



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The Use of Reduced School Days

Information for Parents and Guardians

1. Introduction

The Department of Education has issued guidelines to all schools in relation to students who have been placed on reduced school days.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with information on the process involved if a school proposes placing your child on a reduced school day. Schools should only place students on reduced school days in exceptional circumstances. As an example, if your child has been out of school for a long time that may be due to a medical or mental health-related condition, you and the school may decide that their return to school is best supported by attending for a shorter day. There may be other circumstances where a reduced school day may be considered necessary but the key point is that schools have been advised that reduced school days should last only as long as is necessary to make sure your child returns to school on a full-time basis.

The guidance document issued to schools provides more information and is available at the following link;

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/63545-the-use-of-reduced-school-days/>

The guidelines come into effect from 1st January 2022.

2. Definition of Reduced School Days

Reduced School days are defined as:

- a reduced day in school where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student arrives to school after the usual starting time or leaves before the end of the school day, and/or
- a reduced week where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student may not attend the full five days each week.

The notification system with regard to reduced school days relates primarily to attendance at school for the duration of the school day and does not apply to instances where agreed arrangements are in place locally for students not attending for particular subjects.

3. Consent of parents and guardians

Your child has a right to a full day in school.

It is recognised that a reduced school day may be helpful to your child in special situations as part of a transition period, or to engage with his or her learning based on his or her needs. The school in consultation with you and relevant professionals may identify that a reduced school day may be helpful to your child as a short term measure, while working towards his

or her full school return. A reduced school day should last only as long as is needed to help your child return to school full-time.

If a school is considering the use of reduced school day for your child the school must explain to you the reason why a reduced school day is proposed, and must ask for your permission in writing. If the student is over 18, the student can provide consent.

You do not have to agree or give consent to the use of a reduced school day.

If you do agree or give consent to the school to use a reduced school day, you can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time

Tusla Educational Welfare Officers are available to provide you with advice and support in relation to your child's attendance at school.

When completing the form giving your consent to a Reduced School Day for your child you will be asked a question by the school about your child's ethnic or cultural background.

It is up to you if you wish to answer this question or not. Your child's school will seek written consent to collect this information if you decide to answer it, and it also allows the school to forward the information to Tusla and the Department.

The legal basis for processing the data by Tusla is Section 28 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

4. School Plan for Reduced School Day intervention

Before considering a reduced school day for a student the school must have engaged with you and the relevant support services and professionals, and have developed implemented, and reviewed a Student Support Plan over an appropriate period of time.

If following this period, the school proposes that a reduced school day is required to support your child, the school must have a clear and evidence informed reason for considering this option and should explain these reasons clearly to you.

Following consultation with you, the school will notify Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) of its intention to place your child on a reduced school day no later than the first day the reduced school day is due to start. This will allow TESS to support you and your child and to liaise further with the school. TESS will contact you to follow up, and explain any questions that you may have with regard to your and your child's rights, and to offer support and advice.

When a reduced school day is put in place, the school must agree with you (or in the case of a student over 18 years, the student) a plan for the period for which the reduced school day will be in place. This intervention and return to school plan for your child will include a start, review and end date; any educational supports or interventions to be provided for your child during the period of the reduced school day; and the actions required to support your child's return to a full-time day in school. This form will also set out the name of a member of staff who will act as contact person with whom you (or your son/ daughter if they are aged over

18 years) may communicate, and where appropriate, a plan for the time during which your child will not be in attendance at the school.

This return to school plan should be discussed with you (and the student where appropriate). You (and the student where appropriate) should also receive a copy of the agreed plan.

The guidelines for schools set out that, in instances where a student has special educational needs (SEN), schools are advised to notify the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) local Special Educational Needs Organiser of the decision to place your child on a reduced school day. Schools seeking access to professional development relating to a specific special education issue in their school can contact their local NCSE Regional Team to build the capacity of their school to support students requiring reduced school days.

In addition to assisting schools to support individual students, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) offers a support and development programme to build capacity in schools.

NEPS, in consultation with parents/guardians, teachers and relevant professionals, may support a plan for a gradual reintroduction to school for children who are out of school due to school phobia or separation anxiety or other exceptional circumstances.

5. Length of a Reduced School Day intervention

Ideally, the period in which your child is on a Reduced School Day, should be as short as possible and it should not exceed six school weeks.

A Reduced School Day cannot be carried forward from one school year to the next.

The school must inform you of the date when your child will be able to return to school for the full school day.

If your child remains on a reduced school day as the time limit of the plan approaches the school must arrange for a review with you and your child.

Extending the time period for the Reduced School day should only happen in exceptional circumstances. The school must ask for your written consent for any extension of the plan. If your child is over 18, the school can ask them to agree to the extension.

You do not have to agree to or give consent and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time.

If you agree to extend the period of a Reduced School day the school must submit a new notification form to TESS with the details of the new date for your child's return to school.

You are advised to keep a copy of any forms given to you by the school as this will help you if you need to refer to them later.

6. Where Parents or Guardians or Students over 18 years do not consent to the use of a reduced school day

You do not have to agree or give consent to placing your child on a reduced day and you are free to change your mind and withdraw your consent to the use of a reduced school day at any time.

If you have given consent to a reduced day but have changed your mind, you must inform the school in writing. You will have to sign a form stating that you have changed your mind and that you no longer agree to the reduced school day.

You might want to use the example of a letter written to the school which is at the end of this document (Appendix A). You can seek advice from the TESS educational welfare officer if you have any questions on withdrawing consent for your child to access a reduced school day.

If you have not agreed or have withdrawn consent and the school proceeds or continues with a reduced school day, this is effectively a suspension and, in accordance with Tusla's Developing A Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008), (https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/guidelines_school_codes_eng.pdf) the relevant procedures in relation to a suspension apply.

All schools have a "Code of Behaviour" and schools are required, under section 23(2) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, to include their procedures for suspension and expulsion in their Code of Behaviour. This Code should set out the procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from his or her school. You can ask the school for a copy of the school's Code of Behaviour.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 offers an appeal where the Board of Management, or a person acting on behalf of the Board of Management (for example the School Principal) suspends a student for a period/s totaling not less than 20 days in a school year.

To make an appeal you must complete a Section 29 Appeal Form, the form and information in relation to suspensions or expulsions is available at the following link;

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/19941-appeals-against-expulsion-or-suspension-for-a-period-or-periods-totaling-not-less-than-20-school-days-in-a-school-year/>

TESS Educational Welfare Officers can also provide you with advice and support in relation to your child's attendance at school and the Section 29 appeal process.

7. The Role of Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) promotes school attendance, participation and retention of students in schools. TESS Educational Welfare Officers work with parents,

students, schools and other agencies to address barriers that impact on your child from full school attendance.

Schools must notify TESS when a student is being placed on a Reduced School day. TESS can offer support and guidance to both you and the school in relation to the use of Reduced School days. Contact details for Educational Welfare Officers are available at the following link.

<https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>

Appendix A

Notice of withdrawal of consent to a Reduced School Day

To:{insert Name of School Principal} _____

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

Name of Student: _____

Name of Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

I wish to withdraw my consent to a Reduced School Day with effect from [insert future date you wish the reduced school day to end]: _____

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) signature: _____

Date: _____