



INCLUSION IRELAND

**A submission to the Department of Education and Skills:
The role of the new Inclusion Support Service.**

March 2015

This document is in font 14 Verdana in line with Inclusion Ireland plain English guidelines.

Introduction

Inclusion Ireland is the national organisation for people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ireland. Our core focus is on the realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Part of Inclusion Irelands work is to work with local disability family support groups through the 'Connect Family Network'. We regularly consult with 140 local family groups that support people with a disability. This work is done with the support of Irish Autism Action and Down Syndrome Ireland. A core aim of this work is to allow the voice of families who experience disability services to have a voice into policy development.

This submission is informed by the opinion of families who have a person with a disability in the Irish education system.

Inclusion Support Service (ISS) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The new Inclusion Support Service is a welcome development. Schools will no longer have to go to numerous agencies to support a young person with a disability in school. In this regard, it would be more helpful if NEPS and the ISS were merged and not separate bodies.

The current proposal is for the ISS to come under the control of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) but NEPS will not. For a truly coherent approach to supporting children with a

disability in schools it would make sense for NEPS and the ISS to be one body.

There are advantages to merging NEPS and the ISS.

- Cost saving may be made on administration and single location regional and local offices.
- Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO's) should also be located in the same offices as the ISS. This action would create a one stop shop for educational supports for young people with a disability.
- Any administrative and premises' savings could be invested in front line services for children such as hiring behavior support specialists and educators.

A new ISS: outreach

As noted for effectiveness the ISS and NEPS should be one entity. In addition, the ISS should have other professionals within its membership. The ISS should be staffed to provide an outreach service in the case of school placements breaking down or preventing such situations.

Membership of outreach teams should include NEPS psychologists, behaviour analysts and teachers with a master's degree in the area of special education.

In the United Kingdom the value of speech and language therapy is seen as fundamental to the education of young people with a disability. Addressing speech and language impairments is normally regarded as an education provision.

There would be great benefit to children if the ISS had speech therapists in any outreach teams either directly employed or through interagency working.

Interagency alliances

To be fully effective the ISS must form very close alliances with a number of other agencies. Interagency working with the local disability network team is critical.

Many children with disabilities require health therapies to assist them to reach their fullest potential. This can include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, etc. Health and education must work closely to ensure their services benefit children to the maximum. Therapists, teachers and the ISS must work together to provide advice and goals for a child's individual education plan (IEP).

"The psychologist made recommendations for the teacher when working with my son. He has no IEP and the recommendations were ignored. My son is unable to cope in his class anymore".

"The teacher wanted exercises to help with my sons pencil grip. We are still on a waiting list for occupational therapy"

Access to therapy inputs is difficult due to a lack of therapists. Budget 2014 provided for 80 therapy posts and Budget 2015 provides for 120 therapy posts. To ensure there are enough therapists for the ISS to work with, it is recommended that this

level of recruitment is continued for the next 3 budgets at least.

The Middletown Centre for Autism is funded equally by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills does not fully utilise the services of the Middletown Centre. This service should be used for more specific training and support to individual schools, parents and children to support the placement of children with autism.

The ISS must also form close links with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Many children with a disability also experience a mental health difficulty in their lives. To support the young person in their life and school placement the intervention of CAMHS is essential. Parents have reported on many occasions that it is very difficult to engage CAMHS. The young person can be left in a vulnerable state which can result in a school placement breaking down.

“My child has developed severe anxiety but we cannot access CAMHS. The child has panic attacks when it comes to school time and has missed so many days at school. The principal blames me and the education welfare officer screamed at me that they will bring me to court”.

Individual education plans (IEP's)

IEP's are in place for most children with a disability in schools. However, as the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 has not been commenced they are not mandatory. The EPSEN Act must be fully enacted to ensure all children have access to an IEP as appropriate.

In the absence of the EPSEN Act the DES must issue a circular re-affirming that all children with a disability have a coherent plan with goals to work towards. There is provision for various plans in the reform of additional teaching resources and Circular 0030/2014 on SNA's. One coherent IEP would be of greater benefit to children.

The DES or ISS must redraw attention to 'Guidelines on the Individual Educational Plan Process'. There is some very good practice in schools but also some poor practice according to parents in relation to the quality or absence of IEP's.

Some schools will not include the recommendations of a speech and language therapist in the IEP. Other IEP's include behavior elements that the parent must sign up to including physical restraint.

"When I refused to sign an IEP and behavior plan that involved using 'physical prone restraint' my child had to leave the school. There was no negotiating".

Enrolment legislation

At present schools can place any priority criteria on enrolment that they wish. The NCSE have noted in the past that many schools place 'soft barriers' to the enrolment of children with a disability.

Enrolment legislation must be passed through the Oireachtas and enacted. This legislation must allow the ISS or NCSE to direct a school to enrol a child with a disability or open a special class. It must also compel the NCSE to provide the required resources to support this school placement.

Communication

The NCSE must effectively communicate the functions of the ISS to all stakeholders. This includes parents, teachers, school Boards of Management, SNA's, students, network disability teams and SENO's.

Communication of the role of the ISS can be done through circulars, social media, information seminars and leaflets.

Communication must include how to access the ISS, who can access the ISS, what the ISS does, etc.

Training

At present there is some excellent training for teachers through the Special Education Support Service. However, it is not widespread enough nor is it available to SNA's. When the ISS

take over this remit, training must be more accessible and made available to SNA staff in schools.

Training must be made widely available in the implementation of positive behaviour support plans.

There is much anecdotal evidence of students being secluded or restrained in schools. The vast majority of schools do not have any training in the use of crisis management and prevention. In the absence of such training students and school staff are at risk. This type of training must be provided as a matter of urgency.

The DES or NCSE must also issue policy on the use of crisis management systems. The NCSE noted the absence of such guidance in 2012. In its absence children have been inappropriately restrained and secluded in schools.

“I collected my child from school. His arms were black and blue where he had been held down by staff. The staff wouldn’t tell me what happened. My son was crying that three people held him down. My son never had challenging behaviour before this. This happened two years ago and I am still traumatised”.

Main recommendations

- NEPS and the ISS should be integrated into one organisation.

- Any savings from NEPS, ISS and NCSE sharing offices and administrative support should be invested in front line services/staff.
- The ISS must be adequately staffed to provide outreach services to children, schools and parents.
- The ISS must be measured in some way to ensure its effectiveness.
- ISS must forge interagency working arrangements with network disability teams, CAMHS, etc
- Currently, the DES does not fully utilise the Middletown Centre for Autism. The ISS must take full advantage of the expertise of the Middletown Centre.
- The ISS must seek the full implementation of the EPSEN Act.
- In the absence of the EPSEN Act all children must be able to avail of an IEP. The IEP must include the input of health therapists where needed.
- The HSE must continue its current rate of therapy staff recruitment for at least 3 years (2016-2018).
- Legislation that is before the Oireachtas (Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill) must be passed. This must provide for the ISS or NCSE to direct a school to enroll a child with a disability or open a special class and put in place the resources necessary.
- There must be a comprehensive communication plan to inform all stakeholders about the ISS.

- Training from the ISS must be available to both teachers and SNA's.
- Seclusion and restraint is totally unregulated in Irish schools at present. The NCSE or DES or ISS must provide guidelines or policy in this area without delay and monitor compliance.
- The ISS must deliver training on positive behavior strategies and on managing crisis situations to all front line school staff.