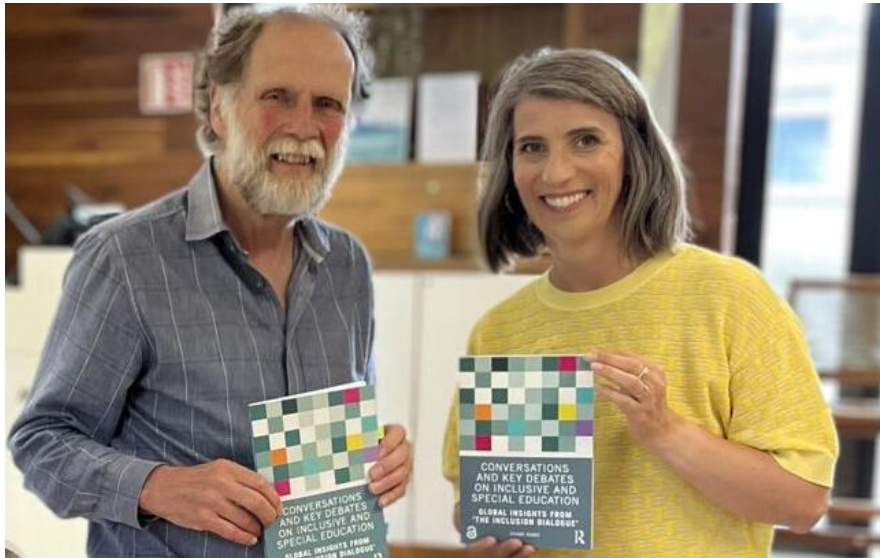




Influencing and Supporting Policy



In a different class

Through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ireland has made a formal commitment to inclusive education. Yet the system still contains a substantial divide between mainstream education, special classes and special schools. Dr Joanne Banks' work examines the consequences of that divide and asks whether increasing special provision is always the right answer.

Her policy advisory work includes sitting on the steering group reviewing the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act,

and has engaged with the education Inspectorate on assessment for children and young people with SEN.

The National Council for Special Education has been an important policy and research partner. She also works with Inclusion Ireland and the wider Inclusive Education Alliance, bringing together disabled people's organisations, advocacy groups, academics and education leaders.

She has also taken board roles in ChildVision and AHEAD.

Dr Joanne Banks

SCHOOL

School of Education

PARTNER AGENCIES

AHEAD ChildVision National Council for Special Education Inclusive Education Alliance NEPS ESRI

FUNDERS:

NEPS Research Ireland/IRC Quality and Qualifications Ireland ERASMUS+

SUBJECT AREAS

Inclusive Education Sociology of Education Special Education Universal Design for Learning Second-chance Education Educational Administration and Policy Educational Inequality

This work showcases how Trinity is changing public attitudes to a societal issue through multiple approaches, such as evidence-informed programmes, deliberative processes and media engagement.

Prepared by Trinity Civic Engagement for Societal Impact, September 2026



Inclusive Education over Parallel Provision

The policy issue, acutely felt by families where a child has additional education needs, is whether there is an appropriate school place available. Within that cohort, there is a strong lobby for separate special school provision. Dr Banks' work attempts to reset the policy debate away from the number of 'places' to what kind of education that place represents, i.e. from capacity issues to system design.

Dr Banks has served on the Steering Group for the review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, placing her research directly alongside the process of considering how Ireland's legislative framework should evolve. She has also been an expert for UNESCO's Inclusive Policy Lab and a member of the scientific advisory group for Growing Up in Ireland.

Resource Allocation in Inclusive Education

Fundamental to public education policy is the appropriate allocation of resources. The Department of Education reports that expenditure on special education increased from €1.9 billion in 2019 to €2.9 billion in 2025, with an expected €3 billion in 2026.

Dr Banks' research has examined Ireland's special-needs funding arrangements. The research found that the existing funding system broadly targeted pupils with special educational needs, but argued that a future model should allow for greater differentiation, particularly in disadvantaged schools. It also called for greater attention to outcomes and

accountability when additional resources are allocated. She has argued that separate funding streams for mainstream and special education can inadvertently reproduce a distinction between 'ordinary' education and 'special' education. In other words, the financing system itself can influence how schools understand disability and inclusion.

Engaging a global community of inclusive education experts

Dr Banks' Inclusion Dialogue podcast and associated books have sought to bring international ideas around inclusive education to a wider education audience including policy makers, teachers and teacher educators, parents and students themselves. Through these informal interviews with global academics on the topic of special and inclusive education, Dr Banks has sought to bridge the gap between what policy states and what is schools operating in Ireland today are actually equipped to do.

Inclusive Education Alliance

Dr Banks has been involved in the Inclusive Education Alliance, a network bringing together disability organisations, advocacy groups, academics and education leaders. The Alliance's work reflects a moving away from a system organised primarily around separate special provision towards one in which children can attend their local school and participate meaningfully in mainstream education.

Outputs

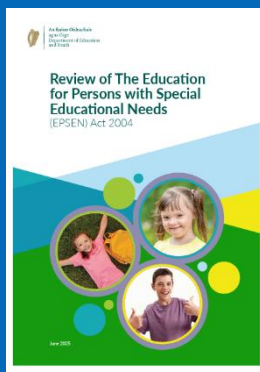


Inclusion Dialogue Podcast (2021, 2023, 2025)

Dr Banks has released three podcast series since 2021 using interviews with leading international experts on how we can implement inclusive education and teach to diversity in schools around the world.

Conversations and key debates on inclusive and special education (2023 and 2025)

These books, based on the Inclusion Dialogue podcast series, provide a comprehensive overview of the current tensions and conceptual understandings in the of inclusive and special education. It delves further into diverse viewpoints around special education, and how mainstream education includes and excludes students



Review of The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 (2025)

Dr Banks was a member of the Steering Group for this review of the EPSEN Act, a process led by the Dept of Education and Youth to ensure that the legislation remained fit for purpose.

Appearance at Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters (2024)

Dr Banks appeared, along with Derval McDonagh, Joe Travers and Tamara Byrne, in front of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters to address the topic of 'An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society'.





Dr Joanne Banks is a lecturer, researcher, and podcaster in inclusive education at the School of Education. Recognised internationally as a leading authority in the field, she has over 80 peer-reviewed publications and serves in academic advisory roles that influence Irish education policy. Her research spans inclusive education and educational inequality, with a particular focus on special and inclusive education policy and practice, school exclusion, and student diversity. Dr Banks' work not only advances academic understanding but also actively contributes to the development of more equitable educational and workplace practices both in Ireland and internationally.

For More Information

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