

Education and Disability

A quarter of children in Ireland have some form of disability ¹

Disability is one of the least visible but most potent factors in educational marginalisation. Physical and mental impairment carry a stigma that is often a basis for exclusion from mainstream education.

Children with disabilities are more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to the rest of the population²

This creates a double disadvantage as those with disabilities, coupled with lower socio-economic status, are more likely to be placed in special school settings, outside of the mainstream.

Successive austerity budgets have markedly impacted on the provision of education for people with disabilities. One example of this is the 21% budget cut of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in 2011. While the Government has gone some way to increasing the numbers of Special Needs Assistants through Budget 2015, the previous erosion of this service and the lack of funding for the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) has resulted in poorer outcomes for children and young people with disabilities.

In the first quarter of 2015, just 39% of applications for Assessment of Need were completed within the required timeframe

Early intervention plays a key role in supporting children with special needs, and can make a significant difference to a child's future. Currently, waiting lists to get an assessment of need are far too long. Many

parents are forced to pay for private assessments to support applications for additional resources. Parents that cannot afford to pay for private diagnoses for their children are getting less resource hours in their school.³

43% of people with disabilities have not progressed beyond primary education, in comparison with 19% of all adults⁴

Children with disabilities are being insufficiently supported through key transitioning periods. Among people with disabilities, one third left education before they intended to as a result of their disability.⁵ There has also been an increase in children with disabilities leaving mainstream primary education to attend special education settings.⁶

Only 24.5% of people with disabilities have completed third-level education, compared to 38.7% of the general population⁷

The above statistic is particularly striking considering the adverse effect of lower levels of education on employability. The 20% cut in funding for third-level access programmes in 2012 undermines the National Disability Strategy objectives to prioritise participation and access to education. This funding provided vital supports such as assistive technology and learning assistance to students with disabilities.

Almost 1 in 5 of the adult population (16-65) scores at or below Level 1 in OECD survey of adult skills⁸

It has been demonstrated that, with training, people with poor literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to exit the Live Register.⁹ However, within the recently published Comprehensive Employment Strategy, outcomes for people with disabilities accessing further education and training are especially weak.

¹ A Study on the Prevalence of Special Educational Needs: NCSE Research Report No.9 J. Banks and S. McCoy ESRI, 2011.

² J. Banks, B. Maître and S. McCoy (2015) Insights into the Lives of Children with Disabilities. NDA, ESRI.

³ Duncan, P. (September 8th, 2015) Affluent areas get more special needs teaching hours. The Irish Times

⁴ Census (2011) Profile 8. Our bill of Health. CSO

⁵ Cullinan, J., Gannon, B & Lyons, S. (2010) Estimating the extra cost of living for people with disabilities. Health Economics 2011 May; 20(5):582-99.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Census (2011) Profile 8. Our bill of Health. CSO

⁸ Kelly, E et al. (2010) Literacy, Numeracy, Activation amongst the Unemployed, ERSI.

⁹ Ibid

Education for all

Children with disabilities have a right to an educational experience equal to that of their peers. Indeed, children with disabilities thrive when educated alongside their peers. Children's services in general are developing in a more integrated fashion but disability services still stand apart. Education policies require 'Disability Proofing' so that disability is considered in mainstream decision making and planning processes.

Government investment in the first six years of a child's life reduces social inequality and enables children to lead a happier life ¹⁰

It is essential that children with disabilities receive equal access to education on par with others. This requires additional investment in supplementary supports required to meet the diverse needs of these students. Focus should be placed on facilitating a school environment that is accessible to everyone, in order to enable all children to learn, play, and grow. Likewise, existing supports and resources to the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young adults (0-18) needs to be protected.

Full publication and implementation of the EPSEN Act is an immediate priority

The Education of Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 provides a legislative framework for these issues to be addressed. However, to date, only certain sections of the Act have been commenced and key provisions of the Act, such as individual education plans and the appeals process, remain outstanding.

A robust implementation plan for the EPSEN is required in order to coordinate and provide important support services to students with disabilities. This would ensure a more systematic approach with the allocation of timely and effective support and accommodations.

A comprehensive strategy for equity of access to Further Education and Training for people with disabilities is required

Considering the negative association between poor literacy and numeracy skills and unemployment, it is imperative that systems and supports are outlined to ensure people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in mainstream training.

Measures are also required to support the transition of young people with disabilities from second levels into higher level and further education. Inter-departmental cooperation has been indicated as being key to support students with transition planning.¹¹

Technology supports students with disabilities to overcome barriers in educational access, participation, as well as markedly improving their learning progress¹²

It is essential that education policy reflects the critical role of Assistive Technology in ensuring an inclusive education sector. A review of the reasonable accommodations implemented by the State Examinations Commission is needed. These have not been reviewed for 10 years and so fail to understand the impact of hidden conditions and, furthermore, do not optimise the use of technology.

Education for all: Key Benefits

- ✓ Inclusive Education can reduce discrimination against children with disabilities and tackle poverty¹³
- ✓ Educating children with a disability is an essential investment as it reduces welfare costs and future dependence¹⁴
- ✓ Diversity, represented in inclusive classrooms, enriches educational experience for all¹⁵

¹⁰ OECD (2009) Doing better for children.

¹¹ Duggan, C & Byrne, M. (2013) What works in the provision of higher, further and continuing education, training and rehabilitation for adults with disabilities? NCSE

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Unicef (2011) The right of children with disabilities in education: a rights based approach to inclusive education in the CEECIS region

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ NCSE (2013) Supporting students with special educational needs in schools