



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Reduced School Days

## January to June 2022

September 2023

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## 1. Introduction

A commitment was made under the Programme for Government<sup>1</sup> to ensure robust data collection on the use of reduced school days and to further ensure that reduced school days are only used in a manner that is limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary.

In September 2021, the Department of Education issued [Reduced School Day Guidelines](#) to all schools on the procedures to be followed when reduced school days (RSD) are put in place for students. These guidelines came into effect on 1 January 2022. The guidelines set out the process to be followed where the use of reduced school days is under consideration for a student. The guidelines are in place to ensure that the use of reduced school days are limited to only those circumstances where it is absolutely necessary and, that where such usage occurs, schools follow best practice with the interests of the student to the fore. The guidelines are intended to support parents and schools and to ensure that the necessary interventions to assist and support students are put in place. It is recognised that, in certain situations, the use of reduced school days is a positive intervention with a view to assisting a student to return to full time attendance and that in some instances parents may request a RSD to support their child to return to full time attendance.

Following the issuing of the guidelines to all schools in September 2021, Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) began gathering data from schools in relation to the use of reduced school days in January 2022 when the guidelines came into effect. The data compiled from January to June 2022 is published within this report.

## 2. Implementation of a Reduced School Day

All students who are enrolled in a school should attend for the full day, except in exceptional circumstances.

Reduced school days are defined as:

- a reduced day in school where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student arrives to school after the usual starting time or leaves before the end of the school day, and/or

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<sup>1</sup> [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Programme for Government: Our Shared Future ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

- a reduced week where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student may not attend the full five days each week.

### **Exceptional Circumstances when a reduced school day might be used**

It is acknowledged that a reduced school day may be helpful in exceptional circumstances as part of a transition or reintegration intervention, based on the needs of individual students.

Any such arrangement should be short term and transitional, and designed to assist the student to attend for the full school day along with his/her peers. In making any such arrangements school authorities should always be mindful of the best interests of the student and of the student's right to a full day in school.

Where schools apply a reduced school day, such arrangements should only be put in place with the consent of the parent or guardian (or the student if over 18 years of age) in exceptional circumstances.

The guidelines state that a reduced school day should not be used as a sanction, offered as an alternative to a sanction, or used as a behavioral management tool. Reduced school days should only ever be considered in very limited and time-bound circumstances such as, for example, supporting a student to return to school after a period of absence, or due to a medical or mental health-related condition or due to other exceptional circumstances.

Where, in exceptional circumstances, schools are placing a student on a reduced school day, the school authorities should formulate and agree a plan for the reduced school day intervention that will specify the following:

- start, review and end dates
- any educational supports or interventions to be provided for the student during the period of the reduced school day
- the actions required to support the student's return to school and reintegration to a full-time school day
- the plan with respect to the reduced school day intervention and return to school will have regard to any relevant psychological reports or other relevant information held in the student's support file
- the intervention and return to school plan must be discussed and agreed in collaboration with the parent/guardian (or in the case of a student over 18, the student).

Ideally, the period for which the student is on a reduced school day, should not exceed six school weeks. A reduced school day cannot be carried forward from one academic year to the next.

Where TESS has been notified that an RSD has been implemented, TESS contact the student's parents/guardians. Information and advice is provided to parents and schools regarding the operation of the RSD Guidelines.

When an RSD has been implemented for a student with an identified special educational need, the NCSE is notified by TESS. The special educational needs officer (SENO) engages significantly with the school to ensure that all relevant CPD, advice and expertise has been provided and that the tools required to support the student who is on a reduced school day are in place at school level. School interventions, necessary student supports and additional school resourcing are explored with a view to a full return of the student to school as soon as possible. Both the NCSE and NEPS provide support and training to schools to develop a range of actions to support students.

### **Monitoring the use of RSD in a sampling of schools**

The Inspectorate made contact with a number of schools where there were more than one RSD notifications. The purpose of this engagement was to establish the reasons behind the RSD notifications and the nature of supports in place to support the child and his/her family during the period of the RSD.

These engagements also sought to establish the extent to which the schools had engaged with the education welfare officer (EWO) and the special educational needs organiser (SENO) regarding the RSD.

When contacted, many of the schools had plans in place to incrementally return the students to a full school day and had engaged with the parents/guardians as well as the appropriate agencies. Schools that applied integrated, internal student support structures and combined this with support from external agencies were the most successful in returning students to a full school day.

While interventions for individual students are a matter for the school and the relevant support services, the Inspectorate will continue to engage with schools in relation to the use of reduced school days as necessary. Since the introduction of the guidelines on the use of RSDs, more in-depth work continues to be undertaken by the relevant agencies and the Inspectorate.

The Department of Education continues to work closely with TESS and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to ensure that all students are supported to the greatest extent possible, to attend for the full school day.

The use of Reduced School Days will continue to be monitored by the Department of Education.

### 3. Overview of the Use of Reduced School Days

This report sets out the data collected by TESS for the period January to June 2022.

#### First Notifications

The report confirms a total number of 743 first notification of students on a reduced school day during the period. This represents 0.08% of total student population.

- 361 (48.6%) were from primary schools, (132 DEIS, 229 non-DEIS)
- 318 (42.8%) from post-primary schools (118 DEIS, 200 non-DEIS) and
- 64 (8.6%) from special schools.

Of the total number of 743 students, 527 (70.9%) had special educational needs (that is students in a special school, enrolled in a special class in mainstream school or attending a mainstream class but with significant/complex additional learning needs<sup>2</sup>). 61 of these students were Traveller or Roma students, which represents 0.006% of total student population.

Of the 361 students in primary schools, 317 (87.8%) had special educational needs. A total of 18 (5%) were Traveller or Roma students (where consent was given to indicate ethnicity).

Of the 318 students in post-primary schools, 146 (45.9%) had special educational needs. A total of 43 (13.5%) were Traveller or Roma students (where consent was given to indicate ethnicity).

#### Second Notifications

Schools were advised to notify TESS where the RSD arrangement was extended beyond the initial period notified. TESS has confirmed that 137 second notifications were received, of which 117 (85.4%) related to students with special educational needs. A total of 6 (4.4%) were Traveller or Roma students (where consent was given to indicate ethnicity). The total number of second notifications was less than 0.01% of total student population.

#### Third and Fourth Notifications

46 third notifications were received, of which 42 (91.3%) related to students with special educational needs. A total of 3 (6.5%) were Traveller or Roma students (where consent was given to indicate ethnicity). The total number of third notifications was less than 0.01% of total student population.

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>Schools were asked to indicate if a student in a mainstream class were accessing the highest levels of support in school at the *School Support Plus/Support for a Few* stage of the Continuum of Support. See appendix 1

14 fourth notifications were received, of which 13 (92.9%) had special educational needs. No Traveller or Roma students were included in this number. The total number of fourth notifications was less than 0.01% of total student population.

### Numbers of Students on Reduced School Days

The following tables show the total numbers of students on RSDs as a percentage of the overall student population based on 2021/2022 enrolment data;

As a % of Total Student Population - Total number of RSDs			
Sector	Total number of students	Total number of students on RSDs	As a % of total number of students
Primary	546,106	361	0.07%
Post Primary	391,698	318	0.08%
Special Schools	8,682	64	0.74%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>946,486</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>0.08%</b>

As a % of Total Student Population - RSDs for students with Special Educational Needs			
Sector	Total number of students	Total number of students on RSDs	As a % of total number of students
Primary	546,106	317	0.06%
Post Primary	391,698	146	0.04%
Special Schools	8,682	64	0.74%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>946,486</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>0.06%</b>

As a % of Total Student Population - RSDs for Traveller and Roma Students				
Sector	Total number of students	Total number of Traveller and Roma students	Total number of students on RSDs	As a % of total number of students
Primary	546,106	10,502	18	0.17%
Post Primary	391,698	4,211	43	1.02%
Special Schools	8,682	28	1	3.57%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>946,486</b>	<b>14,741</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>0.42%</b>

## Appendix 1

### **Classification used to identify students with additional needs, for the purpose of Reduced School Day notification.**

- The student is attending a special school
- The student is attending a special Class in a mainstream school
- The student is attending a mainstream class, but has significant/complex additional learning needs\*

\*These will be the students whom the school has already identified as requiring the greatest level of additional teaching support under the Continuum of Support framework, as follows:

- They are the students who in mainstream schools present with the most significant learning needs and **are accessing the highest levels of support in school at the School Support Plus/Support for a Few stage of the Continuum of Support**
- A Student Support Plan will generally have been developed for students in receipt of School Support P/Support For a Few plus, which will include detailed and individualised planning for that student's learning needs.
- Students with more complex and enduring needs will generally have been identified by schools to receive specific individualised interventions, teaching approaches and/or learning activities.
- Students will have been recorded on the "School Provision Plan for Pupils with Special Educational Needs who are in receipt of interventions through the Continuum of Support Framework" as those students in receipt of School Support Plus.
- Students that have a level of special educational need which is beyond the additional teaching support provided for students with mild learning difficulties, or who require some additional teaching support in literacy and numeracy at whole school support or additional classroom support level.

Guidance for primary schools is available to schools on how to identify students for additional special education teaching support and how to prioritise students for the highest level of support.

Guidance for post-primary schools is also available to schools on how to identify students for additional special education teaching support and how to prioritise students for the highest level of support.



## Appendix 2

Travellers and Roma that enroll in a school have the option to self-identify on the basis of their ethnicity. Written consent from a parent/guardian is required. As not all Travellers and Roma may choose to self-identify as such, and as Traveller and Roma school data is based on self-identification, it is possible that the numbers of Travellers and Roma in schools are underestimated.

Based on 2021/22 school enrolment data, there were:

- 10,530 Traveller/Roma enrolled in Irish primary schools (circa 1.9% of overall primary cohort)
- 4,211 Traveller/Roma enrolled at post-primary level (circa 1.1% of overall post-primary cohort)