
DÁIL ÉIREANN

Motion re: Special Education

That Dáil Éireann –

notes that:

- there is an ongoing failure by the State to adequately plan for school places for children with special or additional educational needs;
- parents have resorted to sleeping outside the Department of Education to raise awareness of the lack of appropriate places;
- significant sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 remain uncommenced, and a review of the EPSEN Act was begun in 2021 with a public consultation in 2023 but to date no report or recommendations have been published;
- schools that have been assessed as requiring additional SNA positions are being blocked from recruiting for these essential roles;
- there is no timeframe or sufficient budgetary provision in place for ensuring the national provision of in-school therapies through the Educational Therapy Support Service, building on the work of the School Inclusion Model pilot;
- the training and supports provided to teachers, SNAs, and other educational staff have not kept pace with developments in the field of additional needs education;

recalls that:

- 126 children with special educational needs had no school place at the start of this school year in September, and the number of children accessing the Home Tuition Grant scheme due to the lack of an SEN placement has increased;
- there is no national centralised system operated by the National Council for Special Education to determine sufficiently in advance the number of additional special educational school places required;
- there are no protocols in place for the sharing of information on special educational needs between pre-schools, primary schools, post primary schools and special schools to support children as they advance through the educational system;
- 14,221 children were overdue an assessment of needs in December 2024, nearly 13,000 children are waiting for initial contact with a Children’s Disability Network Team, and tens of thousands of children are on primary care wait lists for treatment, adding further pressure on schools and educators to support children with additional unmet needs;

recognises that:

- parents and educators continue to have significant concerns about the current system of planning for SEN provision where schools are put under pressure at short notice to open classes without adequate resourcing, appropriate accommodation or training for staff, and with minimal specialised support;
- 399 new special classes were announced for the 2025/26 school year earlier this month but many children will struggle to secure places appropriate to their needs in

their local community;

calls on the government to:

- ensure the right of every child to an appropriate school place in their general locality is fulfilled in September 2025;
- introduce a central application system for special educational places to commence for the 2026/27 school year, and develop protocols on the sharing of information at every step of the educational system;
- provide appropriate means of transport for children with additional educational needs to access their school place;
- guarantee that every school will receive sufficient funding for the full equipping of classrooms including modular builds, sensory and play spaces, and assistive technology when new special classes are opened;
- publish the finalised review of the EPSEN Act and commit to bringing forward amending proposals as necessary and to commencing the long delayed measures;
- provide a timeline for the national rollout of in-school therapists through the ETSS to provide certainty for schools and parents, and introduce play, art, music and other relevant therapies and in-school counselling where appropriate;
- lift the arbitrary cap on SNAs, and ensure that positions are funded when the NCSE has recommended a post is required, remove the 72 hour obligation on SNAs, and continue to support the professionalisation of the SNA role;
- introduce an initial teacher education programme for student teachers allowing them to complete at least one school placement in an additional needs setting, and introduce free upskilling in SEN for existing teachers;
- ensure every teacher is fully trained in seizure first aid, amend the assault leave scheme, and develop a new position in schools of a Special Education Needs Officer.

– *Eoghan Kenny, Ciarán Ahern, Ivana Bacik, Alan Kelly, George Lawlor, Ged Nash, Robert O’Donoghue, Conor Sheehan, Marie Sherlock, Duncan Smith, Mark Wall.*