



NPC Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education for Children with Special Education Needs



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 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.

Opening Statement

The National Parents Council (NPC) thanks the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Youth for the invitation to the meeting on Education for Children with Special Education Needs.

To prepare for this meeting, the NPC carried out a survey to gather feedback from parents. The survey was developed and guided by the areas presented by the Joint Oireachtas Committee for discussion at its upcoming meeting and therefore looked at, how and when schools are told how many Special Education Teachers (SETs) and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) they will have, whether school buildings are suitable for students with additional needs, and how easy it is to access supports like the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). It also asked parents whether delays or problems in these areas have affected their children.

The findings presented in this opening statement are based on the results of this survey conducted by the NPC between the 24th and 26th of June 2025 with a total of 418 parents who completed the survey.





Parents across the country who have responded to this survey have shared their concerns about the delays and difficulties in accessing essential educational supports for their children. These include Special Education Teachers (SET), Special Needs Assistants (SNA), NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service) assessments, and suitable school buildings.

1. Delays in Assessments and Support:

Many parents reported long waiting times for NEPS assessments. In most schools, only one or two students can be referred each year, which means many students are left waiting for years or are never assessed at all. Some parents said they didn't know NEPS existed until late in the process. Some students are only assessed in 6th class, which parents believe is too late to provide early intervention. When there are delays or families don't know what help is available, they often feel they have no choice but to pay for private assessments, even if it's too expensive.

Even when students have a diagnosis or professional recommendations, schools often cannot guarantee support. Parents described situations where they felt that their child's SNA or SET hours were reduced or removed because another student was assessed as a higher priority. This creates a sense of competition between students for limited resources, which parents find deeply unfair and distressing.

2. Inconsistent and Limited SNA and SET Support:

Parents expressed frustration that they believed that SNA and SET support is not always based on need. Some students only receive help after a serious incident or behavioural crisis. Others lose support because they are doing well—ironically, because the support was working. Many parents said their children were left without SNA support because they did not meet the strict criteria for “primary care needs”, even though they needed emotional or learning support.

There is also concern about how support is managed. Parents reported that SET teachers are often pulled away to cover other classes. They also reported SNAs are used as general classroom assistants and can be left supervising classes in place of teachers.



3. Lack of Communication and Transparency:

A common theme was poor communication between schools, parents, and services. Many parents said they were not informed about NEPS referrals, SNA changes, or SET plans. Some only found out about changes after they had already happened. Others said they had to fight for every bit of support, sending multiple emails or making complaints just to be heard. They said it often felt like “everything was up to them”. Parents reported that they had to manage the process alone, without help, even when they didn’t understand how the system worked.

Parents also said they felt excluded from decisions about their child’s education. They want to be more involved and better informed about what support is available and how to access it. They also want clearer processes and more consistent policies across schools.

4. Inadequate School Buildings and Facilities:

Parents reported that many schools are operating in temporary buildings or outdated facilities that are not suitable for students with additional needs. Parents described schools without sensory rooms, quiet spaces, or proper toilets. Some schools are still waiting for promised extensions or new buildings, with delays lasting years.

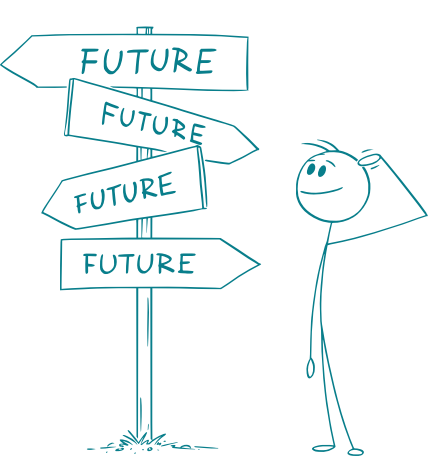
These poor conditions parents reported, make it harder for students to learn and feel safe. Parents said that students with sensory issues, physical disabilities, or emotional needs are especially affected. They want the Department of Education to prioritise building improvements and ensure that all schools are accessible and inclusive.

5. A Call for Change:

Overall, parents feel the system is broken. They are tired of fighting for basic support and watching their children struggle. Parents also said schools should offer basic therapies and better summer support for students with extra needs. They want:

- Clearer communication and more involvement in decisions.
- Faster and fairer access to NEPS assessments.
- More SNA and SET staff in schools.
- Better training for teachers and SNAs.
- Therapy sessions like OT and speech therapy in schools.
- Summer support that is easier to access.
- School buildings that are safe, accessible, and properly equipped.

Parents believe that every student deserves the chance to learn and thrive in school.



Conclusion

This report shares parents views who responded to the survey, about a number of key areas regarding special education provision in Ireland. It shows that while some students are getting helpful support, many others face serious delays and challenges.

Parents want a system that gives every student the support they need—on time and in full. They believe schools should be properly staffed, well-equipped, and offer services like therapy and assessments without long waits. Clearer communication and stronger partnerships between parents, schools, and support services are also needed.

