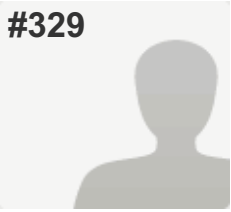


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PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

Q1: Name:

Mark O'Connor

Q2: Organisation:

Inclusion Ireland

Q3: Email:

mark@inclusionireland.ie

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Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

The removal of criteria in school enrollment policies that discriminate against children with a disability. The NCSE refer to this as 'soft barriers' in some of their publications. Examples include: "...parents/guardians must provide the school with the report of an educational psychologist which recommends placement in a school like ours before registration can take place" or "The school reserves the right to refuse enrollment to any pupil in exceptional cases. Such an exceptional case could arise where..... The pupil has special needs such that, even with additional resources available from the Department of Education and Science, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the pupil with an appropriate education". It is Inclusion Ireland's experience that such criteria is on occasion used to not enroll a child into school. This results in children being transported long distances to receive their education. Inclusion Ireland would ask that the minister progress the Education (Admissions to schools) Bill that will allow the NCSE to place a child in a local school where one cannot be found by the parents. In addition school enrollment policies that create a barrier to a child with a disability entering a school must be removed.

Progress the NCSE proposals on the allocation of resource teaching hours. This shifts the focus away from the diagnosis of the child to their needs. The only worry is that this new allocation system is being developed and pilot tested with no input from family or disability advocacy groups.

Stop the practice of children being placed on short school days. Children are being 'suspended' by being placed on a short school day. Parents are left with little option but to accept the short school day. A temporary measure to assist the child will usually rumble on for months resulting in a child missing a substantial amount of school time. At a minimum the Department of Education and Skills needs to collect data on this practice to determine how widespread it is. Inclusion Ireland conducted a short online survey which gathered 100 respondents whose child was on a short school day; 12 children only attended school for 1 hour per day. Some schools even include the right to put a child on a short school day into their enrollment policy: "The Board also reserves the right to reduce the length of the school day for a child who is over challenged in the classroom setting". The Department of Education and Skills must issue a direction to schools not to suspend children via a short school day. One parent told Inclusion Ireland: "I was told that my son could only attend for one day per week. If I did not agree the principal said they would expel him on health and safety grounds. He never had an issue in 8 years at his old school but the new school just didn't understand him".

Banks and McCoy estimate that there is approximately 25% of children in Irish schools with a special education need. Various reports and parental experience would indicate that not all teachers have additional training in SEN awareness or teaching methodologies. Given the prevalence rates this must change. The starting point is at under graduate level where the SEN component of teacher training must be increased. In addition, it is recommended that no teacher should be teaching in an ASD unit without a post graduate course specific to autism.

The Department of Education and Skills must make schools account for their use resource hours. Media reports, current NCSE research and anecdotal evidence suggests that not all children are experiencing their full allocation of resource teaching. One example reported to Inclusion Ireland involved three children with a moderate intellectual disability. They were being grouped together for three hours of resource teaching but there was a total allocation of none hours.

Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

The minister must implement the EPSEN Act 2004 as soon as possible. This would allow for an assessment of a child with a SEN and an appropriate individual education plan would follow on from this assessment.

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the commitment in the Program for Government to have speech and language therapy in schools. This is a very positive step. Irish research conducted in Tallaght and Limerick has noted the efficacy of speech and language therapy in school and preschool. In addition, Irish legislation and international covenants would indicate that such a service should be provided. We live in a world that is communication led. This leave the ability to communicate with peers and teachers as critical in educational settings. Inclusion Ireland would welcome the involvement of speech and language therapists either directly in the school or through the new Inclusion Support Service in the NCSE. It is imperative when this is being rolled out that it is uniform across the country. Inclusion Ireland research as previously indicated the disparity in provision across the country. For example Wexford has 4 times more children per therapist as Wicklow.

The NCSE has aired their frustration at not being able to open ASD units where demand exists. Many schools will not work with the NCSE. This means many children are traveling long distances to access a school place. This lack of ASD classes is apparent at secondary level where there is only a fraction of the places available at primary level. There are also geographical 'blackspots' across the country such as Limerick. The NCSE must be given the power to direct a school to open a special class where the need exists locally. This would have obvious resource implications for the Department of Education and Skills.

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Q6: 2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

The resource allocation model being pilot tested is welcome as it involves a move from a diagnosis led model to one based upon need. However, the pilot testing is being conducted and assessed without the input of any of the disability advocacy groups.

The minister has policy advice from the NCSE on the education of children with autism. This must be published. This advice will also include the issue of seclusion and restraint. Children with a disability are being restrained and secluded in Irish schools. A number of parents have contacted Inclusion Ireland on this issue. We are aware of (as is the DES) one child who has been expelled because mum would not allow the continued use of prone restraint on the child. A section 29 appeal was won by mum when the child was initially suspended but the school moved to expel upon this decision. We are aware of other cases.

The Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill contains provision to allow the NCSE to direct a school to enroll a child where they have no school place. The minister must progress this legislation. Inclusion Ireland would also suggest that the minister look at the current discriminatory criteria in many school enrollment policies.

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the provisions that the DES, Department of Health and Department of Children and Youth Affairs to make the ECCE accessible to children with a disability. Inclusion Ireland made a submission to this process. We believe that the trio of departments should begin an information blitz to inform parents of these very welcome provisions for September 2016. Many families are in the dark as to the provisions that will be available in September 2016.

Inclusion Ireland is very interested in the full inclusion of children with a disability in all aspects of school life. This may be partially addressed in the autism policy advice to benefit all children. Anecdotally, parents tell us of their child being excluded from school trips, the transition year, having a different break time to other children or even being grouped together at lunch time. None of these practices belong in Irish schools as they do not foster inclusiveness.

The DES have two schemes for children with a severe profound intellectual disability or autism that provide for early intervention and an extended school year. Parents value these schemes greatly. However, parents who have children with other disabilities believe these schemes to be exclusionary and should include other children based upon need and not simply a label attached to the child. This would follow a similar ideological line as the new resource allocation model.

Q7: 3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

A recent report by WALK has examined people with a disability and their access to further education in Ireland. While there are some examples of good practice, there are few people with an intellectual disability in mainstream further education. Of 18,275 people over 18 that have registered with an intellectual disability only 32 attend 3rd level education.

The WALK report noted there is evidence of negative attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability around their ability to learn. There is also a stigma around intellectual disability resulting in a “chill factor” in people accessing mainstream provision. There are also low expectations for people with an intellectual disability culminating in a belief that they cannot achieve. There are also structural barriers for people, such as a lack of courses at FETAC level 3 and below. There has also been a historical lack of training for educators in further mainstream education around disability.

As noted earlier the provision of speech and language therapy in school settings is very welcome and will make a significant difference in the lives of children with a disability in Irish schools. We do caution that the provision of speech therapy must be the same across the country to ensure there is equal access for all children who need it. Speech and language therapy (SLT) is fundamental to the education of young people who have reduced communication skills. Inclusion Ireland published a working paper in 2014 ‘The Case of Speech and Language Therapy’. The author, Pauline Conroy noted: the lack of a coherent SLT service for children. Services across Ireland vary greatly but no area is staffed to international standards. Parents reported spending vast amounts of their own money on private SLT. This is another financial barrier to inclusive education.

Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

Actions are derived from strategies to ensure their implementation. The DES does measure many aspects of SEN provision in Ireland which are very helpful. However, most data in the SEN area at present is collected on an input basis and is not focused on outputs and outcomes for children.

Targets should be set and measured against for the use of resource teaching hours and SNA allocation through individual education plans. These measures cost the DES significant sums and their effectiveness must be accounted for.

The efficacy of special classes must be measured. The NCSE is opening new classes regularly in the absence of data as to their effectiveness. Measurements could include the movement of children to mainstream settings, numeracy and literacy achievements among others.

Many parents report to Inclusion Ireland that their child is refused a place in their local mainstream school due to their disability. It would be helpful if the DES data was broken down to indicate the amount of section 29 appeals that involve a child with a SEN. Families also tell Inclusion Ireland that they will not take a section 29 appeal as this will start the family school relationship on a poor footing and negatively affect their child's education. From an inclusion point it would be helpful if parents could register their poor experience of enrollment without taking a section 29 to give the DES a fuller picture of this issue.

The DES should measure the levels of teacher training for teachers who work in the SEN sector but also in mainstream schools given the high levels of SEN in Irish schools. Teachers working exclusively with children with a disability should have post graduate training and the levels of this must be recorded by the DES.

One of the best ways of including children with a disability in mainstream classes is to reduce the size of such classes. Inclusion Ireland has consistently asked that no child should be in a class of more than 30 children. At present more than 120,000 children are in super-sized classes. This is a priority for the DES and will benefit all children.

Success for the DES at further education would be for more young people with a disability to progress to further and higher education. Current levels for young people with an intellectual disability are pitifully low and many are in segregated courses.

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Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

As noted access to further and higher education is a problem for people with a disability, especially an intellectual disability. In addition to suggestions already made on additional courses at Fetac level 3 and above there are barriers in relation to the fund for students with disabilities. This funding that enables people to attend further and higher education is only available for people accessing Fetac level 5 and above. The main way people with an intellectual disability currently access 3rd level is via the 'Certificate in contemporary living' courses in some colleges. However, these courses are subject to fees and are not a fully inclusive model. There are small scale initiatives in this area that are more inclusive models being carried out by WALK (with IT Tallaght) and Kare (with NUI Maynooth).

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Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018

No. Inclusion Ireland would again emphasize the importance of the commencement of the EPSEN Act 2004. Ireland has come under severe criticism from the UN for not commencing the Act. This would copper fasten the right of children to have their education needs assessed and an individual education plan formulated to address these needs. This would assist in achieving the most important aspect of the current DES strategy "We want an education and training system that provides all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy".

PAGE 8: A Programme for a Partnership Government - Chapter 10: Education

Q11: 1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The government commitments to allow children with a disability to be supported to attend the ECCE scheme for children with a disability are welcome as are the commitment to speech therapists in schools and additional NEPS psychologists. At present many children cannot access a NEPS assessment.

In terms of ECCE access, we would ask that applications for resources to support a child in the ECCE should be transparent, based upon identified need and subject to appeal (on a refusal). No child should be denied a place in any local childcare facility as resources will be available to all operators. In addition, the government departments working on these supports must undertake an awareness campaign so all parents are aware of these supports.

Inclusion Ireland believes that no child should be in a class of more than 30 pupils. At present this affects more than 120,000 primary school children in Ireland.

Commence the remaining elements of the EPSEN Act 2004.

Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

Collect the following data in relation to children with a disability:

The amount of children in a class of more than 30.

Commencement of the EPSEN act.

the amount of children with a disability accessing mainstream preschool education.

The amount of service providers getting support to facilitate children with a disability to access ECCE.

The amount of children with a disability accessing ECCE.

The trends in the numbers of children with a disability accessing mainstream education.

Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Children with a disability accessing the ECCE by implementing the full suite of supports published by the inter departmental working group. Although this is for the DCYA this support scheme should be extended to all childcare options as many women must give up work as there is no child care options for a child with a disability.

Employ additional teachers to ensure no child is in a class of more than 30 children in Ireland.

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Q14: 2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

No input.

Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

No input

Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

No input

PAGE 10: A Programme for a Partnership Government - Chapter 10: Education

Q17: 3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The only input is for the Department of Education and Skills to also remember that children with a disability are also discriminated against in school enrollment policies and not just children who are not catholic. Many school enrollment policies contain an effective veto on the admission of children with a disability.

The following are examples taken from school enrollment policies "...parents/guardians must provide the school with the report of an educational psychologist which recommends placement in a school like ours before registration can take place" and "The school reserves the right to refuse enrolment to any pupil in exceptional cases. Such an exceptional case could arise where..... The pupil has special needs such that, even with additional resources available from the Department of Education and Science, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the pupil with an appropriate education."

Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

The removal of barriers to children with a disability enrolling in their local school.

Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

The commencement of an Education (Admissions to schools) Act that contains a focus on the needs of children with a disability in addition to children of particular faiths or none.

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Q20: 4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Consideration must be given to how these initiatives will include children with a special education need. It is the experience of parents who contact Inclusion Ireland that children with a disability can be excluded from such additional activities and initiatives such as this. People report not being able to access school outings, the BT Young Scientist and the transition year.

Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question

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Q23: 5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

No comment

Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

No comment

Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

No comment

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Q26: 6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

No comment

Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

No comment

Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

No comment

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Q29: 7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

There are very welcome elements to this section in the Program for Government. Speech and language therapists in schools, additional NEPS psychologists are very welcome.

The inclusion of children with Down Syndrome in the accessing of resource teaching would seem to run counter to the provisions in the NCSE recommendations that resources are based upon need. While including children with Down Syndrome is welcome is only serves to push who is not included in the allocation of resources under Circular SP ED 02/05 to another cohort of children. The allocation of resources should be based upon need and not the label that has been attributed to the child. This is what the research commissioned by the NCSE says.

The extension of the July provision should be extended beyond children with autism. Again, this is based upon a label given to a child and not their needs for the resource.

The line in the Program for Government is not clear. Inclusion Ireland are very clear as are other like the NCSE, the government must publish a plan to commence the EPSEN Act without delay.

Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

An outcomes framework for measuring the efficacy of special education supports must be developed to ensure money is being spent well. As noted earlier: how well are children doing in numeracy and literacy? how many children with a disability are attending mainstream education? how many children are transferring to mainstream education? etc.

Has the implementation of the NCSE proposals on resource allocations been implemented.

Has the EPSEN Act been commenced.

Has the extended school year been made available to children in special schools or special classes or children who have the need for July provision.

Data should be produced on additional NEPS psychologists recruited and the amount of assessments carried out above current provision. How is this impacting positively on children's outcomes in life.

Reporting on the activity and efficacy of speech and language therapy in schools settings.

Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Commencement of the EPSEN Act.

Additional NEPS psychologists.

No child in a class of more than 30 children.

Implement the NCSE resource allocation model.

All of these measures will result in children with a disability having their needs assessed and the appropriate measures put in place to ensure they get the greatest benefit from their educational experience.

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Q32: 8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

As noted earlier the access to further education and training must be made more accessible for persons with a disability.

Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

No comment

Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Make more course available to people with a disability in further education and training and in higher education.

Make the fund for students with disabilities available to any person with a disability attending further or higher education regardless of the level of the course they undertake.
