

**IPPN Opening Statement by**  
**Páirc Clerkin, IPPN CEO**  
**to the Joint Committee on Education & Youth**

**2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025**

I thank the committee for giving IPPN an opportunity to address the members on the subject of special educational needs.

IPPN's role as the professional body for school leaders is to empower the principals and deputy principals of primary and special schools to focus on their core purpose, and what they are qualified and skilled to do: the leadership and management of teaching and learning in their schools. This includes the 54% of principals and 98% of deputy principals who teach full-time on top of leadership and management responsibilities, which is often forgotten.

All the research shows that high quality leadership has a significant impact on the quality of learning and thus on the outcomes for children. Yet many school matters unrelated to teaching and learning take leaders' time away from their core purpose. IPPN collaborates with our fellow education partners – management bodies, the union, the NPC - to support the aims that are in their remit, particularly where the aims align.

Regarding special educational needs in schools, IPPN fully supports the principle of equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners, alongside their siblings and friends in the local area in which they live. Where a child enrolling in a school has special educational needs, those needs must be planned for, supported and fully resourced, and cannot be limited by lack of time, capacity or resources. If the level of resources made available within the system are dictated by budgetary constraints, then it cannot be claimed that special educational needs are fully met. It can merely be asserted that the needs are met only to the level allowed by the budget allocated for it.

Prioritising access to inclusive education in an appropriate setting for one cohort of children with additional needs, in such a way that it compromises access for another cohort of children with additional needs, is not equitable. Resourcing must meet the actual demand that exists.

The only realistic approach to identifying the full extent of need is to allow schools to self-report on the level of need in their schools.

### **Scale of Need**

Up to 5% of the population has Autism, one among many other examples of additional need that need to be accommodated. Yet the level of resourcing has not kept up with the demands on the system. The current budget-driven 'deficit model' is at the heart of the issues we hear about from school leaders.

Furthermore, pressures are being brought to bear on some schools to open additional special classes when other schools in the same catchment area do not have any. Others are being pressured to enrol a 7th and even an 8th child into special classes designed for 6 children. This is inequitable and unfair. At the very least, these schools require emergency enhanced SET and other measures to meet the needs of the children, until a new special class place opens up, or a new special class is built.

### **SET and SNA Allocations and Timings**

Mainstream primary schools received their SET allocation for the 2025/26 school year on 11<sup>th</sup> February. Special schools received theirs on 18<sup>th</sup> June. As we write this, on 26<sup>th</sup> June, hospital schools have not yet received their allocation. This is simply not conducive to proper planning for the year ahead. A cutoff of the February mid-term needs to be put in place for all schools to receive both SET and SNA allocations.

### **School Buildings**

Every child should be provided with a school place in a timely fashion. Simply clearing admissions lists is not good enough. We must also ask of the system, what happens when the child turns up for their first day in school? Are the appropriate infrastructural supports in place to give that child the chance to succeed and thrive? There has been progress, but we have a long way to go to achieve a truly inclusive system. Flexibility in the provision of appropriate supports is key.

As an interim measure, until such time as the new special class place can be provided or a new classroom can be built, **IPPN calls for a SET+ Allocation Model**, providing an emergency additional SEN and SNA allocation (as appropriate) to mainstream schools where a special

class/school placement is delayed. This would ensure that children can attend school with their siblings, but in a suitable learning environment with the appropriate resources available on a temporary basis.

### **NEPS Assessments**

Every school needs access to and is entitled to, an accredited educational psychologist. Yet many schools do not have one, which causes huge difficulty in planning, accessing assessments, reports and supports. Sufficient trained educational psychologists must be recruited to ensure each school has one allocated at all times.

The low number of NEPS referrals available to schools causes significant concern and frustration. School leaders have to prioritise among children based on identified need, as set out in the school's continuum of support and the student support file, which describes the targets and the interventions already put in place. Parents often lay the blame on schools when their child isn't prioritised, whereas it is the system that has imposed the restriction on the number of assessments per school. To address this, the system needs to increase the capacity for schools to refer more children to NEPS.

Thank you.