

***Leadership for Learning: The critical role of leadership in building schoolwide capacity to respond to diverse needs of learners.***

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This Afternoon

**What ~~works~~ helps to  
support inclusive and  
special education in  
times of change?**



Setting the  
Context:  
Changing  
Landscape

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In an era of unrelenting educational policy and curricular reform, the centrality of leadership in promoting extensive and collaboratively-mediated change across educational environments is profound (Fitzgerald 2018; Fullan, Quinn & McEachen 2018; Senge 1990).


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Inclusive and special education are problematic. They are 'wicked problems' (Armstrong 2017). Wicked problems require complex, multifaceted responses at **ALL** levels.

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Ireland's relatively recent commitment to inclusive education places it at the embryonic stages of this complex 'wicked' process.

*For example, in 2006 there were 88 ASD Special Classes.  
In 2019, there are 1,343 (NCSE 2019).*



Why is  
Inclusive and  
Special  
Education  
Problematic?

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1. Conceptually, inclusive and special education are problematic.

‘...the promotion of the delusion that being present in a school equates with being socially and educationally included, is one of the most dishonest and insidious forms of exclusion.’ (Cooper & Jacobs 2011, p. 6)

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2. Implementing systems to meet such diverse needs requires a radical rethink of our education systems and social policies. David Mitchell warns against ‘piecemeal tinkering’ (2018, p.1) and insists that a global revolutionary transformation needs to occur to address the failures within our education systems.

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3. Performativity agendas are harmful to inclusive education.

# 3. Why are performativity agendas harmful to inclusive education?

## 'The best' schools in Ireland? Give me a break

Schools that reduce themselves to the denominator of degree fodder do themselves and society a disservice

© Tue, Nov 5, 2019, 00:00

Joe O'Toole



Young people who demonstrate leadership, judgment, courage, empathy, and tolerance will be the beacons of their generation. Photograph: iStock

## Diagnosing a crisis of agency

Struggling to manage workload, ground down by the demands of data collection, or even considering leaving the profession? These complaints and many more are symptomatic of the destruction of teacher agency, finds **Tim O'Brien**

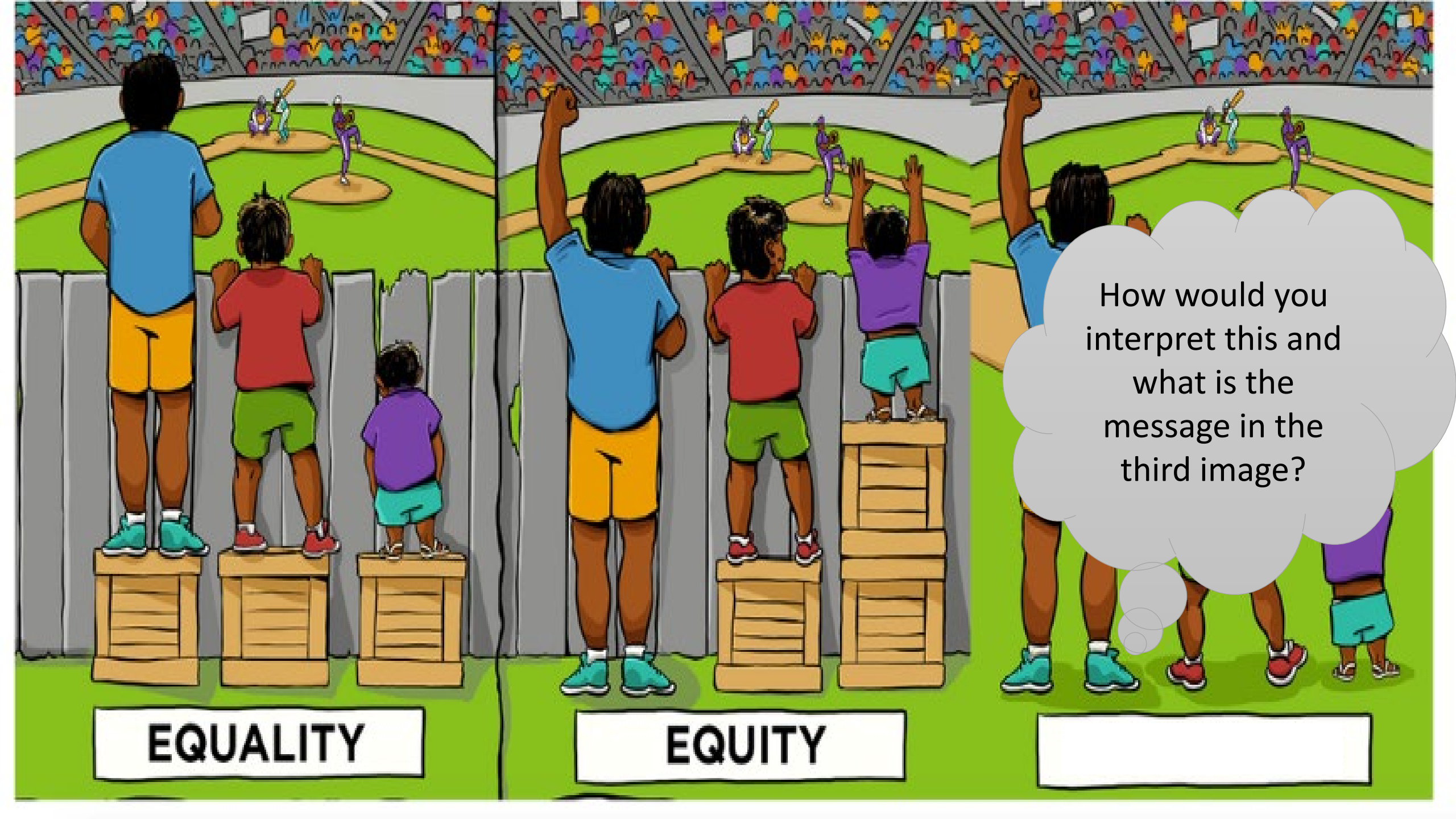


## Negative drivers of educational change:

- Engender a culture of competition, compliance and fear amongst teachers (Fullan, 2011; O'Brien 2018)
- Marginalise the most vulnerable students, many of whom are perceived to be less productive in our education system (Hornby, 2015; Mitchell, 2018).
- Is this shift in focus to output driven reform making *unproductive* students, many of whom may have learning needs, unwelcome in schools (Dyson, 2009)?







**EQUALITY**

**EQUITY**

How would you interpret this and what is the message in the third image?



**Inclusive Education for ALL:  
What are we hoping to achieve**

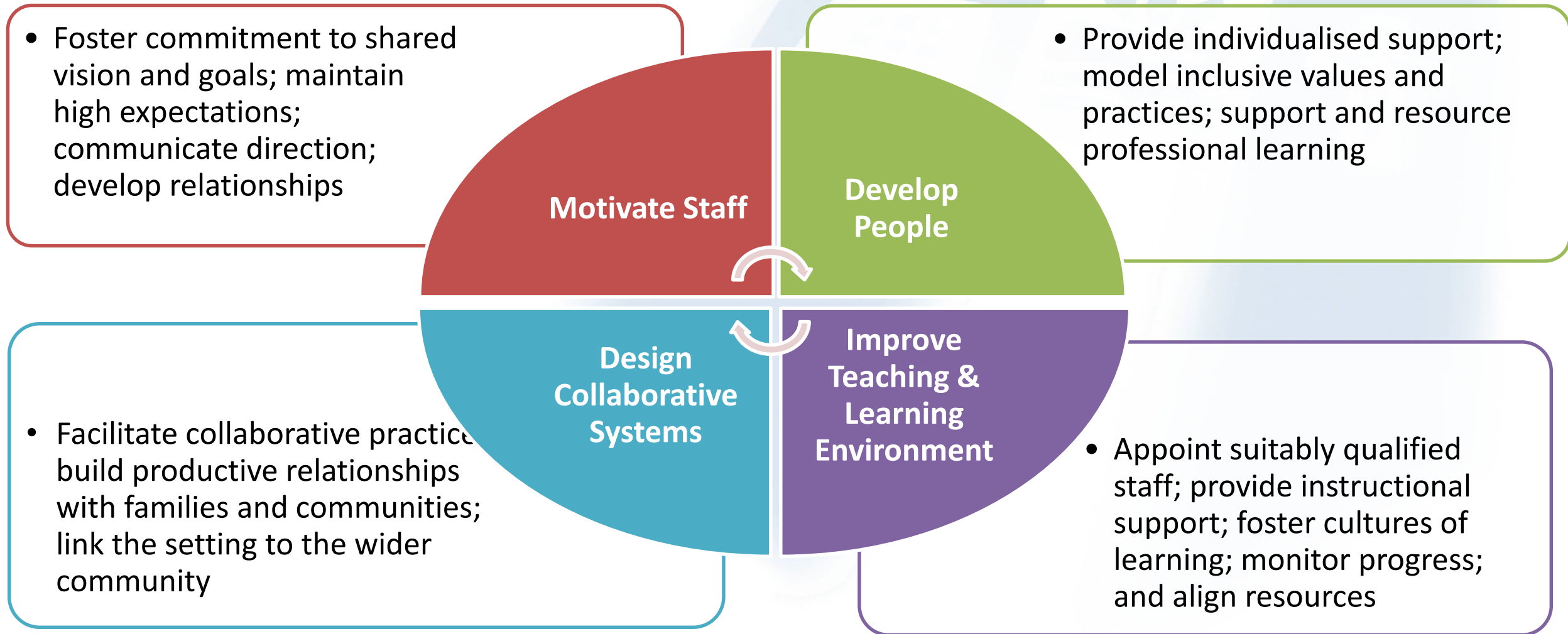
[Education] 'is about providing the best possible **instruction** for all children with SEND, in the **most appropriate setting**, throughout all stages of a child's education, with the aim of achieving the highest possible level of **inclusion** in the **community** post- school.

*(Hornby, 2015, p. 247)*



# Leadership for Inclusive Education

*(Fitzgerald 2018 adapted from Leithwood 2011)*



# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

## ***Formal (but flexible) recognition of the SENCO role.***

Creation of discrete SENCO roles with leadership posts elevates the status attributed to SEN and the SENCO, facilitates SENCO voice and creates opportunities to develop systems which promote schoolwide approaches to inclusive and special education provision.

# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

***Conceptualisation of the SENCO role. We must understand what it is they do before we seek to formalise it.***

Further research in the Irish context is needed to explore the SENCO role considering recent policy changes.

**Specialist Role Requirements**

**CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE SENCO ROLE (Fitzgerald 2017)**

**Universal Role Requirements**

Role embedded in School Leadership Team & Core SEN Team

**Implement Effective Practice:**  
*Assessment, IEPs/ SSPs, evidence-based interventions.*

**Collaborative Practice :** *Interpersonal skills, courage, advocacy, passion, commitment, reflective practice, flexibility.*

**Leadership/ Management:** *Specialist knowledge, professional learning, visionary, administration.*

*SENCO Role Unique Elements*

**Student Support:**

*Special Education Teaching, Advocacy*

**Collaborative Partnerships:**

*Students, Parents, School Personnel, External Agencies, Wider Community, Other Schools, Professional Learning Networks, Colleges of Education, Universities*

**Leadership/ Management:**

*SEN Coordination, SEN Team, Administration, Whole-School Capacity Building*

**Implement Effective Practice:** *UDL, positive behaviour interventions and support, cooperative learning & teaching.*

**Collaborative Practice:** *Interpersonal skills, co-teaching, mentoring, advising, coaching, advocacy.*

**Leadership/ Management :** *Specialist knowledge, change competence, professional learning, visionary, administration, systems development.*

**Flexible and fluid movement along continuum when school engages in School Self-Evaluation (DES Inspectorate 2016)**

**Specialist Support:** for students with complex, unique needs

**Continuum of Support:** Inclusive & Special Education

**Universal Support:** for staff and for students with common needs



# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

***Specific training in relation to special education  
AND leadership in order to support a schoolwide  
approach.***

Unless SENCOs develop their leadership skills special education will continue to reside in ‘special education’.





# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

***Support schools to use processes of School Self Evaluation (DES Inspectorate 2016) to engage in provision mapping across the Continuum of Support (NEPS 2010) to build schoolwide capacity to respond to inclusive and special education.***

When Principals assign importance (and resources), implement systems and structures promoting collaborative reflection and evaluation, it supports a universal response.

# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

***Team approaches to leadership and coordination of SEN are important to reduce the sense of isolation and disperse decision-making responsibility within the SEN team.***

A core SEN team, with suitably qualified teachers, is essential to guide evidence informed decision-making and build collective responsibility.



# Possible Ways Forward

*(Fitzgerald & Radford 2019 under review)*

***Provide access to professional learning communities for SENCOs.***

Professional development, guidance, and collegiality for SENCOs from SENCOs is needed to build and affirm SENCO competence, prevent SENCO burnout and alleviate isolation. It also builds relationship within and between schools.



MIC SENCO FORUM



# Take Home Messages

- Increasing diversity of learners in our schools challenging us to respond.
- Inclusive and special education are problematic for schools- wicked problems.
- Wicked problems require complex, multifaceted responses- i.e. a truly whole school response.
- Special education often seen as the remit of SENCO and SEN Team- this is unsustainable.
- What works to bring about a school-wide approach to learning for ALL students-
  - strong leadership;
  - sustainable professional learning across the continuum of teacher education;
  - continuum of expertise;
  - dedicated SENCO role; and
  - access to continuum of supports and resources.

## The Guest House by Rumi

'This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite  
them in.'

## A Parting Poem to Feed Your Soul!





# Thank You! Any Questions?

Feel free to contact me:

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