



INCLUSION IRELAND

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

**Opening Statement to the
Oireachtas Joint Committee
on Education, Further and
Higher Education, Research,
Innovation & Science**

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Ireland plain English guidelines**

Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, Inclusion Ireland welcomes the opportunity to be here today to discuss this very important issue.

The issue of bullying in schools continues to be an important issue that arises in our advocacy work.

According to research, children with additional needs are two-three times more than their peers to experience bullying. The UN also point out that “children with disabilities are six times as likely as other children to experience violence and abuse”. This is especially true for children with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.

The bullying experienced by children in schools must be seen through the prism of general attitudes towards people with disabilities in Ireland, the absence of inclusive educational systems, and the importance of children’s mental health supports.

One important aspect to consider on bullying is attitudes towards people with disabilities in Irish society. The National Disability Authority have reported that 28% of the public disagreed that children with autism or an intellectual disability should attend the same school as non-disabled children.

Addressing the negative attitudes towards children with disabilities must form part of the response to tackling bullying of children with additional needs.

Northern Irish research illustrated that children with additional needs themselves felt that they were bullied because they were “different”, and that the bullying was related to their disability.

Inclusive education and societies are important factors in addressing bullying as research shows isolation from peers is a risk factor for children with additional needs being bullied.

The NDA proposed five guiding principles are to underpin a framework for schools to ensure that their school becomes a place where staff and

children are happy and safe from bullying.

- A rights-based approach to protect children from bullying to govern and underpin principles and practices
- Systemic interventions
- Inclusive processes
- Education and training
- Leadership training and communication

This framework shares many common principles with inclusive education.

Children's mental health services are a key part in supporting children with disabilities who have been bullied. 35-40% of children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities have mental health problems. This is five times greater than the general population. At the same time, CAMHS ID services are almost non-existent.

To conclude the following actions can be undertaken to address bullying and support children who have been bullied.

- The Government must engage in a public awareness campaign on reducing the stigma around disability
- The government must invest in inclusive education. This results in better short and longer term social outcomes for children with additional needs; such as in maintaining positive peer relationships and better social development
- Continue the improvement of therapeutic supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'
- Invest in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) especially CAMHS ID.