



**INCLUSION IRELAND**

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

# **Pre-Budget Submission 2018**

**Department of Education & Skills**

**August 2017**

**This document is written in font 12 Verdana in line with Inclusion Ireland plain English guidelines.**

## **1. About Inclusion Ireland**

Established in 1961, Inclusion Ireland is a national, rights based advocacy organisation that works to promote the rights of people with an intellectual disability.

Inclusion Ireland uses a human rights-based approach to its work. This recognises persons with an intellectual disability as rights holders with entitlements, and corresponding duty bearers and their obligations. Inclusion Ireland seeks to strengthen the capacities of persons with an intellectual disability to make their claims and of duty bearers to meet their obligations.

The vision of Inclusion Ireland is that of people with an intellectual disability living and participating in the community with equal rights as citizens, to live the life of their choice to their fullest potential. Inclusion Ireland's work is underpinned by the values of dignity, inclusion, social justice, democracy and autonomy.

## **2. Introduction**

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to:

- Eliminate any persisting discrimination on the nine grounds,
- Equality of opportunity,
- Supporting persons with disabilities in maximising their potential,
- Removing barriers which impact on access to services, education, work or healthcare.

Inclusion Ireland believes that persons with disabilities should live self-determined lives and Budget 2018 provides an opportunity to reform traditional services and systems, to create a more equal & just society, to encourage participation and decision-making, and to develop pathways into a life in the community.

### **2.1 Public Sector Duty**

Government Departments are required to have regard to the public sector duty in all activities as provided for by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

Inclusion Ireland would encourage the Department to ensure that all decisions made for Budget 2018 are in line with this duty by being

proactive in promoting equality, ensuring human rights are realised and eliminating discrimination.

In its most recent strategy statement, the Department says that “ensuring access to an equitable system is a driving force throughout the Department’s work.”

Of importance in fulfilling its public sector duty, more must be done to improve the accessibility of services and information. Information should be in a minimum of Plain English and ideally in easy-to-read and other accessible formats.

## **2.2 Consultation**

In preparing our pre-budget submission Inclusion Ireland conducted regional focus groups across Ireland, in Cork, Donegal, Sligo and Tullamore as well as an on-line survey. Men and women with disabilities, family supporters and people employed in disability-related services took part.

## **3. Priorities for Budget 2018**

### **3.1 Primary Education & Early Years**

Educational attainment is significantly lower for people with disabilities. 16% finished school at primary level (compared to 5% of the general population); 22% finished at secondary level (compared to 15% of the general population). People with disabilities are also much less likely to attend further education, with only 25% having completed third level education compared to 39% of the population overall.

Children and young people with disabilities experience many barriers to education. Supports are required at primary, secondary and third level to ensure that young people with disabilities receive an inclusive education and are supported to reach their full potential.

There are 118, 326 children in supersized classes representing around one in four primary school children. While progress has been made on reducing the pupil-teacher ratio slightly, the number of children in classes of more than 30 has increased in recent years. Worryingly, there are 286 pupils in a class of more than 40 children.

### **3.2 Educational Supports**

The Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004 is 13 years old and remains largely not commenced. 'A Program for Partnership Government' commits to introducing elements of the Act on a non-statutory basis. This means a child has no right to an assessment or individual education plan. A parent has no right to appeal any decision they believe is wrong.

The Department of Education and Skills is introducing a new model of resource teaching supports in September 2017. A historical cut of 15% exists to resource teaching hours. Children will have to access a pool of resources that is lower than it should be. In addition, there is no independent appeal for parents if they believe their child is not accessing an appropriate amount of resource teaching.

Worryingly, in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, there is no mention of either the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 or individual education plans. Failure to develop this important measure on either a statutory basis or as a matter of policy, represents a betrayal of children with intellectual disabilities and a decision to resource this measure must be made in Budget 2018.

At present, where a teacher is appointed to an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class, training by the Special Education Support Service is given on the job as opposed to beforehand and the training may take place over a period of months. It would benefit children if the training were to be improved and given prior to the teacher taking over the ASD class, to ensure teachers fully understand the needs of students with autism.

The school environment challenges children to communicate with a range of people in a variety of contexts during the school day and provides the optimum context for developing social language skills. Best educational practice internationally says that since communication is so fundamental in education, addressing speech and language impairment should normally be recorded as special educational provision unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so.

### **3.3 Educational Transitions**

Supporting people with disabilities at key transition points, such as when they are leaving school is critical. Currently, there is no career guidance in special schools for people with disabilities, making it very difficult for

those who may wish to go on to 3rd level education or gain employment to know what to do or how to do it.

Secondary school students with disabilities should also be given the opportunity to participate in Transition Year. From our advocacy work, we are familiar with many cases where children are not allowed into mainstream transition year programmes, and many special schools do not even have the year as an option.

Transition year is often where young people get their first opportunity to get work experience. Having a transitional programme that begins in Transition Year would make it easier to support the individual and highlight the areas in which they need supports and services to manage well.

### **3.4 Further Education**

Currently, many young people with disabilities leaving school must take a place in HSE day services that same year or risk losing the funding for that place. If a young person chooses to follow the mainstream route into further education, training or employment and it doesn't work out there is no HSE option open to them as they are no longer a school leaver. This system actively discourages people who wish to enter mainstream further education because if they try and it does not work well for them, they will not get any place in a day service.

An alternative would be to allow young people to defer taking a place in day services for a year or two and support young people to access mainstream further education, training, employment or employment activation supports after leaving school.

## **During Inclusion Ireland Consultation for Budget 2018, we received the following feedback on education**

*"Mainstream Schools should be required to integrate children more and be more accepting and trained."*

*"A child with a disability is treated as a problem to be removed by resource or SNA throughout the day as teachers can't cope with class size."*

*"Children are missing out due to the failure to commence EPSEN. Reduced class sizes will help every child in Irish schools."*

*"Everyone needs an education plan"*

*"(Parents are) beside themselves with worry on top of all the stresses they already have, parents are white knuckling it through life."*

## **Inclusion Ireland asks for Budget 2018 on education**

- Make provision to ensure no child is in a class of more than 30 pupils,
- Publish a plan to commence the EPSEN Act 2004,
- In the short term, ensure any child with education support needs has an individual education plan,
- Restore the historical 15% cut to resource hours at the introduction of the new model
- Introduce an independent appeal for parents in the new model of resource allocation as recommended by the National Council for Special Education,
- Career guidance should be made available and the option of taking part in transition year should be available to students in special schools,
- Young people with disabilities leaving school should be permitted to defer a place in a HSE day service in order to pursue mainstream further education options.

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