



**INCLUSION IRELAND**

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

# **Opening statement on the use of reduced timetables in schools**

**To the Oireachtas Joint  
Committee on Education and  
Skills**

**May 2019**

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Ireland plain English guidelines**

Chairperson, Deputies, Senators; Inclusion Ireland is a national advocacy organisation that works to promote the rights of people with an intellectual disability.

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the Joint Committee on Education and Skills invitation to speak here today about the current use of reduced timetables in schools.

Evidence from our work suggests that the use of reduced timetables is a relatively common but hidden practice that impacts negatively on the education and wellbeing of children with disabilities and their families.

A reduced timetable is a suspension. However, this is a 'hidden' practice as the child will be marked in on the register, even if they only spend an hour in school. No data is collected on this practice.

In 2018, Inclusion Ireland published a discussion paper: 'Shining a light on seclusion and restraint in schools in Ireland'. One parent described her child missing a combined 100 school days in one school year while another parent described waiting in the school car park as the phone would start ringing to collect her child as early as 9:10am.

Inclusion Ireland previously conducted a survey of parents who had a child on a reduced timetable.

Almost two thirds of the children were in school for less than 3 hours per day, with a very worrying 12% only receiving 1 hour of school per day or less. A significant majority of the children were on a reduced timetable for more than 12 weeks (59%), including some of the children who were in school for less than one hour per day.

Several parents disclosed how they were forced to accept their child being put onto a reduced timetable or the school would move to expel. Other

parents spoke of not agreeing to a reduced timetable and the school calling them as early as 9.10am at the slightest hint of an incident.

Very few of the parents were aware of any assistance they could avail of when their child was placed on a reduced timetable such as a 'Section 29 Appeal' or an Education Welfare Officer. A Section 29 Appeal is less than satisfactory as a child will miss out on months of class time.

Through our casework parents tell us of the stress, the shame and distress the child feels and the huge financial burden of having to give up work and apply for Carer Allowance.

Schools often cite a lack of resources or 'the child's inability to cope with a full school day' when suspending a child in this manner. Many teachers have no specialist training nor are they required to have specialist training to teach children with disabilities; this may lead to bored children who can act out. There is poor access to therapeutic services including speech and language therapy. These therapies can assist children to address their sensory and communication needs in a more appropriate manner than through disruptive behaviour. Possibly the most critical factor, is the failure to commence the parts of Education of Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act that will benefit children with disabilities. Shamefully, this Act was passed by this house 15 years ago and remains not commenced.

I have outlined the problem and some possible causes and will now recommend possible solutions.

Illegal, hidden suspensions via a reduced timetable must be ceased with immediate effect.

- All children with a disability or learning need must have access to an appropriately trained teacher. Teachers should have access to more robust undergraduate training in the area of special needs. Teachers

specialising in the area of special education must hold a post graduate qualification or have significant continuous professional development and experience in the area of special education.

- The HSE must be funded to recruit additional therapists as a matter of urgency.
- Children and schools should be able to access therapy on a universal basis through the new NCSE school inclusion model being piloted. Upon a successful pilot stage the model should be resourced and rolled out nationally.
- Schools must be directed to collect data and report on children who are suspended using a reduced timetable.
- The Oireachtas must review the Education Act 1998 regulations to allow for an independent appeal relating to reduced timetables before the cumulative 20-day period.
- The Department of Education and Skills must be asked to produce a plan to commence the 15-year old EPSEN Act. This will ensure children with disabilities are properly supported in school through assessments, appropriate supports and individual education plans.

Thank you for your time