

Leading Inclusive Special Education: Provision Mapping in ETB Schools



Provision Mapping
#LeadingInclusiveSchools

Executive Summary: Provision Mapping Pilot 2020-2023

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Education and Training
Boards Ireland
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Participating ETBs and schools. The high level of interest from Chief Executives, Directors of Schools, Principals and school personnel across the ETB sector exemplifies the conscientious commitment of so many to inclusive special education.

As a nationwide pilot aiming to support systemic change to inclusive policy and practice, the support for implementation of the provision mapping process across schools depends on the passion, expertise, and commitment of a number of ETB appointed Inclusion Coordinators. The Inclusion Coordinators, in collaboration with their Directors of Schools and the National Inclusion, Special Education and Research Coordinator have worked closely with key school personnel to champion strategic and school-wide approaches to inclusive special education.

This initiative was originally piloted in Limerick and Clare ETB. Sincere thanks and appreciation are extended to the schools involved, the LCETB LILTA Team (Joe Lynch, Angela Martin, Dr. Joe O'Connell, Grainne Dennison, and Gina O'Connor) and the Directors of Schools, Bernadette Cullen who initiated the pilot, and Donncha O'Treasaigh, who continues to support its implementation and subsequent development.

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Introduction

School improvement is linked to a school's collective capacity to respond to change (Senge 2014). However, research indicates that discrete approaches to provision of additional educational supports for learners with special educational needs persists and is creating unsustainable roles for teachers tasked with the responsibility, namely Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; 2020; Colum and Mac Ruairc 2023). Furthermore, a move away from categorical and deficit views of disability, towards a more socially responsive needs-led approach to school profiling, allocation of additional resourcing and response to provision is underway in Ireland since 2017. While the move is welcomed, it has expanded the brief of SENCOs and SEN/ AEN Teams to incorporate learners with identified needs as well as those with diagnosed needs and disabilities. Notably, the SENCO role is not formally acknowledged in Irish policy, but SENCOs are increasingly fulfilling key leadership roles in their schools and play a critical part in developing advocacy and trusting relationships with parents/caregivers and learners with additional needs.

Provision mapping is a developmental process currently underway across 140 post primary schools in 16 ETBs that allows schools to evaluate the provisions and supports in place for students across the Continuum of Support (NEPS 2010) and to list all these the evidence-informed provisions in one summary document, which is called a provision map. It aligns with existing policy frameworks -School Self-Evaluation (DE Inspectorate 2022) and the Continuum of Support (NEPS 2010; DE 2017), and applies a flexible, strengths-based approach building systematic, collaborative, and sustained models of professional learning and capacity building within and between schools across the ETB sector. The provision map provides a basis to strategically cost and plan provision, allocate resources and identify staff professional learning needs. Provision mapping, as a process, seeks to harness cross-sectoral, inter-professional and inter-agency collaboration for systemic change. To this end, partnership with the NCSE is ongoing, which aims to explore collaborative capacity building to support cross-sectoral implementation of provision mapping.

ETBI Commitment to Research and Policy-Informed Inclusive Special Education

Inclusive Education is an identified priority for ETBI which aligns with the *Programme for Government 2020* and the *ETBI Strategy Statement 2022-2024*. A dedicated Task Group for Inclusive Special Education was established in 2020, comprising representatives from across the ETB sector, and includes Chief Executives, Directors of Schools, Principals, and Inclusion Coordinators, and the National Inclusion, Special Education and Research Coordinator. The Task Group supports strategic policy and research led development of inclusive special education across the sector. Provision mapping supports its realisation.

In September 2023, Dr Johanna Fitzgerald was appointed as ETBI National Inclusion, Special Education and Research Coordinator and is seconded from her position as Head of the

Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College for a period of three years to lead, in collaboration with the Task Group, policy and practice development in inclusive special education and associated research, across the ETB sector in post primary Community Colleges, Community National Schools and Community Special Schools. Further, to support operational implementation of provision mapping, each of the 16 ETBs appointed a dedicated Inclusion Coordinator one day per week.

Specifically, provision mapping seeks to:

1. Support excellence in education for all students and respond to the needs of school communities.
2. Develop teachers' capacity at all levels of the continuum of support to respond to increasing diversity in schools. The Inclusion Coordinator team achieves this through sustained and systematic support for change.
3. Ensure additional resource allocations are used effectively, and support schools to identify gaps, areas of strength and possible areas of over-provision.
4. List evidence-informed interventions and strategies that schools have in place to meet students' needs, and it allows schools to strategically cost, plan and allocate the resources to identified areas of need, and to then evaluate whether these provisions are improving outcomes for students.
5. Spotlight the ETB sector as innovative leaders in the field of inclusive and special education and as valued partners when engaging with key stakeholders such as the Department of Education and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Opportunities to support research-informed policy development on the future direction of inclusive and special education in Ireland exist. There is potential to harness existing ETB infrastructure to advance progression pathways in Special Education and Further Education and Training for young people with special educational needs and disabilities and ETBI welcomes further engagement with the Department of Education and the NCSE.

Implementing Provision Mapping: A Systematic, Collaborative and Sustained Approach

The strands to support implementation of provision mapping and are summarised as:

Induction: A total of 46 Inclusion Coaches were selected by Directors of Schools across 14 ETBs to participate in provision mapping. Inclusion Coaches comprised a heterogeneous group of teachers fulfilling different teaching roles in their ETBs; some were SENCOs and Special Education Teachers, other were subject teachers, guidance councillors, DEIS Coordinators, Deputy Principals, or Education Officers in their ETBs. Inclusion Coaches worked closely with one or more schools in their respective ETBs to support implementation of provision mapping. Some inclusion coaches were leading provision mapping in their own schools. Dedicated time to engage with the induction programme was recommended for inclusion coaches if resources allowed, but local and flexible arrangements between school Principals, Inclusion Coaches and Directors of Schools were also encouraged. Multi-modal approaches to induction programme delivery are illustrated in Figure 1 and comprised the following strands:

- *Online Learning.* Three full-day online professional learning events.
- *Independent study and reflection.* Over the course of the pilot phase Inclusion Coaches engaged with resources, empirical and theoretical research, policy literature and reflective logs contained within the repository of materials and resources.
- *Community of practice.* Structured communities of practice were scheduled monthly from March 2021 until May 2023 during the school day for one and a half hours online.
- *Mentoring.* School visits, drop-in clinics, email, and telephone support were available to Inclusion Coaches throughout the two years. Joint school visits with the project lead occurred with Inclusion Coaches who were supporting schools other than their own.

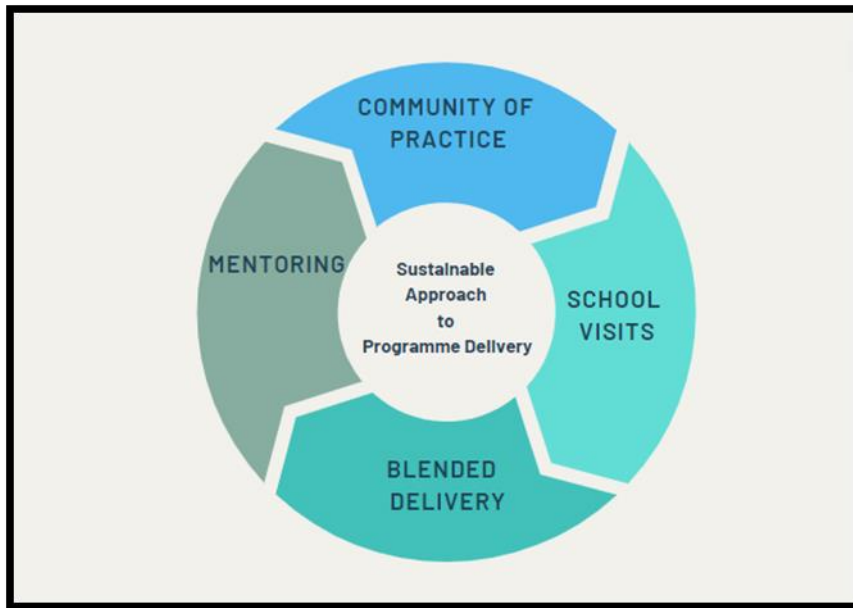


Figure 1. Multi-modal approach to programme of professional learning (Adapted from Fitzgerald et al. 2021).

School Visits: All pilot schools were offered an initial school visit between January and May 2021. The purpose of the school visit was threefold: to build relationships with key staff, including school champions and senior leadership teams; to discuss bespoke arrangements and timelines for implementation of provision mapping within individual school contexts; and to address any queries or concerns, in particular to discuss the initial staff workshop and surveys for parents and students.

Online events for pilot schools: A range of online regional and ETB level cluster meetings, communities of practice events and presentations using case study examples with participating schools, and workshops building research methods and data analysis skills for participating schools were scheduled throughout 2021-2023 to aid implementation of provision mapping.

ETBI Task Group for Inclusive Special Education: The ETBI Task Group for Inclusive Special Education, which replaced the ETBI Strategic Priority Group for Inclusive Education in 2022 serves as the nucleus of the initiative where all strategic decisions were made. Existing pathways

facilitate communication between the Task Group, Directors of Schools Forum, Principal and Deputy Principal Networks, and Inclusion Coaches (Figure 2).

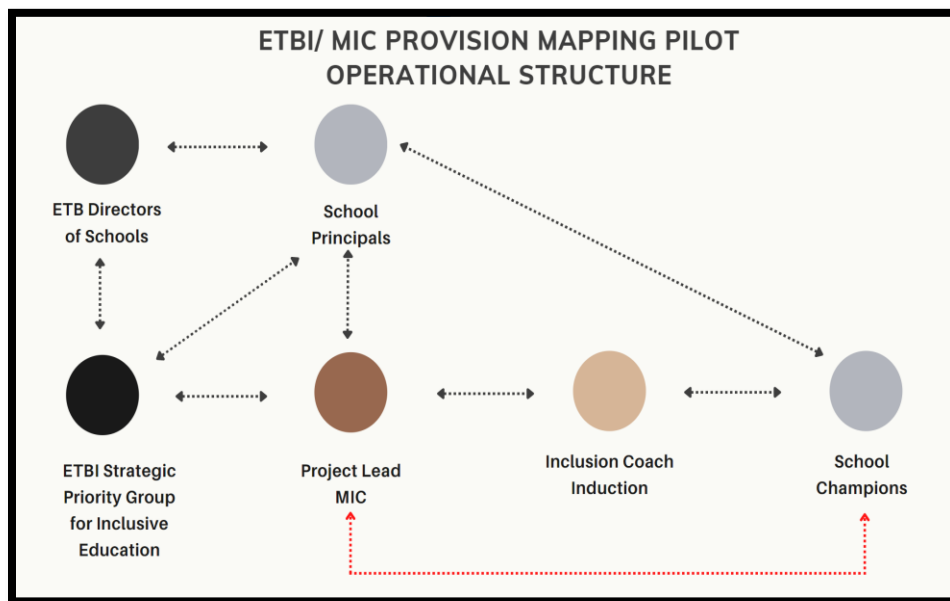


Figure 2. Systematic Communication to Support Management and Implementation of Provision Mapping

Leading Inclusive Schools: Researching the Impact of Provision Mapping in Schools

An initial ETB-level pilot of provision mapping, led by Dr Johanna Fitzgerald, Mary Immaculate College, was undertaken in LCETB in 2016 and was evaluated and published (Fitzgerald, Lynch, Martin and Cullen 2021). The publication can be accessed [here](#). Findings from the initial pilot suggest that developing collaborative approaches to school self-evaluation as it relates to inclusive special education will require a systematic approach involving development and embedding of systems to share relevant information about student and class profiles with all teachers to inform their planning for learning, teaching and assessment. Systems which allow for shared professional learning in schools, will help teachers to cascade their knowledge, skills and understanding across the school, and support in-school, situated capacity building amongst colleagues. Creation of dedicated Inclusion teams are important to lead a school-wide approach to inclusive special education, and support colleagues to implement inclusive strategies in the classroom.

The second phase of provision mapping implementation commenced in September 2020 and incorporated recommendations from the initial pilot to build greater systemic supports for a nationwide pilot across 33 schools in 14 ETB regions. [An Interim Evaluation of Provision Mapping was completed in June 2022 \(Fitzgerald 2022\)](#), which provides an overview of key strands of the process, presents findings on the impact of the project at an early stage in its

development, and identifies areas for further growth. Findings from the Interim Evaluation evidence the positive impact of provision mapping on teachers' collaborative practice in schools, and provision mapping is supporting schools to develop integrated, data-informed approaches to school improvement planning, albeit at a very early stage of development.

Data were gathered in June 2023 to inform a final evaluation of the nationwide pilot and to signpost future developments. The research asked the following questions:

1. To what extent are the aims of provision mapping being achieved?
2. What were the benefits of and challenges with participation in the initiative from the perspectives of Directors of Schools, Principals, Inclusion Coaches and School Champions?
3. How could schools, and ETBs be further supported to implement provision mapping?

A full evaluation report will be published in Summer 2024. Preliminary findings from analysis of surveys ($n=59$) with Directors of Schools, Inclusion Coaches, School Principals and School Champions involved are outlined. Themes derived from interviews with representatives from each cohort will be integrated with survey results and will inform the overall evaluation report.

Key survey results indicate that:

1. Provision mapping is having a positive impact on student learning and staff understanding, awareness and in schools and ETBs.
2. The aims of the provision mapping process are being achieved with varying success across schools.
3. Of the 45 respondents to the survey, 43 indicated that they wish to continue implementing provision mapping.
4. The most important benefits of participating in provision mapping were identified as: access to quality professional learning, affirmation of existing good practice and school-wide awareness and understanding of inclusive and special education.
5. Finding time to devote to the provision mapping process, competing for time and space among other initiatives, and motivating and engaging all staff in the process were the three most significant challenges experienced by respondents.
6. Communities of practice were identified as a powerful mechanism to support professional learning for sustained change.
7. Leadership support from Directors of Schools, Principals, Inclusion Coaches and SENCOs was identified as a critical facilitator of provision mapping.
8. Open ended survey responses indicated that the strategic leadership nature of SENCO role needs to be formally recognised and resourced in schools to develop and embed a school-wide approach to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting for students with additional needs in schools.
9. Respondents indicated that the existing research, theory and practice-informed multi-modal approach to professional learning and sustained support for implementation of provision mapping are effective and should continue.

Future Directions

A final evaluation report will be published in Summer 2024 and will outline, in detail, findings, conclusions and recommendations from the first nationwide pilot of provision mapping.

In September 2023, a third phase of provision mapping commenced across 140 schools. Each ETB has appointed a dedicated Inclusion Coordinator with one day release per week to support and lead provision mapping across the ETB. All sixteen ETBs are committed to implementing provision mapping, which is led centrally at ETBI level by the Task Group for Inclusive Special Education and the National Inclusion, Special Education and Research Coordinator. This phase will be formally evaluated to continue to build an evidence-base for provision mapping and to make research-informed refinements and enhancements to the process in an iterative and interactive way that supports contextual implementation of best practice approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting for inclusive school improvement.

Conclusion

Research findings spanning three formal research evaluations of provision mapping reveal the positive and cumulative impact of provision mapping in schools. As an innovative and developmental process, responsive to iterative cycles of feedback, review and evaluation, important signposts for enhancements to provision mapping are reflected in its current cycle across 140 schools.

To conclude, isolating what works for schools as they continue to embed provision mapping in a system of education in flux has the potential to build universal collaborative expertise across schools, and develop flexibly responsive and reflective inclusive schools. Significantly, the ETB sector has emerged as a dynamic leader in its responsiveness to policy-driven change, and has demonstrated an efficiency, strategic vision, and commitment to systemic approaches to inclusive special education and sustained approaches to teacher professional learning.

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