and Kelly (2005), in a later study of pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools in one local education authority (LEA) in England, found that pupils in special schools were recorded as having more additional areas of difficulty. 75% of pupils with MGLD and no additional area of difficulty were in mainstream schools, whereas 71% of those with MGLD and two other areas of difficulty were in special schools. Additional areas of difficulty cited included LCD, SEBD, motor and sensory difficulties. Similarly, in Ireland, a report on the role of special schools and special classes (Ware et al., 2009) found that special schools for pupils with MGLD were catering for a considerable number of pupils with two or more disabilities categorised as low incidence. This finding lends support to the views expressed by teachers in Stevens and O'Moore's (2009) longitudinal study of educational provision for pupils with MGLD in Ireland. They found that more than half of teachers in special schools for pupils with MGLD reported that their pupils had SEBD. Although there were fewer reported behavioural difficulties amongst pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools, learning support and resource teachers reported an increase in behavioural difficulties from 2004 to 2007. Primary schools for boys were considered to have the greatest number of pupils with SEBD. Whether these perceptions were based on the teachers' own judgements, or whether the pupils in question had assessments stating that they had a SEBD, is not clear in Stevens and O'Moore's study.

Perceptions based on teacher judgements may lack consistency from one context to another in the absence of criteria on which to base these judgements. The identification of SEBD as an additional need is problematic in the sense that behaviours perceived as difficult can vary from school to school (Thomas, 2005). The DES (2005a) categorizes emotional disturbance

and/or behaviour problems as a low incidence disability. Pupils in this category are defined as “being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school” (2005a, p. 17). The last part of this definition is particularly problematic as “inappropriate or immature personal behaviour”, “poor adaptive behaviour” and “emotional disturbance” are all identified as features of MGLD in the SERC Report (DES, 1993, p. 118). There is some overlap in terms of behaviours associated with the categories of SEBD and MGLD, which may make it difficult to ascertain the extent to which the problem behaviours are characteristic of one, or both, categories. SEBD has been identified as an additional need particularly associated with pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD (Kelly & Norwich, 2005; Male, 1996). Kelly, Carey and McCarthy (2004) found that challenging behaviour presented a significant problem in Irish special schools. Their study indicated a prevalence of 29% of pupils enrolled in special schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities, with the majority of those identified being male pupils. Kelly et al. developed a matrix of challenging behaviour types in order to categorise the incidence, prevalence and severity of particular types of challenging behaviour which helps ensure consistency and reliability in terms of identification across all schools involved in that study.

It is evident from the literature addressed thus far that additional needs are common in relation to pupils with MGLD and this may pose a challenge to teachers in terms of identification of the profile of needs, and understanding of the interrelationship of different sources of difficulty. These sources include the interrelationship between social, environmental and innate factors. This challenge has been highlighted by Cooper and Jacobs (2011) in their review of best practice models and outcomes in the education of pupils with

emotional disturbance/behavioural difficulties and they recommend the adoption of a biopsychosocial framework to preserve a balance between valuing the importance of within-child and environmental factors in relation to SEBD.

3.3.2 Mild General Learning Disabilities and socioeconomic status

There is evidence to suggest that one of the predominant features of the MGLD category is that many pupils come from families of low socioeconomic status (Norwich & Kelly, 2005). This claim has been supported by the findings of other studies in the UK and US. Male (1996) found evidence of an over-representation of pupils from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status in her study of special schools for pupils with MGLD in the UK. In a comparison of over-representation in special education in the US and UK, Dyson and Kozleski (2008) found evidence of over-representation of African-American pupils in certain categories of special education in the US, most notably MGLD and SEBD. In the UK, reference was made to the over-representation of Traveller children and Black Caribbean children in the same categories. It has been suggested that this phenomenon provides evidence of the way special education serves to reproduce existing social systems (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This view was endorsed by Tomlinson (1982), who linked MGLD with issues of social control and dominance and described special education as a means of perpetuating discrimination and control of those who do not possess the cultural capital necessary to benefit from the education system. Tomlinson argued that the MGLD category was nothing more than a mechanism for removing troublesome children from the mainstream system. The extent to which pupils from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are over-represented in Irish special schools for pupils with MGLD is not clear. Stevens and O'Moore (2009) highlight the fact that special schools do not have designated disadvantaged status. However, they found that, by 2007, 69% of primary schools with special classes for pupils with MGLD

were classed as disadvantaged. This raises questions about the extent to which pupils from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are represented in the MGLD category and suggests that further research in this area may be warranted.

3.3.3 The purpose of Mild General Learning Disabilities as a category

The lack of agreement in relation to a clear definition of MGLD has led some commentators to question its future. Male (1996) suggested that a lack of clarity about what constitutes MGLD could render these schools vulnerable in a climate of increasing inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools. Questions about the validity of this category have also been raised by Norwich and Kelly (2005), who identify two key features which impact on the identification and description of MGLD. The first is the contentious nature of the category which stems from uncertainty about the extent to which this is an intellectual disability, or is attributable to socioeconomic factors. The second relates to disagreement over whether it should be defined in terms of IQ or difficulties in learning. Norwich and Kelly maintain that in order to justify a category, it is necessary to show that those categorised benefit educationally from additional, or different, provision than that which is provided to those who are not categorised. However, there is no evidence to support the existence of specialist teaching methodologies, or distinctive curricula, which are specific to this category and, Norwich and Kelly argue, this raises doubts about the validity of this general category. Similarly, Fletcher-Campbell (2005) suggests that the lack of a specific pedagogy for MGLD raises questions in relation to the future of this category. According to Norwich and Kelly, the only possible justification could be in terms of compensatory additional resource allocation. Categorization may also be deemed necessary where it determines eligibility for legal protection in terms of entitlement to specific types of educational provision (Ho, 2004). However, categorization of pupils as having a MGLD also raises issues of identification of

difference. Where recognition of difference may lead to stigmatisation, not recognising difference may result in individual needs being overlooked. The purpose of categorization of pupils as having a MGLD requires further analysis within the context of Irish policy and legislation in the area of SEN.

3.3.4 Summary

In summary, a review of the literature in relation to the identification and categorization of pupils with MGLD suggests that pupils within this category often present with varied and complex needs. Categorization of pupils with MGLD based on IQ measures has been criticised, as pupils in this category are not a homogenous group and the additional needs experienced by many pupils are not recognised using this method. In the absence of evidence to support the need for a specific pedagogy in relation to pupils with MGLD, Norwich and Kelly (2005) argue that the only possible justification for categorization is where this is linked to legal entitlement or to the distribution of resources. When this is necessary, there is a tension or dilemma in relation to the identification of difference as categorization may lead to stigmatization. Questions about the purpose of categorization of pupils with MGLD in an Irish context were raised. There is also some evidence to suggest that pupils with MGLD in special schools are more likely to have additional needs than their mainstream counterparts and SEBD has been identified as prevalent among pupils in this category in special schools. Over-representation of pupils of low socioeconomic status has also been identified in this category leading to the suggestion that the process of categorization only serves to perpetuate the social discrimination experienced by these pupils. Differences in the profile of pupils with MGLD attending mainstream and special schools are deemed to be central to the focus of the current study.

3.4 Inclusion of pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities - issues of placement

The SERC Report (DES, 1993) recommended a continuum of provision for pupils with SEN and this has remained government policy to date. The continuum ranges from full-time placement in mainstream classes with additional supports, to full-time placement in a special school. While there has been some criticism of efforts to facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools (McDonnell, 2003; Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008), Stevens and O'Moore's (2009) study highlights some improvements, especially in terms of financial investment between 1989 and 2007. However, they suggest that significant problems exist in relation to policy, practice, training, supports and data-gathering and these findings have been supported by those of other studies (e.g., O'Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Shevlin, et al., 2008). Stevens and O'Moore suggest that levels of inclusion have deteriorated over the period since 1989, as special schools have become increasingly isolated from mainstream schools. This sense of isolation was previously highlighted by McCarthy and Kenny (2006) in their study of issues facing special schools in Ireland. One of the consequences of a policy of inclusion has been a decrease in enrolment of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD.

3.4.1 Profile of pupils in special schools for pupils with Mild General Learning

Disabilities

The number of pupils attending special schools in Ireland decreased from 8,572 to 6,619 between 1989 and 2008 (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). However, while the overall number of pupils attending special schools has decreased, there has been an increase in the number of pupils aged 12 and over enrolling in special schools. This trend has been highlighted by Ware et al. (2009), who found that the age profile of pupils in special schools

for pupils with MGLD was weighted towards pupils aged 12 and over. Table 3.1 illustrates the age range of pupils in these schools.

Table 2: *Age range of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD*

Age band	3+ and under	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-18	19+ and over
Number of pupils	4	200	473	690	634	11

Source: Ware et al., 2009, p. 120.

Table 2 illustrates that a total of 673 pupils between the ages of four and twelve, and 1335 pupils aged 13 and over, were attending special schools for pupils with MGLD at the time of this study. These figures suggest that a large number of pupils attending special schools for pupils with MGLD in Ireland transferred from mainstream schools between the ages of nine and fifteen. The report also found diversity in the range of needs of pupils attending these schools. Of the 28 schools that participated in the survey, only 1,828 pupils out of 2,336 attending were reported as having MGLD as their primary disability. This report provides clear evidence that the majority of pupils with MGLD who leave mainstream to transfer to a special school do so at the upper end of primary or at the early stages of their post-primary education. While these figures do not provide an indication of the reason for transfer, it would seem that factors influencing the decision to transfer manifest themselves during this period of pupils’ education and this phenomenon is at the heart of the current study.

The change in profile of pupils attending special schools has been observed in other countries where policy advocates the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. Head and Pirrie (2007), for example, in their survey of the impact of a presumption of mainstreaming on special schools in Scotland, report that respondents from special schools attributed decreased enrolment to the impact of an inclusion policy. Their survey indicates a perceived increase in the range and complexity of conditions catered for in special schools, similar to

the Irish context, with particular reference to autism spectrum disorders and challenging behaviours. There is also statistical evidence to suggest that the majority of pupils attending special schools in Scotland are of secondary school age. These findings, together with the findings of literature outlined in the previous section on the complexity of needs experienced by pupils with MGLD, suggest that a trend has developed whereby older pupils with complex, or additional, needs are transferring from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. As previously stated, this phenomenon is the subject of investigation in the current study and literature in relation to the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools is further discussed later in this chapter.

3.4.2 Educational provision in mainstream schools

Not all pupils with MGLD attend special schools. Given that there are more pupils in this category than any other SEN group, the majority attend mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Stevens and O' Moore (2009) report that, by 2007, 64% of pupils with MGLD were enrolled in mainstream classes in Ireland, with 27% in special classes and just 9% in special schools. Their findings are supported by Ware et al.'s (2009) survey which found that out of 304 primary schools with one or more special classes, 211 were designated special classes for pupils with MGLD. Once again there is evidence that these classes are catering for a diversity of needs but not to the same extent as the special schools surveyed. In 2009, the DES announced its decision to reduce the number of special classes for pupils with MGLD due to insufficient numbers of pupils to warrant their retention and the introduction, in 2005, of the GAM for pupils with high incidence disabilities, including MGLD (DES, 2009). The decision to reduce the number of special classes received some criticism at the time (Travers, 2009) based on the perceived role of these classes as part of the continuum of provision recommended in the SERC Report (DES, 1993). There was also criticism of the

decision to include MGLD as a high-incidence disability (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009) whereby support was to be allocated from existing resources in the schools rather than additional support being provided based on category of need. This criticism was based on the view that the largest sector of the special needs population was no longer allocated resource hours, no longer required psychological assessment and was placed within a new model that did not have guidelines relating specifically to MGLD.

In their study of the role of special schools and classes in Ireland, Ware et al. (2009) found evidence of support amongst parents, teachers and principals for the future role of special classes as part of a continuum of provision. Educational and social inclusion were identified as advantages of special classes as pupils could attend mainstream schools in their local areas and interact with their peers in mainstream classes. Concerns were also raised about the capacity of the GAM and resource teacher service to meet the needs of pupils with MGLD and Ware et al. (2009) recommend that both models of provision should be evaluated before any reduction in special class provision is implemented.

3.4.3 Issues of placement in the context of a policy of inclusion

Issues of placement of pupils with MGLD highlight difficulties in relation to the process of inclusion, with specific reference to inclusive practice. Identifying or defining inclusive practice presents with difficulties, particularly in an Irish context, due to the lack of research in this area (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008). Policy and recent legislation has been based on the right of pupils with SEN to access and participate in mainstream schools. The underlying assumption that the mainstream school is the desired location in terms of inclusion has been challenged, particularly in the absence of empirical evidence to support this claim. For example, Ware et al. (2009) recommend that, as special schools are catering

for the needs of pupils with complex needs, they “should be enabled to continue to do so in the absence of evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these students” (p. 182). This raises questions about provision for pupils who have MGLD and additional needs in mainstream schools, particularly in relation to the reasons why these pupils leave mainstream schools and transfer to special schools. This question is addressed in the current study, not only in relation to reasons for transfer, but also in terms of the perceived differences, if any, in educational provision for pupils with MGLD in both settings.

Lindsay’s (2007) review of research conducted from 2000 to 2005 on the effectiveness of inclusion indicated that results were only marginally positive. Given the range of research methods, variations in types of disabilities and age ranges of pupils involved in the studies reviewed, Lindsay identifies a lack of a firm research base to support the effectiveness of inclusion in terms of outcomes or processes for implementation. These findings suggest that a policy of inclusion is values-based rather than evidence-based. This has particular relevance to the current study as the theoretical framework is based on the assumption that values underpinning special education such as equity, justice and participation create tensions, or dilemmas, when these values appear to contradict one another and this dilemmatic perspective (Norwich, 1993; 2008a) acts as a lens for analysis of findings in the current study.

A number of studies have investigated educational provision in mainstream and special schools in relation to the inclusion of pupils with SEN from the perspectives of different stakeholders including pupils, teachers and parents. For example, in their study of special education provision in Ireland, Shevlin et al., (2008) found that participants (including advocacy groups, principals, teachers and support personnel in primary and special schools)

conceptualised inclusion mainly in terms of social inclusion. Benefits of inclusion to pupils in mainstream schools were perceived as including increased self-esteem and a greater sense of belonging to the local community. However, the extent to which pupils with MGLD experience this sense of belonging in mainstream schools is questionable and a number of studies have addressed the issue of social inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream and special schools. Among these, Allan and Brown's (2001) study on special schools and inclusion in the UK included pupils from two special schools for pupils with MGLD and one school for pupils with severe and complex needs. The pupils' accounts of their special school experiences suggested a perception of inclusion that, not only viewed the school as part of the community to which they belonged, but also as instrumental in preparing them for lifelong inclusion. Allan and Brown argue that a broader definition of inclusion, as belonging to a community rather than placement in a particular school setting, is required and caution policy makers against simplistic claims that mainstream schools promote social inclusion without specifying system changes that should take place in order to realise this ideal.

Experiences of social isolation of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools have been documented. A number of studies across different countries have found that children with SEN are more likely to experience social difficulties and greater loneliness than their peers in mainstream schools (e.g., Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Pijl, Frostad & Flem, 2008). There is some evidence in the literature which suggests that having a SEN causes social difficulties for pupils in mainstream and special schools. Cooney, Jahoda and Knott (2006) carried out a study of perceived stigma amongst pupils with mild to moderate general learning disabilities (GLD) in mainstream post-primary and special schools in the UK. They found that both groups of participants reported experiences of stigmatized treatment outside of school, with name-calling being the most frequently reported experience. While pupils in special schools

did not report frequent experiences of this nature in school, ridicule or exclusion by non-disabled peers was the most common experience reported by pupils in mainstream schools. These findings suggest that special schools help to shelter pupils from stigmatization in school but not outside, while mainstream pupils with SEN experience stigmatization in both contexts and to a higher degree in the school setting. These findings raise questions about the social inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

3.4.4 Summary

The issue of placement has been identified by Norwich (2008a) as highlighting a particular tension, or dilemma, in special education. The tension exists between two values, namely educational provision to meet individual needs and the inclusion of all pupils in mainstream schools. Policy which promotes inclusion of all children in the context of mainstream placement is a values-based one. There is evidence that special schools in Ireland are catering for pupils with complex needs which raises questions about the inclusion of pupils with complex learning needs in mainstream schools. The social inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools is also an issue worthy of further investigation in light of the evidence of studies which indicate that these pupils are more likely to experience social difficulties than their mainstream peers. The extent to which these factors may contribute to the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream to special schools is explored in the current study.

3.5 Curriculum and pedagogy

The perceived lack of a curriculum which is appropriate to the needs of pupils with MGLD has been cited as a key factor in terms of parents' dissatisfaction with mainstream provision in Ireland (NFVB, 2006). At present, pupils attending mainstream primary schools

are offered the Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) and teachers are encouraged to differentiate, where necessary, to meet the learning needs of all pupils. Special schools, while catering for pupils up to the age of 18, are officially designated as primary schools. While special schools provide vocational training programmes and, in some cases, post-primary curricula, including Junior certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes, only large schools can organize classes according to the age of pupils, and there can be great variations in levels of functioning amongst pupils in any given class (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 1999).

3.5.1 Curriculum issues at primary level

A review of the curriculum at primary level has identified concerns about curriculum overload amongst teachers working in mainstream primary schools. The NCCA (2010a), in its document *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools*, identifies three inter-related factors which have contributed to this phenomenon including the physical size of the primary school curriculum in terms of documentation, its expansion in recent years and the busy schools and classrooms which are the site of its implementation. The NCCA also refer to a lack of practical support in the implementation stage of the primary curriculum, particularly with regard to the use of different teaching and learning resources and strategies for differentiation. There is some criticism of the structure of the primary curriculum which is presented in the form of a separate book for each curriculum area (NCCA, 2010a). Although curriculum integration is advocated, there are few indications of how this is to be done in the guidelines issued to schools. The presentation of curriculum as discrete subjects serves to compound difficulties experienced by pupils with MGLD in terms of access to, and participation in, the curriculum. Low levels of achievement in the areas of literacy and numeracy have also been identified, and have become an area of concern, with regard to

curriculum at primary level. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2010) found that pupil performance in reading and mathematics had declined in Ireland during the period 2000 to 2009, indicating that difficulties in the areas of literacy and mathematics are not specific to pupils identified as having SEN. In its examination of some of the factors which contribute towards successful schools, where success was measured in terms of above average performance and equitable distribution of learning outcomes regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, the report suggests that raising teacher quality is a more effective route to improved pupil outcomes than creating smaller classes. This recommendation is supported by the findings of a number of UK studies on the effects of class size on achievement (e.g., Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein & Martin, 2003; Iacovou, 2002) which highlight the importance of quality teaching, especially in the early years of schooling and suggested that any beneficial effects of smaller classes can only be realised when other factors related to pedagogy and classroom management are adapted to meet the needs of pupils. The curricular issues identified here are not just issues of content, but of pedagogy, and the importance of teacher quality is central to this issue. Potential differences in relation to pedagogies employed by teachers in mainstream primary and special schools are explored in the current study. Literature in relation to pedagogy and teacher knowledge in the area of SEN is addressed later in this chapter.

3.5.2 Post-primary curriculum provision

A NCCA consultation document on the junior cycle stage of post-primary education described the curriculum as rigid, with an emphasis on subject-based learning (NCCA, 2010b). This rigidity is compounded by the assessment structure, namely the Junior Certificate examination. Some pupils have access to a more flexible mediation of the Junior Certificate which is called the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). The JCSP was

introduced in 1996 and was aimed at pupils regarded as being at-risk of early school leaving. While offering a more flexible and individualised approach, it is not an alternative curriculum and pupils are still required to take the Junior Certificate examination on completion of the programme. However, the JCSP is only available to post-primary schools with a designated disadvantaged status. The Junior Certificate is currently the single, recognised award available in mainstream post-primary schools at the end of the junior cycle. The assessment structure is identified by the NCCA (2010b) as a barrier to the achievement of a qualification for some students with SEN in mainstream schools. It is acknowledged that some of these students will have a greater chance of achieving a qualification in special schools where alternative programmes are offered. Many special schools offer a range of post-primary level programmes. Ware et al. (2009) report that out of 28 special schools for pupils with MGLD, 18 offered pupils the opportunity to achieve a qualification through Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited programmes. 15 of the schools offered the Junior Certificate and a further eight offered the JCSP. The number of schools offering a range of programmes was not specified although the report does state that is likely that a restricted range of programmes is on offer in any individual school.

What is significant in relation to these findings is that educational outcomes for some pupils with MGLD may be more successful in special schools, where outcomes are measured in terms of achieving a qualification, and this is due to alternative curricular provision to that which is currently available in mainstream post-primary schools at junior cycle. The importance of appropriate curricular provision to the post-school outcomes of pupils with MGLD has been highlighted. Hornby and Kidd (2001) conducted a small-scale study of a group of 24 adults with MGLD ten years after they had transferred from special schools into mainstream schools in the UK. The majority of participants were unemployed, with only

three participants in fulltime employment, at the time of the study. Most of the participants who had been in employment at some stage since leaving school had been involved in work experience programmes either at school or in college. Hornby and Kidd conclude that, while pupils with MGLD should be educated on the same site as their peers and be socially integrated, this was subject to the availability of suitable curricula and teachers with the specialist training necessary to teach pupils effectively. A vocationally-oriented curriculum is viewed as most appropriate in terms of preparation for adulthood and social independence, and the role of special schools in providing intensive work experience schemes is seen as vital to future employment opportunities for pupils with MGLD. Hornby and Kidd (2001) question why mainstream schools cannot deliver a suitable vocational curriculum and work experience schemes for these pupils. This is a particularly relevant issue in terms of the curriculum difficulties highlighted at post-primary level in Ireland.

3.5.3 Access to the curriculum for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities

Efforts have been made to facilitate greater access to the curriculum for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools at both primary and post-primary level. The *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Difficulties* (NCCA, 2007) were published following a consultation process with partners in education, including teachers and parents. These guidelines offer advice to teachers in special, mainstream primary and post-primary schools on planning and teaching approaches to enable teachers to develop curriculum experiences for students with disabilities “that are broad, balanced, relevant, differentiated, progressive and continuous” (NCCA, 2007, p. 3). However, in its subsequent discussion paper, *Junior Cycle Curriculum Framework for students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2009), the NCCA expresses the view that some pupils with mild to moderate GLD would never access the mainstream junior cycle curriculum. A recommendation was made

for the development of a curriculum that would help post-primary and special schools in designing learning programmes to meet the needs of these pupils and a suggestion was made that a new qualification should be established at a level lower than that of the Junior Certificate programme. Priority would be given to developing the personal, social and vocational skills required for adult living and lifelong learning. The NCCA recommend a personalised approach based on the learning needs of the individual. Special schools are identified by the NCCA as being “well-placed to support the degree of flexibility proposed” (2009, p. 8) while the structure and organisation of mainstream post-primary schools are viewed as supporting the needs of groups of students rather than individuals. The implication here is that the rigidity of structures in post-primary schools make it difficult to cater for the individual learning needs of some pupils and that there is much more flexibility in the way the curriculum is structured, or adapted, to meet individual needs in special schools.

While there is little research-based evidence in relation to the differences between curriculum design, or adaptation, to meet individual needs in post-primary or special schools, Smyth’s (2009) longitudinal study of junior cycle education does offer some support for the view expressed by the NCCA. Smyth’s study of 12 schools found that practices such as streaming in post-primary schools contribute to low achievement levels amongst pupils in lower stream classes and that both teachers and pupils hold low expectations of achievement of pupils in these classes. The study also indicates that the Junior Certificate examination has a very strong influence on the nature of teaching and learning in post-primary schools and that by third-year, the focus has narrowed to preparation for the examination. These findings shed some light on the difficulties experienced by pupils with MGLD in accessing the curriculum in post-primary schools and these issues are explored further in the current study in order to

identify potential factors which influence the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

3.5.4 Curriculum reform at junior cycle level

Smyth's (2009) findings highlight the tension between policy and practice in relation to inclusion, especially when measured in terms of access to curricula. Difficulties experienced by pupils with the curriculum in the early years of post-primary are not confined to pupils with SEN, as the NCCA (2010b) highlight the finding that, in the first year of post-primary school, most students make no progress in reading and mathematics and others drift backwards. Smyth's study of the experiences of students in their first year of junior cycle found that all students experienced some discontinuity and disruption, with some having enduring problems, in the transition to post-primary school. The NCCA recommend that this stage of education should be more focussed on the experience and quality of learning rather than on subjects and examinations. It is envisaged that a new *Framework for Junior Cycle* (NCCA, 2010b) will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders including teachers, parents and pupils. This Framework will be designed to provide schools with a greater role in planning, monitoring and reviewing their curricula.

What is clear from the various reviews and reports addressed here is that some pupils with MGLD are struggling to access the curriculum, particularly at post-primary level, and that the structure and content of the curriculum makes it difficult for teachers to facilitate greater access for these pupils. The proposed reform of the junior cycle is based on recognition of the need to address issues such as these and to construct a new curriculum framework that leads to greater equity and inclusion. However, issues relating to curriculum, at primary and post-primary levels, cannot be addressed without regard to pedagogy.

3.5.5 Pedagogy for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities

Wedell (2008) defines pedagogy as representing the interaction between the learner and the teacher with respect to curricular aims and objectives. A review of pedagogic approaches by Lewis and Norwich (2001) found no evidence to support a distinct MGLD pedagogy. However, the absence of evidence does not mean that all pupils should be taught the same content in the same way and at the same time. Lewis and Norwich concluded that, although there is no specific MGLD pedagogy, common pedagogic principles apply, but with greater density depending on individual needs. The challenge for the class teacher lies in providing the pupil with MGLD the opportunities to learn as a member of a class group while also meeting the individual needs of the learner. Lewis and Norwich (2001) conceptualise this challenge as valuing inclusion and valuing the individual. They argue that inclusive teaching involves some degree of adaptation for individual variations while acknowledging that additional support may be required to supplement class teaching either in, or outside of general lessons. However, there is evidence to suggest that many teachers experience difficulties adapting and differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of learners with SEN (Travers et al., 2010).

In an evaluation of curriculum implementation in 86 primary schools, the DES (2005b) identified the need for more effective approaches to differentiation in the area of literacy and serious concern was expressed in relation to over-dependence on workbook activities. The evaluation presents evidence that just over half of class teachers differentiated learning tasks for pupils of varying abilities in mathematics. The evaluation also found that teacher-talk and an over-emphasis on didactic methodologies persist, as well as an over-reliance on the use of a single textbook as a teaching resource. The NCCA (2010a) also addresses this issue in its review of curriculum overload in schools and identifies two reasons for the over reliance of

teachers on textbooks in primary schools. The first is that teachers reported finding textbooks more helpful than curriculum guidelines in planning for teaching and the second is teachers' perception of parental expectations that textbooks should be completed. These findings suggest pedagogical approaches employed in some mainstream classrooms do little to facilitate the learning of pupils with MGLD and they are significant in the context of the current study in relation to the factors influencing the transfer of pupils to special schools.

3.5.6 Teacher education and professional development

The importance of teacher education to the development of positive attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools has been well documented in the literature internationally. Attitudes towards inclusion were found to be influenced by the nature of pupils' learning disabilities in Avramidis and Norwich's (2002) review of international literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Their review highlights evidence of negative attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with severe learning disabilities and behavioural difficulties. Based on these findings, Avramidis and Norwich recommend the provision of extensive opportunities for teacher education in the area of inclusion during initial teacher education (ITE) and as part of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD).

The pivotal role played by teachers in determining the success or failure of policies of inclusion cannot be underestimated. In a study of the concerns of teachers with regard to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in Western Australia, Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) found that pupil behaviour and perceptions of professional competency were the two major causes of concern for teachers in mainstream classes. These findings are echoed by those of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), in their survey of Greek teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Positive attitudes towards inclusion were found to be dependent on the severity of pupils'

learning disabilities and the availability of extra resources. Again, the findings of this study highlight the importance of teacher education to the development of positive attitudes. Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) argue that teachers require support through the provision of CPD in order for attitudes to change. In their analysis of the nature of CPD provided for teachers in Greece, Avramidis and Kalyva found that teachers who had undertaken long-term courses as part of their CPD held more positive attitudes than those who had undertaken short-term courses. One of the key recommendations from their study is that professional development courses should include critical reflection on the nature of inclusion as well as consideration of pedagogic issues. This view is echoed by Florian and Rouse (2009) and Florian and Linklater (2010) who argue for the development of programmes of teacher education which are based on the assumption that difference is central to human development. A pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners is thus one that “is based on the principles of teaching and learning that reject deficit views of difference and deterministic beliefs about ability but sees difference as part of the human condition” (Florian & Rouse, 2009, p. 599)

Irish studies of teachers’ perceptions of their ability to meet the learning needs of pupils with SEN in mainstream classes highlight similar issues to those identified in the literature internationally. These issues include teachers’ perceptions of a lack of knowledge and experience in the area of SEN. Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008) report a perception amongst parents and advocacy groups of a resistance amongst teachers to the inclusion process due to a lack of knowledge and experience in this area. Class teachers concurred that they lacked knowledge and information about pupils with SEN and, worryingly, schools reported that the majority of resource teachers had no formal training in this area. Similarly, in a survey of special schools and classes, Ware et al. (2009) found that, out of the 988 teachers working in 83 special schools, only 27.6% held a special education qualification at

diploma level which is recognised for payment of an allowance by the DES. Only 50% of primary schools had at least one teacher with a diploma in either special education or learning support in one or more of their special classes. Out of 400 teachers surveyed who were working in special classes in post-primary schools, 235 had an SEN qualification at diploma level or higher. Although not the focus of the current study, the reasons why teachers do not undertake further training in the area of SEN merits further investigation.

The importance of professional development for teachers in promoting inclusion has also been well documented in the Irish literature. Gash's (2006) study of beginning teachers' experiences of working with pupils with MGLD in Ireland found that these teachers had difficulties differentiating the curriculum as well as coping with pupils who presented with behaviour problems. A study of the professional development requirements of resource and learning support teachers in primary and post-primary schools found that training with regard to the implementation of IEPs is the area of professional development most sought after by teachers in both sectors (O'Gorman and Drudy, 2010). Teachers also identified training needs in relation to types of disabilities and learning difficulties. A study of teachers' efficacy beliefs for including pupils with SEN in Irish mainstream primary schools (O'Donnell, 2009), found that over half of teachers surveyed were not aware of the NCCA's (2007) guidelines for teachers of pupils with MGLD, while just half stated that they were aware of the requirements of the EPSEN Act (2004). These findings raise questions about the capacity of teachers in mainstream and special schools to meet the learning needs of pupils with MGLD and highlight the need for CPD in this area.

3.5.7 Policy and change in mainstream schools

Legislation, namely the EPSEN Act (2004), protects the right of children to be educated with their peers and is underpinned by values of equality and acceptance of

diversity. However, as Lewis and Norwich (2001) suggest, teaching involves working with groups of learners and inclusive practice requires a balancing of learning together and meeting individual needs. If this is to be achieved, professional development, at both pre-service and in-service levels, will be required. It is evident that, if inclusion is to be successful for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools, teachers need to be supported in the acquisition and application of pedagogical approaches which provide pupils with the opportunities to learn as members of a class group and which meet the needs of individual learners. As stated earlier in this chapter, pedagogy and teacher quality are central to inclusion and these issues are further explored in the current study in the context of educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools.

3.5.8 Summary

Issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy represent one of the dilemmas of difference highlighted by Norwich (2008a) in relation to tensions that exist between equality and individualisation. The tension exists between efforts to recognize and meet individual needs while endeavouring to ensure equality of access and participation in the context of a common curriculum. However, ensuring equality of access and participation for pupils with MGLD, particularly at post-primary level, has been hampered by rigidity and inflexibility with regard to curriculum content, structure and assessment. At primary and post-primary levels, difficulties experienced by teachers in the differentiation and adaptation of the curriculum have been identified. The implications of these issues as factors influencing the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD are explored in the current study. The literature on parental perspectives on educational provision for pupils with MGLD is reviewed in the following section.

3.5 Parental perspectives on educational provision in mainstream and special schools

A review of the literature on parental attitudes towards special education (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2010) includes studies of parents of typically developing pupils and parents of pupils with SEN. Only studies that contained empirical data and a standardised measurement to examine parental attitudes were selected for review. The ten studies considered eligible represent a wide range of countries although six are US-based studies. The review found that, while parents had positive attitudes towards inclusive education, parents of pupils with SEN tended to be undecided in their attitude towards inclusion and were less likely to favour inclusion for their own children. The review also found that parents of pupils with SEN had concerns about inclusive practices including social isolation, lack of teacher education and a lack of supports and resources in mainstream schools. Interestingly, parents of typically developing pupils were more positive towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN and identified social benefits as a positive outcome of inclusion for their children. The review identifies a number of variables which influence attitudes including socioeconomic status, level of education, experiences of inclusion and type of disability. Parents of high socioeconomic status and high levels of education held more positive attitudes and, in relation to disability type, parents were least positive about the inclusion of pupils with behaviour problems and cognitive disabilities. The importance of social development of children with disabilities has been highlighted in a number of studies on parental attitudes. In a study of special educational provision in Ireland, Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008) found that all participants from parents/advocacy associations and staff in primary schools placed a high value on socialisation skills that were developed in mainstream schools and there was strong agreement that inclusion in mainstream schools promoted these skills and enabled children to develop relationships with their peers. The types of SEN experienced by the children of parents included in the study are not specified but

significantly, the issue of transfer to special schools is raised. This transfer is said to take place when social inclusion in mainstream schools has not been successful despite the hopes of parents in this regard. Reasons for this lack of success are described as including class teachers' lack of knowledge about how to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, inconsistencies in collaborative relationships between class and support teachers, over-dependency of pupils on SNAs and a lack of support for parents in understanding the educational implications of a disability or SEN. These studies indicate that parents view inclusion in terms of social benefits and, although parents of pupils with SEN may desire social inclusion for their children, when choosing placement, perceptions of the quality and level of supports available tend to outweigh the perceived social benefits of mainstream placement. These findings are particularly relevant in relation to the current study which aims to explore factors influencing the decision to transfer pupils with MGLD from mainstream to special schools.

Runswick-Cole's (2008) study of parental attitudes towards inclusion in mainstream schools in England found that parents held complex and conflicting views about inclusion, as some of those interviewed were wholly committed to mainstream school while others believed that the special school was most suitable to meet the needs of their children. This study is unique in that all of the 24 parents who took part had registered appeals with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST). As advocates for their children, these parents had strong views in relation to inclusion in mainstream schools. Runswick-Cole (2008) uses a social model of analysis to interpret perspectives stating that "parents who choose inclusive schooling engage with a model of disability that focuses on the need to remove barriers to children's learning, and on their acceptance within mainstream settings" (p. 177). According to Runswick-Cole, these parents viewed education as a pathway to an inclusive experience of adult life and were sceptical about professional judgements, relying instead on their own

knowledge of their children. With regard to parents who transferred their children from mainstream to special schools, Runswick-Cole suggests that this decision was not necessarily driven by a change of ideology but was rather a response to their children's experiences of exclusion in mainstream schools. Exclusion is explained in terms of barriers to participation including lack of resources, inflexible teaching styles and attitude to difference. With regard to parents whose first choice for their children was a special school, Runswick-Cole suggests that these parents were more likely to use medicalised discourses which focused on within-child factors, and were more likely to value professional judgements. However, in a critique of her own analysis, Runswick-Cole (2008) acknowledges that parental choices may be more driven by pragmatism than ideology. This was the finding of Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang and Monsen (2004), in their study of parents, pupils and teachers perspectives on partnerships between mainstream and special schools. They found that parents evaluated inclusion in terms of specific benefits for their children, rather than its merits on political or ideological grounds. Runswick-Cole's study is particularly relevant, not just in relation to parental attitudes towards inclusion, but also because it also illustrates the importance of the relationship between parents and professionals in the decision-making processes regarding the educational placement of pupils with SEN. Those parents who transferred their children to special schools were considered more likely to value professional judgement than those who were strongly in favour of mainstream placement. The parent-professional relationship forms part of the theoretical framework outlined in the current study and is an issue that is addressed in greater depth later in this section.

3.6.1 Parents' views on special educational provision in Ireland

Parental attitudes to, and experiences of, local and national special educational services in Ireland were the focus of a survey conducted by Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan and

Kelly (2010). The views of parents of pupils with SEN, who were in receipt of support from the NCSE, were sought. They found that almost 90% of parents indicated that their children attended the “right type of schools” (2010, p.4) and this was based on a perception that the teachers had an understanding of their children’s needs. 20% of parents reported difficulties in finding placement for their children and this was related to the nature of the children’s SEN. Parents of pupils in special schools reported more difficulty in finding placements. Supports received for pupils with SEN included resource, or learning support teaching and SNA support. The process of applying for supports and resources was found to be the aspect of SEN provision which caused parents most dissatisfaction. Parents of pupils in primary and special school settings tended to be more positive about the supports received than those in post-primary schools particularly with regard to the level of knowledge of SEN teachers and the curriculum offered. Many parents referred to support received by SNAs and, while parents were generally positive about the role of SNAs, there were concerns raised about the future deployment of SNAs and fear of further reductions in resources based on economic uncertainty. Although this survey provides valuable information on the experiences of parents of pupils with SEN, it is limited in that only parents of pupils who were allocated support by the NCSE were included in the study. As MGLD is considered a high-incidence learning disability by the DES (DES, 2005), support for these pupils is determined by individual schools at primary level as part of the GAM and, consequently, resources are no longer allocated as a result of application to the NCSE. The views of parents of pupils with MGLD who have not been allocated support by the NCSE are thus not represented in Armstrong et al.’s (2010) study. Further investigation of the views of parents of pupils receiving support through the GAM is warranted as part of an evaluation of this model.

3.6.2 Access to mainstream schools

Armstrong et al.'s finding that a substantial minority of parents had difficulty gaining access to a mainstream school is supported by findings from other studies. Flatman Watson (2004) conducted a survey on access involving parents of pupils with GLD in Dublin and Kildare. Her study found that 54% had experienced negative outcomes, with two-thirds having experienced multiple refusals. In these cases, parents were most often advised to seek placement for their children elsewhere. In relation to information on educational provision, 70% of parents disagreed that information was readily available to them while just over half of respondents agreed that assessment personnel were helpful in supporting access to parents' choice of educational setting. While the absence of information impacted negatively on parents' ability to make decisions about placement, the survey indicates that the greater majority of parents had high aspirations for their children and wanted the best education possible to enable their children to reach their full potential. It is notable that only parents of pupils whose learning disabilities were identified prior to enrolment in a primary school were included in this study. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, difficulties associated with MGLD are more likely to manifest themselves in the context of accessing a school curriculum than those of other GLDs (Fletcher-Campbell, 2005) and consequently some parents of pupils with MGLD may not have been eligible for inclusion in Flatman Watson's (2004) study.

Statistical information from the NCSE concerning appeals submitted in relation to access provides evidence that some pupils with SEN experience difficulties gaining access to mainstream schools. Under Section 29 of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) parents may appeal a decision taken by a school not to enrol a pupil. A report by the NCSE (2009) indicated that in 2009, it had provided information to the Appeals Committee in

relation to approximately 95 cases involving children with diagnosed SEN. In 30% of these cases, the appeal was withdrawn by parents. In 35% of cases the appeal was not upheld while in 18% of cases the appeal was upheld. In 17% of cases a facilitator or local resolution applied. These findings in relation to access are particularly relevant given the increase in the number of pupils aged 12 and over enrolling in special schools (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). The extent to which difficulty experienced in gaining access to mainstream schools is a factor in parents' decision to transfer their children from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD warrants further investigation. The balance of power in the parent-professional relationship with regard to decision-making is also an issue worthy of further investigation, particularly where views conflict about the most appropriate placement for pupils. These questions are addressed in the current study in relation to the reason pupils transfer from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

3.6.3 Parent-professional relationships

Fylling and Sandvin (1999) suggest that parents' role in special education can be conceptualised as that of client or implementer. As a client, teachers tend to see parents as part of their child's problem whereas in the role of implementer, parents are given some responsibility in terms of the aims set out by the school without influencing how things are done. Parents of pupils with emotional and behavioural problems are deemed more likely to assume the role of client. Both roles confer the balance of power on the professional and Fylling and Sandvin argue that this is due to the stigma attached to special education which restrains parents from forming collective resistance. Special education is perceived as different from ordinary education as it usually requires more specialized knowledge and involves different professionals, especially in the assessment process. Professionals are thus perceived as experts and outcomes of assessments become the "indisputable facts" (1999, p.

154). Allan (1996) suggests that pupils with SEN are constructed as objects of power and knowledge by professionals as they are objects of scrutiny within schools. Allan bases this assertion on a Foucauldian perspective, the basic premise of which is that the professional gaze, or surveillance, constructs individuals as both subjects and objects of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1982).

Armstrong (1995) suggests that parents are often perceived by professionals to be responsible for their children's difficulties at school and this is similar to the view espoused by Croll and Moses (1985), who argue that teachers have a repertoire of explanations for children's difficulties which centre on the psychological characteristics of the child and the social characteristics of the parents, without acknowledging the potential contribution of schools and teachers to these problems. Armstrong et al. (2010) found that the relationship between parents and schools played a central role in parents' attitudes and experiences of special education services. Tensions, or difficulties in this relationship are identified in Shevlin et al.'s (2008) study which found evidence of a lack of trust in school-parent relationships which, they suggested, may be influenced by parental perceptions that the education system is dominated by a medical model of thinking. Their study found a perception amongst advocacy groups that schools reacted defensively to empowered parents and tended to see them as a threat rather than as an asset.

In his study of dilemmas in special education, Norwich (1993) included parent-professional influences as a dilemma in terms of whether, and how, parents and professionals shared power relating to decisions about pupils with SEN. Educators from the US and England participated in the study and the results indicated that there was no perceived dilemma, as participants from both countries suggested that parental contributions were welcomed. In a

subsequent study, (Norwich, 2008a), Norwich identifies tensions in only three areas, namely identification, curriculum and placement of pupils with SEN. However, the studies reviewed in this section provide evidence that a dilemma exists with regard to parent-professional influences where the balance of power is weighted in favour of professionals in decision-making process. This is particularly relevant in the context of the current study as the role of parents, pupils and professionals in the decision to transfer a pupil from a mainstream to a special school for pupils with MGLD is investigated.

3.6.4 Summary

The 1998 Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) refers to the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice and the 2004 EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004), confers on parents the right to what it describes as "greater involvement in the education of their children" (2004, p. 5). The legislation represented a move towards a legal policy framework bestowing rights on parents which may be interpreted as confirming their position as consumers in education (Riddell, 2002). The findings of studies discussed in this section indicate legislation alone does not ensure parental involvement or participation in decision-making processes. The literature reviewed in relation to parental involvement and attitudes towards special educational provision would suggest that a dilemma does exist with regard to the parent-professional relationship. The models of partnership discussed in this section view the role of parents as that of client, or implementer, whereby the balance of power is weighted in favour of the professional. In the current study, the dilemmatic perspective, which forms part of the theoretical framework and acts as a lens for analysis, includes the parent-professional relationship as a dilemma of difference with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The role of parents and professionals in the decision to transfer pupils from mainstream schools to special

schools for pupils with MGLD forms the basis for one of the research questions in the current study. The final section in this chapter addresses the literature on this transfer process.

3.7 Transfer from mainstream to special schools

Much of the literature on the transfer process between sectors refers to transfer from special schools to mainstream provision, particularly in relation to pupils with MGLD. This reflects a view, which has been reinforced through policy initiatives such as the GAM (DES, 2005) that, given the appropriate support, pupils with MGLD can be successfully included in mainstream classrooms. The view that inclusion can be fostered through allocation of resources has been challenged. Slee (2008) argues that the core business of inclusive education is the reform of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and not how resources are to be allocated. A number of the studies on the transfer of pupils between mainstream and special schools have focussed on pupils' experiences of, and perspectives on, educational provision in both settings.

3.7.1 Pupils' perspectives on educational provision in mainstream and special schools

Jacklin's (1998) study on pupils' experience of the transfer process between special and mainstream schools in the UK, explored the perspectives of 15 pupils who had experience of mainstream and special schooling. The process of transfer encompasses the whole process of movement from one school to another, beginning with the early stages of identification that a pupil may need to leave a placement and ending with full-time placement in the receiving school. Of the group of pupils studied, five had transferred due to emotional and social difficulties while learning and social difficulties were stated as reasons for two other pupils. All pupils had a medical condition, or a degree of physical disability, as well as

varying degrees of emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. All pupils identified differences between mainstream and special schools, particularly regarding organisational features, teachers and teaching styles, and friends and friendship groups. The most important issue identified from the pupils' perspective was that of friendships, including relationships with peers, building and maintaining friendships and achieving status amongst peer groups. Seven of the eight pupils who transferred from mainstream referred to feelings of isolation from their peers in their mainstream settings and felt more included in the special school.

Pupils' perspectives on their relationships with peers in special schools are the focus of a small-scale exploratory study carried out in one school for pupils with MGLD in London by Norwich (1997). His study explores the perspectives of adolescents with MGLD on their experiences of special schools, and their self-perceptions, in order to identify whether these perspectives reflected a tension between positive and negative consequences. Norwich was referring to the tension that exists between pupils' need and desire for additional support and the potential for stigmatisation of those attending special schools. The majority of pupils interviewed indicated that special schools were for those who could not read or write and for those with learning difficulties. In describing their personal feelings about attending a special school, most positive responses related to quality of teaching and curriculum, while most negative responses related to bullying or teasing, both within and outside the school environment. The majority of pupils reported that the special school helped pupils with literacy difficulties or with learning difficulties in general. However, few had confidence of this type of support being available in a mainstream post-primary school. With respect to the tension between availing of educational provision in special schools and stigmatisation, Norwich (1997) argues that the findings were consistent with "the assumption of a balance between positive learning benefits and negative aspects of teasing and devaluation" (p. 49).

In a later study, Norwich and Kelly (2005) explored the perspective of pupils with MGLD, aged between ten and fourteen, from mainstream and special schools on positive and negative aspects of educational provision in mainstream and special schools. In this study, 74% of pupils in special schools had previously attended mainstream schools and so, were able to comment on both forms of provision. Some of these pupils expressed the view that there was greater support from learning support assistants in special schools than had been available to them in mainstream schools. Others reported experiences of isolation in mainstream schools or bullying from their mainstream peers. There were mixed views expressed in relation to teachers in mainstream schools, with some pupils suggesting that teachers did not seem to understand their learning difficulties. However, there were also some positive experiences of mainstream schools reported, including more opportunities to pursue hobbies in larger schools. One of the most interesting findings from this study is that boys of post-primary age in special schools were more dissatisfied with being in their present school than any other group of pupils in mainstream or special schools. Furthermore, boys of post-primary age in mainstream schools, who expressed dissatisfaction with elements of their educational provision, still preferred remaining in a mainstream school. These findings are significant to the Irish context particularly when considered in light of the fact that the majority of pupils attending special schools for MGLD are boys of post-primary age.

3.7.2 Reasons for transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools in Ireland

A recent Irish study on the reasons pupils transfer from mainstream to special schools (Kelly & Devitt, 2010), identifies reasons for the prevalence of transfer amongst pupils over the age of 12. The study consisted of two phases. Phase one included a survey of principals in 54 special schools in Ireland and phase two consisted of interviews with parents, pupils and teachers in special schools. Of the 54 schools involved in phase one of the study, the largest

groups represented included 17 special schools for pupils with MGLD, 18 special schools for pupils with moderate GLD and seven special schools for pupils experiencing emotional disturbance. Of the ten schools which participated in phase two of the study, five were special schools for pupils with MGLD, two were special schools for pupils with moderate GLD and special schools for pupils with physical disabilities, hearing impairment and emotional disturbance were also represented. The results of their survey indicate an increase in the number of pupils transferring to special schools between 2004 and 2009. In special schools for pupils with MGLD, the results indicate a 75% increase in the number of pupils enrolling from mainstream schools during this five year period. Overall, 90-95% of pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD and moderate GLD transfer between the ages of 12 and 15. The study found a variety of reasons for the transfer of pupils to special schools including academic, social, emotional, behavioural and, to a lesser extent, physical or health-related needs. The results of the survey indicate that 90% of pupils who transferred from mainstream primary schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD did so for academic reasons and 74% did so for social reasons. Similarly, 91% who transferred from post-primary schools did so for academic reasons while 57% did so for social reasons. However, 62% of those who transferred at this stage did so for emotional and behavioural reasons. Academic reasons included the number of subjects in the post-primary curriculum, lack of emphasis on life skills, class size and over-reliance on SNA support. Social and behavioural reasons included social exclusion and pupils' awareness of their own difficulties in mainstream schools. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of support in mainstream schools including difficulties accessing resources and a perceived lack of teacher knowledge and training in the area of SEN. The study also investigates parents and pupils perspectives on the decision-making process regarding placement in the special schools. Their findings indicate mixed experiences on the part of 13 parents interviewed, with six reporting that mainstream schools

initiated the transfer process and seven reporting that they made the decision themselves in consultation with the principals of the special schools. The majority of pupils interviewed reported that they had talked with their parents about leaving their mainstream school. While the findings from the survey are presented according to the category of special school, findings from the interviews relate to all special schools represented.

Although Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study provides a comprehensive overview of reasons pupils seek enrolment in special schools, the views of teachers and principals in mainstream schools were not sought. This raises some issues as the findings are mainly expressed in terms of difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream schools. As key stakeholders in educational provision for pupils with SEN, teachers and principals in mainstream schools are central to the transfer process and can contribute an insider perspective on the types of difficulties and challenges experienced by mainstream schools in meeting the learning needs of these pupils. Frederickson et al. (2004) draw attention to a lack of studies on experiences of inclusion which obtained multiple stakeholder perspectives, thereby offering limited opportunities to look at commonalities and differences. The inclusion of multiple stakeholders is identified as crucial to developing effective communication and collaboration. This is particularly relevant to the Irish context given the suggestion that special schools are becoming increasingly isolated from mainstream schools (McCarthy & Kenny, 2006; Stevens & O'Moore, 2009) and the recommendation for the need to develop links between both sectors (Ware et al., 2009). The current study includes perspectives from key stakeholder including pupils, parents, principals and teachers in mainstream and special schools.

3.7.3 Summary

While most of the literature on the transfer process focuses on the transfer from special to mainstream schools, studies of the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools identify academic, social, emotional and behavioural factors among the reasons for this phenomenon. Norwich (2008a) highlights the tension, or dilemma, which exists for pupils attending special schools between the desire for additional support and the potential for stigmatisation which may result. A recent Irish study, (Kelly & Devitt, 2010), of the transfer of pupils over the age of 12 from mainstream to special schools indicates a high percentage of pupils are transferring to special schools for pupils with MGLD between the ages of 12 and 15. Given the high percentage of pupils transferring to special schools for pupils with MGLD, further research which focuses on this particular category is warranted. The views of key stakeholders involved in the transfer process, including teachers and principal in mainstream schools, are necessary to identify issues which may be common or different in each sector and to promote greater linkage and collaboration through research. The current study aims to bridge this gap in the literature.

3.8 Summary and Conclusion

The findings of studies relating to the four areas identified by Norwich (1993; 2008a) as representing dilemmas in special education were reviewed in this chapter. This structure was chosen as the dilemmatic perspective forms a central part of the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. As stated at the outset of this literature review, the aim was not to present an argument for or against one type of educational provision over another. The aim was simply to identify issues raised in the literature which were relevant to the dilemmas of difference in special education identified by Norwich. These issues represent dilemmas at an ideological level as they relate to the social values underpinning policy but also at a

pragmatic level as they influence and reflect efforts to resolve tensions through policy frameworks. This perspective, which recognizes the ideological dilemmas presented when policy is based on values of equality and social justice, provides the lens for analysis of the findings of the current study. These dilemmas relate to issues of identification, placement, curriculum and pedagogy and the parent-professional relationship.

A review of the literature in relation to the identification of pupils with MGLD highlights a lack of clarity in relation to the category of MGLD, the prevalence of additional needs amongst pupils attending special schools and the heterogenous nature of this category. Literature relevant to the issue of placement indicates a lack of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of inclusion in mainstream schools, suggesting that policies supporting inclusion are values-based rather than empirically-based. A number of studies also highlight difficulties experienced by pupils in terms of social inclusion in mainstream schools. Reports and studies relating to curriculum and pedagogy highlight deficiencies, particularly with regard to curriculum at post-primary level, and the need for curricular reform at this level is recognised. Despite the lack of evidence to support a specific pedagogy for pupils with MGLD, there is evidence of difficulties experienced by teachers in adapting and differentiating the curriculum and a need for training and professional development. Analysis of the literature in relation to parent-professional relationships indicates that parents hold positive attitudes towards inclusion but there is evidence of dissatisfaction with regard to supports and resources available to pupils in mainstream schools. Studies indicate that the balance of power in the parent-professional relationship tends to be weighted in favour of the professionals. Finally the literature relating to the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools indicates that academic, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream schools are factors influencing this process.

This literature review also highlights some gaps and limitations in the research on pupils with MGLD in Ireland. While there has been an increase in research based on issues relevant to special educational provision in Ireland in recent years, much of this research addresses SEN as a broad category rather than focusing on specific groups, or categories, including MGLD. With the exception of recently published studies, including Stevens and O'Moore (2009) and Kelly and Devitt (2010), there has been a dearth of research concerned with issues relating to educational provision for pupils with MGLD in Ireland (Travers et al., 2011). In light of this, and other recent policy developments (including the introduction of the GAM), it is necessary to conduct research which draws attention to the implications of policy for these groups of pupils. The literature would suggest that recent trends in special education, including the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools, seems to be particularly prevalent in the case of special schools for MGLD. It is timely, therefore, to conduct research which focuses on this particular issue with regard to this particular group of pupils. It is also necessary to include the key stakeholders concerned in this process.

This study investigates factors which influence the transfer of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The views of stakeholders, including teachers and principals from mainstream primary, post-primary schools and special schools, parents of pupils with MGLD who transferred from mainstream schools and the pupils themselves, are represented.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study explores factors influencing the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. This was undertaken using qualitative methods of inquiry in an attempt to make sense of, or interpret, this phenomenon in terms of the meanings attributed to it by the people involved. In order to provide a rationale for the choice of methodology, and to clearly articulate the link between methodology and theoretical perspectives which act as analytical lens, this chapter is structured according to the five phases of qualitative research outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). These include the researcher, interpretive paradigms, strategies of inquiry, data collection and analysis and finally, the art, practices and politics of interpretation and evaluation.

4.2 The researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that behind these five phases stands the biographically situated researcher who enters the research process from inside an interpretive community with its own historical research traditions. A researcher in the field of special education has to identify the assumptions conveyed through questions asked, language used and interpretations made, as the story that is told is mediated through the personal values and experiences of the researcher (Armstrong, Armstrong & Barton, 1998). Echoing this perspective, Creswell (2003) suggests that the interpretative nature of qualitative research brings with it a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues. Researchers are obliged to explicitly identify their biases, values and personal interests in the research topic.

It should be noted, therefore, that personal interest in this area stems from my former role as a teacher in primary schools and my current professional role as lecturer in the area of special education. This was conveyed to participants during the consent process. It is part of my role as a lecturer in the field of special education to promote inclusive practice in schools. I am not a neutral observer, or entirely objective researcher, due to my experiences as a former teacher of pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special class settings in primary schools. I was also known to some participants from this and my present role. This raises a number of ethical issues, including issues of power relations between the researcher and participant, which are addressed later in this chapter.

4.3 Interpretive paradigms and perspectives

As outlined in Chapter 2, this qualitative study is informed by an interpretive research paradigm which draws on elements of the critical hermeneutic tradition in its attempt to give a voice to participants on their perspectives and experiences of the transfer process between mainstream and special schools. The underlying assumptions which guide this study include a relativist ontology, a subjectivist, or transactional epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures. The critical hermeneutic tradition holds that there is only interpretation and that there are no value-free descriptions in qualitative research (Kincheloe & McClaren, 2003). Norwich (2002) identifies the social values which shape special educational provision as equity, individuality and power-sharing. The interpretive paradigm underpinning this study allowed for the construction of a theoretical framework which highlighted the competing values, tensions and complexities within the field of special education. Clark, Dyson and Millward (1998) call for a theory that recognises the multiple forces which shape special education, its complexities and the historical context in which it has developed. An interpretive approach to analysis, which draws on elements of the critical

hermeneutic tradition, allows the interpreter to incorporate social and historical dynamics in the shaping of interpretation. The theoretical framework and methodology are thus linked, through recognition of the centrality of these historical and social forces, which have shaped the development of special education provision.

4.4 Strategies of inquiry

A multiple case study design was considered most appropriate given the qualitative nature of the study and appropriateness of the case study when investigating contextual conditions which are seen as pertinent to the focus of study. Stake (1995) defines case study as the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, the case being a specific, complex, functioning thing. Four special schools for pupils with MGLD were the subject of this multiple case study. Each case had its own story to tell and was unique in terms of its particular context but, in multiple case study design, the interest is in the collection of cases, or collective case. Each single case was investigated as if it were the only one, as each case was a complex entity located in its own situation and context. As the aim of this study was to seek the perspectives of those most closely involved in the process of transfer of pupils to special schools for pupils with MGLD, the focus was on the special schools as cases rather than individual pupils. This allowed for the views of a greater number of participants to be heard than would have been possible otherwise. Parents who did not wish their children to participate in the study could still take part and parents who were unable, or unwilling, to participate could still provide consent for their children to take part. More teachers could be represented in the special schools as the focus was on their experience working with many pupils, rather than a single pupil. By focusing on the schools as the case, no parent, teacher or pupil who wished to participate in the study was excluded from doing so. The study was concerned with giving a voice to the four key groups involved, while recognising the

importance of the context in which the transfer process took place. The focus on special schools as cases broadened the scope of the study, as it allowed for an investigation of commonalities and differences in educational provision for pupils with MGLD between mainstream and special schools. It also allowed for an examination of the transfer process with regard to the roles played by all the participants involved in the mainstream and special school context. For this reason, it was essential that perspectives of teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools were sought. The use of schools as case studies is not unusual in research in special education. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) employed a multiple case study design, which involved four schools, in their investigation of the effectiveness of inclusive education for students with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. Mac Nab, Visser and Daniels (2008) also used this design to identify and examine educational provision for students aged 14 to 16 years with SEBD at colleges of further education in the UK.

4.4.1 Ethical issues

Conducting research in the area of special education raises a number of ethical issues and any research should be conducted within a framework of values (Sheehy, 2005). Not least among these issues is the role played in the research process by those who are the focus of the study, pupils with MGLD, their parents and their teachers. Hence, it is important to address the role as researcher in terms of the power relations that exist between researcher and participant. Bishop (2005) advises the researcher and research participant to reflect on issues of power by addressing five critical issues to evaluate power relations before and during the research activity. These issues include initiation, benefits, representation, legitimization and accountability.

4.4.1.1 Initiation

This research was initiated as part of the requirements of a doctorate in education. The aim of the research was identified as part of this process by me, as researcher, under the supervision of a team of three supervisors. Permission was sought from an ethics committee before embarking on data collection. Another issue at the initial stages was that of obtaining access to pupils with MGLD in special school settings. This was necessary in order to interview pupils. Parental consent was gained through the schools initially. It was important that all those who agreed to become involved in the research understood its purpose and anticipated outcomes. Lewis and Porter (2004) suggest that it is important to provide opportunities to participants to grant or withhold assent from involvement and that this consent process should be ongoing. As the research unfolds, participants can express their views about continued involvement at any stage during the research process. Creswell (2003) highlights a number of elements which should be made explicit in a consent form. These include:

- The right to participate voluntarily and the right to withdraw at any time
- The purpose and procedures of the study
- The right to ask questions and obtain copies of results
- The benefits of the study to the participants and schools
- Signatures of participants and researchers agreeing to provisions.

Guided by Creswell, this study employed a rigorous consent process whereby all initial contact with participants was made through participating schools which acted as gatekeepers. All participants were informed, both verbally and in writing, of their right to withdraw from the process at any stage (Appendices H-P). All participants signed consent forms outlining that they had been informed of their right to withdraw from the research. Consent was sought for pupil participants both from their parents and from the pupils

themselves (Appendices O-Q). The purpose of the study was explained to pupil participants verbally and pictorially in the presence of a trusted adult. Pupils were accompanied by a trusted adult in all interviews.

Informed consent is also an issue when teachers are asked to participate in research that uses the narrative interview. Indeed, there are a number of ethical considerations in narrative research, as it involves the formulation of meanings for participants' narrative expressions, often in quite different terms than the participants themselves may expect. Participants were informed that they could have copies of interview transcripts and that they could make any changes to these transcripts through the addition, amendment or deletion of content. All participants were given my contact details so that this could be facilitated. Participants were also informed that they would receive a summary of findings on completion of the research project.

4.4.1.2 Benefits

Bishop (2005) questions whether participants gain, or are disadvantaged, from the research process. It was envisaged that the outcomes of this study would benefit all participants by giving them a voice, as stakeholders who have experience in the transfer of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. It was hoped that the outcomes would highlight the perspectives of principals, teachers, parents and pupils and inform the wider educational community of these perspectives. Every effort was made to ensure that no participant was disadvantaged by taking part in this research. No school or participant was named or identified at any stage in the documenting and reporting of research outcomes and all participants were informed that information given would be held in confidence. All recordings and transcripts were kept under lock and key and were accessed only by me, as researcher. Digital recordings were deleted on completion of the project and

all other data will be destroyed after a period of ten years, during which time it may be used for teaching purposes only. This was explained to participants as part of the process of informed consent. In order to protect the identity of schools and participants, a coding process was used to report findings. The four special schools selected for this multiple case study were referred to as cases A, B, C and D. Participants were referred to by code only; for example, teacher two in a special school in case A was coded as Teacher 2A.

4.4.1.3 Representation

Two key issues which must be addressed when undertaking qualitative research are those of representation and legitimization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Bishop (2005) describes representation in terms of whether the research constitutes an adequate depiction of a social reality. This study was designed to include the voices of the key stakeholders involved in the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. Principals, teachers, parents and pupils in each of the case study schools participated in this research. In order to ensure that mainstream schools were not in any way misrepresented, teachers and principals from mainstream primary and post-primary schools were also included. This was essential to the integrity of the research process as the research questions included an examination of participants' perspectives on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools, in order to identify commonalities and differences in provision. Obtaining the views of multiple stakeholders provided an opportunity to establish these differences, which Frederickson et al. (2004) identify as important in promoting collaboration with regard to perspectives and experiences of inclusion. Teachers and principals from mainstream schools were included as participants as they were directly involved in educational provision for pupils with MGLD before they transferred to special schools and during the transfer process.

Obtaining the perspectives of pupils was also essential as pupils with MGLD were the focus of the study. Lewis and Porter (2004) argue that research in the field of special education should be both inclusive and participatory in nature with an emphasis on research with, rather than research on, people with learning disabilities. Pupils from each of the four special schools participated in this study. In order to facilitate pupils in expressing their views on the reasons they transferred to special schools and on educational provision in mainstream and special schools, photographs of school activities were used as prompts when required. Participation of pupils who communicated through sign language was also facilitated through the presence of an interpreter. Costley (2000) warns of difficulties, including issues of status and position, in relation to pupils' perception of what the interviewer wants to hear and peer group pressure. In some cases, particularly with younger or less confident pupils, it may be more appropriate to interview pupils in small groups. Hence, pupils were interviewed in small groups of three and no child under the age of 12 participated in this study.

4.4.1.4 Legitimation

Legitimation concerns the authority of a text and how it claims to be accurate, true and complete (Bishop, 2005). This is a question of epistemology and requires what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) refer to as "a rethinking of validity, generalizability and reliability" (p.19). Qualitative approaches use the terms trustworthiness, credibility and transferability rather than validity or reliability (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation of data sources in this study was used to establish credibility. Four different groups were represented including principals, teachers, parents and pupils in each of the special schools. Principals and teachers in mainstream primary and post-primary schools were also included as data sources. The process of triangulation occurs during data collection and analysis (Stake, 2006). It involves discussion with critical insiders and outsiders. The 'insiders' in this study included the team

of supervisors overseeing the research and the ‘outsider’ was a colleague who was not involved in any way with the data collection but who assisted in checking the coding process of analysis.

As this was a case study design, there is no claim to generalisability. However, a multiple case study design is used when the goal is to understand something other than the single case (Stake, 1995). The involvement of four schools, rather than one, in a multiple case study design, allows for generalisation across the four individual cases as some comparison is inevitable (Stake, 2006). The use of multiple cases adds confidence to findings. Generalisations are made from one case to the next on conceptual, rather than representative, grounds. Knowledge can be transferred from one case to another and through a process of naturalistic generalisation based on experience (Stake, 2005). The underlying premise of the interpretive approach is that knowledge is socially constructed and through the research process, the researcher assists readers in the construction of knowledge by presenting an interpretation of a particular phenomenon, which, in this study, was the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream to special schools. There was an articulated theoretical framework which underpinned the study and framed the cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This framework, which was outlined in Chapter 2, guided interpretation and analysis in this study. Observations were interpretive and, as well as offering my interpretations based on the process of analysis, readers have the opportunity to generate their own interpretations.

4.4.1.5 Accountability

Accountability is an issue when it comes to responsibility for the evaluation and dissemination of the research report (Bishop, 2005). It is an issue of who uses the findings and for what purpose. The findings were used in this research study which was carried out as

part of the requirements for the Doctorate in Education programme in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. Findings are to be used in my role as lecturer in the area of SEN on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in St. Angela's College, Sligo. It is hoped that the dissemination of findings from this study will provide participants with the opportunity to have their experiences and perspectives on educational provision for pupils with MGLD heard amongst the wider educational community.

4.5 Data collection and analysis

4.5.1 Selection of the case

The common characteristic for each case was that they were special schools for pupils with MGLD but each case had unique characteristics in terms of staffing, pupils, location and educational provision. Schools for this multiple case study were selected on the basis of their relevance, diversity across contexts and the opportunity they provided to learn about complexity and contexts (Stake, 2006). This study recognised the importance and complexity of context in shaping the views and experiences of all those involved.

4.5.2 Description of cases

4.5.2.1 Case A

Case A is a large school, catering for a wide urban catchment area. The school had an enrolment of 137 pupils, between the ages of 5 and 18 years, at the time of this study. The majority of pupils in the school were between the ages of 12 and 18, with a two to one ratio of boys to girls. There were four classes in the junior section of the school for pupils up to the age of 12 and eight classes in the senior section. The senior section was divided into four post-primary and three senior cycle classes. There were 17 teachers and 13 SNAs. There were also specialist teachers, who were subject teachers, in the post-primary section of the

school. These included a home-economics teacher and part time teachers for woodwork, computer studies, drama, music, art and P.E. There was also a fulltime speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist in the school. The school had the service of a psychologist two days a month. The enrolment policy stated that the school was a specialist school which provided for the academic, personal and social needs of pupils with MGLD, who could best benefit educationally from placement in the school. Pupils were required to have MGLD as their primary SEN. The primary curriculum was offered to pupils in the school. FETAC modules were offered to pupils in the post-primary and senior cycle classes.

4.5.2.2 Case B

Case B is a relatively large urban school with an enrolment of 90 pupils. The school caters for a wide urban and rural catchment area across two counties. Pupils range in age from 5 to 18, but the majority of pupils were aged 12 and over. There was a two to one ratio of boys to girls at the time of this study. There were 15 teachers in the school including 11 class teachers, a P.E. teacher, a home-economics teacher, a home-school liaison teacher and the principal. There were 12 SNAs. The school received the service of a speech and language therapist three days a week. There were 11 class groupings, three of which catered for pupils aged 5 to 12. There was a distinct primary and post-primary structure in the school, both in terms of the school layout and curricular provision. Pupils were taught the primary curriculum up to the age of 12 or 13. In the post-primary section, there were four classes for pupils following the JCSP, two classes following the LCA Programme and a Leavers' Group engaged in vocational and social training. The enrolment policy stated that the school catered for pupils with MGLD based on the school's ability to meet a pupil's SEN.

4.5.2.3 Case C

Case C is a medium-sized school in a small urban area with an enrolment of approximately 59 pupils at the time of this study. 19 of these pupils had moderate GLD. 10 of those with MGLD were members of the Traveller Community. The school catered for pupils from a large catchment area in one county. Pupils ranged in age from 4 to 18 years. The majority of pupils were aged 12 and over. There was a two to one ratio of boys to girls. There were 7 teachers in the school, not including the principal. 6 of these were class teachers and there was a resource teacher for pupils on the autistic spectrum. There were also 3 part-time teachers funded by the local VEC who taught home-economics, woodwork and computer skills. There were 13 SNAs in the school. The school was structured according to a junior, middle and senior section. There were two classes in the junior section, one catering for pupils aged six to eleven and another catering for children aged ten to twelve. There were two classes in the middle section for pupils between the ages of 12 and 15 and there were two classes in the senior section for pupils between the ages of 15 and 18. The pupils followed the primary curriculum throughout the school. Pupils in the senior end could follow programmes to achieve a FETAC award. The enrolment policy stated that the school catered for pupils with MGLD, although there was considerable flexibility in relation to this.

4.5.2.4 Case D

Case D is a small school in a small urban area with an enrolment of approximately 40 pupils at the time of this study. The school caters for a relatively large catchment area encompassing the east and south-west of one county. Pupils range in age from 4 to 18 years. The majority of pupils were aged 12 and over with only nine pupils between the ages of 4 and 11. There were six classes in the school including a class for pupils with sensory impairment. There were six class teachers and the principal. There were two classes for pupils between the ages of 4 and 11 and there were three classes for older pupils. The sensory class catered for

three pupils between the ages of 8 and 9 years. There were also four teachers allocated to the school on a part-time basis for home-economics, woodwork, music and P.E. There were 13 SNAs and one part-time nurse whose post was funded by the HSE. All pupils followed the primary curriculum. FETAC modules for older pupils were being piloted in the school at the time of this study. The school enrolment policy stated that the school catered for pupils whose primary disability was MGLD. There were a small number of pupils in the school who had moderate GLD but the principal reported that these pupils had MGLD when they were enrolled in the school.

Table 3 provides a summary of cases.

Table 3: Summary of case study schools

Case	Enrolment	Classes (4-12 years)	Classes (12-18 years)	SNAs	Curriculum/certification	Subject/Specialist teachers	Multidisciplinary supports
A	137	4	8	13	Primary Curriculum FETAC	Home-economics Woodwork, Art, ICT, P.E. Drama, Music,	On-site speech and language therapist and occupational therapist NEPS
B	90	3	8	12	Primary Curriculum JCSP/Junior Certificate LCA, FETAC	Home-economics P.E. Woodwork	HSE speech and language therapist HSE psychologist
C	59	2	4	13	Primary Curriculum FETAC	Home economics ICT Woodwork	Access to HSE speech and language therapy
D	40	2	3	13	Primary Curriculum FETAC (Pilot)	Home economics Music, P.E, Woodwork	On-site nurse Access to speech and language therapy HSE

4.5.3 Description of mainstream schools

Nine mainstream schools participated in this study. Five of these were mainstream primary schools and four were mainstream post-primary schools. Pupils had transferred from each of these schools to one of the special schools participating as cases in this study, within

a period of five years prior to data collection for this study. Table 4 provides details of each school according to enrolment, gender of pupils, curricula offered, the number of pupils who transferred to a special school for pupils with MGLD and the case study school to which pupils transferred.

Table 4: Description of mainstream schools

Mainstream School Type	Enrolment	Gender	Curricular provision	No. of pupils transferred	Transferred to case
Primary 1A	200-250	Mixed	Primary Curriculum	2	A
Primary 2A	200-250	Boys	Primary Curriculum	2	A
Primary B	200-250	Mixed	Primary Curriculum	3	B
Primary C	450-500	Boys	Primary Curriculum	9	C
Primary D	450-500	Boys	Primary Curriculum	1	D
Post-primary A secondary school	150-200	Boys	Junior Certificate JCSP Leaving Certificate LCA	1	A
Post-primary B community school	500-550	Mixed	Junior Certificate JCSP Leaving Certificate LCA	2	B
Post-primary C secondary school	850-900	Boys	Junior Certificate Leaving Certificate	1	C
Post-primary D vocational school	100-150	Mixed	Junior Certificate JCSP Leaving Certificate LCA	1	D

4.5.3.1 Mainstream primary schools

Mainstream primary 1A is a mixed school on the outskirts of a large urban area, with an enrolment of between 200 and 250 pupils. Mainstream primary 2A is an all-boys school in an inner city area. Two pupils had transferred from each of these schools to case A within the time period specified.

Mainstream primary B is a mixed school, on the outskirts of a medium-sized urban area, with an enrolment of between 200 and 250 pupils. Three pupils had transferred to case B within the time frame specified.

Mainstream primary C is an all-boys school, on the outskirts of a medium-sized urban area, with an enrolment of between 450 and 500 pupils. Nine pupils had transferred during the time period, the majority of whom were members of the Travelling Community.

Mainstream primary D is also an all-boys school, in a small urban area, with an enrolment of between 450 and 500 pupils. One pupil had transferred to case D within the time frame of five years. The Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) was offered in all the mainstream primary schools.

4.5.3.2 Mainstream post-primary schools

Post-primary A is an all-boys secondary school, in a suburban area, with an enrolment of between 150 and 200 pupils. The curricula offered included the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. One pupil had transferred from this school to case A during the five year time period.

Post-primary B is a community school in a medium-sized urban area, with an enrolment of between 500 and 550 pupils. The curricula offered included the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Two pupils had transferred from this school to case A during the five year time period.

Post-primary C is a secondary school in a medium-sized urban area, with an enrolment of between 850 and 900 pupils. One pupil had transferred to case C within the time period

specified for this study. The curricula offered include the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes.

Post-primary D is a vocational school in a small urban area, with an enrolment of between 100 and 150 pupils. One pupil had transferred to case D within the time period outlined. The curricula offered include Junior Certificate, JCSP, Leaving Certificate and LCA programmes.

4.5.4 Research participants

Participants in this study included principals, teachers, parents and pupils in each special school. Participants also included principals, deputy principals and teachers from mainstream primary and post-primary schools who had experience of the transfer of a pupil to a case study school. There were 76 participants involved in the study across the four cases including four principals, twelve teachers, twenty six parents and eighteen pupils. Five mainstream primary principals, six mainstream primary teachers, five mainstream post-primary principals and/or deputy principals participated in the study. Teachers in mainstream post-primary schools were not asked to participate as most pupils who transferred from post-primary schools did so during their first year in the schools. Table 5 provides an overview of the number of participants involved in the multiple case study.

Table 5: *Number of participants involved in study by group*

Group	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Total
Principal	1	1	1	1	4
Teachers	3	5	3	1	12
Parents	6	8	8	4	26
Pupils	3	9	3	3	18
Mainstream primary principals	2	1	1	1	5
Mainstream primary teachers	1	2	1	2	6
Mainstream post-primary principals/deputy principal	1	2	1	1	5
Total per case	17	28	18	13	76

Many of the 26 parents who participated in this study consented to the participation of their children as well. However, 12 parents did not consent to the participation of their children. 14 of the 18 pupils who participated had a parent, or parents, who also participated in this study.

4.5.4.1 Criteria for selection of participants

Criteria for selection of participants were devised for parents and pupils in each of the case study schools. The criteria were guided by the aim of the study, the research questions and ethical issues. Parents invited to participate were those who had children with MGLD, who had transferred from mainstream primary or post-primary schools, in each of the special schools. Pupil participants included those who were enrolled in one of the special schools and who had transferred from a mainstream primary or post-primary school. Only pupils who had transferred within a three year period were included. This was due to the difficulties some children with MGLD can have with memory and recall of experiences. Only pupils aged 12 and over were included in the study and within each case, pupils had transferred from a variety of mainstream schools. The mainstream teachers who participated in this study all taught a pupil with MGLD who had transferred to a special school for pupils with MGLD.

4.5.5 Stages in data collection

Data collection took place over a period of nine months. A flexible approach to data collection was adopted, whereby methods were not fixed and changes could be made in keeping with an iterative research process. This meant that the findings at each stage were reflected upon in the context of literature and methods used. There were two stages to the data collection procedure. The first stage comprised of the piloting of the study with one special school. Data collection at this stage involved an interview with the school principal and focus groups interviews with teachers, parents and pupils in the school. The second stage

involved collecting data from the four case study schools and the associated mainstream schools. Table 6 summarises the stages of the study.

Table 6: *Stages in the data collection process*

Period	Stage	Action
September 2009	1	Contacted special school to pilot research
October 2009	1	Consent gained from all participants
November 2009	1	Focus groups with teachers, parents and pupils. Interview with principal
January 2010	1	Interview with principal of mainstream school. Review of pilot and changes made. Contacted special schools for stage 2 of study
February 2010	2	Obtained consent and conducted interviews in Case C and two mainstream schools
March 2010	2	Obtained consent and conducted interviews in Case A and four mainstream schools
April 2010	2	Obtained consent and conducted interviews in Case B and two mainstream schools
May 2010	2	Obtained consent and conducted interviews in Case D and two mainstream schools

4.5.5.1 Stage 1- Piloting the study

Data collection at the pilot stage involved an interview with the principal of one special school for pupils with MGLD and focus group interviews with parents, teachers and pupils. The principal of one mainstream primary school was also interviewed. Interviews with selected participants in each group were planned to follow the focus group interviews. Three focus group interviews were carried out with three parents, four teachers and two pupils respectively. Once the pilot stage was completed the outcomes were reflected upon in the context of the literature, research questions and data collection methods. Issues emerging at this stage were consistent with those highlighted in the literature review but some additional issues arose which warranted further reference to relevant literature. These included issues relating to curriculum, pupil friendships, social development, pupil safety in mainstream schools and stigma.

There were some difficulties identified with regard to the use of focus groups as a method of data collection. All of the teachers who took part in the focus group were working with pupils of post-primary age. Many of these pupils had transferred from mainstream schools during the primary stage of their education. There was not enough time for the teachers to fully express their views in the hour allocated for the focus group and individual interviews would have allowed teachers greater freedom to express views based on individual experiences.

Focus group interviews with parents proved difficult to organise due to the distance some parents lived from the school and their own commitments. Only one parent arrived for the first focus group. Out of courtesy, I interviewed this parent. A new time was arranged for the parent focus group and four parents participated. The focus group interview took approximately one hour and was held in the school. The four parents had children in the same class at the primary end of the school. All had children who transferred from mainstream schools. It would have been beneficial to have interviewed parents of children of post-primary age in the focus group also. There was a mismatch in some of the issues raised by parents and teachers because of the lack of representation in relation to primary and post-primary aged pupils. Social issues were highlighted by both groups but there was a greater emphasis on behavioural issues in relation to older pupils.

Due to the difficulties highlighted, it was decided not to use focus groups for parents and teachers in the main study. All participants were interviewed individually with the exception of pupil participants. Parents of children of post-primary age were also included. This allowed greater flexibility in arranging times and locations as well as allowing for the possibility of telephone interviews. It also afforded privacy to parents in light of potentially sensitive information that could be divulged about schools, teachers or pupils.

4.5.5.2 Stage 2 – Data collection for case study

The interview was the main data collection method employed in the study. A semi-structured interview method allowed for the flexibility required to reflect the uniqueness of each case in terms of context. The structure of the interview schedules (Appendices A-G), and issues addressed, was similar for all cases but questions reflected and recognised differences between schools in terms of structure, organisation, policy and provision. Questions were added as new issues arose. All questions were relevant to the research questions and reflected issues identified from the literature review and pilot study. Although all interviews were semi-structured, parents were asked to relay their experiences reflecting a more narrative style. Interviews were designed using Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) guide on the translation of research questions into interview questions which provide thematic knowledge. All interviews were recorded, with participants' consent, using a Samsung YP-U3 MP3 player. Data collection procedures for each case are outlined.

4.5.5.3 Procedure for data collection in special schools

The principal of each special school was contacted by telephone initially in order to introduce the research topic and myself, as researcher. Once the principal agreed to consider a request to research being conducted within the school, the following documents were forwarded:

1. A letter to the Board of Management outlining the research aim and design and a request for consent to conduct the research with the school (Appendix H). A copy of a consent form was also included (Appendix I).
2. A letter to the principal requesting consent to conduct research with the school (Appendix J). This letter outlined the research aim and design, the right of participants to withdraw from the study and a consent form.

3. A letter to the principal requesting consent to participate in an interview and a consent form (Appendix K).

Once consent was received, an appointment was made to conduct an interview with the principal in the school. After the interview had taken place, the principal was given copies of the criteria for selection of pupils (Appendix L). Letters were given to the principals for dissemination to potential participants requesting consent. These letters included:

1. A letter for teachers in special schools, with accompanying consent form, explaining the nature and purpose of the research and requesting participation in an interview (Appendix M).
2. A letter for parents, with accompanying consent form, explaining the nature and purpose of the research and requesting participation in an interview (Appendix N).
3. A letter for parents requesting consent for participation of their child in a group interview. The letter also included details about the venue for interviews and the presence of a trusted adult (Appendix O).
4. A letter for pupils requesting participation in an interview (Appendix P). This letter included details of the structure and topics to be discussed in the interview. It also informed pupils that another adult, known to them, would accompany them during the interview. Pupils were not asked to sign a consent form at this stage. Verbal consent only was required. The consent form was signed by pupils only after the purpose of the research was further explained, by me, in the presence of an adult nominated by the schools (Appendix Q).

Once letters of consent were returned to the school principal, contact was made to set up an interview date, time and location. Participants were invited to choose a venue and time which

was most convenient for them. All teachers were interviewed in their schools with the exception of one telephone interview. It was necessary to provide participants with this option given the wide geographical spread involved. A small number of parents were interviewed in schools while others opted for home or telephone interviews. Two parents opted to be interviewed in a neutral venue such as a hotel or café. Table 7 provides a summary of parent interviews according to location.

Table 7: Data collection from parents according to school and location

Location	School	Home	Telephone	Other
Case A	2	1	2	1
Case B	4	0	4	0
Case C	2	5	0	1
Case D	1	0	3	0

The individual interviews with parents proved more satisfactory than a focus group for a variety of reasons. In practical terms, it allowed greater flexibility in arranging times and venues. In terms of data collection, the transcripts were much richer in detail as each parent was able to discuss their experiences in relation to their own children, rather than a general discussion. This resulted in a more narrative style of interview which was appropriate.

All pupils were interviewed in their schools, in the presence of an adult nominated by the principal. This adult was a SNA in all schools, except in case D where a teacher was nominated. Children were interviewed in small groups of three. The presence of an adult who was already known to them also helped to ease any worries they may have had. In one instance, the SNA helped interpret one pupil's responses through the use of *Lámh* sign language. Pupil interviews were informal in style. Photographs of school activities were used as prompts when required. Photographs of my place of work were also used to help explain to participants the relevance of the study to me as researcher. A lot of time was spent at the beginning of each interview discussing general school activities in order to build up a rapport

with pupils and gain their confidence. Care was taken not to probe too much when it came to sensitive issues so that no pupil would be upset in any way by the discussion.

4.5.5.4. Procedure for data collection in mainstream schools

The principals of the four special schools were asked to provide the names of mainstream schools which had been involved in the recent transfer of pupils. While the majority of these were mainstream primary schools, it was decided to include mainstream post-primary schools also. This decision was made as issues relating to educational provision at post-primary emerged from the data. One primary mainstream school and one post-primary school were targeted for each special school. Two primary schools were selected in relation to case A as this school was the largest and covered the most densely populated catchment area. Schools were selected if they had been involved in transfer within the previous five-year period. An effort was made to target schools which had been involved in more than one transfer although this was not always possible as pupils who transferred came from a very wide catchment area and a wide variety of mainstream schools. The principal and at least one teacher were interviewed in each of the primary schools. The principal and/or deputy principal were interviewed in each of the post-primary schools. Teachers were not interviewed because, in each of the mainstream post-primary schools, the pupil or pupils left at a very early stage. Due to the nature of educational provision at post-primary, pupils are taught by a number of subject teachers and would not have been in the school for a sufficient length of time for a teacher to have an in-depth knowledge of the pupils. All interviews were conducted in the schools.

4.5.6 Analysis of data

During the pilot stage of the study, two interview transcripts were coded in order to identify any potential issues. Analysis at this stage was based on Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub's (1996) five-step procedure which includes the following:

1. Identify the big ideas
2. Unitize the data
3. Categorise the data
4. Negotiate categories
5. Identify themes and theories

While useful for initial coding, this method was not sufficient to guide multiple case study analysis which required a system for tracking and comparing codes, categories and emerging themes across four individual cases with a total of 76 participants. Cross-case analysis was deemed appropriate as the study was designed to investigate a particular phenomenon in terms of commonalities and differences across four cases. The purpose of the cross-case analysis is to convey the most important findings from each case, some of which may be context bound (Stake, 2006). Before the cross-case analysis took place the data from each case were analysed separately, as each case was studied in its own context. Data were analysed with the aid of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programme called NVivo 8 (QSR International, 2008). While some commentators have expressed concern that the use of such CAQDAS distances researchers from their data (Seidel, 1991), Barry (1998) dismisses these assertions and argues that it is not possible to analyse the data without being thoroughly familiar with it first. Other advocates of CAQDAS, including Macer (2008), suggest that the power of NVivo as an analysis tool lies in its concept of nodes. Nodes are used to bring together units of data, observations and comments which then become the essence of analysis as concepts are mapped out and relationships

established. At the beginning of the process of analysis, the parent or category nodes corresponded to four broad general categories based on the research questions. These included reasons why pupils transfer, educational provision in mainstream, educational provision in special schools and the decision-making process. New categories and sub-categories emerged as part of the coding processes. Coding was displayed hierarchically as parent and child nodes in NVivo. The steps involved in the process of analysis involved four phases which are outlined here.

4.5.6.1 Phase 1 – Generating categories and initial themes

Step 1 – Transcribing the data

Interviews were transcribed into a Word (Microsoft, 2007) document. This process, while time-consuming, allowed me the opportunity to listen to the recordings in the context of the research questions. These research questions formed the basis for the original coding categories.

Step 2 – Importing transcripts into NVivo programme (Appendix R)

Transcripts were imported into NVivo. Only transcripts from one case were imported at a time for analysis. Once the transcripts were imported a case folder was created for each participant and for each school.

Step 3 – Creating Free nodes

The initial coding process began by identifying free nodes. Free nodes corresponded to categories or chunks of information. These were created inductively at the beginning of the coding process. This process was carried out manually and entered into the programme. (Appendix S).

Step 4 – Creating new nodes from the data

During the initial coding process, categories emerged and became tree nodes. Free nodes were grouped together into general categories at this stage. Within each of these broad categories, a number of initial themes emerged. Categories and themes were arranged in a hierarchical fashion. Steps 1 to 4 were repeated for each case (Appendix T).

4.5.6.2 Phase 2 – Comparison and merging of categories and themes across cases

The categories which emerged from Phase 1 of analysis were similar across the four cases. Sub-categories from the four cases were merged as part of the process of cross-case analysis during Phase 2 of the coding process. Within each of these categories a number of themes and sub-themes emerged. At this stage it was evident which themes (such as curriculum and additional needs) emerged very strongly from the cross-case analysis (Appendix U).

4.5.6.3 Phase 3 - Generating proposition statements (memos)

Step 1 - linking themes with research questions

Once Phase 2 was completed all of the themes from the cross-case analysis were grouped according to the corresponding research question (Appendix V). When this was completed memos were created for each theme.

Step 2 – Creating memos

Each memo consisted of proposition statements which were summaries of findings which emerged from the data. This was done for each theme and samples from individual sources (participant groups) were transferred from the transcripts into the memos as evidence

to support these summaries. Summaries were created in the memos for each participant group (Appendix W).

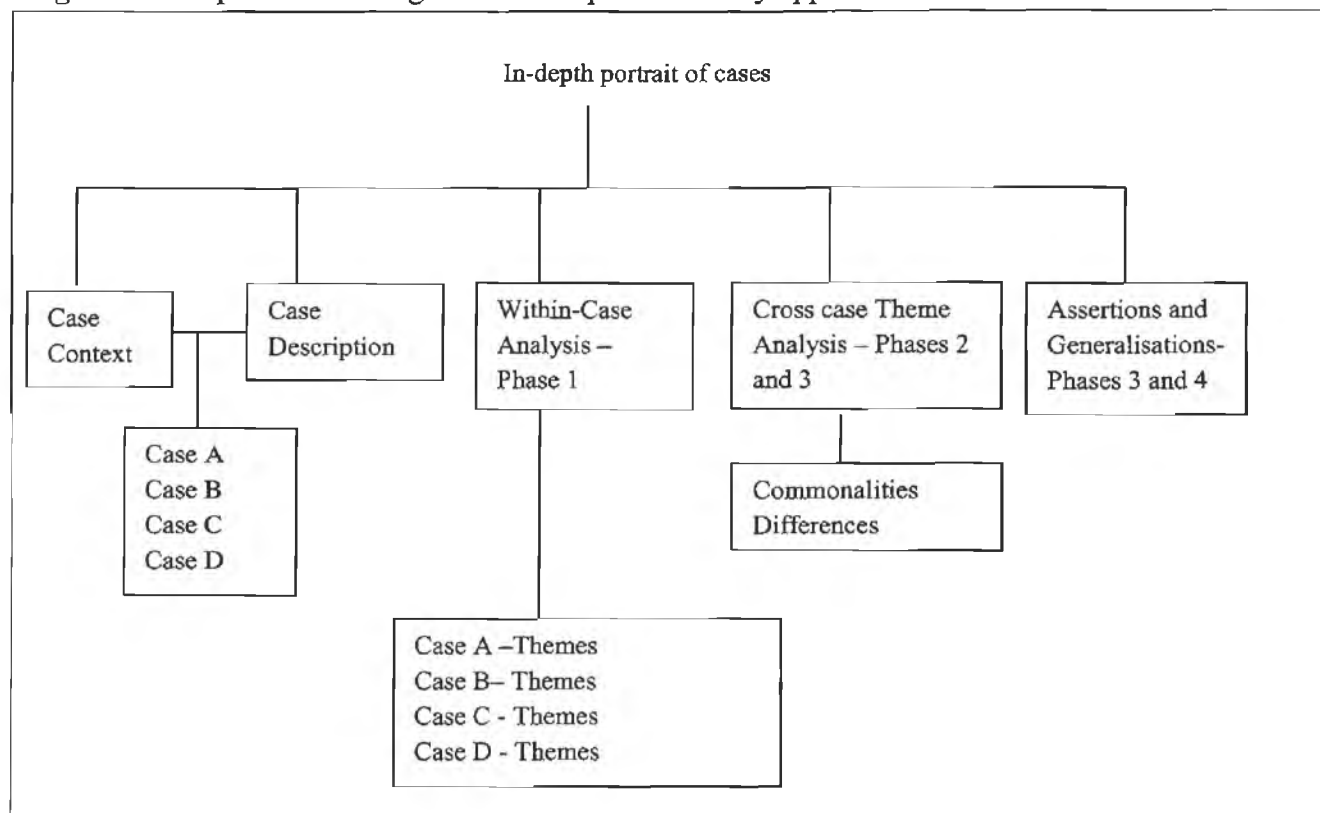
4.5.6.4 Phase 4 – Merging of themes

Once the linkage between themes and research questions was established, it was evident that some of the same themes had emerged in relation to more than one question. For example, the theme of curriculum emerged in relation to research questions one, two and three. The final phase of analysis involved merging themes from each of the four research questions. Once again memos were created and linked to each theme. These memos contained a summary of the key findings in relation to the themes with evidence from the four participant groups across the four cases (Appendix X).

4.5.6.5 Cross-case analysis

Cross-case analysis was necessary as this study was concerned with the phenomenon of pupil transfer across cases, both in terms of commonalities and differences. While each case was studied to gain understanding in its particular context, the complex meanings of the collective case were understood because of the particular activities and contexts of each case (Stake, 2006). Figure 2 employs Creswell's (2007) template for coding a case study and illustrates how the cross-case analysis was situated within the process of analysis in this multiple case study.

Figure 2: Template for coding in this multiple case-study approach



Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2007.

The four schools, or cases, were analysed separately, each within their own context. Each case within the multiple case study design was chosen because of its relevance to the phenomenon at the heart of the study, which was the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. A number of themes emerged in each case and similarities and differences between themes across cases were analysed. Stake (2006) argues that researchers have an obligation to provide interpretation across cases in a multiple case study design. Analysis of findings in this study showed that there were a number of common themes which emerged across all cases. To avoid repetition in the presentation of findings, these themes were presented only once, with examples of data from each case to support any assertions or generalisations made. Generalisations and assertions apply to the cases in this study only. As Stake suggests, it is the responsibility of readers, based on their knowledge and experience, to make generalisations to other similar situations or contexts. In order to

preserve the uniqueness of each case, differences were emphasised between cases, where these emerged. These have been highlighted in the presentation of findings.

4.5.7. *Qualitative terms used in the study*

A number of qualitative terms are used throughout the study. Table 8 provides a summary of the most common terms used.

Table 8: *Summary of qualitative terms used in study*

Many/most/the majority of	>60%
Some	30-60%
A small number of	<30%

4.6. **The art, practices and politics of interpretation and evaluation**

This stage of the research process is the critical site where theory, method, praxis, action and policy come together. Findings are interpreted in the context of a previously articulated theoretical framework. The findings of this study were interpreted in the context of a previously stated theoretical framework which included interpretation at macro and micro-levels of analysis. The research process was iterative, involving reflection and interpretation which informed every stage of the process. This process of reflection was ongoing throughout the research process and reflections following the first phase, or pilot stage, of the study have been outlined in this chapter. Reflections throughout the second phase of the study were concerned with practical and organisational issues, including access to schools, as well as theoretical issues linked to the development of thinking and understanding with regard to emerging themes. This process of development involved returning to relevant literature which informed thinking in relation to these areas. Reflection also involved consideration of the implications of findings for future policy and research.

These issues are explored further in Chapter 7 of this study which contains reflections on the research process and the implications of findings.

4.7 Summary of chapter

The methodology underpinning this study was outlined in this chapter. Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) five phases of qualitative research provided the framework required to clearly articulate the link between the chosen methodology and theoretical perspective in this study. In order to address issues of bias, and acknowledge the interpretative nature of qualitative research, personal interest in the research problem was stated. The choice of a multiple case study design as the strategy of inquiry in this study, and the decision to focus on special schools for pupils with MGLD as cases, was explained and justified. This included reference to the desire not to exclude any teacher, parent or pupils who wished to participate in the study and to investigate commonalities and differences in educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools. Ethical issues were highlighted and addressed relating to power-relations between researcher and participant, access, informed consent, confidentiality, and ownership and dissemination of data. The two phases of data-collection and analysis in this study were outlined in detail. Phase 1 involved piloting the study with one special school and this process informed Phase 2 of the study, the collection of data from four case study schools and mainstream schools. The process of analysis, which included the use of a CAQDAS programme, was described by outlining the steps involved in the four phases of data analysis. Interpretation and evaluation of findings was also addressed with reference to the processes of interpretation and reflection, which were ongoing throughout the research process. Chapter 5 contains findings and analysis in relation to the four research questions underpinning this study.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

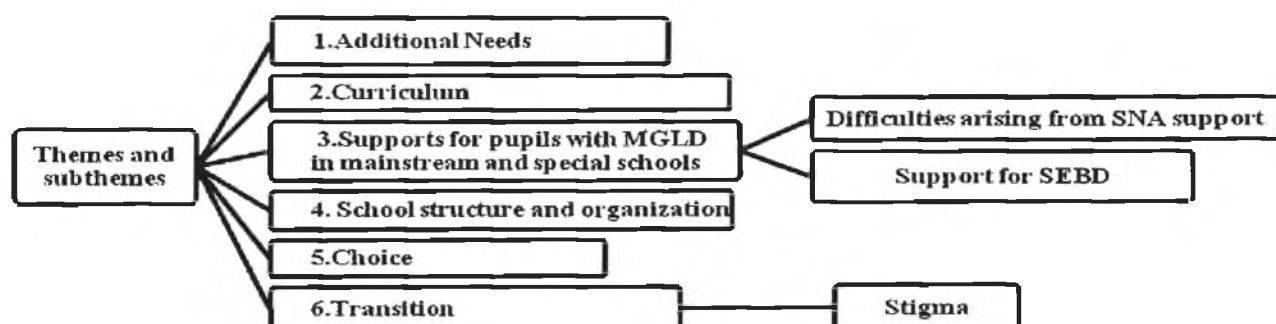
5.1 Introduction

The findings from this multiple case study are presented in this chapter in respect of the four research questions which formed the basis of this study:

1. What factors influence the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD?
2. What are the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers and principals on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools?
3. What are the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers and principals on educational provision in special schools for pupils with MGLD?
4. What role do parents, pupils and professionals play in the decision-making process regarding the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD?

Six themes and three sub-themes emerged from the data in response to these four questions. Some of these themes emerged in response to more than one research question. Due to the overlap and repetition in themes relating to the four research questions, each theme is presented and discussed once in this chapter and reference to the relevant research questions are incorporated as part of the discussion of themes. The six themes and three sub-themes which emerged during the course of analysis are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Themes and sub-themes



The six themes include additional needs, curriculum, supports for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools, school structure and organisation, choice and transition. Two sub-themes, including difficulties arising from SNA support in mainstream schools and support for SEBD, emerged in relation to theme three. One sub-theme, stigma, emerged in relation to theme six.

5.2 Theme 1: Additional special educational needs

The majority of pupils who transferred from mainstream schools were reported as having SEN additional to MGLD. This was consistent across almost all cases although in case B there were a significant minority in the school who did not have an additional need. The principal of case B indicated that up to 30 out of 90 pupils in the school had no additional need. Types of additional needs reported across the four cases included:

Autism spectrum disorder	Speech and language difficulties
Motor difficulties	Physical disabilities
Sensory impairments	SEBD
Social disadvantage	Cerebral palsy
Down syndrome	Medical needs

The most frequently reported additional need was SEBD. Speech and language difficulties, motor difficulties, medical needs and autism spectrum disorders were also referred to as additional needs across all cases. The principals in all cases, with the exception of case D, stated that many pupils in the schools came from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The prevalence of social disadvantage among pupils with MGLD has been documented in the literature and has been identified as a dominant feature of this group (Norwich & Kelly, 2005; Tomlinson, 1982). It is also widely recognised that MGLD is associated with other SEN (Fletcher-Campbell, 2005; Male, 1996). Male's (1996) study of special schools for pupils with MGLD in the UK found that the two most frequently associated difficulties were speech and language difficulties and SEBD. In the current study, SEBD was more frequently reported than any other additional need as a reason for the transfer of pupils from mainstream schools. This finding is supported by that of Norwich and Kelly (2005), who also found that pupils with MGLD in special schools were recorded as having additional areas of difficulty.

5.2.1 Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

SEBD emerged very strongly as a reason pupils had transferred from mainstream schools. This was referred to by all groups of participants and across all cases. Because not all pupils were described as having social *and* emotional and behavioural difficulties, they are addressed separately here.

5.2.1.1 Emotional and behavioural difficulties

Principals and teachers in mainstream primary and post-primary schools highlighted behavioural difficulties, in particular, as one of the main reasons pupils had transferred from the schools. Some stated that they could not cope with the level of disruption caused in mainstream classes by pupils with behavioural problems, particularly where behaviours were

considered aggressive and threatening to other pupils in the school. As one teacher in a mainstream primary school remarked:

We couldn't actually physically remove him from the room so every day was becoming more problematic for him and he knew we could do nothing about it so I think in the end up, it was the best decision... (Teacher mainstream primary C)

Teachers and principals in special schools indicated that many of the pupils who transferred had difficulties controlling their behaviours and/or had a diagnosed conduct disorder. There was also a suggestion that some pupils had learned behaviours which may have been tolerated in a primary school because of the pupils' SEN. The following comments from Teacher 2B highlights the behavioural difficulties experienced by some of the pupils who transferred from mainstream schools:

...conduct disorder, temper issues. Temper issues would be one that does stand out, difficulty with self-control and a lot of issues that have not been resolved with the students that they act out... (Teacher 2B)

Parents described how behavioural difficulties became worse as pupils progressed through the primary school. Some parents attributed the behaviours to the difficulties pupils were experiencing accessing the curriculum and the growing frustration that resulted from these difficulties. Parent 2A described how her child's behaviours progressively worsened in the mainstream schools:

It got to the stage that L used to throw himself on the floor over frustration and temper and I was half afraid to bring him out anywhere at one point he was so bad with it(Parent 2A)

When asked why pupils came to the special schools from mainstream schools, Pupil 2, Group 3B, referred to behavioural difficulties in a post-primary school as a reason for transfer.

R: *What kind of special needs do people have?*

P2: *ADHD*

R: *What's ADHD?*

P2: I just know it's called that.

P1: It's when people can't pay attention....(Pupils 1 and 2, group 3B, females aged 16)

These findings echo those of Ware et al. (2009), who found that pupils who transferred from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD were likely to have additional needs, including behavioural difficulties, as well as MGLD.

5.2.1.2. Social difficulties

Participants referred to social difficulties experienced by pupils who had transferred from mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Teachers and principals described how pupils became isolated from their peers as they grew older as they lacked the social skills required to maintain friendships. The principal of one mainstream primary school described some of the social difficulties experienced by pupils with MGLD:

The differences aren't as obvious up second class but from third class onwards in the yard they have their own little social networks and groups and children with mild general learning difficulties find it harder and harder... (Principal mainstream primary 2A)

Instances of teasing, particularly at post-primary level, were highlighted by the principal of post-primary school D:

They used to tease him because he was kind of an obvious target for making fun of....(Principal mainstream post-primary D)

Teachers and principals in special schools suggested that inappropriate behaviours and lack of social skills were among the key reasons for the transfer of pupils with MGLD to the special schools. As the principal of case A commented:

Socially it begins to break down for them....if the child is no longer able to keep up with their classmates and can't join in what's happening in the yard and you know, just is sort of gradually sidelined by the other kids and it happens not because the other kids are being cruel to them but because they can't cotton on to the rules of the game and because they can't keep up.... (Principal A)

For most parents, social isolation in mainstream schools was highlighted as a key factor in the decision to transfer their children to the special schools. Parent 6C described this social isolation in terms of lack of friendship in the mainstream school:

She never ever made a friend. She was alone. She was alone for most of her primary education....(Parent 6C)

There were more references from pupils to social, rather than behavioural, difficulties. Pupil 2C described her feelings of loneliness in her primary school while Pupil 1, group 1B, described his experiences of teasing while in the mainstream school:

It was ok but you know I wasn't good at running and stuff, they were good to me but they didn't really understand me. They were good to me but they didn't really understand everything....(Pupil 2C, female, aged 12)

There was a lot of teasing and stuff and it was very hard for me to go in....(Pupil 1, group 1B, male aged 12)

5.2.2 Summary of findings in relation to theme of additional needs

The findings in relation to the theme of additional needs are relevant to the first research question on factors which influence the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. Many of the pupils who transferred experienced additional needs and SEBD was more frequently cited by participants than any other type of additional need. Teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools emphasised the behavioural difficulties experienced by pupils, while parents and pupils focused on the social isolation experienced by pupils in mainstream schools. The finding that many of the pupils who transferred from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD experienced additional SEN, echoes that of a number of studies across different countries which have identified that pupils with SEN are more likely to experience social difficulties and greater loneliness than their peers in mainstream schools (e.g., Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Pijl, Frostad & Flem, 2008).

5.3 Theme 2: Curriculum

All of the participant groups across all cases referred to pupils' difficulties with regard to accessing and participating in the curriculum in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. This emerged as a key theme in the decision to transfer pupils and also in relation to educational provision in mainstream and special schools for pupils with MGLD. Issues which arose included the adaptation of the curriculum to meet individual needs, a lack of life and social skills development in mainstream schools, curriculum and assessment structures in post-primary schools and certification in special schools.

5.3.1 Difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools

Principals and teachers in mainstream primary schools agreed that pupils with MGLD, who transferred to the special schools, had experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum. The principal of mainstream primary 1A suggested that pupils with MGLD could only reach a certain level, and then plateau, in terms of their ability to access the curriculum in primary schools:

I suppose from third class onwards you can see it. SESE, a lot of it is book based. The more hands-on approach further down the school would suit better.... (Principal mainstream primary 1A)

Others, including a teacher in mainstream primary 1D suggested that the curriculum was overloaded with content:

The curriculum is so overloaded and you have everybody else to try and cater for as well.... (Teacher mainstream primary 1D)

Principals in post-primary schools suggested that pupils who had transferred to special schools for pupils with MGLD experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum during their first year in the schools. The deputy principal of post-primary mainstream C described the difficulties experienced by a pupil with MGLD who subsequently transferred to a special school:

He found the programme from day one too difficult and it caused a lot of difficulties at home he just couldn't do the work. He said he couldn't do it, he didn't want to be here, he wasn't happy and it was causing rows at home (Deputy-Principal post-primary mainstream C)

Some teachers in special schools, including Teacher D, attributed pupils' difficulties accessing the curriculum to their learning disabilities:

I think they plateau. Very often they can work out fine when they are younger but as they get a little bit older, third, fourth class in primary school, from then on the gap gets wider and wider and from then on, the difficulties are greater as a result(Teacher D)

Others, including Teacher 3B, suggested that the curriculum was overloaded and insufficient effort was being made in mainstream primary schools to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of the pupils:

The amount of curriculum they have to get through and the books they have to get through, maybe it's a different system that would need to be looked at. I think that there needs to be a balance, different levels of books in a class, I know that's difficult for a teacher....(Teacher 3B)

Most parents referred to difficulties pupils experienced accessing the curriculum in primary school as the majority of the pupils had transferred in upper, or at the end of, primary. For some pupils, difficulties were apparent from as early as first class and literacy and numeracy were the key areas of difficulty mentioned. Many parents, including Parent 4B, suggested that pupils were unable to access the curriculum at their class level:

He wasn't able to keep up with the pace of the class and I thought this was affecting his self-esteem that I'm stupid, I'm dumb. He kept on saying that all the time, that he was stupid and dumb....(Parent 4B)

Some pupils used the terms 'learning difficulties' and 'special needs' in reference to themselves, or other pupils in the special schools, when asked why they had transferred from mainstream schools. One pupil described the special school she was attending as a school for people with special needs:

It's for people that have special needs and aren't able for proper work in school....(Pupil 2, group 3B, female, aged 16)

Maths was the subject most often mentioned by pupils, including Pupil 1A, as an area of difficulty in mainstream school:

Some people have learning difficulties or if they need help they come to this school. I was still in third class when I was in my old school and I had to get held back...because I couldn't do maths (Pupil 1A, female, aged 12)

The finding that pupils experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools is supported by the findings of previous studies (e.g., Kelly & Devitt, 2010). The perceived lack of a curriculum appropriate for the needs of pupils with MGLD is cited as a key factor in terms of parents' dissatisfaction with mainstream provision in Ireland in a study conducted by the NFVB (2006). However, evidence to support the need for a separate curriculum for pupils with MGLD is weak (Norwich & Lewis, 2001). A recent report, *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools* (NCCA, 2010a), suggests that teachers are struggling with the sheer size of the mainstream primary curriculum in terms of content. This report also identifies the reliance of teachers on textbooks as a guide in curriculum implementation as a barrier to differentiation in mainstream classes. All participant groups in this study cited difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools as a reason for transfer.

5.3.2 Differentiation of curricula in mainstream and special schools

Mainstream primary teachers expressed the view that it was difficult to differentiate the curriculum for pupils who had fallen behind the class level. One teacher suggested that differentiation was particularly difficult once pupils reached the senior classes in a primary school:

The other side of it being bandied around is differentiation, teachers should

differentiate, but going on up the senior end especially, and with the curriculum overload up the senior end, to get through the maths curriculum and so on, it's very difficult when you are talking about that kind of a gap.(Teacher mainstream primary 1B)

There was a suggestion, from the principal of mainstream primary D, that special schools could facilitate greater levels of differentiation and individualised support, due to small class size and more staff to support pupils with SEN, than in mainstream schools:

The idea that you would have a special needs assistant and a plethora of support people and the rooms with a small number of children and the curriculum modified. It is a special school for a special child with special needs. Ours is mainstream, the middle of the road....(Principal mainstream primary D)

The teachers and principals in the special schools stated that they adapted the curriculum to suit the needs of pupils and there was more activity-based learning, particularly in the junior end of the schools. Teacher 5B suggested that a lot of time was devoted to individualised planning so that curriculum content could be taught at the level of ability, and according to the needs, of individual pupils:

At the beginning of the year we have the IEPs to do and it's a huge amount of work on each child and it takes a very long time but it has to be done and it's important that it's done. It really is an individual programme for each child.... (Teacher 5B)

There was a perception amongst some teachers, including Teacher 1A, that there was little differentiation of the curriculum for pupils in mainstream schools:

In mainstream you have your text and you have your book and everybody's working to the same level, do the work and get on with it(Teacher 1A)

However, while this was the view expressed by most principals and teachers in special schools, Principal A suggested that teachers in primary schools were very good at differentiating the curriculum:

The teachers are very good at differentiating and providing alternative or adapted curriculums for children, that's my experience anyway. I see a lot of great work going on out in the schools where they are doing this.... (Principal A)

Many parents also suggested that pupils worked at the level of their ability in special schools. They felt that learning strengths were developed and pupils could progress at different rates. Parent 1A stated that teachers in special schools set learning goals which were achievable:

So really they work to the level the child is at, they are not setting goals the child can never achieve. So in each individual class, each child is working to their ability. That's kind of the main thing. ... (Parent 1A)

Some parents reported that pupils had increased confidence in their own abilities and greater independence in academic work since transferring to the special schools. Others suggested that the pupils were of similar levels of ability and this allowed for a slower pace in the classes. Again, class size was considered to be an important factor in allowing for a slower pace in the special schools, as expressed by Parent 3D:

She would have a one to one person with her for learning and she would always have somebody there. The classrooms are small as well there isn't big numbers in it (Parent 3D)

Many of the pupils, including Pupil 3A, indicated that they found the work much easier in the special schools and suggested that there was more help available from teachers and SNAs when it was needed:

It's good, like, it's not that hard. The work is not hard.... (Pupil 3A, male aged 13)

Pupil 2, group 1B, stated that in his old school he was given the same work as everybody else in the class:

*They give you easier work. They help you.
Did they not give you easier work in your old school?
No, they gave you the same work as everyone else.... (Pupil 2, group 1B,
male, aged 12)*

The findings highlight difficulties relating to curriculum planning and adaptation for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools. Similar difficulties are highlighted in Stevens and

O'Moore's (2009) study on educational provision for pupils with MGLD. They found that one-third of resource teachers made curricular provision, including the development of IEPs, without reference to pupils' class-based learning.

5.3.3 Life and social skills development

Teachers and principals in mainstream schools suggested that there was more time spent on developing life skills in special schools than in mainstream schools. The principal of mainstream primary B stated that this was more appropriate for pupils who had transferred to special schools:

Practical life skills, shopping, things that we take for granted they have to be taught. Queuing in a shop, paying for things, working, budgeting money. Very practical things, practical maths, cookery, things like hotel and catering, keeping things clean, hygiene. Simple things like that can be very important.... (Principal mainstream primary B)

Teachers and principals in special schools agreed that there was more of an emphasis on life skills in special schools than in mainstream schools. The teachers stated that there was an emphasis on developing social skills and independence, as they felt that some children had become over-dependent on adults from their experience of mainstream. This was seen to be a very important part of the pupils' social and personal development. Teacher 2C described some of the activities undertaken by pupils as part of their social development in special schools:

We take them down the town, going to the shop, going to Tescos going to the post office, going on the bus for trips, going to indoor football, going on trips ..just to get them out into the community so they can meet people and greet people, know where to go to the toilet, use their coins, use their money, know that if they go into a shop and hand over their money to wait for change.... (Teacher 2C)

Some parents also referred to the emphasis on life skills and social skills development in special schools. Parent 1D spoke about activities that pupils engaged in as part of this

development:

They go out to restaurants and do some shopping in Tesco to give them the social skills...Parent 1D

Many parents stressed that work placement was a very important part of pupils' life skills development. Work placement for older pupils was practice across all cases.

Most of the pupils referred to their preference for the practical subjects offered in the schools including home economics, woodwork, horticulture, PE and art. Pupil 1, group 1B and Pupil 1D described activities they enjoyed:

I like woodwork very much. I built a pencil holder for my mum, a book thing for my mum and I am building a bird house at the moment...(Pupil 1, group 1B, male aged 12)

It's all pretty good but I would be doing woodwork now. You get to make things and all that. I'd like to make a baseball bat.... (Pupil 1D, male aged 14)

The NCCA (2009) identified the need for a curriculum framework which focuses on personal, social and vocational skills for pupils with GLD at post-primary level. The findings of the current study support the need for the development of a new framework at junior cycle. It is evident from the findings presented here that all participants groups viewed the emphasis on life skills development and work placement as an essential and for pupils, a preferred part of the curriculum for pupils with MGLD.

5.3.4 Curriculum and assessment in mainstream post-primary schools

There was a broad consensus from principals and deputy principals in mainstream post-primary schools that the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme were particularly suited to the needs of pupils with MGLD and there were reports of the success of these programmes. The continuous assessment component of these programmes was deemed to be particularly suited to the

needs of the pupils who did not tend to perform well in more traditional examination conditions. The principal of mainstream post-primary A indicated that all pupils in junior cycle undertook the JCSP:

I'd have them all doing JCSP. The support that we have from JCSP is enormous for our boys....(Principal mainstream post-primary A)

The principal of mainstream post-primary B described how pupils following the JCSP were placed in a special class:

Students with special educational needs may be placed in a special class for students who will follow the JCSP.... it kept students in school as some would never achieve a Junior Certificate and would fall out of the system....(Principal mainstream post-primary B)

However, despite this view that the JCSP facilitated access to the curriculum, there were some reservations, also expressed by mainstream principals and deputy principals, in relation to its provision. It appeared that not all teachers at post-primary level were convinced of the merits of the programme, or that there was a need to provide the programme if another school in the area was already doing so. The principal of mainstream post-primary D expressed this view:

Some teachers don't particularly engage with it, they are still doing the Junior Cert, they are still doing the same exam, so it is just a methodology in a way. Some teachers don't take to it as well as others and they feel they have their curriculum to cover and you know (Principal mainstream post-primary D)

There was consensus from principals and teachers in the special schools that the curriculum at post-primary level was inaccessible for the pupils who had transferred from mainstream schools. The principals and teachers, including Teacher 5B, suggested that the curriculum was too difficult, there were too many subjects and that there wasn't enough emphasis on life skills:

I think the curriculums are so tight and inflexible that with the best will in the world it

is very hard to keep it all going.... (Teacher 5B)

There was also a suggestion from Teacher 2B, that the JCSP, because it was only offered to the less able pupils in some schools, could further highlight a pupil's learning difficulties amongst their peer group:

In a secondary school, all the emphasis is on the Junior Cert and the JCSP is only an aside. It wouldn't be offered in every class, it would be offered in the lower, less able classes.... (Teacher 2B)

Parents also expressed concern about the pupils' ability to cope with the curriculum and examination structures in a post-primary mainstream setting. Some felt that there would be too much pressure placed on the pupils to keep up with the level of work involved and others were concerned at the lack of emphasis on life skills. The number of subjects pupils had to undertake was considered to be unmanageable and literacy and numeracy levels of pupils was considered an obstacle. Parent 5B was among those who expressed these concerns:

They seem to do a lot of subjects in the first few years. 12 subjects is a massive amount for any child coming from the primary school system. Most of them are exam taking subjects....(Parent 5B)

Two pupils in case B who had attended post-primary schools for a brief period indicated that they had found the work difficult when they were there:

I just went because my sister and brothers went there before me and my mother went there as well. I liked it at the start but then the work was getting hard and then I found that I wasn't, you weren't that comfortable there like....(Pupil 1, group 2B, male aged 15)

The work was a lot harder down in that school(Pupil 2, group 3B, female aged 16)

The findings indicate a consensus from all participant groups that the curriculum at post-primary was considered inaccessible to pupils who transferred to the special schools and that the assessment structures were inappropriate for these pupils in mainstream post-primary

schools. These views are supported by a NCCA (2009) discussion paper which acknowledged that the curriculum at junior cycle was inaccessible for some pupils with GLD.

5.3.5 Certification for pupils in special schools

Due to differences across cases in relation to certification in special schools, findings from cases A, C and D are presented first and this is followed by findings from case B.

5.3.5.1 Certification in cases A, C and D.

Three of the special schools offered FETAC accredited courses and certification for pupils once they reached the senior stages of the school. While these schools were following the Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999), the content was adapted to enable pupils to follow FETAC modules.

Principals and teachers in cases A, C, and D were of the belief that FETAC courses were particularly suited to their schools because they were inclusive of every pupil and the content was practical. Teacher 3C described how this programme offered pupils a recognised award at a level which was suited to their ability:

That's the beauty of FETAC .. you cater for their needs and you adapt a programme that is suitable to their standard....(Teacher 3C)

Teachers and principals indicated that FETAC accredited courses were also offered in many of the training centres to which pupils progressed once they reached 18 years of age. This offered continuity of provision for pupils when they left the schools and they could build on existing awards or levels they had reached. There was agreement that certification was important, as it provided pupils with more choices for placement on leaving the schools. Principal D suggested that certification provided pupils with a sense of achievement:

I think it's important, it's nice for kids to have been seen to have achieved something and to have a certificate (Principal D)

The principals in cases A, C and D were less enthusiastic about offering the Junior Certificate programme to pupils in the schools. Principal A stated that they had tried the JCSP for a short time but considered that it was not inclusive of all pupils:

We tried it for a year or two but it really didn't suit our students and there were only some of the students that could do it. We didn't want anything that divided them up into groups like that, we wanted to have something that was inclusive of everybody....(Principal A)

The principal in case C stated that they would consider the programme if there was a demand from parents but the assessment component was considered unsuitable. In case D, the principal indicated that they did not meet the criteria to introduce the programme as only schools with a designated disadvantaged status could apply.

Some of the parents in these three cases suggested that they were initially concerned that their children would not achieve a Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate but were generally happy that their needs were being met through alternative programmes. Parent 3D indicated his satisfaction with the progress his daughter was making in the special school:

Saying that, since she went down to D, she has actually come along way, I wouldn't have a fear now of her. What she is doing in D, she is happy enough with them.... (Parent 3D)

Parent 2A suggested that FETAC programmes were more appropriate because of the nature of the assessment structure:

They do FETAC for the junior and leaving cert. They do FETAC where it's all based on their work throughout the year, you know, so that's their level of exams.... (Parent 2A)

However, Parent 6C was anxious that her child would access some of the post-primary curriculum through a process of dual enrolment in a local post-primary school and was trying to find a post-primary school that would facilitate this process:

Well I'm in the process at the minute of negotiating with another mainstream school

to get em, I'm trying to do some shared schooling, if she could do some maybe Applied Leaving Cert classes in the other school, but maybe still stay in case C for a lot of it.... (Parent 6C)

The pupils in these three cases did not refer to any certification or awards they were pursuing in the special schools. This may have been because these pupils were all between the ages of 12 and 16 and were still following programmes based on the primary curriculum.

5.3.5.2 Certification in case B

In case B, the school offered the JCSP to pupils up to age 16 and once pupils had completed this programme they could do the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. However, where pupils were unable to follow the JCSP, an alternative programme based on the primary curriculum was available. Principal B stated that the JCSP was offered to the majority of pupils of post-primary age in the school because it was considered well structured and supported:

The JCSP is structured in modules and you can devise modules yourself for a particular school. So it is very well structured and the students can see where they are going and what they are doing. It is easy to record progress so we certainly find it useful and helpful....(Principal B)

Pupils who followed this programme were able to complete the Junior Certificate in a limited number of subjects.

Parents here were more concerned that their children would participate in state examinations like the Junior Certificate and many, including Parent 2B, expressed satisfaction that their children were able to avail of this programme like their mainstream peers:

I feel it's great for him to do this Junior Cert. It means that he has something there and it just needs to come out. He's just like any other first year or second year or whatever year he's in....(Parent 2B)

Pupils in case B referred to the Junior Certificate and LCA programmes particularly with reference to the assessment aspect of the programme. Pupil 2, group 2B, talked about the subjects she was undertaking for upcoming examinations and preparation for examinations in the school:

I picked home ec, maths, English, CSPE and art. We done our mocks last week. Yesterday we had our art exam and in June we're having the other exams.... (Pupil 2, group 2B, female aged 15)

Two pupils stated that they were following the LCA programme and described how it was different to the Leaving Certificate:

P1: There's two different types of leaving cert and we're doing the leaving cert applied

R: What's the difference?

P2: You do the leaving cert in two years. It's more practical stuff here

P1: We do Spanish and English as well

P2: We do hair and beauty

P1: I do horticulture and studying plants and animals.... (Pupils 1 and 2, group 3B, females, aged 16)

These findings highlight the importance of certification to parents and pupils in special schools for pupils with MGLD. Certification was considered to be important by all participant groups although there were differences between cases with regard to the type of certification considered most appropriate. The importance of providing pupils with the opportunity to access certification programmes similar to their peers was identified in case B and this has been highlighted in a study of the views of pupils with MGLD on their educational provision in a special school in Ireland (Motherway, 2009).

5.3.6 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of curriculum

The findings presented in relation to the theme of curriculum are relevant to Research Questions 1, 2 and 3. Difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream primary and post-primary schools were cited as a key reason for the transfer of pupils to special schools for

pupils with MGLD. The curriculum in mainstream primary schools was viewed as overloaded with content and increasingly inaccessible to pupils as they progressed into the middle and senior stages of the school. Mainstream primary teachers experienced difficulties differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. At post-primary level, the curriculum was viewed by participants as inaccessible to pupils with MGLD due to the number of subjects pupils were required to undertake at junior cycle and inappropriate assessment structures. The curriculum in special schools for pupils with MGLD was viewed as more appropriate and accessible due to an emphasis on life skills development, the perception that the curriculum was adapted to suit the level of ability of pupils in special schools and the provision of alternative programmes which provide pupils the opportunity for achieving certification. The findings in relation to the curriculum at post-primary level are supported by a NCCA (2010b) consultation document on the junior cycle stage of post-primary level which describes the curriculum as rigid with its emphasis on subject-based learning. This rigidity is compounded by the assessment structure at this stage, namely, the Junior Certificate examination.

5.4 Theme 3: Supports for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools

Lack of appropriate supports for pupils in mainstream primary and post-primary schools was frequently cited by participants across all groups and cases as a key factor in the decision to transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The views of participants on supports and resources in mainstream schools are presented here and due to differences in the nature of these views in relation to mainstream primary, post-primary and special schools, these are presented separately. Two sub-themes emerged within this theme, which are presented later in this section. The first related to SNA support in mainstream schools and the second concerned support for SEBD.

5.4.1 Supports and resources in mainstream primary schools

There were mixed views in relation to supports and resources for pupils with MGLD at primary level. Difficulties accessing resources, the general allocation model (GAM) and a perceived lack of support for pupils in mainstream classes were issues raised in relation to support for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools.

5.4.1.1 Access to resources

Teachers and principals expressed concerns in relation to the level of supports available for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools. These concerns included a perceived reduction in resources allocated to pupils, with SNA support being most frequently mentioned as an area where allocation to pupils with MGLD had been reduced. One principal indicated that it had become very difficult for pupils to meet the criteria for allocation of SNA support:

Some of the children here would have access to an SNA. In the past it would have been one to one but with the way things have gone, we've had to fight to gain access to an SNA and there is a lot of sharing and things like that....(Principal mainstream primary 1A)

One mainstream primary teacher in case D suggested that the reduction in resource allocation in mainstream primary schools could result in an increase in pupils going to special schools:

With this down turn in the economy, is it going to swing back, it's so difficult to get an SNA, to get resource time, even though it is the parents' choice where they go to school. I can see it will come to a stage where a SENO will say - well actually, there is a place for your child in D - if you decide to send your child to mainstream there will be no SNA and no resource time....(Teacher mainstream primary 2D)

Parents whose children had access to resource teaching hours and SNA support in mainstream primary schools tended to express more positive views than those who struggled to gain access to these supports. Parents, including Parent 5B, considered SNA support to be particularly beneficial:

The special needs assistant, I couldn't have asked for better, she was wonderful....(Parent 5B)

Parents of pupils who had their SNA support withdrawn were particularly critical as they felt nothing was put in place to compensate for the loss. Parent 4B suggested that it was very difficult to access supports in mainstream primary and that it was a continuous struggle to retain supports even after they had been allocated to pupils:

He'd been in school for three years. I was ringing the department for three years. I had to threaten to sue in the end....(Parent 4B)

While pupils did not comment on access to resources and supports in primary schools, there was some reference made to support received from SNAs with class work. Pupil 1, group 1B described how his SNA supported him in his mainstream primary school:

She used to sit with me during the day which meant say if I was stuck like I would, she would give me help. During Irish classes, I didn't really like Irish too much because I have epilepsy as well, so it was too much for me so we just did something else while they did Irish....(Pupil 1, group 1B, male aged 12)

5.4.1.2 General Allocation Model

There was a view expressed by teachers and principals in mainstream schools that the introduction of the GAM had resulted in a reduction of support for pupils with MGLD and one teacher in a mainstream primary school in case C indicated that pupils with MGLD would no longer be considered a priority when selecting pupils for psychological assessment. This was because the outcome of such assessments would not result in any additional resource allocation for pupils with MGLD:

It's awful really because when those children were in a category they were getting a dedicated time and they were entitled to it and I think now they are the big losers. They are the children that are the hardest to teach but they are getting the same as the child that maybe has fallen behind. There is nothing to identify them as a special group and I do think that they miss out..... there is nothing to be gained for the school from having assessments for MGLD....(teacher mainstream primary C1)

Principal A suggested that the GAM had resulted in a loss of appropriate support for pupils with MGLD, particularly those who did not have additional needs:

If you have a child with straightforward MGLD, no speech problems, very well socially adapted, just has the learning difficulty, that child nowadays is much more likely to fall through everybody's net because they are not going to get extra support in mainstream school and they possibly won't get into our school because other children with more complex needs need the place more than them..... Principal A

The findings highlight a perception amongst teachers and parents that supports and resources for pupils with MGLD are difficult to access in mainstream primary schools. The findings also highlight a perception among teachers in mainstream and special schools that the GAM is an inadequate method of resource allocation for these pupils. These views echo those of Stevens and Moore (2009), who are especially critical of the lack of guidelines issued to schools in relation to resource allocation and support for pupils with MGLD.

5.4.1.3 Support in mainstream classes

Some principals and teachers in mainstream schools referred to the difficulties faced by teachers in providing support for pupils with MGLD in mainstream classes. It was suggested that this was due to class size and the varying levels of ability of pupils in classes. There was a suggestion from one teacher that pupils without SEN were not receiving the same level of attention in classes as those with SEN and that some parents were aware of this:

Mainstream school for a lot of children just won't work. I have 35 children in my class this year, two classes, and there are a whole range of disabilities there, there is no time, there just is no time because it is getting to a stage now where parents of children of normal intelligence are saying - but my child isn't getting that kind of attention - and they have a point.... (Teacher mainstream primary 2D)

Some of the principals and teachers in special schools suggested that teachers in mainstream primary schools lacked knowledge and experience in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN.

There was a view, expressed by Teacher 2B, that although pupils were present in the classes, they were not participating:

I've one boy in my class who talked about he hated his old school because there were three of them and they were ignored in their own school, they were just left at the back of the class.... (Teacher 2B)

Some parents, such as Parent 1D, were critical of the support received by their children in mainstream primary classrooms. They suggested that mainstream class teachers had insufficient knowledge or training in the area of SEN. There was a view that mainstream class teachers did not have time to support pupils:

They would have the qualifications for it you know they would have done whatever. The mainstream teachers don't have that and as well as that they don't have the time.... (Parent 1D)

The pupils did not generally comment on the quality of provision in mainstream primary schools. Some pupils, including Pupil 1A, mentioned difficulties getting help in mainstream classes and reported having been left on their own to do their work:

The teacher wouldn't come to my table when I asked her. I put my hand up and said I needed help and she said no try them yourself and I said I already did it and she said try some more and I said I can't it's hard.... You ask the teacher to help you and you're waiting and you're waiting and two hours later she's here.... (Pupil 1A, female, aged 12)

The findings indicate a perception that teachers in mainstream primary schools lack expertise in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. This view has been identified in previous studies where the level of expertise of teachers has been called into question and a need for further training has been identified (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2010; Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008).

5.4.2 Access to resources in mainstream post-primary schools

Principals in post-primary schools agreed that there was a lack of continuity in support from mainstream primary, as supports had to be reapplied for when pupils enrolled in

the post-primary school. One deputy principal indicated that the school had no control over resource allocation:

What the child has in primary school doesn't follow into secondary school. That's nothing to do with (school), that's the whole system....(Deputy principal mainstream post-primary C)

The principals and teachers in the special schools suggested that the lack of certainty regarding entitlement to support in mainstream post-primary was very off-putting for some parents and they were more likely to send the pupils to the special school instead. Principal B suggested that a reduction in resources at post-primary level affected pupils' progress there:

It appears to be that the supports at primary school are not available to the same extent in post-primary... I think that generally, the youngsters that have gone to post-primary who have come to us afterward, we have found were very lost in post-primary.... (Principal B)

Many parents suggested that there were insufficient resources available for pupils in post-primary schools. Parent 2B expressed her disappointment at the level of support her son received while in the post-primary school, while Parent 4D expressed her concern that teachers in post-primary schools did not have the knowledge required to support her son's needs:

They said they were going to have someone in the class with him like an SNA and that they would keep me informed as to how he was doing. K said he didn't have anyone with him at all, seemingly they couldn't get funding for it, to get someone to sit with him and so, the teachers used to take it upon themselves to sit down beside him and help him with the work...(Parent 2B)

Up here in teachers' minds... they are not trained for this, this is what is thrown at you.. I haven't been trained to teach kids with special needs so I don't know....(Parent 4D)

5.4.3 Supervision in post-primary schools

A lack of appropriate supervision of pupils with MGLD outside of class time was an issue of concern for parents of pupils who had transferred to the special school. Some

parents, including Parent 1B, indicated that a lack of adequate supervision of pupils outside of class time could leave their children vulnerable to bullying or engaging in appropriate behaviours:

I said to her what happens when he comes out the door, what happens when he's in the yard, what sort of supports will be there for him? I said he's very vulnerable, he's very gullible and he's so desperate to be part of a group that he can be very easily influenced by his peer group....(Parent 1B)

Parents of pupils who had medical needs or physical disabilities, also expressed concern for their children's safety in the busy environment of a post-primary school. Parent 1C expressed these concerns:

Well my biggest worry was, the day I went into the C, I actually went in the wrong door, and I met loads of classrooms finishing class and they all just came flying out on the corridor and I thought 'O my God' ...it was like a stampede... and I thought 'O my God, you'd get trampled here'. Because of her peg and special needs, I thought you just be ploughed down and I thought 'No, it's not for her.... (Parent 1C)

It was accepted by principals in post-primary schools that pupils could be susceptible to bullying while unsupervised and that this had happened in the case of pupils who had transferred in the past. The deputy principal of a mainstream post-primary school in case C said that, while the school provided adequate supervision for all pupils during break times, no school could guarantee complete supervision for pupils:

The school has an adequate level of supervision for people that's all students. Every school will have recreational activities to the best of their ability during breaktimes. No school can guarantee complete supervision for pupils during breaks....(Deputy principal mainstream post-primary C)

These findings highlight a perception among participant groups that the level of support and resource allocation for pupils with MGLD was inadequate. A lack of continuity of supports from primary and the perception that there were inadequate levels of supervision were

identified as reasons for transfer by parents, principals and teachers. These findings are supported by those of Armstrong et al. (2010) who found that parents of pupils in primary schools were more likely to report that their child was in receipt of resource teaching hours and SNA support than parents of pupils with SEN in mainstream post-primary schools.

5.4.4 Resources and supports in special schools

There was a perception across all cases that the special school could offer more resources and supports to pupils. These included teacher expertise and SNA support. The role of the special school in organising placements in vocational and training centres for pupils when they reached 18 was considered a very important part of educational provision.

5.4.4.1 Expertise in special schools

There was a perception, expressed by some parents, that the teachers in special schools had greater expertise and training in the area of SEN than their mainstream counterparts. Some parents felt that the teachers in special schools had a greater understanding of the needs of the pupils and that teaching was adapted to suit these needs. Parent 4D indicated that teachers in special schools had a greater understanding of the needs of pupils than those in mainstream schools:

They know if J is not getting something or he is getting contrary which is the case with kids with special needs, you need to take a break from it. I don't think ordinary teachers have that concept especially if they haven't worked with them before, they are not going to understand that....(Parent 4D)

While some principals in the special schools referred to extra courses attended by teachers, they did not express the view that teachers in special schools had any additional, or different, training. Some teachers referred to the use of adapted teaching approaches to meet the learning needs of pupils while others indicated that teachers' experience in working with

pupils with SEN was a feature of provision in special schools. Teacher 3A suggested that teachers in special schools used different methods or approaches than teachers in mainstream schools:

I don't think we have better skills than mainstream teachers, we just have a different way of teaching or doing certain things, that maybe they wouldn't have the opportunity of doing because maybe their class is a mainstream class and maybe that one special needs child goes out to resource. It's hard to say really.... (Teacher 3A)

One principal of a mainstream primary school in case D expressed the view that teachers in special schools had greater expertise in the area of SEN than those in mainstream schools:

I think the disability level that a mainstream school can't cater for because there is a greater need for expertise than what you have.... Principal mainstream primary D

These findings highlight a perception amongst parents and teachers in mainstream schools that teachers have greater expertise in special schools which is similar to the findings of Ware et al.'s (2009) study of the role of special schools and classes. However, Ware et al. found that there were disparities in expertise and qualifications amongst teachers in special schools.

5.4.4.2 Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support in special schools

Teachers and principals in special schools agreed that the SNAs played an important role in supporting pupils in the classes. The SNAs supported the pupils with their care needs and their school work. There was a view that the role of the SNA should incorporate support for all aspects of pupils' needs including care, academic, social and behavioural needs. Teacher 3C described her working relationship with the SNA in her class:

I know they are supposed to be there for the care needs but in our setting at the end of the day we all work together and there is no such thing in my room that I'm the teacher and you're the SNA and you're down there....(Teacher 3C)

Some parents stressed the importance of SNA support for their children, particularly those with medical needs. Other parents, including Parent 3A, referred to the SNAs role in supporting pupils with class work:

She might take them out on a one to one, or two or three in a group based on who all goes out. It might be their reading or spelling or maths. The whole class would have SNA support.... (Parent 3A)

The pupils referred to SNAs as people who would help them when they found their work difficult. Some pupils, including Pupil 3C, considered the SNAs to have a teaching role and referred to them as other teachers in the class rather than SNAs:

There's other teachers in the classroom they help you too....you ask them, you say Miss, can I have some help please, and they just come over....(Pupil 3C, female aged 15)

The findings indicate a perception amongst participant groups that SNAs play an important role in supporting pupils' academic and care needs. Logan's (2006) study of SNA support revealed similar findings, with both teachers and principals advocating that the role of the SNA should include learning support activities.

5.4.4.3 Placement at 18 years of age

Placement for pupils when they reached the age of 18 emerged very strongly as an issue especially amongst parents across all cases. Many parents referred to the fact that pupils were placed in vocational and training centres when they reached 18 years of age and this kind of assistance was considered very important for pupils when they left school. Parent 1A indicated that this influenced the decision to transfer their child to the special school:

Well that was another consideration sending her here because when she did her five or six years here they would help her get onto a training course.... (Parent 1A)

Some parents, including Parent 4C, were also hopeful that the pupils might be placed in

employment on leaving school:

She will get a job through the school. They go round places and try to get them in, you know.... (Parent 4C)

The principals in some of the primary and post-primary schools also referred to this aspect of the special school's provision. There was a suggestion from the principal of one post-primary school that special schools had links with training centres and other organisations which provided placements for pupils with MGLD, whereas mainstream schools could not offer the same support with transition at this stage:

It's not that easy to get into the special schemes so when he got into the special school we said that was the best way for him....(Principal mainstream post-primary A)

Principals and teachers in special schools across cases highlighted their role in supporting pupils with the selection of placements. Principal B described some of the placement options available to pupils:

It's usually something like the National Learning Network would be a follow-on,services would take youngsters that are less academic. They offer gardening, horticulture and stable management, which would be an attractive option... (Principal B)

None of the pupils interviewed stated that they would go to a training centre when they left the special school. Many pupils indicated they would go to college while others described the kind of jobs they would like to do when they left school. Pupils 1 and 2, group 3B, identified some of their choices:

R: What do you do when you're finished here?

P1: Look for a job or go to college, it depends what you want to do. I don't really know, a cookery course or something.

P2: I'd like to be a hairdresser....(Pupils 1 and 2, group 3B, females aged 16)

The findings illustrate the perceptions of parents, principals and teachers that special schools played an important role in supporting pupils with placements when they reached 18 years of

age. The perception that post-school outcomes are enhanced for pupils attending special schools is supported by Fahey's (2006) study of post-school outcomes for past-pupils of a special school for pupils with MGLD, which found that the majority of participants progressed to some form of full-time training on graduation from the special school.

5.4.5 Theme 3 – Sub-theme 1: Difficulties arising from SNA support in mainstream schools

5.4.5.1 Dependence on SNA support in mainstream primary schools

Dependence of pupils, parents and teachers on SNA support was a theme which emerged across all cases. A few parents, including Parent 6A, expressed the view that the SNA did not enable the pupil to develop independence:

She was taking the books out for him and that's not what I wanted. I wanted him to be independent not someone taking the books out for him. ... (Parent 6A)

However, there was also a view that the SNA helped protect the pupils from bullying or teasing by classmates. Other parents were happy that the SNA did everything with pupils and an SNA was described by Parent 4D as a second mother to the pupil:

But the fact of him having an SNA was a bonus and we used to say she was like a second mammy. She used to do everything with him.... (Parent 4D)

Teachers in special schools stated that pupils who transferred had acquired a level of learned helplessness and that it took some time before pupils could engage in a task without constant adult supervision. There was also a view, expressed by Teacher 1C, that social development had been inhibited by the constant presence of the SNA in the mainstream class:

I just say no to R, my assistant, she knows not to do it, she knows to stand back and if there's need for them to be shown something, how to wash something, then gradually, you know, but you have to give them the opportunity. But I can see that in mainstream you just couldn't, you know.... Another thing as well is that they go through school life with an adult. Now what child should go through life with an

adult at its side all the time....(Teacher 1C)

There was some acknowledgment from principals and teachers in mainstream schools that there was a certain level of dependence on SNAs to support pupils but it was suggested that this was unavoidable given the numbers in classes. One principal argued that the SNA provided support by keeping pupils on task in mainstream classes:

That has been said to us that maybe some children are a little dependent on the SNA but we wouldn't be able to keep the child in the school if we didn't have the SNA to withdraw them or keep them on task....(Principal mainstream primary B)

Some of the pupils indicated that they found it easier to cope in the mainstream when they had access to a SNA and found it difficult to work independently when the SNA was withdrawn. Some also highlighted the role of SNA support in the special schools as someone who helped them with their work. Pupil 2C referred to the SNA who supported her in primary school as her best friend:

P2: My best friend, she was my special needs (assistant), she would copy stuff for me and give me books from the people that make the print bigger.

R: Your best friend, was that a girl in your class?

P2: No, she was my special needs....(Pupil 2C, female, aged 12)

5.4.5.2 Resentment of SNA support in mainstream schools

Principals and teachers in special schools highlighted resentment of SNA support as an issue for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools. The pupils' resentment of the SNA and the constant presence of the SNA caused difficulties for some pupils as they were seen as different to their peers. Teacher 2A described one pupil's experience of SNA support in a mainstream school:

One boy in particular, this year, has spoken to me that he had an SNA with him last year and he came from a primary school and he just hated that whole thing and he didn't get on with her and the relationship wasn't good, you know. I'm not sure why it got to that stage but he actually resented having one person for him and probably nobody else had that....(Teacher 2A)

The principal of a mainstream post-primary school in case D recounted how the presence of an SNA had been the cause of upset and frustration for a pupil who had subsequently transferred from the school:

He had an SNA appointed and he didn't often like the idea of having an SNA. He had a very funny attitude, like he would expect the SNA to carry his bag or there was an incident where there was a bag in the way of his chair and he wouldn't move it, he wanted her to move it. He was quite difficult and he didn't particularly like the SNA for no good reason that I could see. So this became an issue and a couple of times he lost his temper and produced an amazing string of language....(Principal mainstream post-primary D)

These findings highlight a perception amongst some parents and teachers that pupils became dependent on SNA support in mainstream schools and that, for some pupils, the constant presence of an SNA was a source of upset and resentment. These findings are supported by those of previous studies (e.g., Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Vincett, Cremin & Thomas, 2005) which have identified problems relating to over-dependency and social isolation of pupils in receipt of SNA support.

5.4.6 Theme 3: Sub-theme 2 Support for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

There was a perception expressed by many participants that pupils experiencing SEBD received greater support in special schools than in mainstream schools. Pupils did not express a view on this issue. Some parents expressed the view that mainstream schools were ill-equipped to deal with the behavioural and social difficulties experienced by pupils who had transferred. They indicated that the main approach employed in mainstream schools to deal with behavioural problems was to remove the pupil from the classroom. There was also some criticism of the way social difficulties had been dealt with while pupils were in mainstream schools. Some parents, including Parent 6C, felt there was a lack of understanding on the part of teachers:

Like I'll give you an example that the school were going away on a trip away

somewhere one day and they had to get a big, a huge bus for this trip and my daughter was awake most of the night fretting because she knew that no one would sit beside her. So I rang up somebody in the school you know to say that before they left could they make sure that somehow that someone would sit beside her, that she wouldn't be left on her own. So, the teacher stood up and said 'now John, it's your turn to sit beside X, now Mary you can swap over now, Mary it's your turn'. That type of thing to me shows a great lack of understanding....(Parent 6C)

There was a perception amongst parents and mainstream teachers that pupils' emotional and behavioural difficulties would be addressed in special schools in a more effective way than in mainstream. Parent 3B expressed this view:

If a child is down in any way at all that child is seen to and brought out and whatever that need is, it's seen straight away. It's not festering.... (Parent 3B)

There was some agreement from teachers in mainstream schools that some of the pupils' behavioural and social difficulties were not adequately addressed while they were in mainstream primary schools. Some of these teachers acknowledged that they found the behavioural difficulties of pupils who had transferred very difficult to deal with in a classroom situation. One mainstream primary teacher described her difficulties coping with the behaviours presented by a pupil who subsequently transferred to case D:

There were many days when I went to the principal and said I just can't deal with him. The kids are terrified, he is throwing stuff around, nobody is able to hold him. He was big and very aggressive....(Teacher mainstream primary 1D)

Another mainstream primary teacher in case C suggested that special schools were better equipped to deal with behavioural difficulties:

Probably because they have a higher tolerance level and they have more ways of coping with children there..they have their time-out(Teacher mainstream primary 1C)

Principals of post-primary schools also stated that they did not have the facilities or supports in the schools to deal with some of the emotional and behavioural problems experienced by

some pupils and one principal suggested that it was not always in the pupils' best interests to attend mainstream schools that did not have adequate supports:

Here we have children with emotional problems and ADHD, we would have to ask their parents to ask their GP to refer them on to X Child and Family Care Centre and there's a six month waiting list to get in there. So, in one sense, taking children who have very special needs, which we don't normally on a day to day deal with; you have to be very cognisant of the fact that you may be doing more damage. It's a big ask(Principal mainstream post-primary A)

Teachers in special schools referred to the sometimes challenging behaviours presented and suggested that experience of such behaviours over time had provided them with the skills necessary to cope in these situations. Teacher 2A described how she learned to cope with difficult behaviours exhibited by pupils at times:

Sometimes the children can be very confrontational, especially the older children and they can be very, I mean the language they can use towards a member of staff that can affect a member, or the level of violence that they might try to, or you might witness, can be quite difficult especially. I can remember the rawness of that in the beginning. You do learn to cope with that.... (Teacher 2A)

These findings indicate a perception that pupils receive greater support for SEBD in special schools than in mainstream schools. Teachers and principals in mainstream schools acknowledged difficulties in coping with challenging behaviours in the class environment. These findings are supported by a recent report by Cooper and Jacobs (2011), who identify the need for teachers to develop a basic knowledge of behavioural and cognitive behavioural principles, and their application, in the promotion of good behaviour, emotional well-being and positive social adjustment.

5.4.7 Summary of findings in relation to supports and resources in mainstream and special schools.

The findings in relation to the theme of supports and resources for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools are relevant to Research Questions 1, 2 and 3. A perceived

lack of appropriate supports and resources was one of the main reasons cited for the transfer of pupils to special schools for pupils with MGLD. In mainstream schools, a perception that supports were being reduced and a lack of support in mainstream classes were cited as reasons for transfer. The GAM was identified by teachers and principals as having contributed to a decrease in levels of support for pupils with MGLD in the current study. This model of support has been criticised in terms of the capacity of schools to provide adequate support for pupils with MGLD (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). At post-primary level, the need to reapply for supports, as well as a perceived lack of appropriate supervision of pupils, were cited as reasons for transfer.

There was a perception amongst all participant groups that pupils received a greater level of supports in special schools particularly in relation to support for pupils with SEBD and SNA support. However, an over-reliance on SNA support and resentment by some pupils of SNA support in mainstream primary and post-primary schools were difficulties highlighted by parents and teachers in mainstream and special schools. The role of the SNA in supporting teachers of pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools was highlighted as important in keeping pupils on task. Despite the importance attached to the role of the SNA by participants in this study, there is currently no evidence to support the view that pupils' outcomes are better for those who receive SNA support in mainstream schools (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown & Martin, 2007). However, Blatchford et al. did find that the presence of a support assistant in the classroom facilitated more individualised teacher attention towards pupils which is consistent with the views expressed by teachers in the current study.

The perception amongst parents and teachers in mainstream schools that there was greater support for pupils with SEBD in special schools highlights the need for greater supports and professional development for teachers in mainstream schools in this area. However, the perception that teachers in special schools have greater expertise due to professional

development in the area of SEN is not supported by the evidence of studies (Ware et al., 2009). Teachers in special schools in the current study attributed their expertise to years of experience rather than extra qualifications.

Parents and teachers in special schools agreed that support with placement for pupils when they reached 18 years of age was an important aspect of provision in special schools and was identified by some parents as a key factor in their decision to transfer their children from mainstream schools.

5.5 Theme 4: School structure and organization

School structure and organization in post-primary mainstream schools, as well as class size in both primary and post-primary schools, were factors which influenced the decision to transfer pupils to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

5.5.1 Class size in mainstream primary schools

Teachers and principals in mainstream schools considered class size at primary level to be a cause of difficulty for teachers. Teacher 1D in a mainstream primary school expressed concern that there was little time to meet the needs of all pupils and cope with behavioural and learning difficulties:

We have large classes. When you have a child with a difficulty and children like S with a behavioural difficulty it is hard to deal with in a big class where you are trying to get everything done....(Teacher mainstream primary 1D)

Teachers and principals in special schools, including Principal C, also agreed that it would be very difficult for a mainstream teacher to meet the needs of pupils who had transferred in a situation where there were large numbers of pupils:

If you've a child in a class of thirty and one teacher and no SNA and they're not getting that wee bit of extra help that they need they just get frustrated, and that's it.... (Principal C)

Parent 4B indicated that classes were too large and this made it difficult for teachers to provide support and that the noise level in a large class had posed difficulties for her son:

I felt that he needed a quieter environment. Another big thing was that there was 32 in his class. I just felt there was a lot going on. ... (Parent 4B)

Parent 4B's son also referred to class size in relation to his experience in mainstream primary. He described his class as 'mental':

..well you see there was like 30 people in the class in A's, it was really mental. ..(Pupil 2, group 1B, male, aged 12)

The perception amongst participant groups in this study that large classes in mainstream schools were detrimental to pupils' progress is not supported by evidence of studies on the relationship between class size and achievement (OECD, 2010). However, there is some evidence to suggest that low-achieving pupils benefit from small class size in the early years at school (Blatchford et al., 2003).

5.5.2 School structure in mainstream post-primary schools

School structure in mainstream post-primary schools was another theme which emerged across all cases. Principals of mainstream primary and post-primary schools referred to potential difficulties the structure of post-primary schools could cause for pupils. It was acknowledged that smaller classes were desirable for pupils with MGLD and that the transition from primary could cause problems where there was no base class, or teacher, for the pupils. As the principal of one post-primary school stated:

There is a very different structure at primary level. Students may become used to a cosy environment in primary school and the leap required in the transition to post-primary can be difficult for all students. The special school has a structure which is close to that of a primary school(Principal post-primary mainstream B)

Teachers and principals in the special schools also referred to the difficulties posed by the change in structure from mainstream primary to post-primary schools. Teacher D described some areas of difficulty including class changes and timetables:

It is too difficult, there is a huge onus on kids to find their way around a school from class to class for a start, to follow timetables that are very complicated, carry so many books and that sort of thing. A lot of the kids we have they are the areas they have problems in, organising themselves.....(Teacher D)

Many parents felt that their children would not have coped with the number of different classes, subjects and teachers. Some suggested that the pupils' lack of organisational skills would have made it too difficult to negotiate a busy timetable and to remember all the material required for different subjects. The physical layout of large schools was also considered a problem for some pupils, especially where there were stairs involved. Parents worried for the safety of the pupils in such circumstances. Parent 1B described some of these issues:

He wouldn't have had the organizational skills to be able to cope with all those different teachers and the timetable and different books. It would have been a little bit more than he would have managed....(Parent 1B)

One pupil suggested that finding your way, and negotiating materials and a locker, in a post-primary schools could be very worrying:

And you get very confused because you don't know where you are going. You get lockers for stuff and you're worrying you might lose some of the stuff or it might be stolen. You wouldn't want that.... (Pupil 2, group 4B, female aged 15)

5.5.3 School structure in special schools

Although pupils did change classrooms and teachers for some classes, particularly in the middle and senior sections of the schools, pupils always had a base class and teacher in the special schools. This was viewed as an important feature of special schools by teachers, principals and parents who referred to this issue. Principals and teachers stated that the

structure of the special schools suited the pupils because it was similar to the structure in primary schools. The small number of pupils in each class in special schools was also seen as an advantage to these pupils compared to the larger classes in mainstream schools. As Teacher 3A stated:

First of all you have smaller classes, your base class is the same set up as in primary school, you are in a certain room with a certain teacher and it's easier for students to find their way around because they know on a Friday at 2 o'clock, they go to home economics or on a Monday morning at 10 they have P.E. That's easy when you are starting from the same base class all the time. ... (Teacher 3A)

The principal of one of the mainstream schools suggested that while a mainstream post-primary school could prove overwhelming for pupils with MGLD, the special school was much smaller and less intimidating:

Also B is quite a small little set up. I think in a secondary school it's over whelming whereas here, they have two secondary school classes.... (Principal Mainstream Primary B)

Parents also referred to the benefits of smaller number classes in special schools in each of the cases. This was seen by Parent 3D to be a huge advantage in terms of the time and attention that could be devoted to each pupil:

The way the classrooms are done, they are not huge big rooms, they don't have a lot of kids to think about at any one time which is easier for the kids to learn. When the classrooms are too packed, it's more serious. There is only eight or ten in the classes.... (Parent 3D)

Some of the pupils stated that they preferred the way the special schools were structured. One pupil, in case B, expressed his preference for having a post-primary and primary section in the one school as it meant there was less change in terms of teachers and pupils:

And I like the idea that you're not changing the school, you get to stay in it with the teachers and the same people.... (Pupil 2, Group 2B, male aged 15)

These findings indicate a perception among participant groups that some pupils with MGLD experience difficulties adjusting to the change in structures between primary and post-primary mainstream schools. There is evidence to support this view, including McCauley (2009), who argues that inconsistencies in structures create challenges for pupils with SEN in relation to organisation, curriculum and in personal and social areas.

5.5.4 Summary of findings in relation to schools structure and organisation

The findings in relation to the theme of structure and organisation of mainstream and special schools are particularly relevant to Research Questions 2 and 3. All participant groups considered the smaller class size and similarities in structure between primary and special schools as features which enhanced the educational provision for pupils with MGLD who had transferred from mainstream to special schools across all cases. However, studies, including Bennett (1998), suggest that class size is one contextual factor, alongside other factors, including curriculum policy and school organisation, which interact with teacher and pupil characteristics to mediate classroom processes and educational outcomes. The finding that participants expressed a preference for continuity of structure from primary to special schools is supported by the findings of other studies which indicate that the majority of pupils who transfer do so at the end of primary school (Kelly & Devitt, 2010; Ware et al., 2009).

5.6 Theme 5: Choice

The theme of choice emerged across all cases in relation to research questions 1 and 4. This theme illustrated the role played by professionals, such as teachers and psychologists, in the transfer process and is subdivided into two areas, including the decision-making process and access to mainstream post-primary schools.

5.6.1 The decision-making process

Many parents, across all cases, described how the decision to transfer their children to a special school for pupils with MGLD was based on the recommendations of teachers and principals in mainstream schools. This usually happened when the pupil reached the senior classes in primary schools. It was usually a resource teacher or the principal who first suggested that parents should consider a placement for the pupil in a special school. Some of the parents, including Parent 3D, indicated that they had not considered a special school placement for their children until this recommendation was made:

I had never heard of D ever until the principal mentioned it here on the phone one evening she rang me and she said do you know where it is and I said not a clue(Parent3D)

Many parents in case B described how they had been advised to accept, or seek, a placement in a special school from principals and teachers in post-primary schools. Some, like Parent 7B, described how this recommendation was made based on the pupils' performance in school entrance examinations:

The headmaster said when he did the entrance exam, he said he wouldn't keep up and he said that by 16 he'd probably have left school and be on the street, he couldn't cope. So that's actually why we decided on B....(Parent 7B)

A small number of parents were told that their children could be excluded from classes as they would not be able to access the curriculum in post-primary schools. Parent 2B described how she was summoned to the post-primary school after her son had started and asked to consider an alternative placement:

They realized that they just couldn't cater for him. So that's why, apart from worrying about him, she called me in to see if there was anything else I could do for him, get him transferred somewhere....(Parent 2B)

Parent 1A was told that while her child could enrol in the school, she would probably be excluded from participating in the curriculum due to her learning difficulties:

So we went to the mainstream schools and we spoke to the principal and he said that where he would be welcome to have her but, according to her academic record she wouldn't be able to sit Junior Cert or anything like that and he also felt, he was of the opinion, that she might end up in the office with the secretary and that, doing little jobs, you know(Parent 1A)

For some parents, the recommendation of placement in a special school came from a professional outside the school, including psychologists, or other agencies involved in the assessment and intervention process. Parent 5A was among these:

I got him reassessed and the school had recommended and the psychiatrist recommended that he go to a special needs school. The man said ...he'll always be the bottom of the class in mainstream but he'll be up straight you know, in the top two or three, in special needs....(Parent 5A)

Two parents, including Parent 6B, stated that they had been refused a place for their children in post-primary schools due to the pupils' SEN:

I was trying to keep her local. I wanted to keep her in mainstream. I didn't want a special school. I tried one in K but they said no, they didn't take special needs children....(Parent 6B)

Principals and teachers in the special schools suggested that most referrals of pupils to the school came directly from mainstream schools or psychologists. This usually happened when pupils were in the senior end of primary, although principals stated that pupils were sometimes referred at an earlier stage. Teacher 2B agreed that most pupils transferred at the end of primary school based on the recommendation of teachers and psychologists:

A lot of them transferred just after sixth class. It was on a recommendation, they weren't keeping up in primary. The teachers felt, and obviously the psychologists felt, that they wouldn't hack it as such in a mainstream post-primary school so they were recommended to come here.... (Teacher 2B)

Principal B suggested that professionals, including teachers, principals, psychologists or social workers were more involved with the transfer process where it was considered that parents were reluctant to instigate the process of transfer of pupils to the special school:

I think that teachers and psychologists have more inclined, or even social workers are inclined to do it if they think parents are reluctant or having difficulties making that kind of contact....(Principal B)

Not all mainstream principals, or teachers, at primary and post-primary levels stated that they had made recommendations to parents to seek placement for a pupil in a special school. One principal of a primary school said that they advised, rather than recommended, that the special school was the best placement for a pupil:

They'd look for our advice and in that conversation the idea of a special school might come up. They may raise it initially or sometimes the school might put it there as an option. ... Principal mainstream primary 2A

One principal of a primary school in case A suggested that the recommendation of a placement in a special school for pupils with MGLD was only made to parents who were less likely to oppose such a recommendation:

Generally their desire would be to send them to a mainstream secondary school and generally it wouldn't be recommended if it was felt the parent would be against it....(Principal mainstream primary 1A)

While principals of post-primary schools stated that they would not refuse to enrol a pupil on the basis of SEN, one principal of a post-primary school in case A suggested that some principals were reluctant to enrol pupils if they felt that the school did not have adequate resources to support pupils, especially where behavioural difficulties were involved:

You see the whole idea is that you don't want to get the name of taking people in just to expel them afterwards because of the behavioural patterns or because of emotional difficulties that you may not be able to cope with in the school.(Principal mainstream post-primary A)

In response to questions about the decision to come to the special schools, the majority of pupils indicated that it had been their parents' decision to send them to their present school. Most pupils, including Pupil 1D, stated that they had been told by their parents that they were going to the special schools:

Why did you pick Case D?

Basically I think my mother did that....(Pupil 1D, male, aged 14)

Only two pupils indicated that they had made the decision to transfer with their parents. Pupil

2A was one of these:

We came to visit the school to see what it was like and then me and mom sat down and chatted about the school and I said I feel fine about going to this school and then she rang the school and said is R going to the school and they said yes. So I was really happy then....(Pupil 2A, female, aged 13)

Pupil 3C suggested that the decision to transfer to the special school was made by her teachers in mainstream primary school:

R: Why did you come to this school?

P3: ...mmm...cos I was sent here.

R: Who sent you here?

P3: the teachers in (national school)

R: What did they say?

P3: I don't know but they told my mum and so I came here then....(Pupil 3C, female, aged 15)

Only one pupil referred to the refusal on the part of mainstream schools to enrol pupils with SEN:

Some other schools, if they have learning difficulties, they just say go away....(Pupil 1A, female, aged 13)

The finding that some pupils with MGLD were reported by participants as having experienced difficulties gaining access to mainstream post-primary schools echoes the findings of a study by Kenny et al. (2005) on access for pupils with GLD and Down Syndrome. More recently, Armstrong et al. (2010) found that parents of pupils with complex needs reported difficulties gaining access for their children to mainstream schools.

5.6.2 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of choice

The findings presented in relation to the theme of choice are relevant to Research Questions 1 and 4. A recommendation from a professional including principals, teachers and psychologists was cited by many parents as a key factor influencing the decision to transfer a pupil from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. With regard to the role played by parents, pupils and professionals in the decision-making process, the findings clearly indicate that many parents adopted a subordinate role in this process and that the majority of pupils were not involved in decision-making in relation to their educational provision.

The finding that parents played a subordinate role to professionals with regard to the decision to seek admission for their children in special schools echoes the findings of Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study of the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools in Ireland. In addition to this, the findings of the current study also indicate that some pupils were reported to have been refused access to post-primary schools on the basis of their SEN, and that this was more likely to happen if pupils had complex needs including SEBD. These findings are supported by an audit of enrolment policy (DES, 2007), which indicates wide variations in the number of pupils with SEN enrolled in post-primary schools.

5.7 Theme 6: Transition to special schools

The transition from mainstream schools to the special schools was a difficult one for some pupils and parents. Principals and teachers in all cases described how the schools endeavoured to make this process as easy as possible for pupils. Despite this, it took some pupils a considerable time to come to terms with the fact that they were in a special school. Some parents also reported that they found the transition difficult. Stigma was a sub-theme here and the findings in relation to this are presented following the participants views on

experiences of the transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

5.7.1 *Pupils experience of the transfer process*

Principals and teachers in special schools across all cases described the difficulties experienced by many pupils in the transfer from mainstream schools. These difficulties included acceptance of being in a special school, being separated from their friends in mainstreams schools and adjusting to a new routine in the special schools. Teacher 2A described some of these difficulties in relation to one pupil who transferred:

He came in at 14 and really he had a very difficult adjusting time to this school. It would appear in his other school, he knew he couldn't cope with the academic programme, the curriculum, so he became the helper in the school, the gofor. So he was allowed to do all the jobs in the school, help everyone out, that was his role. He found it so difficult to be part of a small group with only 11 or 12 in the class having to open a book, having to have a pen, pencil, he just couldn't understand why we would make him learn anything.... (Teacher 2A)

Parents of pupils who experienced difficulties adjusting to the special schools indicated that pupils were initially upset that they weren't staying in mainstream schools with their friends and peers. Parent 7B described how her son begged her to allow him enrol in the local post-primary schools with his peers:

The only thing he was on and on about was he wanted to go to the local secondary school, the community college – I want to go to the community college, I want to go to the community college – but that certainly wasn't an option....Parent 7B

While all pupils stated they liked being in their present schools, some, including Pupil 2A, did mention difficulties accepting the separation from their peers in mainstream schools.

I liked my old school best. I had more friends there and I really miss my old friends.... (Pupil 2A, female, aged 12)

The finding that pupils experience difficulties adjusting to the transition from mainstream to special schools was also highlighted in a recent study by Kelly and Devitt (2010). However,

it is worth noting that there is evidence to suggest that many pupils, both with and without SEN, experience difficulties with transition from one school to another. Smyth's (2004) study of pupils' experiences of the transition from primary to post-primary schools found that one in six pupils take longer than a month to settle in a post-primary school and that pupils who have a negative self-concept experience greater transition difficulties.

5.7.2 Difficulties experienced by parents in the transfer process

Parents, who described the difficulties they experienced in coming to terms with the realisation that their children would not be continuing their education in mainstream schools, spoke about the process of accepting the permanence of their children's learning difficulties.

Parent 1A was one of these:

It was also at that stage we had to accept her condition as it was and you know I felt that if we didn't accept it then and deal with it and move on, it was a big kind of crossroads for us all.... (Parent 1A)

Some parents also spoke of their worries that their children would mimic behaviours of pupils who had more severe learning disabilities. For some parents, including Parent 4D, this process of making the decision to transfer their child was very difficult and stressful:

One of things that used to bother me was that J might mimic other kids who had problems and I don't want him doing that before he came here I had this perception that they would be drooling in the corner or doing things with their hands (Parent 4D)

The finding that some parents of pupils with MGLD reported difficulties in coming to terms with the transfer of their children to the special schools is supported by Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study on the transfer of pupils to special schools in Ireland. They also found that parents reported the transition to the special school as stressful. The findings highlight the need for support for parents and pupils throughout this process.

5.7.3 Summary of findings in relation to the theme of transition to special schools

The findings presented in relation to the theme of transition to special schools are relevant to Research Question 4 on the role of parents, pupils and teachers in the transfer process. The transition is the last stage in this process and the findings indicate that some parents and pupils find the adjustment to being in the special school very difficult. For pupils, the separation from their mainstream peers is cited as a part of that difficulty. Parents spoke of the difficulties they experienced in coming to terms with their children's learning difficulties and also of the anxiety they felt in relation to the severity of disabilities of pupils in special schools. These findings are supported by Kelly and Devitt's study (2010) which found that parents experienced adjustment difficulties, including acceptance of their child's academic ability and anxieties and concerns about the school. Their study also found that pupils over the age of 12 who transferred to special schools experienced adjustment difficulties. However, there is also evidence to suggest that the transition from one school to another can be a difficult process for many pupils (Smyth, 2004) and these difficulties are not unique to those who transfer to special schools.

5.7.4 Subtheme - Stigma

Stigma emerged as a strong theme across all cases. Principals and teachers in special schools suggested that pupils experienced some teasing outside of school because they were attending a special school. They stated that some pupils would try to hide the fact that they were attending the school. Teacher 1A described some of the how some pupils were reluctant to be seen on the school bus:

A lot of them won't say (A) Special School they'll only say (A) or whatever school is around here, they'll name that particular school. A lot of them don't say it. The a lot of them hate the special buses because the special bus goes to your house, so a lot of kids have decided I don't want you coming here, I'll meet you at the top of the road, so yeah, it's a lot to take on, you can only imagine....(Teacher 1A)

Parents also referred to the issue of stigma. Some parents were aware of negative comments that had been made to their children by their peers in the schools and in their local area.

Parent 6B referred to this:

I suppose for kids, once it's known as a special needs school, they're going to get slagged, you know – you're going to a stupid school – special needs – you know. It's for them I'd feel but for myself now, no, there isn't. It's just unfortunately, kids can be cruel....(Parent 6B)

One pupil stated that people would think he was thick if they knew he attended a special school while another stated that he was not ashamed to tell people where he went to school:

P3: I say I'm in a different school. I just say I am in a school in (town). I don't say it

P2: No, because it's special

R: What's wrong with that?

P2: Because it's a special needs school.

P3: Because they think you're thick or something.

R: Do you get teased?

P3: Yeah

P1: I say I'm here. I'm not ashamed....(Pupil 1 male, Pupil 2 female and Pupil 3 male, all aged 15, group 2B)

Pupil 1A used the word 'handicapped' to describe some of the pupils in the special school.

I'm not being bad but like I'm saying there's some handicapped people in this school that has to go to this school. I'm not slagging them or anything I'm just trying to say like some people have learning difficulties (Pupil 1A)

5.7.5 Summary of findings on the sub-theme of stigma

The findings in relation to the sub-theme of stigma are relevant to Research Question 4 on the role of parents, pupils and teachers in the transfer process. Fear of stigmatisation due to attendance in special schools was reported as a source of anxiety and concern by many parents and teachers in special schools and was referred to by pupils also. The finding that some pupils attending special schools experience stigma has been highlighted in previous studies. Norwich and Kelly (2005) found that pupils with MGLD in special schools

experienced more bullying by peers outside of their special schools than was reported by pupils in mainstream schools.

5.8 Summary of findings

The aim of this multiple case study was to identify factors which influenced the transfer of pupils with MGLD from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The study also investigated commonalities and differences in educational provision between the two sectors. The findings indicate that five key factors influenced the transfer process. The first of these was that the majority of pupils who transferred to the four special schools had MGLD and additional SEN. A variety of additional needs were identified across cases but SEBD was more frequently cited by participants than any other type, or category, of SEN. The findings indicate a perception amongst teachers in mainstream schools that there were greater levels of expertise in special schools in meeting the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties whereas the presence of these pupils in mainstream classes was reported by teachers as being disruptive and time-consuming. However, parents and pupils emphasised the social isolation experienced by pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools.

The second factor identified in this study was that many pupils with MGLD were reported as having experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Differences in curriculum provision in terms of emphasis on life and social skills were highlighted between mainstream and special schools by all participant groups.

The third factor influencing the decision to transfer was a perception among teachers and parents that supports and resources in mainstream schools were inadequate and that there had been a reduction in resource provision for pupils with MGLD.

The fourth factor identified in this study was the perception, expressed by many parents, teachers and some pupils, that the school structure and organisation of special schools was more appropriate for pupils with MGLD than that in mainstream schools with particular

reference to post-primary schools and class size in mainstream primary schools.

The fifth factor related to reasons for transfer and to the role of parents, pupils and teachers in the transfer process. This finding indicates that the decision to transfer a pupil to a special school for pupils with MGLD was often based on the recommendation of professionals, including teachers and principals in mainstream schools. For those pupils and parents who expressed a preference for placement in a mainstream school, the experience of transition to a special school was often difficult.

The implications of these findings are explored and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate factors which influenced the transfer of a cohort of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. Perspectives on educational provision in mainstream and special schools for pupils with MGLD were also sought in order to identify factors, or aspects of provision in mainstream and special schools, which influenced the decision to transfer. As key stakeholders in education, the views of parents, pupils, teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools were sought. The role of parents, pupils, teachers and principals in the transfer process was also investigated in this study, in order to explore issues relating to the balance of power in decision-making. These stakeholders were chosen because they were deemed to be central to the transfer process, from the initial recommendation, or decision, to consider placement in a special school, to the final transfer. A multiple case study design was chosen and four special schools for pupils with MGLD were selected as cases. Perspectives of each of the participant groups on reasons for transfer, educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools and roles played in the transfer process were presented in the previous chapter according to themes which emerged in each of these areas. In this chapter, the findings are further explored and discussed in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework which acts as a lens for analysis in this study. A reminder of this framework is briefly presented below and, following on from this, each of the key findings is discussed.

6.2 Summary of theoretical framework

The findings of this study are discussed in the context of a theoretical framework which reflects the underlying assumptions of an interpretative paradigm, namely that special

education is a construction of historical and social influences. Two theoretical perspectives were chosen to construct the theoretical framework which guides interpretation and discussion at different levels of analysis. Macro-level analysis involves discussion of ideological tensions, or dilemmas of difference, in special education. Micro-level analysis involves discussion of attempts to resolve these dilemmas through the construction and implementation of policy. Norwich (2008a) highlighted the basic dilemma in special education as being whether or not to recognise, and respond to, differences in three related areas including identification, curriculum and placement of pupils with SEN. In an earlier study, Norwich (1993) included a fourth dilemma concerned with the relative influence of professional educators and parents in decision-making about what is to be learned, where learning takes place and reported outcomes. This fourth dilemma is considered to be highly relevant in the current study and is included for analysis as the role of parents and professionals in the decision-making process regarding educational provision for pupils with MGLD is deemed to be central to the transfer process.

Attempts to resolve tensions or dilemmas are reflected in the construction of policy in special education but this is a complex process involving discourses which interact and often compete with one another to achieve dominance. A number of different types of policy frameworks have been identified (Kirp, 1982; Riddell, 2002) including professional, political, legal, bureaucratic, consumerist and managerial. Kirp argued that these policy frameworks represent alternative values and the way policy problems are defined determines how they will be resolved. Attempts to resolve dilemmas in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD have resulted in shifts in dominance between different types of policy. Policy development in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD is discussed in the context of these policy frameworks as part of the analysis of findings in this chapter.

6.3 First key finding – additional needs

The first key finding of this study is that many of the pupils who transferred from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD had additional needs and that SEBD was prevalent amongst these. Teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools reported that many of the pupils with MGLD who transferred to the special schools had also experienced SEBD. While some pupils who transferred were identified by principals across cases as having behavioural or conduct disorders, for many pupils, the description of SEBD was based on the observations of parents, teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools. Teachers, of pupils who had transferred due to SEBD in mainstream classes in primary schools, described the behaviours as challenging and difficult to cope with in a classroom environment. Some parents suggested that difficulties experienced by pupils in accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools were a contributing cause of these behaviours.

6.3.1 Support for pupils experiencing SEBD in mainstream and special schools

The prevalence of SEBD reported in this study amongst pupils who transferred to special schools for pupils with MGLD, raises questions about the adequacy of supports for these pupils in mainstream schools. Parents of pupils with behavioural difficulties expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support received in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and some of these parents expressed the view that teachers in mainstream schools lacked the necessary expertise required to deal with these difficulties. Most of the mainstream primary teachers and principals suggested that teachers in special schools had greater levels of expertise in supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties than teachers in mainstream schools. However, this view was not supported by teachers and principals in special schools who suggested that experience in dealing with SEBD, rather than expertise in terms of

additional qualifications, was the main difference in terms of provision in mainstream and special schools. This view is supported by Ware et al.'s (2009) study which found evidence that just over a quarter of teachers in special schools held special education qualifications at diploma level or higher. Some of the teachers in special schools in the current study indicated that they also found some behaviours very challenging but they suggested that high levels of support received from other members of staff within the special school were beneficial in dealing with these behaviours. While this suggests a need for further professional development for teachers in both sectors, there is also a need for the development of support structures within mainstream schools for teachers of pupils with SEBD. Concerns in relation to competence amongst teachers to support pupils with SEBD were raised in a recent review of practice and outcomes in the education of pupils with emotional disturbance/behaviour difficulties¹ (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011). A recommendation was made for the establishment of benchmark minimum standards of competence among all teachers of pupils with SEBD. While teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools in the current study emphasised the prevalence of SEBD amongst pupils who transferred from mainstream schools, parents and pupils placed greater emphasis on the social difficulties and isolation experienced by pupils in the mainstream setting.

6.3.2 Social isolation of pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities in mainstream schools

The findings of the current study highlight the impact of social isolation on the development of SEBD in pupils who transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD. For many pupils, this experience of social exclusion began at the middle stages of primary school. This was reported as a cause of concern for parents in particular, as many spoke of the effects

¹ Emotional disturbance/behaviour difficulties is the terminology used in Cooper and Jacobs's (2011) review

of social isolation in mainstream schools on their children. Some parents spoke of the teasing, or bullying, experienced by pupils and this was referred to by some of the pupils themselves. This finding demonstrates the need to facilitate social inclusion of pupils with MGLD, particularly as they get older and progress through the mainstream primary school. There seemed to be a sense of acceptance from teachers and principals, in both mainstream and special schools, that this social isolation was inevitable. There was a suggestion that, because of the developmental delay experienced by pupils with MGLD and the tendency for their mainstream peers to mature more quickly, pupils tended to grow apart from each other. One principal of a post-primary school described a pupil with MGLD, who had eventually transferred to the special school, as an ‘obvious target for making fun of.’ This was contrasted by a sense of frustration and helplessness on the part of some parents who described their experiences of having approached schools to seek help for their children in relation to social inclusion. For some parents, the desire to protect their children from being socially isolated was a dominant factor in the decision to seek alternative placement. While the social isolation of pupils with MGLD is not unique to the Irish context (Pijl, Frostad & Flem, 2008), the importance of having formalised systems of social support in schools has been recognised as central to the inclusion process (Travers et al., 2010). There is a need for mainstream schools at primary and post-primary levels to place a much greater emphasis on the social inclusion of pupils with MGLD and to identify those who are vulnerable to teasing and bullying from their peers. Programmes to develop and foster positive relationships and to support those experiencing isolation need to be a central part of interventions for pupils with MGLD, both at an individual level and as part of the school curriculum in mainstream schools.

6.3.3 Policy dilemmas – the placement dilemma

Norwich (2008a) describes the placement dilemma as whether and to what extent pupils with SEN should learn in mainstream classes. This dilemma was apparent in the views expressed by some teachers in this study in relation to the SEBD experienced by pupils with MGLD who transferred from mainstream schools. Principals and teachers in mainstream schools reported that special schools were better equipped to cope with the challenging behaviours presented by these pupils. This suggests an assumption, on the part of teachers in this study, that the mainstream system is limited in terms of its ability to meet the needs of these pupils and that alternative placement is necessary in these circumstances. When viewed in the context of the current national policy of inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, these findings raise questions about the success of this policy to date for pupils with MGLD and additional needs. Although the number of pupils who transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD is small in proportion to the population of pupils with MGLD in Irish mainstream schools, the increase in number transferring is indicative of failure within the mainstream system to meet the needs of pupils with complex needs. This is particularly evident where pupils with MGLD experience SEBD. In their study of the role of special schools and classes in Ireland, Ware et al. (2009) recommend that special schools should be enabled to continue to cater for the needs of pupils with complex needs in the absence of evidence that mainstream schools could provide a better education for these pupils. The findings of the current study indicate a lack of confidence and expertise amongst teachers in mainstream schools in terms of their ability to meet the learning needs of the pupils with MGLD and SEBD who transferred to the special schools.

6.4 Second key finding – Access to curriculum

The second key finding of this study is that many of the pupils with MGLD who transferred to special schools experienced difficulties accessing and participating in the curriculum in mainstream schools. This finding is supported by evidence from Kelly and Devitt's (2010) study of the reasons pupils leave mainstream schools to enrol in special schools. The difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream primary and post-primary schools in this area raise a number of issues in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The first of these relates to differentiation of the curriculum in mainstream primary schools and the second relates to the need for curriculum reform at post-primary level. Due to difference in the nature of these issues in primary and post-primary schools, they are discussed separately here.

6.4.1 Access to curriculum in primary schools

There was a suggestion from some teachers in mainstream primary schools that content overload and large class sizes made it very difficult for them to differentiate the curriculum for the pupils who had transferred to special schools for pupils with MGLD. While some studies do present evidence to suggest that low attainers benefit from small class size on entry to school (Blatchford et al., 2003), class size is only one of a number of factors related to educational outcomes for pupils. Other factors include teacher attitudes to teaching and learning, classroom management styles, experience and training (Bennett, 1998). The quality of teaching is a significant factor in determining educational outcomes and any benefit of smaller classes for pupils with MGLD can only be realised when factors related to pedagogy and classroom management are addressed. Given the finding of the current study with regard to difficulties experienced by teachers in meeting the learning needs of pupils with SEBD and the perception of a lack of expertise in this area, it is argued that class size is

not the sole contributing cause of a lack of differentiation and individualisation of curricula for pupils with MGLD. Some teachers in mainstream primary schools expressed a view that many of the pupils with MGLD who transferred reached a plateau in terms of their learning as they progressed through the primary school and that there was very little teachers could do when this happened. The explanations provided by teachers reflect two different perspectives of disability, one which locates the cause of difficulty within the child and the other which recognises barriers in the environment which may contribute to difficulties experienced in accessing the curriculum. The suggestion by some teachers that the nature of pupils' learning disabilities restricts their ability to access and participate in the curriculum implies the persistence of a disability-deficit perspective in relation to SEN. This raises questions with regard to categorisation and the influence of labelling on teachers' expectations in relation to these pupils.

Parents of pupils who transferred to the special schools indicated that difficulties experienced by pupils accessing the curriculum at primary level could manifest at a very early stage although, for most, difficulties became apparent in the middle, or senior, stages of primary schools. While some parents referred to the sense of frustration experienced by pupils who had difficulties accessing the curriculum, others referred to the impact of these difficulties on the self-esteem of pupils and some reported that their children described themselves as 'dumb' or 'stupid' due to their inability to keep up with their peers.

Many of the pupils also referred to their difficulties in primary schools, and for the majority of pupils, the main reason given for the transfer to the special schools was their learning difficulties. Some pupils described themselves as slow learners while others referred to difficulties they experienced with particular subjects areas, with mathematics being most frequently mentioned. The findings in relation to difficulties experienced by teachers in

differentiating the curriculum for pupils with MGLD, suggests a need for training and support in adapting and differentiating curricula to meet individual learning needs.

6.4.2 Access to the curriculum for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities at post-primary level

At post-primary level, the findings indicate that the majority of parents, pupils and teachers in mainstream and special schools who participated in this study, perceived the curriculum to be inaccessible to the pupils who transferred to special schools. These findings support the view that the curriculum at post-primary level acts as a barrier to the inclusion of some pupils with MGLD (NCCA, 2009). While only a small number of pupils in this study attended mainstream post-primary schools, their experiences highlight the failure of the present system of educational provision to provide a curriculum framework which has the flexibility in structure and assessment to facilitate the inclusion of all pupils. This lack of flexibility and rigidity in structure of the curriculum at junior cycle level in post-primary schools has been recognised as particularly challenging for pupils with GLD (NCCA, 2009). Differences were highlighted by participant groups in relation to curriculum provision in mainstream post-primary and special schools. An emphasis on life skills development and alternative programmes, which provide pupils with an opportunity for certification, were features of special school provision perceived by many parents and teachers as more appropriate to the learning needs of pupils who transferred than the subject-based, academically-driven, curriculum in post-primary schools. Alternative programmes were offered in the special schools which were considered by many parents and teachers in special and mainstream schools to be more inclusive as pupils could access and participate in these at different levels.

One aspect of curriculum provision which was perceived by parents and teachers in special schools as most important in ensuring successful post-school outcomes for pupils with MGLD was work-placement in the local community. Many parents expressed the hope that pupils' employment opportunities would be enhanced by these placements. The importance of a vocationally-oriented curriculum for pupils with MGLD in determining successful post-school outcomes has been identified in previous studies, including Hornby and Kidd (2001). Many pupils in the special schools expressed a preference for subjects which had a practical base, such as woodwork and home economics. However, there were differences between mainstream and some special schools in relation to views on curricular provision for pupils of post-primary age.

Only one of the special schools offered pupils the opportunity to participate in the same curriculum as their peers in mainstream schools. The importance of providing pupils with the opportunity to participate in the same curriculum as their mainstream peers was emphasised by parents and teachers in this case. When asked about their school, many of the pupils in this case also referred to upcoming assessments and examinations in relation to the Junior Certificate or LCA programmes. In contrast, none of the other three schools offered these programmes. Inaccessibility of content for all pupils and difficulties with assessment structures were cited as the main reasons for not offering the programmes, with one principal suggesting that it was inappropriate to offer a programme that was not inclusive of all pupils. These findings highlight the need for a curriculum which is accessible to all pupils and which provides them with realistic opportunities to achieve positive outcomes in terms of certification at post-primary level. The importance of providing pupils with the opportunity to access programmes similar to their peers has been identified in a previous study of pupils' views of their educational provision in a special school for pupils with MGLD in Ireland (Motherway, 2009).

6.4.3. *The curriculum dilemma*

Norwich (2008) describes the curriculum dilemma as being about the consequences of having, or not having, a common curriculum for all pupils. If all pupils with MGLD are offered the same learning experiences as their peers, there is the possibility that some will be denied the learning experiences which are relevant to their needs. If they are not offered the same learning experiences, then there are issues of equity of provision. The findings of the current study indicate that while some special schools offer a curriculum similar to that offered in mainstream post-primary schools, others consider this curriculum inappropriate and would prefer a more vocationally-oriented curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils with MGLD who transfer to the schools. In order to address the dilemma which arises between offering pupils the opportunity to access the same curriculum as their peers and meeting individual learning needs, a balance is required between the vocationally-oriented curriculum offered in special schools and the traditional mainstream post-primary curriculum in a way that provides pupils with a choice in terms of how this balance is achieved. The NCCA (2009) recommends the development of a curriculum at the junior cycle stage of post-primary which would allow pupils with MGLD, who experience difficulties accessing the curriculum, to achieve a qualification at a level lower than the present Junior Certificate. This curriculum framework would incorporate a personalised approach, with priority being given to developing the personal, social and vocational skills required for adult living and lifelong learning (NCCA, 2009). Each of these areas was identified by principals, teachers and parents in this study as key aspects of the curriculum offered in the special schools. In his discussion of the curriculum dilemma, Wedell (2008) warns against the development of alternative curricula for pupils with SEN which he describes as “patch-up” (p. 129) attempts to meet pupils’ needs. It is important, therefore, that any curriculum reform for pupils with SEN at

junior cycle takes place within the context of a broad curriculum framework for all pupils in order to avoid the isolation of any group of pupils in mainstream schools.

6.5 Third key finding – Supports and resources in mainstream and special schools

The third key finding of this study is that many parents, pupils, teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools expressed the view that there were greater levels of supports and resources available to pupils in special schools than in mainstream schools. This was a key factor in the decision to transfer pupils from mainstream schools. The GAM was the aspect of educational provision which caused most dissatisfaction for teachers and principals in mainstream schools, while parents had more concerns in relation to a perceived reduction in resource allocation, particularly with regard to SNA support in mainstream schools. Inconsistencies in resource allocation between mainstream primary and post-primary schools were highlighted by many parents, principals and teachers. Many parents considered the support for pupils with the transition from school when they reached the age of 18 to be an important aspect of support provided for pupils in special schools. Each of these issues is discussed separately.

6.5.1 General allocation of resources in mainstream primary schools

Teachers and principals in mainstream primary schools were critical of the GAM of resource allocation for pupils with MGLD. There was a perception that the GAM had negative implications and consequences for pupils with MGLD. The first of these was that pupils were no longer entitled to a specific allocation of resource teaching time and consequently the amount of support received depended on the overall level of need in the school. Pupils with MGLD were thus seen to be competing for additional support with other pupils in the schools and this meant that there was less time for individual support. Teachers

and principals in mainstream primary schools considered the GAM to be inadequate in terms of the resources available to schools to meet the needs of pupils with MGLD. While in the past, pupils with MGLD received an allocation of teaching hours with a resource teacher, the present system places responsibility on the school to meet the additional learning needs of these pupils within the schools' existing general resource allocation. The views expressed by teachers and principals in this study suggest that the transition to this new system has been challenging for some schools.

The second implication of the GAM, highlighted by teachers and principals in mainstream and special schools, is that pupils were less likely to be referred for psychological assessments in primary schools, as an outcome of MGLD from assessments made no difference to the school in terms of extra resource allocation. This has implications for pupils leaving mainstream primary schools as access to resources at post-primary level are still allocated according to category of disability. This raises an identification dilemma in relation to resource allocation for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools.

6.5.2 Identification dilemma

The policy of general allocation of resources in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools may be viewed positively as it allows schools to allocate resources without labelling pupils as having a learning disability and thus avoid the negative social implications attached to labelling (Ho, 2004). The problem, or dilemma, associated with labelling and categorization is that it reinforces differences that may lead to stigmatization (Norwich, 2008a). Although none of the pupils in the current study referred to themselves as having MGLD, they used other labels including 'slow learner', 'handicapped' and 'special needs' when asked about the reasons pupils attend special schools. It is clear from these labels that pupils perceive a difference between

themselves and their mainstream peers and that this difference is related to learning difficulties. There would appear to be no justification for categorisation of pupils as having MGLD in mainstream primary schools as this does not lead to any benefit in terms of resource allocation and it may help to avoid the negative consequences of labelling for pupils who perceive themselves as different to their peers. However, the decision not to allocate specific and predetermined resources to pupils with MGLD raises issues about equity of provision as pupils are left to rely on the professional judgement of teachers in relation to the amount, and type, of resource allocation they receive in primary schools. This decision reflects a shift in terms of policy from one which was dominated by rights-based and bureaucratic policy frameworks to a dominant professional framework which operates by applying professional judgement (Riddell, 2002). Before the introduction of the GAM, professionals, who were predominately psychologists, had the power to decide who should receive a categorisation of MGLD and all those within this category had the same entitlement, in terms of resource allocation, reflecting a bureaucratic framework based on consistency and accuracy. While this type of framework may appear the most equitable, it lacked the flexibility which has been afforded to schools by the GAM. However, the current model of resource allocation has resulted in a dominant professional policy framework as each school decides on the amount and type of support allocated to pupils with MGLD. A system of allocation which relies on professional judgement also assumes expertise on the part of professionals involved (Kirp, 1982). In the current study, some teachers and principals in mainstream schools expressed the view that teachers in special schools had greater levels of expertise than those in mainstream schools. Parents, teachers and principals in special schools were also critical of support received by pupils with MGLD in mainstream classes. These findings are supported by those of previous studies which question the level of

expertise of teachers in the area of SEN in mainstream primary schools (O’Gorman & Drudy, 2010; Shevlin et al., 2008).

6.5.3 Resource allocation in mainstream post-primary schools

While a policy of general allocation has been in place in mainstream primary schools since 2005, pupils with MGLD are still allocated supports based on category of need in mainstream post-primary schools. The lack of consistency in relation to allocation and the need to reapply for resources was criticised by principals in post-primary schools in the current study. For many parents, uncertainty in relation to access to resources in post-primary schools influenced the decision to transfer pupils to special schools. While only a small number of parents in this study had children who transferred from mainstream post-primary schools, those that had, expressed disappointment at the level of resources received in post-primary schools. These findings suggest that the lack of consistency in policy with regard to resource allocation for pupils with MGLD at primary and post-primary levels creates difficulties for pupils with MGLD, their parents and teachers with regard to educational provision.

The lack of consistency between allocation in primary and post-primary schools represents conflicting policy frameworks in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. At primary level, a dominant professional policy framework confers responsibility and power in relation to resource allocation on teachers. However, a dominant bureaucratic framework still persists at post-primary level whereby resource allocation is predetermined based on a system of categorization. The findings of the current study highlight the concern and anxiety caused by uncertainty and inconsistencies in resource allocation at post-primary level, particularly for parents of pupils with MGLD. The increase in numbers of pupils transferring to special schools at the age of 12 and over (Kelly & Devitt, 2010) suggests that the concerns expressed

by participants in the current study are a key factor in the decision to transfer pupils to special schools for pupils with MGLD.

6.5.4 SNA support in mainstream and special schools

The findings of this study highlight a perception amongst parents and teachers in mainstream that special schools received a greater allocation of SNA support than mainstream schools. Many parents cited the lack of SNA support and the fear of cutbacks in this area as a reason for choosing the special schools. Despite the perception of a greater allocation of SNA support in special schools, the criteria for allocation of SNAs is the same in both mainstream and special schools, with the exception of an allocation of one SNA for every four classes in special schools for pupils with MGLD.

The level of SNA allocation among the four case study schools was similar. The smallest school, with an enrolment of 40 pupils had the same allocation of SNA support as the largest school, with an enrolment of 137 pupils. Both had an allocation of 13 SNAs. This suggests a high level of care needs² in relation to pupils attending the smaller school. While there is no statistical data with regard to the prevalence of care needs amongst pupils in the special schools in this study, the principal of one of the larger special schools indicated that there was a significant minority of pupils without a diagnosed additional need attending the school. The principals and teachers in the larger special schools also indicated that many pupils came from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and there is evidence from other studies which indicates that such pupils are overrepresented in the categories of SEBD and MGLD (Dyson & Kozleski, 2008).

² The type of care needs which may warrant SNA support are defined by the DES (2002) as including a significant medical need, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where behaviour is such that the pupils are considered a danger to themselves or to other pupils.

6.5.4.1 Difficulties arising from SNA support in mainstream schools

While the findings of the current study highlight the importance attached to SNA support by many parents and teachers, there was also a view expressed, particularly by teachers in special schools, that some pupils were overly dependent on SNA support in mainstream schools to the extent that it inhibited their social development. There was a suggestion that social interaction with peers and the development of independence were inhibited by the constant presence of an adult. One pupil who transferred from a mainstream primary school described her SNA as her best friend while she was in the primary school. Resentment of a constant SNA presence was an issue for older pupils and this was reported by teachers in special schools. Problems relating to over dependency and social isolation of pupils in relation to SNA support have been identified in previous studies (Groom, 2006; Vincett, Cremin & Thomas, 2005). The findings of the current study highlight the need for greater clarity in relation to the role of the SNA and training for teachers and SNAs in order to prevent the social isolation of pupils who receive SNA support.

6.5.5 Post-school outcomes for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities

The issue of post-school outcomes for pupils with MGLD was raised in relation to support for pupils with the transition from special schools when they reached the age of 18. Many parents in this study referred to the support provided by the special schools in finding placements for pupils in training centres, or employment, when it came to the time to leave the special schools. One of the principals of a post-primary school suggested that this type of support was outside the remit of mainstream schools and agreed that pupils would benefit from this type of support in a special school. The role played by special schools in coordinating the transition for pupils with MGLD to vocational and rehabilitative training has been identified in a previous study on post-school outcomes for pupils with MGLD (Fahey,

2007). The findings of the current study support the view that pupils with MGLD receive this type of support in special schools and that the need for this type of support for pupils, through the development of transition programmes in mainstream post-primary schools, is warranted.

6.5.6 Dilemmas of difference

The findings discussed in relation to resources and supports for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools highlight two dilemmas of difference. A dilemma of identification is evident in policy relating to resource allocation for pupils with MGLD. While identification, through categorization, is no longer required in mainstream primary schools due to a policy of general allocation of resources, confusion and uncertainty with regard to entitlement highlights the policy dilemma here. However, inconsistencies highlighted between allocation in primary and post-primary schools does not help in the resolution of this dilemma but merely results in conflicting policy frameworks and demonstrates a lack of clear policy direction.

The other dilemma identified in relation to the third finding of this study is a dilemma of placement. Norwich (1993) describes the dilemma of placement as whether, and to what extent, pupils with disabilities should learn in mainstream classes. Participation in mainstream education is a right afforded to all pupils under the terms of the Education Act (1998) and reflects a policy of inclusion underpinned by values of equality and social justice. However, the perceptions expressed by parents, pupils, teachers and principals in this study, indicates a view that pupils benefit from greater levels of supports and resources in special schools than in mainstream schools. The findings of this study suggest that conflicting policy frameworks in relation to provision of resources for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary and post-primary schools contribute to this view.

6.6 Fourth key finding - school structure and organisation

The fourth key finding of this study is that the school structure and organisation of special schools for pupils with MGLD was perceived to be more appropriate for pupils with MGLD than that of mainstream schools, and this was one of the factors which influenced the decision to transfer pupils with MGLD to the special schools. The majority of parents, teachers and pupils who referred to difficulties with school structure and organisation did so in relation to mainstream post-primary schools. Among the difficulties highlighted in the current study was the increase in number of classes linked to individual subjects, movement from one class to another after relatively short periods of time and difficulties experienced by pupils with organisational skills in negotiating a busy timetable. The physical layout of some post-primary schools was also identified as a problem by some parents and pupils. Many parents and teachers in the special schools suggested that the similarity in structure between special and mainstream primary schools provided pupils with a greater sense of structure and continuity. One pupil suggested that it would be easy to get lost in a post-primary school while some parents indicated that they would fear for the safety of their children in the large post-primary schools.

The finding that the transition from mainstream primary to post-primary schools creates many difficulties for pupils with MGLD echoes the findings of McCauley's (2009) study on the transition of pupils with SEN. However, it is worth noting that Smyth's (2004) study of the transition from mainstream primary to post-primary schools in Ireland found that feelings of anxiety are common among pupils, with and without SEN, in relation to the transition process and that the development of induction programmes for pupils can help to ease the transition from one school to another. The findings of the current study indicate that such induction programmes are an essential aspect of educational provision for pupils with MGLD in order to support them in the transition process.

6.6.1 The placement dilemma

These findings highlight a dilemma of placement for some pupils with MGLD. While not all pupils commented on differences between school structure in mainstream post-primary and special schools, those that did expressed a preference for the structure and organisation of the special school. However, the findings indicate that, despite issues relating to structure, some pupils had wanted to transfer with their friends to the mainstream post-primary school. The provision of a base class, with a teacher assigned to that class, provides continuity and security to pupils with MGLD and this is required during the transition process from primary to post-primary mainstream schools. Smyth (2004) also recommends the development of student mentor systems as part of an induction programme for all pupils entering mainstream post-primary schools.

6.7 Fifth key finding - choice

The fifth key finding of this study relates to the issue of choice. Many parents indicated that the decision to transfer pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD was often based on the recommendation of a professional to do so. The professionals involved were identified by parents in this study as predominately teachers and principals in mainstream schools, although a number of parents reported that a recommendation had come from a psychologist, or other professionals involved in the assessment and intervention process. Many of the parents who received recommendations from professionals indicated that placement in a mainstream primary, or post-primary school, was their preferred choice for their children. Some parents reported that they had never heard of the special schools before it was mentioned by a teacher or other professional. For other parents, the decision to transfer their child to a special school was based on their inability to secure a placement in a mainstream post-primary school. While only a small number of

parents indicated that a mainstream post-primary school had refused to enrol their child, more parents reported that they were encouraged by principals, or teachers, in post-primary schools to seek alternative placement following the poor performance of their children on school entrance examinations. This finding is supported by those of previous studies (e.g., Shevlin et al., 2005) which have highlighted difficulties experienced by parents of pupils with SEN with regard to access to mainstream schools.

6.7.1 The parent-professional dilemma

The views expressed by parents in relation to this issue highlight the subordinate role played by some parents in the decision-making process relating to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. These findings highlight a dilemma of difference with regard to parent-professional influences in this decision-making process. One principal referred to ‘deciding what is best for them’ in reference to pupils with MGLD who had transferred in the past, while another stated that the recommendation to transfer a pupil to a special school would be made to some parents but not others ‘if it was felt the parent would be against it.’

Norwich (1993) included the parent-professional dilemma in his study of professionals’³ views on ideological dilemmas in special education. The findings of his study revealed that the parent-professional dilemma was not recognised by participants. Based on the findings of the current study, it is suggested that the parent-professional dilemma is evident in the subordinate role played by many parents in the decision-making process. The findings illustrate that the balance of power in this process was weighted in favour of professionals involved. Further evidence for this assertion can be found in the descriptions by principals in special schools of the transfer process. Each of the four principals involved in this study

³ The professionals in Norwich’s 1993 study included teachers in mainstream and special schools, advisory teachers and support staff (psychologists and specialist teachers) in Pennsylvania, USA and Northampton, England (Norwich, 2008a).

indicated that the majority of pupils who transferred from mainstream schools were referred to the school by psychologists, or principals, of mainstream schools.

Similarly, many pupils in this study indicated that they would have liked to remain with their peers in mainstream schools. Some pupils stated that they still missed their friends in the mainstream school. Only a small number of pupils stated that they were consulted by their parents regarding the decision to transfer to a special school and many parents indicated that their children were initially unhappy with the decision to transfer. While many pupils indicated that they were happy being in the special schools, some of the pupils admitted to experiencing difficulties adjusting to being in the special school following transfer. For some pupils these difficulties were attributed to teasing from their peers outside of the special schools. One pupil expressed the concern that he would be considered 'thick' because he attended a special school.

These findings in relation to the views of pupils on their involvement in the decision to transfer to a special school, suggest that many pupils with MGLD also play a subordinate role in the decision-making process regarding their educational provision. While the parent-professional dilemma relates to whether and how parents and professionals can share power with regard to decisions about educational provision for pupils with disabilities, this dilemma implies that only parents and professionals are involved in the decision-making process. Whether or not to include pupils in decision-making processes relating to their educational provision creates a further dilemma, which I shall describe as a dilemma of participation. The need for pupils with disabilities to be involved in decision-making regarding their educational provision has been recognised as central to the process of inclusion (Kenny, McNeela, Shevlin & Daly, 2000). Similarly, Travers et al. (2010) advocate the development of flexible and creative approaches to facilitate the participation of pupils in all matters which affect their educational provision, including the development of policy and practice which impacts

on their lives. The dilemma for professionals and parents alike is the extent to which the wishes and views of pupils regarding their educational provision should influence the outcome of the decision-making process. The findings of the current study illustrate the consequences of a dominant professional policy framework in special education whereby the balance of power in decision-making processes relating to educational provision for pupils with MGLD who transferred to special schools was weighted in favour of professionals involved. The findings also illustrate the lack of equity in participation between parents, professionals and pupils. While recognising the parent-professional dilemma, the findings of this study provide evidence of a fifth dilemma, a dilemma of participation, which is concerned with the extent to which pupils with MGLD participate in decisions regarding their own educational provision.

6.8 Summarising dilemmas and policy frameworks

The findings of this study have highlighted dilemmas of identification, curriculum and placement in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. Dilemmas of difference in special education have previously been identified in these three areas by Norwich (1993; 2008a). However, in the current study, a parent-professional dilemma was also highlighted and a fifth dilemma, entitled a participation dilemma, was added in order to acknowledge the right of pupils to have a role in decision-making processes relating to their educational provision. These dilemmas highlight the increasing professional dominance with regard to policy in education of pupils with MGLD. This is evident in the dominant role played by teachers and psychologists in the assessment, identification and categorisation of pupils as having MGLD. Where allocation of resources reflected professional and bureaucratic policy frameworks in the past, at primary level, the GAM has seen the emergence of a dominant professional framework. The difficulties experienced by some

professionals involved in the implementation of this policy does not bode well for pupils with MGLD who depend on the expertise and professional knowledge of teachers for appropriate educational provision. The findings in relation to the subordinate role played by some parents of pupils with MGLD illustrate the power of professionals in deciding where pupils should receive their education. While parents have the option to appeal decisions made in relation to their children's education, not all parents will avail of this service. Tisdall and Riddell (2006) suggest that it is usually the more socioeconomically and educationally advantaged parents who are able to ensure their children receive resources when policy gives power to professionals to determine need. Legislation, including the Education Act (1998) and EPSEN Act (2004), represents a move towards a legal policy framework bestowing rights on service users and this is likely to be favoured by parents and advocacy groups (Riddell et al., 2000). However, the bestowal of these rights privileges those parents who are aware of them and are in possession of the resources to pursue them. The findings of the current study indicate that many pupils who transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD come from families of low socioeconomic status.

If policy frameworks represent an effort by policy makers to resolve dilemmas of difference with regard to educational provision for pupils with SEN, and in particular, those with MGLD, the very least that is required is consistency of policy across all sectors. Conflicting policies in relation to provision at primary and post-primary levels do not serve the needs of pupils with MGLD but only create confusion and uncertainty for pupils and their parents. A lack of policy in relation to the professional development of teachers in the area of SEN is also a cause of concern in the context of the emergence of a dominant professional policy framework.

Chapter 7: Reflections, summary and implications

7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a reflection on the research process. This includes a critique of the research methodology in terms of its suitability for this study and its contribution to research in the area of study. Limitations are outlined and discussed. The second part of this chapter includes a brief summary of findings and the implications of these findings for policy are addressed. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for further research.

7.2 Reflections on the research process

This study was informed by an interpretive paradigm which also drew on the critical hermeneutic tradition. The decision to draw on this aspect of critical theory was important in the context of this study as hermeneutics is described by Kincheloe and Berry (2004) as a form of philosophical inquiry that focuses on the cultural, social, political and historical nature of research. Critical hermeneutics goes further to acknowledge issues of power and the way institutions and interests deploy power in an effort to achieve dominance. The choice of theoretical framework was guided by Clark, Dyson and Millward's (1998) recommendation that any theoretical perspective used as the basis for analysis of special education should recognise three dimensions of special education. These dimensions include the complexity of processes and historical influences which have shaped special educational provision and the workings of power in its production. The critical hermeneutic approach recognises the centrality of these dimensions to the process of interpretation. Issues relating to power in decision-making and policy frameworks were central to analysis in this study. This study represents an attempt to contribute to this tradition of research by providing a medium for those who are sometimes disempowered in decision-making processes with regard to special educational provision, to have their voices heard. The findings of this research suggest that

some parents of pupils with MGLD, and the pupils themselves, played a subordinate role in decision-making processes. The theoretical framework which guided interpretation of their perspectives was particularly suited to recognising the competing values which have made the implementation of policy in the area of special education problematic.

7.2.1 Reflections on the theoretical framework

One of the basic assumptions underpinning interpretation in this study was that any discussion of issues relating to inclusion had to identify the values on which it is based and recognise the dilemmas which arise when these values appear to contradict one another. For this reason, Norwich's dilemmatic perspective (1993; 2002; 2008a) was chosen as part of the theoretical framework, as it is based on the assumption that the social and individual values underpinning educational provision create problems in its realisation. This perspective proved to be particularly suitable for this study as the findings highlighted dilemmas, not only in the areas of identification, curriculum and placement, which were also recognised in Norwich's studies (1993; 2008a), but also in the area of parent-professional influences, which was not recognised. A dilemma of participation also emerged from the findings of this study in relation to the role of pupils in the transfer process. Interpretation and analysis was not constrained by the use of Norwich's model as this perspective allowed for the construction of other dilemmas of difference. As all observations are interpretive, the reader may construe further dilemmas which I have not identified from the findings of this study.

The choice of a theoretical framework at two levels of analysis allowed for a more in-depth analysis of findings than would have been possible using the dilemmatic perspective alone. While the dilemmatic perspective allowed for analysis of ideological dilemmas with regard to the values underpinning educational provision for pupils with MGLD, attempts to resolve dilemmas at a pragmatic level were discussed in the context of policy frameworks (Kirp,

1982; Riddell, 2002). These frameworks were particularly apt in the context of the critical hermeneutic approach as they facilitated discussion of power and the dominance of different types of frameworks in the construction of policy. The emphasis on context in the theoretical framework also meant that the choice of case study as the strategy of inquiry was particularly suited to this study.

7.2.2 Reflections on the research design

The decision to focus on the special schools, rather than individual pupils who had transferred from mainstream schools, as cases in this study, was taken in order to focus attention on the phenomenon at the centre of the study in the broad context in which it occurred rather than the experience of a single individual. This phenomenon was the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for pupils with MGLD. While the aim of the study was to identify factors influencing this transfer process, the focus of attention was the experiences of individual pupils, parents and teachers in the context of educational provision in the mainstream and special schools they had attended. This study not only investigated reasons for transfer from mainstream schools but also sought to identify aspects of educational provision in the special schools which were perceived by participants to be particularly suited to the learning needs of pupils with MGLD. Four special schools were chosen in order to acknowledge the diversity of these schools in terms of pupils, size, curriculum and supports offered. The focus on schools rather than individuals also facilitated the inclusion of any parent or pupil in the special schools who expressed interest in participation in this study. Parents who did not wish their children to participate were not excluded and pupils whose parents did not wish to participate were not excluded from participation. The inclusion of all pupils and parents who wished to participate contributed to the richness of the data as this study was concerned with giving voice to the perspectives of

parents, pupils and teachers on the reasons for transfer and on educational provision in mainstream and special schools.

7.2.2 Reflections on the data collection process

The interview was the main data-collecting method employed in this study. The decision to use individual interviews, rather than focus groups, with parents was made after the piloting process and this certainly proved much more beneficial not only in terms of the richness of data collected but also for the development of a rapport with the participants. It also facilitated parents to choose the time and venue for interviews. More importantly, for some parents, the interview was the first time they had told the story of the circumstances of their children's transfer and the emotional impact of the experience on them and their families.

7.2.3 Reflections on data-analysis

The number of interviews conducted in the course of this study generated a lot of data and a method of analysis was required which would assist in the management and organisation of the data. The use of a CAQDAS programme assisted in this regard. While the coding process was done manually, the use of the software meant that every stage of this process was stored in one place. The main advantage of the software, apart from the physical management of data, was that all categories or themes created were linked to the relevant supporting excerpts from transcripts. This enables the construction of an audit trail whereby all themes could be traced back to the supporting evidence in all cases and for all participant groups. One of the disadvantages was the time that it took at the initial stages of analysis to learn how to use the software and this would not have been possible without some training and support. It is important to note that the software, while useful in managing the storage

and organisation of data, does not in any way lessen the role of the researcher in the process of coding, analysis and interpretation of data.

7.2.4 Limitations of research

Every effort was made in this study to include the voice of the key stakeholders involved in the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools for MGLD. However, while drawing on aspects of critical theory in an effort to give voice to the views of parents, pupils, principals and teachers, this study does not claim to be transformative, or emancipatory, in terms of empowering any group of individuals. Rather, it is hoped that this small-scale study has given a voice to participants in relation to their perspectives on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools.

In an effort to portray the differences, as well as similarities, between schools, four different special schools were chosen to represent differences in terms of size, location and demographic factors. The participation of only one teacher in case D may be viewed as a limitation of this study, although each group was strongly represented across cases.

While the perspectives of four participant groups were sought in this study, this is not to suggest that other groups (including psychologists, SNAs and other agencies involved) do not have information to contribute on the transfer process. However, given the timescale and limited scope of this study, it was not possible to include representatives from all professional and support bodies involved in educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The four groups identified in this study were chosen because they were considered to be those most directly involved in the transfer process. The perspectives of teachers and principals in mainstream schools were sought but it must be noted that only a small number of mainstream primary and post-primary schools participated in this study and the views expressed are not representative of all teachers and principals in mainstream schools.

As this study was qualitative in design, there is a lack of statistical data regarding the number of pupils who transferred from mainstream schools and the types of additional learning needs experienced by pupils, particularly with regard to SEBD. This information would have enhanced the study, in particular with reference to the representation of pupils with and without additional needs in the special schools.

Given the limitations in scope and timescale, it was only possible to focus on the reason for transfer in relation to a very small cohort of pupils with MGLD in special schools. However, a multiple case study design was chosen as it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the experiences of participants in four special schools for pupils with MGLD.

Finally, it is important to note that there are many pupils with MGLD who do not transfer from mainstream to special schools and that this study focussed on the experiences of pupils, as well as their parents and teachers, for whom educational provision in mainstream schools was perceived as being inappropriate, or insufficient, to meet their needs. Future research which seeks examples of positive experiences in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools is warranted.

7.3 Summary of key findings

The aim of this study was to investigate factors influencing the transfer of a cohort of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The study also investigated perspectives on educational provision in both sectors. The role played by the key stakeholders in the transfer process was examined in order to explore issues of power in decision-making processes regarding educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The findings indicate that there were a number of factors influencing the transfer process. These included additional SEN experienced by pupils with MGLD, difficulties accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools, dissatisfaction with supports and resources in mainstream

schools and a perception by parents that the school structures and organisation in special schools were more suited to the learning needs of pupils who transferred. Participants identified differences in provision between special schools and mainstream schools in the areas of curriculum, supports and resources and school structure. Curriculum provision in special schools was perceived to be more vocationally-oriented than in mainstream schools. Supports and resources included SNA support, support with transition from special schools to further training and education and teacher expertise. The school structure of special schools was considered by participants to be more appropriate for pupils with MGLD than in mainstream post-primary schools, due to similarities with mainstream primary structures. An examination of roles played in the transfer process indicated that many parents and pupils played a subordinate role to professionals involved in decision-making with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD.

The findings highlight dilemmas of difference in special educational provision for pupils with MGLD, including dilemmas of identification, curriculum, placement, parent-professional influences and participation.

The dilemma of identification is highlighted in the tensions that exist between models of resource allocation at primary and post-primary levels where only one is based on categorisation of MGLD. At primary level, the GAM does not require categorisation for allocation of supports yet a perception that pupils with MGLD were not receiving appropriate level of support through this model was highlighted in the findings of this study.

The curriculum dilemma is highlighted by the difficulties experienced by pupils with MGLD who transferred in accessing the curriculum when they were in mainstream schools. These difficulties were apparent in relation to curriculum provision in primary and post-primary schools. At primary level, there was a perception that class size and content overload contributed to the difficulties experienced by teachers in mainstream classes in differentiating

the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils. At post-primary level, there was a perception that the curriculum itself, in terms of content and assessment structures, was inaccessible to pupils with MGLD. While there is support for perspectives on curriculum overload at primary level and inaccessibility for some pupils with MGLD at post-primary level (NCCA, 2010a; 2010b), there is little support from previous studies (including Bennett, 1998; Blatchford et al., 2003) on the relationship between class size and achievement in primary schools. The need for a vocationally-oriented curriculum was emphasised by many participants including teachers and parents. Pupils also expressed a preference for practical subjects at post-primary level.

The placement dilemma is highlighted by the preference expressed by many parents and pupils for mainstream placement and the perception that there were greater levels of resources and supports available in special schools. These supports included support from SNAs, support for SEBD experienced by pupils and support with transition from special schools to further training and education placements. This dilemma highlights how parental choice in relation to educational provision may be more driven by pragmatism than ideology in relation to inclusion. This has been the finding of previous studies, including Runswick-Cole (2008) and Frederickson et al. (2004).

The parent-professional dilemma is highlighted by the finding that many parents played a subordinate role in the transfer process to the professionals involved. These professionals were mainly teachers, principals and/or psychologists attached to mainstream schools. Some parents indicated that they had never heard of the special schools before the recommendation while others expressed the view that there were no other options available for their children. Teachers and principals in mainstream schools indicated that it was part of their role to advise parents of options available and that sometimes, the special school was considered to be the most appropriate placement for pupils with MGLD. Some of these teachers and principals

suggested that a recommendation to transfer to a special school would be more likely for pupils with MGLD and SEBD, especially where pupils presented with disruptive behaviours in mainstream schools.

A fifth dilemma, a participation dilemma, was proposed as a result of the finding that many pupils also played a subordinate role in the transfer process. Many pupils indicated that their teachers or parents had made the decision to transfer while some parents and teachers in the special schools stated that many pupils experienced difficulties adjusting to placement in the special schools after the transfer.

While analysis at macro-level was informed by a dilemmatic perspective, at micro-level, analysis was concerned with the implications of findings at the level of policy with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD.

7.4 Implications of findings for policy

The findings of this study have implications for policy with regard to the educational provision for pupils with MGLD and in the broader context of a policy of inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools. These implications relate to the areas of resource allocation, curriculum and support for pupils with MGLD and additional SEN in mainstream and special schools. Policy implications for pedagogy and teacher education are also addressed. The findings also have implications in terms of the role of parents and pupils in decision-making with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD.

7.4.1 Resource allocation for pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities

The findings highlight two issues with regard to policy in the area of resource allocation for pupils with MGLD. The first of these is the implementation of the GAM in primary schools, and the difficulties experienced by some schools with this model, and the

second issue relates to differences in resource allocation between primary and post-primary mainstream schools. The findings of this study highlight a perception amongst principals and teachers in mainstream primary schools that the GAM represented a reduction in the level of support available to pupils with MGLD as these pupils had to share resources with other pupils in schools who required extra support. There was a perception that pupils with MGLD could no longer receive adequate levels of individualised support due to the demands on resources in primary schools. In addition to concerns expressed by teachers with regard to the level of support available to pupils with MGLD, there was also a suggestion that only pupils with significant, or severe, learning difficulties would be referred for assessment in primary schools as categorisation would be more likely to result in resource allocation for these pupils, whereas a categorisation of MGLD would not lead to an extra allocation of resources for schools. The shift to a policy which gives flexibility to schools to decide on the level of support required by individual pupils represents an effort to resolve dilemmas of identification as pupils can receive support without having to be labelled as having MGLD. However, the success of any policy depends on local capacity and will (McLaughlin, 1987). Capacity includes providing necessary resources, supports and training required by teachers and schools in the implementation of policy. The level of support and training which was made available to schools in the implementation of the GAM is questionable and this is an area which needs to be addressed if this policy is to facilitate the inclusion of pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools. Will, is described by McLaughlin as the attitudes, motivations and beliefs of policy implementers and this is determined by the implementer's assessment of the appropriateness of a policy. This is a concern with regard to current policy in primary schools particularly given the views of teachers and principals in this study regarding the appropriateness of the GAM for pupils with MGLD. Concerns have also been expressed about the capacity of the GAM to cater for the needs of pupils with MGLD in

previous studies (e.g., Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). The findings of the current study suggest an urgent need for evaluation of the GAM in terms of its capacity to meet the learning needs of pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools.

The second issue raised by the findings of this study is that inconsistencies in policy relating to resource allocation between mainstream primary and post-primary schools have resulted in conflicting bureaucratic and professional policy frameworks. This, in turn, causes confusion and anxiety for pupils with MGLD and their parents in relation to entitlement to supports and the level of supports available when moving from one sector to another. The findings of this study indicate that this confusion was one of the key factors influencing the decision to transfer to a special school for pupils with MGLD as there was greater certainty and a perception of greater levels of resource allocation in the special schools. This highlights the need for consistency and transparency in relation to resource allocation for pupils with MGLD in the transition from mainstream primary to post-primary schools.

7.4.2 Curriculum and policy implications

The findings of this study have implications for current policy, particularly in relation to the proposed curriculum reform at junior cycle in post-primary schools. Allan and Brown's (2001) study of special schools in the UK emphasises the role of the special school in preparing pupils for lifelong inclusion, and they present an argument for a reconceptualisation of inclusion as belonging to a community rather than placement in a particular school setting. The findings of the current study highlight the efforts of special schools to provide a vocationally-oriented curriculum, which was considered by participants to be more appropriate in meeting the learning needs and enhancing post-school outcomes for pupils with MGLD, than the curriculum in mainstream post-primary schools. The curriculum in mainstream post-primary schools was considered inaccessible due to its subject-based and

assessment structure. It is important that the development of any new curriculum framework for pupils with GLD is situated within the broader context of curriculum reform rather than an add-on to the general curriculum in mainstreams schools. The development of a curriculum which provides a balance between academic and vocational skills, and which can be accessed at a level appropriate to the individual needs of the learner, is a requirement for all pupils, not just pupils who have been assessed as having a particular category of learning disability. It is also important that any curriculum which is deemed appropriate in facilitating access for pupils with MGLD is available to any of these pupils who wish to access the curriculum, regardless of school type or designation. An important consideration in the implementation of a new curriculum framework for pupils at junior cycle is, once again, the capacity and will of schools and teachers to implement such programmes.

7.4.3. Pedagogy, teacher education and policy implications

The findings of this study highlight a perception that teachers in mainstream post-primary schools did not have sufficient knowledge or training to meet the needs of pupils with MGLD. The findings also highlight a perception amongst teachers in mainstream primary schools that it was very difficult to differentiate the curriculum for pupils with MGLD who transferred to special schools. Where teachers experience difficulties in meeting the learning needs of pupils with MGLD, then support and CPD is evidently required. There are, however, issues with regard to the nature of such professional development. There has been some criticism of teacher education programmes which reinforce a belief that specialist knowledge and pedagogies are required to teach pupils with SEN. The idea of specialist pedagogies for pupils with SEN has been challenged by Florian and Rouse (2009), who argue that teacher education for inclusion should be concerned with the preparation of people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the

learning and participation of all pupils. Difference amongst pupils is, thus, regarded as natural and part of the human condition, rather than being associated with a particular group of pupils. Ensuring that teachers understand that teaching strategies which are commonly used in mainstream classrooms can be adapted to assist pupils identified as having learning difficulties, is one of the core tasks of teacher education, according to Florian and Rouse (2009). This view is echoed by Lewis and Norwich (2001) in their review of systematic evidence concerning distinctive pedagogies for pupils with SEN, where they found no evidence to support a distinctive pedagogy for pupils with MGLD. Lewis and Norwich advocate the concept of a continuum of teaching approaches which entails adapting common teaching approaches based on individual learning needs. Although common pedagogic principles apply, the nature and intensity of application of any teaching approach will depend on individual learning needs. What is required then is a reconceptualisation of pedagogy for pupils with MGLD as inclusive, rather than specialist, and a reconsideration of how teacher education can best prepare teachers to respond to the learning needs of all pupils.

7.4.4 Policy implications for pupils with MGLD and additional needs

The findings of this study echo those of previous studies (Male, 1996; Norwich & Kelly, 2005) which have found that the majority of pupils who transfer to special schools experience additional SEN. In this study, SEBD was more frequently cited than any other additional need by parents, teachers and principals in special schools. The prevalence of SEBD amongst pupils who transfer to special schools for pupils with MGLD raises concerns about the ability of mainstream primary and post-primary schools to meet the needs of these pupils. There was a perception amongst teachers and principals in mainstream schools that teachers in special schools had greater expertise in catering for emotional and behavioural difficulties and that the behavioural difficulties presented by these pupils were disruptive in

mainstream classes. The findings suggest that the recommendation to transfer pupils with MGLD to a special school is more likely to be made for pupils with MGLD and SEBD than for pupils experiencing MGLD only. This finding echoes that of Stevens and O'Moore (2009), who found that more teachers in special schools for pupils with MGLD, than in mainstream schools, considered their pupils to have SEBD. The findings of the current study highlight the need for support and professional development for teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with MGLD and SEBD. This includes support in identifying factors that contribute to the development of SEBD. The need to address the lack of competence on the part of teachers to identify causes of SEBD and to provide appropriate support for pupils experiencing these difficulties echoes the findings of a recent review of best practice models and outcomes in the education of pupils with emotional disturbance/behavioural difficulties (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011). The findings of the current study also highlight deficiencies with regard to the social inclusion of pupils with MGLD and the need for programmes which facilitate and foster peer relationships in mainstream schools.

7.4.5 The role of parents and pupils in decision-making processes

The role played by parents in the transfer process is also a concern in the context of a dominant professional policy framework. This was particularly evident in relation to the finding that some parents were discouraged from enrolling pupils in mainstream post-primary schools based on the results of entrance examinations or psychological reports. This illustrates the power held by professionals, who engage in a form of professional gatekeeping, with regard to decisions about access to mainstream schools. Partnership for parents in education is a stated policy aim of the Government (DES, 1991) and is underpinned by legislation including the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998). However, the findings of this study indicate that many parents of pupils with MGLD assumed

the role of client, rather than partner, in decision-making processes relating to their children. The findings highlight the need for the development of clear policy and guidelines in relation to the role of stakeholders in decision-making processes regarding educational provision for pupils with MGLD to ensure a greater balance of power in these processes. The stakeholders also include the pupils themselves and the findings indicate a need for greater involvement of pupils in decisions relating to their education.

7.4.6 Dilemmas of difference and a policy of inclusion

One of the aims of this study was to explore the perspectives of principals, teachers, parents and pupils with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools for pupils with MGLD. The findings identified dilemmas in the areas of identification, curriculum, placement, parent-professional influences and in the participation of pupils with MGLD in decision-making processes with regard to their educational provision. These dilemmas are described as dilemmas of difference (Artiles, 1998; Norwich, 2002; 2008c) as they represent tensions which arise between positive and negative conceptions of difference. While positive conceptions focus on the recognition and celebration of individuality, there are also negative connotations, which may lead to stigmatisation.

The findings of this study provide evidence that efforts to resolve dilemmas of difference in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD, through the formulation of policy, have not always proven successful. This was highlighted by teachers in mainstream primary schools, in their criticisms of policy with regards to resource allocation for pupils with MGLD. As Clark et al. (1998, p. 170) state “Forms of provision can be dismantled, but the dilemmas out of which they arise cannot.”

How, then, can policy address dilemmas in the areas identified in this study, in a way that facilitates the inclusion of pupils with MGLD in mainstream schools? There is a growing body of opinion, internationally, that policy with regard to educational provision for pupils with SEN must be developed as part of, rather than separate or parallel to, provision for all pupils (Florian, 2007; Slee, 2008; Wedell, 2008). Special education is described by Florian (2007), as the process of providing something different from, or additional to, that which is otherwise available in schools. The findings of this study highlight a perception among principals, teachers, parents and pupils that the special schools for pupils with MGLD could provide supports, resources and expertise which were not available to the pupils who transferred in their mainstream schools. There is an onus on policy makers to challenge what Florian describes as complacency about what is not “otherwise available” (2007, p. 15) in mainstream schools. This is especially important for pupils with MGLD, given the lack of evidence for a distinctive pedagogy for this group (Lewis and Norwich, 2001). Where there is no such evidence, Florian suggests that lack of expertise on the part of mainstream teachers is not a compelling argument for the need for separate educational provision. Responding to the diversity of all pupils is part of the core business of inclusion (UNESCO, 2005). While differences between pupils must be recognised in order to meet individual learning needs, this recognition applies to all pupils, not just those who are described as having SEN. Recognition of difference should not lead to any exclusionary practices which, in turn, reinforce dilemmas of difference in educational provision. Debates around dilemmas of difference provide policy makers, and all those involved in education, with an opportunity to reconsider thinking and practice with regard to special educational provision, in order to improve the quality of education for all pupils.

7.5 Future research

The aim of this study was to identify factors which influenced the transfer of a cohort of pupils with MGLD from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with MGLD. The findings build on those of previous studies in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD (e.g., Stevens & O'Moore, 2009) and the transfer of pupils from mainstream to special schools in Ireland (e.g., Kelly & Devitt, 2010). This study raises issues which are worthy of further exploration through research in relation to educational provision for pupils with MGLD. The first of these issues relates to the prevalence on additional needs, including SEBD, among the population of pupils transferring to special schools. There is a need for a database of the types of additional needs experienced by pupils in special schools which indicates the prevalence of SEBD among this population.

Resource allocation for pupils with MGLD in mainstream primary schools through the GAM was criticised by teachers and principals in mainstream schools. As there were a small number of mainstream schools involved in this study, the findings are not representative of all mainstream primary schools. However, the concerns expressed are worthy of further investigation on a larger scale which suggests the need for data-gathering procedures which will elicit information in relation to the efficacy of this model to cater for the learning needs of pupils with MGLD. Where there are schools which have successfully adapted support structures and provision for pupils for MGLD within the framework of the GAM, then case studies illustrating models of best practice can be provided to support schools experiencing difficulties in its implementation.

Access to curriculum at mainstream post-primary level was also an issue raised in the findings of this study. The perception that the curriculum offered in special schools was more appropriate to the learning needs of pupils with MGLD suggests the need for research which focuses on best practice with regard to curriculum provision in special schools. The outcome

of this type of research may prove invaluable in contributing to the development of new curriculum frameworks for mainstream post-primary schools at junior cycle. The difficulties experienced by pupils accessing the curriculum in mainstream primary schools and the difficulties experienced by teachers in differentiating the curriculum at this level suggest a need for research which identifies best practice in facilitating access to the curriculum for pupils with MGLD.

7.6 Concluding remarks

The aim of this study was to investigate the perspectives of teachers, parents and pupils with MGLD in relation to their views on the reasons that a cohort of pupils with MGLD transferred from mainstream to special schools. Their perspectives on educational provision for pupils with MGLD in mainstream and special schools was also sought in order to identify similarities and differences in provision between both sectors. While current policy advocates the inclusion of all pupils in mainstream schools, the values of equity and participation which underpin this policy prove problematic when these values seem to compete with one another. Where values compete, tensions or dilemmas arise and the findings of this study highlight examples of these dilemmas in the areas of curriculum, identification, placement, parent-professional relationships and in the participation of pupils in decision-making processes regarding their educational provision.

The construction of policy takes place within the context of policy frameworks which reflect dominant influences in relation to policy choices, at different times, in special education. This study identifies inconsistencies in policy with regard to educational provision for pupils with MGLD and the findings illustrate how conflicting policy frameworks have created confusion and uncertainty for pupils and their parents. This, in turn, influences the decision to transfer

pupils from mainstream to special schools. The need for a clear and consistent policy with regard to educational provision is apparent.

Finally, the findings of this study highlight the complexities involved in the realisation of a policy of inclusion where dilemmas of difference arise and the importance of recognising, and endeavouring to resolve, these dilemmas in the construction of future of policy.

Reference List

- Artiles, A.J. (1998). The dilemma of difference: Enriching the disproportionality discourse with theory and context. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 32-36.
- Avramidis, E. (2010). Social relationships of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream primary class: peer group membership and peer-assessed social behaviour. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(4), 413-429.
- Avramidis, E., & Kalyva, E. (2007). The influence of teaching experience and professional development on Greek teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 22(4), 367 - 389.
- Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitude towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Educational Needs*, 17(2), 129 - 147.
- Allan, J. (1996). Foucault and special educational needs: A 'box of tools' for analysing children's experiences of mainstreaming. *Disability and Society*, 11(2) , 219-233.
- Allan, J. & Brown, S. (2001). Special schools and inclusion. *Educational Review*, 53(2), 199-207.
- Armstrong, D. (1995). *Power and partnership in education: Parents, children and special educational needs*. New York: Routledge.
- Armstrong, D., Armstrong, F., & Barton, L. (1998). From theory to practice: Special education and the social relations of academic production. In C. Clark, A. Dyson, & A. Millward, (Eds.), *Theorising special education*. London: Routledge.
- Armstrong, D., Kane, G., O'Sullivan, G., & Kelly, M. (2010). *National survey of parental attitudes to and experiences of local and national special educational services*. NCSE. Retrieved April 25, 2011 from http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Parental_Survey_Report_1.pdf

- Barry, C.A. (1998). Choosing qualitative data analysis software: Atlas/ti and Nudist compared. *Sociological Research Online* 3(3). Retrieved February 2, 2008 from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/4.html>
- Bishop, R. (2005). Freeing ourselves from neo-colonial domination in research: A Kaupapa Maori approach to creating knowledge. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Bennett, N. (1998). Annotation: Class size and the quality of educational outcomes. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 39(6), 797-895.
- Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Goldstein, H., & Martin, C. (2003). Are class size differences related to pupils' educational progress and classroom practices? Findings from the Institute of Education class size study of children aged 5-7. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(5), 709-730.
- Cambra, C., & Silvestre, N. (2003). Students with special educational needs in the inclusive classroom: Social integration and self-concept. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 18, 197-208.
- Cigman, R. (2007). *Included or excluded*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Clark, C., Dyson, A., & Millward, A. (Ed.). (1998). *Theorising special education*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: "Student Voice" in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*. 36(4), 359-390.
- Cooney, G., Jahoda, A., Gumley, A., & Knott, F. (2006). Young people with intellectual disabilities attending mainstream and segregated schooling: perceived stigma, social comparison and future aspirations. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 50(6), 432- 444.

- Cooper, P., & Jacobs, B. (2011). *Evidence of best practice models and outcomes in the education of children with emotional disturbance/behavioural difficulties: An international review*. Retrieved May 13, 2011 from http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/EBD_Report.pdf
- Corbett, J., & Norwich, B. (2005). Common or specialized pedagogy. In M. Nind, J. Rix, K. Sheehy and K. Simmons (Eds.) *Curriculum and pedagogy in inclusive education. Values into practice*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Corrie, M., & Zaklukiewicz, S. (1985). Qualitative research and case-study approaches: an introduction. In S. Hegarty and P. Evans (Ed.), *Research and evaluation methods in special education: quantitative and qualitative techniques in case-study work*. Berkshire, UK: Nfer-Nelson.
- Costley, D. (2000). Collecting the views of young people with moderate learning difficulties. In A. L. a. G. Lindsay (Ed.), *Researching children's perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications.
- Croll, P., & Moses, D. (1985). *One in five: The assessment and incidence of special educational needs*. London: Routledge.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Youngs, P. (2002). Defining Highly Qualified Teachers: What does Scientifically-Based Research actually tell us? *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 13-25.
- De Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2010). Attitudes of parents towards inclusive education: a review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(2), 165-181.

- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- De Monchy, M., Pijl, S.J., & Zandberg, T. (2004). Discrepancies in judging social inclusion and bullying of pupils with behaviour problems. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 19(3), 317-330.
- Department for Education and Science (1978). *Special educational needs (The Warnock Report)* HMSO: London
- Department of Education and Science (1980). *White paper on educational development*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science (1984). *Programme for action in education 1984-1987*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education (1991). *Parents and partners in education*. Circular letter 24/91. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science. (1993). *Report of the special education review committee*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science. (1998, November, 5). *Major initiative in special education services*. Retrieved August 13, 2007 from Department of Education and Science Online: <http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861&language=EN&category=11>.
- Department of Education and Science. (2002). *Application for a full or part-time resource teacher to address the special educational needs of children with disabilities*. Circular SP. ED 08/02. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science. (2003). *Allocation of resources for pupils with special educational needs in national schools*. Circular SP. ED 24/03. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and Science (2005a). *Organisation of teaching resources for pupils who need additional support in mainstream primary schools*. Circular SP ED 02/05. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and Science (2005b). *An evaluation of curriculum implementation in primary schools. English, mathematics and visual arts*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Retrieved February 8, 2011 from <http://www.omc.gov.ie/docsdb/results.asp?rl=52>

Department of Education and Skills. (2007). *Audit of school enrolment policies by Regional Offices Service*. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www.education.ie/insreports/des_enrolment_audit_report.pdf

Department of Education and Skills. (2009). Archived speech from Minister for Education and Science. *Speech by the Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe TD, at the Dail private members debate on mild general learning disability classes*. Retrieved April 6, 2011 from <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?maincat=&pcategory=10861&ecategory=54229§ionpage=12251&language=EN&link=link001&page=4&doc=44726>

Dyson, A. & Kozleski, E.B. (2008). Disproportionality in special education. In L. Florian & M.J. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Disability Classification in Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press; Sage.

Fahey, R. (2007). Post-school outcomes and social experiences of past pupils of a special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities: How they inform transition curricula. *Reach Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*. 21(1), 7-20.

Flatman Watson, S. (2004) Access to mainstream primary education for students with intellectual and/or developmental disability [Electronic Version]. Retrieved March 23,

2009, from

<http://www.nda.ie/cntmgmtnew.nsf/0/B34CBB01D478162F802570BB00530FBE?Op>

- Fletcher-Campbell, F. (2005). Moderate learning difficulties. In A. Lewis and B. Norwich (Eds.) *Special teaching for special children? Pedagogies for inclusion*. (pp. 180-191). UK: Open University Press.
- Florian, L. (2007). Reimagining special education. In L. Florian (Ed.) *The SAGE handbook of special education*. London and Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.
- Florian, L., & Rouse, M. (2009). The inclusive practice project in Scotland: Teacher education for inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 594 - 601.
- Florian, L., & Linklater, H. (2010) Preparing teachers for inclusive education: using inclusive pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for all. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 40(4), 369-386.
- Florian, L., Hollenweger, J., Simeonsson, R.J., Wedell, K., Riddell, S., Terzi, L., & Holland, A. (2006). Cross-cultural perspectives on the classification of children with disabilities: Part 1. Issues in the classification of children with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, 40 (1), 36-45.
- Forlin, C., Keen, M., & Barrett, E. (2008). The concerns of mainstream teachers: Coping with inclusivity in an Australian context. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 55(3), 251 - 264.
- Foster, P. (1999). Some critical comments on the BERA ethical guidelines. *BERA research Intelligence*. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from <http://bera.ac.uk/ri/no67/ri67foster.html>.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rainbow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. Brighton, UK: Harvester.
- Frederickson, N. (2010). Bullying or befriending? Children's responses to classmates with special needs. *British Journal of Special Education*, 37(1), 4-13.

- Frederickson, N., Dunsmuir, S., Lang, J., & Monsen, J.J. (2004). Mainstream-special school inclusion partnerships: pupil, parent and teacher perspectives. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 8(1), 37-57.
- Fyelling, I., & Sandvin, J.T. (1999). The role of parents in special education: the notion of partnership revised. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 14(2), 144-157.
- Gash, H. (2006). Beginning primary teachers and children with mild learning difficulties. *Irish Educational Studies*, 25(3), 275-287.
- Giangreco, M.F., & Broer, S. (2005). Questionable utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: Are we addressing symptoms or causes? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 20(1), 10-26.
- Government of Ireland (1965). *Report of the commission of inquiry on mental handicap*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland (1980). *White paper on educational development*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland (1995). *Charting our education future: White paper in education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland (1998). *The Education Act 1998*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Government of Ireland (1999). *Primary Curriculum*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Government of Ireland (2004). *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act [EPSEN] 2004*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Gray, D.E., & Denicolo, P. (1998). Research in special needs education: objectivity or ideology? *British Journal of Special Education*, 25(3), 140-145.

- Groom, B. (2006). Building relationships for learning: the developing role of the teaching assistant. *Support for Learning*, 21(4), 199-203.
- Head, G., & Pirrie, A. (2007). The place of special schools in a policy climate of inclusion. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 7(2), 90-96.
- Hegarty, S. (1985). Introduction. In S. Hegarty and P. Evans (Ed.), *Research and evaluation methods in special education: quantitative and qualitative techniques in case study work*. Berkshire, UK.: Nfer-Nelson.
- Hess, R.S., Molina, A.M., & Kozleski, E.B. (2006). Until somebody hears me: parent voice and advocacy in special educational decision making. *British Journal of Special Education*, 33(3), 148-157.
- Ho, A. (2004). To be labelled, or not to be labelled: that is the question. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 86-92.
- Hornby, G., & Kidd, R. (2001). Transfer from special to mainstream - ten years later. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 8.
- Humphrey, N., & Lewis, S. (2008). What does 'inclusion' mean for pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary schools? *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 8(3), 132-140
- Iacovou, M. (2002). Class size in the early years: Is smaller really better? *Educational Economics*, 10(3), 261-288.
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (2002). *New challenges for special schools and classes*. Dublin: INTO.
- Jacklin, A. (1998). The transfer process between special and mainstream schools: the pupils'experience. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 13(2), 155-169.
- Kavale, K.A. & Forness, S.R. (1998). The Politics of Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 21(4), 245-273.

- Kelly, A., Carey, S., & McCarthy, S. (2004). *A Nationwide Study of Challenging Behaviour in Special Schools in Ireland (2002-2003)*. Kildare, Ireland: National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education.
- Kelly, A., & Devitt, C. (2010). *Why are post 12 year old students with special education needs who have attended mainstream schools seeking admission to special schools?* Kildare: NABMSE.
- Kelly, F., Kelly, C., & Craig, S. (2007). *Annual report of the national disability database committee 2007*, Dublin: Health Research Board.
- Kenny, M., McNeela, E., Shevlin, M., & Daly, T. (2000). *Hidden voices; young people with disabilities speak about their second-level schooling*. Cork, Ireland: South West Regional Authority:
- Kenny, M., Shevlin, M., & Loxley, A. (2006). *Special education provision for children with disabilities in Irish primary schools-the views of the stakeholders*. Dublin: NDA.
- Kenny, M., Shevlin, M., Noonan Walsh, P., & McNeela, E. (2005). Accessing mainstream: examining the struggle for parents of children who have learning difficulties. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 5(1), 11-19.
- Kincheloe, J.L., & Berry, K.S. (2004). *Rigour and complexity in educational research: conceptualizing the bricolage*. New York: Open University Press.
- Kincheloe, J.L., & McClaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- King-Sears, M. (2008). Facts and fallacies: differentiation and the general education curriculum for students with special educational needs. *Support for Learning*, 23(2), 55-62.

- Kirp, D.L. (1982). Professionalism as a policy choice: British special education in comparative perspective. *World Politics*, 34 (2), 137-174.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Lewis, A., & Norwich, B. (2001). A critical review of systematic evidence concerning distinctive pedagogies for pupils with difficulties in learning. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 1(1), 1-13.
- Lewis, A., & Porter, J. (2004). Interviewing children and young people with learning disabilities: guidelines for researchers and multi-professional practice. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 191-197.
- Lincoln, Y.S., and Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Lindsay, G. (2007). Educational psychology and the effectiveness of mainstreaming/inclusion. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 29.
- Lodge, A., & Lynch, K. (2004). *Diversity at school*. Dublin: The Equality Authority.
- Logan, A. (2006). The role of the special needs assistant supporting pupils with special educational needs in Irish mainstream primary schools. *Support for Learning*, 21(2), 92-99.
- Macer, T. (2008). NVivo 8 reviewed: Will this web interviewing product deliver on its promise to allow users greater freedom? *Research*, May 2008.
- MacNab, N., Visser, J., & Daniels, H. (2008). Provision in further education colleges for 14 to 16 year olds with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(4), 241-246.

- Male, D. (1996). Who goes to MLD schools? *British Journal of Special Education*, 23(1), 35-41.
- McCarthy, O., & Kenny, M. (2006). *Special Schools in Transition: concerns and hopes among teachers in the sector*. Dublin: IATSE.
- McCauley, E. (2009). Transition from primary to post-primary schools: Issues for students with special educational needs. *Reach Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 23(1), 32-46.
- McDonnell, P. (2003). Developments in special education in Ireland: deep structures and policy making. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(3), 259-269.
- McLaughlin, M. (1987). Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 171-178.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Minow, M. (1990). *Making all the difference: Inclusion, exclusion and American law*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Motherway, C. (2009). *Enabling, hearing and giving weight to students' views of special schooling in 21st century Ireland: Do 'dilemmas of difference' apply?* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.
- Mulvany, F. (2000). *Annual report of the national intellectual database committee 1998/1999*, Dublin: Health Research Board.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA]. (1999). *Special educational needs: Curriculum issues. Discussion paper*. Retrieved February 2, 2010 from <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/nccaeng.pdf>
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2007). *Guidelines for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities*. NCCA. Retrieved May, 8 2009

from [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum and Assessment/Inclusion/Special Educational Needs/Download Special Educational Needs Guidelines/Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities.html](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Inclusion/Special_Educational_Needs/Download_Special_Educational_Needs_Guidelines/Guidelines_for_teachers_of_students_with_general_learning_disabilities.html)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Junior cycle curriculum framework for students with general learning disabilities. Towards a discussion paper*. Retrieved December 12, 2010 from [http://www.sdpi.ie/NCCA Materials/Curriculum Framework for Junior Cycle General Learning Disabilities.pdf](http://www.sdpi.ie/NCCA_Materials/Curriculum_Framework_for_Junior_Cycle_General_Learning_Disabilities.pdf)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2010a). *Curriculum overload in primary schools. An overview of national and international experiences*. Retrieved January 4, 2011 from [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum and Assessment/Early Childhood and Primary Education/Primary School Curriculum/PSN Curriculum Overload/Overview_national_international_experiences.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Curriculum_Overload/Overview_national_international_experiences.pdf)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2010b). *Innovation and identity: Ideas for a new junior cycle*. NCCA. Retrieved February 8, 2011 from [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum and Assessment/Post Primary Education/Junior Cycle/Junior cycle developments/Report on JC consultation .pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post_Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Junior_cycle_developments/Report_on_JC_consultation_.pdf)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2011). *Junior cycle developments. Innovation and identity: Summary of consultation findings*. Retrieved March, 7, 2011 from [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum and Assessment/Post-Primary Education/Junior Cycle/Junior cycle developments/Report on JC consultation .pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Junior_cycle_developments/Report_on_JC_consultation_.pdf)

National Council for Special Education [NCSE]. (2006). *Guidelines on the individual education plan process*. The Stationery Office: Dublin.

- National Council for Special Education. (2009). *Annual Report, 2009*. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from <http://www.ncse.ie/docs/2009%20Annual%20Report%20final.pdf>
- National Council for Special Education. (2010a). *Submission to Joint Committee on Education and Skills*. Retrieved March from [http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Submission to Joint Oireachtas Education Comm
____ittee.doc](http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Submission%20to%20Joint%20Oireachtas%20Education%20Committee.doc)
- National Council for Special Education. (2010b). *Report on NCSE review of SNA allocation to schools: April 2009-March 2010*. NCSE, Retrieved December 5, 2010 from <http://www.ncse.ie/publications/Reports.asp>
- National Federation of Voluntary Bodies [NFVB]. (2006). *Report to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from http://www.fedvol.ie/about_us/default.asp?NCID=117&NID=426
- Nilholm, C. (2006) Special education, inclusion and democracy. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 21(4), 431-445.
- Nind, M. (2005). Introduction: Models and practice in inclusive curricula. In M. Nind, J. Rix, K. Sheehy & K. Simmons (Eds.), *Curriculum and pedagogy in inclusive education. Values into practice*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Norwich, B. (1993). Ideological dilemmas in special needs education: practitioners' views. *Oxford Review of Education*, 19(4), 527-548.
- Norwich, B. (1997). Exploring the perspectives of adolescents with moderate learning difficulties on their special schooling and themselves: stigma and self-perceptions. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 12(1), 38-53.
- Norwich, B. (2002). Education, inclusion and individual differences: recognising and resolving dilemmas. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50(4), 482-502.

- Norwich, B. (2008a). Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability. International perspectives and future directions. UK: Routledge.
- Norwich, B. (2008b). What future for special schools and inclusion? Conceptual and professional perspectives. *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(3), 8.
- Norwich, B. (2008c). Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability: international perspectives on placement. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23(4), 287-304.
- Norwich, B., & Kelly, N. (2005). *Moderate learning difficulties and the future of inclusion*. UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Nowicki, E. A. (2003). A meta-analysis of the social competence of children with learning disabilities compared to classmates of low and average to high achievement. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 26, 171-188.
- O'Connor, U. (2008). Meeting in the middle? A study of parent-professional partnerships. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23(3), 253-268.
- O'Donnell, M. (2009). *Inclusive education policy; Teachers' efficacy beliefs for including pupils with special educational needs in Irish mainstream primary schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.
- O'Gorman, E., & Drudy, S. (2010). Addressing the professional development needs of teachers working in the area of special education/inclusion in mainstream schools in Ireland. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 10(1), 157-167.
- O'Neill, A., & Rose, R. (2008). The changing role of teaching assistants in England and special needs assistants in Ireland: A comparison. *Reach Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 22(1), 48-59.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010). *PISA 2009 Results:*

Executive Summary. OECD Retrieved from

<http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/60/46619703.pdf>

Pijl, S.J., Frostad, P., & Flem, A. (2008). The social position of pupils with special needs in regular schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52, 387- 405.

Pijl, S.J., Skaalvik, E.M., & Skaalvik, S. (2010). Students with special needs and the composition of their peer group. *Irish Educational Studies*, 29(1), 57-70.

Pinkus, S. (2005). Bridging the gap between policy and practice: adopting a strategic vision for partnership working in special education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 32(4), 184-187.

QSR International (2008). *The impossible just got possible. NVivo 8 Getting started*. QSR International.

Reisberg, L. (1998). Facilitating inclusion with integrated curriculum: A multidisciplinary approach. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 33(5), 272-278.

Riddell, S. (2002). *Policy and practice in education: Special educational needs* (Vol. 5) Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

Riddell, S., Adler, M., Mordaunt, E., & Farmakopoulou, N. (2000). Special educational needs and competing policy frameworks in England and Scotland. *Journal of Education Policy*, 15(6), 621-635.

Rix, J., Simmons, K., Nind, M., & Sheehy, K. (Eds.). (2005). *Policy and power in inclusive education: Values into practice*. Routledge Falmer.

Runswick-Cole, K. (2008). Between a rock and a hard place: parents' attitudes to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(3), 173-180.

- Seidel, J. (1991) Methods and madness in the application of computer technology to qualitative data analysis. In N. Fielding & R.M.Lee (Eds.) *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*. London: British Library.
- Sheehy, K. (2005). Inclusive education and ethical research. In K. Sheehy, M. Nind, J. Rix and K. Simmons (Eds), *Ethics and research in inclusive education: Values into practice*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Shevlin, M., Kenny, M., & Loxley, A. (2008). A time of transition: exploring special educational provision in the Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 8(3), 141-152
- Slee, R. (2008). Beyond special and regular schooling? An inclusive education reform agenda. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 18(2), 99-116.
- Skrtic, T.M. (1995). *Disability and democracy: Reconstructing special education for postmodernity*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Skrtic, T.M. (2005). A political economy of learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28(2), 149-155.
- Smyth, E. (2009). Junior cycle education: Insights from a longitudinal study. *ESRI Research Bulletin*, 4(1), 1-5.
- Smythe, W.E., & Murray, M.J. (2000). Owning the story: ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics and Behaviour*, 10(4), 311-336.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York and London: The Guilford Press.
- Stevens, P., & O'Moore, M. (2009). *Inclusion or illusion? Educational provision for primary schools children with mild general learning disabilities*. Dublin: Blackhall Publishing:

- Stone, D. (2002). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Thomas, G. (2005). What do we mean by 'EBD'? In P. Clough, P. Garner, J.T. Pardeck & F. Yuen (Ed.), *Handbook of Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*. London: Sage.
- Thomas, G., & Loxley, A. (2007). *Deconstructing special education and constructing inclusion*. UK; Open University Press.
- Tisdall, E.K.M., & Riddell, S. (2006). Policies on special needs education: competing strategies and discourses. *European Journal of Special needs Education*, 21(4), 363-379.
- Tomlinson, S. (1982). *A Sociology of special education*. London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul.
- Travers J. (2009). The suppression of 128 special classes for pupils with mild general learning disabilities: A response. *Reach Journal of Special Educational Needs in Ireland*, 23(1) 2-12.
- Travers, J., Balfe, T., Butler, C., Day, T., Dupont, M., McDaid, R., O'Donnell, M., & Prunty, A. (2010). *Addressing the challenges and barriers in inclusion in Irish schools. Report to the research and development committee of the Department of Education and Skills*. Dublin Retrieved February 22, 2011 from http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/academic/special_education/documents/StPatricksCollegeSENReport/2010.pdf
- Travers, J., Butler, C., & O'Donnell, M. (2011). *An inventory of research and policy related publications in the field of special education on the island of Ireland since 2000*. Retrieved May 10th 2011 from http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_of_Audit_January_2011.pdf

- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO]. (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Salamanca: UNESCO.
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO]. (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF]. (2004). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved July 30, 2007, from <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm>.
- Vaughn, S., Schumm, J. S., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology*. Sage: London and New York.
- Vincett, K., Cremin, H., & Thomas, G. (2005). *Teachers and assistants working together*. UK: Open University Press
- Ware, J., Balfe, T., Butler, C., Day, T., Dupont, M., Harten, C., Farrell, A.M., McDaid, R., O'Riordan, M., Prunty, A., & Travers, J. (2009). *Research report on the role of special schools and classes in Ireland*. NCSE: Meath.
- Warnock, M. (2005). *Special educational needs: A new look*. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.
- Winter, E. & O'Raw, (2010). *Literature Review of the Principles and Practices relating to Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs*. Ireland: NCSE.
- Webster, R., Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., & Russell, A. (2010). Double standards and first principles: framing teaching assistant support for pupils with special educational needs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(4), 319-336.
- Wedell, K. (2008). Confusion about inclusion: patching up or system change? *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(3), 127-135.
- World Health Organisation (1996). *ICD-10 guide for mental retardation*. Geneva: WHO. Retrieved March 2, 2009 from http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/69.pdf

Appendix A: Interview Schedule Principal Special Schools

Interview schedule – Principal of Special School

A. General Information

1. Number of years as school principal?
2. School enrolment number September 2009. Increase or decrease on previous years?
3. Criteria for enrolment in school? Priority?
4. Number of these who transferred from mainstream schools? Primary? Post-primary?
5. Number of pupils in school aged 4-11?
6. Number of pupils in school aged 12-18?
7. Special educational needs of pupils in school other than mild general learning difficulties (MGLD)?
8. Number of pupils with moderate general learning difficulties?
9. School structure and curriculum provision – primary/post-primary? Class groupings? Number of classes? Class size? Curriculum? Certification?
10. Number of teachers – primary/post-primary?
11. Training?
12. Specialist teachers (VEC)? Resource teachers?
13. Number of support staff? SNA; HSE
14. Resources? Facilities?

B. Pupils who transfer

1. Average age of pupils at time of transfer from mainstream?
2. Reason for transfer? (stated before and during process by mainstream schools, parents, other professionals involved etc.)
3. Special educational needs of pupils who transferred other than, or additional to, MGLD?
4. Who initiates transfer process?
5. Role of special school in transfer process e.g. advising parents, schools.
6. Parental expectations of special school? Outcomes for their children?
7. Pupil expectations of special school?
8. Transition from mainstream to special school – pupils' experience?

C. Difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream primary?

Difficulties experienced by pupils in mainstream post-primary?

Difficulties experienced by mainstream schools in meeting needs?

What can special school offer pupils who transfer?

Difficulties experienced in relation to pupils who transfer?

Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Teachers in Special Schools for Pupils with Mild General Learning Difficulties

1. What are the reasons pupils leave mainstream and come to X School?
2. At what age do pupils generally transfer?
3. Do pupils who transfer have special educational needs other than mild general learning difficulties?
4. What can X School offer a pupil with mild general learning difficulties who has left mainstream?
5. Do you think that pupils who transfer benefit from coming to X School? How?
6. Who is involved in making the decision to transfer pupils from mainstream schools to X School?
7. Who usually initiates the transfer process from mainstream to X School?
8. What role does the special school play in the transfer to X School?
9. What role does the mainstream school play in the transfer of a pupil to X School?
10. What role do parents play in the transfer of a pupil from mainstream to X School?
11. Who else is generally involved in the transfer?
12. What are the stages involved in the transfer of a pupil?
13. How do pupils generally cope with the transfer from mainstream to X School?
14. Do pupils generally maintain contact with their mainstream peers?
15. Do you have regular contact with the parents of pupils you work with?
16. Do you have regular contact with other professionals who may be involved with the pupil?
17. Do you think that the special school is the best placement for pupils you work with?

Appendix C: Interview Schedule Pupils

- A. What do pupils consider to be the main differences between the mainstream and the special school?

Questions

- What class are you in?
- Who is your teacher?
- Who else is in your class?
- What kind of work do you do in your class in this school?
- Is it hard? What happens if you get stuck? Does anyone help you with your work?
- What other kind of things can you do here? Other than classwork?
- What do you like best about this school?
- Is there anything you would like to change?
- Who are your friends here?
- Do you see them after school or in holidays?
- Are you glad you came to this school? Why?
- Why did you come here?
- Would you like to go to a different school?
- Would you like to go back and visit your old school?

- B. What were pupils' experiences of mainstream?

Questions

Can you remember the school you went to before you came here?

- Was it a big school or a small school?
- Were there boys and girls at the school?
- Did you like your old school?
- What did you like best about it?
- Was there anything you didn't like?
- What kind of work did you do there? Was it hard? Did anyone help you?
- Did you have friends there?
- Are they still your friends? When do you see them? Do you have friends here? Are they in your class?
- Do you see your friends after school; when you're on holidays?

- C. What was pupils' involvement in the transfer process?

Questions

- Why did you leave your old school?
- Who told you that you were coming to this school?
- Did anyone bring you to visit the school? What did you think of it?
- How did you feel about leaving your old school and coming here?

Appendix D: Interview Schedule-Parents

1. How old is your child?
2. How was your child when he/she transferred to X School?
3. What were the reasons you sent your child to X School?
4. When did you first realise there were difficulties in relation to your child's education in the mainstream school?
5. Do you think your child has special educational needs?
6. How would you describe these?
7. Were these needs met in mainstream? How?
8. When did you become aware of the possibility that your child could transfer from the mainstream school to X School?
9. How were you informed about this?
10. Did you consider any other schools?
11. Did you visit or contact any other schools?
12. Did you or your child visit X School before he/she started attending?
13. Who organised the transfer?
14. How did your child react to the news that he/she would be going to X School?
15. How did he/she react to the first visit?
16. Does your child enjoy attending X School?
17. Does your child have friends there?
18. What do you think X School has to offer your child? Socially, academically?
19. What do you think are the main differences between X School and the mainstream school? (Curriculum, structure, organisation, teaching approaches and supports).
20. What are the benefits to pupils who transfer from mainstream schools?
21. Are there any drawbacks or disadvantages?
22. Which would be your preferred choice of educational placement for your child? Why?
23. Do you have any recommendations for post-primary schools in order for them to become a viable option for pupils with special educational needs?

Appendix E: Schedule for Interview (Principal Mainstream Primary School)

Key Questions

1. Are there pupils with mild general learning disabilities attending this school?
2. How are they supported within the school?
3. The introduction of general allocation resulted in pupils with MGLD moving into the category of high incidence disability? Did this impact on support for these pupils? How?
4. Have pupils with mild general learning disabilities transferred from this school to a special school in the past?
5. Why do some pupils leave the mainstream primary school and transfer to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD)?
6. At what age do pupils generally transfer?
7. What kind of special educational needs do they have?
8. Who is involved in making the decision/recommendation that a pupil should transfer?
9. What are the criteria or indicators which influence such a recommendation/decision in relation to a pupil in the school?
10. Is there a policy/document which guides this process?
11. Who usually initiates the process?
12. What role does the mainstream school play in the transfer process?
13. What role does the special school play?
14. Who else is involved?
15. What is the transfer procedure?
16. What can the special school offer these pupils?
17. What are the difficulties in relation to educational provision/inclusion for these pupils in the primary mainstream school?
18. What can primary schools do to address these difficulties?

Appendix F: Schedule for teacher's interview (Mainstream Primary)

Key Questions

1. Have you worked with pupils who transferred from here to a special school for pupils with MGLD?
2. Why do some pupils leave the mainstream primary school and transfer to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD)?
3. At what age do pupils generally transfer?
4. What kind of special educational needs do they have?
5. Who is involved in making the decision/recommendation that a pupil should transfer?
6. What are the criteria or indicators which influence such a recommendation/decision in relation to a pupil in the school?
7. Is there a policy/document which guides this process?
8. Who usually initiates the process?
9. What role does the mainstream school play in the transfer process?
10. What role does the special school play?
11. Who else is involved?
12. What is the transfer procedure?
13. What can the special school offer these pupils?
14. Have you ever worked in or visited a special school for pupils with MGLD?
15. Do you feel confident in advising parents in relation to the appropriate educational provision for pupils with MGLD?
16. What are the difficulties in relation to educational provision/inclusion for these pupils in the primary mainstream school?
17. What can primary schools do to address these difficulties?

Appendix G: Interview with principal/deputy principals in post-primary schools

1. Are there pupils with MGLD attending the school?
2. What supports are in place to help pupils with difficulties like MGLD?
 - Support teachers
 - SNA
 - Other
3. What programmes can pupils access if there are difficulties with the Junior Certificate programme?
4. What programmes can they access after junior cycle?
5. Have any pupils with MGLD left before completing the Junior Certificate?
6. Where did they go?
7. Why did they leave?
8. At what stage did they leave?
9. Who was involved in the decision regarding placement?
10. Some parents of pupils with MGLD have indicated that they didn't send their children to mainstream post-primary because of lack of sufficient support. Do you agree with this perception?
11. Others have mentioned class size. Do you agree with this?
12. Some have indicated that they felt safety and supervision would be an issue. What do you think about this? (bullying/medical needs/change of classes).
13. Do you think there are sufficient resources or supports available to support pupils with MGLD?

Appendix H: Letter to Board of Management of Special school seeking consent to conduct research

January 25th, 2010.

RE: Research Study for Doctorate in Education

Dear Chairperson,

I am a lecturer in special educational needs in St. Angela's College, Sligo and am currently a participant on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. As part of this programme, I am carrying out research in the area of special education during this school year. The research study aims to investigate the reasons why pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. The study will investigate the reasons pupils transfer from the perspectives of principals, teachers, parents and the pupils themselves.

I would be very grateful if you would consider allowing x Special School to be involved as a case study in this research project. The research methods will involve interviews with the principal, parents, teachers and pupils. As this is not large-scale research, this study will involve no more than four schools in total and no school, or participant will be named in any draft or final document produced.

Data collection in the form of interviews will be conducted at the convenience of schools and participants. Interviews with teachers and parents, will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to conduct. It is hoped that four pupils will be invited to participate in interviews with the consent of their parents/guardians. These will also be conducted at the convenience of the school and will take no more than 30 minutes to conduct. Pupils must be aged twelve or over, and will be accompanied by a trusted adult, nominated by the school, for the duration of the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary and any school or participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any stage before its completion.

I would be very grateful if you would allow me to approach the school principal in order to gain consent from potential participants in this research project. I would be happy to visit the school to discuss the research process in more detail and answer any questions you

may have in relation to the proposed research. I have included telephone and email contact details below.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins

Lecturer in Special
Educational Needs

X (M)

Appendix I: Consent Form

For the attention of the Board of Management

Consent to participate in research study conducted by Pauline Kerins

Research Title

An exploration of factors influencing the transfer of pupils from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities.

Purpose of research

This research aims to investigate the reasons why some pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities.

Requirements of Participation in Research Study

Participation includes an interview of between 45 and 60 minutes duration. Participants include the principal, a selected sample of teachers, parents and pupils.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

The Board of Management is aware that participants who agree to take part in this study do so voluntarily and may withdraw from participation at any stage before the study is completed.

All data will be stored under lock and key by the researcher and will be destroyed after a period of ten years.

**Participant – Please complete the following
(Circle Yes or No for each question).**

Have you read, or had read to you, the letter accompanying this consent form outlining details of the research project?

Yes/No

Do you understand the information provided?

Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?

Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?

Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. Therefore, the Board of Management consents to the participation of X Special School in this research project.

Signature:

Name in capitals:

Witness:

Date:

Appendix J: Letter to principal of special school requesting consent to conduct research

November 24th, 2009.

RE: Research for EdD

Dear Principal,

I am a lecturer in special educational needs in St. Angela's College, Sligo and am currently a participant on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. As part of this programme, I am carrying out research in the area of special education during this school year. The aim of the research study is to investigate the reasons why pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. The study will investigate the reasons pupils transfer from the perspectives of principals, teachers, parents and the pupils themselves. It is hoped that the research will highlight the experiences of all those involved in the transfer process and in turn, raise awareness of the issues participants consider to be of relevance amongst the wider educational community.

I would be very grateful if you would consider the participation of your school in this research project. The research methods include focus group and individual interviews. A focus group interview would involve parents and individual interviews would involve you, as principal, and a small number of parents, teachers and pupils. It is envisaged that these would take place between the end of January and February 2010.

Data collection in the form of interviews will be conducted at the convenience of schools and participants. One focus group interview for parents will take approximately forty five to sixty minutes to conduct. Participants will be invited to take part in a follow-up individual interview at their convenience. Individual interviews will take approximately thirty to forty five minutes to conduct. It is hoped that a small number of pupils will be invited to participate with the consent of their parents/guardians. Pupils must be aged twelve or over, and be accompanied by a trusted adult for the duration of the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary and any school or participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any stage before its completion. All interviews will be recorded but no person, other than I, will have access to recordings. Recordings will be deleted on

completion of the research project. No school or person will be named in any recording or written draft of the research project.

I hope you will consider the participation of your school in this research. I have included a summary of research questions and methods. I would be happy to visit the school to discuss the research process in more detail and answer any questions you may have in relation to the proposed research. I have included telephone and email contact details below. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins

X (M)

X

Appendix K: Letter requesting principal of special school participation in interview

January 18th, 2010.

Dear Principal,

I am a student on the Doctorate in Education programme in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and as part of the requirements of this programme, will be conducting research in the area of special education. The aim of the proposed research is to investigate the reasons why some pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. It is hoped that this research will highlight the experiences and perspectives of all those involved in this process, particularly parents/guardians, teachers and the pupils themselves. Your experience is considered to be of great value and it is hoped that, by sharing these experiences, there will be greater awareness of the issues you consider to be of relevance amongst the wider educational community.

I would be very grateful if you would consider participating in this research project. Participation will involve taking part in an interview with me, as researcher. The interview will be recorded but no other person, other than I, will have access to the recording. The recording will be deleted on completion of the project. No school or person will be named in any recording, draft or text of the research project. The interview will be arranged at a time and location which is most convenient for you.

You have the right to withdraw consent at any stage even after signing the consent form. On completion of the interview, you are invited to view the transcript of the recording if you so wish. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number or email address provided below. Thank you for considering this request for participation.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins

Appendix L: Criteria for pupil participation:

1. Pupils must be at least 12 years old.
2. Pupils must have transferred from mainstream schools within a period of one to three years
3. Pupils must consent to being interviewed
4. Parents/guardians must also consent to interviews.
5. Where there are a number of eligible pupils, they should not have transferred from the same mainstream school
6. If there is sufficient representation of boys and girls then both should be included if possible
7. Pupils have a mild general learning disability. Pupils may also have additional needs.

Appendix M: Letter requesting participation of teacher in special school

Dear Teacher,

I am a lecturer in education in St. Angela's College, Sligo and I am currently conducting research as part of a doctorate in education. The aim of the research is to investigate the reasons why some pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning disabilities. It is hoped that this research will highlight the experiences and perspectives of all those involved in this process, particularly parents/guardians, teachers and the pupils themselves. Your experience is considered to be of great value and it is hoped that, by sharing these experiences, there will be greater awareness of the issues you consider to be of relevance amongst the wider educational community.

I would be very grateful if you would consider participating in this research project. Participation will involve taking part in an interview. The discussion will be recorded but no other person, other than I, will have access to the recording. The recording will be deleted on completion of the project. No school or person will be named in any recording, draft or text of the research project.

The interview will be conducted at your convenience and will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews can be conducted by telephone or at a venue of your choosing.

You have the right to withdraw consent at any stage even after signing the consent form. On completion of the interview, you are invited to view the transcript of the recording if you so wish. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number or email address provided below. Thank you for considering this request for participation.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins

Ph: X

Email: X

Appendix N: Letter requestion parent participation in interview

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Pauline Kerins and I am a lecturer in special education in St. Angela's College, Sligo. I am carrying out research in the area of special education during this year as part of a doctorate in education.

The aim of the research is to investigate the reasons why some pupils transfer from mainstream schools to special schools for pupils with mild general learning difficulties. It is hoped that this research will highlight the experiences and views of all those involved in this process, particularly parents/guardians, teachers and the pupils themselves.

Your experience of mainstream schools, and special schools, is considered to be of great value and it is hoped that, by sharing these experiences, there will be greater awareness of the issues you consider to be of relevance amongst the wider educational community.

I have been granted permission by the principal to ask parents of pupils with mild general learning difficulties, who have transferred from mainstream schools to St. x's, if they would consider taking part in this study.

Participation will involve taking part in an interview based on issues you, as a parent/guardian, consider important to this topic. The discussion will be recorded but no other person, other than I, will have access to the recording. The recording will be deleted on completion of the study. No school or person will be named at any stage of the study.

The interview will take place at a time and venue of your choice. Interviews can take place over the telephone if you prefer. The interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes in total.

You have the right to withdraw consent at any stage even after signing the consent form. You may view the transcript of the recording if you so wish.

If you would like to take part in this study please sign the enclosed form and return to me in the envelope provided. You may contact me directly at the number listed below. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins.

X

Email: X

Appendix O: Letter to parents requesting pupil participation

April 19th, 2010.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Pauline Kerins and I am a lecturer in special education in St. Angela's College, Sligo. I am carrying out a research project with four special schools as part of a doctorate in education. I am looking at the reasons why pupils with mild general learning difficulties transfer from mainstream to special schools. I hope that this research will be of benefit to me in my work with teachers and to the wider educational community including pupils, parents and teachers.

The school principal has given me permission to ask some of the teachers, parents and pupils in X School to take part in this research. I feel that the views of the pupils in special schools like X School are very important and should be included in this research. I would be very grateful if you would allow me to talk your child. This interview will take place in the school and there will be other pupils and an SNA present. The interview will take no more than thirty minutes in total.

The interview will be taped but I am the only person who will have access to the recording. No child's name will be used or written down at any stage of this project. All recordings will be deleted on completion of the research project.

You can withdraw your child from the research project at any time, even after signing the consent form. Your child can withdraw from this project at any time also.

If you are happy for your child to talk to me, please sign the attached form and send it back to (Principal) by Monday 26th of April. If you have any questions, I can be contacted at the number below.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Kerins

X

X

Appendix P: Letter to pupils requesting assent to participate

Dear _____,

My name is Pauline and I am coming to visit your school on _____ (day).

I will be talking to some boys and girls in your school.

I hope you will talk to me too and tell me about your school.

We will be talking about all the things you do at school, and about your friends and teachers.

We will also talk a little about the school you used to go to before you came here.

I will be asking you about some of the things you did at your old school and about your friends and teachers there too.

I hope you will be happy to talk to me for a little while when I come to your school.

I am really looking forward to talking to you.

I will be writing down some of things you tell me and using them to write a story about your school but I will not tell anyone your name or write your name in the story.

If you want to tell me about your school, that is great, but if you don't want to talk about it, that is ok too.

(named adult) _____ will stay with us while we are having a chat.

From

Appendix Q: Pupil's Consent Form

Dear Pauline,

I got your letter and I know why you want to talk to me.

I will talk to you today.

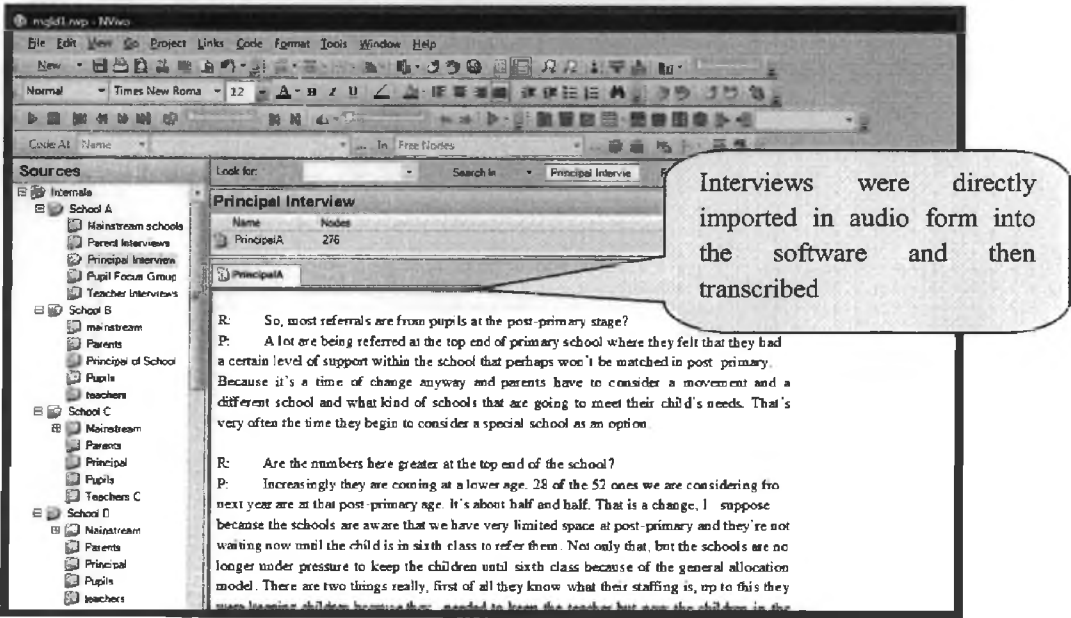
(Adult)_____ is here too.

I am happy to talk to you.

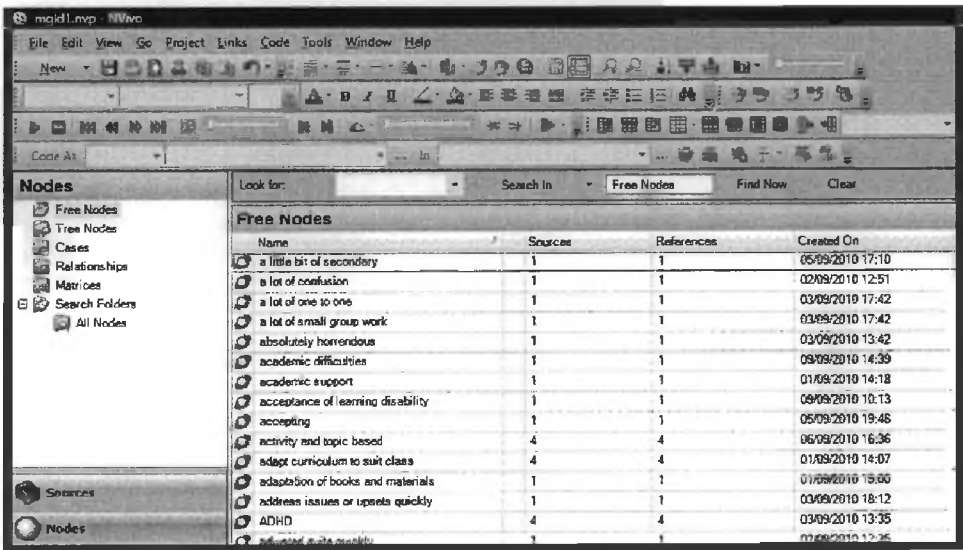
Signed:

Witnessed:

Appendix R: Imported Transcripts



Appendix S: Initial Coding



The first stage of coding was inductive. The language used by participants was not interpreted at this stage

Appendix T: Emerging categories and themes within each case

Categories were formed based on research questions some emerged from the data

At this stage, information relating to primary and post-primary schools was coded separately in some categories

During phase one of analysis, each case was coded and analysed separately in separate folders

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By
Phase 1	0	0	28/10/2010 17:18	PK
School A	0	0		
enrolment in special school	0	0	28/08/2010 15:37	
issues for pupils in special school	0	0	30/09/2010 15:46	
perspectives on provision in mainstream schools	0	0	01/09/2010 16:45	
post primary provision	0	0	18/10/2010 11:52	
primary	0	0	15/01/2011 16:22	
class size	24	34	03/09/2010 16:29	
curriculum	29	54	06/09/2010 15:56	
parental involvement	0	0	15/01/2011 16:46	
supports and resources	4	4	15/01/2011 16:46	
pupils' experiences of mainstream	0	0	30/08/2010 20:29	
reasons for transfer	0	0	28/08/2010 15:25	

This process was conducted for each school

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By
Phase 1	0	0	28/10/2010 17:18	PK
School A	0	0		
School B	0	0		
enrolment in special school	0	0	28/10/2010 17:22	PK
issues for pupils in mainstream schools	0	0	28/10/2010 17:23	PK
issues for pupils in special schools	0	0	28/10/2010 17:24	PK
perspectives on provision in mainstream	0	0	28/10/2010 17:22	PK
post primary provision	0	0	28/10/2010 19:04	PK
curriculum	38	85	03/11/2010 14:16	PK
perception of JCSP	9	16	05/11/2010 12:22	
special class for JCSP	4	8	25/11/2010 13:11	
signs associated with JCSP	1	1	03/11/2010 14:18	
varying levels of ability	4	5	03/11/2010 14:16	

Appendix U: Merging and comparison of categories and themes across cases

Nodes

- Free Nodes
- Tree Nodes
- Cases
- Relationships
- Matrices
- Search Folders
- All Nodes

Tree Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By
Phase 1	0	0	17/01/2011 20:16	PK
Phase 2	0	0	17/01/2011 20:17	PK
enrolment in special school	0	0	17/01/2011 20:1	PK
issues for pupils in mainstream schools	0	0	22/01/2011 15:1	PK
issues for pupils in special school	0	0	17/01/2011 22:1	PK
perspectives on provision in mainstream schools	0	0	17/01/2011 22:2	PK
reasons for transfer	0	0	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
behavioural difficulties	76	206	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
curriculum	0	0	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
disability allowance	5	6	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
lack of appropriate support	4	10	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
pupil's happiness	54	101	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
recommendation from mainstream PP	13	87	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
recommendation from mainstream primer	28	65	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
recommendation from other professional	24	55	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
social difficulties	90	219	22/01/2011 17:5	PK
resources available in school	0	0	22/01/2011 18:4	PK
transfer process	0	0	22/01/2011 21:5	PK
Phase 3 - research questions	0	0	17/01/2011 20:35	PK
Phase 4 - Themes	0	0	17/02/2011 12:26	PK

The second phase of analysis was the beginning of the cross case analysis. This included the merging/collapsing/redefining of free nodes within categories and identifying and classifying emergent categories

Appendix V: Themes linked to research questions

The third phase of analysis involved linking categories and themes to research questions

Nodes

- Free Nodes
- Tree Nodes
- Cases
- Relationships
- Matrices
- Search Folders
- All Nodes

Sources

Nodes

Sets

Queries

Models

Links

Classifications

Tree Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Created On
Question 1	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
enrolment in special school	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
reasons for transfer	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
behaviour difficulties	76	206	
curriculum	0	0	
disability allowance	5	6	
lack of appropriate support	4	10	
pupil's happiness	54	101	
recommendation from mainstream PP	18	87	
recommendation from mainstream primary school	28	65	
recommendation from other professional	24	55	
social difficulties	30	219	
Question 2	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
issues for pupils in mainstream schools	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
perspectives on provision in mainstream	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15
Question 3	0	0	13/02/2011 11:15

Appendix W: Generating proposition statements

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface with the 'Memos' list selected. The list contains the following data:

Name	Nodes
atmosphere in school (2)	67
awareness of difference	123
awareness of difference (2)	220
behaviour difficulties	218
behaviour difficulties (2)	137
choice	131
choice (2)	261
class size	247
classsize	0
classsize	0
classsize	120
classsize	177
curriculum	139
curriculum and academic difficulties	215
curriculum and academic difficulties	484
curriculum and academic difficulties	210
curriculum and academic difficulties	477

A callout box points to the 'Memos' list with the text: "Memos were created for each theme. This involved generating proposition statements and importing extracts from interviews to support these statements".

The selected memo, titled "curriculum and academic difficulties", contains the following text:

The children wouldn't have the same academic achievement level as your mainstream school, the reading and writing skills would be slightly less

Teacher 2B
 <Internal\School B\Teachers\Teacher 2> - \$ 1 reference coded [1.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.59% Coverage

I suppose they are just not able to keep up with the class and they are falling behind and they are not able to fit in with the special class, you know the extra input that they might get in a special class is not enough, they are still not able to keep up and their reading ages are a lot lower than they average in the class. So their reading and maths they would certainly be falling behind on.

A second callout box points to the memo content with the text: "Extracts from interviews".

Appendix X: Merging themes across cases

mgld1.nvp - NVivo

File Edit View Go Project Links Code Tools Window Help

New

Code At

Look for: Search In Tree Nodes Find Now Clear

Nodes

- Free Nodes
- Tree Nodes
- Cases
- Relationships
- Matrices
- Search Folders
- All Nodes

Sources

- Nodes
- Sets
- Queries
- Models
- Links
- Classifications
- Folders

Tree Nodes

Name

Phase 4 - Themes

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Cre
support in mainstream and special schools	0	0	17/02/2011 12:	PK
Name	Sources	References	Created On	
supports and resources	0	0	17/02/2011 12:56	
SNA	25	39	17/02/2011 12:55	
post primary provision	0	0	17/02/2011 12:53	
lack of appropriate support	4	10	17/02/2011 12:51	
integration links with mainstream scho	14	50	10/03/2011 16:17	
access to facilities and supports	0	0	17/02/2011 12:58	
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Cre
school structures and class size	0	0	17/02/2011 15:	PK
Name	Sources	References	Created On	
structure not suited to pupils with SEN	34	113	17/02/2011 15:12	
school structure and curriculum	0	0	17/02/2011 15:32	
School structure	25	58	17/02/2011 15:13	
class size	49	79	17/02/2011 15:11	
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Cre
Curriculum	0	0	17/02/2011 12:	PK
choice	0	0	17/02/2011 18:	PK
Additional Needs	0	0	17/02/2011 12:	PK
Name	Sources	References	Created On	
social difficulties	77	198	17/02/2011 12:28	
behaviour difficulties	69	165	17/02/2011 12:27	
additional needs	1	1	17/02/2011 12:27	

The final phase of analysis was the identification and merging of themes linked to research questions