



AsI Am's Submission to the National Convention on Education.

About us

AsI Am is Ireland's Autism Charity. Founded in 2014, AsI Am advocates for an inclusive society that is accessible, accepting and affirming for Autistic people and our wider community. We work to support the Autistic community and our families throughout the lifecycle to fully engage in Irish life and build the capacity of society to facilitate true inclusion. This is achieved through the programmes of support we offer and our advocacy work.

As a Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO), AsI Am is Autistic led, informed by the experiences of Autistic people.

Introduction:

AsI Am welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Convention on Education. This Convention presents an opportunity for families and individuals to shape the direction of the Irish education system over the coming decades. As Ireland's autism charity, we advocate for an inclusive education system grounded in rights, dignity, and evidence-based practices that support the inclusion of all Autistic children.

Key provision within our strategic plan 2025-2030 is to ensure every Autistic child in Ireland has access to a school place that meets their needs and enables them to thrive. This fundamental position must be at the heart of this upcoming Convention.

We know through our Autism Information Line and the annual results in our Same Chance Report, that Autistic children are not provided with the same chance or opportunity within our education system; experiences of exclusion, isolation, malpractice and misunderstanding can often form part of the "narrative of experiences" for some Autistic children. These experiences highlight that as a society we must do more to ensure Autistic children are not disproportionately impacted in our education system. When it comes to having a conversation on the type of education system that we need as a society, it is vitally important that the state utilises the UNCRPD as its guiding principle. Connected to this, is

the requirement for the state to engage with disabled people and organisations in any policy changes or practices that impact disabled people directly, including Autistic people.

United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with a Disability:

This Convention comes at a critical moment considering the State's obligations on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the recently published List of Issues by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee. This discussion on education is a timely and welcome opportunity to ensure that disabled people, including Autistic people, play a central role in shaping reforms to the education system that are adherent to inclusive education principles and practices, particularly considering the recently published EPSEN Review, National Human Rights Disability Strategy and the Autism Innovation Strategy.

The UNCRPD provides a framework for states to operate within, in delivering inclusion, quality of service and access. Despite some progress in recent years in our education system, Autistic children continue to face systemic barriers in accessing their constitutional right to an appropriate education. Notwithstanding this, Autistic children compared to non-Autistic children experience an inordinate number of barriers when accessing the school curriculum. Such barriers have a direct and regressive impact on the Autistic children.

In a system that should foster inclusion, acceptance and understanding many Autistic children experience preventable barriers within our education system. Long waiting lists for basic supports, denial of supports, exclusionary practices such as reduced timetables, seclusion and restraint and ableist school Codes of Behaviour all feed into a system that is not currently built to support Autistic children. These issues were documented in AsIAM's recent publications "*What We Wish You Knew: A Rights Based Analysis of Codes of Behaviour*" and "*Exploring the school experience of Autistic Children and Young People*". The former, analysed 40 randomly selected codes of behaviour in schools, alongside engaging directly with Autistic people who had experienced barriers within the schooling system. This research evinces a system that can often be inherently unfair and prejudice to Autistic children but also one that is not meeting the standards of the UNCRPD.

The EPSEN Act Review recognises the need for reform and sets out a pathway for a "twin track" approach: ensuring that every child has a suitable school place with supports, while building towards a future where children can attend their local school together, in accessible school environments and buildings, and have the supports and resources they need to thrive at school. This approach reflects the vision of Article 24 of the UNCRPD and General Comment 4 and to achieve this, AsIAM wishes to use this Convention to identify the issues below which must be addressed to make our education system more inclusive of Autistic students. In our recent submission to [the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters on Inclusive Education and Article 24 of the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) the below barriers/challenges were highlighted as key areas of reform within our

education system. We invite participants of the Convention to read our submission to the Joint Oireachtas committee which provides a comprehensive oversight on the barriers experienced by the Autistic community and what progressive reform looks in the following areas:

- **Inclusive School Environments**
- **Teacher training**
- **Lived Experience Advocacy**
- **Peer Awareness Programmes**
- **Sensory-Friendly Classrooms**
- **In- School therapies**
- **Individualised Learning Supports**
- **Codes of Behaviour reform**
- **Reduced Timetables**
- **Seclusion and Restraint practices in Irish schools**
- **Transition planning**
- **Barriers to participation**

Conclusion

AsIAM looks forward to engaging in the upcoming Convention. This once in a generation opportunity creates a unique moment for the Irish state, to be bold and audacious in designing a school system that is inclusive of all. An education system that irrespective of need, difference or disability all will have a place within our education system. Our focus will be on ensuring that the next iteration of the Irish education system ensures every Autistic child in Ireland has access to a school place that meets their needs and enables them to thrive.