

# iatse *Update*

Autumn Update

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## IATSE Annual Conference 2011

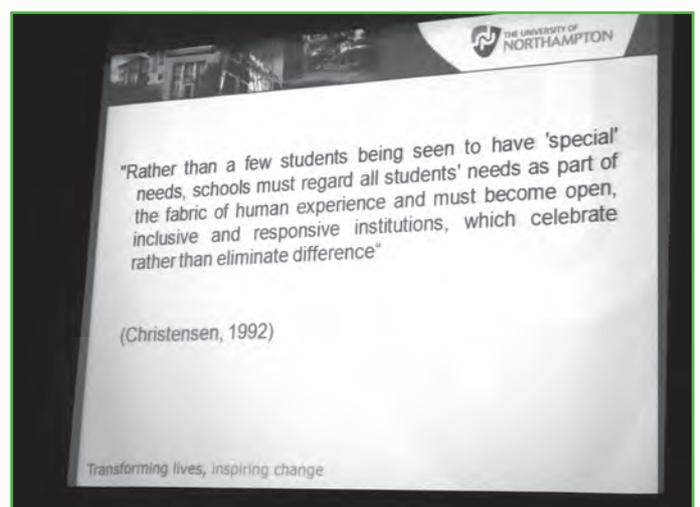
The 23rd Annual conference of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education was held in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra on the 9th, 10th and 11th June. We had a diverse, stimulating conference with a range of topics that enabled teachers and other professionals working in the field to learn, develop their skills and network with colleagues.



The conference was opened by Maureen Costello, Director of NEPS. The Keynote address was delivered by Philip Garner, Professor of Education at the University of Northampton who examined the current agenda for change in special education across a range of national settings. His presentation addressed the theme of this year's conference: "Teaching and Learning- Forging Ahead".



As ever, we had an international dimension to our conference and we would like to thank the delegates and presenters who joined us from abroad. On the Friday night of conference the CEC hosted a reception in the beautiful James Joyce Centre in North Great Georges Street. Delegates had the opportunity to socialise with a glass of wine while listening to a superb choir!



# Free Downloadable Tools to Support Accessibility

We have previously looked at the increasing convergence of accessible tools in mainstream devices and operating systems. We saw in the last issue how Apple Mac and Windows operating systems offer built-in accessibility features. In this issue we look at other tools to support diverse learners, which are available free on the Internet. There are many such free tools to support accessibility for our students. I would highly recommend the Scottish Regional Support Centre which runs an authoritative one-stop shop for this purpose at [www.eduapps.org](http://www.eduapps.org) They offer these free collections:

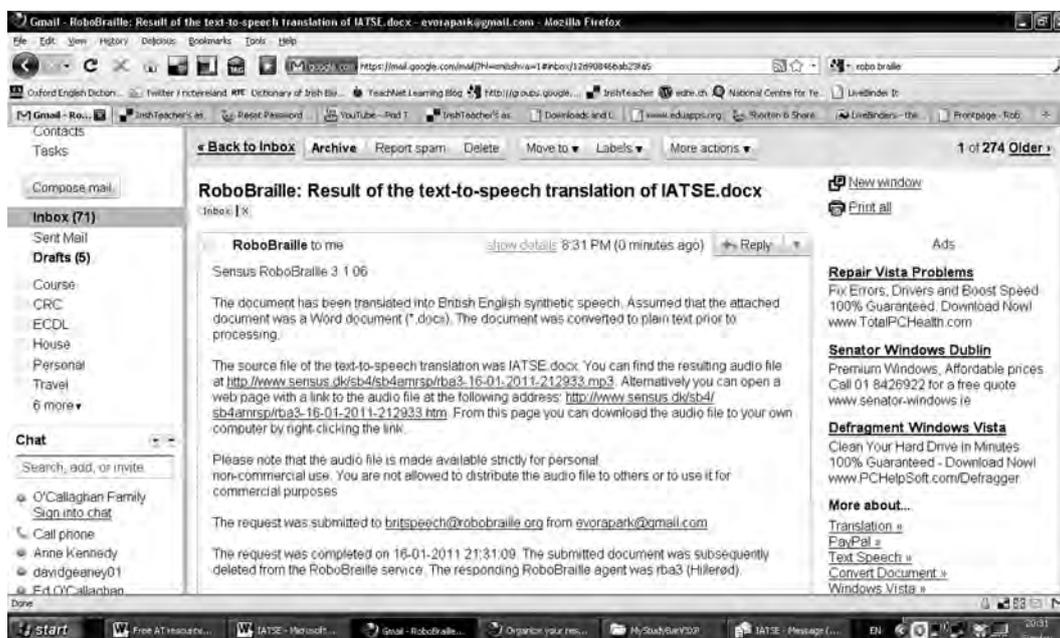
1. **AccessApps** consists of over 60 open source and freeware Windows applications which run from a USB stick. There are apps to help you change the background colour of your computer screen to make things easier to read, or you can listen to words and sentences read back as you type. There are many more apps including typing tutors and free text to MP3 converters
2. **TeachApps** offers a host of valuable resources to support teachers in everyday learning and teaching.
3. **LearnApps** is a collection of free software that would suit students in mainstream education
4. **My Study Bar** is a set of tools designed to support learners with reading and writing, including those with Dyslexia. Clicking on a Topic displays a drop-down menu of applications

These collections can be transferred to a USB stick and the student can run the applications from the memory stick, no matter which computer he is working on. There are lots of video tutorials on [www.eduapps.org](http://www.eduapps.org) which show how to transfer to USB and to get the most out of the collections. It is advisable to download the core suite as this is a smaller download and contains the most popular programs.

We just have space to highlight another free tool, RoboBraille, which is an award-winning (BETT 2010) free online tool <http://www.robobraille.org> Robobraille is an e-mail service which can convert digital text documents into either Braille or audio files. It is quick and easy to use: You simply send an e-mail with an attached text document to RoboBraille. Shortly after, you will receive the document back from RoboBraille in the specified format - an audio file, for example. This is an example email reply from RoboBraille with conversion to MP3 of this document - Time taken: around 90 seconds

In addition to users of Braille, this would be great for students who find it difficult to read – they can send the email – receive the MP3 (audio) file back and then they can read along with the text. It would also be excellent for students who want to improve their pronunciation of English as an additional language or in studying foreign languages. There are many more highly-regarded tools available online. To read more about them, and about the features mentioned in the last issue please visit our online **livebinder** at <http://bit.ly/assistive3>.





## Date For Your Diary: IATSE AGM 2011

The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education will take place in The Teachers' Club, Parnell Square on Saturday, November 19th, 2011 at 10.30am.

## IATSE Annual Award 2011/2012

IATSE has in recent years, established an annual award to give recognition to good practice in Irish schools in the area of Special Education. All practising teachers involved in Special Education are eligible to apply. This also includes teachers of mainstream classes where pupils with Special Needs are included.

Submissions may describe:

- A piece of work carried out with a particular pupil/group/class
- A programme of staff development established e.g. school based induction programme for new staff i.e. Teachers, SNAs
- A curricular programme or innovation

A submission may be in the form of a case study/project which would describe the practical application,

methodologies and outcomes of the innovation. It may also take the form of a narrative through which the story is told. It should be between 1,000 and 3,000 words in length. Submissions may be made by an individual or group of teachers. **Up to four prizes of €500 each will be awarded each year.** Only one award will be made for each winning submission.

### Adjudication

Winning submissions will be selected by a panel of adjudicators, comprising members of the IATSE CEC, representatives and members selected from a panel of readers. The CEC of IATSE will be the final arbiter in relation to the award.

Applications should be made to Annual Award, IATSE, Drumcondra Education Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Closing date for submissions is March 31st 2012.

# St Joseph's Fairview

St. Joseph's Primary and Secondary schools, Fairview are part of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust network. Some thirteen years ago the primary school Board of Management, under the guidance of Mr. Pádraig Ó Fainín, principal, set up one of the first Asperger Syndrome Units in a mainstream primary school. In June 2010 the first pupil with this particular syndrome sat his Leaving Certificate examination, having completed five years in St Joseph's primary and six years in our secondary. This student is currently studying at third level, and another who graduated this year has obtained a place in Trinity College Dublin on the TAP (Trinity Access) programme. Next year he will start a science degree there.

At present there are 24 boys who attend the ASD unit which allows for 4 full-time Resource teachers and some 11 full-time SNAs. There are another six part-time Resource and Learning Support teachers. There are also other boys who present with less severe forms of the syndrome and these boys – four or five in number – can survive without the help of an SNA and are mainstreamed for all classes and very rarely attend the unit.

Of the 24 who attend the unit, only 2 require one-to-one tuition due to the severity of their disability. People with Asperger syndrome have problems, varying in degree and intensity, in areas of social interaction and communication, but have normal intelligence and verbal skills. These two boys would have considerable problems in these areas and really cannot be mainstreamed. However, they attend a few classes per week when adequate support and preparation are in place. We also use "reverse inclusion" on occasions with these boys where we bring selected students from their year into class to interact with them. Indeed, one of these boys sat his Junior Certificate in five subjects this year. This was a huge success for him, his parents and for the school.

Most of the other 22 students attend mainstream classes with the help of SNAs in most cases. All the boys at Senior Cycle are doing six subjects while the boys at Junior Cycle are doing between 5 and 8 subjects depending on ability. Particular emphasis is placed on SPHE when these boys have class in the AS unit, that is, during those subjects which they are not taking, like Irish, European Language Classes or Business Studies. The books and programmes of Dr. Tony Atwood, the Australian Clinical Psychologist who specialises in the clinical treatment of Asperger Syndrome, have been found particularly useful and practical in reducing anxiety and anger in our pupils.

As far as possible, a physical education programme - which comprises light exercises like rolling and various ball games - is followed to help improve the boys' gross motor skills. Some of the boys are being coached in tennis at Westwood Gym which is very close to the school. Rolling helps the person with Asperger's to gain a sense of their body – also called the proprioceptive or kinaesthetic sense. In this regard the Occupational Therapist from Beechpark Autism Services has been extremely helpful in guiding the teachers over the last number of years. Needless to say, this same service provides Speech and Language Therapy as well as psychological, social and psychiatric support to the boys.

In conclusion, the growth in numbers of the boys attending our Asperger Unit has been a tribute to its success. The Department of Education and Skills has approved the building of a new purpose-built wing for a new Unit which will comprise of three classrooms, kitchen and sensory room. That two young men are now successful students at third level is surely another testimony to the commitment of parents, teachers and SNAs over the last thirteen years.

*(Tim Quinlan, Resource Teacher)*

## Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland

Would you like to write an article or describe a piece of research or good practice relating to the area of special education?

The Irish Association for Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) publishes REACH journal twice yearly. As a resource for teachers of pupils with special educational needs and other professionals, its articles reflect research findings, good practice and international perspectives. The editor welcomes articles relating to the education of children with special educational needs in all settings. If you are interested in publishing in REACH journal please contact the editor at [reacheditor@iatse.ie](mailto:reacheditor@iatse.ie)