

Children's Rights Alliance
NEWS RELEASE

12 December 2002
For Immediate Release

Don't cut special education services to children

The Children's Rights Alliance today called on Minister for Education Noel Dempsey to abandon plans to cut special education services to children and to proceed with the planned appointment of 788 resource teachers whose employment is now apparently on hold.

Responding to a published report of planned cuts, the Alliance said the threatened reductions in services violate children's educational rights and appear to be little more than an attempt to bring educational expenditures into line with the regressive Budget introduced last week by the Government.

"The level of special educational services provided by the Department must be driven by children's needs, not by artificial budget caps or by reference to alleged levels of services provided in other countries," said Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance. "Children - including children with special needs - have a right to education and the Government has an obligation to provide it. Claims that other EU countries serve fewer children with special needs in no way relieves the Irish Government of its duty under both the Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide an education to all Irish children. By the same token, the fact that the City of Boston provides special educational services to half again as many children (17%) as the percentage of children served in Ireland (12%) does not mean that Ireland should increase its provision level, despite Boston (as opposed to Berlin) being so often cited as a policy model for Ireland. Nor does the fact that the same percentage of children in the United States and Ireland receive special needs educational services prove that the service levels in either country are adequate to meet the real needs of children.

"The National Children's Strategy states that 'Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential.' It says nothing about Ireland entering into a 'race the bottom' with other countries that may choose not to provide such services.

"We already knew that Budget 2003 represented a series of broken promises to children. Now we are learning that the broken pledges apparently go beyond Medical Cards, Child Benefit and the repair of dilapidated primary schools."

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 72 non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and needs of children. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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