

IEPs – Advice to ASTI Members

The ASTI is committed to the provision of equality of opportunity for students with special educational needs. ASTI members have a long and proud track record of providing quality and inclusive learning experiences for all students in their classrooms.*

The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, 2004 includes a requirement for schools to provide an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students with special needs. However, this section of the EPSEN Act has not been commenced, as was recently confirmed by the Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh in a statement to the Dáil: “There is currently not a statutory requirement for schools to provide a mandatory Individual Education Plan for children with special needs” (for full statement visit <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-12-04/section/202/>).

In view of the fact that IEPs have not commenced under the EPSEN Act, ASTI members are advised not to implement IEPs or equivalents (such as Student Support Files, etc.).

While members are being advised not to create or devise IEPs or equivalents, existing arrangements for the education of current and future students with special education needs will not be impacted by this.

Members should therefore continue to engage in their normal class planning (e.g. pedagogical strategies, differentiation, etc.).

The ASTI is extremely concerned that in the context of insufficient resourcing and the lack of a sustainable model for the delivery of all aspects of the EPSEN Act, Circular 0014/ 2017 and the accompanying “Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools Supporting Students with Special Education Needs” effectively seek to introduce IEPs or equivalents.

The ASTI rejects the imposition of a special needs model which takes no account of the time, workload and practical implications for teachers and schools. In particular, the ASTI is concerned that:

- Teachers’ professionalism and commitment to inclusive education is not being supported by the necessary resources, training and allocation of time for collaboration.
- Requiring subject teachers to collaborate with parents, external agencies and a significant number of teachers for each student with a special education need is impractical.
- The training is inadequate to ensure appropriate levels of specialist knowledge in schools in the area of special needs education.
- Special Education Needs (SEN) Co-ordinators are being given a near impossible task and face excessive demands.
- SEN Co-ordinators/ SEN teachers are not being given adequate time to co-ordinate education planning for students with special education needs.
- The wider issue of teacher workload and initiative overload is not being addressed.

The ASTI has raised the above issues directly with the Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh and has emphasised the urgent need to address this matter.

The ASTI is available to advise and support any ASTI member in relation to this issue.

Inspectorate

In advance of a new model of inspection in the area of special needs education, which is being implemented from January 2019, the Inspectorate has been made aware of the ASTI's advice to members.

*It is estimated that approximately 25% of students have special education needs. This means that a subject teacher teaching 250 student typically has 60 plus students with special education needs.

Below is a further statement issued in response to queries to Head Office.

Since the introduction of the EPSEN Act (2004) inclusive education has become a success story for Ireland.

The vast majority of students with special education needs are attending mainstream schools and are in mainstream classes. This is despite the significant under-funding of Irish schools and a decade of austerity. The success of inclusive education in Ireland is testament to the professionalism and commitment of teachers and other staff to students with special education needs.

Despite recent advances and improvements, schools and teachers remain grossly unsupported. For example, the new Resource Allocation Model, which is in place since September 2017, has not been accompanied by training for all teachers.

Classroom teachers are extremely concerned that without the proper training, they do not have the skills to prepare and implement complex Individual Education Plans/ Student Support Files.

The ASTI advice to its members - that they do not prepare and implement Individual Education Plans/ Student Support Files - seeks to ensure that the Government delivers on its responsibilities to students with special education needs by equipping schools and teachers with the training and supports needed to deliver a fully inclusive education service.

The ASTI believes that forcing teachers to engage in the preparation of extensive planning documentation without the necessary training and resources is unworkable. Moreover it has the potential to undermine much of the excellent work going on in the classroom with students with special education needs. We note that the other second-level teachers' union (TUI) has the same concerns and has issued similar advice to its members.

Parents and students can be assured that teachers and schools will continue to provide a quality education to students with special education needs including differentiated teaching, feedback and assessment, assistance with communication, visual supports etc.