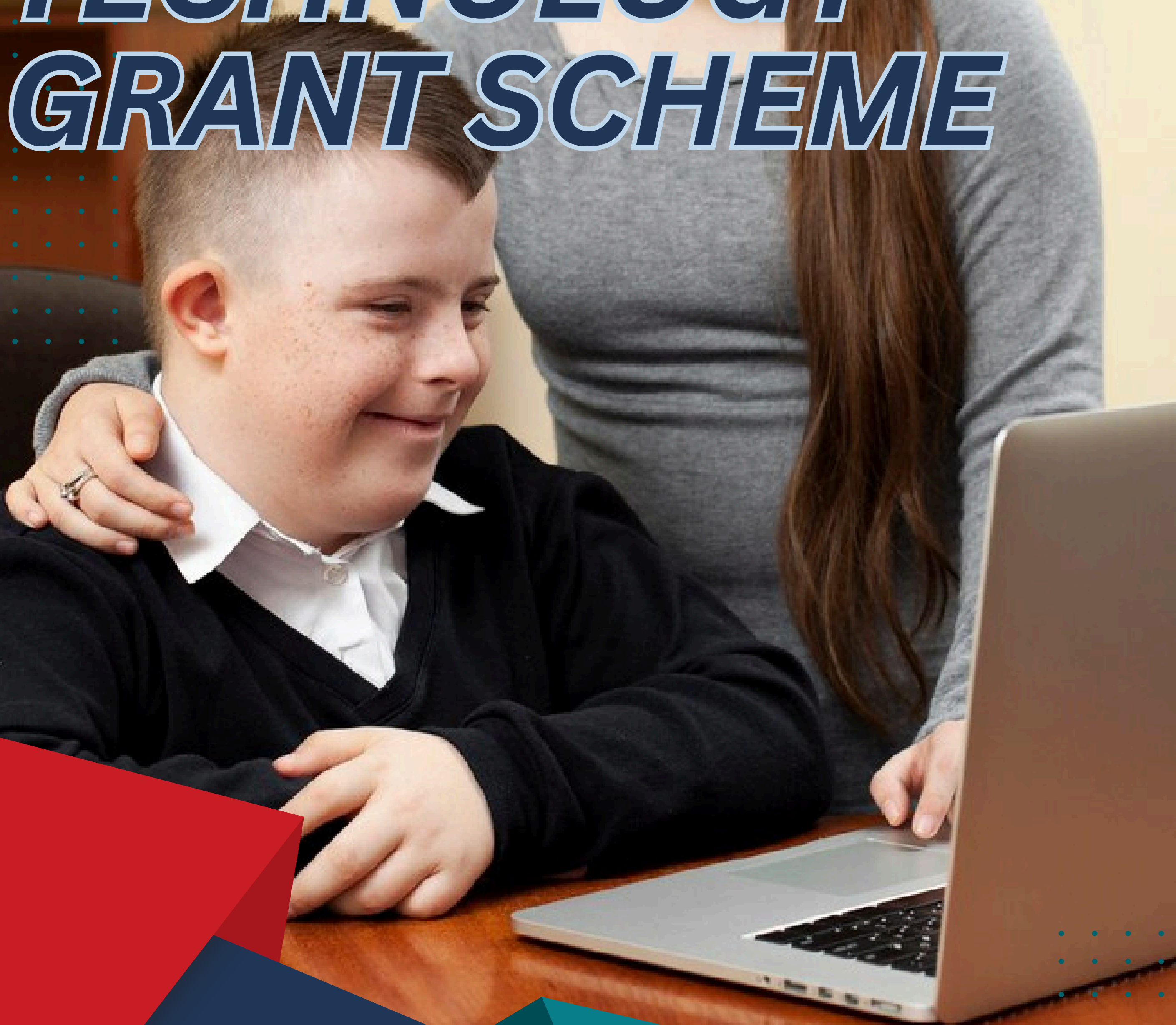


# ***REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY GRANT SCHEME***



**NPC**

SUPPORTING PARENTS  
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

# NPC Vision

The National Parents Council want to see an Ireland where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential

# NPC Mission

The National Parents Council exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children's education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children and young people.

# Values

NPC knows that when parents and schools work together, children do better. Therefore, NPC believes that in order to achieve this parents must feel:

**Engaged:** Parents must be actively engaged in the education of their children.

**Supported:** Parents' involvement in children's education must be supported by the attitudes, beliefs and practices of all members of the school and broader education community.

**Partners:** Parents must be viewed as partners in facilitating children's learning and be supported in this role by the school and broader education community.

**Valued:** Parents should be viewed as full partners in the decisions that affect their children and their family.

**Welcomed:** Parents should be welcome in the school, and their support and assistance sought as a valuable resource to support children's education in the school.

**Connected:** All communication and dialogue with parents must be regular, open, two-way and meaningful.

# National Parents Council

## Key Activities

### SERVICE DELIVERY

NPC's services are developed to empower parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

### HELPLINE

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen and give information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.

### TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.

### WEBSITE

The NPC's website [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie) aims to provide parents with information regarding education at early years, primary and post primary levels.

### ADVOCACY

NPC engages in awareness-raising activities and campaigning and lobbying at a national level on the objectives of its Strategic Plan.

### REPRESENTING PARENTS

NPC represents the voice of parents through representation on external bodies and other mediums. NPC consults with parents and brings parents' views to bear on education policy.

### BUILDING PARTICIPATION

NPC builds participation strategies and activities to ensure parents and children are an integral part of the work of NPC.

# Introduction

**The National Parents Council (NPC) is pleased to share the views of parents regarding the Department of Education's (DOE) review of its Assistive Technology (AT) Grant Scheme. NPC prepared a survey which was based on the questions shared by the DoE. The survey was circulated to all parents on our mailing list and was advertised on our website and social media channels. The survey was open from Monday 2nd September to Monday 9th September and received a total of 1074 responses.**

**Many parents gave individual answers to our survey questions and these have been summarised in this report and included separately as a word document.**



# VOICE ASSISTANT



HI! HOW CAN I HELP YOU?



## NPC

SUPPORTING PARENTS  
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

**Q1:** The majority of parents who responded have a child in a mainstream class in a primary school with a smaller number (20%) in post-primary. Parents who have children in special schools or classes have also responded. (See Figure 1)



Figure 1- Is your child in a:

**Q2:** Just over half the parents who responded are aware of the supports available, but a significant minority are not. (See Figure 2)



Figure 2- Are you aware of any technological support tools that are made available to children with special needs?

**Q3:** One-third of the parents who responded reported that their child had access to assistive technology, but the other two thirds of parents reported that their children did not have access to support or that they were not aware of this. (See Figure 3)



Figure 3- Does your child have access to technological support tools to help their learning?

**Q4:** We asked those parents whose children do not have access to support if they thought their children needed this support. More than half said yes, and the rest said no, or they did not know. (See Figure 4)



Figure 4- Do you think they need access to technological support tools?

**Q5:** Of the parents whose children do have access to assistive support a substantial number said they found those supports helpful, but more than half said either they were not helpful, or they did not know if they were helpful. (See Figure 5)



Figure 5- Do the current technological support tools help your child to access the curriculum?

**Q6:** We asked all parents what made it difficult for them to access assistive technology. We gave parents a range of options. More than half of the parents said that the lack of availability of equipment was the greatest barrier. This was followed by resistance from the school or medical staff and too many forms to fill out. Only 5 parents reported that their children did not want to use the equipment. (See Figure 6)



Figure 6- Have any of the following factors made it difficult for your child to access technological support tools?

**Q7:** When we asked parents what would make it easier for their child to make the best use of the assistive technology, 305 parents gave us individual responses. These are all included in the appendix but in summary, many parents highlighted the need for easier access to technological support tools with fewer administrative hurdles. They want faster approval processes, less red tape, and the ability for parents to directly apply for these tools, not just the schools to be able to apply. A considerable number of responses emphasised the importance of providing training for teachers on how to use assistive technologies effectively in the classroom. Additionally, parents want more information and training themselves, so they can better support their children at home. Another common theme was the need for better communication from schools about the available technological supports, eligibility criteria, and guidance on how these tools can be best utilised both in school and at home.

Overall, parents are calling for improved accessibility, better training, and clearer communication regarding technological support tools to help their children make the most of these resources.

**Q8:** We asked parents who should decide which students are given assistive technology. We gave them a range of choices and the most popular choice was the school, followed by the parent and then a medical professional, then a visiting teacher, the NCSE, and finally the child. (See Figure 7)

In addition, 92 parents gave individual comments. These have all been included in the appendix but in summary, they believe that the decision as to who should decide which students are given assistive technology should be a combined one between parents, teachers, and health professionals such as educational psychologists and occupational therapists.

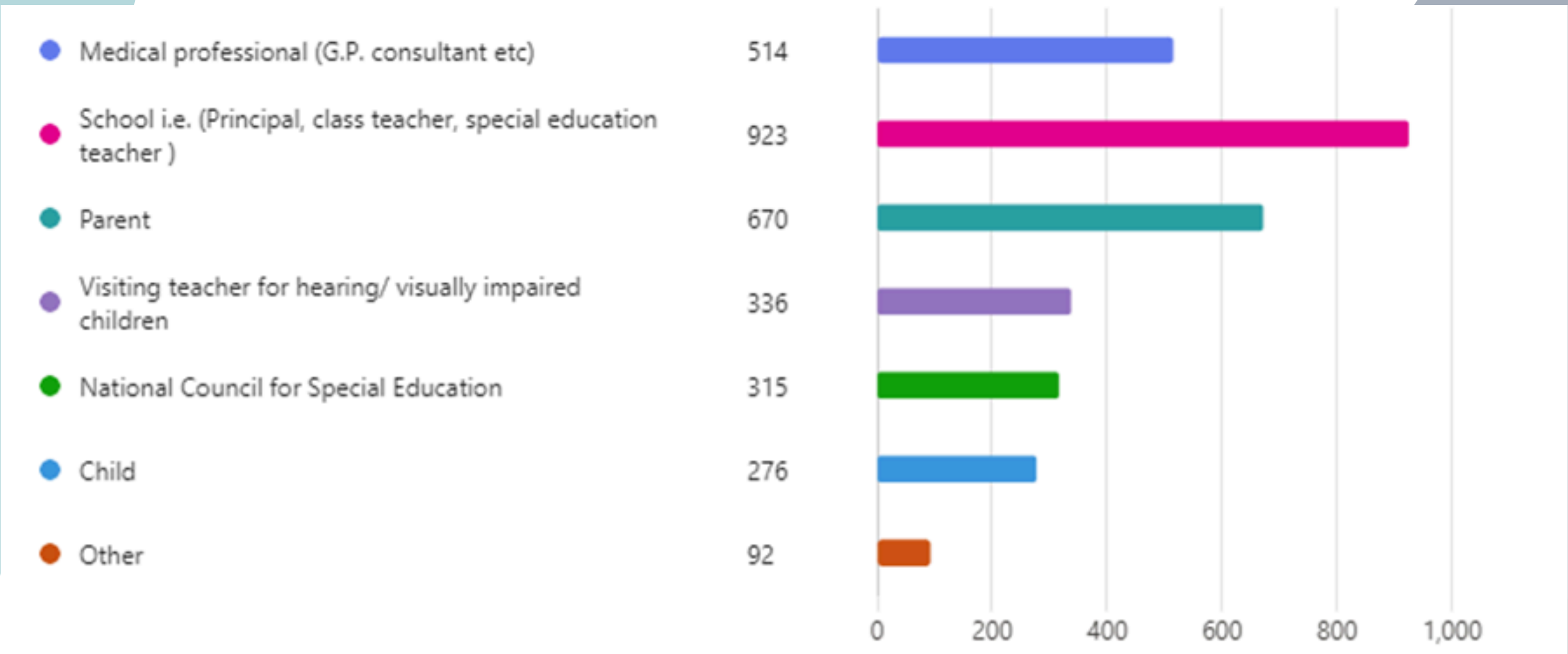


*Figure 7- Who should decide which students are given technological support tools*

**Q9:** When we asked parents if they would like to comment further on this, 336 parents gave us more details. As before these are all included in the appendix. In summary, many parents strongly believe that decisions regarding technological support should be based primarily on the child's individual needs, as identified by professionals like occupational therapists, educational psychologists, and teachers. They argue that the current criteria and approval processes are too rigid and often overlook the specific needs of the child. A recurring theme was the need for a more collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, and medical professionals in decision-making. Parents feel that their insights, along with those of educators and clinicians who work directly with their children, should be central to the process of determining and implementing technological support.

**Q10:** We asked parents on what basis assistive technology support should be given to students. We gave parents a range of options and the most popular answer was that support should be given based on the child’s Individual Education Plans (IEP). This was followed by an equal number of parents (24%) saying they believe it should be based on severity of need and the suitability of the technology. 15% of the parents surveyed told us that support should be given to children who have multiple diagnoses with a final 3% of parents giving individual views. These views have all been included in the appendix. In summary, they are saying it should be based on a flexible, inclusive, and needs-based approach to providing technological support tools for children with special needs. (See Figure 8)

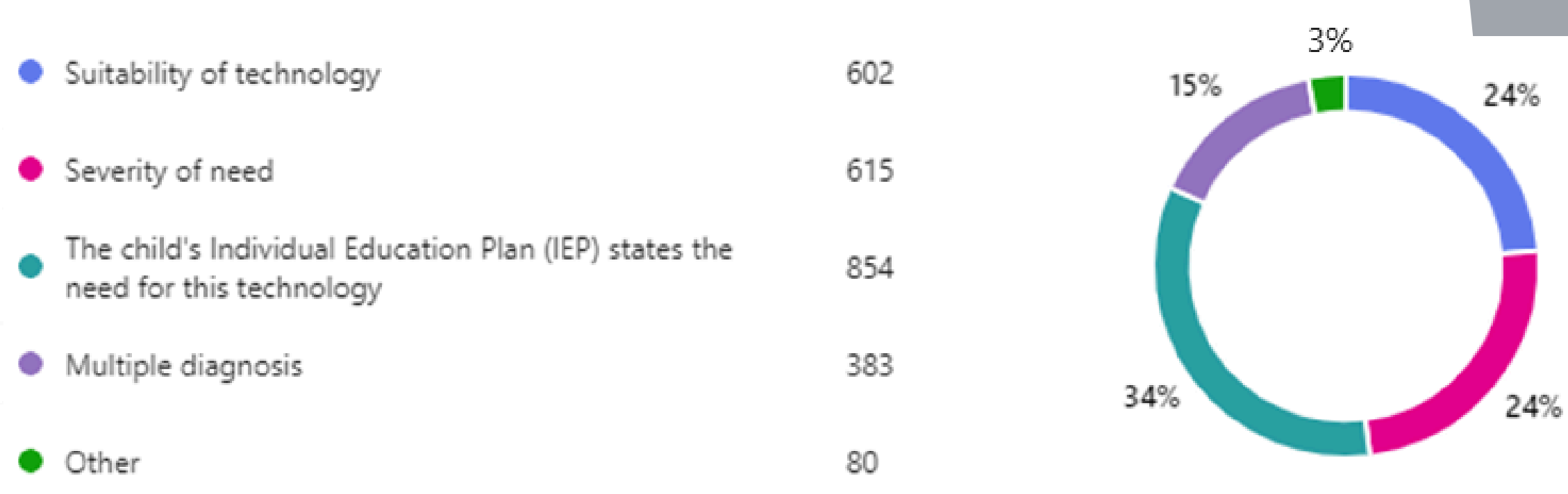


Figure 8- Technological support tools should be provided to students based on:

**Q11:** We asked what can be done to make the process of applying for technological support easier for parents and students. Parents had lots of ideas of how the system could be improved. They started by outlining their key concerns which included: the lengthy and cumbersome process often delayed by bureaucratic hurdles. Parents reported waiting for over two years in some cases, and the application process involved multiple steps, including securing assessments from occupational therapists and educational psychologists, which are often delayed due to long waiting lists or financial constraints.

Parents also highlighted the need for better communication between schools, parents, and education departments regarding the availability of AT and the application process. Furthermore, they voiced concerns about schools not always implementing the recommendations made in formal assessments or denying access to AT based on unclear criteria, leaving children without crucial tools for their education.

The general sentiment is that more streamlined processes, quicker access to resources, and greater awareness of what supports are available are needed to ensure children with special needs can access the curriculum effectively with the help of technology.

**Q12:** We asked parents who should retain ownership of the technology when a child moves from one school to another. More than half said the child with a quarter saying the school. 5% said the NCSE. The final 5% of parents gave a range of individual answers which are all included in the appendix. In summary, they asked for a flexible approach, considering factors such as the type of device, the needs of the new school, and whether the device is specifically adapted for the child’s use. (See Figure 9)



*Figure 9- When a child moves from one school to another, who should keep the device?*

**Q13:** We then asked if their child had moved school. Only 26% had moved. (See Figure 10)



Figure 10- Has your child moved school (e.g. primary - post-primary)?

**Q14:** We asked those parents whose child had moved school if there were any difficulties with the move regarding the use of the technology supports. The majority said there were no difficulties. (See Figure 11)



Figure 11- Have you experienced any difficulties with this?

**Q15:** We asked what those difficulties were, and 89 parents responded. They told us when schools retained devices, such as laptops, instead of transferring them with the child, this caused delays or forced parents to reapply for technology. In addition, there was a lack of communication between primary and post primary schools, leaving parents unsure of how or if the technology would be transferred. In some cases, parents were unaware of who to contact for support. Transitioning to a new school without the necessary technology caused added stress for children, particularly for those with autism or sensory needs, leading to feelings of isolation or being "different" from their peers.

Overall, the transition to a new school often compounded existing challenges with obtaining and using AT, creating frustration for both parents and students.

**Q16:** We asked parents if they thought school staff had been adequately trained to use the supports. Roughly one-third believed that they had with a further third believing they had not. The final third of parents gave individual answers which have all been included in the appendix. Overall, the predominant feedback reflects uncertainty and highlights the need for better training and clearer communication about the use of technological support in schools. (See Figure 12)



*Figure 12- In your experience, have the school staff been adequately trained to use technological support tools to ensure the best outcome for children?*

**Q17:** Almost all parents believe that they should be trained in how to use the supports. (See Figure 13)



*Figure 13- Do you think parents should be trained to use technological support tools?*

**Q18:** Finally we asked if parents had any additional comments to add. Key points included the inconsistent and delayed provision of technology, often taking over a year after being recommended by professionals. Many expressed frustrations with the bureaucratic hurdles and lack of clear information about eligibility and application processes, with some families reporting having to pay for private assessments to qualify.

Training was another major theme, with both teachers and parents requiring more education on how to effectively use the devices. Inconsistent use of technology across schools and teachers was a common complaint, with some children only able to use their devices depending on the teacher's engagement with assistive technology. Additionally, devices are sometimes not used outside of the classroom or during exams, further limiting their usefulness.

Parents also expressed concerns about who owns the technology—whether it stays with the child when they move schools—and stressed that technology should be upgraded as children advance in their education. They also emphasized the need for early diagnosis and intervention, as well as better communication between schools, parents, and support services. Many called for increased funding and faster processes to support children's needs, and for broader access to technology as a fundamental part of education, not just a supplementary tool.

Finally, there was a desire for more consistency across schools, better integration of assistive technology into the curriculum, and an overall improvement in the provision and management of support systems for children with special needs.



VOICE ASSISTANT



HI! HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

