



**INCLUSION IRELAND**

**Submission to the National Council for Special Education on a new model for the allocation of resource teaching hours**

## Introduction

Inclusion Ireland is the national organisation advocating for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. Established in 1961, our vision is of a society where people with intellectual disabilities live and participate in the community with equal rights as citizens. Our focus is on the core principles and values expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the invitation from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to make a submission, on the proposal for a new model for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools.

Inclusion Ireland has consistently called for the full implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004. The full implementation of EPSEN will allow for children to access supports in their local schools based upon their assessed needs. The roll out of individual education plans under EPSEN will address many of the issues that exist within the current system of allocating resource teaching hours.

## Summary of recommendations

The government must publish a plan to implement the EPSEN Act 2004.

Until such a time as the EPSEN Act 2004 is implemented, all children that require educational supports should be able to access an individual education plan (IEP).

All resource hours must be based upon assessed need. The Department of Education must move from the model of allocating resource hours based on diagnosis. The current model views some children as a group and not individuals. Children with a similar diagnosis often have quite different needs.

Children without a formal diagnosis should be able to access the appropriate support based upon need.

The Department of Education and the NCSE must consult fully with people and relevant advocacy groups on policy formation. People must be informed of new policy formation that directly affects them.

There is much information already in the education environment. This information should be used by the Department of Education for building the educational profile of a school and allocating resources.

Schools must enrol a child with SEN who applies for a place in the school. Where a child is not permitted to enrol or a special class is not opened to accommodate a child the SENO must be able to direct a school to do so. The SENO should then provide the required resources.

The experience and skills of teachers is the most critical factor in recognising, assessing and educating children with SEN. Inclusion Ireland believes it is important that resource teachers have completed substantial additional training in special education. Special education training must form part of the continuing professional development of all teachers.

## Consultation

Inclusion Ireland took part in a consultation meeting with the NCSE on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013. This meeting was to discuss the proposal for a new model for allocating resource teaching hours in schools. At this meeting a representative from 7/8 relevant organisations had less than two hours to express their combined views. This is a very limited consultation on such an important issue.

The NCSE has established a working group to develop the policy on the new model of allocating resource teaching hours. Inclusion Ireland believes that this working group should have representation from relevant advocacy groups. The CRPD states quite clearly, that in the development of policy that directly affects children with disabilities they should be closely involved, and actively consulted, directly or through their representative organisations<sup>1</sup>.

The NCSE has noted that any attempt to change how resources are allocated will be met with suspicion and anxiety from schools and parents of children with special education needs<sup>2</sup>. If advocacy groups are not involved in the consultation process they cannot keep their members informed of change and the reason for change. To allay concern, people who are directly affected by any change must be involved in the consultation process and kept informed.

## Issues with the current model of resource allocation

Schools are allocated resource teaching hours based upon the amount of pupils

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<sup>1</sup> CRPD, Article 4 (3)

<sup>2</sup> NCSE, Supporting Children with Special Education Needs

enrolled in the school. Additional teaching resource hours are allocated to a school when they enrol a child with a low incidence special education need (SEN).

Children with low incidence disabilities are allocated an amount of resource hours according to their diagnosis. Currently, a child qualifies for resource teaching hours based upon diagnosis, regardless of variance within the diagnosis<sup>3</sup>. For example: using the current model two children with a diagnosis of autism will get the same resource teaching hours. Autism is a spectrum disorder. Therefore, the support needs of each child will vary greatly. Their teaching resource hours are the same based on diagnosis, not assessed need.

A flaw of the current system is that children with no diagnosis cannot access low incidence resource teaching hours.

The current system measures inputs only. At present, there is no measurement of whether an educational intervention is effective or not.

## Education profile of a school

The present government has committed to publishing a plan for the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004<sup>4</sup>. Inclusion Ireland calls for this to be published without delay.

Implementation of the EPSEN Act will allow for the educational needs of children to be identified without the requirement for a formal diagnosis. This information will allow for the educational profile of a school to be built up. This will allow for teaching resource hours to be allocated on a needs basis both to children and schools.

Most high incidence SEN can be met within the general allocation model. This is contingent on schools accepting all children for enrolment in line with obligations under the Education Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000.

Low incidence disabilities can greatly skew the amount of resource hours that a school requires. Many schools place 'soft barriers' in the way of parents enrolling children with low incidence disabilities. As a consequence certain schools have a larger cohort of pupils with a need for resource teaching hours.

Inclusion Ireland supports the idea that all children with a disability should be able to attend their local school. In this regard a Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) should be able to direct a school to enrol a pupil and then supply the appropriate resources to the school. The EPSEN Act provides for financial resources to be made available to a school to meet the needs of a child.

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<sup>3</sup> Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05

<sup>4</sup> Program for Government 2011-2016

As stated, the education profile of a school is best established through the assessed needs of children. Formal educational assessments are not always required. Resource teachers are excellent at recognising when a child needs assistance in their work. The skill of individual teachers coupled with the NEPS continuum of support advice<sup>5</sup> not only addresses the needs of children but also helps in establishing the education profile of the school.

## Existing, available information to help establish the educational profile of a school

Any child who has had an assessment of needs under the Disability Act 2005 will have a statement of their educational needs. This information is not currently used to build an educational profile of a school.

Most children with SEN will have encountered the NEPS continuum of support at one of the three stages. This is a source of information that can build the educational profile of a school.

Many children with a disability have an individual education plan (IEP). These plans contain valuable information that can be used to establish an educational profile of a school.

There are literacy and numeracy tests in second, fourth and sixth class of primary school<sup>6</sup>. These tests contain rich data that can help drawing up the educational profile of a school. The information from the sixth class tests can also provide information to the secondary school the child is to attend. The test in sixth class occurs in May. This test should occur earlier in the year to ensure that secondary schools have time to obtain and act on the information generated.

## Recording and measuring outcomes for children with SEN

Inclusion Ireland calls for government to live up to the commitment in the program for government and publish a plan for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 without delay.

The EPSEN Act provides for IEP's for children with special education needs. An IEP contains educational, social and personal goals for a child. The IEP is reviewed within twelve months. The IEP not only informs the education of the child, it is also a

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<sup>5</sup> Special Education Needs: a continuum of support, Support pack for teachers (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and skills, Circular 0056/2011.

measurement tool for the effectiveness of any educational intervention. The IEP records what goals have been met and what goals have not been met.

The rich information that is contained within IEP's can be easily collected and reported by schools. An IEP measures outputs and not just inputs.

An effective IEP should chart if an educational intervention was successful for an individual child in areas such as numeracy, literacy, social skills, play skills, aspects of daily living, health therapies required, etc, depending on the needs of each child.

## References

Department of Education and Skills (2011). *Circular 0056/2011: Initial steps in the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy.*

Department of Education and Skills (2005). *Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05: Organisation of teaching resources for pupils who need additional support in mainstream primary schools.*

Department of Education and Skills (2007). *Special Education Needs: a continuum of support, a resource pack for teachers.* Dublin: The stationary office.

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