



No. 6 – ITP and School

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Title: **ITP and School Attendance**

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The ITP Support Association was contacted by a distressed parent whose child was excluded from school because of her ITP. Shirley consulted the Rathbone Institute, a charity that advises on the education of children with special needs, and has compiled some general advice for parents in this situation.

ALTHOUGH IT is understandable that a school may be worried about an ITP child, since we seem to be living in such a litigious world, it is wholly unacceptable for a pupil to be excluded from school and refused an education merely on the grounds that the child has ITP. The Local Education Authority (LEA) has a statutory obligation to educate every child that lives within its boundary. The LEA may be worried about issues related to insurance for the ITP child, while in school, but this is a matter for them to sort out, given their statutory responsibility.

On rare occasions, an ITP pupil may need special supervision during playtime or other activity. Since this may involve the provision of extra staff for short periods of the day, perhaps lying outside the school's budget, this can cause difficulties for the school and the child may need to be 'Statemented', a procedure which can take 6 months or more – in some instances up to 2 years. In the meantime if the child has been excluded from school on account of having ITP he or she may not be receiving the education to which they are entitled. It is important to remember that if a pupil misses more than 15 days in school, the LEA has a responsibility to provide an alternative education plan suitable for that child.

So, if your child is excluded from school on the grounds that he or she has ITP, we suggest that you pursue the following course of action:–

1. Make an urgent appointment to see the head teacher

Take with you some of the relevant ITP Support Association publications – Know About ITP – School Guidelines for Pupils with ITP, etc. Also take a filled-in copy of Factsheet for Pupils with ITP which additionally will provide the pupil's personal details for the school.

The head teacher may be more amenable if you agree to be contacted at any time during the day should the teachers have any concern about the child's condition or symptoms. If you are unable to be quickly on hand (perhaps due to employment conditions) in the unlikely event that an emergency arises, appoint a named person (a relative or trusted friend) who can take responsibility instead.

Teachers have to be extremely cautious nowadays about touching children, even administering first aid, but this difficulty may be overcome if you state in writing that you are willing for their child to receive medical aid following any minor or major accidents at school (including pressure on wounds, plasters, bandages etc.).

Do try to be flexible over arrangements for playtime supervision. The school may be having genuine staffing difficulties and it may be best to accept the child being restricted initially. You can always ask for the situation to be reviewed at a later date, particularly if the child has been problem free.

2. If the matter is unresolved, appeal to the school governors.

Send the governors clear information about ITP (as indicated above). Ask the child's paediatrician or GP to write to the governors to reinforce your case that your ITP child has no need to be excluded from school. Stress to the governors that ITP is not contagious and suggest that the head teacher or chair of the governors contact the ITP Support Association for further information. (The ITP Support Association will confirm that many ITP children have platelet counts in single figures, attend mainstream schools as normal, and are not considered disabled or in need of statementing.)

3. If the child's reinstatement is still refused, contact the Local Education Authority.

Ask the LEA to explain as a matter of urgency what provision they intend to make about your child's education. If they state that he/she may no longer go to their normal school but will need a home tutor, this action could be construed in law as discrimination because of the child's ITP (which is illegal under Section 19 of the 1996 Education Act). The Discrimination Helpline on 0207 925 5750 (Mon – Fri 9–5) may be able to advise or visit www.sendist.gov.uk.

4. If all else fails write to your MP, local newspaper, and/or solicitor.

Your local MP may be able to assist the negotiations between the LEA, the school and you, as the child's parent. Adverse publicity in a newspaper can sometimes prompt officials to act more co-operatively. If these avenues fail to fully reinstate your child a solicitor who specialises in education law should be able to advise you on the next step. In many cases the first consultation will be free (but check with the receptionist first) and some parents will also be entitled to Legal Aid. For free education advice contact the Advisory Centre for Education (an independent charity) on 0808 800 5793 or visit their website at <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/> Ω