

President's Address
Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education
The Annual General Meeting, November 14th 2015
Teacher's Club, Parnell Square, Dublin 1

It is a real pleasure to welcome you all here to the 2015 Annual General Meeting of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE).

It has been a busy year; we have had a number of changes to the members on the central executive committee. Our esteemed colleague Ann Jackson has retired and Lisa White who served for many years on the committee, has moved on to the inspectorate. Their contributions have been phenomenal and we hope as they move into different stages of their lives that they will have health, wealth and happiness. More recent CEC members Conor Mellon and Aoife Traynor have stepped down for the year and we also thank them for their contributions to iatse.

It has been a very busy year, we continue to remain focused on providing quality seminars and a high quality annual conference. Two seminars were held; one in Donegal and one in Thurles in Tipperary. The topics covered on both occasions were 'An Overview of Current ICT and Assistive Technology used as an Educational Resource for Students with SEN', presented by Ann Jackson and 'Software and Apps for Developing Literacy/Numeracy and Communication Skills for Children with SEN' and this was presented by Damien Quinn. Both seminars were well attended and the feedback from both was excellent. I wish to extend a heartfelt thanks to both presenters for providing high quality interactive workshops. These workshops and the organisation of them can be very difficult and time consuming and I would like to thank the seminar organisers and the other members of the CEC for their continued work in this area.

The 27th annual conference was held in All Hallows in Drumcondra, as St. Patrick's College continued rebuilding and extension works. The theme of the conference was 'Our School Community – Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing'. We had a fantastic response to the abstract submission and 44 presentations, very much centered on the theme of wellbeing, occurred over the course of the two days. I would like to extend

congratulations to all the contributors for an excellent conference and particular congratulations and thanks to the conference director and the conference team for their hard work and dedication. To highlight the continuing efforts of the CEC to adequately address CPD needs and special interests, the conference director undertook to gather extensive feedback from conference delegates. This information has been very enlightening and we have been able to identify key areas for our next seminars as a result.

An ongoing challenge for the organisation is membership, which remains stable this year at just over 200. We continue to make efforts to increase awareness of IATSE and this year we have provided 4th year B.Ed students from special education modules and students on M.Ed programmes in inclusion, in some of the colleges of education with an opportunity to engage with our association via poster presentations and invitations to workshops. We will continue in our endeavours to raise awareness by linking in with final year students from all the colleges over the course of the year.

We continue in the process of upgrading our website. I want to extend a serious thanks to our website secretary for her hard work and persistence in trying to keep ahead of the issues that constantly emerge and challenge our technological skills. This year's focus will be in making the website more user friendly, more mobile friendly, on resolving the ongoing issues with online payment, and on creating an area where members can access audio/visual records of our AGM, seminars and conference presentations. It is hoped that once these issues are resolved we will see an increase in uptake of membership and in conference attendance.

We are also currently reviewing the format of our newsletter 'Update'. This will become an ezine available via the website. You may recall we announced that the position of the Update Secretary was merged with the role of the Honorary Secretary but we will have to revise this as the role of Honorary Secretary has this year been very busy.

Our journal REACH continues to provide excellent contributions to our knowledge and practice. The editorial team is made up of practicing teachers, researchers and academics who work in a voluntary capacity to support the authors and to produce the

high quality peer-reviewed articles that make up each volume of REACH. This year our editor Mary Carrig, and the majority of the editorial board have announced their retirement or their intention to retire from the REACH board. We wish to extend our sincere thanks and very best wishes to all our REACH board for their hard work and extremely high standards over a very long period. While Mary retires this coming December Anna Logan will take on the position of Editor. She and the remaining board have agreed to support the induction of a new editorial team for a smooth transition. Currently the REACH board is working on a draft strategic plan to provide the CEC and its members with a vision for the future and the development of the journal.

IATSE has represented special education at a number of important forums this year, especially and including the Teaching Council's forums on CPD. We remain actively engaged in communications with the Teaching Council and we are responding to their requirements for high standard professional development opportunities.

I wish to acknowledge the continued support of the Special Education Support Service and the staff of St. Patrick's College Special Education Department who continue to provide us with facilities and advice.

The CEC committee has had much discussion about the role of IATSE in mainstream education today and we are challenged by the question; 'is our title appropriate for the society we live in and the changing landscape of special and inclusive education?' This debate, like much in education, reflects the values placed on key words and their meanings and interpretations. We have debated whether the word 'special' should be replaced by 'inclusive' or whether all special education is inherently 'inclusive' and therefore implies a best practice inclusive approach. Debating 'special education' will continue to be to the forefront of this organisation because we have a passionate concern for the quality of provision for all pupils with learning disabilities and difficulties. Our aim is, and always has been since 1969; to provide collegial support to teachers working with pupils with special educational needs, to provide a forum for networking, and to access high quality continuing professional development. As the needs of teachers in special education and its landscape changes, so must the organisation, learn to adapt faster and more efficiently. The CEC consists of active

teachers with knowledge, understanding and open mindedness, with strong visions for the future of teaching and learning in special education in Ireland. They hold as essential that we remain focused on supporting teachers in curriculum and assessment, pedagogy, classroom and school management, resources and therapies relating to special education. We acknowledge we need to be more technically savvy; we need to offer access to greater numbers of teachers around the island of Ireland. Forums today are not just local meetings in local halls but can be virtual and blended in nature. One particular cohort of teachers that requires our attention is Secondary teachers and the year ahead will see IATSE reach out and provide support to them in our regional seminars.

Constitutionally the CEC is required to consist of thirteen members. I would like to thank the officers and members of the CEC: Rosemary Fahy, Muriel Weekes, Jerry Pierce, Bernie Smyth, Aidín NíMhaonaigh, Isobel Ryan, Colin McElroy, Aisling Hale, Julie Shields and Katie O'Dowd. It is their continued support and dedication to IATSE that has maintained this association's critical place in supporting teachers in special education in Ireland. I also would like to welcome and thank our member Michael Quinn for agreeing to join the CEC. There is currently a vacancy on the CEC and I welcome contact from any member who would like to volunteer their time and skills to supporting the association.

Thank you

Carol-Ann O'Síoráin