

Presentation

Joint Committee on Education & Science

On behalf of

IMPACT

Thursday 11th March 2010

IMPACT trade union has a very real concern that the current round of cuts to the Special Needs Assistants service are not driven by a reasoned approach to the needs of children.

We believe that they are driven more by crude - and ultimately bogus - financial considerations. That is, more by the McCarty report than by any attempt to meet the rights of children with special educational needs in a fair and efficient manner.

All of the stakeholders in this issue accept that while there is an obvious need to ensure that the service delivers in a cost effective and transparently accountable way, it must continue to be a needs based service, with the best interests of children at its heart.

Special Needs Assistants are committed to finding better ways to provide for the children they work with, so long as the rights and needs of these children are protected. They also need to have confidence that their entitlements as employees are similarly respected.

In November 2008 we made a submission to the *Value for Money and Policy Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme* with suggestions on more efficient use of resources, clarifying the role of SNAs, professional qualifications, and the basis of employment which would best facilitate redeployment of staff as required.

Our contention is that the outcome of this review would have provided a better and more reasoned approach to ensuring that the rights of these vulnerable children are protected.

The failure to implement the 2004 EPSEN Act is at the root of our current difficulties. There is inadequate provision for an independent appeals procedure, and ultimately, we do not feel that the rights of children with special needs can be fully vindicated.

The appeals procedures introduced by the NCSE from 22nd February this year, are too late to address the bulk of the recent cuts, and fail to meet the standards of natural justice we would hope for.

The independent review is restricted to looking at the process applied rather than the decisions actually made in relation to the child's needs. In its current form, the appeals procedure merely reviews the NCSE's own internal decisions.

The outcome, ultimately, is that jobs are shed from the system despite a continuing need for the service. And while the procedure is drawn out, vulnerable children will lose out on continuing access to education, which the EPSEN act is supposed to facilitate.

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Assistant General Secretary
IMPACT

*(Attached copy submission to
Value for Money Review of The Special Needs Assistant scheme)*