



Special Education Survey:

Submission to the Minister for Special Education

Family Carers Ireland

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The following survey is based on the responses of 508 family carers on their views impacting special education in Ireland.

We gathered these responses through our own membership database and social media channels. Below are the questions asked and the responses given to each of these. The responses to question 1 and 3 have been analysed thematically. In question 2, parents were asked to select the top 5 issues for them from a list of 13.

What are the greatest issues/challenges you experience as a parent of a child/ren with additional needs in relation to education?

- **Education/Training:** Respondents noted that there is a general lack of education amongst teachers in being able to teach children with additional educational needs. Respondents also note that there is lack of training available to teachers.
- **Resources:** respondents said that resources/technology were one of the greatest challenges from them. This includes a lack of school resources to support children in class, such as SNA/SET hours, assistive technology and funding to make schools accessible.
- **School places:** Parents highlighted the lack of a suitable school place as one of their biggest challenge.
- **Therapies:** Parents noted that access to therapies/services were their biggest challenge. Parents here noted that they were experiencing difficulties in accessing essential therapies for their children, particularly due to waiting times, and noted the lack of in-school therapies.
- **Assessment of Need:** Parents raised the challenge of Assessment of Need. Parents noted that they were experiencing delays in getting an AON for their child, with some parents noting that they were going private which is becoming a financial burden.
- **Transportation:** Respondents noted they were experiencing difficulties in accessing school transport.
- **Summer Programme:** Some parents noted that they couldn't access a Summer Programme for their child.
- **Home Tuition:** Accessing home tuition was another challenge for a small percentage of parents.

Top 5 issues regarding special education

1. Ensure every child with an additional need has an appropriate school place in line with their constitutional right – 82.48%.
2. Provide dedicated training for every teacher to ensure they can fully support students with additional needs – 71.46%.
3. Abolish waiting lists for Assessment of Need (AON) under the Disability Act 2005 and ensure every child receives an Assessment of Need within the statutory time frame – 66.14%.
4. Ensure every child has access to the technology that they require to participate fully in their education – 51.18%.
5. Provide individualised support plans to help students with additional needs transition from early education to primary education and to second level – 47.44%.

What do you believe are the key solutions needed to improve special education?

Assessment of Need: Parents raised the need to address the waiting list for assessment of needs, with current waiting times becoming unacceptable.

Communication: Respondents raised the need for better communication between all stakeholders, including the Department of Education, NCSE, schools, teachers and therapists with parents.

Education model: Some parents noted the need for a new education model for children with additional needs, one that focuses on life skills.

Resources: Parents noted the need for greater resources to support schools, such as additional SNAs and equipment, greater resources available to parents and financial support as well.

School places: Parents raised the need for a greater number of school places and special schools to ensure an education for their child.

Summer Provision: Greater access to Summer Provision, which could include having all schools run Summer Provision.

Therapies: Address waiting lists for therapies, have in-school therapies.

Training: Greater training needs to be made available for teachers on special education, in particular parents noted the need to have specific modules on special education as parent of teacher training.

Are there any models of good practice in schools or internationally you feel should be replicated? (341 responses)

Countries

Throughout the survey a number respondents noted countries which had good practices, most notably:

- Canadian, Spanish, Maltese and Finnish models of education
- Australian model of wrap around supports
- America
- UK
- Sweden
- Norway
- Denmark
- New Zealand
- The Netherlands
- Singapore

Schools – International

- Wilds Lodge Schools UK
- Liberty Woodlands School in London
- Ruby Bridges Elementary School, Seattle

Schools – Ireland

- Castlehackett NS, Galway
- Rosedale, Galway
- St Vincent's Secondary School
- St Ita and St John Primary and Post Primary School, Kerry
- Holy Family School for Deaf Children, Dublin
- Grace Park Educate Together, Dublin

- Clonkeen College
- Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan
- Scoil Na Naomh Uilig, Newbridge
- Pals Preschool in Hampton Wood
- G6 in Athy College
- Scoil Na Hinse in Bettystown
- Holy Family School, Charleville
- Cherry Blossoms Kiskeam
- Le Chéile Secondary School, Ballincollig
- Primary school model Realt Na Mara, Dundalk
- Pals Preschool, Finglas
- ABACAS
- St Finian's Primary School, Newcastle, Co. Dublin
- St Anthony's, Castlebar
- St Joseph's School for Visually Impaired
- St Paul's and Scoil Eanna, Cork
- Boyerstown National School, Co Meath

Appendix

Special Education consultation

1. What are the greatest issues/challenges you experience as a parent of a child/ren with additional needs in relation to education?

2. Please select the top 5 issues for you regarding special education.

- Fund a ten-year plan towards a fully inclusive model of education. Similar to Sláintecare, this plan should have cross-party support and commit to achieving the State's obligations under the UNCRPD.
- Fully implement the commitments contained in the EPSEN Act
- Enhance the powers of the NCSE in order to oversee the EPSEN Act's implementation.
- Publish a costed and time-bound implementation strategy for the Disability Capacity Review and a cross-departmental strategic workforce development plan
- Ensure every child with a special educational need has an appropriate school place in line with their constitutional right.
- Abolish waiting lists for Assessment of Need (AON) under the Disability Act 2005 and ensure every child receives an Assessment of Need within the statutory time frame.
- Increase funding for Home Tuition to support students in need of home support'
- Ensure every child can avail of the Summer Programme if they need it.
- Ensure every child has access to the technology that they require to participate fully in their education.
- Provide dedicated training for every teacher to ensure they can fully support students with additional needs.
- Ensure school buildings are fully accessible
- Provide individualised support plans to help students with additional needs transition from early education to primary education and to second level.
- Other (please specify)

3. What do you believe are the key solutions needed to improve special education?

4. Are there any models of good practice in schools or internationally you feel should be replicated?