



Guidelines on the use of reduced timetables in schools

**Submission to the
Department of Education & Skills**

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1 Introduction

IPPN is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the DES, the National Parents' Council, management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of over 6,500 Principals and Deputy Principals.

1.1 Consultation Process

IPPN thanks the Department for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to draft guidelines on the use of reduced timetables in schools. Given the timescales involved in the submission, IPPN was not in a position to consult with member or to provide any facts and figures, which we would typically endeavour to do to support the points made in a submission.

IPPN made a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee in April 2019 in relation to reduced timetables and presented to the JOC in May 2019 on the same topic. The context and recommendations from the April 2019 submission are included in Appendix A. We note and acknowledge that a number of these recommendations have been reflected in the draft guidelines.

If the Department would like to discuss any aspect of this submission with IPPN, we remain at your disposal.



2 Review Conclusions

Having reviewed the draft guidelines, IPPN welcomes the guidelines, as they will give certainty to schools. Up to now, there was no ‘official’ or ‘legal’ basis to use a reduced day and schools were unclear of the best approach to take, the reporting needed and the support available.

IPPN has no major concerns with the proposals to implement the guidelines. Clearly, school leaders and Boards of Management will require training and support in relation to the guidelines, before they are due to be implemented.

We welcome the support outlined in Section 6 – Support for Schools, which focuses on the upskilling of teachers and SNAs. However, there is no facility to examine the **level of support** provided. While the guidelines state that schools have been given an allocation, they make no mention of possibly reviewing the allocation on an individual basis, depending on the severity of need.

We would request that a key word on page 4 be amended to replace ‘may’ with ‘will’.

*‘NEPS, in consultation with parents/guardians, teachers and relevant professionals, **may** support a plan for a gradual reintroduction to school for children who are out of school due to school phobia or separation anxiety or other exceptional circumstances.’*

The timing of implementation is somewhat problematic if the Department is intending to issue them this school year. IPPN and other education stakeholders have repeatedly sought assurances that no new initiatives would be introduced this school year, as school leaders and boards of management continue to grapple with the impact of the pandemic in their schools. The strain on school leaders in particular is very clear and we would ask that the timing of implementation be considered very carefully in this regard. Communicating intent is one thing, and indeed some schools are looking for guidance in relation to this, but expecting schools to review in detail their procedures relating to reduced timetables in the current school year will present additional challenges.



Appendix A – Context and Recommendations from IPPN’s April 2019 Submission

Context

IPPN is aware that some schools use a reduced timetable as one tool, among number of tools, to manage behaviour. It can be used for a number of reasons and, in the case of younger children, is generally used to create a more positive school experience, whereby hours are gradually increased to the full school day over a period of weeks. It must be noted that the reduced timetable for pupils can often make the school a more positive environment for the pupils themselves and for their families, as well as their peers in the classroom.

In relation to Special Education, there are particular disorders where certain triggers are identified as leading to behavioural issues. For example, yard time or later in the day can be a trigger for some children. A reduced timetable can be looked at in these circumstances for a period of time.

Most schools using reduced hours would do so in the ways described below in Recommendations, and are very careful in ensuring it is appropriate and managed well. There have been a few cases that we are aware of where schools have not applied what we would consider to be best practice and this has led to interpersonal difficulties and increased anxiety for all involved. For this reason, IPPN believes that schools would benefit from clear guidelines in relation to the use of a reduced timetable.

Recommendations

IPPN believes that schools would benefit from clear guidelines in relation to the use of a reduced timetable, and makes the following recommendations in this regard:

1. A reduced timetable should never be used as a sanction or for punishment of any kind
2. It should be used only as part of an overall behaviour management strategy which should specify the criteria which should be used in determining when a reduced timetable should apply. This strategy should be approved by the school’s Board of Management
3. The criteria should be defined in the Guidelines
4. A reduced timetable should only be used in accordance to the school’s policy, which should be approved by the school’s Board of Management
5. It should only be used with parental approval
6. It should be used for as short a period as possible, with a specific goal in terms of improved behaviour
7. The Principal should inform the Board of Management of decisions taken to introduce a reduced timetable for any pupil, as part of the Principal’s regular Report to the Board.