

# International Experience in the Provision of Individual Education Plans for Children with Disabilities

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# 1. Introduction

The right to education in Ireland is recognised under Article 42 of the Constitution. However, in 1993 the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) reported that “Ireland has a conspicuous lack of legislation governing much of educational provision but particularly covering education provision for students with special needs.” This was initially addressed with the passing of the Education Act 1998. A stated objective of this Act was “to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability.” The Act further stated that support services and a level of education “appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities” of students should be provided for.

How this had been effected in some countries, in particular the USA since the mid-1970s, had been to make individual planning and educational programming the cornerstone of provision for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The existence of such provision was highlighted by the report of Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in 1996. The Commission recommended that one of the principles which should be enshrined in legislation was that: “The unique needs of the individual person must be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the appropriate provision of education for that person.” (Recommendation 165). The Commission further recommended that a definition of what is an ‘appropriate’ education should follow the example of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the USA. The IDEA stated that for a programme to be ‘appropriate’ it must be based on and be responsive to the child’s individualised educational needs. And this was given effect through the requirement that an Individual Education Programme be developed for people with disabilities (Recommendation 168).

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act was enacted in Ireland in 2004. One of the key provisions of the Act was to provide the legislative basis for the introduction of individual education plans for people with special education needs. While the blueprint has now been established, much of the finer detail of how education plans will be implemented has yet to be finalised.

The aim of this report is to examine international practice in the provision of individual education plans (IEPs) and to make recommendations that may be applied to the service which emerges following the provisions of the EPSEN Act. The report begins by outlining those provisions made in the 2004 Act and identifies the structure for IEP provision in Ireland. This is followed by an overview of policy in five different countries, namely Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Then some of the key issues that emerge when policy is put into practice are explored with an examination of the research literature. Finally, the report identifies a range of recommendations which may be applied to the emerging system in Ireland.

## 1.2 Methodology

The vast majority of this paper is based on desk research; reviewing international legislation and policy documentation in five chosen countries, as well as research literature that have emerged, largely from the UK and USA. This literature was sourced using traditional library searches as well as the Internet. The five countries in which international policy is reviewed were chosen on the basis of two main criteria: firstly, that they are jurisdictions that have substantial histories and relatively progressive track records regarding special needs education, thereby offering a yardstick of 'good practice'; and secondly, that there was a sufficiently substantial range of information available in English with which to provide a good overview of each system. The review of literature was supplemented by both e-mail and in-person consultation with a small number of individuals who have been involved in the delivery and critique of modes of individual planning. The overview of new legislative provisions in Ireland in the next section is based on personal analysis of the Education for People with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, and is intended to provide a context for discussion and a focus for the recommendations outlined in the final section.

## 2. Ireland – Provisions of the EPSEN Act 2004

The following is a summary of the provision for 'education plans' that is outlined in the Education for People with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. This provides the statutory requirements for educational planning as they impact upon students, parents, schools, and the National Council for Special Education (the Council). However, with the legislation only recently enacted, much of the detail remains to be finalised (e.g. the format of written plans and reports) and this will be done over time as the Council assumes its powers and responsibilities. Therefore, what follows in this section merely establishes the new context for special education and individual planning; the planning process as it is currently established; and identifies the rights, roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in that process.

### 2.1 Education Plans

The EPSEN Act 2004 provides for the provision of education plans for students with special educational needs (SEN). Under the Act, children with SEN will be educated "in an inclusive environment with children who do not have SEN", unless this should be inconsistent either with the best interest of the child, or with the effective provision for the other children.

### 2.2 Identification & Assessment

When a student is identified to a principal as not benefiting from the educational programme being provided in their school, the principal "shall take such measures as are practicable to meet the educational needs of the student concerned." Having taken such measures, if the student continues not to benefit, because of their SEN, the principal will arrange for the student to be assessed. The principal must consult the parents prior to making this arrangement.

Assessment must commence not later than one month after the principal's decision and be completed no later than three months after that decision. Where an assessment establishes that a student has SEN, the principal must, within one month, "cause a plan to be prepared for the appropriate education of the student" – called an 'education plan' (EP).

Parents, the Council or the relevant health board may refer a child for assessment. An assessment "shall include an evaluation and statement of the nature and extent of the child's disability... and an evaluation and statement of the services which the child will need so as to be able to participate in and benefit from education and, generally, to develop his or her potential." The assessment should be carried out with the assistance of people with appropriate expertise and qualifications (as deemed by the Council or health board). This may include a psychologist, medical practitioner, the principal or designated teacher, social worker, or a therapist suitably qualified to provide support services in relation to the child's SEN. The participation of parents should be facilitated by, 'as appropriate', the health board, Council or principal. A statement of the findings of the assessment is to be made available immediately to the parents.

## 2.3 Preparing the Plan

In preparing an EP the principal must ensure that the parents, area Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), and other 'appropriate' people are consulted. Furthermore, s/he must ensure that parental involvement "is facilitated". As soon as the plan is prepared the principal must provide a copy to the parents and the SENO. It is usually the responsibility of the principal to ensure that a plan is prepared. However, where a child has a severe or complex SEN, or where, following review, it is determined that their needs are not being met, the principal can request the Council to prepare a plan for the child.

When the Council is asked by a principal or health board to prepare an education plan for a child, the Council can agree or disagree to grant this request. If the Council refuses to prepare the plan then the principal or child's parents may appeal to the Appeals Board. If the Council accepts the request it will direct the relevant SENO to prepare the plan. Preparation of the plan should begin no more than one month after direction, and be completed no more than two months later. The SENO must convene a team to provide advice in relation to preparing the plan. The team should include parents (where consenting), principal or teacher, and one or more of:

- The child (where SENO deems appropriate)
- A psychologist (NEPS or otherwise suitably qualified)
- Any other person whom the parents or SENO consider appropriate and who is suitably qualified

The team are also directed to consider "any needs, other than educational needs, ...specified in the assessment."

## 2.4 Content of the Plan

The format of EPs has yet to be determined by the Council. The specific content of plans will include the following:

- (a) The nature and degree of the child's abilities, skills and talents;
- (b) The nature and degree of the child's special educational needs and how those needs affect his or her educational development;
- (c) The present level of educational performance of the child;
- (d) The special educational needs of the child;
- (e) The special education and related support services to be provided to the child to enable the child to benefit from education and to participate in the life of the school;
- (f) Where appropriate, the special education and related services to be provided to the child to enable the child to effectively make the transition from pre-school education to primary school education;

- (g) Where appropriate, the special education and related support services to be provided to the child to enable the child to effectively make the transition from primary school education to post-primary school education, and
- (h) The goals that the child is to achieve over a period not exceeding 12 months.

The Council 'may' prepare in due course, guidelines in relation to matters to be provided in an EP by reference to the category of SEN relevant to the child and their category.

## 2.5 Placement

The Council may designate, of its own volition or upon the request of the parents, the school that a child with SEN will attend, and the school must admit the student upon the Council's directions. In deciding this, the Council must consider the needs of the child, the parents' wishes, and the capacity of the school to accommodate the child and meet his/her needs. The board of management of the school may appeal against this designation.

Where transfer between schools is identified in the EP, the principal in the first school must consult the second, before the transfer, to ensure that the second school knows about the EP, and to assist the second principal in amending the EP where necessary.

The Council must ensure that the necessary services identified in the EP are provided to a student with SEN. The health board has this responsibility for children who are not students. Provision is to be made "as soon as practicable after the completion of the assessment or...the preparation of the plan."

## 2.6 Review

The principal must initiate a review of the EP at regular intervals and at least once a year. The purpose of the review is to establish if the child has received the services set out in the EP, and that s/he is achieving the goals specified therein. This is done with a view to amending the plan for the following period. The principal must provide a copy of a review report to the parents and the relevant SENO.

Where the SENO considers that the goals specified in the plan have not been achieved, s/he will reconvene the EP team (or part thereof) in order to review the content and implementation of the plan. In addition, where parents consider that the specified goals are not being achieved, they may request the principal to initiate a review – so long as no such reviews have been completed in the preceding six months.

## 2.7 Appeals

There are a number of grounds upon which the relevant parties may appeal to the Special Education Appeals Board, including:

- Principal and parents may appeal against the Council's refusal to prepare a plan following a request from the principal or health board (Section 3.13)
- Parents may appeal against the Council or health board's refusal to undertake an assessment (Section 4.7)
- Parents may appeal against an assessment on the grounds that it wasn't carried out in accordance with the relevant standards (Section 6.1)
- The board of management of a school may appeal a decision by the Council to designate its school as the recipient of and provider for a specific child with SEN (Section 10.3)
- Parents may appeal against the Council's refusal or failure to designate a school for their child (Section 10.6)

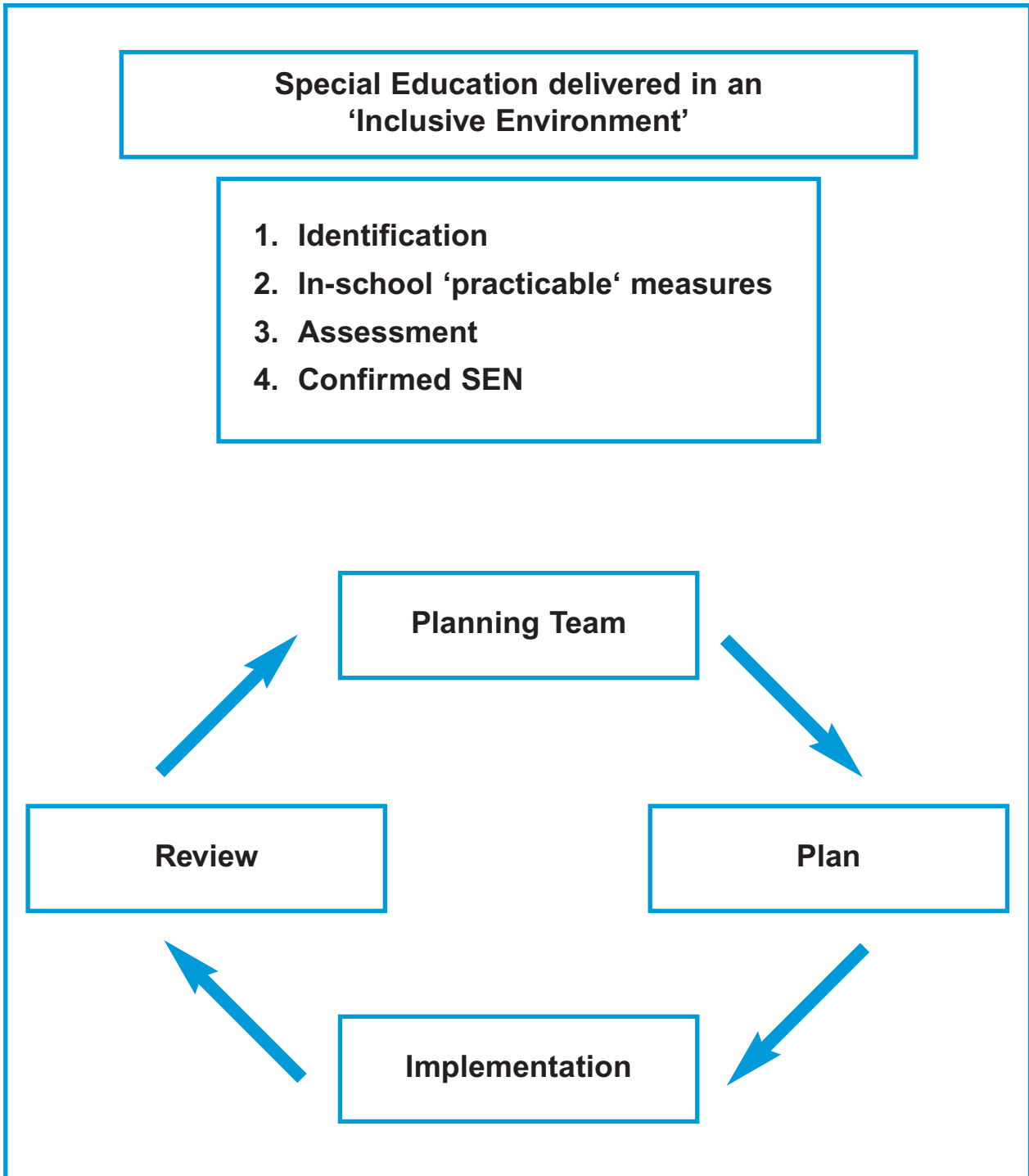
- Parents may appeal against a principal's refusal to arrange a review of their child's education plan (Section 11.6)
- Parents may appeal against the discharge of duties in relation to their child's education plan, by the Council, principal, school or health board (Section 12)

## 2.8 Resources

The school principal is responsible for implementing a child's EP within the school. The Council is responsible for providing to the child the necessary services identified in his/her education plan. The Minister for Education and Science has a duty to provide the resources identified as necessary for the delivery of EPs, pending the consent of the Minister for Finance, and in keeping with the principle of allocating resources in a manner consistent with the common good (therefore, the allocation of resources is not unconditional once needs and their related services have been identified).

Figure 1 below gives an overview of the structure of the IEP system and process that the EPSEN Act 2004 has provided for.

**Fig. 1: EPSEN Act Provisions for Individual Planning:**



### 3. Overview of International Policy

This section outlines the policies on IEPs that are in place in five other countries, identifying the key features in each system. The countries included are: Australia (Queensland), Canada (British Columbia), New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

#### 3.1 Individual Education Plans in Queensland, Australia

The Department of Education in Queensland views the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with special educational needs as a ‘collaborative and ongoing’ process. It brings students, parents and professionals together as appropriate to consider the student’s level of performance and to determine needs and learning priorities for the following 6 months. The IEP process promotes shared responsibility for planning, consensus on educational goals, collective accountability for outcomes, and ongoing communication.

The product of this process is the student’s individual plan, which provides key information to help educators meet individual educational needs resulting from the student’s disability. The plan is not designed to completely rewrite the general educational programme, it merely identifies the modifications to the general education programme that are required to respond to individual needs. As such, the student with special needs will participate in the general programme insofar as possible, and will use adapted elements as appropriate.

The development of an IEP consists of the following stages:

- Information gathering;
- IEP meeting;
- Design;
- Implementation;
- Evaluation.

It is a cyclical process, so the evaluation at the end of one cycle will feed into the beginning of the next phase. (Queensland Department of Education, 2003a)

### **3.1.1 Information Gathering**

Before the information gathering begins an IEP team must be established for each child. As a general principle, all those who regularly work with a student should contribute to their IEP and be part of their team. Teams will usually include the class teacher, parents, a support teacher with disability expertise and, where appropriate, the student him/herself. Respective roles and responsibilities within the team are identified and clarified by the principal. While the position of team co-ordinator may be negotiated, it is usually the role of the class teacher at primary level, and a special needs teacher or head of special needs at secondary level.

Effective planning is based upon the gathering and sharing of relevant information on the student. This may include:

- The student's competence levels across different learning areas;
- His/her preferred learning style;
- His/her talents, interests and ambitions;
- Any required specialised equipment and/or resources.

This type of information is collected in a variety of both formal and informal settings, including the school, home and in the community. It is important that there is an exchange of information between the family and school regarding what each party sees as the current educational priorities for the student. (Queensland Department of Education, 2003b)

### **3.1.2 Consultation Phase – IEP Meeting**

While consultation is an ongoing element of the IEP process, the most important of these is the IEP Meeting. The IEP Meeting brings family members and educational personnel together to jointly decide upon learning priorities for the student with special needs. The student should also be encouraged to actively participate where

appropriate, and families may bring an advocate or other relative along to attend. Both family members and education personnel are asked to prepare by considering their learning priorities for the student. The IEP meeting should produce the following outcomes:

- Clarification of family expectations and aspirations;
- Learning priorities for the following six months;
- Identification of learning environments/settings;
- Roles/responsibilities of individual team members;
- Date for review;
- Any additional tasks – e.g. transition preparation;
- Distribution of meeting notes to all members by team co-ordinator.

(Queensland Department of Education, 2003c)

### 3.1.3 IEP Design

Once a baseline level of data on the student's current educational performance and achievement is established, the plan will go on to outline the following information:

- Student details and information;
- Timeframes – start and review dates;
- IEP team – members' names, role and responsibilities, contact details;
- Duty of care aspects relating to health, medical and therapy support, and student safety;
- Statements of measurable goals for prioritised learning for the following 6 months;
- Links to class curriculum, key learning and competency areas;
- Key teaching strategies – may include instructional content, teaching strategies, resource materials, specialist support and classroom management;
- Monitoring procedures – may include data collection, discussion and informal observations.

While the principal is the one responsible for documenting the plan, it is usually the person who has most involvement with the student (i.e. the class teacher) who completes the plan. The most important parts of the plan are the statements of measurable goals for prioritised learning for the following 6 months. There are three elements that these goals need to address:

1. Identify the student's targeted learning outcome – i.e. a skill, activity or piece of knowledge;
2. Outline the conditions which apply to the learning – e.g. specialised equipment, environment.
3. Set the criteria by which the student will demonstrate the learning outcome – e.g. the number correct, level of accuracy. (Queensland Department of Education, 2003d)

### **3.1.4 Implementation**

For the implementation of the IEP, team members should be skilled with the appropriate teaching strategies and monitoring procedures. Each element of the programme should be implemented as agreed by the team.

It is recommended that data collected should be kept to the minimum necessary to provide regular, effective monitoring for the educational programme. Comparison of data collected at the beginning and end of each 6 month period allows for the student's progress to be assessed. (Queensland Department of Education, 2003e)

### **3.1.5 Evaluation**

The evaluation stage of the IEP will contribute valuable information for the next cycle of planning. It serves as the basis for reporting to team members (including parents) and enables new priorities to be considered as part of the continuing IEP process. Programme effectiveness should be evaluated in terms of:

- Student performance;

- Implementation issues - such as time or staff available;
- Team co-ordination issues;
- Additional outcomes – including positives (e.g. enhanced social skills) and negatives (e.g. time required to complete a task). (Queensland Department of Education, 2003f)

### **3.1.6 Critical Aspects for Transition Planning**

Careful and systematic planning is needed to ensure a smooth transition between educational settings and levels, including special education settings, pre-school, primary, secondary and post-school options, including tertiary education. Key considerations include establishing links between the sending and receiving settings, facilitating access to the new environment, and ensuring participation in the new environment.

An individual transition process is identified as being especially important for having positive outcomes in the post-school transition stage. This should be established at least by the time a student reaches the end of compulsory schooling, although it is recommended that preparation begins much earlier than this. The process may involve the family, Department of Education representatives and other relevant Departments, and community agencies. (Queensland Department of Education, 2003g)

## **3.2 Individual Education Plans in British Columbia, Canada**

In British Columbia (BC) students with special needs are defined as those who have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, or who have exceptional gifts or talents.

The School Act 1996 requires school boards to make educational programmes available to all those of school age who are resident in their districts. Furthermore, a Ministerial Order (M150/89, amended in 2004) requires the integration in most instances of students with special needs with other students.

School personnel, in collaboration with parents, are responsible for establishing goals for pupils that take into account their special needs and strengths. Apart from some exceptions, the identification of special needs necessitates the development of an IEP for students. The Special Education Policy Framework outlines that IEPs:

- Are written records of planning conducted by students, parents/guardians, school personnel and other service providers;
- Provide coherent, short-term and long-range plans for student learning and service needs;
- Provide administrators with evidence of individualised planning;
- Are useful tools in planning the transition of students with special needs from one setting to another;
- Help in determining how well students are meeting their goals, and form the basis of reporting students' progress. (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995)

The BC Ministry of Education states that the process of developing an IEP works best when:

1. There is ongoing consultation with and collaboration between teachers, parents, students, support personnel and community agencies;
2. Parents and students are active participants in the process;
3. Staff have the support of in-service and other resources available to them;
4. Individual schools establish staff teams and procedures to support consultation and planning, including: ensuring information is shared promptly; planning and facilitating transitions; promoting communication and collaborative decision-making between the school and home; and resolving differences effectively;
5. School districts support the process, including: recognising the time and space required for planning; facilitating prompt transfer of information; establishing qualification standards for personnel; and providing in-service opportunities to support staff development. (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated<sup>1</sup>).

There are 5 distinct yet interrelated stages identified in the IEP development process: identification/assessment, planning, programme support/implementation, evaluation, and reporting.

### **3.2.1 Identification/Assessment**

The special educational needs of some children are identified prior to enrolment, or are obvious and severe and immediately identified upon enrolment. However, for most students the identification/assessment phase begins in the classroom, with the teacher observing 'exceptionalities' in learning and behaviour.

The teacher consults the child's parents regarding progress, concerns, and the potential appropriateness of medical examination to exclude this as a basis for the concerns. They also screen for sensory impairments. Teachers also introduce variations in instructional approaches and assess any changes.

If these approaches prove insufficient to meet the identified special needs then the teacher consults school-based resource personnel to identify any additional alternative approaches. Failing this, the teacher refers the student to a 'school-based team' for further assistance. The school-based team is usually comprised of a small group of regular members, including an administrative officer, a learning assistance or resource teacher, a classroom teacher and a counsellor. The team may also include the referring teacher, and involve the parent, student and, as appropriate, district resource staff and community service representatives.

The role of the school-based team is to provide support through extended consultation on possible classroom strategies. The team appoints a case manager, identifies the need for additional services and/or initiate referrals to access other school, district, community or regional services.

To better understand a child's strengths and needs, and thus plan more effectively for them, students may be referred for extended assessment. These may include psycho-educational, speech and language, or orientation and mobility assessments. (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated2)

### 3.2.2 Planning

At its core, the planning process is the same for all students - it is a collaborative process in which the student, the parents and educators identify educational goals that are appropriate to the student, and the ways of attaining them. This process results in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which identifies appropriate goals and objectives, and describes the nature of these commitments which the educational system makes to assist the student in attaining these goals and objectives.

### 3.2.3 The IEP

An IEP is a written plan, developed for a student, which describes the programme modifications/adaptations for the student and the services to be provided. It serves as a tool for collaborative planning amongst the school, parents, the student (where appropriate) and other relevant personnel or agencies. Some students will require only small adaptations and minimum levels of support. Other students with more complex needs may require detailed planning for educational modifications, adaptive technologies, or health care plans. The IEP should reflect the complexity of the student's need and, accordingly, can be brief or more detailed and lengthy. The IEP document only refers to those aspects of the educational programme that are modified or adapted, and identifies the support services to be provided. The IEP must set out:

- The present level of educational performance of the student;
- The learning outcomes set for the student for that school year where they are different from those set out in the relevant educational programme guide;
- All the required adaptations to educational materials, and instructional and assessment methods;
- All the support services to be provided;
- A description of the place where the educational programme is to be provided;
- The names of all personnel who will be providing the educational programme and the support services for the student during the school year; and
- The period of time and process for review of the IEP

In addition, the IEP should include, where applicable, plans for the next transition point in the student's education (including transitions beyond school completion) and linkages to the Student Learning Plan (SLP) in the intermediate and graduation years.

Goals established should be:

1. Set at a high but attainable level to encourage parents, students and staff to hold high expectations; and
2. Accompanied by measurable objectives developed for each goal to enable IEP review and evaluation.

The principal of the school is responsible for the implementation of educational programmes. Though planning is collaborative, the principal must ensure that for each student a case manager is appointed to co-ordinate the development, documentation and implementation of the student's IEP. Parents must also be given the opportunity to participate in the planning process, and should receive a copy of the IEP. To the extent possible, the student should also participate in the process (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated<sup>3</sup>).

### **3.2.4 Programme Support / Implementation**

This involves putting the plans, strategies and support agreed upon in the IEP into practice. Before these are implemented it is important that plans are understood and supported by all involved, including the student, and that every effort is made to ensure the resources are in place. Programme support/implementation is usually composed of at least one of the following:

- Adaptations to make the learning environment more accessible;
- Alternative approaches to instruction and/or evaluation;
- Use of adaptive/assistive technologies;
- Provision of intensive instructional intervention (e.g. remedial, compensatory);
- Modifications to the curriculum content;

- Provision of support services - such as speech and language therapy, occupational or physiotherapy, counselling, teaching assistants; and
- Provision of specialised training – such as Braille, sign language, or orientation and mobility (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated4).

### 3.2.5 Evaluation of Student Learning

Pupils with special needs are evaluated on all parts of their programme (including those that have been modified and those that haven't) using established standards for other pupils whenever possible. Evaluation procedures should accommodate the range of adaptations and modifications in order to recognise that pupils with special needs may:

- (a) Follow the regular programme with some adaptations;
- (b) Follow the regular programme with some modified components, in which expected learning outcomes will be substantially different - e.g. maths may be totally individualised with a life skills approach; or
- (c) Follow a completely modified programme.

Many students with special needs follow programmes with identical learning outcomes to those of their peers, but with adapted evaluation procedures – e.g. an oral rather than written exam. Use of such adapted evaluation procedures should always be noted in the IEP. On the other hand, for students who need extensive modifications to their programme, some or all of their learning outcomes will be substantially different from the prescribed curricula. In these latter cases evaluation is based on the degree to which their outcomes are achieved and must be referenced to individually established standards (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated5).

### 3.2.6 Reporting Student Progress

Progress reports for students with special needs should use the same format as used for all students in the school. Additional information may include other alternative procedures, such as daily logs. Where a student with special needs is using expected learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum, standard grading and reporting practices are followed. Where instructional and assessment methods differ from standard practice this should be identified in the IEP. In cases where a professional other than the classroom teacher provides some portion of the student's educational programme (e.g. a speech pathologist), that person also provides written reports on the student's progress, which are then included in the classroom teacher's report (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, undated<sup>6</sup>).

## 3.3 Individual Education Plans in New Zealand

The New Zealand Government's special education policy is set out in the 'Special Education 2000' framework, which was first introduced in the 1996 Budget to enhance resources for pupils with special needs. This special education policy framework affirms the right of every student to learn in accordance with the principles and values of the Education Act 1989, the National Education Guidelines and the Special Education Policy Guidelines. The Special Education Policy Guidelines outline the following principles:

- Learners with SEN have the same rights, freedoms and responsibilities as people of the same age who do not have SEN;
- The primary focus of special education is to meet the individual learning and development needs of the learner;
- All learners with identified SEN have access to a fair share of the available special education resources;
- Partnership between parents and education providers is essential in overcoming barriers to learning;
- All special education resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible, taking into account parent choice and the needs of the learner;

- A learner's language and culture comprise a vital context for learning and development and must be taken into consideration in planning programmes;
- Learners with SEN will have access to a seamless education from the time that their needs are identified through to post-school options. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

Special Education 2000 applies to all students with special education needs, irrespective of setting or location, and parents can choose the school and setting their child attends. All educational settings must align the teaching and learning experiences for all students with the New Zealand Curriculum Framework. The principles of the Curriculum Framework form the basis for the IEP process in New Zealand and the criteria by which all teaching and learning is validated. An IEP is identified as:

- A means of identifying and prioritising learning outcomes for students with special educational needs (SEN);
- A tool for collaborative planning between a school, the parents, the student (where appropriate) and other agencies as necessary;
- An agreement on the student's current learning and development focus;
- A statement of learning objectives;
- A concise and usable summary of the student's educational programme;
- A summary of teaching strategies and related resources for curriculum areas and essential skills;
- A commitment to support the student to achieve identified goals;
- A tool for tracking agreed individual learning objectives;
- Support for those with less experience in working with students with SEN;
- A record of the relationship between any support service provided and the student's educational programme;
- A method to promote effective partnerships between the student and all those involved with them.

Students with SEN may include children with a disability, learning difficulty or behavioural difficulty. IEPs are designed for students with SEN who require (1) extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, and/or (2) specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or mainstream educational settings.

IEPs are living documents which provide direction for a student's educational programme for a defined period. IEPs are normally reviewed each term, but this can vary depending on individual needs and changing circumstances. IEPs are usually required when:

- Barriers to effective learning are identified which cannot be overcome with standard classroom strategies;
- A student receives insufficient support through the standard classroom planning cycle;
- There are key transition points – e.g. changes in class, school, or preparing to leave school;
- There is a change in a student's circumstances – e.g. deterioration in health or a substantial gain in skills. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

The IEP process provides a systematic approach to programming for students with special needs, based on a standard teaching model of: assessment - setting objectives – teaching – monitoring – evaluating - re-assessing - and further planning.

### **3.3.1 IEP Team**

The process brings together a team of people who are closely involved with the student in order to plan a programme to suit the student's needs. The core team includes the student, parent/caregiver and classroom teacher. The wider team will also include other family support (e.g. relative, advocate), other school personnel (e.g. principal, special needs teacher), specialist service providers (e.g. Ministry special education staff, rehabilitation and special needs specialists), therapists (e.g. speech-language, OT, physio), and a teacher aide. From this team, a key worker is

appointed to co-ordinate services across agencies and settings, and to provide the continuity between the IEP meetings and the implementation of the programme.

### **3.3.2 Gathering Information - Assessment**

The identification of students with SEN and the development of appropriate learning programmes for these students depends on good assessment principles and procedures. Some of the key principles of assessment identified by the New Zealand Ministry of Education include:

- The assessment process should be part of the learning process whenever possible;
- Assessment methods and contexts may vary according to the needs of individual students;
- No single assessment procedure should be used as the sole means of identifying the needs of a student;
- Assessment, testing and evaluation materials should be provided in the student's primary language or mode of communication;
- The assessment activity should be appropriate to the age and development level of individual students, and should have credibility with all involved.

### **3.3.3 Assessment Strategies**

The IEP guidelines warn about using the convenience of standardised tests and screening tools as assessment strategies on their own. It is recommended that a variety of tools and approaches is used to provide a more comprehensive assessment of a student's abilities and needs. Recommended tools/approaches include:

- Structured observations – in different settings;
- Anecdotal records;
- Checklists;

- Interviews with the student and those closely involved;
- Formal, standardised tests;
- Curriculum-based assessment, directly derived from specific curriculum materials, using exemplars and guidance;
- Environmental assessment;
- Task analysis;
- Outcome-based assessment linked to teaching strategies;
- Assessment of learning style;
- Review of records, including school attendance;
- Portfolio of student's work.

The process should lead to a comprehensive programme for the student with SEN that addresses their present and future needs. This programme should be implemented in the following term.

### **3.3.4 IEP Meetings**

Once the student's abilities and needs have been assessed, the IEP team will meet to agree on the student's educational programme. This will involve the core team and possibly wider members, depending upon the wishes of the parents. Parents will also be consulted on the meeting venue, which can take place in the home or elsewhere (e.g. school, community centre). Effective IEP meetings are said to have two main functions – 'task activities' and 'people activities'. Task activities include: identifying current needs and the achievement objectives and learning outcomes to address them; allocating the roles and responsibilities for planning and implementation; and establishing a review date for evaluation and further planning. People activities aim to develop the team as a group with a common purpose. These ensure that everyone has a chance to speak; everyone understands and is understood; all team members are valued and respected; and all concerns and differences of opinion are dealt with. The roles of facilitator and recorder should be agreed and assigned by the team. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

### 3.3.5 Writing the Plan

**Long-term aims** - these capture the team's aspirations for the student for the following few years. These are developed at key transition points in the student's life and provide direction for the IEP process for the chosen timeframe. The New Zealand guidelines recommend using the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) as a tool designed to help the team focus on future aims and innovative ways to achieve them.

**Focus areas** – these reflect the priorities identified for the student's development in light of the long-term aims. Chosen focus areas depend on the student's current skills as well as their needs in relation to the different environments in which they live and learn. It is also carried out within the context of The New Zealand Curriculum Framework. Specific focus is drawn from the 'essential learning areas', 'essential skills', or from both. For some students, the context (e.g. classroom, home) or functional considerations (behaviour, mobility) will be major factors in identifying this focus.

**Recording present skills and needs** – after focus areas have been selected, the student's current achievements and related needs are recorded in the IEP. This part should include a summary of key assessment data. From this, the team should record a statement of present needs regarding the focus area, which will identify the gap between what the student can currently do and what s/he needs to be able to do.

**Selecting the achievement objective or goal** – this looks forward for about one year and provides direction for the student's programme during that time. These are usually selected from the appropriate curriculum, but for some focus areas the team may develop a non-curriculum goal that is particularly important for the student. However, the goal still needs to be a statement of what the student should be able to do in the future.

**Selecting the learning outcomes** – these are statements of what the student should be able to do at the end of a specific IEP period or programme. Outcomes

are identified for each achievement objective or goal of the IEP, sometimes several for each objective if required. When writing learning outcomes the IEP team must ensure that they are linked (to the objective/goal), specific, achievable and measurable. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

### 3.3.6 Designing the Programme

In planning a programme, the IEP team will aim to identify strategies to remove barriers to learning and make the curriculum more accessible to the student. Before individualised adaptations are made to the curriculum, the teacher should be satisfied that other alternative strategies known to be effective in many cases have been attempted. These include co-operative learning techniques, small group work, buddy systems, peer tutoring and active/experiential learning. Should these prove unsuccessful then some or all of the following strategies need to be incorporated into the programme:

**Adaptations to the physical environment** – considerations include the arrangement of the room, lighting, noise levels, location of materials and resources, access routes, proximity of teacher and peers.

**Adaptations to the content and delivery of the lesson** – teachers can do this by either adjusting the delivery and design of the lesson (e.g. allowing more time, checking more frequently than usual for understanding) and/or adjusting the demands of the curriculum (e.g. lowering the performance standards in quality and/or quantity).

**Modifications to resources and materials** – to enable students with special needs to access information or demonstrate their understanding (e.g. simplifying resources and materials, using different resources and materials, enlarging print, taping text).

**Use of equipment or assistive technology** – e.g. computers, Braille machines, or 'low tech' items such as adjustable desks.

**Provision of support personnel** (e.g. teacher aides, specialist teachers or therapists)

– this is recommended only after other curricular adaptations and accommodations have been established. Some students will need intensive support for parts of the day and the IEP should record what is required. But to facilitate independence and inclusion, support that can be provided by the class teacher and peers should be employed first and to the greatest extent possible. Also, students should not be separated from their classmates if they can achieve similar outcomes working with a peer or in a co-operative group. "An implicit goal in programming for students with special needs should be to increase independence and to reduce the need for support over time wherever possible." (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

### 3.3.7 Implementation

Soon after the IEP meeting, those responsible for implementing the programme should determine the details of teaching and learning strategies, adaptations to materials, use of support personnel and appropriate mechanisms for monitoring. These should be recorded in the IEP. Then, before the next IEP meeting, the implementation team should consult to review any effects of the programme which have been monitored, and to decide if any further assessments are necessary. The key worker should coordinate this process.

### 3.3.8 Review & Evaluation

At the review stage of the IEP process, three important questions are identified for consideration:

1. Has the student achieved the learning outcomes?
2. Has the programme been appropriate in meeting the learning needs of the student?
3. How has the IEP process contributed to the outcomes?

Members of the IEP team should consider these questions in advance of the IEP review date and collect the necessary assessment data. A summary of data collected should be recorded in the IEP. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003)

### 3.4 Individual Education Plans in the United Kingdom

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice came into effect in the UK in January 2002 under the authority of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The Code updates previous codes which were based on the 1996 Education Act, thereby taking account of new SEN provisions contained within the Special Educational Needs & Disability Act 2001. The purpose of the Code is to give practical guidance to Local Education Authorities (LEAs), maintained schools, early education settings and others on carrying out their statutory duties in the identification, assessment and provision for children with SEN. (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

Under the 1996 Education Act children are identified as having SEN if they have a learning difficulty which requires special educational provision to be made for them. A child is said to have a learning difficulty if they:

- (a) Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- (b) Have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of their LEA; and
- (c) Are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

Special educational provision means:

- (a) For children of two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, provision generally made for children in schools maintained by their LEA, other than special schools;
- (b) For children under two, educational provision of any kind. (Section 312, Education Act 1996)

The SEN Code of Practice promotes a common approach to the identification, assessment of and provision for the SEN of all children, which it reflects as a continuum of provision utilising a graduated approach. The learning needs of most children are thus met through the 'differentiation' of the curriculum. This implies teachers must tailor their approaches to suit the different learning needs and styles of individual pupils. In cases where this differentiated approach is not successful the school must make additional or different provision. This school-based SEN is described in the Code as 'School Action' and 'School Action Plus'.

School Action can include further assessment, additional or modified teaching methods and materials, or additional support. Under School Action, teachers use IEPs to record the additional/modified provision made for students. These plans also record specific teaching strategies, short-term learning targets, criteria for success, and the achievements of the student. School Action Plus is enacted when inadequate progress is made for students under School Action and the school requests outside advice from the LEA's support services or from health or social service professionals, such as a speech and language or occupational therapists. The key criterion for decisions about what approach to take for a student is whether or not they are making 'adequate progress' under the specific strategies employed. And essentially this "is a matter for the teacher's professional judgement." (Teachernet, 2004)

### 3.4.1 IEPs

The Department for Education and Skills' Special Educational Needs Toolkit outlines that IEPs are:

- Planning, teaching and review tools that underpin a process of planning intervention for a student with SEN;
- Teaching and learning plans which set out what, how, and how often specific knowledge and skills should be taught through additional or different activities than those provided to all pupils through the differentiated curriculum;
- Structured planning records of the differentiated steps and teaching methods required to achieve identified targets;

- Accessible and understandable to all concerned, and should be agreed with the involvement of the parent and pupil whenever possible.

It is recommended that IEPs should focus on a small number (3-4) of key individualised targets, set according to their specific needs and learning priorities. These targets should be focused on key areas of communication, literacy, mathematics, and some aspects of behaviour and physical skills. IEPs should contain the following information:

- Short-term targets set for or by the pupil;
- Teaching strategies to be used;
- The provision that will be put in place;
- A review date for the plan;
- Outcomes – recorded when the IEP is reviewed;
- Success and/or exit criteria.

It is not considered appropriate to set too many targets. While IEP targets should be limited to current agreed priorities, the full range of the curriculum should continue to be offered to the student. Longer-term aims may be added to put learning into an overall context. These can also help to identify outcomes and progress. The success criteria of the IEP should imply that targets have been achieved and new ones need to be set. Exit criteria will further imply that an IEP may no longer be required. Teachers are guided to use SMART objectives (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

Students who have severe and complex needs may need to have other types of individual needs incorporated into their IEP. These can relate to activities such as eating, dressing or mobility. Strategies need to be agreed for such needs and recorded in the student's IEP. (Department for Education and Skills, undated)

### 3.4.2 Managing IEPs

The SEN Toolkit notes that IEPs of individual students should be considered in the context of overall class management for all pupils and staff. To facilitate this, the timeframes for delivery built into IEPs should be realistic as well as being integral to classroom and curriculum planning. Teachers, in their daily or weekly plans, should plan for time spent working with a pupil on specific IEP activities and targets.

Staff members who come into contact with students with SEN should be made fully aware of the individual targets and strategies outlined in the IEP for each student under their tuition. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) should receive regular feedback from all relevant staff within their school. IEPs should usually be implemented, in part at least, in the normal classroom setting. This means that the SENCO may need to facilitate liaison between class and subject teachers and other relevant educators within the school.

Depending on the size and complexity of given schools and on the pupils' range and level of needs, the SENCO may need to oversee the management of the process for all students with SEN. As such, the SENCO may not be solely responsible for devising and delivering all IEPs in their school. The SENCO and school management team also need to ensure continuity in delivery of IEPs. This requires the establishment of protocols for providing information on IEPs to new staff when a pupil moves classes, or when a pupil transfers schools.

Provision may be made for external specialists to act in an advisory capacity, to provide additional specialist assessment or be involved in teaching the pupil directly. However, in such instances, it is recommended that such strategies be implemented in the normal classroom setting to as great an extent as possible.

Schools need to develop appropriate systems for overall planning and target setting for all pupils. The management of IEPs is said to be less demanding when they are integrated into the general organisation of school planning, assessment, recording and reporting. In this sense, it is recommended that monitoring the effectiveness of

IEPs should be part of monitoring the school's overall planning and targeting process. (Department for Education and Skills, undated)

### **3.4.3 Monitoring and Review**

While IEPs should be continually reviewed over time, their success and progress made should be evaluated at least twice a year. However, more frequent evaluation may be necessary, especially with younger children, and in general frequency should always be guided by the individual needs of each pupil and the provision being made to meet those needs.

As with other aspects of the IEP process, parents' views on the progress of their child and on future targets should be sought, as should the views of the pupil themselves where possible.

In cases where targets are not achieved, teachers should consider all of the possible reasons. This includes teaching methods and resources, both of which may be inappropriate and need to be changed. It may also be the case that the target set for a pupil was itself inappropriate or too ambitious, in which case it may need to be re-designed or perhaps broken down into smaller, more achievable steps.

When reviewing an IEP teachers should consider the following:

- The pupil's progress;
- Views of the parents and pupil;
- Effectiveness of the plan;
- Any access issues impeding the child's progress;
- Any future actions to be taken, including new targets and strategies or a need for additional information.

Once progress has been considered, targets for the next period should be set by the appropriate staff, along with the input of parents and pupil where possible. For pupils whose progress remains inadequate after two reviews it may be decided to increase the frequency of their reviews. On the other hand, if good progress is continually made then it may be the case that the pupil no longer requires additional help and can revert to the standard differentiated curriculum. 'Adequate progress' is identified as progress which:

- Closes the gap in attainment between the pupil and their peers, or prevents the gap growing wider;
  - Is similar to that of peers starting from the same baseline;
  - Matches or improves a pupil's previous progress;
  - Ensures access to the full curriculum;
  - Demonstrates improved independence, behaviour, or social or personal skills;
  - Is likely to lead to appropriate accreditation;
  - Is likely to lead to participation in further education, training and/or employment.
- (SEN Code of Practice, section 6.49)

### 3.5 Individualized Educational Programs in the USA

Each public school child who receives special education in the USA must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The statutory basis for the provision of IEPs was established through the Education of the Handicapped Act<sup>1</sup> (EHA) of 1975. The EHA required that an IEP must be developed for each child with a disability who was eligible for special education and related services. Amongst other things, the IEP was intended to identify the services that would be provided to each individual pupil. Additional regulations<sup>2</sup> for the requirements of the IEP were issued in 1981.

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1. P.L. 94-142

2. Appendix C to Part 300: Notice of Interpretation, US Department of Education

The EHA was amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, and was further amended in 1997 through the IDEA Amendments.<sup>3</sup> The IDEA Amendments became the federal law that guarantees children with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE), and is used by school systems around the USA to guide the way in which special education and related services are provided. Regulations for IDEA 1997 were published in March 1999. (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1999)

### 3.5.1 Special Education Context for IEPs

The IEP is seen as the cornerstone of a quality education for pupils with disabilities. Each one must be designed for one student and must be truly individualised. A child's IEP guides the delivery of the special education supports and services that they receive. However, this takes place within the broader context and process of special education provision under the IDEA. This process includes the following:

1. Identification – a child is identified as possibly needing special education services. This can be through the 'Child Find' system, or through referral by a school professional. In either option, parents may also request an evaluation for their child. Where a professional identifies the child, parental consent must be obtained for evaluation.
2. Evaluation – the identified child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability. Parents who disagree with the evaluation result have the right to take their child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), which can be paid for by the school system.
3. Eligibility – qualified professionals and the parents decide together, based on the evaluation results, whether the child has a disability, as defined by the IDEA. Eligibility decisions may be challenged by parents.
4. Child is found eligible for services – once identified as having 'a disability' the child is then eligible for special education services. Within 30 days of eligibility being determined the IEP team must meet to write the child's IEP.

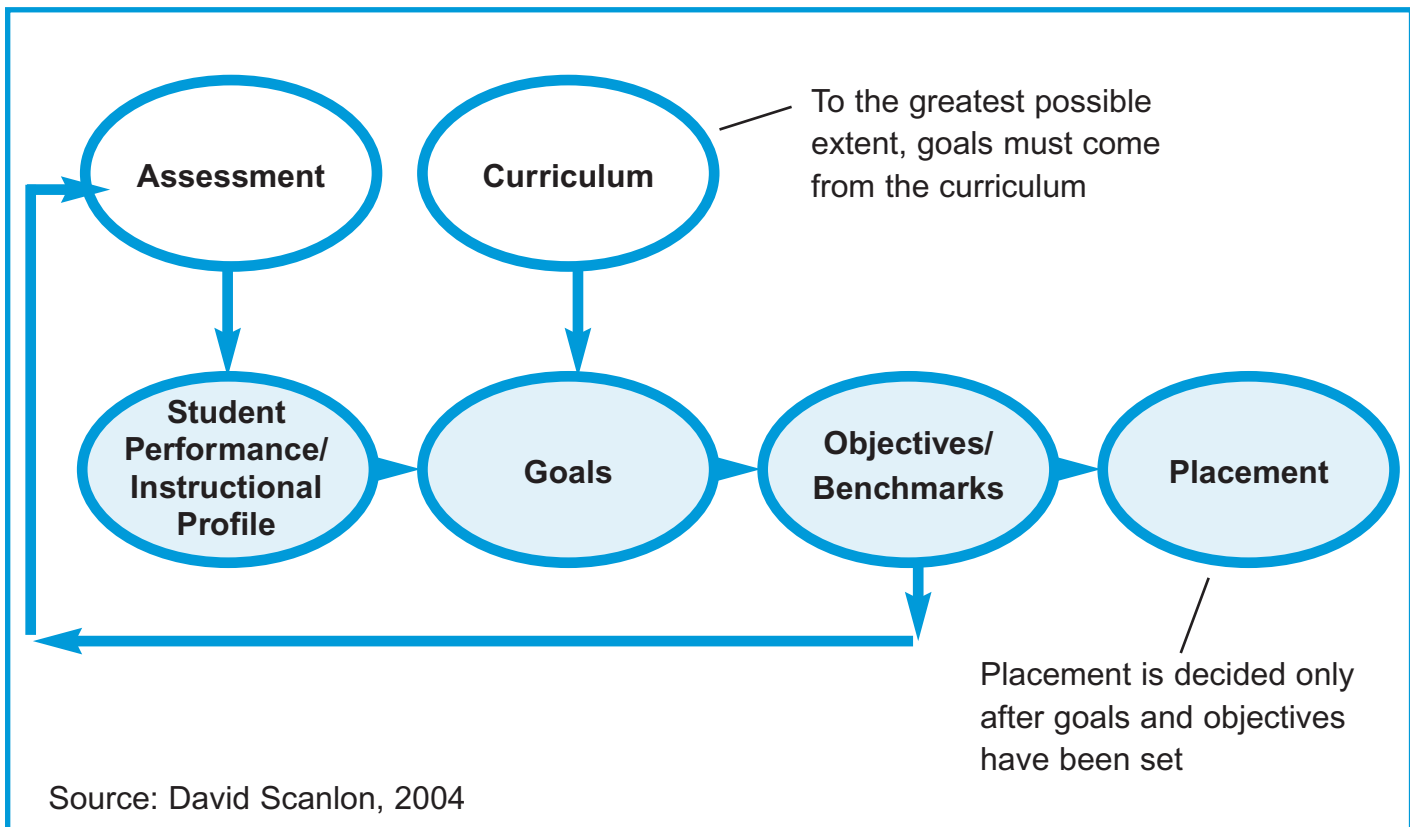
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3. P.L. 105-17

5. IEP meeting is scheduled – this is done by the school, which must contact and notify all members, including the parents.
6. IEP meeting held and IEP written – parents and the child, where appropriate, must be part of the team. Parents have recourse to appeal and mediation where they disagree with the IEP and placement.
7. Services are provided – the school must ensure that the child’s IEP is carried out as planned and written.
8. Progress is measured and reported to parents – progress is measured against the achievement of the goals identified for the child in their IEP.
9. Review of IEP – the IEP team reviews the programme at least once a year, or more often if parents request.
10. Re-evaluation – this occurs at least every three years, but more often if warranted by the child’s disability or upon the request of a parent or teacher.

(US Department of Education, 2000)

### Overview of IEP System in the USA



Source: David Scanlon, 2004

### 3.5.2 The IEP Team and Roles<sup>4</sup>

The legislation identifies certain people who must be involved in designing a child's IEP, and who must work together to as a team to write the programme. The following people make up the IEP team members – note that one member may fulfil more than one of the roles identified.

**Parents** – as members they have unique knowledge about their child's strengths, needs and interests. They can offer insights into how their child learns and ideas for enhancing their education. They can also report on whether or not skills learned in school are used in the home.

**Student** – involvement of the student, as appropriate, can give them a strong voice and input into their own education. They must be present when transition services are being discussed.

**Regular education teacher** – for children who are/may be involved in regular education settings, at least one of their regular education teachers must be on the team. The regular teacher may inform about curriculum and classroom issues, or specific supports, services or changes required. They may also inform about specific supports school staff may need in order to meet the needs of the student, including professional development and training.

**Special education teacher** – these will contribute information and experience on educating children with disabilities. This might include information on modifications to the curriculum and to testing methods, supplementary aids and services. In addition, they will have responsibility for working with the student in carrying out the IEP.

**School system representative** – this member will contribute knowledge about special education services. They will also know about resource issues – it is important that this individual has the authority to commit resources set out in the IEP.

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4. US Department of Education, 2000

**Transition services representative** – this person should be invited by the school whenever transition services are being discussed during a meeting. They should help plan any transition services required and should also be in a position to commit the resources of his/her agency to pay for or provide the services.

**Others with special knowledge or special expertise** – these members may be invited as required by either the parents or the school. Parents may invite an advocate or professional who knows the child, while schools may wish to include individuals with special expertise, such as occupational or physical therapists, psychologists, or speech and language therapists.

**Someone who can interpret evaluation results** – this member should be able to inform the team about the instructional implications of the child's evaluation/assessment results, and to plan subsequent planning on their basis.

### 3.5.3 Contents of the IEP<sup>5</sup>

Each child's IEP must legally contain the following information:

**Statement of current performance** – this information may derive from eligibility assessments, classroom tests and assignments, or from observations by professionals or parents. The statement should identify how the child's disability affects their involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

**Annual goals** – these are measurable goals that the child can be expected to accomplish within a year. They are broken down into shorter-term objectives or benchmarks. Goals may relate to academic performance or other educational needs, such as social, behavioural or physical issues.

**Special education and related services** – the IEP must list the services to be provided to each child, including any supplementary supports, aids or services needed. It should also document any changes to the programme or support for school personnel (e.g. training or professional development), which will be provided to the child.

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5. US Department of Education, 2000

**Participation with non-disabled children** – where relevant, the IEP must explain how and why a child will not participate in the regular school activities with their non-disabled peers.

**Participation in state tests** – where necessary, the IEP must identify what changes are needed for administering state tests in order for the child to participate. Where specific tests are determined inappropriate for a child, the IEP must explain why and identify alternative means of testing.

**Dates and places** – the IEP must identify the timeframes and settings for when and where services will be provided to the child.

**Transition service needs** – starting at age 14, or younger where appropriate, the IEP must identify the course a child should take to achieve their post-school goals. Transition services can include developing post-secondary education and career goals, work experience, links with adult service providers, or whatever is appropriate for the student given his/her interests, preferences, skills and needs.

**Needed transition services** – starting at age 16, or younger where appropriate, the IEP must establish what transition services are needed to help prepare for leaving school.

**Age of majority** – starting at least a year before a child reaches their full legal age, the IEP must confirm that the student has been informed of any rights that will transfer upon reaching that age.

**Measuring progress** – The IEP must state how a child's progress will be measured against their goals and objectives, and also how parents will be informed of this progress.

The law also requires that the IEP team needs to consider what are referred to as 'special factors'. While the relevance of these will vary from child to child, special factors that should be taken into consideration include the following:

- The child's behaviour;
- A limited proficiency in English;
- Blindness or visual impairment;
- Communication needs;
- Whether the child is deaf or hard of hearing;
- Need for assistive technology devices or services.

While the type of information that should be contained within an IEP is specified in statutory legislation and guidance, what the document itself should look like, or what format it should follow, is not specified. This is left to the discretion of individual states, and sometimes school systems. As such, there are many different forms in use in America, all attempting to capture the same thing. In general however, when writing a child's IEP the team should frame the programme around how to help the child to:

- Progress towards achieving their annual goals;
- Be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum;
- Take part in non-academic and extra-curricular activities;
- Receive their education alongside both their disabled and non-disabled peers and participate with them.

#### **3.5.4 Placement<sup>6</sup>**

A placement group is responsible for deciding the setting in which a child's IEP will be delivered. The group may be composed of members of the IEP team or another group with relevant knowledge and expertise. This varies between states.

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6. US Department of Education, 2000

Regardless of which group makes the decision, parents always have the right to be members of that group and involved in the decision.

Depending on individual needs, pupils with disabilities may receive their individualised programme in regular class (with supplementary aids and services if required), special class, special school, at home, in a hospital, institution, or other setting.

Placement decisions are required to adhere to the principle contained in the IDEA's requirement of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This requirement of LRE states that pupils with disabilities must be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum possible extent. The IDEA further requires that pupils with disabilities may only be taught outside the regular educational environment if their disability is such that they can't be educated satisfactorily in regular settings.

A school system can meet its obligation to provide an appropriate education placement for a child in one of the following ways:

1. Providing an appropriate programme for the child; or
2. Contracting another agency to provide the programme; or
3. Using alternative arrangements, consistent with the IDEA, for providing or paying for an appropriate programme for the child.

### **3.5.5 Implementing the IEP<sup>7</sup>**

Before a school can begin to provide special education services to a child for the first time it must obtain the written permission of the child's parent(s). Parents must receive a final written copy of their child's IEP. The following issues need to be considered for implementation:

- Those involved in implementing the programme should know and understand their responsibilities as identified in the IEP.

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7. US Department of Education, 2000

- Teamwork is important – with many professionals possibly involved, the sharing of expertise and experience will help improve results for students. Schools can encourage teamwork by giving staff and professionals the time to plan and work together, especially in relation to adapting the curriculum.
- Good communication between the school and parents is crucial. Parents might report on what happens at home and try to build upon the work from school.
- Appointing a lead person within the IEP team is helpful for co-ordinating and monitoring the receipt of services, and ultimately the proper implementation of the programme.
- It is important to maintain regular progress reports. These are required by the law in the US, and can help to monitor the child's progress towards achieving their goals.

### 3.5.6 Reviewing and Revising the IEP<sup>8</sup>

The IDEA requires that each child's IEP is reviewed at least once a year. Such reviews should address the following:

- Progress or lack of progress towards IEP goals and in the general curriculum;
- Any updated information regarding the child – through re-evaluation, or from the parents or school;
- The child's anticipated needs; or
- Any other matters relevant to the child's education.

While review must take place at least once a year, the team may do so more often. Either the parents or school may request an IEP meeting to review the child's programme.

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8. US Department of Education, 2000

### 3.5.7 Disputes<sup>9</sup>

In situations where parents disagree with the school's recommendations about a child's education, the parents are entitled to challenge decisions in relation to eligibility, evaluation, placement or the services provided by the school. Challenges may be pursued via a number of avenues:

1. Try to reach agreement – through dialogue with school officials;
2. Mediation – the parents and school sit down with a third party and try to reach agreement;
3. Ask for due process – the parents and school each present their cases to an impartial hearing officer, who then proposes a solution;
4. File a complaint with the state education agency (SEA) – parents can write directly to the SEA and identify which part of the IDEA they believe has been violated.

## 3.6 Summary of International Policy

This section has given an overview of the provision of individual planning for students with SEN in five separate countries, within the context of legislation and policy developments governing special education in general. While there are some important variances between provision in the chosen jurisdictions, a large degree of commonality has also emerged in the analysis of policy. These common areas also largely reflect the elements for a system of individual planning identified in the EPSEN Act 2004. As a general observation, each of the countries place IEP and SEN provision within the context of mainstreaming, inclusion and a focus on basing individualisation on changes to the standard/general curriculum – as opposed to ignoring the curriculum and starting from scratch for each child with SEN. The table below attempts to summarise what have been identified as key elements within the overall structure of IEP provision in the countries examined. This includes a summary in relation to: information gathering (including identification and assessment), the IEP team, planning and design of IEPs, implementation and management of IEPs, and processes of review.

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9. US Department of Education, 2000

**IEPs: Summary of International Practice**

|  | <b>Queensland, Australia</b>   | <b>British Columbia, Canada</b>   | <b>New Zealand</b>  | <b>United Kingdom</b>  | <b>United States</b>   |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Information Gathering</b> (incl. Identification, consultation & assessment) | Formal and informal methods; student's competency, learning style, talents, interests, ambitions, required equipment or resources. | Teachers observation; parents' views and concerns; possible sensory screening; possible psycho-educational, speech and language, orientation or mobility assessments. | Assessment methods and contexts vary; no single method used as sole means of identification; age-appropriate methods; use student's primary language and mode of communication.   | IEP required where differentiated approach not successful; 'adequate progress' a general criterion for decisions on approach; teacher's professional judgement; parent and pupil involvement.                            | ID by teacher, system or parental referral; assessment in all relevant SEN areas; professional and parents agree on assessed disability and SEN, as defined by IDEA.   |
| <b>IEP Team</b> (Students involved 'as appropriate' in all cases)              | Those who regularly work with a student; core team includes – class teacher, parents, support teacher, student; team coordinator.  | Ongoing consultation and collaboration between teachers, parents, students, support personnel and community agencies; case manager                                    | Those closely involved with the student; core – student, parent/caregiver, classroom teacher; wider team – other family support, other school personnel, specialist providers, therapists, and aides; key worker/ coordinator | No 'team' as such; teachers, parents and pupils; if necessary - LEA support services, health/social service professionals; varying roles and involvement for SENCOs, depending on different schools and levels of needs. | Parents; student; regular teacher; special teacher; school system representative; transition services representative; other specialists as required; someone to interpret evaluation results; lead person appointed. |

## IEPs: Summary of International Practice (continued)

|                          | <b>Queensland,<br/>Australia</b>  | <b>British Columbia,<br/>Canada</b>  | <b>New Zealand</b>  | <b>United Kingdom</b>  | <b>United States</b>   |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Planning / Design</b> | Family expectations/<br>aspirations; 6-months<br>learning priorities;<br>goal statements;<br>learning setting;<br>teaching strategies,<br>curricular links; start &<br>review dates;<br>monitoring<br>procedures; team<br>roles and<br>responsibilities | Collaborative process;<br>students, parents &<br>educators set<br>appropriate goals;<br>plan includes -<br>educational<br>performance; outcome<br>for 1 year;<br>adaptations; supports;<br>educational setting;<br>named education and<br>support personnel;<br>review timeframe and<br>process. | Student's long-term<br>aims; focus<br>areas/learning<br>priorities; current skills<br>and needs; 1-year<br>achievement<br>objectives/ goals;<br>learning outcomes –<br>specific statements<br>relevant to objectives/<br>goals; curricular<br>adaptations only after<br>alternative teaching<br>considered. | Identify additional<br>provision; specific<br>teaching strategies;<br>short-term learning<br>targets; criteria for<br>success and/or exit;<br>SMART objectives;<br>realistic timeframes;<br>date for review. | Current performance;<br>annual goals; services<br>required; mainstream<br>participation; dates;<br>settings; transition<br>services; age of<br>majority information;<br>progress criteria;<br>'special factors' – e.g.<br>behaviour,<br>communication needs. |

|                                   | <b>Queensland, Australia</b>   | <b>British Columbia, Canada</b>  | <b>New Zealand</b>   | <b>United Kingdom</b>   | <b>United States</b>   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Implementation /Management</b> | Each element implemented as agreed by team; data collected to aid monitoring | Agreed plan; implementation includes: adaptations to environment; alternative instruction and/or evaluation; assistive technology; intensive instructional intervention; curricular modifications; support services; specialised training. | Plan as agreed – to include: adaptations to environment; teaching and learning styles; adaptations to materials; assistive technology; support personnel; mechanisms for monitoring; key worker coordinates. | Implemented as agreed; stick to timeframes; IEPs considered in context of overall class management; teachers plan IEP time in weekly /daily plans; SENCO role in overall school management of IEPs; all contact staff aware of individual IEPs. | As agreed; guidance stresses important considerations – understanding roles/responsibilities, facilitating teamwork, school/parent communication, lead person coordinates, maintaining regular progress reports. |
| <b>Review</b>                     | 6 months; student performance, implementation & coordination issues          | 1 year; pupils with SEN evaluated using established standards for other pupils; reflects adaptations/modifications; any different assessment methods identified in the plan.   | 1 year; review achievement of learning outcomes; is programme appropriate for meeting learning needs? how has IEP process contributed to outcomes?   | Continuous monitoring/review; success and progress evaluated formally at least twice a year – more frequent if necessary, depending on age, individual needs and provision; ‘adequate progress’ a general criterion considered.                 | At least once a year – more often if requested by parents, school or team; review looks at – progress on IEP goals and curriculum; new information on child; child’s anticipated needs; other relevant matters.  |

## 4. Discussion

The previous two sections have illustrated the types of policies, structures and procedures that are in place in a number of other jurisdictions in relation to individual planning for special education. This has provided an overview of IEP provision internationally, and indeed highlighted a large degree of commonality between different countries that were selected on the basis of a developed history regarding legislation, policy and service provision for people with disabilities. What follows in this section is an examination of some of the issues which arise when policies such as those outlined are put into practice. This section takes an in-depth look at some of the research literature that has been produced, which provides a critical analysis of provision to date. The following are the key issues identified in the literature.

### 4.1 Involvement

One of the main areas identified as being critical to get right to ensure the success of IEPs was the involvement in the process of students and their parents.

Consequently, this is also one of the key areas in which difficulties can arise, due to a lack involvement. In a Scottish study, Riddell and colleagues (2001) found that parents and pupils were not routinely involved in IEP production and review; parents felt schools could do more to explain the purpose of the documents; that involving children with the most significant difficulties posed the most serious problems; and that schools found it difficult to involve pupils in setting and reviewing academic targets, but often tried to involve them in identifying behavioural targets. Whilst highlighting the importance of involvement of children, parents and other professionals at all levels, the researchers also identified that “issues of time and efficiency clearly arise here and it is necessary to achieve a balance between ensuring wide involvement and keeping the requirements of IEP production and review within reasonable bounds.” (Riddell et al., 2001)

Nugent (2002) states that “a lack of student involvement in the planning, implementation and review of their IEPs is seen as a crucial lack of process.”

The UK Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) also cites this as a problem, particularly in the crucial areas of preparation and review (Ofsted, 1999). This lack of proper engagement can result in a plan which fails to record the student's actual strengths and needs, a concern which underpins the entire process: "The only legitimate focus of an IEP meeting is on the special needs of the student and how those are to be addressed" (Bateman, 1995). In identifying criticism of IEPs in the UK, Bowers and Wilkinson (1998) highlight the lack of attention given towards the inclusion of students with SEN in decision-making. Sopko (2003) cites Snyder's research (2000) as identifying that students are better able to contribute to IEP meetings when they receive prior training on active participation and goal development.

Sopko (2003) noted that research in the US prior to the IDEA amendments of 1997 indicated that parents often didn't feel involved in the IEP process, regarding teachers as being the decision makers and themselves merely as consent givers (Rock, 2000). The amended legislation specifically gave support to parents as equal partners in the educational process and their right to involvement – specifically with regard to including the information provided by parents; inclusion in the decision making process on eligibility; and on educational placement.

Sopko then cites survey data following the legislative changes which showed that a high proportion (91%) of parents agreed that their child's IEP goals were appropriate and challenging in accordance with the general curriculum; and that many believed that their child's education services were 'somewhat' or 'very' individualised (93%). A smaller majority (66%) of parents felt that they had the 'right amount' of involvement in IEP decision making. (US Department of Education, 2001). Other survey data cited suggests that many states in the US are now investing more time, energy and funding to increase parental involvement in IEP development. From various research, Sopko identifies important measures for parental involvement:

- Greet the parents;
- Introduce all participants and explain their roles;

- State the purpose of the meeting;
- Share strengths and positive observations about the child;
- Provide enough time for a complete discussion during the meeting;
- Be flexible throughout.

Barriers to parental involvement that are identified by Sopko in the US research include:

- The use of educational jargon and acronyms;
- Parents' lack of understanding of the school system;
- Parents' uncertainty about how to help their child;
- Parents feelings of inferiority; and
- Logistical problems – such as such as time for and transportation to IEP meetings. (Rock, 2000; Smith, 2001)

These researchers concluded that “parents and professionals must work together collaboratively and respect, trust and equally value each other to benefit the child as the IEP is developed and effective interventions are designed.” (Sopko, 2003: 5) Sopko also notes that the parents who were commonly reported as being least satisfied with their involvement in the IEP process were those from ethnic minority and low income groups.

## 4.2 Training and Development

Training and development for teachers on all elements of the IEP process is identified in the research as a critical factor for the successful implementation of individual planning. Riddell at al (2001) recommended that additional guidance and training was desired particularly in mainstream schools. Sopko (2003) noted that the US research has identified development needs in relation to: understanding the connection between general curriculum standards and IEP goals and objectives;

instructional strategies to improve student participation in the general curriculum; and developing co-teaching and collaboration skills. Furthermore, research has identified that “training teachers on writing IEP goals and using curriculum-based assessment and evaluation measures makes a significant difference in the quality of goals and objectives written for a student” (2003:13). Sopko also notes that the literature includes specific information for physical education teachers to effectively include students with disabilities, which includes guidance similar to that for other educators; this includes “sharing information with special education teachers, understanding how IEP goals can be addressed in the regular curriculum and communicating regularly with all educators and therapists working with the child” (2003:13).

Nugent’s (2002) small-scale Irish study, undertaken in a special school for children with mild general learning disabilities, focuses on teachers’ views of the IEPs used within the school.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, in the first year of implementation teachers received collective training, followed by individual support in writing IEPs for their classes. This was supplemented with a further half-day’s training session for all staff at the beginning of the third year of working with IEPs, with the aim of developing practice. Nugent notes that the views of teachers in this particular survey were overwhelmingly positive. In this regard it was found that the teachers:

- Did not share the findings from other countries which has viewed IEPs as a paper exercise;
- Felt that IEPs helped them to plan their work and gave a focus to teaching – citing ‘attainable goals’ as an important feature;
- Found the multi-disciplinary team approach very positive.

The ‘overwhelmingly’ positive views of teachers in Nugent’s study towards IEPs is credited, in part at least, to the training, preparation and development these teachers received, which appears to be significantly more than in the majority of other studies examined. It may also be indicative of the greater potential of IEPs,

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10. The small scale of the study (n=13) means that findings should be interpreted as being indicative rather than representative of teachers in similar positions and contexts across the country.

once the additional training and development that the other studies call for is invested in the process. With regard to training Nugent notes:

“The topic arose just once and referred to staff new to the school having access to training. This is most important in that it suggests that most teachers found the level of training that they received to be satisfactory.” (Nugent, 2002:108)

Consultation identified that teachers need to have, firstly, a good general awareness of disability and special needs; secondly, the specific knowledge and teaching skills required to support children with special needs within their classroom; and finally, a level of information about the IEP process in order to allow them to fulfil their central roles in that process.

### **4.3 Curriculum: Access and Participation**

Another key aspect of IEP policies examined is that they all stipulate that children with SEN for whom IEPs are developed should continue to have their education based on the standard/general curriculum. As such, IEPs should only reflect the changes and additional supports that a particular child will utilise throughout the planning period. The IDEA in the US places strong emphasis on the participation of students with SEN in the general curriculum and general education classroom, and IEPs must address access to the general curriculum.

Sopko cites an NCAC (National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum) review which identified barriers to accessing the general curriculum including: lack of time, skills and training for teachers; different perceptions about curriculum adaptability; different interpretations of inclusion; increased educator responsibility; challenges in meeting every students' needs; and attitudes towards shifting roles and expectations. The same research also makes recommendations to overcome such barriers, including:

- Supporting teachers through professional development;
- Restructuring educational systems;

- Providing administrative support;
- Ensuring equal opportunities and clear instructional goals;
- Incorporating effective teaching practices;
- Managing a self-directed learning environment;
- Strengthening peer support structures;
- Increasing parent involvement;
- Enhancing collaboration among stakeholders; and
- Using authentic assessments. (Jackson et al, 2001 – cited by Sopko, 2003)

In relation to maintaining curricular balance, Riddell et al (2001) warn against the potential impact that IEPs might have on the curricular opportunities available to pupils: “The dangers... are that the introduction of IEPs will lead to teachers limiting their setting of targets to those areas of the curriculum which are most amenable to an ‘objectives approach’.” (Riddell et al., 2001)

A 2003 study by Shriner and Destefano found that training can influence teachers’ decisions regarding participation and accommodations; can improve the way that decisions are recorded in IEPs; and can increase the consistency between intended and actual accommodation. Furthermore, they found that the likelihood of teachers carrying out documented testing scenarios was affected by when and by whom an IEP was developed; they noted that best practice suggests that the IEP should:

- Be developed during the same academic year as state testing;
- Consider the curriculum and instructional accommodations received by the student during the testing year; and
- Involve teachers who will be implementing the assessment recommendations. (Shriner and Destefano, 2003)

## 4.4 Transition

Regarding the issue of transition, Sopko identifies research which indicates US states have failed to achieve minimal compliance with transition elements of the IEP set out in the legislation. Reasons for this include the relevant personnel not being present to discuss transition, participants not receiving sufficient advance notice of meetings, and IEPs not including statements of transition services required by students. Recommendations for transition elements of the IEP include:

- Ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the full range of general education curricular options and learning experiences;
  - Making data-based decisions using meaningful indicators of students' learning and skills to plan transition services;
  - Collaborating and linking with community organisations and services to ensure that students with disabilities have access to employment, post-secondary and independent living opportunities;
  - Supporting student and family participation in planning for transition services.
- (Sopko, 2003)

## 4.5 Time & Administration

The issue of time, administration and the level of bureaucracy involved in planning, implementing and reviewing IEPs is one which can cause great difficulties for teachers, and be a huge strain on their own resources within the classroom. In relation to the level of paperwork involved, Bowers and Wilkinson (1998) identify research that views IEPs as “a bureaucratic control mechanism” (Pieckering and Thompson, 1996); which warns against the process becoming “an administrative millstone round the necks of staff” (Wedell, 1995); and which identifies IEP-related paperwork as a concern especially for secondary schools (Derrington, et al., 1996).

Bateman (1995) echoes this view and notes that, for teachers, this can mean that IEPs can become a “time consuming, sometimes threatening and, too often, a

pointless bureaucratic requirement”, and that the document is irrelevant to what actually happens in the class (Bateman, 1995). The risk of the IEP not being practised as it is written can mean that it “becomes a cumbersome paperwork exercise which results in little educational benefit for the pupil” (Tod, 1999). The time consuming nature of IEPs was also one of the rare negative aspects identified by Nugent (2002).

Bower and Wilkinson (1998) also found a link between a shortage of time to complete IEPs, workload and stress. They note a survey which revealed a lack of time as the primary cause of intense stress amongst teachers in mainstream schools and special schools for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties. The researchers highlight “a relentless requirement for the completion of paperwork” as the main cause of this stress - although this was also partially due to other non-IEP elements of the SEN Code of Practice (Male and May, 1997).

## 4.6 Review

The importance of monitoring and review of IEPs was highlighted in consultation. A danger of the IEP failing to achieve its objectives may arise where the review process loses sight of the student’s long term goals. Riddell et al (2001) noted that there appeared a greater emphasis on IEP production than on review and analysis, and that this may be detrimental to the process as a whole. Nugent (2002) identified inadequate review and monitoring procedures as a likely cause of ineffective IEPs, particularly where schools feel under pressure to produce plans in order to meet administrative obligations.

## 4.7 Targets

Riddell et al (2001) found that most schools had difficulty setting SMART targets for pupils with more ‘intractable and complex difficulties’, such as autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder and complex, profound or multiple difficulties. Furthermore, they noted that a focus on SMART targets commonly meant that wider teaching goals became obscured, and that education was in danger of being reduced to “a mechanistic process which is readily captured in simply learning

objectives”. And from a broader perspective, they concluded that: “If the achievement of IEP targets was to be linked to overall school or individual teacher ‘effectiveness’ there is a risk that teachers will limit the type of targets that are included to those areas of the curriculum where there are more proven ‘technologies’ for delivering progress.” (Riddell et al., 2001)

## 4.8 Plans: Content and Detail

Riddell’s study found that IEPs were formatted in different ways in different schools; and that some of the short IEPs, whilst being used effectively within their particular context, tended to omit some vital information, whilst the longer IEPs required a very significant time investment. The researchers suggest a balance between the two is the most desired approach (Riddell et al., 2001).

Bower and Wilkinson (1998) cite criticism by Bowers for IEPs that are over complex, multi-page documents, or which on the other hand are too loosely phrased; and which recommends “keeping the IEP simple, straightforward and specific” (Bowers, 1997).

## 4.9 Other Issues

A number of other important points are identified in the research, including:

- **Teacher satisfaction:** Sopko cites a survey of general education teachers which identified reasons for not attending IEP meetings, including: not feeling valued as a team member; insufficient time to attend meetings; not feeling prepared; not knowing what to expect at meetings; feeling insufficiently trained; and feeling uncertain about the IEP’s relevance to instruction and student learning. The researchers also make recommendations to improve attendance and participation for general education teachers:
  - ▶ Effectively collaborating and communicating regularly with general educators;
  - ▶ Hiring substitutes to provide release time;
  - ▶ Sharing blank IEP forms prior to meetings;

- ▶ Using an agenda for meetings;
- ▶ Providing specific training for the process and on the connection between IEPs and instruction. (Menlove et al, 2001)
- **At School Level:** Riddell et al (2001) identified some important findings:
  - ▶ Mainstream schools generally found the initiative more difficult to fit into existing practice than special schools and units;
  - ▶ Consideration needs to be given to cultural and organisational features of secondary schools which pose problems to the smooth implementation of IEPs, particularly in the light of plans to include more children with SEN in mainstream; and
  - ▶ All schools require ongoing support and this may be essential to the effective bedding down of the programme. (Riddell et al., 2001)
- **Behaviour:** Sopko identifies the functional behavioural assessment (FBA) as an effective approach for interventions with students with development disabilities who display problem behaviour. While the IDEA identifies when schools should conduct an FBA and develop a subsequent plan, it doesn't explain how. In light of this, Sopko references many 'how-to' guides which have emerged in practice. In the use of FBAs, Sopko identifies the following recommendations:
  - ▶ Specific pre-service courses, ongoing in-service activities, and a new certification area for behaviour support specialists;
  - ▶ Policy makers should provide guidance for FBA;
  - ▶ FBA should be defined as an integrated set of practices with general parameters rather than specific procedures;
  - ▶ Use of FBA should be integrated into the special education decision-making process. (Sopko, 2003)
- **Assistive Technology:** Sopko also notes that "surveys revealed that teachers require training in the use of assistive technology and prefer direct, hands-on training in addition to support from administration and collaboration with other team members to effectively use assistive technology in their classrooms." (Sopko, 2003:17)

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the examination of IEP policies in countries with substantial histories and progressive track records regarding special needs education, and on the analysis of research literature that has been produced, largely in the USA and UK. These are structured according to the elements of education plans identified and outlined to some extent in the EPSEN Act 2004. This allows for direct applicability of international experience to the blueprint for the Irish context insofar as it has been identified by the Act.

### 5.1 Identification & Assessment

- (i) Good communication between a student's home and school, parents and teachers/principals, will help to identify potential SEN as early as possible.
- (ii) In-school measures used prior to full assessment should include screening for sensory impairments. They should also include the use of varied teaching methods by teachers – which should reflect a degree of flexibility with the general education programme, especially within the mainstream environment.
- (iii) Before individualised adaptations are made to the curriculum, teachers should be satisfied that other alternative strategies have been attempted – such as small group work, buddy systems, or active/experiential learning.
- (iv) No single method of assessment should be used as the sole means of identifying the needs of a student.
- (v) Assessment methods and contexts may vary according to individual needs. As such, assessment should be appropriate to the age and development level of individual students. They should also have credibility with all IEP team members.

- (vi) Both informal and formal methods of assessment should be utilised, rather than relying only on standardised tests, as these can be unsuitable for certain disability types (e.g. ASDs). Such assessment methods may include observation, interview, task analysis, or environmental assessment (see pages 25-26 for the full range identified in the New Zealand model)
- (vii) Identification, assessment and later planning procedures/tools should be cognisant of each individual student's language and culture, as these comprise a vital context for learning and development.

## 5.2 Planning

This incorporates information gathering, the IEP team and team meeting, planning and design of the IEP.

- (i) IEPs should be designed only to identify modifications to the general educational programme that are necessary, rather than completely rewrite the programme or curriculum.
- (ii) Individual plans may incorporate the following strategies:
- Adaptations to the physical environment
  - Adaptations to the content and delivery of the lesson
  - Modifications to resources and materials
  - Use of equipment or assistive technology
  - Provision of support personnel
- (iii) All those, and only those, who know the child should be involved as part of their IEP team. This should not preclude outside professionals. However, where professionals are involved they should have at least spent time with the child or time observing them.
- (iv) The core IEP team should include:
- The student, the parent or primary care giver and the classroom teacher.

The wider team may further include:

- Other family support (e.g. relative, advocate)
  - Other school personnel (e.g. principal, special needs teacher, resource teacher)
  - Specialist service providers (e.g. Council staff, rehabilitation and special needs specialists)
  - Therapists (e.g. speech-language, occupational or physical therapists)
  - Teaching assistants.
- (v) Information should be gathered in both formal and informal settings, including the school, home and in the community. This will ensure a more rounded assessment of the child's strengths and needs.
- (vi) Team members should prepare by considering their priorities and goals for the student. Long-term goals can help maintain a clearer focus on priorities over a period of time. These can be established for the following years, and perhaps tied into specific transition points in the student's education.
- (vii) Each team member should have the opportunity to give their input, and this should be valued by the other members and reflected in the plan.
- (viii) In addition to the 'contents of the plan' identified in the EPSEN Act 2004 (see p. 7), the IEP design should also incorporate the following information:
- Specific timeframes – start and review dates
  - The roles and responsibilities of each IEP team member
  - Statements of measurable goals for prioritised learning in the subsequent learning period
  - Links to class curriculum, key learning and competency areas
  - Key teaching strategies, including resource materials, specialist support, and classroom management
  - Duty of care aspects relating to health, medical and therapy support and student safety

- Monitoring procedures to be used
- (ix) The person who has most involvement with a student (usually the class teacher) should complete the IEP, even though the Principal is ultimately responsible.
- (x) Statements of measurable goals for prioritised learning should:
- (a) Identify the student's learning outcome (i.e. a skill, activity or piece of knowledge)
  - (b) Outline the conditions which apply (e.g. specialised equipment, environment), and
  - (c) Set the criteria by which the student will demonstrate the learning outcome (e.g. level of accuracy, quantity correct)
- (xi) Goals established in the IEP should be set at a high but attainable level, thereby encouraging parents, students and school staff to hold relatively high expectations. Goals should also contain objectives to facilitate better progression towards the goal as well as enabling easier review and evaluation.
- (xii) Learning outcomes should be identified for each goal and objective in the IEP. The team must ensure that learning outcomes are directly relevant to the specific goals, and that they are specific, achievable and measurable.
- (xiii) Careful and systematic transition planning is crucial between educational settings and levels – considerations include establishing links between the sending and receiving settings, facilitating access to the new environment, and ensuring participation in the new environment.
- (xiv) Transition planning is especially important for post-school outcomes, and as such transition planning should be established at least by the end of compulsory school age, and preferably sooner.
- (xv) Communication is an essential part of the planning process, which should be collaborative by nature and ongoing.

### 5.3 Implementation

- (i) Team members should be skilled with the appropriate teaching strategies and monitoring procedures.
- (ii) It is helpful to appoint a lead person within the team to co-ordinate implementation of the plan. Usually this will be the class teacher, or person with whom the student has most regular contact.
- (iii) All those involved in implementing the IEP should know and understand their responsibilities as identified in the plan.
- (iv) Good communication is also essential between the school and parent during implementation of the IEP. Parents can report on what happens at home and try to build on work from school.
- (v) It is important to maintain good progress reports.
- (vi) The implementation of IEPs can only be realised properly where the relevant authorities support the policy with the necessary resources and supports identified in planning.

### 5.4 Evaluation/Review

- (i) Students with SEN should be evaluated on all parts of their education programme using the same established standards for other students whenever possible.
- (ii) The effectiveness of an IEP should be evaluated in terms of: student performance and progress; implementation issues (e.g. time/staff available); team co-ordination issues; and any additional outcomes, positive or negative.
- (iii) Adequate progress may be measured (as in the UK) as that which:
  - Closes the gap in attainment between the student and his/her peers – or stops the gap growing
  - Is similar to that of peers starting from the same baseline
  - Matches or improves a student's previous progress

- Ensures access to the curriculum
  - Demonstrates increased independence, behaviour, or social or personal skills
  - Is likely to lead to appropriate accreditation
  - Is likely to lead to participation in further education, training and/or employment
- (iv) Evaluation procedures should accommodate the type and range of adaptations and modifications identified in each individual student's plan. Any requirement for and use of adapted evaluation procedures should be recorded in the plan.
- (v) Plans should be formally reviewed at least once a year, and ideally more often. More frequent evaluation may be necessary, especially for younger children. In general, frequency of review should be guided by the individual needs of each student and the provision made to meet those needs.
- (vi) Ongoing monitoring should be part of the IEP process between formal evaluation/review periods, with ongoing communication and feedback between IEP members an essential feature.

## 5.5 General

- Parents and students should be included to the fullest extent possible at all times.
- There should be a shared responsibility for planning and collective accountability for outcomes amongst members of the IEP team.
- There should be a consensus on educational and other goals.
- Socialisation and behavioural contexts, priorities and targets should be central elements of each child's plan. Inclusion within peer groups can become more of a barrier to educational inclusion in mainstream settings as students move beyond primary level.

## 5.6 Ireland – Setanta School for Children with ASDs

Finally, it may be useful to finish by highlighting an example of a system of individual planning that is currently in use in Ireland. The Setanta School for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) has been operating an IEP process that is based on a model developed in Virginia, USA.<sup>11</sup> The system is quite similar to those outlined above, insofar as the main elements of the process are present (such as identifying needs and priorities, the IEP team and its membership, team meetings, design/planning, implementation, and review). The same principles can be seen to underpin the entire process (e.g. inclusion, collaboration, communication, shared purpose, achievement, a student focus).

Amongst the tools developed for the process are ‘Input Forms’ for students, parents and teachers. For students, the input form records their views on what they see as: their strengths, things that they find difficult, their interests, and things they find useful from a teaching and learning point of view. The teacher and parental forms cover similar ground from their own unique perspectives.

The Setanta model also notes the critical importance of training for all staff, and also of considering the child’s IEP and educational experience not in isolation, but rather to consider the wider context and importance of friendships and the community. See Appendix A for a more in-depth outline of Setanta’s system.

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## Appendix A: Setanta School for Children with ASD

### Policy:

- The IEP will have a collaborative approach based on mutual respect and trust will be encouraged;
- The IEP process will endeavour to share in developing a common vision for the student and his or her future;
- The principal will have the responsibility of chairing the IEP meetings but may designate this job when necessary;
- There will be equity among team members, and the input of each member will be equally valuable and necessary;
- The membership and work of the IEP team may change over time. As goals are achieved and new needs are identified, the team shall respond and encourage growth;
- The core of any IEP team shall consist of those who know and work most closely with the student: e.g. the parents, the class teacher, the SNAs or other teachers, and the student where possible;
- Other members may be invited on an 'as needed' basis (such as speech/language therapists, occupational therapists, educational and/or clinical psychologists, and the SENO);
- Other school staff as needed (guidance counsellors, bus drivers, lunch room aides, etc.)
- Other individuals may be invited to join the IEP team by the student, parents or educators. Brothers, sisters, and other relatives may also provide unique insights into the strengths and needs of the student;
- Each child in the school will have an IEP and this plan will be reviewed annually.

## Meetings format:

1. Welcome
2. Introductions
3. Purpose of meeting - to discuss and discover the strengths and needs of (the student) and to develop a purposeful IEP
4. Present level of performance
  - a.) Strengths – in school, home and community (teacher and parents)
  - b.) Needs – in all environments
  - c.) Assessment information – informal as well as formal
5. Formulating goals and objectives – based on strengths, needs and assessment information
6. Determine supplementary aids and services – including curriculum modifications and adaptations
7. Agree location – where goals and objectives will be addressed
8. Closure – develop a ‘wish list’ by having each person share a wish for the student during the coming year (parents to listen and add theirs last)

## Student Profile:

*To be filled out by members of the IEP team.*

1. Who is \_\_\_\_\_ (Describe the child, including information such as family, personality, likes and dislikes)
2. What are \_\_\_\_\_’s strengths? (Highlight all areas in which the child does well, including educational and social environments)
3. What are \_\_\_\_\_’s successes? (List all the successes, no matter how small)
4. What are \_\_\_\_\_’s greatest challenges? (List all the areas in which the child has the greatest difficulties)

5. What supports are needed for \_\_\_\_\_? (List supports that will help the child achieve his/her potential)
6. What are your dreams for \_\_\_\_\_? (Describe your vision for the child's future, including both short-term and long-term goals)
7. Other helpful information. (List any pertinent information, including health care needs, that has not been determined elsewhere on the form)

### Issue / Action Planning Form:

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Team Members Present:**

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| Issue | Planned Action | Person(s) Responsible | By When (date) |
|-------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|       |                |                       |                |

### Student IEP Input Form:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I am good at:**

Science      Maths      Reading      Writing      History  
Geography      Cooking      Spelling      PE

**It is not so easy for me:**

|           |         |          |         |         |
|-----------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| Science   | Maths   | Reading  | Writing | History |
| Geography | Cooking | Spelling | PE      |         |

**When I have free time, I like to:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**It helps me when the teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**It helps me when I: (circle as many as you want)**

|                                     |                              |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| use a calculator                    | have a shorter spelling list |
| use a math chart                    | use a dictionary             |
| have a homework sheet               | have highlighted directions  |
| have extra time to complete my work | have things read to me       |
| have choices for test question      |                              |

**I work best when I work:**

by myself                      in a small group                      with a partner

**I am good at:**

|                 |                |                 |                         |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| telling stories | colouring      | writing my name | counting                |
| cutting         | being a helper | reading a story | knowing my phone number |

**It's hard for me to:**

|                 |               |                          |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| tell how I feel | colour        | remember my numbers      |
| glue            | write letters | remember my ABC's        |
| read a story    | cut           | remember my phone number |

**I love to:**

play outside

use the computer

paint

look at books

colour

watch television

**I like when my teacher:**

helps me count

helps me write my letters

lets me use things to count

tells me directions again

helps me on the computer

helps me tie my shoes

**Goals at a Glance:**

This form is to be filled out by each team member and shared with the team. Under each heading below, enter a few major goals that you feel the IEP should address.

**Academic:**

**Social / Emotional / Behavioural:**

**Communication:**

**Daily Living:**

**Transition to Adulthood (no later than age 14):**

**Other:**