

## What is the Special Needs Parents Association?

Special Needs Parents Association exists to support all parents of children with special needs irrespective of age or diagnosis, by advocating on a national level for improved treatment, education, welfare and acceptance for our children.

## Why does it exist?

The Special Needs Parents Association was set up early in 2010 by likeminded parents from all over Ireland who realised that there was a need for a national organisation to represent the views of all parents who had children with special needs, regardless of their diagnosis or age. We chose not to distinguish between parents who had children with physical disabilities; intellectual disabilities, Autistic spectrum disorders or non-diagnosed conditions, for all parents of these children had one thing in common. They were parents of children with special needs.

## What do we do?

We do not seek to compete with other local groups, but to help point parents in the right direction who may be looking for a local group or service and to provide parent to parent support in the areas where there is none. The Association has a network of Area Representatives offering local support to parents and to liaise with local groups and services.

On a national level the Association aims to represent parents who feel strongly about their children's access to the Irish education system as well as to society in general.

Should you require advice or support, a list of nationwide contacts is available on our website.

Phone: +353 86 8123458/087 7741917

[www.specialneedsparents.ie](http://www.specialneedsparents.ie)

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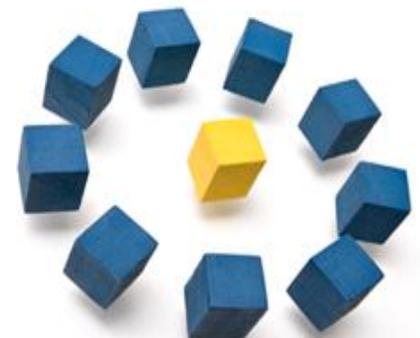


## Election 2011

**Your Child's Future**

**Your Vote**

**What you need to ask  
your politicians.**



**special needs parents**  
*association*

## What you should be asking your local candidates and why your vote matters?

- **What is your party policy on Special Education Provision and the support of children with special needs to get an Inclusive Education?**

This year, children with special needs and disabilities are having previously-allocated Special Needs Assistant hours removed in Irish primary and secondary schools. The number of SNA's has now been capped at 10,575 for 2011, but beyond looking at a general allocation for schools that qualify, as of yet there are no plans as to how this can be implemented.

There still is no independent appeals process in place for a parent to lodge an appeal to regarding a decision of a Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), regarding their child. Appeals will become commonplace in the future.

- **Will your party support more investment in integrated student support services in mainstream 3<sup>rd</sup> level education for students with intellectual disabilities and specific learning difficulties?**

There is little provision outside smaller programmes currently being run in some Irish Universities, which limit places and opportunities for young adults with learning disabilities. Once they reach 18, the opportunity to continue with their education ceases in many areas. Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Further Education, have a lack of support services which could facilitate more students with special needs in achieving a 3<sup>rd</sup> level qualification.

- **Where does your party stand on Disability Legislation? Are you prepared to make their enactments a priority?**

EPSEN Act 2004 has still not been fully enacted. Individualised Educational Plans (IEP's) are recommended by the National Council for Special Education but are not a legal requirement. Modern Capacity Legislation is required before we can ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. This will give our children who are over 18 yrs. the right to make their own decisions. The Disability Act 2005 has yet to be fully implemented, particularly in relation to the Assessment of Needs for children over 5yrs and adults.

- **How is your party planning on addressing the lack of therapies and waiting lists, particularly for Speech & Language and Occupational Therapy? Is your party in favour of Individualised Funding and do they propose to means test it?**
- Families of children with learning disabilities often have no access to therapies and service supports once their child enters mainstream education, and are left with no choice but to wait for years on a HSE waiting list. There are currently over 23000 waiting for SLT. Children can be waiting 3 years plus. Waiting lists that have been further affected by the staff embargo in the HSE. Once our children reach the age of 18, access to all essential therapies diminishes further. Individualised Funding is one solution proposed to allow more choice and access to therapies, where and when they need them.
- **How does your party intend on facilitating children and adults with disabilities to enable them to participate equally in society?**

The National Disability Strategy 2004 has fallen to pieces. An essential element of the National Disability Strategy is the completion of assessments of need for all people requiring support. Assessment of Needs only identifies what support your child or an adult requires with no obligation to provide those services when they would be of most benefit. The chance of Early Intervention is missed in many cases of Autistic and non-label children and has become almost a 'postcode lottery'.

- **Will your party ring fence and maintain appropriate levels of funding for Disability Services, Residential and Respite Care and Community based schemes that improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities and special needs?**

Respite care, services, welfare payments and tax credits have also been affected and will face a further dramatic cut over the next few years. This combination of cuts has put unprecedented strain on parents and has reduced the ability for those trying to live independently of their parents.

Greater transparency is called for to ensure that funds are being spent appropriately by the HSE and Service Providers to ensure that efficiency and effectiveness is optimized in the Disability Sector. We can no longer afford decisions based on a 'save now-pay more later' ideology. Proper resources now will be more cost effective in the long-term.

- **The list is endless. Please add any questions that are relevant to your particular situation.**