

**O'Connell, Helena, 2009, *Teachers' Perceptions of Special Needs Education in Post-Primary Schools*.**

## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

There have been many changes in the area of special needs education in Ireland over the past decade with significant developments in departmental policy and legislation. The most notable development has been the *Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004*. This Act brings with it huge challenges for teachers and all those involved in education. This writer has undertaken a study to explore teachers' perceptions of special needs education in four post-primary schools in the south of Ireland. This dissertation was focused on determining teachers' attitudes to current practice in relation to children with Special Educational Needs.

The writer has critically evaluated the literature in relation to special needs education. Issues, which were considered, were inclusion and its implementation. Other issues discussed were teachers' training, including both pre-service and in-service, whole-school policies in relation to special needs education and the effectiveness of learning support. Further issues that were examined were school resources and teachers' awareness in relation to legislation and departmental literature concerning the area of special needs education. Some of the challenges associated with special needs education were also discussed.

The writer used both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as research tools. The main conclusions are that: the majority of teachers perceive that inclusion is a positive development in Irish schools; there is a lack of awareness of the contents of both the EPSEN Act 2004 and indeed, the *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines 2007* and most of the teachers surveyed believe that they did not receive adequate pre-service training in special needs.