



Educational Planning

Students with Down syndrome have the right to be educated in their local mainstream school (UNCRPD), but currently, schools are 'encouraged' rather than obligated to provide an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The answer to a recent PQ about the implementation and resourcing of the EPSEN Act makes it clear that the Minister accepts that the funds needed for its full implementation have not (and will not) be provided. The current DES position seems to be that schools are 'encouraged' to implement large parts of the EPSEN act, including providing an IEP for every student with special educational needs, without the necessary resources.

Down Syndrome Ireland has long campaigned for the EPSEN Act to be fully enacted and adequately resourced so that the rights of students with additional educational needs are enshrined in law, rather than depending on 'encouragement' from the DES and the goodwill of schools and teachers.

However, DSI cannot stand by while teachers' unions advise members to take action which discriminates against students who have intellectual disabilities. We believe that students with Down syndrome will suffer and will struggle to be successful in education if they don't have a structured, individualised education plan in place. This planning needs to be coordinated by teachers who are given the training, resources and non-contact time to carry this out effectively.

What is needed?

Acknowledgement that fully inclusive education is a right, not a privilege, and a plan to be initiated immediately to ensure that teachers are resourced and trained to meet the learning needs of all students.

Continuity

July Provision provides funding for an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

We recognise that there are faults with the July Provision scheme. It is inequitable and discriminatory in its current form (which excludes most students with Down syndrome). Down syndrome, like ASD, leads to complex educational needs regardless of intellectual ability, and students with Down syndrome are likely to regress educationally unless they have some level of support in place for at least a portion of the summer break. Teachers and parents are telling us that the long summer break is detrimental to learning and retention of skills.

Our questions to the DES and various Ministers on this matter have received the response that the whole July Provision scheme is under review and that no revisions will happen until the review is complete.

Our experience with previous DES reviews is that they take a considerable length of time to lead to action, sometimes many years. Meanwhile, students continue to progress through the education system without the supports they need in order to reach their potential. It is not acceptable to Down Syndrome Ireland that discrimination continues while a review of the scheme is carried out. We are calling for an interim arrangement to be put in place to meet the needs of our members.

What is needed?

July Provision to be made immediately available to all students with Down syndrome, regardless of intellectual ability.