



To: Management Authorities of recognised Primary Schools and Post Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards

Special Needs Assistant Allocation 2022/23

1. Purpose of this Circular and background

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of revised arrangements for the allocation of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support to mainstream classes in primary and post primary schools for the 2022/23 school year. SNA support is one of the central elements to the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs in education, including mainstream classes, special schools and special classes. The aim of this circular is to provide certainty of SNA provision for SNAs, schools, students in mainstream classes and their families for the 2022/23 school year.

2. The Role of the SNA

This Circular outlines arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in mainstream classes for the 2022/23 school year. The Circular does not change the role of the SNA nor does it amend the existing employment terms and conditions of SNAs.

This Circular should be read in conjunction with existing SNA Circulars. The role of the SNA continues to be; to support the care needs of students; to assist classroom teachers and special education teachers and to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of DES Circular 30/2014

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2014/30.pdf>

The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified special education teachers who may assist the subject/class teacher to provide additional teaching to students with special educational needs.

3. Role of Schools to Manage SNA Support

SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of students in mainstream classes. It is a matter for each school to allocate SNA support to meet student need through identifying and monitoring the care needs of all students in the school, thereby allowing schools flexibility in how the available SNA support is utilised. Primary care needs should continue to be interpreted in the context of Circular 30/2014

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2014/30.pdf> Students with the greatest level of need should receive the greatest level of support. SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or ETB in accordance with Circular 0071/2011 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2011/71.pdf> The work of SNAs should, at the principal's or teacher's direction, be focussed on supporting the particular care needs of the student/s and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.

4. Allocation Arrangements for 2022/23 School Year

The following arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2022/23 will apply:

- a) The SNA allocations for mainstream classes in schools on 31st May 2022 will be maintained for 2022/23. This will provide greater certainty for schools.
- b) A process for schools, whereby if they consider their SNA allocation is in excess of the required care needs, to engage with the NCSE. Schools should contact their local NCSE Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) to commence the process.
- c) The exceptional review process undertaken by NCSE will remain in place throughout the 2022/23 school year, where schools can seek a review of their SNA allocations which will result in one of the following outcomes:
 - i. No change in the level of care need identified (and no change in the resultant SNA allocation);
 - ii. Increase in the level of care need identified (which if significant would see an increase in the SNA allocations to the schools) ;

- iii. Decrease in level of care need identified in the school (which if significant would result in a reduction in SNA allocations as the care need could be managed with less resources than are currently allocated);

In relation to outcome iii, the SNA allocation will be adjusted at the end of the relevant school term.

- iv. The NCSE will develop over the summer period criteria for a rolling programme of targeted reviews of SNA mainstream allocations which would be strategic in nature and would help ensure that the SNAs are allocated to schools with students who have the greatest level of significant care needs. The pilot of the targeted review process will commence in the 2022/23 school year. Full details of the process will be issued to all schools prior to the start of the 2022/23 school year by the NCSE.

5. Exceptional Review of Mainstream SNA Allocation 2022/23

It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2014/30.pdf>

Following such a review and reprioritisation, it is expected that a small number of schools, e.g. developing schools, may not have a sufficient SNA allocation to meet the needs of their students. These schools can apply to the NCSE for an Exceptional Review of their allocation. Detailed information on the NCSE Exceptional Review process is published on the NCSE website. <https://ncse.ie/application-for-sna-exceptional-review>

The NCSE will endeavour to respond to all applications for Exceptional Review received as expediently as possible and in that regard, it will prioritise applications from schools with no current SNA allocation and developing schools. The Exceptional Review process for mainstream allocations will be available to schools throughout the 2022/23 school year.

6. Appeal of the outcome of the Exceptional Review

The NCSE has developed an appeal mechanism for schools who are not satisfied with the outcome of the Exceptional Review. Local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) will provide information and clarification to schools on the outcome where requested. Where schools wish to appeal the outcome of the review, they must do so using the prescribed form provided by the NCSE

<https://ncse.ie/ncse-appeals-process>

In processing appeals, the NCSE will ensure that the appeal is dealt with by an official (Appeals Officer) who was not involved in the Exceptional Review decision. The Appeals Officer is tasked with reviewing the information on which the Exceptional Review decision was made. When the appeal is complete, the outcome will be communicated to the school by email or letter. Detailed information on the Exceptional Review appeals process and grounds for appeal is published on the NCSE website <https://ncse.ie/ncse-appeals-process>

7. Independent Examination of the Appeal Process

Where a school is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal on the basis that the process was not followed, it can refer the matter to the Independent Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC) which comprises an independent Chairperson, a representative of school management bodies and a parent representative. The decision of the AAC is final. Further information on this process is available on the NCSE website <https://ncse.ie/ncse-appeals-process>

8. Medical and Professional Assessments

A diagnosis of disability and/or professional report will not be required in order for a student to access SNA support. However, medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a student's needs, including their care needs, the nature of difficulties that they have, and to inform relevant interventions. Where parents have assessments or medical reports which outline the nature of care needs that students may have arising from a disability or special care need, they

should still bring these to the attention of schools in order to assist schools in planning how best to support the student in the school context. The NCSE guidance on seeking an Exceptional Review provides further information on the types of information and supporting documentation that may be used where such assessments/reports are not available.

**Frank Hanlon
Principal Officer
Special Education**

May 2022