



Dear Ms. Fallon,

Please find attached/enclosed a written submission by Kids Behind the Cuts to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response on the topic of Education – Re-opening of Primary and Secondary Schools.

We have considerable information and research on the key issues identified in our submission which we will happily give to committee members should they require it.

Please feel free to contact us. We would be happy to attend the committee in person or virtually.

Yours sincerely,

Rachael Prendergast Spollen

Chairperson of Kids Behind the Cuts

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Who we are

Kids Behind the Cuts started in Dalkey School Project NS when a group of teachers and parents met to raise awareness about the lack of adequate resources and supports for children with additional or special educational needs. Since our inception, we have actively worked to lobby the support of politicians and advocacy groups. Our mission is to persuade the government to create **The Right Inclusion Model** for every child. Support for our campaign has been widespread and is growing as parents, children and those who work in the sector become more and more frustrated by the ongoing deficiency in resources available to children with special needs.

This submission is also supported by ADHD Ireland, Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Dyspraxia DCD Ireland and Inclusion Ireland.

The Context

All children will return to school in September in deficit but for most, as a result of the efforts of their parents/guardians and carers, that deficit will not be huge.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for our most vulnerable children. Parents of children with additional needs have also made the same valiant efforts to teach their children during lockdown, but they have experienced the greatest challenges. It is difficult to teach the content of a curriculum when your child's social, emotional and behavioural needs have not been met. These children and their parents deserve access to the resources needed to ensure their future success. Summer Provision, while welcome, is insufficient to reduce the gap created by the Covid 19 school closure. Parents and children with additional needs rely on professionals such as teachers, SNAs, psychologists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists to fulfil these needs on a daily basis in school.

In an era of social distancing, it is and will be more important than ever to ensure the right and adequate supports are available to children with additional needs as they return to school.

The Issues

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), one of our most valuable resources, cater for the care needs of children with additional needs within the school system.

Since 2011, almost 80,000 applications for access to SNA support have been made. Despite this vast number, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has only provided an additional 5,375 SNAs.

The Department of Education has currently frozen the numbers of SNAs available to schools. Since April 2020, schools can no longer apply for SNA access without triggering a very lengthy and time consuming review of their SNA allocation. All this comes at a time

when, due to the effects of Covid 19, it is widely accepted and anticipated that an unprecedented number of additional children will present with emotional, behavioural and social needsⁱ. SNAs along with teaching staff are best placed to cater for the children's needs once they return to school. However, the DES has stated that they will only make an additional 800 SNA posts available for the school year 2020-2021. This equals the total number that was made available for the school year 2019-2020 in response to 10,418 applications. If this allocation was not enough for last year, it will certainly fall far short of what our children need post COVID lockdown.

Special Education Teachers (SET) are also an invaluable resource for children with additional needs. The role of the SET is to cater for the academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs of children. The current allocation of SET hours assigned by the DES are not adequate to deal with the needs of our children and they most certainly will be nowhere near sufficient when we return to school in September with an increased number of children with academic, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as huge anxieties as a result of Covid 19.

Access to time with **psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists** was also insufficient to meet the needs of children in our school system pre COVID-19. This is a direct result of ill-advised changes to the Assessment of Need Operating procedure. Changes which the Psychological Society of Ireland, Occupational Therapists of Ireland and the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists fought against but to no avail. These negative changes alongside the impact of Covid 19 will now have an even more detrimental effect on the lives and well-being of the most vulnerable within our school system.

Our Recommendations

Re-opening school in September (whether staggered or not) will undoubtedly require additional resources. We recommend an increase in human resources across the board to ensure the success of children with additional needs.

We need the **Right Inclusion Model** with

- 1. A vastly increased SNA allocation to match the increased needs of a greater number of children in September.**
- 2. A vastly increased number of Special Education Teaching hours to cater for the needs of the children who will have experienced the largest gap in their educational attainment during Covid 19.**
- 3. Vastly increased access to Multi-disciplinary teams (Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists) to match the needs of the children in September.**
- 4. Transparency in the Process** Meaningful consultation with schools, parents and children's advocacy groups to inform an inclusion model that will work - the right inclusion model.

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ⁱ <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/Podcasts>