

The Role of the Environment in Supporting Self-Regulation in a Special Class Setting in Ireland

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Abstract

Stemming from Ireland's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([CRPD], United Nations, 2006), Ireland committed to upholding the principles of inclusive education, including developing environments that are suitable for autistic people. For autistic children, special classes are designed to provide environmental and academic support, whereby the environment of the mainstream setting can cause significant dysregulation (National Council for Special Education [NCSE], 2024). Guided by a neuroaffirmative lens, the current study adopted a case study design to explore environmental supports for self-regulation within a special class setting in Ireland. Participants included six autistic children, their class teacher and parents. Qualitative results are presented, including results from a Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms (Middletown Centre for Autism, n.d.) and a Positive Sensory Profile (Positive About Autism, n.d.) for each child. Findings from a thematic analysis of interviews with the class teacher and parents are further explored. The implications of these findings are related to Ireland's ratification of the CRPD and the role of special classes in the Irish education system.

Keywords: autism; environment; neuroaffirmative; self-regulation; primary education