AN ROINN | **DEPARTMENT OF**
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AGUS SCILEANNA | **A N D S K I L L S**

THE SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANT SCHEME

A VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW OF EXPENDITURE ON THE SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANT SCHEME

2007/8 – 2010

June 2011

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Glossary and Abbreviations	
VFM	*Value for Money*
SNA	*Special Needs Assistant*
NCSE	*National Council for Special Education*
DES	*Department of Education and Science/Skills*
SERC	*Special Education Review Committee*
SENO	*Special Education Needs Organiser*
CPD	*Continuing Professional Development*
EPSEN Act, 2004	*Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004*
EC	*European Community*
UNESCO	*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation*
UN	*United Nations*
Programme Logic Model	*Maps out the shape and logical linkages of a programme and provides a systematic and visual way to present and share understanding of the cause-effect relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.*
Inputs/Resources	*Inputs/Resources include, human inputs (grades of staff), system inputs (procedures), financial inputs (budget made available for programme) and data inputs such as information flows.*
Outputs	*The outputs are what are produced by a programme. They may be goods or services and in this case can be equated with the number of SNAs*
Outcomes	*Combine the results and impacts of a programme.*
Activities/Processes	*Activities/Processes, are the actions that transform inputs into outputs. Activities are collections of tasks and work-steps performed to produce the outputs of a programme. In the case of the SNA Scheme, these include the application, allocation and review processes.*
Results	*The results are the effects of the outputs on the targeted beneficiaries in the immediate or short term. Results can be positive or negative. The results of the SNA Scheme are the number of students whose additional care needs are being provided for.*
Impacts	*Impacts are the wider effects of the programme, from a sectoral or national perspective, in the medium to long term. They include the medium to long-term effects on the targeted beneficiaries.*
Strategic Objective	*Desired outcome at the end of the strategy period.*
Performance Indicators	*Performance indicators are data points used to measure inputs, activities, outputs or outcomes and are used to monitor the progress of the programme being reviewed.*
NEPS	*National Educational Psychological Service*
Vol. Sec.	*Voluntary Secondary*
VEC	*Vocational Education Committee*
C&C	*Community and Comprehensive*
SPSS	*Statistics Package for the Social Sciences*
Professional Focus Groups	*Refers to all focus-groups other than parent and student focus groups.*
HSE	*Health Service Executive*
ASDs	*Autistic Spectrum Disorders*

Executive Summary: Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The Executive Summary provides a synopsis of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review under the following thematic headings:

1. Economy and Efficiency
2. Effectiveness
3. Continued Relevance of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme
4. Management, Training and Development
5. Future of the SNA Scheme

The specific chapters to which individual key findings refer are noted numerically in the boxes below.

1. Economy and Efficiency

The Review has shown that the SNA Scheme is supporting schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities who also have significant care needs. However, it is clear that the allocation process is generally not well understood within schools and by parents nor is the purpose of the Scheme fully understood.

The meaning of the term 'care needs' has been stretched beyond what was intended by the Scheme and this has meant that both parents and schools now expect that the role of the SNA is to carry out a much broader range of duties than originally envisaged. The Review has identified that the role of the SNA in schools has expanded far beyond the Scheme's objectives. There is also evidence of over-allocation of SNA posts.

In its national review of SNA allocations carried out in 2009/10, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) found that 955 SNA posts were no longer required as the students to whom the posts related had left the school and 764 posts were no longer required because students had diminished care needs.

Key Findings: Economy and Efficiency

4.1   The school-certification procedure introduced in February 2002 led to an unprecedented increase in the allocation and cost of SNA support.

4.2   There is evidence to suggest that the SNA Scheme is moving away from the objectives of the Scheme, which may partly account for the fact that the number of SNAs has continued to grow and the cost of the Scheme has continued to accelerate.

4.3   In reviews conducted in 2002 and 2003, the Inspectorate found that there was an over-allocation of SNAs in the schools reviewed, and expressed

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concerns that the greater availability of resources in recent years may have led to an over-identification of students with special educational needs.

4.13 The requirement of intermittent SNA support for some students may be contributing to surplus SNA allocations in schools.

4.15 The success of SNA support can lead to the suppression of the SNA post. This, together with the change in SNA roles by schools may account for the absence of school policies that refer to the aim of post-suppression where there is evidence of students' diminishing care needs.

5.1 Expenditure on the SNA Scheme has risen by 922% in the period 2001 - 2009. These increases were occasioned by:

- Introduction of automatic response policy.
- Changes in legislation.
- SNA numbers and the associated salary cost.
- Number of schools supported.
- Number of schools supported in different sectors.
- Costs for smaller schools compared to bigger schools.
- Increase in the number of students with special educational needs being identified.
- Gradual change over the years in the interpretation of criteria set out in Circular 07/02 for the allocation of SNA support.
- Non-removal of SNAs as the students in respect of whom they were assigned left the system.

5.2 The unit cost per SNA has increased steadily since the establishment of the Scheme.

5.3 Salary increases and a requirement for redundancy payments to be made, due to lack of transfer arrangements for SNAs under the Scheme, have contributed to the growth in unit costs.

5.4 The Department of Education and Science/Skills (DES) has prioritised and provided resources to allow for each student who is assessed as eligible for SNA support with reference to Departmental circulars to be provided with support.

5.6 The demand driven nature of the Scheme and the independent assessment and allocation process for the Scheme has made it more difficult for the DES to control or restrain overall growth and expenditure trends.

5.7 The fact that the SNA Scheme, until the introduction of a cap on overall SNA numbers in December 2010, had not been limited by budgetary or SNA number constraints may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme.

5.8 The body with responsibility for the allocation of SNA resources operated on the basis of an automatic response, allocating resources on the basis of need and demand. It was not required to have budgetary responsibility for

these resources and this separation of budgetary responsibility from responsibility for resource allocation may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme.

5.9 The fact that schools are not directly accountable to the Department of Education and Skills for the use of an SNA resource, once it has been allocated to them, may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme.

6.4 An over-allocation of SNA support has been identified in primary, post-primary and special schools.

6.5 The cost effectiveness of the SNA Scheme is compromised by the extension of the role of the SNA beyond what was envisaged by the Scheme.

Conclusion: Economy and Efficiency

1. The SNA Scheme could achieve its objectives and the associated level of output with fewer inputs and thereby achieve greater value for money.

Recommendations : Economy and Efficiency

The Government's recent decision to introduce a cap on overall SNA numbers means that the body which has responsibility for allocating SNA resources must now also take into account overall numbers and budgetary considerations.

1. The Scheme needs to be restated to ensure an efficient allocation of SNA resources and clarify the 'care' nature of the SNA role for parents, schools and professionals.

2. The role that professional reports play in supporting the SNA Scheme should be restated to ensure that professionals are fully informed of their role in relation to the Scheme. The criticality of professional reports identifying the care needs of the students with direct reference to the applicable circular should be highlighted.

3. The Department should restate the responsibilities of school management concerning SNA posts, once the relevant student has left the school. The Department should also give consideration to potential consequences for schools that retain SNA posts once the relevant student has left the school.

4. The NCSE should continue to review all SNA posts on an annual basis.

5. The criteria for the allocation of SNA support under the present needs-based Scheme should be clearly restated and be subject to ongoing review.

6. The Department should consider conducting a cost benefit analysis, to establish if the introduction of a regional redeployment scheme would lead to greater economic efficiency.

2. Effectiveness

The Review has shown that the SNA Scheme is very effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities

However, the expansion of the SNA role, together with the identified over-allocation of SNA posts, suggests that the effectiveness of the Scheme has been compromised. The Review has established that the SNA Scheme currently does not deliver value for money as the over-allocation of SNA posts and the resistance to suppressing SNA posts that are no longer required has increased the overall cost of the Scheme.

It is a concern that excess support may lead to an over-dependence by the student on SNA support, a loss of opportunity for the student to develop independent learning skills and an over-reliance by the class teacher on the student having such support as well as the opportunity cost of such excess support.

Key Findings: Effectiveness
3.1   **The provision of SNA support has contributed significantly to the enhancement of students' experiences in schools.**
3.2   **There is a need for clarity with regard to the understanding of the role of the SNA as envisaged in Department circulars.**
3.3   **There is clear evidence in the literature review that the role of the SNA in Ireland has been changed by schools to include an educational remit.**
3.4   **Although policy on the SNA role has remained consistent, the application and use of SNAs in schools has changed, leading to a disconnect between the official role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools. This has contributed to inconsistencies in practice and a lack of clarity in schools concerning SNA duties.**
3.13   **There is evidence to suggest that SNA support may contribute to the social isolation of students as the presence of an adult may create an unintentional barrier between the student and his/her peers.**
3.15   **The weight of educational research considers that the delegation of educational instruction to support staff is inappropriate and would represent an unacceptable departure from the role.**
3.16   **There is evidence to suggest that utilising peer support, particularly in social settings, may be an alternative to SNA involvement and potentially have a positive impact on students' behaviour.**
3.17   **The literature does not find that the presence of support staff improves students' academic achievement.**
4.6   **There is evidence that the category related to 'behaviour is such that**

students are a danger to themselves or others' is being misinterpreted and leading to an over-identification of students in this category.

4.8 **Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are perceived by some of the education stakeholders to be applying the criteria for the allocation of SNA support inconsistently.**

5.5 **The SNA Scheme has assisted in enabling as many students as possible to be included in mainstream schools.**

Conclusions: Effectiveness

1. **The SNA Scheme is effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities.**

2. **The effectiveness of the SNA Scheme has been compromised by the inappropriate expansion of the role and the identified over-allocation of SNA posts.**

Recommendations : Effectiveness

1. **The allocation of SNA support should be clearly linked to the individualised planning in place for each student and specifically refer to the student's identified care needs. In this context, a focus should be maintained on the pro-active development of students' independence skills.**

2. **A formal school-based review process should be in place for each SNA post in order to ensure that SNA support is reduced or withdrawn in accordance with the student's needs.**

3. **The Review suggests that the use of part-time posts should be more widely considered.**

4. **In accordance with the terms of Circular 07/02, SNA duties should be assigned by the principal, sanctioned by the board of management and supervised by either the principal or the class teacher.**

5. **The role of the SNA in supporting the care needs of students should be communicated clearly to parents by school authorities.**

6. **It should be highlighted to schools that responsibility for the learning and teaching of students with special educational is the remit of the teacher.**

7. **The impact of SNA support on students' behaviour should continue to be monitored by the school in order to ensure that the support is not contributing to the emergence of problem behaviours for individual students.**

3. Continued Relevance of Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The findings of the Review indicate that the SNA Scheme continues to be needed to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities.

However, the Review has established that the role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals now seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative, pedagogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties.

The continued expansion of the Scheme is fundamentally unsatisfactory due to the significant departure from the role of the SNA as envisaged in Circular 07/02 and the associated costs.

It is not open to schools, professionals or parents to seek to use the SNA Scheme to supplement teaching or therapeutic support for students. It is critical therefore that the SNA Scheme is communicated clearly to parents in order to ensure that they understand the 'care role' envisaged for the SNA.

Key Findings: Continued Relevance of SNA Scheme
3.12 There is a need to communicate the role of the SNA clearly to parents.
4.4 The SNA Scheme is meeting the objectives of the original Scheme and these objectives continue to be valid.
4.5 While all stakeholders could identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme, a wider interpretation of the role, which is not consistent with the objectives of the Scheme was evident in practice.
4.7 A perception was identified among some professionals that SNA support could compensate for the absence of therapeutic interventions. While an SNA might assist a child to access therapeutic interventions, the provision or management of such services by an SNA is not in keeping with the criteria laid down for the role in Circular 07/02.
4.10 The finding that more SNAs support pupils with medical needs in special schools is not unexpected as there is a concentration of students with the most complex needs in special schools
4.11 SNAs have considerable involvement in the management of students' behaviour.
4.12 SNAs are adopting a pedagogical role, contrary to best practice and the stated purpose of the Scheme.
6.1 The SNA Scheme has moved away from what the objectives of the Scheme envisaged to SNA involvement in behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical and administrative duties.

Conclusions: Continued Relevance of SNA Scheme

1. The SNA Scheme continues to be relevant to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities.

2. The role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative, pedaogogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties.

Recommendations : Continued Relevance of SNA Scheme

1. The objectives of the SNA Scheme as they relate to providing schools with additional staffing to cater for the 'care needs' of students should be made clear to all stakeholders and the primary role of the teacher in the education and care of all students reiterated.

2. The issue raised by focus groups that professionals may have been put under pressure to state that the care needs of certain students meet the terms of the SNA Scheme should be referred by the DES to the relevant professional bodies for their information and consideration.

3. The provision of school-based therapy supports should be raised with the HSE/Department of Health and Children. A policy needs to be developed in relation to the delivery of therapeutic programmes for students in schools. Where it is necessary to deliver such programmes in schools, the recommending therapists should liaise with the school in order to put all necessary supports in place, and to ensure that such programmes are delivered without adversely affecting the ability of the school to deliver its education programmes. All therapeutic programmes should be planned, implemented and reviewed under the supervision of the appropriate therapist.

4. Individualised planning should be a feature of provision for all students with special educational needs. A team approach to the development, implementation and review of individualised planning should be adopted and where relevant a care dimension should be included in the planning.

5. Different requirements in relation to the deployment of SNA support were evident in primary, post-primary and special schools due to the different needs of students and the differing organisational structures of school sectors. These differences should be acknowledged and accommodated in the restating of the Scheme.

6. Appropriate liaison should take place between the Health and Education authorities to ensure a common understanding of the purpose and principles of the Scheme.

7. The Scheme should be clearly restated:

a. **To clarify for recommending professionals the nature of information required in professional reports, irrespective of whether these reports are State-funded or privately funded,**

b. **To emphasise the role of the relevant professionals in specifying students' care needs,**

c. **To re-iterate that the role of the SENO is to quantify the extent of any SNA support provided,**

d. **To remove the criterion '*where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other students'* and replace this with the requirements for explicit evidence in relation to the precise needs of the students and details of the 'care role' that it is envisaged the SNA will adopt in relation to the student.**

4. Management, Training and Development

The report concludes that there is a requirement to clarify the role of the SNA in order to ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the role. A need to develop clear guidelines on the management and utilisation of SNA support with reference to Departmental Circulars was identified. These guidelines should incorporate the findings of the Review in relation to the effective management of support staff in schools and promote collaborative, whole-school practice in meeting the care needs of students.

Key Findings: Management, Training and Development

3.6 **A whole-school approach based on the principles of collaboration and team work constitutes a key feature in the effective deployment of SNA support.**

3.7 **Clear communication and understanding of the duties of the SNA within the school are pre-requisites to the effective management of support.**

3.8 **Proper supervision and management of SNA support is necessary in order to ensure that the care needs of students are being met appropriately.**

3.10 **The effective management of SNA support requires teachers to have developed appropriate levels of management competencies.**

4.9 **The majority of focus groups stated that the application process was a source of dissatisfaction for them.**

4.14 **Indications of a lack of consistency in relation to school policies in different schools sectors are evident for the management and deployment of SNAs.**

6.2 **Teacher preparation in developing appropriate skills to work effectively with SNAs has the potential to contribute further to the effectiveness of the Scheme.**

6.3 **Evidence from the focus groups affirm the benefits of SNA training.**

Conclusion: Management, Training and Development
1. **The role of the SNA should be managed with reference to relevant Departmental Circulars.**
2. **SNA training programmes should be based on the role of the SNA as envisaged in Departmental Circulars.**
3. **The findings suggest that schools require guidelines to assist them in the management and utilisation of SNA support.**

Recommendations : Management, Training and Development
1. **Guidelines for schools should be drawn up by the NCSE on the effective management of SNA support that incorporates the findings of this VFM Review in relation to best practice in this area.**
2. **The NCSE should formalise a process of school-based and external monitoring of the SNA role.**
3. **Programmes of continuing professional development (CPD) and school development planning for all teachers in the management of student behaviour should continue to be provided.**
4. **The Department should consider how best to address the training needs and training programmes provided to SNAs.**
5. **The content of training programmes for SNAs should be linked to the role of the SNA as detailed in Department circulars.**
6. **The effective management of SNA support should be addressed in initial teacher education and programmes of CPD for teachers.**

5. Future of the SNA Scheme

The Review has found that the SNA Scheme does have continued relevance and a role for the future. Some students with disabilities and care needs require additional support over and above that which can be provided by the class teacher in order to provide for their educational placement in mainstream or special education settings.

However, the Review recognises the view of some focus group participants that there may be students who do not have care needs under the SNA scheme but who may require some support in the classroom and advocates that a flexible approach is adopted to models of meeting students' needs such as co-teaching, co-operative learning, and peer-support systems based on students' identified needs. A focus should continue to be placed on enabling students with special educational needs to

access differentiated learning and teaching experiences based on their identified strengths and needs.

Key Findings: Future of the SNA Scheme

3.5 **A key focus of the provision of SNA support is to facilitate the development of a student's independent living skills and thereby remove the need for additional support for the student in the future.**

3.9 **SNAs have a role in supporting the care needs of deaf and hard of hearing students and blind and visually impaired students who have been identified as requiring additional support.**

3.11 **The literature review suggests that students should be included in decisions related to SNA support.**

3.14 **Detailing the roles and responsibilities of staff clearly in school policies may assist in promoting a shared understanding of the specific remit of individual staff members in relation to students with special educational needs.**

Conclusions: Future of the SNA Scheme

1. **The SNA Scheme has continued relevance for students with disabilities who have additional care needs**

2. **The possibility of the SNA Scheme achieving greater administrative efficiencies should be considered by the DES.**

3. **The Steering Committee recognises the views of some focus group participants that there may be students who do not have care needs under the SNA scheme, but who may require some form of additional support in the classroom.**

Recommendations : Future of the SNA Scheme

1. **The SNA Scheme has continued relevance for students with disabilities who have additional care needs provided that in future it operates within the parameters of the Scheme as recommended in this report.**

2. **Alternative employment models for SNAs that could achieve greater administrative efficiencies and provide greater employment certainty for SNAs should be considered by the DES.**

3. **A sustainable alternative model of school-based support for students with special educational needs, taking into account all of the supports available for students with special educational need, could be considered.**

4. **Allocation of SNA support should be linked to formal school policies on the deployment of SNAs.**

5. **Alternative models of support that promote students' socialisation such as peer- support should be considered.**

6. **The role of the SNA in Ireland should be restated to ensure that it includes the necessary duties that are required to support the care needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students and blind and visually impaired students.**

Chapter 1   Introductory Chapter

Purpose of Review

The aim of this Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review is to assess the extent to which the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme is achieving its objectives and whether it is doing so in a cost-effective manner; whether there is justification for continuing with the Scheme and, if so to make recommendations for its future operation.

The relevance and continued validity of the objectives of the SNA Scheme are examined with reference to the Strategy Statement of the Department of Education and Science 2008-2010 as it relates to the objective of providing resources and supports for learners with special educational needs. The role of the SNA is described in Departmental circulars as providing for the care needs of students arising from a disability and being concerned with duties of a non-teaching nature. The specific Terms of Reference of the VFM and Policy Review that relate to each chapter are explicitly identified at the beginning of each chapter and outlined in Annex 1 of this report. The Terms of Reference are not exclusive to specific chapters and may apply equally to a number of chapters. While the review of national and international literature detailed in Chapter Three is not linked to a specific Term of Reference, the findings that emerged from the literature were used to inform the data analysis, which was subsequently considered when addressing each of the Terms of Reference.

Value for Money and Policy Review Framework

The Government's VFM and Policy Review Initiative is part of a framework introduced to secure improved value for money from public expenditure. The objectives of the VFM and Policy Review Initiative are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. It is one of a range of modernisation initiatives aimed at moving public sector management away from the traditional focus on inputs to concentrate on the achievement of results.

The structure and format of VFM and Policy Reviews have been pre-determined by the Department of Finance and all such reviews are carried out in line with the formal evaluation framework set out in the Department of Finance Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative Guidance Manual (Department of Finance, 2007).

Terms of Reference for each review are agreed with the Department of Finance and approved by the Secretary General of the Department conducting the review. A steering committee is established to conduct the review and an external quality assessor is appointed from a panel of independent evaluation experts to quality assure each report before publication. Details of the membership of this review's steering committee and quality assessor are provided in Annex 2.

All completed reviews are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and are available to members of the public.

Role of the Department of Education and Skills

The official name of the Department has changed since the introduction of the SNA scheme. The Department of Education was renamed the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 1997, and again renamed as the Department of Education and Skills (DES) from May 2010. All references in the report to the Department or the DES should be read accordingly.

The mission of the Department is to provide for *'high quality education which will enable individuals to develop their full potential and to participate fully as members of society and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development'* (p.11: DES, 2008-2010).

The Department's priorities for primary and post-primary education over the coming years are the promotion of quality, relevance and inclusiveness by supporting schools in developing an inclusive environment for all learners, targeting interventions to address educational disadvantage, raising educational attainment, meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs, progressing the modernisation agenda, enhancing teacher education and professional development, promoting ongoing curriculum development, school evaluation and quality improvement and providing high-quality school accommodation, administrative and financial supports.

In this context, the Department funds a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs including learning support and resource teachers, SNAs, assistive technology, specialist equipment, adapted buildings and special school transport arrangements.

The SNA Scheme was selected by the Department as the subject of a VFM and Policy Review in 2007. This Scheme funds the costs of SNAs to assist schools in supporting students with disabilities who have care needs, that require the allocation of additional support. The Scheme currently costs the Exchequer over €340m per annum.

The educational landscape for students with disabilities has changed significantly since the SNA Scheme had originally been put in place. While not all sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 have yet been commenced, Section 2 of the Act providing for inclusive education for children with special needs was commenced in July 2005. This section of the Act states that students with special educational needs should be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools unless the nature or degree of those needs is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the student with special educational needs or the effective provision of education for students with whom the student with special educational needs is to be educated.

The Department considered it timely to review the SNA Scheme against this changed educational backdrop to ensure that it continued to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. The number of SNAs employed had significantly increased year on year even though the SNA Scheme had not, in essence, changed since it had been originally introduced in the 1970s. The SNA Scheme accounts for a significant proportion of the DES budget for special education. The Department was concerned

that future resource allocation decisions should be informed by a comprehensive review of the Scheme.

This chapter contextualises the Review through describing the role of the Department and providing a brief overview of the SNA Scheme. The rationale, purpose, scope and objectives of the review are also detailed.

Overview of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The origins of the current SNA Scheme can be traced to the introduction of a Child-Care Assistant Scheme at the commencement of the 1979/1980 school year designed to provide non-teaching assistance for class teachers in special schools and as a mechanism for job creation. See Annex 3 for a copy of the letter that issued from the Department announcing the Child-Care Assistant Scheme in 1979.

Prior to the introduction of this Scheme in 1979, child-care assistants were allocated to special schools by Health Boards, under employment schemes, or by private arrangements by School Patrons and Boards of Management. On 16th October 1979, the Department of Finance sanctioned the creation of seventy-eight such posts and also approved the allocation of a child-care assistant post to all newly established special schools. During the 1980s, restrictions were placed on the recruitment of child-care assistants as part of a public service embargo on recruitment.

From the 1990s, there was a move away from segregated provision internationally for students with special educational needs towards including these students in mainstream education. Ireland endorsed this policy and adopted the practice of supporting the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools (European Community (EC) Council of Ministers of Education, 1990; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994; United Nations (UN), 2008).

The development of this inclusive policy and practice impacted on the need for additional staff to support students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. These students would previously have attended special schools or in the case of students with severe to profound general learning disabilities may not have accessed education until the early nineties.

The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established by the Minister for Education in 1991 to report and make recommendations on educational provision for students with special educational needs (Ireland, 1993). Submissions to the Committee articulated a need for additional SNA posts in both special and ordinary schools. The Committee observed that there were SNA vacancies in many special schools as a consequence of the 1980s recruitment embargo and recommended that such key personnel should not be subject to an embargo. It was recommended by the Committee that SNA posts, funded by the Department should be created in both special and ordinary schools, in accordance with set appointment ratios attached at Annex 4.

On 5th November 1998, the Minister for Education and Science announced a major initiative in special education, which provided the first ever automatic supports for

students with special educational needs irrespective of educational placement (DES, 1998). This initiative introduced a formalised system of child-care support for all students with special educational needs including those in special schools, special classes and mainstream schools. A copy of the Press Release that accompanied this ministerial announcement is included in Annex 5. This initiative together with the move towards inclusive education impacted considerably on the increase in the number of SNA posts, which has continued to grow and as at 31/12/2009 was 10,342. See Table 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 below illustrates the cumulative growth in the number of SNAs in all sectors from 2001-2009.

Table 1.1 Growth in the Number of Special Needs Assistants in Individual School Sectors from 2001-2009				
	Primary	**Post-Primary**		
	Mainstream Primary and Special Schools	**Community, Comprehensive and Voluntary Sector**	**Vocational Education Committee**	**Total in All Sectors**	**% Increase Annually**
31/12/2001	2695	232	61	2988	99.8%
31/12/2002	4594	277	108	4979	66.63%
31/12/2003	4901	316	150	5367	7.79%
31/12/2004	5250	412	207	5869	9.35%
31/12/2005	6273	625	396	7294	24.28%
31/12/2006	6974	895	521	8390	15.03%
31/12/2007	8038	1148	638	9824	17.09%
31/12/2008	8440	1298	704	10442	6.30%
31/12/2009	8392	1263	687	10342	-0.95%
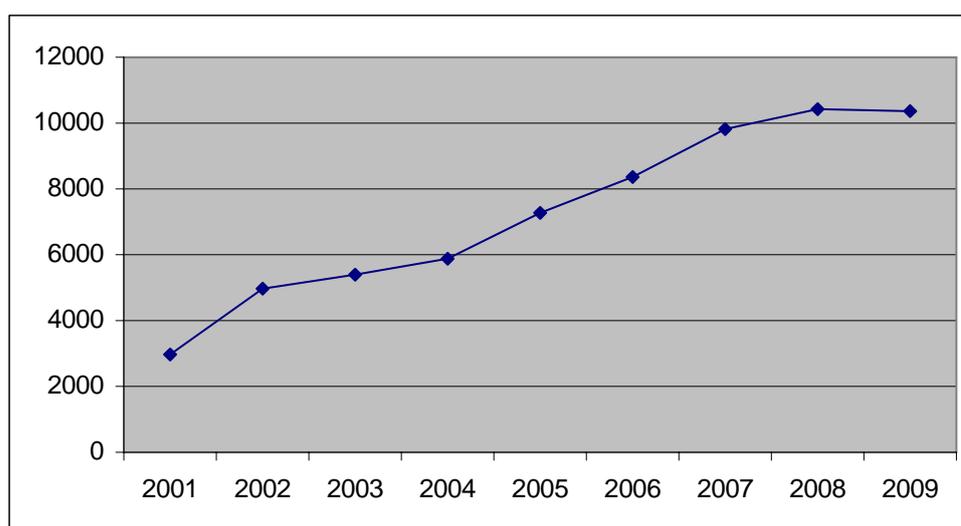
Figure 1.1 Cumulative growth in the Number of Special Needs Assistants in all School Sectors from 2001-2009

In accordance with the terms of Circular 07/02, SNAs are allocated to schools to assist teachers in meeting the additional care needs of students arising from a disability and should be assigned duties of a non-teaching nature (DES, 2002). See Annex 6 for a copy of this circular. The duties outlined in Circular 07/02 are broadly in line with those in the letter that issued to special schools in 1979, a copy of which is included in Annex 3. In 2005, circulars issued to primary and post-primary schools, which provided for a contract of employment for SNAs (DES, 2005a; 2005b).

The duties of SNAs referred to in these circulars have been extended to include participation with school development planning, engagement with parents and other duties appropriate to the grade as determined by the needs of the students and school from time to time. The circulars also state that SNAs may be assigned other work appropriate to the grade when students with special educational needs are absent or when particular urgent work demands arise. See Annexes 7 and 8 for copies of these circulars.

Review of Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The SNA Scheme was scheduled to be reviewed under the 2008-09 round of Value for Money and Policy Reviews. The Review was undertaken by the DES, with representation from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Department of Finance. External assistance was engaged to analyse the quantitative and qualitative data generated from the Review and to conduct focus group interviews with key stakeholders.

A quality assessor was commissioned by the Department to provide external advice in relation to this Value for Money and Policy Review. Details of the membership of the Steering Committee, Editorial Committee and Data-Collection Group, external personnel and quality assessor are provided at Annex 2.

The Steering Committee met on 22 occasions, between November 2007 and May 2010. Terms of Reference were agreed by the Steering Committee and finalised by the Secretary General of the Department on 5 February 2008.

Purpose, Scope and Objectives of the Review

The Terms of Reference are detailed below and the chapters in the Review to which each term *primarily* applies referenced in brackets. However, as stated previously, the Terms of Reference are not exclusive to specific chapters and may apply to a number of chapters.

1. Identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme and the role of an SNA.(Chapter 4)

2. Examine the relevance and continued validity of these objectives and role as they relate to the objective of the Department's Strategy Statement 2008-2010 concerned with providing a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs. (Chapter 4)

3. Define the outputs associated with the SNA Scheme and examine the duties allocated to and undertaken by SNAs in the context of the objectives of the Scheme. (Chapter 5)

4. Examine the extent to which the objectives of the SNA Scheme have been achieved and the effectiveness with which these objectives have been achieved. (Chapter 6)

5. Identify the level and trend of costs associated with the SNA Scheme and comment on the efficiency of the Scheme. (Chapter 5)

6. Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient/effective basis and make appropriate recommendations for change, if necessary. (Chapter 7)

7. Specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor the performance of the SNA Scheme. (Chapter 7)

8. A VFM Review should not, as a general rule, recommend an increased resource allocation for the programme concerned. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it is proposed to recommend such an increase to deliver better overall VFM, the Department's/Office's overall Steering Committee (or MAC) should be consulted in advance and should identify possible savings and/or additional income on other lower priority programmes (for the Department/Office concerned or another public body) that would be sufficient to meet the additional costs involved: full details of these offsetting measures should be included in the VFM Review report.

The last meeting of the VFM steering group took place on 27th May, 2010 while final editorial work on the report was completed in December 2010.

Chapter 2   Methodology

This chapter relates to the Terms of Reference of the Review as detailed in Annex 1 and Chapter 1.

Introduction

The methodology selected for this Review was adopted with specific reference to the Terms of Reference. The Review followed the model of best practice as set out in the Department of Finance handbook on policy analysis and VFM Reviews (Department of Finance, 2007).

A variety of methodological and analytical approaches, which utilised the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. The Programme Logic Model described below was followed both in the planning stages and throughout the Review and informs the methodology used.

The methodology was chosen to ensure that the trend in inputs/resources, outputs and outcomes could be identified and the links between inputs-activities-outputs-results-impacts confirmed. A methodological approach was adopted in order to measure achievement with reference to agreed performance indicators as they relate to the objectives of the SNA Scheme for each link of the inputs-activities-outputs-results-impacts chain.

Programme Logic Model

The Programme Logic Model maps out the shape and logical linkages of a programme and provides a systematic and visual way to present and share understanding of the cause-effect relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes (results and impacts). Adopting this approach enables programmes to be analysed in terms of inputs, activities or processes, outputs and outcomes that are arranged to achieve specific strategic objectives. The model is also referred to as the "Input-Output Model". Figure 2.1 below demonstrates the application of the Programme Logic Model.
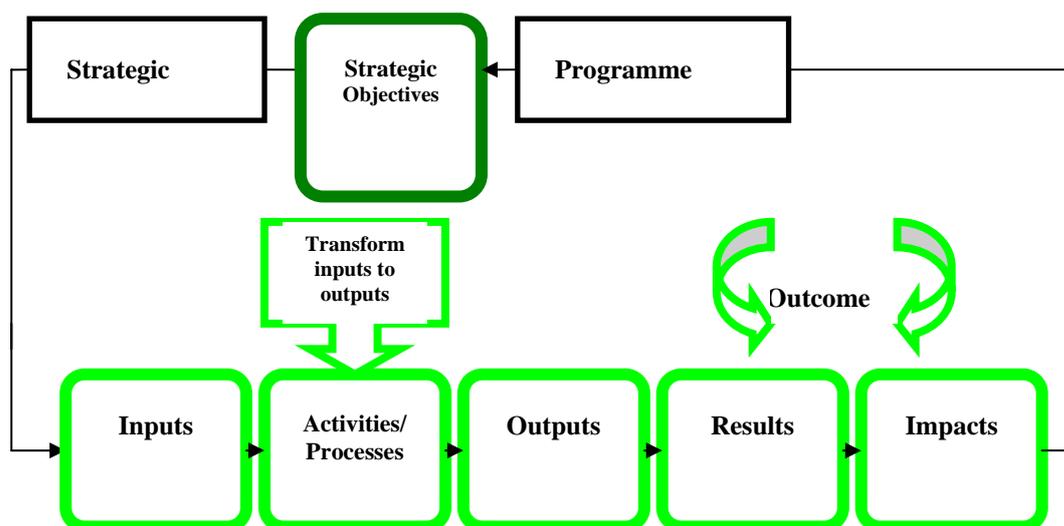
Figure 2.1   Programme Logic Model

Under the Programme Logic Model, it is possible to measure the achievement of a scheme at each stage of the chain with reference to performance indicators. Performance indicators are data points used to measure inputs, activities, outputs or outcomes and are used to monitor the progress of the programme being reviewed.

In the VFM Review methodology, the term 'performance indicators' is the collective term used for input, output, result and impact indicators. Table 2.1 provides a summary of the link between the Programme Logic Model outlined at Figure 2.1 above and Performance Indicators as they apply to the SNA Scheme.

Table 2.1 Application of the Programme Logic Model to the Special Needs Assistant Scheme		
Individual Components of the Programme Logic Model	**Definitions of the Individual Components of the Programme Logic Model**	**Performance Indicators designed to Measure the Individual Components of the Programme Logic Model**
Strategic Objective	*Providing a range of resources and supports for students with special educational needs.*	*Number of students with special educational needs in different school sectors.*
Programme Objective	*The provision of a system of additional care support within educational contexts for students with special educational needs.*	*Number of students with special educational needs who require and have been allocated SNA support per school sector.*
Inputs	*Human and financial inputs to SNA Scheme.*	*Overall cost of programme including no. and grade of staff involved in administration of SNA Scheme*
Activities	*Application, Allocation and Review Processes.*	*No. of applications processed; No. of successful*

		applications; No. and % of schools applying and allocated SNA support in each sector.
Outputs	*Number of SNAs in different school sectors.*	*Total no. of SNAs; No. of SNAs allocated per school sector; Total no. of schools allocated SNA support; No. and % of schools allocated SNA support per school sector.*
Results	*Number of students with special educational needs requiring additional care support who are being provided for.*	*No. of students with special educational needs allocated SNA support in each category of special need educational need and in each school sector.* *The manner in which providing for students' care needs is facilitating/not facilitating their educational placements.*
Impacts	*Number of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the number no longer requiring support*	*No. of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the no. that no longer require SNA support per school sector annually.*

Data Gathering

Data were collected from both service users and providers using two main methods:

1. A series of school reviews aimed at collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in relation to the allocation, role, administration practices and deployment of SNA support in the context of relevant Department circulars.

2. Focus group interviews with service users and providers. Focus groups are listed below at Table 2.2.

School review forms were developed and used in the field by the Department's Inspectorate, administrative staff, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists and special educational needs organisers (SENOs) on behalf of the NCSE. These forms were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data related to key areas of the duties of SNAs and allocation under Department circulars. A stratified random sample of 100 schools was visited during the field exercise. As schools were selected at random, when reviews were actually being conducted, not all schools still had SNA support by the time that the reviews took place, hence the total number of schools referred to in tables 4.15 to 4.17 is 95. The selection of schools was based on the following strata:

1. **School Type:** Special schools (20%), mainstream primary schools (60%) and post-primary schools (20%). Special schools and post-primary schools were sampled above-quota to allow for a larger number of such schools to be included in the review.

2. **Number of SNAs** : Schools with 1- 5 , 6 - 10 , 11 - 15 , 16 - 20 , and > 20 were selected.

3. **Additional Selection Process for Post-Primary Schools**: Voluntary Secondary (Vol. Sec.) (50%), Vocational Education Committtee Schools (VECs) (34%) and Community and Comprehensive (C&C) (16%).

Initially professional reports that triggered the allocation of SNA support to students in the 100 schools were examined by the NEPS/SENO teams. Subsequently in-school reviews by the Inspectorate comprised classroom observation and discussions with teachers, school principals and SNAs. A total of 1,087 SNA posts were reviewed initially by the NEPS/SENO teams. The review of the NEPS/SENO was followed by the Inspectorate review, which reviewed a total of 171 SNA posts in special schools, 171.15 SNA posts in primary schools and 57.5 SNA posts in post-primary schools. During the in-school reviews, inspectors observed 276 students at primary level, 276 students in special schools and 104 students in post-primary schools who were in receipt of SNA support.

Inspectorate reviews were conducted in accordance with the Professional Code of Practice for the Inspectorate and with reference to its evaluative and reporting function under S. 13 of the Education Act, 1998 (Ireland, 1998; DES, 2001,). The data was entered into a data base using a combination of Excel and the Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This allowed for the data to be interrogated, collated and coded for the identification of emergent themes and issues. The data provide insights into the profiles of those students in receipt of SNA support, the nature of their needs, the allocation of SNAs and the specific activities in which they are engaged.

A total of fourteen focus group interviews were conducted with service users and providers as detailed in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 Focus Groups Convened	
Focus Group Participants	**Number in Attendance**
Primary School Students	**6**
Special School Students	**7**
Post-Primary Students	**4**
Parents	**8**
Special Needs Assistants	**8**
Teachers	**7**
Principals	**8**
Special Education Needs Organisers	**8**
National Educational Psychological Service	**11**
Inspectors	**8**
Health Service Executive	**10**

Management Bodies	**9**
Trade Union Representatives	**7**
Total Number of Participants	**101**

In the context of this research, the term *'professional focus groups'* is used as a composite term to refer to all focus-groups other than parent and student focus groups.

The interview schedules for the focus groups were constructed on the basis of the terms of reference of the VFM Review. As the school review data had been collected prior to the focus groups being convened, emerging themes from these data were also used to inform the focus group interview schedules. Both generic questions, those which examined the role of SNAs and the programme as a whole, and specific questions related to the view points of specific individuals and groups were used in the construction of the focus group schedules. Interview schedules were designed to obtain elaboration, verification and expansion of the school review data and to provide an opportunity to ensure that interested parties were fully engaged with the data-collection process.

Participants for the focus groups were nominated through a process of consultation with the partners in education, comprising the DES, Management Bodies, Trade Unions and Parent Organisation. The Department's Inspectorate, NEPS, the NCSE and the Health Service Executive (HSE) were also represented. Focus groups of students representing primary, post-primary and special schools were nominated through schools identified by the Department.

All colleagues involved in data collection through this process were subject to an ethical code designed to ensure confidentiality of data. Where focus groups were conducted in schools, students were always accompanied by a known adult who was able to support them in respect of ensuring an understanding of the issues being discussed and in order to assist with interpretation of responses. These focus groups were conducted in the schools to ensure that students were in a familiar environment.

Available quantitative data from relevant sections of the Department and the NSCE are also included in the report to assist in measuring the achievement of the Scheme with reference to the identified performance indicators at Table 2.1 above.

Data Analysis

The school review forms were subjected to a process of categorical coding and analysis. This was informed by Creswell's model of reductive analysis using major and minor codes (Cresswell, 2002). Through this process all documentation was scrutinised and the responses to questions were entered into a data base. This was scrutinised both electronically and manually in order to identify repeated themes and issues emerging from the data.

The establishment of a set of coded themes was then further refined in order to ascertain those factors and issues, which were of significance in terms of the qualitative data presented. Quantitative data were interrogated using the computer software package, SPSS, which enabled the identification of trends and significant

features emerging from the data. These data were then cross-tabulated with the qualitative data extracted from both the school review forms and the focus group interviews held with service users and providers.

The focus group responses were used to gain further insights into those issues, which had emerged from the school review and to assist in providing a greater clarity and understanding of data obtained from the review. Data collected from the Department, NSCE and the discussions of the Steering Committee were used to further augment this process.

Data Restrictions

Discrepancies were evident in the interpretation of the questions contained in some of the review forms, which resulted in a lack of clarity in some responses. When necessary and appropriate, data were conflated, which allowed for a good overall impression of the duties engaged in by SNAs to emerge. Where a lack of clarity was evident, the data were used only where it was possible to verify the interpretation from other sources or contextual information. This also accounts for discrepancies that may be evident in the number of responses recorded in different tables.

A stratified sample of primary, post-primary and special school sectors was included in the Review. However all sampling processes are restricted and specific findings may be peculiar to particular contexts.

The focus-group interviews provide data on the attitude and opinions of participants towards the SNA Scheme. These attitudes and opinions represent a source of information for consideration during the Review, however they are also restricted and influenced by the participant selection, the questions asked, the setting in which the interviews took place and the inadvertent influence of those conducting the focus groups. They are also restricted by the fact that some participants may be reflecting a single experience rather than a broad overview.

While attention was directed to methodological triangulation, it is important to point out that all data are restricted by the sampling process selected, the instruments used and the skills of the reviewers.

Chapter 3   Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews recent national and international literature in order to examine the approaches used to allocating support staff to schools in other jurisdictions. It also explores issues relating to the objectives of the SNA Scheme. It was necessary to consider literature from a range of contexts for this review as there is limited literature available on the role of the SNA in Ireland.

When interpreting the findings of the literature review, it is important to consider that much of the literature that is examined originates in differing international contexts, which are characterised by a range of historical, political, legal, cultural, social and economic influences. Direct comparison between the literature from different contexts is therefore not possible.

However, analyses of differences in perspective, context and meaning in unfamiliar contexts can potentially contribute positively to existing practice (Fuller and Clarke, 1994; Delamont, 1992). Booth and Ainscow (1998) consider that examining different international practice in education can enable features that are normally ignored to become clearer, facilitate a reconsideration of possibilities that may have been overlooked and subject existing practice to new scrutiny.

This review was conducted using EBSCO databases and combinations of a variety of key words, authors, journal and article titles (EBSCO, 2009). A range of related literature, reports, and journal articles that emerged as relevant to the focus of the review was also sourced and included.

Both conceptual papers and research studies were reviewed. Hand searches of each source identified were also conducted in order to determine whether references were made in these sources to other potentially eligible articles or book chapters. If a potential source was identified, it was then obtained and reviewed. Additional relevant materials and advice were provided by members of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee sought to ensure that information used in the literature review was relevant, objective and reliable.

Existing literature in relation to the role of the SNA in Ireland was examined together with international literature in order to identify the positive and negative features of practice in the allocation of additional support staff to schools and the impact of support staff on students' outcomes.

In addition, information on the allocation and deployment of support staff to schools in ten European Countries was collected. This data is detailed in Annex 9. While direct parallels between the roles of support staff internationally and in Ireland cannot be asserted, it is suggested that convergence can be identified between the key features of the role in all jurisdictions.

The literature variously refers to support staff as teacher assistant, teaching assistant, paraeducator, paraprofessional, educational assistant, therapy assistant, transition trainer, job coach, home visitor, teacher aide and instructional assistant.

Throughout this chapter support staff is adopted as a generic term and specific terms are used where the literature is expressly concerned with the features of particular roles. Key findings are articulated in terms of their relevance to the Irish context and generally refer to the implications of the findings of the literature review as they relate to the management and role of the SNA.

The Role of the Special Needs Assistant in Ireland

Special needs assistants are allocated to assist teachers in meeting the care needs of students and in accordance with the terms of circulars issued by the Department are assigned duties of a non-teaching nature (DES, 2002; 2005a; 2005b). It is clear from the literature review that the provision of support staff for students with special educational needs both in Ireland and internationally has contributed significantly to the enhancement of students' experiences in school (Elliott, 2004; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron and Fialka, 2005; Logan, 2006; Takala, 2007).

Key Finding:
3.1   The provision of SNA support has contributed significantly to the enhancement of students' experiences in schools.

However concerns have also been expressed regarding the importance of systematically reviewing and evaluating the utilisation of support staff in order to ensure that students with special educational needs continue to be supported appropriately in schools (Giangreco et al., 2005). Ainscow (2000) points out that while the concept of using additional adults to facilitate the participation of students with special educational needs is an excellent one, many schools have yet to find ways to use this support effectively.

The role of the SNA in Ireland as detailed in Department circulars is fundamentally different to the role of learning support assistants (LSAs) and paraprofessionals in the United Kingdom and the United States who have a role in relation to supporting students' learning. There has been little research in Ireland on the most effective use of SNA support or its impact on students' outcomes. However the research that has been conducted has unanimously identified a discrepancy between the officially prescribed role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools (Lawlor, 2002; Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004; Logan 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008). Lawlor and Cregan (2003) suggest that the appointment of significant numbers of SNAs with minimal or varied qualifications and training, and an official job description, which is at variance with the actual practice in schools, is a matter that requires attention.

Recurrent themes that emerge from an examination of the literature indicate a change in usage of SNAs within schools from that of a 'care' role to a predominantly 'educational' one and a need for clarity with regard to the understanding of the role of the SNA.

Key Finding:
3.2   There is a need for clarity with regard to the understanding of the role of the SNA as envisaged in Department circulars.

Evidence in the Literature of the Changing Role of the Special Needs Assistant in Ireland

Lawlor (2002) conducted research on the role of the SNA in twenty-seven out of the twenty-eight schools for students with mild general learning disabilities. A total of 116 out of 206 teachers and 115 out of 195 SNAs that were surveyed responded. The findings indicate that the role of the SNA in the surveyed schools had changed from that of a 'care' role to a predominantly 'educational' one. Eighty-four percent of SNAs in these schools reported being involved mainly in a learning-support or teaching-assistant role.

This was corroborated by ninety-five percent of teachers who reported that SNAs were involved in tasks related to literacy, numeracy, speech and language and social-skill development. Similarly seventy-four percent of principals reported that SNAs were engaged in supporting students' learning in their schools. Critically a role in support of learning was preferred by SNAs, teachers and principals.

Research undertaken with teachers and SNAs in a special school for students with moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities indicates that both teachers and SNAs perceive a high level of involvement of the SNAs in duties of a non-teaching nature (Carrig, 2004). However, many of the SNAs were involved in the students' educational programmes under the direction of the class teacher. Carrig concluded that the research demonstrated a need for clarification in relation to the care and education roles of SNAs in the classrooms.

Research by Logan (2006) in schools where a total of one hundred and ninety-two SNAs was employed similarly identified that SNAs were increasingly acquiring an educational role in addition to a care role. The educational role was identified as encouraging students, clarifying instructions, adapting or interpreting lessons and assisting individuals and small groups of students with educational activities.

Key Finding:
3.3   There is clear evidence in the literature review that the role of the SNA in Ireland has been changed by schools to include an educational remit.

This changing role does not reflect the role of the SNA as described in Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002).

Elliott (2004) conducted research that included exploring the perceptions and practices of SNAs and class teachers in order to identify issues relating to role definition. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and SNAs in classes for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) in forty-one schools in Ireland.

While a very good working relationship between staff and a mutual respect and appreciation of the work of the SNAs was evident, concerns were articulated by SNAs and teachers in relation to a number of areas. They identified the absence of an official relevant job description, the disparity between the prescribed role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools and the lack of clarity regarding the SNA's role in the students' education as emerging issues.

Carrig (2004) observed that just over half of the SNAs in a school for students with moderate, severe or profound general learning disabilities perceived themselves as having a role in the preparation or tidying up of the classroom while over two thirds of teachers perceived a role for the SNAs in this activity. Logan (2006) identified inconsistencies in practice from school to school with regard to issues such as time in school and attendance at staff meetings. The lack of clear guidelines in relation to the role of the SNA was also criticised.

O'Neill and Rose (2008) recently conducted comparative research between the role of the SNA in Ireland and that of the teaching assistant (TA) in England. Questionnaire data were collected and analysed from seventy-four TAs and eighty-two SNAs. It emerged that SNAs spend significant amounts of time in providing support for individual students, are involved in taking whole-class groups and engage in assessment, which appears to indicate inconsistency between developing practice in schools and the role envisaged for SNAs in DES circulars.

Key Finding
3.4 **Although policy on the SNA role has remained consistent, the application and use of SNAs in schools has changed, leading to a disconnect between the official role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools. This has contributed to inconsistencies in practice and a lack of clarity in schools concerning SNA duties.**

Factors Identified as Contributing to the Effective Deployment of Additional Support Staff in Schools

While it is generally accepted that the provision of additional support has the potential to enhance the education of students with special educational needs, it is also clear that the mere presence of additional staff does not automatically result in enhanced educational opportunities and optimal provision (Rose, 2000; Ofsted, 2002; Ofsted, 2006; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). A number of factors have been identified in the literature that influence and contribute to the effectiveness of additional classroom support. These factors include the importance of: **a clear role definition, the creation of a collaborative working environment, effective management of support,**

training of support staff, teacher competencies in managing SNA support, student involvement and parental perception.

A Clear Role Definition

A clear role definition has been identified as a prerequisite to teachers and support staff working effectively in the classroom (Lorenz, 1998; Rose, 2000; Groom, 2006). The literature suggests that support staff may often lack a job description outlining what they are supposed to do and thus cause those in charge to intervene only as problems occur (French, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005; Wenner-Conroy, 2007).

It is clear that while Department circulars detail the role of the SNA in the Irish context, current practice in schools does not always correspond with this role (DES, 2002; 2005a; 2005b; O'Neill and Rose, 2008). It is a cause for concern when the role of the SNA lacks clarity and when staff without the requisite qualifications are providing instruction for learners with the most unique and complex learning needs (Brown, Farrrington, Knight, Ross and Ziegler, 1999; Wenner-Conroy, 2007). This reinforces the finding previously made at 3.2 that there is a need for clarity with regard to the understanding of the role of the SNA as envisaged in Department circulars.

The aim of the provision of additional support is to enable the student to become an independent learner thereby removing the need for additional support. In research conducted by Skar and Taam (2001), an ideal assistant was one who understood that liberation from adults was necessary for students' independence.

The importance of avoiding adopting the role of both the 'helicopter model' of support whereby support staff hovers over the student or the 'velcro model', which involves the student being consistently monitored by support staff is highlighted in the literature (Down's Syndrome Association (DSA), 2003). It is advocated that the role of support staff should decrease as the child increases in independence (DSA; Takala, 2007).

Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle and Broer (2004) suggest that thoughtful planning of the assignment and role of the paraprofessional results in improved instruction, increased support, greater collaboration between home and school, improved parental satisfaction, more peer interactions and increased student involvement in the curriculum.

Key Finding
3.5   A key focus of the provision of SNA support is to facilitate the development of a student's independent living skills and thereby remove the need for additional support for the student in the future.

A Collaborative Working Environment

Classroom collaboration is a complex process that requires a high level of skill and sensitivity (Snell and Janney, 2000). Calder and Grieve (2004) describe collaboration as working with others in a co-operative yet assertive manner in order to find a mutually satisfying solution. Collaboration and teamwork have been identified as critical when there is more than one adult in the classroom (Ainscow, 2000; Groom, 2006). It is observed that the process of developing school policy and procedures on special education is most effective when the process is undertaken in collaboration with the various partners within the whole school community (DES, 2007).

The literature suggests that it is not always easy for a teacher to work with other adults in the classroom (Jerwood, 1999; Calder and Grieve, 2004). Teachers may feel threatened, anxious about their own competence, unsure of how to manage staff or involve them in a positive way for the benefits of students.

Jerwood (1999) conducted research in a mainstream secondary school in the United Kingdom in order to consider how teachers could optimise the use of support staff. She identified that support staff were most effective in classes where teachers possessed good management skills. The importance of support staff having a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the promotion of good communication with teachers were considered essential to ensuring that support was optimised. Attaching support staff to specific subject areas rather than specific students was viewed as more beneficial as it enabled personnel to become familiar with the methods, materials and personalities involved in particular subject areas. The rapport of the support staff with their students increased and students began to see them as a resource rather than as minders of individual students and working relationships with teachers improved. Support staff was included in the faculty CPD programme and activities.

However for some teachers the role of the support staff continued to be an afterthought. Jerwood (1999) concluded that whether the support staff member was deployed to a subject area or an individual student was irrelevant but rather where teachers were not provided with training in the skills of motivating, delegating and managing the work of an additional adult in the classroom, a considerable waste and under use of resources ensued. Concerns were expressed about finding the time to plan, discuss lessons and identify ways in which staff can be enabled to work collaboratively.

Logan (2001) advises that while induction programmes for SNAs are important, research suggests that in-school joint-training of teachers and SNAs is the most effective means of developing a co-operative and collaborative approach.

Key Finding
3.6   A whole-school approach based on the principles of collaboration and team work constitutes a key feature in the effective deployment of SNA support.

Teachers are able to identify several competencies required for adequately supervising support staff such as planning and scheduling, communication, instructional support, teacher-modelling and management skills (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay and Stahl, 2001). However the authors concluded that the teachers did not often demonstrate these competencies during classroom observation. French (2001) surveyed 321 teachers' supervision practices and found that the majority of teachers did not plan for the support staff, and those who did plan communicated their plans orally.

A report from the Northern Ireland Inspectorate observed that the work of support staff was most effective when staff worked in close partnership with a teacher who understood and had planned well for the support staff's role in the lesson and had good arrangements for obtaining appropriate feedback on the students' learning and behaviour (Northern Ireland, 2006). It was further observed that where staff was insufficiently or superficially briefed, or had inadequate knowledge, they sometimes became more concerned with the completion of the set task rather than with supporting the student to improve his or her skills, understanding or ability to work independently.

Effective practice in deploying support staff is associated with a positive school ethos for inclusion, where teachers, and all within the school, have developed a shared understanding of the role of support staff and value their work (Northern Ireland, 2006). The Northern Ireland Inspectorate identified a need to promote a shared understanding of the role of support staff in supporting both students and teachers, to ensure consistency in their deployment across the school and to develop monitoring strategies to ensure that the provision is being used effectively and appropriately.

The DES advised that clear directions and support be given to SNAs in relation to their expected duties and that they should work closely with teachers in providing assistance to students (DES, 2007).

Key Finding
3.7 Clear communication and understanding of the duties of the SNA within the school are pre-requisites to the effective management of support.

Snell and Janney (2000) observed that, in the United States, direct supervision of paraprofessionals is the responsibility of the special education teacher. Snell and Janney suggest that the process for teaching, monitoring and supervising paraprofessionals' skills needs to be shared between the classroom and special education teacher.

Circular 07/02 explicitly states that the non-teaching duties of the SNA are assigned by the principal teacher and sanctioned by the board of management and that their work should be supervised either by the principal or the class teacher (DES, 2002).

Key Finding
3.8   Proper supervision and management of SNA support is necessary in order to ensure that the care needs of students are being met appropriately.

Calder and Grieve (2004) identify the skills required in managing other adults working in the classroom as leading and organising, directing, training, coaching, motivating and supervising. The authors, citing Kyriacou (1989), observe that change happens slowly in teaching and that teachers tend to conceptualise classroom management in terms of maximising learning time, quality of instruction, content and structure of the curriculum and its delivery and the general craft of teaching.

The emergence of a supervisory role is a recent development for mainstream teachers that is linked to the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream education and one which requires development in order to ensure that additional support is effectively managed.

The Training of Support Staff

Internationally, and in Ireland, the need for CPD for support staff is highlighted in the literature (Logan, 2001; Riggs, 2001; Carrig, 2004; Elliott, 2004; Patterson, 2006). Riggs refers to the wisdom in the observation of Susan, an elementary school paraprofessional, who remarked on the criticality of knowing what to do, or what not to do, when supporting students with special educational needs.

There is no evidence to suggest that training and supervision of support staff will be sufficient to ensure quality inclusive education nor is there an international consensus with regard to what constitutes adequate training and supervision (Patterson, 2006; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). However the literature suggests that CPD linked to the duties of support staff should continue to be available (Riggs, 2001; Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

The Department has provided funding for CPD programmes for SNAs from 2005 with reference to the role of the SNA as detailed in Department circulars (DES, 2002; 2005a; 2005b). These programmes comprise Introductory and Certificate programmes and are delivered by three third level institutions in association with the Education Support Centre Network. To date 1,484 SNAs have completed the Introductory Programme and 480 SNAs have completed the Certificate programme. From 2007, the Special Education Support Service has provided CPD for 186 SNAs allocated to classes for students with ASDs.

The literature identifies the benefits of allocating support staff to deaf and hard-of-hearing students and to blind and visually impaired students. Social isolation, frustration and feelings of exclusion due to difficulties in communicating have been identified as pervasive issues for individuals who are deaf (Latchem, 2006; Buckingham, 2007). It has been observed that support staff can assist in providing access to communication, and therefore to peer interaction and academic participation for students who communicate through sign language or sign supported

English.(Antia and Kreimfyer, 2001; Schick, Williams and Kupermintz, 2006). Additionally support may also be provided through note-taking, checking equipment, and the delivery of deaf awareness training (National Deaf Children's Society, 2003).

Support staff may also be assigned to students who are blind/visually impaired. Support staff provides follow-up instruction, reinforces concepts, provides opportunities for students to practice skills, assists in the preparation of Braille materials, tactile graphics and large print and assists with orientation and mobility throughout the school day.

Key Finding
3.9 SNAs have a role in supporting the care needs of deaf and hard of hearing students and blind and visually impaired students who have been identified as requiring additional support.

Teacher Competencies in Managing SNA Support

Calder and Grieve (2004) summarise the professional knowledge, which newly qualified primary teachers have acquired in terms of a body of general knowledge, knowledge of child development and its effect on learning, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge and skill in curriculum planning, development and evaluating learning, skills in creating effective, inclusive learning environments and skills in classroom management and organisation. The authors suggest that in order to manage additional support in classrooms, teachers need to adopt the role of manager and leader. This involves developing agreed support strategies for students, ensuring collaborative working practices and managing the involvement of other adults in the classroom.

Wallace et al. (2001) identified the competencies needed by teachers to supervise or direct paraprofessionals in educational settings in a study involving ninety-two administrators, 266 teachers and 211 paraprofessionals. These competencies were categorised into seven skill areas and included communication with paraprofessionals, planning and scheduling, instructional support, modelling for paraprofessionals, public relations, training and management of paraprofessionals.

While the study conducted by Wallace et al. (2001) indicated that participants considered the competencies very important, teachers did not employ these competencies as frequently as their perceived importance. It is unrealistic to expect that programmes of initial teacher education can facilitate teachers in developing these skills to the necessary level. It is clear that teachers are key agents in ensuring that the provision of additional support is optimised and should therefore be encouraged to develop competencies related to the effective management of SNA support.

Student-Involvement

Perspectives of students with special educational needs are notably absent from the
literature on the use of additional support in classrooms (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco,
2005)**.** Broer et al. conducted a study in order to elicit the views of sixteen young
adults with special educational needs concerning their experiences of attending
general education classes with paraprofessional support. Four interrelated
perspectives of mother, friend, protector and primary teacher emerged.

Broer et al. (2005) observed that the descriptors of mother, friend, protector and
primary teacher each represents cause for concern and suggest that schools should be
encouraged to consider the social validity of supports, increase teacher involvement,
highlight the importance of listening to students and include students in decisions
about their own supports.

Beth, a student with Down Syndrome, was assigned a full-time paraprofessional in
high school and demonstrated her opposition to the decision through reacting
uncharacteristically and engaging in inappropriate and escape-motivated behaviours
(Giangreco et al., 2005). A month into the school year and after her second
paraprofessional had left, Beth was consulted as part of a team meeting. Beth stated
that she didn't like being bossed and did not want an aide. The problem behaviours
disappeared, once the aide was not reappointed, and Beth became more engaged with
curriculum activities.

Research conducted by Skar and Tamm (2001) expresses concern that children and
young people with restricted mobility were not given opportunities to control key
decision-making processes in relation to the allocation of assistants in supporting their
educational placements. A study conducted by Suter and Giangreco (2009) found that
students with disabilities were the least likely to have a voice in decisions concerning
the need for paraprofessional support. The authors suggested that future efforts should
seek substantive ways to involve students with disabilities in decisions related to the
support they require in schools.

Parental Perception

The increasing numbers of support staff in mainstream schools has been attributed in part to the view held by many parents that the allocation of additional adult support is a prerequisite for a student with special educational needs attending a mainstream school and has a positive impact on the ability of the student to cope with the demands of inclusive schooling (Northern Ireland, 2006; Doherty and Egan, 2008).

Little research exists on parent perceptions of the work of support staff in schools. Werts Gessler, Harris, Tillery Young, and Roark (2004) examined parent perceptions of paraeducators working in inclusive classrooms under teacher direction in the United States. Each of the twenty-eight parents interviewed had a child with a special educational need included in a mainstream classroom. There were twenty-four paraeducators assigned to twenty-eight students either on a one-on-one basis or as a general classroom assistant.

Most parents reported positive perceptions of the paraeducators working and interacting with their children and identified the provision of academic help, keeping the child focused and assisting with behaviour problems as being the key reasons for the provision of paraeducator support.

Parents believed that paraeducators should be invited to their children's individual education plan meetings. The more severe the child's need, the more likely that communication with parents was through the paraeducator. In order to improve the use of paraeducators, parents suggested focusing on training, employing more paraeducators and on communication issues.

Hebdon (2008) observes that parents frequently think that if their child has one-on-one paraprofessional support, he or she could be included in the general education classroom more and attain higher skills, standards and individual education plan goals. Hebdon advises considering each child's strengths and needs individually and avoiding considering one-on-one support as the only solution to optimising a child's educational placement.

A need to communicate clearly the role of support staff to parents was identified by the Northern Ireland Inspectorate (Northern Ireland, 2006). This is particularly critical in the Irish context whereby research has identified a disparity between the role of the SNA as detailed in DES circulars and the practice that is developing in schools.

Key Finding
3.12   There is a need to communicate the role of the SNA clearly to parents.

Concerns in the Deployment of Additional Support Staff in Schools

A number of concerns are evident in the literature in relation to the deployment of additional support staff in schools that include **the social isolation of the student**, **the creation of over-dependency on support**, **interference with teacher engagement, the assuming of increased responsibilities by support staff and the emergence of problem behaviours.**

Social Isolation of Student

Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2002) point to the increase in the allocation of paraprofessional support for individual students in the United States. It has been suggested that while providing classroom support may at times be critical in enabling students with special educational needs to access, participate in and benefit from education, attention should also be directed towards the possibility of the role of the allocation of additional support in reducing the student's opportunities for interaction with other students or the class teacher (Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1997).

Research conducted by Booth, Ainscow and Dyson (1998) suggests that adult support may act as a barrier between students and their classmates where students are grouped together, as students tend to seek assistance from the adult rather than from each other or their peers.

Lorenz (1998) advises that by using support staff to develop and modify resources, instead of sitting next to students telling them the answers, students will be enabled to become independent learners and support can be provided for a greater number of students. Carrig (2004) notes that the over-dependence of the student on the assistant combined with a lack of involvement of the class teacher can lead to the student becoming more isolated rather than more included.

Recent research conducted by Tews and Lupart (2008) found that students with special educational needs felt that their paraprofessional-support was viewed favourably by peers. However the authors suggest that the promotion of socialisation and peer networking may have been compromised as students reported that they spent a majority of the school day interacting with the paraprofessional as opposed to other students.

Key Finding
3.13 There is evidence to suggest that SNA support may contribute to the social isolation of students as the presence of an adult may create an unintentional barrier between the student and his/her peers.

Creation of Over-Dependency

In order to foster students' self-reliance, support staff should be conscious of maintaining a balance between providing support and maintaining independence (Fox, 1993). A report published by the Inspectorate in Northern Ireland cautions that an emphasis on one-to-one support may increase the potential for 'learned helplessness' and thus diminish the speed at which a student develops full independence (Northern Ireland, 2006).

Students with special educational needs should be treated in the same way as any other student of the same age and given opportunities to express themselves and make their own choices (Lorenz, 1998). It has been observed that support staff may do too much for students, which creates both over-dependency and a loss of personal control for the student (Giangreco et al., 2005). Ainscow (2000) notes that at some point the continual availability of adult support may cease to ensure meaningful participation in the lesson by the student with special educational needs and instead trivialise it.

Research conducted by Booth et al. (1998) in a second-level school in Great Britain indicates that adult support can limit student participation in lessons and emphasise task completion rather than understanding. The authors observed a student with Down Syndrome over a series of lessons and concluded that while all of the tasks she was set were completed, some held little meaning for her. Effective management of support staff is concerned with ensuring that staff is deployed across a range of contexts and that their skills are utilised for the benefit of the whole class (Groom, 2006).

The findings in relation to the creation of over-dependency support the finding at 3.6 above and highlight the importance of the development of students' independence skills continuing to be a key focus of the role of the SNA.

Interference with Teacher Engagement

The literature indicates that teachers may be less involved when a student is being supported by support staff as the teacher perceives that adequate individual support is being provided (Ainscow, 2000; Giangreco et al., 2005; Northern Ireland, 2006). Booth et al. (1998) suggest that the presence of an assistant, acting as an intermediary in communication and as a supporter in carrying out the required tasks, can result in the teacher adopting less responsibility for some members of the class. Giangreco (2010) observes that assigning a paraprofessional will not logically result in improved teacher attitudes towards students with disabilities, increase teacher instructional engagement with students with disabilities, increase teacher capacity to modify curriculum and instruction for mixed-ability groupings, improve collaborative practice between class teachers and support teachers or contribute to effective interventions for students with disabilities

Ofsted (2002) engaged in an evaluation of the work of teaching assistants in sixty-seven primary schools and observed that few schools monitored the time that individual students, particularly those of low ability or with special educational needs spent with teaching assistants. The practice of assigning an insufficiently qualified

staff member to spend the greatest amount of time with a student constitutes an untenable position (Downing, Ryndak and Clark, 2000).

Key Finding
3.14 Detailing the roles and responsibilities of staff clearly in school policies may assist in promoting a shared understanding of the specific remit of individual staff members in relation to students with special educational needs.

Assuming Increased Responsibilities

Giangreco and Broer (2003) have expressed concerns that, in the United States, paraprofessionals are being asked to assume ever increasing instructional, curricular and behavioural support responsibilities for students with special educational needs. This is commensurate with the research findings in relation to the role of the SNA in Ireland whereby the literature has indicated a change within schools from that of a 'care' role to a predominantly 'educational'. Giangreco and Broer observe that this has created a situation whereby students with special educational needs receive education from the least qualified staff rather than from fully certified educators.

Giangreco et al. (2002) indicate that this shift has occurred without sufficient training. Etscheidt (2005) cautions that the over extension in duties for which the paraprofessional is not qualified may impact negatively on students' programmes. While in the United States, certain tasks may be delegated to paraprofessionals, the legal and ethical responsibility for all services remains with the qualified teacher or service provider (Etscheidt). Ofsted (2002) observed that teaching assistants sometimes became more concerned that students completed the required task rather than improving students' knowledge, skills and understanding where they were insufficiently or superficially briefed or had inadequate subject knowledge.

Key Finding
3.15 The weight of educational research considers that the delegation of educational instruction to support staff is inappropriate and would represent an unacceptable departure from the role.

Emergence of Problem Behaviours

Giangreco et al. (2005) point out that some students with special educational needs may express their dislike of being provided with additional support by displaying inappropriate behaviours and off-task behaviours.

Young, Simpson, Smith Myles and Kamps (1997) conducted a study of the effect of the allocation of paraprofessional support on the behaviours of three elementary-age students in the US. The authors observed that the three students remained on task most often when working one-to-one with a peer and concluded that utilising peer groups to facilitate instruction, particularly in social settings, might be a successful alternative to direct paraprofessional involvement.

The monitoring of students' behaviour should form a part of individualised planning in place for the student and be implemented as an element of a whole-school approach to the management of behaviour.

Key Finding

3.16 There is evidence to suggest that utilising peer support, particularly in social settings, may be an alternative to SNA involvement and potentially have a positive impact on students' behaviour.

The Impact of Additional Support on Students' Outcomes

Ofsted (2006) examined the factors that promote good academic, personal and social outcomes across a range of different provision in seventy-four schools for students with a range of special educational needs. The report found that effective provision was distributed equally between mainstream primary and post-primary schools and special schools when certain factors were securely in place.

More good and outstanding provision was identified in resourced mainstream schools (Ofsted, 2006). These schools are described as schools in which provision is referred to as 'a unit', 'specialist facility' or 'designated special provision'. Students typically spend their time being taught both by specialist teachers and included in mainstream schools. It was acknowledged that teaching assistants provided valuable support and had often received high quality training and relevant qualifications but that such was not a substitute for focused, highly skilled teaching.

Crucially the provision of additional resources such as support from teaching assistants did not ensure good quality intervention or adequate progress by students. This has recently been corroborated by a study conducted by Blatchford et al. (2009). Key factors for good progress were identified as a positive and inclusive ethos, the involvement of a specialist teacher, good assessment, work tailored to challenge students sufficiently, focused professional development for all staff and commitment from school leaders to ensure good progress for all students.

It has been identified that there is a paucity of research relating student achievement and social outcomes to the allocation of additional support staff (Young et al., 1997). Researchers at the Institute of Education, London conducted a survey of 20,000 teachers and support staff in primary, secondary and special schools in England and Wales and found that while support staff reduced teachers' stress levels and improved

classroom discipline, there was no evidence of an impact on students' academic progress (Blatchford et al., 2009).

Key Finding
3.17 The literature does not find that the presence of support staff improves students' achievement.

Identification of Convergence

The literature reviewed, while originating from a range of international contexts has identified key principles, which it is suggested have general applicability in the provision of support staff to assist teachers in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. It is suggested that points of convergence between systems have been successfully identified and have the potential to inform policy and practice in relation to the future development of the role of the SNA in Ireland.

Chapter 4   Objectives and Current Practice

This chapter relates specifically to items 1 and 2 in the Terms of Reference:

1. Identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme and the role of an SNA.

2. Examine the relevance and continued validity of the objectives of the SNA Scheme and the role of the SNA as they relate to the objective of the Department's Strategy Statement 2008-2010 concerned with providing a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs.

Introduction

The objectives of the SNA Scheme are identified in Circular 07/02 as providing a system of care support for students with disabilities who have additional care needs in order to facilitate their educational placements (DES, 2002). The role of the SNA should reflect these objectives. The relevance and continued validity of the objectives of the SNA Scheme are reviewed in this chapter.

Initially the historical background and growth of the Scheme are examined in order to provide a context in which the objectives of the Scheme and current practice can be understood. The relevance and continued validity of the Scheme as they apply to current practice are then examined with reference to the literature reviewed and the fieldwork conducted for the Review.

Historical Background and Growth of Special Needs Assistant Scheme

An analysis of the historical background and growth of the SNA Scheme suggests that a number of key stages in the evolution of the present Scheme should be considered when reviewing the relevance and continued validity of the objectives of the Scheme. These stages, which are presented below, can be identified as **Initial Administrative Procedures; School Certification; Inspectorate Survey 2002; Verification by the National Psychological Service; Subsequent Inspectorate Review 2003; Transfer of Application Function to the NCSE** and **Further Development of the Scheme**.

Initial Administrative Procedures

In April 1999, following the 1998 Ministerial announcement of the provision of automatic supports for children with special educational needs irrespective of educational placement, the Department introduced a revised administrative procedure for considering applications for SNA support (DES, 1998). This revised procedure was initiated as a response to the expected demand for SNA support that it was anticipated the Ministerial announcement would generate.

The Department considered that the provision of automatic supports for students with special educational needs would create a greater demand for SNA support and required an expedient administrative procedure that incorporated professionals' views with regard to the appropriateness of SNA support for students with disabilities who had additional care needs.

It was decided that applications for SNA support would be sent to the Department's Inspectorate, accompanied by relevant supporting professional reports. The Inspectorate evaluated individual applications and advised the Department's Special Education Section accordingly. Subsequently Special Education Section formally notified the schools of the outcome of the application.

As anticipated, a significant increase in applications for SNA support followed the Ministerial announcement. This increase is demonstrated below in Table 4.1. While initially able to cope, the combined resources of the Inspectorate and administrative staff of the Department proved inadequate to process the volume of applications that were being submitted by schools for SNA support. It was necessary therefore to introduce a new administrative procedure, which is set out in Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002). See Annex 6 for details of this procedure.

The growth in the number of SNAs employed in schools and the associated costs for the period 1990-2001 are detailed below in Table 4.1. The data in the table demonstrate the increase in the demand for SNA support that followed the introduction of the Ministerial announcement in 1998. This is illustrative of a trend that has continued to the present day, whereby the number of SNA posts and the associated costs has continued to grow.

Table 4.1 Number of Special Needs Assistants Employed in Primary and Special Schools and the Associated Cost for the Period 1990-2000		
Year	**Number of SNA Posts**	**Out-turn £000s**
1990	70	673
1991	72	724
1992	70	743
1993	76	872
1994	123	925
1995	230	1303
1996	250	2338
1997	270	2577
1998	293	3087
1999	558	6771
2000	1495	18203

As the number of SNA posts was growing, a background of emerging anecdotal information was simultaneously suggesting that a dissonance between the prescribed role of the SNA and practice in schools was developing. The Department

systematically sought to address this trend through directing schools' attention to the terms of relevant Departmental circulars and implementing alternative administrative procedures.

See Annex 10 for a record of correspondence between the Department and schools concerning the provision of advice by the Department in relation to the appointment, management and allocation of SNA-support and emphasising the 'care role' of the SNA.

School-Certification

In February 2002, the Department introduced a school-certification process in order to further expedite the administrative procedure associated with applying for SNA support. School-certification involved a process whereby the school applied directly to the Department for SNA support based on available external professionals' reports. Schools were invited to submit applications for SNA support to Special Education Section of the Department based on a recommendation from a relevant professional with reference to the terms of Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002).

At the time of the introduction of the new procedures, it was intended that a review of the operation of the school-certification process would take place before the end of 2002. As Table 4.2 below illustrates, the school-certification procedure led to an unprecedented increase in the allocation and cost of SNA support.

Table 4.2 Number of Special Needs Assistants Employed in Schools and the Associated Cost for the Period 2001-2010					
	Primary	Post-Primary			
	Mainstream Primary and Special Schools	Community, Comprehensive and Voluntary Sector	Vocational Education Committee	Total in All Sectors	% Increase Annually
31/12/2001					
No. of SNAs	**2695**	**232**	**61**	**2988**	**99.8%**
Cost €000	**29,229**	**3,331**	**918**	**33,478**	
*Substitution costs €000	**200**	**33**		**233**	
31/12/2002					
No. of SNAs	**4594**	**277**	**108**	**4979**	**66.6%**
Cost €000	**67,250**	**4,200**	**1120**	**75,570**	**125.7%**
*Substitution costs €000	**500**	**42**		**542**	**132.6%**
31/12/2003					
No. of SNAs	**4901**	**316**	**150**	**5367**	**7.79%**
Cost €000	**103,556**	**5,034**	**1990**	**110,580**	**46.32%**
*Substitution costs €000	**800**	**51**		**851**	**57%**
31/12/2004					
No. of SNAs	**5250**	**412**	**207**	**5869**	**9.35%**
Cost €000	**121,461**	**5,735**	**2730**	**129,926**	**17.49%**

*Substitution costs €000	2,182	58		2240	163.2%
31/12/2005					
No. of SNAs	6273	625	396	7337	24.28%
Cost €000	156,894	13,038	4250	174,182	34%
Substitution costs €000	2,772	122		2894	29.19%
31/12/2006					
No. of SNAs	6974	895	521	8390	15.03%
Cost €000	190,052	19,533	8500	218,085	25.2%
Substitution costs €000	5,044	255		5299	83.1%
Redundancy costs €000	600	111		711	
31/12/2007					
No. of SNAs	8038	1148	638	9824	17.09%
Cost €000	230,344	27,700	11,700	269,744	23.68%
Substitution costs €000	6,530	374		6904	30.28%
Redundancy costs €000	1,916	272		2188	207.7%
31/12/2008					
No. of SNAs	8440	1298	704	10442	6.29%
Cost €000	268,750	36,392	14,820	319,962	18.6%
Substitution costs €000	10,139	795		10,934	58.37%
Redundancy costs €000	1,916	275		2191	0.13%
31/12/2009					
No. of SNAs	8392	1263	687	10342	- 0.95%
Cost €000	268,859	39,552	21,800	330,211	3.2%
Substitution costs €000	11,145	876		12,021	9.9%
Redundancy costs €000	2,260	211		2471	12.7%

* Substitution costs in Post-Primary Sector for 2001 to 2004 are estimates based on the data available in 2005 – Approx. 1% of total cost

Key Finding
4.1   **The school-certification procedure introduced in February 2002 led to an unprecedented increase in the allocation and cost of SNA support.**

Inspectorate Survey 2002

The Department continued to be concerned with the increasing demand for SNA support and initiated a process of obtaining empirical data with the assistance of the Inspectorate. In late 2002, the Department's Inspectorate conducted a sample survey of twenty-five primary schools that had been allocated resource teacher and SNA support in accordance with the process of school-certification. Resource-teachers are appointed in accordance with the terms of Circular 08/99 to provide additional teaching support for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools (DES, 1999).

A key focus of the review conducted by the Inspectorate was to ascertain whether the terms of Circular 07/02 were being interpreted correctly by the relevant professionals and whether sufficient evidence existed in professional reports to warrant the allocation of additional support (DES, 2002). The findings of the survey suggested that there was a higher than should be expected incidence of students with significant special educational needs being identified.

While the small sample size of the Inspectorate Survey was acknowledged, concerns were expressed by the Inspectorate that the greater availability of resources in recent years may have led to an over-identification of students with special educational needs and that such over-identification could have serious long-term implications for the future funding and development of special education services.

Verification by the National Educational Psychological Service

Arising from the findings of the Inspectorate's survey, it was decided that all existing and future applications for special education resources would be subject to individual verification by the NEPS. The purpose of this process was to verify that the resources sought in these applications conformed to the terms of Departmental circulars governing such allocations.

The review, conducted by the NEPS concluded that sixty per-cent of the applications examined conformed to the terms of Departmental circulars. The NEPS observed that a tendency to recommend additional support for students in excess of that outlined in relevant circulars for particular categories of special educational needs was evident in some professionals' reports and that in a number of cases, the requisite professionals' reports required to support applications were not available in schools for inspection by the NEPS.

In 2003, the Department wrote to the management of national schools advising them of the arrangements for processing applications for resource teacher and SNA support for the last term of the 2002/2003 school year. The Department directed the schools' attention to the need for strict compliance with the conditions of Circular 07/02 in making such applications (DES, 2002).

4.2 **There is evidence to suggest that the SNA Scheme is moving away from the objectives of the Scheme, which may partly account for the fact that the number of SNAs has continued to grow and the cost of the Scheme has continued to accelerate.**

Subsequent Inspectorate Review 2003

In May 2003, the Inspectorate conducted a further review of SNA posts in sixteen primary and four post-primary schools. The purpose of this review was to identify any surplus SNA posts with a view to the subsequent withdrawal or re-allocation of these posts.

The inspectors found an over-allocation of SNA posts in thirteen of the sixteen primary schools and estimated that the number of SNA posts in these schools could be reduced by a minimum of fifteen full-time and seven part-time posts. The inspectors also indicated that there was spare capacity in the SNA allocations in each of the post-primary schools.

However, due to the movement of students, the situation in some of the schools changed and some of the original findings were no longer applicable. The Department had issued Circular 24/03 to schools in September 2003 (DES, 2003). This Circular advised schools of the arrangements for processing applications for teaching and SNA support for the 2003/04 school year.

Applications from schools for SNA support continued to be submitted directly to the Department by schools. The Department allowed schools to retain any surplus resources up to the level of resources applied for on a temporary basis pending the outcome of the review of the application.

4.3 **In reviews conducted in 2002 and 2003, the Inspectorate found that there was an over-allocation of SNAs in the schools reviewed, and expressed concerns that the greater availability of resources in recent years may have led to an over-identification of students with special educational needs.**

Transfer of Application Function to the National Council for Special Education

In September 2004, Circular 13/04 advised schools of the Department's intention to carry out a general review of SNA deployment in schools and that the review would involve a visit to each school that had been allocated SNA support (DES, 2004a). It further advised that decisions regarding the appropriate level of SNA support in individual schools would be based on the outcome of this review.

This review coincided with the establishment of the NCSE in accordance with the terms of the EPSEN Act 2004 (Ireland, 2004). At that point, certain functions

previously carried out by the Department transferred to the NCSE including the processing of applications for SNA support by SENOs.

A decision by a SENO to allocate SNA support to schools is based on the criteria outlined in DES Circular 07/02, the special educational needs of the student as identified and documented in the professional assessments supporting the application, the proposals from the school as to how it will meet the students' needs, parental views, the overall SNA support currently available in the school and Departmental policy in relation to the allocation of SNA support. See Annexes 11-13 for copies of information-gathering instruments used by SENOs in processing applications for SNA support.

The SENO informs the school directly of his/her decision and forwards a copy of the decision to Head Office, NCSE and relevant line division in the Department.

Further Development of the Scheme

Employment conditions for SNAs have continued to develop and the costs associated with these developments have also expanded. A payroll system was introduced for SNAs in April 2001. The manner in which the cost of the Scheme has accelerated in the period 2001-2008 is demonstrated previously in Table 4.2.

In May 2006, Circular 58/06 issued to primary and post-primary schools advising of new redundancy arrangements for SNAs (DES, 2006). These redundancy arrangements were the result of the Union claim agreed at the Labour Relations Commission. Following discussion with the education partners, it was agreed to admit SNAs employed in Primary Schools to the membership of the Superannuation (Education) Pensions Scheme. Circular 02/04, which issued in April 2004 provides details of this Scheme (DES, 2004b).

A pension Scheme was made available to SNAs employed in secondary, community and comprehensive schools in 2008. Details of this Scheme are provided in Circular 63/08 (DES, 2008).

Where an SNA is supporting a candidate in a special centre during examinations and also performs duties associated with supervising the centre, SNAs receive a remuneration of ninety euro per day for such duties from June 2008. This seems to represent an anomaly as one of the duties of an SNA is stated to be assisting on examinations and this requires clarification in order to ensure unnecessary duplication is avoided (DES, 2005a; 2005b). See Annexes 7 and 8.

Substitution costs for SNAs have also continued to grow. See Table 4.2 previously.

The Relevance and Continued Validity of the Objectives of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The relevance and continued validity of the SNA Scheme as they apply to current practice are examined in this section with reference to the analysis of data obtained during the Review and the literature reviewed. As previously stated, the objectives of

the SNA Scheme are concerned with providing a system of additional care support for students with disabilities who have additional care needs in order to facilitate their educational placements.

The provision of a system of care support within educational contexts is a relevant and valid programme objective and public policy intervention, which is compatible with the Strategy Statement of the DES 2008-2010 as it relates to the strategic objective of providing resources and supports for learners with special educational needs (DES, 2008-2010).

Objective 1.5 of the DES Strategy Statement details among its strategies and actions, the provision of financial and other supports to the NCSE, the ongoing development of an overall policy framework for the delivery of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs and the commencement of sections of the EPSEN Act 2004 (Ireland, 2004; DES, 2008-2010).

Outputs associated with these strategies/actions are identified as the provision of financial and other supports to the NCSE, ongoing development of an overall policy framework for the delivery of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs, commencement of sections of the EPSEN Act, the establishment of appropriate services and procedures to give effect to the provisions of the Act and securing appropriate arrangements for the co-ordination of services with the Health Sector.

It is clear therefore that the objectives of the SNA scheme as they relate to the provision of additional care support for students with disabilities are both relevant and valid. The VFM Review process is concerned with examining the current operation of the Scheme in order to ensure that the objectives of the Scheme are reflected in practice and that practice is therefore both relevant and valid.

Key Finding

4.4   The SNA Scheme is meeting the objectives of the original Scheme and these objectives continue to be valid.

An analysis of the data from the school reviews and focus group discussions suggests that a number of areas require attention in order to ensure that practice in schools continues to reflect the objectives of the Scheme. These areas are presented below under the following headings: **Knowledge of the Objectives; Allocation of Special Needs Assistant Support; Identifying Care Needs; Application, Allocation and Review Process; Students in Receipt of Special Needs Assistant Support; Duties Allocated to Special Needs Assistants, Allocation of Special Needs Assistants to Classes** and **Monitoring Special Needs Assistant Support**.

Knowledge of the Objectives of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

A summary of the focus groups discussions indicates that all stakeholders could identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme. However further discussion below demonstrates that while stakeholders displayed this knowledge, a wider interpretation of the objectives of the Scheme was evident in practice. This wider interpretation has led to an expansion of the SNA role beyond that envisaged in Department circulars. This finding reflects the evidence in the literature review of the changing role of the SNA in the Irish context (Lawlor, 2002; Carrig, 2004; Logan, 2006).

Key Finding
4.5   **While all stakeholders could identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme, a wider interpretation of the role, which is not consistent with the objectives of the Scheme was evident in practice.**

Allocation of Special Needs Assistant Support

The Review findings indicate that there was some variation in the reasons for allocating SNA support to students, which was associated with different school sectors. Table 4.3 indicates that the percentage of students with physical disabilities that have been allocated SNA support in primary and post-primary schools was higher than that in the special schools, which is expected given the policy of including students in mainstream schools.

A higher incidence of allocating SNAs to support medical needs in special schools than in mainstream primary or post-primary schools was evident. Interestingly the percentage incidence of SNA support allocated to students identified as a danger to themselves or others in special schools was not significantly more than the same population within primary or post- primary schools.

The finding that more SNAs support pupils with medical needs in special schools is not unexpected as there is a concentration of students with the most complex needs in special schools. However the finding in relation to students identified as a danger to themselves or others is unexpected as one would expect a significantly greater number of these students to be enrolled in special schools.

The number of students identified as a danger to themselves or others and allocated SNA support presented as a serious concern during the Review. The level of students was so high that one of the researchers remarked that, if this was the case, observers could consider that Ireland was not a particularly safe place to visit. The remark was not intended to trivialise the finding but rather to highlight the necessity of engaging in an in-depth examination of the issues related to the finding. It may also suggest that classroom behaviour management may need reviewing.

In interpreting Table 4.3, it should be noted that the categories of need referred to in the Table are the broad categories delineated in Circular 07/02, which do not provide details with regard to the specific needs of individual students.

Table 4.3	Number and Percentage of Students Receiving Support from Special Needs Assistants in Accordance with Circular 07/02 as Observed by Inspectors During In-School Reviews						

	School Type						Total
	Primary		Special		Post Primary		
Medical Needs	15	*7%*	44	*14%*	3	*5%*	62
Physical Impairment	64	*31%*	64	*21%*	20	*36%*	148
Sensory Impairment	32	*16%*	49	*16%*	9	*16%*	90
Danger to Self/Others	93	*46%*	151	*49%*	24	*43%*	268
	204		**308**		**56**		**568**

In considering the data reported in Table 4.3, consideration should also be taken of the data reported in Table 4.4 below, which suggests that 42.5% of the SNAs observed in this context spent almost all or most time engaged in meeting the care needs identified in Table 4.3. 27% of SNAs spent less than half or a small amount of time engaged in meeting these care needs. These data are corroborative of the surplus allocation of SNA support identified by the Inspectorate during in-school reviews. The in-school reviews of SNA staffing by the Inspectorate in one hundred schools found an over-allocation of 31 posts in special schools which equates to 18% of supernumerary posts[1] and 10% of all SNA posts in these schools. In mainstream primary schools, the over-allocation found was 31% of supernumerary posts and 27% of all SNA posts. In post-primary schools an over-allocation of 30% of supernumerary posts and 27% of all posts was indicated. While data in relation to the over-allocation of posts are not available specific to the individual categories outlined in Table 4.3, the apparent over-identification of students in the category 'danger to self/others' suggests that attention should be directed to this category in this context.

Table 4.4	An Estimation of the Amount of Time during a Typical Working Day that Special Needs Assistants Engage in Meeting the Care Needs identified in Table 4.3 and which are consistent with Circular 07/02 as reported by Inspectors During In-School Reviews				

Number of SNAs by school type	School Type			Total
	Primary	Special	Post Primary	
Almost All (more than 90%)	36	21	18	75
Most (75-90%)	20	38	17	75
Majority (50-74%)	33	73	3	109
Less than Half (15-49%)	38	27	3	68
Small Amount (up to 15%)	**18**	**5**	**3**	**26**
Total SNAs				**353**

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[1] Supernumerary posts are posts in excess of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) recommended ratios for SNA support by special class group for the various disability categories.

Identifying Care Needs

Circular 07/02 states that an application for SNA support may only be made on behalf of a child if that child has been identified as having 'special care needs' arising from a disability. The criteria by which these needs are identified are also outlined in this circular. These criteria state that applications for an SNA should be considered where 'for example, *a student has a **significant** medical need for such assistance, a **significant** impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other students'* (p. 2: DES, 2002).

It was generally accepted in focus groups that these criteria are easily applied when children present with medical needs and/ or physical care needs but that professionals found them to be less easily applied to the other categories. Professionals and parent focus group participants considered that the term *'care needs'* was ambiguous. Participants in professional focus groups articulated a view that the criteria for the allocation of SNA support were too narrowly focused. Parents and professionals expressed dissatisfaction with the criterion *'behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or other students'* and considered it resulted in a negative labelling and portrayal of students.

The figures suggest that a significant number of students in receipt of SNA support are identified as being a danger either to themselves or to other students. This confirms a range of other data obtained during the Review and data provided by the NCSE as detailed in Table 5.1 in the next Chapter. The number of students being identified in this category appears disproportionate in relation to figures associated with schools in other administrations and must be a considerable cause for concern (Mental Health Foundation (MHF), 2002; Lowe et al.(Challenging behaviours:prevalence and topographies), 2007; Remschmidt et al., 2007).

This figure is reiterated in the reports from inspectors, which also indicate that a high number of students are assigned SNA support with reference to the criterion of danger to themselves or others. There is evidence from a number of professional focus groups that this criterion can be the subject of a very broad interpretation.

However, evidence from a number of professional focus groups also suggests that students so labelled may require alternative support systems that directly address their identified needs rather than those envisaged by the objectives of the current SNA Scheme as detailed in Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002). The timeframe and terms of reference of this Review precluded an in-depth examination of possible alternative support systems.

Concern was expressed in the professional focus groups that there may be an assumption in schools that the provision of SNA support will substitute for the limited availability of therapeutic support. In order to compensate for this, it was reported that pressure is placed on professionals to identify behavioural problems or apply the criteria that *'behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or other students'* in order to elicit resources.

Key Finding
4.6 **There is evidence that the category related to 'behaviour is such that students are a danger to themselves or others' is being misinterpreted and leading to an over-identification of students in this category.**

Some focus group participants expressed the view that professionals have been put under pressure to state that certain students meet the terms of the SNA Scheme when it is clear that they do not.

One professional expressed the view that it was natural for a professional to do whatever was required to obtain a resource which would assist a student, even in circumstances where the student wasn't strictly entitled to such a resource. This practice may result in students being inappropriately labelled.

Further concerns were expressed by the focus groups in relation to the involvement of SNAs in therapeutic interventions. Therapy interventions such as speech and language and physiotherapy services are often provided to students who require such therapy in schools by HSE medical professionals.

It was suggested that on occasions SNAs have been involved in liaison with therapists with minimal involvement of the class or resource teacher. This ensures students access therapeutic approaches, which cannot be provided through more appropriate sources.

In such situations it was suggested that this placed additional responsibilities on the SNA and may result in unsatisfactory intervention with a student. There is also an indication from the focus group data that some therapeutic programmes managed by SNAs lack appropriate supervision, monitoring or evaluation. Conversely parents and some HSE professionals welcomed the interventions conducted by SNAs, particularly acknowledging that therapists have insufficient time to oversee many of the essential procedures required by students.

In some instances, training has been provided to SNAs by therapists and this has generally been welcomed. However, members of the HSE believe that SNAs are being expected to undertake duties that are not in accordance with the circulars. They also suggest that the availability of SNAs to conduct work of this nature is variable and that their own work pressures do not afford sufficient opportunities for monitoring activities in this area.

The role of the SNA is to support the care needs of a child. Therefore, while it may be appropriate for SNAs to assist students in accessing therapy support in schools or to assisting a therapist in providing support for a child, it is not appropriate for an SNA to carry out, or to be responsible for the management or provision of therapy services in view of the particular skill-set required to deliver therapeutic interventions. However, it is important to note that the delivery of therapies is not in itself a reason to warrant the allocation of an SNA post.

Key Finding
4.7   A perception was identified among some professionals that SNA support could compensate for the absence of therapeutic interventions. While an SNA might assist a child to access therapeutic interventions, the provision or management of such services by an SNA is not in keeping with the criteria laid down for the role in Circular 07/02.

An examination of the application forms to elicit SNA support was carried out as part of this Review. There was a high level of inconsistency in relation to the kind of information provided on these forms. School principals went to great lengths to describe students' special educational needs, their behaviours as well as the role of SNAs currently working within the school. Some of the applications ran to in excess of ten pages.

The language used to describe students' needs was often inconsistent with that suggested in the DES categories of special educational need, which suggests a need to develop a shared knowledge and understanding of these categories. The volume of information included in some applications would suggest that school principals consider that they are required to go to great lengths making a case on paper in order to elicit SNA support for students. The comment was made in a number of focus groups that principals spend a lot of time assembling the relevant paperwork, collating assessments, consulting with colleagues and considering the best use of resources.

There was a perception among some of the education stakeholders that there were inconsistencies in relation to decisions regarding allocations made by individual SENOs. Evidence from the SENOs focus group indicates that in addition to Circular 07/02, SENOs may refer to the principles in DES Circular 02/05 and their own internal guidelines when making recommendations (DES, 2002; 2005c). This may be contributing to the perception that an inconsistent approach is being adopted to the application of the current criteria. There was also a perception among the SENOs that some of the flexibility enjoyed by them in their role has changed in the last two years and that they now have less control over the management of the process.

Key Finding
4.8   Special Education Needs Organisers are perceived by some of the education stakeholders to be applying the criteria for the allocation of SNA support inconsistently.

The data collected from the focus group interviews did not indicate that parents and professionals experienced clear procedures for the application, allocation or review of SNA support in schools. During the focus group interviews, parents reported that they did not understand and were detached from the application process. They expressed a view that the system was managed through a process of letter writing and phone-calls and that it constituted an impersonal and disempowering approach. Parents were not clear about the documentation required and viewed the process as obscure.

Furthermore, they reported that they were often unaware that the application for SNA support had been successful until the SNA had been appointed, which they considered added to a sense of isolation from the application process. Parents considered that the NCSE should acknowledge the receipt of an application for SNA support to parents by letter and inform them of the outcome as soon as the decision was made. The reported parental experiences are surprising in view of the importance that SENOs place on emphasis on engaging and consulting with parents in their work. Additionally liaising with parents in a collaborative manner and keeping them informed in relation to their children is an element of a positive school ethos and culture.

It was widely reported in the professional and parent focus groups that a more collaborative effort is needed during the application, allocation and review processes. It was suggested that at no stage do people sit around a table to discuss the needs of the child and the purpose of SNA support. Focus groups felt that teachers' views about the appropriateness of allocation or the use of SNA support are not sought. Because of these shortcomings the process is perceived to be disempowering for teachers.

There was a general feeling that there is often a delay in completion of the current process because of the lack of collaboration and necessity to get the paperwork in order. Professionals are seen to be in a gate-keeping role and to have control over the allocation of resources within a system where they consider that transparency is compromised. These findings are unexpected in view of the consultative approach adopted by SENOs in allocating SNA support to schools, which was previously referred to.

Key Finding
4.9   The majority of focus groups stated that the application process was a source of dissatisfaction for them.

Difficulties were also identified following the allocation of SNA support. Health Service Executive professionals stated that they may not get to meet the SNA before a child comes to the school and that their professional expertise is therefore under-utilised. Similarly, parents stated that they may not get to meet the allocated SNA until that person has started working with the child and that this can be a source of some anxiety.

It was widely believed that SENOs can have a considerable influence upon the effectiveness of current procedures and that there are many instances where their actions result in positive outcomes for students. In the best examples reported SENOs were described as collaborating with parents and providing them with good quality information.

Overall, the process is reported by SENOs as being a considerable source of stress. They report finding themselves under considerable pressure in relation to the job security of SNAs. This often results in reviews of allocation being fraught, with SENOs feeling pressurised and SNAs, teachers and parents feeling anxious. This has been partly mitigated by the fact that SENOs have been given guidance on consistent application of the scheme and are required to apply the criteria for the scheme in a consistent manner. However in focus groups, other professionals also referred to pressure and reported a lack of overall control of the situation or their inability to influence decisions relating to the needs of children.

Table 4.5 indicates that there has been an increase in the level of review of SNA support in the past three years. This may be indicative of the development of the role of the SENO and the increasing positive impact of the SENO on the SNA allocation and review processes.

Table 4.5 Review of Special Needs Assistant Posts since the Original Allocation was made as Reported by SENO/NEPS Teams							
	Review Date						
	02/03	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	Total
Primary	1	6	7	5	64	81	**164**
Special Schools	0	0	1	10	18	5	**34**
Post-Primary	0	0	1	13	15	7	**36**
	1	**6**	**9**	**28**	**97**	**93**	**234**

Students in Receipt of Special Needs Assistant Support

According to inspectors' in-school reviews, SNA support is provided to students across all of the categories of special educational needs as detailed in Department circulars. However variations between primary, post-primary and special school sectors were evident in the care needs for which SNA support was allocated. See Table 4.6 below. This is consistent with the data in Table 4.3 previously.

It should be noted that SNA support is not allocated to students on the basis of the categories detailed in Table 4.6 below, but on the basis of the four categories of care needs outlined in Circular 07/02 and as detailed in Table 4.3 previously. The categories detailed in Table 4.6, which below give more detailed specifications, are all included in the four categories of care needs outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.6 Categories of Assessed Special Educational Needs of Students who were Allocated Special Needs Assistant Support Sourced from Inspectors' In-School Reviews

	School Type			Total
	Primary	**Special**	**Post Primary**	
Autism/ASD	61	75	23	**159**
Assessed Syndrome	2	0	6	**8**
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	15	6	1	**22**
EBD/SEBD/BESD	17	15	3	**35**
ED	54	6	11	**71**
General Learning Disability	0	2	1	**3**
Hearing Impairment	4	4	4	**12**
Mild General Learning Disability	35	40	21	**96**
Moderate General Learning Disability	13	33	8	**54**
Multiple Disabilities	5	17	0	**22**
Physical Disability	46	13	27	**86**
Sensory	1	0	0	**1**
Specific Learning Disability	9	2	9	**20**
Severe and Profound General Learning Disability	1	14	0	**15**
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	1	3	1	**5**
Visual Impairment	4	0	2	**6**
Other	2	67	0	**69**
Total	**270**	**297**	**117**	**684**

While as stated previously the inspectors reviewed the allocation of SNA support to 276 students in primary schools, 276 students in special schools and 104 pupils in post-primary schools, a number of these students could be categorised in more than one category of special educational need. This accounts for the discrepancy between the allocation of SNA support to 656 students reviewed by the Inspectorate and the total number of categories identified in Table 4.6 above.

The data in Table 4.6 also indicate that there are some categories of special educational need that are more likely to attract higher levels of SNA support. These data are confirmed by data provided by the NCSE in Table 5.1. Of particular note is the high level of allocation to students with ASDs in primary and special schools.

Should this trend continue, the need for SNA support is likely to increase in order to meet the needs of these students when they transfer to post-primary schools. However, if greater levels of independence were achieved by the students, continued

support may not be required. A similar situation pertains in respect of students with disabilities who present with behaviour-related difficulties and those with physical disabilities.

The number of SNAs in special schools reflects the trend referred to in the previous section of this Chapter on Allocation of Special Needs Assistant Support (page 56) whereby students with the most complex needs are now attending special schools. Professional focus group participants suggested that the ratios of allocation recommended by the SERC Report are no longer applicable in special schools due to the changed populations attending these schools (Ireland, 1993). See Annex 4 for details of the SERC ratios.

However, as special schools are allocated SNA support with reference to the individual needs of students in the schools under the terms of Circular 07/02, the SERC ratios have now become the minimum level of SNA support allocated to each school (DES, 2002).

Key Finding
4.10 The finding that more SNAs support pupils with medical needs in special schools is not unexpected as there is a concentration of students with the most complex needs in special schools

Analysis of school review data from the Inspectorate and the NEPS/SENO Team indicates that more boys than girls are allocated SNA support. This is to be anticipated and is in accordance with European trends whereby more males than females are assessed as having special educational needs (Organisation for Economic and Community Development (OECD), 2008).

Duties Allocated to Special Needs Assistants

There is clear evidence from all data sources that SNAs are undertaking duties in accordance with Department circulars and the objectives of the SNA Scheme (DES, 2002; 2005a; 2005b). Furthermore, it is evident that professionals and parents regard these duties as essential to the welfare and management of students in schools. For those students who have physical or medical needs the support provided appears to be more readily defined and the duties reflect the terms of Department circulars. Amongst the specific duties evident from the data sources associated with a care role were:

- Toileting
- Facilitating students' mobility
- Escorting students around the school
- Feeding
- Dressing
- Accompanying students on school outings
- Supervision duties

- Consulting with parents regarding the physical needs of students.

An analysis of all data suggests that SNAs provide for the care needs of students in a professional and effective manner and it is clear that the provision of SNA support provides for the inclusion of students in educational contexts, which might otherwise not be feasible. This analysis supports the findings of the literature in relation to the positive impact of support staff on students' experiences in school (Elliott, 2004; Giangreco et al, 2005; Logan, 2006; Takala, 2007; Suter and Giangreco, 2009; Giangreco, 2010).

The duties envisaged for SNAs were further elaborated within the review of professional reports conducted by the SENO/NEPS teams. Table 4.7 below provides an indication of the range of duties envisaged for SNAs that are commensurate with the objectives of the SNA Scheme. These duties include addressing students' care needs, classroom preparation and facilitating access physically or through the provision of technology or communication support. The provision of support during unstructured periods of the school day, for example on the school yard, was viewed by the SENO/NEPS teams as an important feature with regards to both socialisation and student safety.

Table 4.7 Duties Envisaged for Special Needs Assistants that are Consistent with the Care Role Specified in DES Circulars as Reported by the NEPS/SENO Team from an Examination of Professional Reports				
	Primary	**Special**	**Post-Primary**	**Total**
Administration of Medication	6	12	1	**19**
Assistance with Personal Care	86	53	21	**160**
Assistance with Mobility	30	24	18	**72**
Preparation and Tidying of Classroom/Work Areas	15	4	10	**29**
Assistance with Access/Using Transport	18	21	3	**42**
Out of School Activity	41	22	9	**72**
Assisting with Acute Social and Communication Difficulties	94	44	22	**160**
Enabling Curriculum Access for Students with Physical/Sensory Needs	40	24	7	**71**
Individual Education Plan Developments	20	11	4	**35**
Assistance with Particular Tasks e.g. typing/writing	16	7	6	**29**
Assistance with Assistive Technology	17	15	11	**43**
Assisting with Behaviour that is a Danger to Self	73	33	15	**121**
Assisting with Behaviour	60	30	18	**108**

that is a Danger to Others				
Assisting / Supervising at Assembly, Recreation and Dispersal Times and in the Playground	100	23	18	**141**
Withdrawal Temporarily from Classroom for Safety or Medical Reasons	24	13	7	**44**
Supporting Attendance at School for a Student with School Phobia	0	1	0	**1**
Other	24	7	12	**43**

An analysis of inspectors' reports provides more detail in relation to the care duties undertaken by SNAs in respect of particular groups of students. Table 4.8 below provides an indication of the incidence and nature of the care duties undertaken by SNAs in relation to students with significant medical needs in primary and special schools. No incidence of these needs was evident in post-primary schools that were part of this review. As has been pointed out previously, the highest numbers of these students attend special schools, which appears to indicate that special schools are now catering for high proportions of students with significant medical needs.

Table 4.8 Incidence and Nature of Care Duties Undertaken by Special Need Assistants in Relation to Students with Significant Medical Needs Consistent with DES Circulars from Inspectors' In-School Reviews			
Care Duties Undertaken	**School Type**		**Total**
	Primary	**Special**	
Administration of medication	3	14	**17**
Specific procedures relating to feeding and toileting	3	8	**11**
Uncontrolled epileptic seizures	1	17	**18**
Students who are critically ill or have fragile health	2	23	**25**
	9	**62**	**71**

The incidence and nature of care duties undertaken by SNAs in relation to students with significant physical impairment and/or sensory function as reported by the Inspectorate are presented in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9 Incidence and Nature of Care Duties Undertaken by Special Needs Assistants in Relation to Students with Significant Impairment of Physical Function and/or Sensory Function Consistent with DES Circulars from Inspectors' In-School Reviews				
Care Duties Undertaken	**School Type**			**Total**
	Primary	**Special**	**Post Primary**	
Assistance with clothing, feeding and personal care	74	172	12	**258**
Providing supportive guidance to avoid hazards and assisting in accessing educational materials or resources	73	141	19	**233**
Responding to mobility/access needs in classroom/school	38	115	18	**171**
Assistance with access using transport	39	162	9	**210**
Assistance with out of school visits, walks and similar activities	105	189	29	**323**
Providing special assistance as necessary for students with particular difficulties	39	57	10	**106**
Assistance with assistive technology	21	60	9	**90**
Assisting students with physical or sensory needs with curricular tasks	74	150	9	**233**
	463	**1046**	**115**	**1624**

The incidence and nature of care duties undertaken by SNAs in relation to students who are perceived to be a danger either to themselves or to other students is outlined in Table 4.10 below. Discussions in professional focus groups highlight the need to ensure that decisions taken with regard to the withdrawal of students are taken as part of an agreed individualised care or behaviour plan for a particular student.

Table 4.10 Incidence and Nature of Care Duties Undertaken by Special Needs Assistants in Relation to Students Whose Behaviour is Such that They are a Danger to Themselves or Others Consistent with DES Circulars from Inspectorate In-School Reviews				
Care Duties Undertaken	**School Type**			**Total**
	Primary	**Special**	**Post Primary**	
Assisting with behaviour dangerous to self (preventative)	78	127	17	**222**
Assisting with behaviour dangerous to self (responding to incidents)	51	85	11	**147**

Assisting with behaviour dangerous to others (preventative)	73	102	24	**199**
Assisting with behaviour dangerous to others (responding to incidents)	55	89	14	**158**
Withdrawal temporarily from classroom for safety or medical reasons	38	103	22	**163**
	295	**506**	**88**	**889**

An analysis of the data in Table 4.10 suggests that SNAs have considerable involvement in the management of students' behaviour. This is an issue that requires close examination as the management of behaviour is a complex process that requires a focused and consistent approach, which is embedded in a whole-school policy. A range of areas has been identified as impacting on the management of students' behaviour, which include inappropriate curricula, inadequate management/leadership, ineffective policies, deficits in staff understanding and skills, deficient pastoral care systems, poor school ethos, child poverty, poor health, family environment and social immobility (Mowat, 2007). The finding in the literature review in relation to some students with special educational needs expressing their dislike of being provided with additional support by displaying inappropriate and off-task behaviours should also be considered and understood in this context (Giangreco et al., 2005). Assigning responsibility to SNAs for the management of students' behaviour in a context where these elements have not been considered is therefore inappropriate and may potentially lead to an escalation of a student's behaviour.

It is not clear from the data provided whether SNAs were involved in the management of students' behaviour with reference to whole-school policies and under the direction of the class teacher.

Table 4.11 below provides evidence of direct support to students, but also indicates that SNAs are seen as playing an important role in assisting in the management of the classroom environment and in working on planning activities for individual students. The physical presence of the SNA is apparently seen as essential in enabling students to be included at recreation times and in school assemblies.

This is further evidenced from data collected from the inspectors' review forms, which indicate that a majority of SNAs in primary schools and all SNAs in special schools are involved in supporting students with special educational needs on the playground, though this practice is far less common in post-primary schools. However the latter may be interpreted as a positive factor in promoting inclusion and students' independence skills in post-primary contexts and is commensurate with the findings in the literature review that the role of support staff should decrease as the child increases in independence (DSA, 2003; Takala, 2007).

Evidence that students appreciate this additional support was presented in data from the focus groups of primary and special school students. Participants in both of these groups indicated that they appreciated the additional support offered by having SNAs involved in supervision and that it contributed to their sense of personal safety.

Table 4.11 Incidence and Nature of Other Duties Undertaken by Special Needs Assistants Consistent with DES Circulars from Inspectors' In-School Reviews				
Care Duties Undertaken	**School Type**			**Total**
	Primary	**Special**	**Post Primary**	
Assisting students with social and communication difficulties	102	153	27	**282**
Supporting students in reducing stress in the classroom/school setting	105	155	34	**294**
Assisting with transition from one lesson activity to another (care aspect)	128	197	31	**356**
Assisting/supervising at assembly, recreation and dispersal times	158	216	30	**404**
Supporting attendance at school for students with school phobia	8	14	0	**22**
Preparation of and tidying of classroom and/or work area	129	214	5	**348**
Supporting individual education plan development (care needs)	67	168	1	**236**
	697	**1117**	**128**	**1942**

The data in Table 4.12 and Table 4.13 below demonstrate that SNAs engage in a considerable range of tasks, which are over and above the care role specified in DES Circulars. The majority of SNAs in primary, special and post-primary schools are seen to be directly involved in assisting with curriculum tasks both in and outside the classroom.

This reflects similar findings in the literature review where concern was expressed that paraprofessionals in the US were being asked to assume increasing instructional and curricular responsibilities for students with special educational needs, which was resulting in students receiving education from the least qualified staff rather than from fully certified educators (Giangreco et al., 2002; Giangreco and Broer, 2003; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco, 2010).

Table 4.12 Incidence and Nature of Special Needs Assistant Duties that are Over and Above the Care Role Specified in DES Circulars as Recorded in Inspector's In-School Reviews				
	School Type			Total
	Primary	Special	Post Primary	
Helping the child stay on task	212	223	67	502
Helping the child to develop organisation skills	191	165	44	400
Assisting assigned students with curricular tasks in the classroom	197	196	66	459
Acting as reader or scribe in the class	49	45	32	126
Acting as reader or scribe in examinations	9	4	18	31
Helping students to develop self confidence/self-esteem	128	130	17	275
Helping students develop language skills by interaction with others	102	130	18	250
Helping students engage in age-appropriate socialisation	142	152	40	334
Assisting assigned students with curricular tasks outside the classroom	81	155	2	238
Supporting individual education plan development (curricular aspects)	84	109	8	201
Clarifying teacher instruction so that the students can participate as appropriate	145	143	33	321
Monitoring student in social interaction and reporting to class teacher as necessary	144	123	28	295
Carrying out occupational therapy programme under the direction of the class teacher	34	99	1	134
Carrying out speech and language therapy programme under the direction of the class teacher	17	92	1	110
Supporting the student in preparing for the learning activity and in attending to the task	129	184	18	331
	1664	1950	393	4007

Table 4.13 Incidences of Special Needs Assistant Duties Identified as Over and Above the Care Role Specified in DES Circular as envisaged in Professional Reports from NEPS/SENO Review Data				
	School Type			Total
	Primary	Special	Post Primary	
Helping the child stay on task	108	28	23	**159**
Helping the child to develop organisation skills	60	14	24	**98**
Assisting assigned students with curricular tasks in the classroom	74	20	21	**115**
Acting as reader or scribe in the class	3	0	3	**6**
Acting as reader or scribe in examinations	0	0	1	**1**
Helping students to develop self confidence/self-esteem	22	10	9	**41**
Helping students develop language skills by interaction with others	33	8	7	**48**
Helping students engage in age-appropriate socialisation	72	13	20	**105**
Assisting assigned students with curricular tasks outside the classroom	8	9	4	**21**
Supporting Indivdiual Education Plan development (curricular aspects)	14	12	5	**31**
Non-Assigned Students	0	4	0	**4**
Secretarial Duties	0	1	0	**1**
	394	119	117	**630**

These data represent a cause for concern due to the number of incidences in which the provision of SNA support to students was over and above that envisaged by the care role set out in DES Circular.

This finding is confirmed in the literature review where it was pointed out that support staff may do too much for the student, which results in over-dependency and a loss of personal control for the student (Ainscow, 2000; Lorenz, 1998; Giangreco et al., 2005; Northern Ireland, 2006).

Key Finding

4.11 SNAs have considerable involvement in the management of students' behaviour.

4.12 SNAs are adopting a pedagogical role, contrary to best practice and the stated purpose of the Scheme.

There was a general consensus among the majority of the focus group participants that the role of the SNA has in many instances moved away from that described in the circulars. This is illustrated in the number of identities ascribed to SNAs during the focus group sessions, where SNAs were variously described as Helper, Advocate, Link Person/Liaison/Bridge, Supporting Professional, Guard and Mother figure.

While all of these identities were not presented as positive or desirable, the range is in itself an indication of some confusion with regard to the role of the SNA. The finding reflects research conducted by Broer et al. (2005) where similar descriptors were used by young adults with special educational needs in describing paraprofessional support. The authors considered that such descriptors represented a cause for concern and advised that schools should be encouraged to consider the social validity of supports, increase teacher involvement, highlight the importance of listening to students and include students in decisions about their own supports.

Evidence from the NEPS/SENO Teams, Inspectorate, and focus groups indicates that SNAs frequently engage in the following duties.

- Supporting students' personal organisational skills
- Repeating teaching instructions
- Elaborating on information from the teacher
- Keeping the student on task
- Helping with teaching and learning tasks
- Observation of students and reporting back to the teacher
- Assisting with curriculum-focused projects
- Working with children and small groups (including both those with special educational needs and others)
- Working with the class while the teacher works with individual students in infant classes
- Working with a student on work different to that assigned to other students in the class
- Teaching reading
- Adapting texts for students
- Scribing
- Assisting the class teacher and /or resource teacher to implement programmes
- Translating and/or instructing in English in Gaelscoileanna
- Making materials i.e. visual schedules
- Modelling positive social skills

- Supporting inclusion of a student through play activities
- Providing feedback on learning to teachers
- Taking the student for 'time out' or calming down sessions
- Undertaking a preventative role through anticipating difficulties for the student and preventing disruptions
- Debriefing a student after an episode of poor behaviour
- Involvement in implementing behaviour plans
- Unspecified Secretarial and Clerical Tasks
- School-preparation for Religious Sacraments.

While some duties clearly are commensurate with the care role envisaged in Departmental circulars, others are not.

In addition to the interventions and additional responsibilities described above, several of the focus group participants reported that they found it very difficult to separate care needs, social needs and teaching. They observed that classrooms are social and educational environments in which these three aspects of a student's life are intrinsically related.

There was for example, a general agreement that where SNAs are fully involved in the development and implementation of individual education or behaviour plans that this has marked benefits for the student and the teacher. Similarly, it was acknowledged that SNAs often play a preventive role in terms of the management of student behaviour.

However, there was some concern expressed that knowing when and how to intervene was not always easy and that in some instances SNAs were more involved in the 'containment' of potential unwanted behaviour rather than its prevention. This is a particularly significant finding in view of the number of students with SNA support whose behaviour is such that they are assessed as being a danger to themselves or to other students. The previously identified interrelated elements involved in the management of students' behaviour and the importance of considering these in implementing a whole-school approach to the management of behaviour should also be considered in this context (Mowat, 2007).

The role of SNAs working with students with challenging behaviours in special schools was perceived as often being particularly challenging but also seen as essential to the effective management of classes in those schools.

Within the focus groups, and in particular those conducted with the NEPS, SENOs and inspectors, a number of concerns were expressed with regard to the level of involvement in curriculum delivery by SNAs observed in schools, particularly at post-primary level. These included a concern that SNAs may be teaching students in isolation and negatively impacting upon involvement with their peers, which reflects the finding reported at 3.13 that there is evidence that adult support may contribute to the social isolation of students.

Furthermore, such activity may potentially involve students receiving undifferentiated instruction, or may place the responsibility for differentiation on the SNA. Concerns were expressed in the literature review that support staff may interfere with teacher engagement unless the roles and responsibilities of all staff are clearly delineated and

understood (Ainscow, 2000; Giangreco et al., 2005; Northern Ireland, 2006). Evidence from students' focus groups indicated that SNAs are involved in learning activities that might be termed as extra-curricular.

Many SNAs have regular contact with parents and in some instances their role as a critical member of a whole-school team was recognised and approved. This represents positive practice in view of the findings of the literature review that collaborative practice and teamwork are a key component in the effective management of support staff (Ainscow, 2000; Groom, 2006).

However, in none of the focus groups or through the school review data was there reference made to the role of SNAs in relation to parents as expressed in Circulars 12/05 or 15/05 (DES, 2005a; 2005b). This is particularly significant in view of the advice in the literature review of the need to communicate clearly the role of support staff to parents (Northern Ireland, 2006).

The findings suggest that there is scope for development in relation to establishing school-based processes with regard to communicating the role of the SNA clearly to parents and ensuring that parents are appropriately involved in agreeing the manner and extent to which the SNA will provide additional care support and assistance to each child.

Allocation of Special Needs Assistants to Classes

Table 4.14 provides details of the allocation of SNAs to classes by school type. Special schools are more likely to have more than one SNA allocated to a class. Amongst primary schools, thirty schools indicated that they had between two and four SNAs allocated to a single class. This finding may reflect intensity of need and refer to schools with special classes. However it is not possible to clarify this from the data.

The management of more than one SNA in the classroom emerged as a concern for mainstream primary teachers in the teachers' focus group. This concern reflects the finding of the literature review in relation to the importance of support staff being effectively managed.

Table 4.14	Number of Special Needs Assistants Allocated to Classes by School Type from Inspectors' In-School Reviews			
Number of Special Needs Assistants Per Class	**School Type**			**Total**
	Primary	**Special**	**Post Primary**	
1	197	27	70	**294**
2	25	91	1	**117**
3	1	116	0	**117**
4	4	19	0	**23**
5	0	4	0	**4**
6	0	4	0	**4**
7	0	4	0	**4**

It was reported by the SENOs in the focus groups that there had been a move from the allocation of hours for SNA support to full-time or part-time posts. The constant movement between classes and the need for adolescents to be supported at a distance where possible were reported to be issues that would influence the model of deployment pertaining in post-primary schools.

Key Finding
4.13 The requirement of intermittent SNA support for some students may be contributing to surplus SNA allocations in schools.

Monitoring Special Needs Assistant Support

The data from the school review and focus groups raised issues that pertained to the monitoring of SNA support. Inspectors reported that they had seldom seen the role of the SNA defined within school special education policy documents. While inspectors reported that they often see good practice in the deployment of SNAs, this appeared to be based upon custom and practice within the school rather than through specifically developed whole-school policies and procedures.

This view was endorsed by representatives of the HSE, SENOs and the NEPS in the focus groups conducted as part of this review. Some teachers when asked about the role expressed a view that they had not been involved in discussions related to this matter and that they were unaware of school policies that offered guidance on working practices.

Principals commented on the somewhat *ad hoc* nature of planning for the deployment of SNAs and suggested that a structure was required in order to ensure that the role was better defined. In particular principals at post-primary level felt that there was a difference in interpretation of the SNA role between themselves and the SENOs. This misunderstanding and/or confusion may have emerged from the fact that schools have changed their use of SNAs while the SENOs are sanctioning SNA support in line with the Scheme's criteria.

Table 4.15 below from the inspectors' in-school reviews indicates that a small majority of primary and special schools surveyed indicated that they had policies in relation to the appointment and deployment of SNAs. However, it cannot be concluded from the data available whether the interpretation of the SNA role within these documents is consistent with the expectations of the circulars.

Table 4.15 The Availability of a Policy Document on the Appointment and Deployment of Special Needs Assistants from Inspectors' In-School Reviews				
		%Yes	**%No**	**Nil Response**
Primary	N=57	53	47	0
Special Schools	N=19	52	48	0
Post-Primary	N=19	40	56	4

At post-primary level, there was an indication that policy documents may be less common. Conversely inspectors' findings from in-school reviews suggest that guidelines on the development of working relationships with teachers and the demarcation of roles are more likely to be found in post-primary schools. See Table 4.16.

Within the professional focus groups there was a suggestion that there may be some reluctance to produce written policies and guidelines in this area because of awareness that the SNA role has moved away from that which was intended in the circulars.

This finding raises some cause for concern in view of the findings of the literature review, which indicate that a clear role definition is a prerequisite to teachers and support staff working effectively in the classroom (Lorenz, 1998; Rose, 2000; Groom, 2006). Giangrco et al. (2004) suggest that thoughtful planning of the assignment and role of support staff results in improved instruction, increased support, greater collaboration between home and school, improved parental satisfaction, more peer interactions and increased student involvement in the curriculum.

Table 4.16 The Availability of Written Guidelines Agreed at Whole-School Level to Guide the Working Relations of the Teacher and Special Needs Assistant related to Supervision, Duties and Demarcation of Responsibilities from Inspectors' In-School Reviews				
		%Yes	%No	Nil Response
Primary	N=57	42	54	4
Special Schools	N=19	42	58	0
Post-Primary	N=19	58	40	2

Key Finding

4.14 Indications of a lack of consistency in relation to school policies in different schools sectors are evident for the management and deployment of SNAs.

During focus group interviews, SNAs indicated that tensions arise within their posts because of the sometimes contradictory expectations placed upon them by different professionals. Several SNAs were aware that their jobs might be put at risk where their work was most successful and students made particularly good progress. A lack of job security was a source of continuing stress for many SNAs.

Key Finding

4.15 The success of SNA support can lead to the suppression of the SNA post. This, together with the change in SNA roles by schools may account for the absence of school policies that refer to the aim of post suppression where there is evidence of students' diminishing care needs.

There are particular challenges in respect of the monitoring and co-ordination of the SNA role at post-primary level where it was stated that an individual SNA might work with up to eleven teachers. It was seen as particularly difficult for resource teachers at post-primary level to keep everybody involved with a student fully informed.

Evidence from professional focus groups suggested that roles relating to monitoring the role of the SNA within all schools and the responsibilities of principal, co-ordinator (where these exist) and teachers should be clearly defined in Departmental guidelines.

Parents had particular concerns with regard to the current model of SNA support. In particular they stated that once an SNA is in place, their role is at the discretion of the principal. Parents reported that in some instances principals would identify the needs of a student whose hours had been reduced and would re-designate SNAs to provide support where they perceived the need. Principals were perceived by parents to have the 'gift to take away from one and give to another'.

A further issue relates to the daily management of SNAs in situations of staff absences or where the student in their charge is absent from school. It is clear from the data that deploying SNAs as substitute teachers is rare and was not recorded in either the special or post-primary schools. A small number of primary schools indicated that they have used SNAs in a teacher substitute role. See Table 4.17 below.

Table 4.17 Deployment of Special Needs Assistants as Substitute Teachers				
		%Yes	%No	Nil Response
Primary	N=57	3	97	0
Special Schools	N=19	0	100	0
Post-Primary	N=19	0	100	0

As there are were no data related to the qualifications of these SNAs it is not possible to comment further. It could be the case that these SNAs were qualified teachers. However allocating SNA support in this manner is not envisaged by the objectives of the SNA Scheme. In the case of the absence of an SNA in primary and special schools, a substitute SNA is employed in the majority of occasions. However, in the case of post-primary schools this is not the norm with most providing cover from within existing resources.

Future Directions

An examination of the historical background and growth of the SNA Scheme and an analysis of current practice suggest that the objectives of the Scheme are relevant and valid. However a range of issues was identified that require addressing in order to ensure that the SNA Scheme continues to be relevant and valid in practice as a dissonance is evident between the stated objectives of the Scheme and the operation of the Scheme.

In particular it is critical that all stakeholders have a clear knowledge and understanding of the objectives of the Scheme in order to ensure that the role of the SNA is concerned with supporting students with disabilities who have additional care needs commensurate with the terms of Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002). The identification of a significant number of students who are presenting as a danger to themselves and/or others and the involvement of SNAs in the management of students' behaviour requires further scrutiny.

The adoption of a pedagogical and therapeutic role by SNAs should be discontinued as it is not envisaged by the objectives of the Scheme.

The Review has shown that considerable time and effort is devoted to obtaining more resources for students with care needs. While more resources are sought across the entire educational sector, the Committee was concerned that SNA support was the focus of such demand over other potential supports which could be sought for students with special educational needs. Some models of alternative SNA support were suggested by the Focus Group participants and discussed by the Steering Committee during the Review. The Review data suggest that the expansion of the role of the SNA beyond what is envisaged by the objectives of the Scheme indicates that further analysis of the issues that emerged during the Review is necessary.

As the timeframe and terms of reference of the Review precluded an in-depth analysis and costing of alternative models of SNA support, these models are not presented in detail in the Report. However the Steering Committee wishes to point out that further discussion and consultation in relation to primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools is required based on the issues raised by this Review.

Chapter 5   Special Needs Assistant Scheme: Achievement of Objectives, Cost and Efficiency

This chapter relates specifically to items 3 and 5 in the Terms of Reference:

3.   Define the outputs associated with the SNA Scheme and examine the duties allocated to and undertaken by SNAs in the context of the objectives of the Scheme.

5.   Identify the level and trend of costs associated with the SNA Scheme and comment on the efficiency of the Scheme.

Introduction

The chapter sets out to identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the SNA Scheme and thereby comment on the *efficiency* with which the Scheme has achieved its objectives. Efficiency can be defined as the relationship between input and output of an activity and the extent to which it is possible to maximise output from the input available or to minimise the levels of input for the given level of output.

The inputs and outputs, and the efficiency indicators used to measure the relationship between them are analysed. The human, system and financial inputs to the Scheme are detailed and the outputs of the Scheme are identified. Outputs are considered in terms of the number of SNAs employed (intermediate output) and the results of the Scheme are equated with the number of students whose additional care needs are being provided for.

This chapter will, therefore,
- provide data on the numbers of students with special educational needs who are receiving care support in the various school sectors,
- look at the numbers and cost of SNAs from 2001-2008,
- set out the trends in the numbers of SNAs across schools from 2001-2008 and draw conclusions from this.

The performance indicators related to the achievement of the objectives and cost of the SNA Scheme and the associated efficiency measures are identified as:

1. Performance Indicators

- Expenditure level over years.
- Number of SNAs over years and cost of SNAs
- Distribution of SNAs across different school sectors.
- Number of students in all schools with special educational needs in the 2009/10 school year.

- Distribution of students with special educational needs across school sectors and by category of disability in the 2009/10 school year.
- Number of students who have been identified as requiring SNA support in the 2009/10 school year.
- Number of students who have been identified as having diminishing care needs in the 2009/10 school year.

2. Efficiency Performance Measures

- Total cost as a percentage of the overall budget
- Average cost of SNAs over years.

The chapter also looks at limitations in the current available data and considers likely demographic trends in the future.

The Targeted Beneficiaries of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The targeted beneficiaries in terms of the results the SNA Scheme are outlined in Table 5.1 below. Results refer to the effects of the outputs on the targeted beneficiaries in the immediate or short term. The results of the SNA Scheme are the number of students whose additional care needs are being provided for.

Table 5.1 The Targeted Beneficiaries of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme				
	Primary Mainstream Schools	No of Students with Diminishing Care needs	Post Primary	No of Students with Diminishing Care needs
Estimate of the number of Students with Special Educational Needs	* 89,837		* 63,124	
Assessed Syndrome	351	31	67	8
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorder	2369	207	567	66
Borderline/Mild General Learning Disability	138	12	86	10
Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	2352	206	769	90
Severe Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	533	47	211	25
Hearing Impairment	232	20	54	6
Mild General Learning Disability	386	34	267	31
Moderate General Learning Disability	434	38	149	17

Multiple Disabilities	1038	91	288	34
Physical Disabilities	1519	133	523	61
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	25	2	2	-
Specific Learning Disability	22	2	30	3
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	310	27	13	2
Visual Impairment	172	15	109	13
Total no. of students who require SNA support	9,881		3,135	
TOTAL	**9,881**	**865**	**3,135**	**366**

*** NCSE Implementation Report: Plan for the Phased Implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 estimates that 18% of all children have Special Educational Needs – not all of these would have care needs requiring SNA support***

In addition, approximately 6,905 students with special educational needs attend special schools, all of whom have access to SNA support.

These data indicate that there may be positive, negative, intended and unintended results for the targeted beneficiaries which, while observed, are not always quantifiable. Positive and intended results are evident in the meeting of the objectives of the SNA Scheme through providing for the care needs of students, supporting students to acquire independence skills as evidenced by the diminishing care needs identified and enabling all students to access, participate and benefit from education both in mainstream and special schools. Negative and unintended results are related to the identification of 'role creep' whereby the role of the SNA has extended beyond that intended by the objectives of the SNA Scheme.

Students in Receipt of Special Needs Assistant Support

Special needs assistant support is provided to students across all of the categories of special educational needs as detailed in Department circulars, though as indicated in Table 5.1 above, there are some categories of students with special educational needs that are more likely to attract SNA support. Of particular note is the high level of allocation to students with ASD, particularly in the primary and special phases of education.

Should this trend continue, the need for SNA support is likely to increase in order to meet the needs of these students when they transfer to post-primary schools. A similar situation pertains in respect of students who present with behaviour-related difficulties and those with physical disabilities. The number of SNAs in special schools reflects the trend whereby students with the most complex needs are now attending special schools.

Impact of Future Enrolment Patterns

One factor that could significantly influence the future cost of the SNA Scheme is projected enrolment patterns. The latest data indicate that enrolments at primary and post-primary level could rise from an estimate of 500,000 and 336,000 respectively in the 2008/2009 school year to 565,000 and 366,000 in the 2013/2014 school year. This would represent an increase of some 65,000 primary and 30,000 post-primary students over the next five years.

Should this situation be realised, and this is contingent on the continuation of a number of social and demographic trends that have been apparent in Irish society in recent years, it will have serious funding implications for the SNA Scheme if the Scheme continues to operate along the same lines as present.

Students identified as requiring special education resources in the form of SNA support currently represent approximately 2.4% of the total school going population. If the same proportion of students require SNA support into the future this will mean that 11,014 SNAs will be required by 2013/2014. It is indicated below in Table 5.2 that the overall current unit cost per SNA is €33,300. Based on this unit cost, the SNA Scheme would cost in the region of €366.7 million in 2013/2014 compared to the cost of €344.7 million in 2009.

However, given the identification of over-allocation and retention, it may not be appropriate to extrapolate based on current figures. A range of contributing factors to the expenditure increase on the SNA Scheme by 922% in the period 2001-2009 has been identified by the analysis of data examined for the Review and is summarised at Key Finding 5.1 below.

Key Finding

5.1   Expenditure on the SNA Scheme has risen by 922% in the period 2001 - 2009. These increases were occasioned by:

- **Introduction of automatic response policy.**
- **Changes in legislation.**
- **SNA numbers and the associated salary cost.**
- **Number of schools supported.**
- **Number of schools supported in different sectors.**
- **Costs for smaller schools compared to bigger schools.**
- **Increase in the number of students with special educational needs being identified.**
- **Gradual change over the years in the interpretation of criteria set out in Circular 07/02 for the allocation of SNA support.**
- **Non-removal of SNAs as the students in respect of whom they were assigned left the system.**

Unit Costs

Table 5.2 below demonstrates that not only have the number of SNAs employed each year risen steadily, but that taking into account the number of SNAs employed each year, versus annual expenditure under the SNA Scheme each year, it can be seen that the unit cost per each SNA between 2001 and 2009 has trebled.

Table 5.2 Unit Cost *Analysis of Special Needs Assistant Scheme: 2001-2008				
Year		**Cost €m**	**Unit Cost €k**	**Annual Change in Unit Cost**
2001	2,988	33,478	11.2	-
2002	4,979	75,570	15.2	35%
2003	5,367	110,580	20.6	36%
2004	5,869	129,926	22.1	7%
2005	7,337	174,182	23.7	7%
2006	8,390	218,085	26.0	9%
2007	9,824	269,744	27.5	6%
2008	10,442	319,962	30.6	12%
2009	10,342	344,703	33.3	8.8%

*excluding Substitution Costs

The main driving factors behind the increase in unit costs are increases in salary payment rates for SNAs and also the requirement for redundancy payments for SNAs who are no longer required in a particular school. Where SNAs are employed on the basis of school placement, as opposed to by transferable grade, there is no opportunity for transfer and maintaining employment between schools. Thus the lack of transferability options for an SNA post may have contributed to the growth in unit costs.

Key Finding

5.2   The unit cost per SNA has increased steadily since the establishment of the Scheme.

5.3   Salary increases and a requirement for redundancy payments to be made, due to lack of transfer arrangements for SNAs under the Scheme, have contributed to the growth in unit costs.

Allocation and Provision of Resources

The commitment to having an individual student's special educational needs identified, met by appropriate provision and regularly reviewed is evident in DES circulars and publications (DES, 2003: 2004a; 2005c; 2007). In this context, the SNA Scheme is an element of the system in place to support the educational placements of students with special educational needs.

The Scheme is a demand driven scheme where resources are allocated in accordance with DES policy provisions. Students whose care-needs meet the terms of the relevant circulars are provided with SNA support on the basis of need and within their schools overall SNA allocation. In December 2010 the Government made a decision, in the context of the National Recovery Plan, to introduce a ceiling of 10,575 whole time equivalent SNA posts. Prior to this, and for the period covered by this VFM report, the scheme was not subject to budgetary constraint or any cap on overall SNA numbers.

The commitment which has been shown to the SNA scheme reflects the policy of the DES in relation to providing for a continuum of educational provision that promotes the maximum level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, within their locality, or where necessary to support students in special classes or schools.

The SNA Scheme has been integral in assisting students with special educational needs to access appropriate school settings in accordance with their assessed needs and abilities. Additionally the Scheme has assisted in providing for as many students as possible to be included in mainstream schools.

Key Finding

5.4   The DES has prioritised and provided resources to allow for each student who is assessed as eligible for SNA support with reference to Departmental circulars to be provided support.

5.5   The SNA Scheme has assisted in enabling as many students as possible to be included in mainstream schools.

While the DES has overall budgetary responsibility for the SNA Scheme and funds resources for the Scheme, it does not directly control the number of SNA posts that are allocated due to the demand/needs driven nature of the process. Accordingly, until the recent introduction of an overall cap on SNA numbers, the number of SNA posts that were allocated annually could not be anticipated by the Department. The DES did, however, have the option to review or restate the policy for SNA allocation. Subject to the overall cap on numbers, the DES does not control the location or quantity of posts.

SNA resources are allocated on a demand driven basis, based on the reports and assessments of relevant professionals, and subsequent consideration by NCSE

SENO's of these reports. A number of personnel are therefore involved in the process whereby SNA support is allocated to students with disabilities who have been assessed as having additional care needs.

Each professional is required only to consider the needs of the particular student for whom an assessment has been requested. While the SENO considers applications for SNA support with reference to whole-school contexts, he/she is also required to consider the needs of individual students with reference to DES circulars. Neither the relevant professional, SENO or their associated organisations is required to consider, or have responsibility for, the overall resources or budgetary demands of the Scheme, or to consider overall expenditure growth trends.

Though providing for independence of opinion and assessment, this also means that the persons recommending, or approving, SNA support are not required to save or prioritise such resources, or to consider opportunity costs for other areas of expenditure, where if savings could be made in one expenditure area, they could be applied at a greater benefit elsewhere in the Education budget.

Relevant professionals, in the absence of incentives to do otherwise, may recommend resources, which they consider may be of benefit to a student as opposed to resources, which are required or essential to assist a student to access education. This prospect was discussed previously in the analysis of data in Chapter 4. As almost all students could benefit from additional resources, this creates difficulties and potential for significant growth of the Scheme.

The analysis of the historical background and growth of the SNA Scheme demonstrates that the Department has consistently sought to curtail the growth of the Scheme and align it with DES' policy parameters through the provision of policy advice and direction and through instituting review mechanisms. However, the demand driven nature of the Scheme and the independent assessment and allocation process remove the management of the Scheme from the direct control of the Department and make it more difficult for the Department to control or restrain overall growth and expenditure trends

Key Finding
5.6 The demand driven nature of the Scheme and the independent assessment and allocation process for the Scheme has made it more difficult for the DES to control or restrain overall growth and expenditure trends.

The length of time that a student may require SNA support also falls largely outside the control of the Department, as it is dependant upon a number of different factors, including the availability of NEPS/ NCSE ongoing review processes and assessment of a student's diminishing care needs. The findings of the Review, previously discussed indicate that a reduction in SNA support may also potentially be affected by the willingness of parents and schools to accept professional opinion regarding the development of students' independence skills.

Under the SNA alloaction process, the NCSE has primary responsibility for the allocation of SNA support, with reference to Departmental policy. Eligibility for SNA

support is determined by the NCSE with reference to the criteria detailed in Circular 07/02. However, the NCSE was not, until the decision of December 2010 on a numerical cap, limited by any budgetary restrictions and was not requested to prioritise resources within overall budgetary or numerical constraints.

The rationale for allocating this responsibility to the NCSE was based on a concern to allow for an independent assessment of each student's needs on an unrestricted basis in order to ensure that students were not denied the requisite support due to lack of resources, pressure on resources, or to curtail expenditure.

Conversely however the body with responsibility for the allocation of SNA resources did not have any budgetary responsibility for these resources. This separation of budgetary responsibility from responsibility for resource allocation may have contributed to the growth of expenditure under the SNA Scheme. This may also be related to the finding of the Review that identified a possible link between the greater availability of resources in recent years and an over-identification of students with special educational needs.

It is conceivable that there may be less of an incentive to restrict resources in a context where the allocating body is unrestrained by resource limitations and where such a restriction may intensify a dispute with schools and parents as to the necessity for SNA support.

A further complication is that SNA resources are allocated to schools who are not directly responsible or accountable to the Department for the resource. Paradoxically the successful targeting of a student's independent skills may result in the school losing the SNA resource as the student may no longer require such support. It is inevitable therefore that schools make every effort to retain SNAs since they do not have a role in accounting for the use of such resources or associated budgetary responsibility.

In general, system organisations, which make allocations have control of the budget and this provides a rigorous framework for the management of expenditure. However, because the SNA scheme is demand-driven, this framework does not apply. This is further compounded by the involvement of agencies/personnel outside of the education sector making professional recommendations, some of whom may be acting on an advocacy basis, as well as the independence of the NCSE in allocating resources without recourse to the Department. In the absence of the normal rigorous framework of a limited budget, consideration will have to be given to adopting an alternative approach, which surmounts this identified difficulty.

It is not within the remit of this Review to reconsider the operational role and responsibility of the NCSE. However, as the DES has responsibility for ensuring appropriate allocation of public resources, it is critical that the Department is satisfied that the SNA Scheme is properly understood and that the operation of the Scheme reflects a clearly stated and understood policy.

This is particularly imperative in view of the absence of an overall budget allocation for the Scheme and the potential drawbacks identified that are associated with this process. The findings of the Review indicating a dissonance between the prescribed role of the SNA in Departmental circulars and the operation of the Scheme in schools

is therefore a serious cause for concern both in terms of students' learning and teaching and the appropriate allocation of public resources.

It is also important to ensure that a robust mechanism is in place to provide for the ongoing monitoring and review of the allocation of SNA support. It is essential that SNA posts do not remain in situ in the absence of ongoing need or in the event of students who were allocated the resources having left the school.

Key Finding
5.7 The fact that the SNA Scheme up until the introduction of a cap on overall numbers in December 2010, had not been limited by budgetary or SNA number constraints may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme.
5.8 The body with responsibility for the allocation of SNA resources operated on the basis of an automatic response, allocating resources on the basis of need and demand. It was not required to have budgetary responsibility for these resources and this separation of budgetary responsibility from responsibility for resource allocation may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme.
5.9 The fact that schools are not directly accountable to the Department of Education and Skills for the use of an SNA resource, once it has been allocated to them, may have contributed to the growth of the scheme.

Chapter 6   Effectiveness

This chapter relates specifically to item 4 in the Terms of Reference:

4.   Examine the extent to which the objectives of the SNA Scheme have been achieved and the effectiveness with which these objectives have been achieved.

Introduction

This chapter compares the outputs to outcomes of the Scheme in order to assess the effectiveness of the Scheme in achieving its objectives. Effectiveness is considered in terms of the extent to which the objectives are being achieved and the cost effectiveness of the Scheme.

The Extent to Which the Objectives of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme are Being Achieved

The extent to which the objectives of the SNA Scheme are being achieved was evident in the school review data and was clearly articulated through the focus groups consulted as part of the review process. It was stated that the Scheme allowed schools to retain and include students in schools who might otherwise present challenges to the education system. Members of the teachers' focus group commented on the progress that had been made in including students with special educational needs in Irish schools and considered that the SNA Scheme was critical to this process. This point was further reinforced by members of the Inspectorate.

Table 6.1 below indicates that the majority of students with special educational needs are now enrolled in mainstream schools. This is an important and valuable outcome of the Scheme in view of the commitment to inclusion articulated in legislation and the Department's Strategy Statement 2008-2010.

Table 6.1 also provides a summary of the number and percentage of students with special educational needs whose additional care needs are currently being provided for in different school sectors through the provision of SNA support.

Table 6.1 Number and Percentage of Students with Special Educational Needs Whose Additional Care Needs are Provided for Through the Provision of Special Needs Assistant Support			
	Number of Students with Special Educational Needs Enrolled in Different School Sectors	Number of Students with Special Educational Needs whose Additional Care Needs are Being Provided for Through SNA Support	Percentage of Students with Special Educational Needs whose Additional Care Needs are Being Provided for Through SNA Support
Primary	*89,837	9,881	10.9%
Special Schools	6,905	6,905	100%
Post-Primary Schools	*63,124	3,135	4.9%

* NCSE Implementation Report: Plan for the Phased Implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 estimates that 18% of all children have Special Educational Needs

The process of inclusion was seen to depend upon a number of factors associated with the SNA role. These factors included assisting the teacher in maintaining a focus upon the curriculum, while remaining confident that an SNA will ensure both participation and minimal disruption from students with special educational needs and enabling students to develop independence and confidence in the classroom.

The suggestion that SNAs can facilitate improved classroom management on the part of the teacher came from several of the professional focus groups. This particular point was made with regards to supporting curriculum access and also in respect of assisting with behaviour management of potentially disruptive students. However, on this last point, it was emphasised by both SNAs and teachers that SNAs cannot be seen as the solution to the management of disruptive behaviour but rather as one part of a range of strategies required.

The SENOs also saw the provision of a more inclusive education as a benefit of the SNA Scheme suggesting that the fact that SNAs are providing for the care needs of students allows teachers to engage more in learning and teaching. They also stressed the importance of the SNA role in respect of students' safety and enabling some students to be successfully retained in school.

These findings in relation to the effectiveness of the Scheme reflect the key finding 4.4 that the SNA Scheme has continued relevance, is meeting the objectives of the original Scheme and that these objectives continue to be valid.

Enabling curriculum access for their children was also seen as critical to the role by parents in the focus group. However, parents' emphasis upon ensuring that care needs were met was paramount in their consideration. They emphasised the preventative nature of much of the work conducted by SNAs and felt confident that exclusion from social and academic activity was being avoided and feeling safe as part of a school community was being achieved for many vulnerable young people. Parents of children attending mainstream school believed that this might not be possible without the presence of an SNA and stated that these support staff have become an important feature of school communities. Some parents of students in mainstream schools were of the opinion that without the support of an SNA their child may have attended the school but would not receive the teaching support required to learn effectively.

Maintaining the balance between a care role and an education support role was highlighted as a critical factor in enabling students to function effectively in schools. The flexibility required to achieve this balance was seen as considerable. Parents suggested that the assumption that it is possible to easily distinguish between care and education was possibly a false premise, a point which was also made in a number of professional focus groups.

Some parents recognised that there may be situations when a student no longer requires the support of an SNA and that the maintenance of this provision could be disadvantageous and possibly inhibiting of the student's independence. However, such situations were deemed by them to occur rarely and regular review processes

were referred to as being important in ensuring that these situations were not allowed to develop.

Principals suggested that considerable management implications exist around the current SNA Scheme. This in part relates to the lack of clarity around the role and the perceived inadequacy of the current circular, which fails to recognise the potential value which SNAs could add to schools. It was emphasised that the DES gets tremendous value for money from the Scheme because of the extra responsibilities taken on by SNAs.

Principals suggested that a re-wording of the circular might be timely, in particular allowing a definition of the role to focus upon supporting the learning needs of the student and the required supports for the class teacher. It was suggested that this approach might correspond to the role of a teaching assistant as defined in other jurisdictions and would be a more accurate reflection of the way in which the job has evolved. These suggestions further reflect the fact that the role of the SNA has moved from that envisaged in the Department circulars and demonstrates a disconnect with the objectives of the SNA Scheme. In this context, however, it is worth noting the observations of Suter and Giangreco (2009) that in an era where there is a growing emphasis on evidence-based educational practices, the increase in the use of paraprofessionals has proceeded without adequate supportive evidence on the impact of this support on students' outcomes.

Key Finding
6.1   The SNA Scheme has moved away from what the objectives of the Scheme envisaged to SNA involvement in behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical and administrative duties.

The benefits of social inclusion as well as learning were highlighted by the NEPS focus group. This, they emphasised, was beneficial not only in terms of students with special educational needs but also for the school community as a whole. Barriers could be broken down between students and their peers with special educational needs, but this was less likely to happen without the support of an SNA. Interestingly while the value of support staff in developing students' social skills is acknowledged in the literature review, the potential of support staff in contributing to students' isolation from their peers is also highlighted.

The focus group considered that there was a feeling that where an SNA was in place it was easier for the NEPS psychologists to determine what was possible in terms of meeting students' needs. Members of NEPS also expressed the view that for students undertaking transition from a special class to a mainstream class, or from a special school to a mainstream school, the reassuring presence of an SNA could be critical. Similarly, the SNA in this situation could be a source of considerable reassurance for families. It was also pointed out that for some students the support of an SNA enabled the student to stay within their own community for schooling, rather than being transported to a special school.

The Inspectorate focus groups affirmed that the objectives of the SNA Scheme as envisaged in Department circulars were being achieved. In particular, inspectors acknowledged the positive contribution of SNAs in providing for students' additional care needs, enabling students to access the curriculum and assisting in the inclusion of students with special educational needs in schools.

The preventative nature of the work of SNAs was affirmed by inspectors and the importance of adopting a whole-school approach to the management of students' behaviour highlighted. Inspectors expressed concern with regard to the lack of clarity in relation to the objectives of the Scheme in schools.

Participants in focus groups for students were able to describe personal benefits arising from SNA support. Students in the primary group in particular were able to discuss progress in relation to their behaviour in the class and in the playground. The role of SNAs keeping them on task and assisting them during lessons was also reported in student groups.

It was reported in the focus groups that in some instances boards of management had provided specific training for SNAs. It was recognised by the management focus group that identifying training at an appropriate level for SNAs could be difficult, but that the benefits of well-focused training was evident in practice in classrooms. Special needs assistants affirmed the benefits of training and articulated the need for an initial qualification as soon as possible after entry to the profession.

Some concerns were expressed across focus groups with regard to the broad range of providers of training for SNAs. It was felt that some of the training provided outside of the established DES and college routes was of variable quality and that this situation was likely to continue unless clarification of course structures and provision was made. The training needs of SNAs identified across the focus groups were linked to four categories, those related to supporting the care needs of students, those related to specific special educational needs, those relating to effective collaboration and teamwork and those related to the school curriculum.

Disappointment was expressed by the principals' focus group that SNAs were not involved in in-service training for the primary school curriculum. Examples were provided of resource teachers having provided some effective training for SNAs in this and other areas.

In addition to the training needs of SNAs there was some agreement that teachers would also benefit from a greater understanding of how to make the most effective use of SNAs in the classroom. It was felt that not all teachers had a clear idea of the role of the SNA and that many lacked training in the management of an additional adult in the classroom or the development of effective collaborative teamwork.

There was a suggestion that newly qualified teachers were not receiving training in this area during their initial teacher training programmes. A number of the focus groups proposed that joint training of teachers and SNAs in the area of collaboration and teamwork would be appropriate and could prove beneficial in this regard.

These findings suggest that appropriate training for both teachers and SNAs has the potential to contribute further to the effectiveness of the SNA Scheme and confirm the

findings of the literature review in relation to the potential for the training of support staff and teacher preparation to contribute to the effectiveness of support staff in schools.

Key Findings

6.2   Teacher preparation in developing appropriate skills to work effectively with SNAs has the potential to contribute further to the effectiveness of the Scheme.

6.3   Evidence from the focus groups affirm the benefits of SNA training.

It is clear from an analysis of the review data that the objectives of the Scheme are being met. However it is also clear that the role of the SNA has moved away from that envisaged by Circular 07/02 (DES, 2002). The in-school reviews of SNA staffing by the Inspectorate in one hundred schools found an over-allocation of 31 posts in special schools which equates to 18% of supernumerary posts and 10% of all SNA posts in these schools. In mainstream primary schools, the over-allocation found was 31% of supernumerary posts and 27% of all SNA posts.

In post-primary schools an over-allocation of 30% of supernumerary posts and 27% of all posts was indicated. If these findings were replicated across all schools in the three sectors in relation to the provision of SNA support, it would result in a reduction of 2,485 posts. This has considerable implications in terms of the significant human, financial and system inputs that are being employed to secure outputs consistent with the objectives of the Scheme.

In its national review of SNA allocations carried out in 2009/10, the NCSE found that 955 SNA posts were no longer required as the students to whom the posts related had left the school and 764 posts were no longer required because students had diminished care needs. This represented approximately 16% of all SNA posts as at the 2009 level of 10,342 overall posts. It should be noted, however, that this was a specific as opposed to an annual review.

Key Finding

6.4   An over-allocation of SNA support has been identified in primary, post-primary and special schools.

The expansion in the role of the SNA as evidenced in the Review data and the findings of the Inspectorate indicate that the objectives of the Scheme can be achieved in a more cost effective manner.

Cost Effectiveness of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

As the role of the SNA has continued to expand, the demand for SNA support has increased and the cost of the SNA Scheme has continued to escalate. The total cost of the Scheme is now over €340m. The review has identified that while the objectives of the SNA Scheme are being met, the Scheme is operating beyond these objectives in schools and this is further supported by the over-allocation of SNA posts identified by the Inspectorate in primary, post-primary and special schools.

The cost effectiveness of the Scheme is being compromised by the general mis-intepretation of the role of the SNA that is evident and the involvement of SNAs in duties beyond those envisaged by the objectives of the Scheme.

Key Finding
6.5   The cost effectiveness of the SNA Scheme is compromised by the extension of the role of the SNA beyond what was envisaged by the Scheme.

Chapter 7   Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter relates specifically to items 6 and 7 in the Terms of Reference:

> 6. *Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient/effective basis and make appropriate recommendations for change, if necessary.*
>
> 7. *Specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor the performance of the SNA Scheme.*

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the three aspects of the VFM Review and Policy Initiative related to Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy based on discussions in the previous chapters. Economy is considered in the context of Efficiency and is concerned with securing the appropriate quality of inputs at the most favourable cost. The continued relevance of the SNA Scheme is considered, amendments to the existing Scheme are suggested and alternative means of achieving the objectives of the programme detailed. Finally, potential future performance indicators are detailed.

Economy and Efficiency

The Review has shown that the SNA Scheme is supporting schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities who also have significant care needs. However, it is clear that the allocation process is generally not well understood within schools and by parents nor is the purpose of the Scheme fully understood. The meaning of the term 'care needs' has been stretched beyond what was intended by the Scheme and this has meant that both parents and schools now expect that the role of the SNA is to carry out a much broader range of duties than originally envisaged.

The Review has identified that the role of the SNA in schools has expanded far beyond the Scheme's objectives. There is evidence to suggest that SNAs are engaging in duties related to behaviour management, administrative duties, pedagogical and therapeutic activities. There is also evidence of over-allocation of SNA posts in the hundred schools reviewed by the Inspectorate. This has contributed to the increase in the number of SNAs and the associated costs involved.

This expansion of the role has directly led to a conflict between the original intention of the Scheme and the desires of parents and schools for different types of support, not envisaged by the SNA Scheme, for students with special educational needs. This lack of understanding has led to inefficiencies in that both schools and parents have come to expect the allocation of SNA posts for students whose care needs do not meet the terms of the Scheme. This in turn has led to unacceptable pressures being placed on both diagnosing/assessing professionals as well as SENOs.

As detailed in Chapter 4: Objectives and Current Practice (page 59) some focus group participants expressed the view that professionals have been put under pressure to state that certain students meet the terms of the SNA Scheme when it is clear that they do not. One professional expressed the view that it was natural for a professional to do whatever was required to obtain a resource which would assist a student, even in circumstances where the student wasn't strictly entitled to such a resource.

The attitude adopted to the allocation of State resources is a cause of serious concern especially given the current Scheme's dependency on the assessment findings and recommendations of professionals and the expectation that these professionals will carry out this function in accordance with the terms of the circular. SENOs are being put under pressure to either retain existing levels of support or to allocate additional support when the needs of the student(s) do not merit such support within the existing criteria.

This Review considers that this effort is well meant and with the best interests of the student at the core of the activity. However, all of this contributes to a remarkable lack of efficiency in which the time of teachers, parents, professionals and SENOs is taken up in trying to process applications for students who do not qualify for SNA support. It also adds to parental frustration and the perception that they have to fight for resources for their children. The group is concerned that the expanded range of duties, for example, in relation to maximising the quality of the student's learning and teaching experiences, are not appropriate to the role of the SNA.

There is evidence to suggest that some schools invest considerable time and effort into retaining the SNA resource once it has been allocated. The outcome from the recent NCSE review of SNA supports in schools has clearly demonstrated that schools are reluctant to let SNA support go even when a student for whom such support was allocated has left the school or has achieved greater independence. Recent events have shown that schools and parents engage in appealing SENO decisions, involving public representatives and the media, in order to retain SNA supports when such supports are no longer deemed necessary.

Such activity goes against the spirit of any Scheme but has wider repercussions in the SNA Scheme. Schools, in the first instance, should be pro-active in seeking to reduce the dependence of a student on SNA support. At a minimum, once a student for whom SNA support was provided has left the school, the onus should be on the school to suppress the post itself. Retaining such posts reduces the capacity of the State to invest in other initiatives to support students with special educational needs.

Conclusion: Economy and Efficiency
1.   **The SNA Scheme could achieve its objectives and the associated level of output with fewer inputs and thereby achieve greater value for money.**

Recommendations: Economy and Efficiency

The Government's recent decision to introduce a cap on overall SNA numbers means that the body which has responsibility for allocating SNA resources must now also take into account overall numbers and budgetary considerations.

1. **The Scheme needs to be restated to ensure an efficient allocation of SNA resources and clarify the 'care' nature of the SNA role for parents, schools and professionals.**

2. **The role that professional reports play in supporting the SNA Scheme should be restated to ensure that professionals are fully informed of their role in relation to the Scheme. The criticality of professional reports identifying the care needs of the students with direct reference to the applicable circular should be highlighted.**

3. **The Department should restate the responsibilities of school management concerning SNA posts, once the relevant student has left the school. The Department should also give consideration to potential consequences for schools that retain SNA posts once the relevant student has left the school.**

4. **The NCSE should continue to review all SNA posts on an annual basis.**

5. **The criteria for the allocation of SNA support under the present needs-based Scheme should be clearly restated and be subject to ongoing review.**

6. **The Department should consider conducting a cost benefit analysis, to establish if the introduction of a regional redeployment scheme would lead to greater economic efficiency.**

Effectiveness

The Review has shown that the SNA Scheme is very effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities. The Inspectors observed students receiving assistance with a range of activities including clothing, feeding, mobility, assistive technology and access and being provided with support in out-of-school activities.

However, the expansion of the SNA role, together with the identified over-allocation of SNA posts, suggests that the effectiveness of the Scheme has been compromised. The Review has established that the SNA Scheme currently does not deliver value for money as the over-allocation of SNA posts and the resistance to suppressing SNA posts that are no longer required has increased the overall cost of the Scheme.

The Review has shown that, once an SNA post has been allocated, some schools have deployed the SNA inappropriately e.g. clerical and secretarial support. The Review has also found that in a number of incidences schools continue to provide SNA support for students, which is inconsistent with the role of the SNA, for example,

Inspectors noted that, of the 502 incidences observed where SNAs were assisting a student to stay on task, such support was inconsistent with the SNA role in 159 (32%) such incidences.

The Steering Committee is concerned that, in accordance with the findings of the literature review, such excess support may lead to an over-dependence by the student on SNA support, a loss of opportunity for the student to develop independent learning skills and an over-reliance by the class teacher on the student having such support as well as the opportunity cost of such excess support.

Additionally the experience of Beth, referred to previously in the literature review, highlights the potential negative and damaging impact of support staff on students' behaviour and school experience when such support is not required (Giangreco et al., 2005). A key objective of education generally is to ensure that students develop independent living skills in order to maximise their opportunities in life as adults. It is clear that the constant availability of SNA support, when such a post is no longer essential, runs counter to such an objective.

Conclusions: Effectiveness

1. **The SNA Scheme is effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities.**

2. **The effectiveness of the SNA Scheme has been compromised by the inappropriate expansion of the role and the identified over-allocation of SNA posts.**

Recommendations : Effectiveness

1. **The allocation of SNA support should be clearly linked to the individualised planning in place for each student and specifically refer to the student's identified care needs. In this context, a focus should be maintained on the pro-active development of students' independence skills.**

2. **A formal school-based review process should be in place for each SNA post in order to ensure that SNA support is reduced or withdrawn in accordance with the student's needs.**

3. **The review suggests that the use of part-time posts should be more widely considered.**

4. **In accordance with the terms of Circular 07/02, SNA duties should be assigned by the principal, sanctioned by the board of management and supervised by either the principal or the class teacher.**

5. **The role of the SNA in supporting the care needs of students should be communicated clearly to parents by school authorities.**

6. It should be highlighted to schools that responsibility for the learning and teaching of students with special educational is the remit of the teacher.

7. The impact of SNA support on students' behaviour should continue to be monitored by the school in order to ensure that the support is not contributing to the emergence of problem behaviours for individual students.

Continued Relevance of Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The findings of the Review indicate that the SNA Scheme continues to be needed to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities. Given the numbers of students with disabilities who are now included in mainstream schools, and that their additional care needs are being met through SNA support, it is clear that the original Scheme remains relevant to the delivery of an inclusive school environment for students with disabilities. It is also clear that SNA support is needed to assist teachers in meeting the additional care needs of students in special schools.

However, the Review has established that the role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals now seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative, pedagogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties. This Review has established that there is an expectation that a key role of the SNA is to assist students access the curriculum and that this reason alone should be sufficient to enable the allocation of SNA support.

Enabling a student to access the curriculum requires pedaogogical skills, which are the remit only of a qualified teacher. It is of concern that some schools and parents consider that it is part of the SNA role to assist students access the curriculum. This expansion is fundamentally unsatisfactory due to the significant departure from the role of the SNA as envisaged in Circular 07/02 and the associated cost, which is now approximately €340m. It is imperative therefore that this expansion is addressed in order to ensure that SNA support is provided in accordance with the terms of the circular.

The literature review has found that SNAs have specific functions to support children with a sensory impairment. Circular 07/02 specifies that applications for an SNA should be considered where, for example, a student has a significant impairment of physical or sensory function. In restating the role of the SNA in Circular 07/02 and for further clarification, the duties appropriate to students with sensory impairments should be detailed.

This review has established that the management of behaviour is one of the principal reasons for the sanctioning of SNA posts. The view expressed in focus groups that some 'professionals write reports to suit the [Scheme's] criteria ..' is worrying. The contention that professionals allow themselves to be pressurised into using the criterion 'is a danger to themselves or others' when this conclusion is not warranted is alarming.

There is considerable concern in the literature review, as well as evidenced by practice in schools, that SNAs are being used to contain behaviour as distinct from students with such emotional/behavioural needs receiving appropriate interventions in school through individualised planning, and additional psychiatric/medical interventions as required to remediate their difficulties.

The Steering Committee considers that it would be unacceptable for professionals to inappropriately label a child as being a danger to themselves or others in order to obtain SNA support. The Committee recommends that he issue raised by focus groups that professionals may have been put under pressure to state that the care needs of certain students meet the terms of the SNA Scheme, should be referred by the DES to the relevant professional bodies for their information and consideration.

This Review has found (Chapter 4: Identifying Care Needs) that focus group members have reported that in some instances SNAs are actually delivering health therapies, as opposed to assisting children with care needs to access therapy supports. Also, that SNA posts may be recommended by professional therapists in order to deliver therapy programmes. Concern was expressed during the focus group interviews that there may be an assumption that the provision of SNA support can substitute for the lack of therapeutic support in schools.

There was an indication also that some therapeutic programmes lack appropriate supervision, monitoring or evaluation. The Steering Committee considers that it would be inappropriate for HSE and/or other professionals to recommend SNA support in order to carry out therapy programmes in schools for students who do not have care needs, or to carry out therapeutic supports for children with care needs, as opposed to assisting them to access such support, on an unsupervised basis.

Where an SNA post is available and time permits an SNA may assist a child to access a therapy programme. However, the delivery of a therapy programme or assistance in delivering such a programme is insufficient in itself to warrant the allocation of an SNA post. In addition, any such programme must be delivered only where the SNA has been trained for the programme and where HSE staff are available to quality assure and supervise the programme.

The Steering Committee group considers that the provision of such services remains a key function of the HSE. The Committee acknowledges that there may be potential for the HSE to fund such supports in schools or potential, in certain appropriate cases, for example, where therapy, nursing/medical needs have been identified as well as care needs, to jointly fund the provision of support, or perhaps to consider a different scheme to provide such support. The Steering Committee recommends that this issue is taken up with the HSE and the Department of Health and Children to ensure that;

- they are aware of the inappropriateness of the recommendations of some professionals;
- they consider how therapy needs may be best met;
- they ensure that a model of support is developed and funded to appropriately support any school-based, therapeutic requirements of students with disabilities within the existing resources available.

The Review has also established that significant emphasis is placed by schools on non-care duties. For example, many SNAs now carry out an educational role by assisting assigned students with curricular tasks outside the classroom (459 incidences observed), clarifying teacher instruction so that students can participate as appropriate (321 incidences observed), supporting the student in preparing for the learning activity and attending to the task (331 incidences observed) and supporting the curricular aspects of individualised planning (201 incidences observed). See Chapter 4 previously. This is unsatisfactory and does not relate to the objectives of the Scheme.

It is clear from the Review that many professionals, schools and parents consider that the SNA role should expand to include care, learning and social skills. Indeed the thrust of much of the frustration voiced by professionals, schools and parents seems to originate from their efforts to restate a child's learning and social skills' needs as care needs in order to obtain SNA support.

It is understandable that professionals, parents and schools are concerned to ensure that students with disabilities are supported in schools. While schools, professionals and parents may be of the view that a greater level of additional teaching support is required in order to address students' learning and social needs, providing for such needs is not the remit of an SNA.

It is not open to schools, professionals or parents to seek to use the SNA Scheme to supplement teaching or therapeutic support for students. It is critical therefore that the SNA Scheme is communicated clearly to parents in order to ensure that they understand the 'care role' envisaged for the SNA. This would assist in reassuring parents that SNA support cannot be equated with educational supports for their children and guard against the perception by parents that they are obliged to fight for such supports.

However, it is clear that many parents, professionals, and schools consider that students would benefit from additional support, to assist in their learning and educational programme, over and above that provided through the Learning Support and Resource Teacher supports provided in schools. This would appear to be at the root cause of the 'role creep' described in this Review. It is beyond the scope of this Review to determine if there is merit to this view, but as it is arguable that all students attending school could benefit from additional support and resources, the focus of the SNA Scheme should be restated and redirected, as much as possible, to providing resources where they are essential or required to enable the student to access education in accordance with Circular 07/02. In this context also, the lack of supportive evidence identified in the literature with regard to the impact of paraprofessional use on students' outcomes should be considered (Suter and Giangreco, 2009; Giangreco, 2010).

Conclusions: Continued Relevance of SNA Scheme

1. **The SNA Scheme continues to be relevant to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities.**

2. **The role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative,**

pedaogogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties.

Recommendations : Continued Relevance of SNA Scheme

1. **The objectives of the SNA Scheme as they relate to providing schools with additional staffing to cater for the 'care needs' of students should be made clear to all stakeholders and the primary role of the teacher in the education and care of all students reiterated.**

2. **The issue raised by focus groups that professionals may have been put under pressure to state that the care needs of certain students meet the terms of the SNA Scheme should be referred by the DES to the relevant professional bodies for their information and consideration.**

3. **The provision of school-based therapy supports should be raised with the HSE/Department of Health and Children. A policy needs to be developed in relation to the delivery of therapeutic programmes for students in schools. Where it is necessary to deliver such programmes in schools, the recommending therapists should liaise with the school in order to put all necessary supports in place, and to ensure that such programmes are delivered without adversely affecting the ability of the school to deliver its education programmes. All therapeutic programmes should be planned, implemented and reviewed under the supervision of the appropriate therapist.**

4. **Individualised planning should be a feature of provision for all students with special educational needs. A team approach to the development, implementation and review of individualised planning should be adopted and where relevant a care dimension should be included in the planning.**

5. **Different requirements in relation to the deployment of SNA support were evident in primary, post-primary and special schools due to the different needs of students and the differing organisational structures of school sectors. These differences should be acknowledged and accommodated in the restating of the Scheme.**

6. **Appropriate liaison should take place between the Health and Education authorities to ensure a common understanding of the purpose and principles of the Scheme.**

7. **The Scheme should be clearly restated:**

   a. To clarify for recommending professionals the nature of information required in professional reports, irrespective of whether these reports are State-funded or privately funded,
   b. To emphasise the role of the relevant professionals in specifying students' care needs,
   c, To re-iterate that the role of the SENO is to quantify the extent of any

SNA support provided,

d. To remove the criterion *'where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other students'* and replace this with the requirements for explicit evidence in relation to the precise needs of the students and details of the 'care role' that it is envisaged that the SNA will adopt in relation to the student.

Management, Training and Development

There is a requirement for a wider understanding of the role of SNAs across the school system and for clear guidelines on the management and utilisation of SNA support in accordance with Departmental Circulars. There is a role for school policies, management and teachers to ensure that everyone is aware of the role of SNAs and to communicate the policy expressed through circular.

Conclusions: Management, training and development

1. The role of the SNA should be managed with reference to relevant Departmental Circulars.

2. SNA training programmes should be based on the role of the SNA as envisaged in Departmental Circulars.

3. The findings suggest that schools require guidelines to assist them in the management and utilisation of SNA support.

Recommendations : Management, Training and Development

1. Guidelines for schools should be drawn up by the NCSE on the effective management of SNA support that incorporates the findings of this VFM Review in relation to best practice in this area.

2. The NCSE should formalise a process of school-based and external monitoring of the SNA role.

3. Programmes of continuing professional development and school development planning for all teachers in the management of student behaviour should continue to be provided.

4. The Department should consider how best to address the training needs and training programmes provided to SNAs.

5. The content of training programmes for SNAs should be linked to the role of the SNA as detailed in Department circulars.

6. The effective management of SNA support should be addressed in initial teacher education and programmes of continuing professional development for teachers.

Future of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

The Review has found that the SNA Scheme does have continued relevance. Some students with disabilities and care needs require additional support over and above that which can be provided by the class teacher in order to provide for their educational placement in mainstream or special education settings.

However, the Review recognises the view of some focus group participants that there may be students who do not have care needs under the SNA scheme but who may require some support in the classroom. In particular, the Review has established an unprecedented demand for extra support in schools to assist in the management and remediation of students with/without disabilities who present with significant behaviour issues.

The HSE professionals have expressed their preference for individual support or health care staff to deliver therapy programmes in schools and to support students with severe emotional/behavioural difficulties. The Review has identified that many schools, parents and professionals consider that these duties are within the remit of the SNA, which has resulted in an expansion of the role beyond that envisaged in Circular 07/02.

It is the current policy of the DES that the pedaogogical needs of students are the responsibility of the class teacher, supported as necessary by the learning support and/or resource teacher in the context of a collaborative whole-school approach. It is to be noted that the DES has expended significant resources in providing additional teaching support for students with special educational needs. There are currently over 9,000 resource and learning support teachers employed in mainstream schools.

Additionally advice has been provided for schools in the deployment of this support through a range of publications that includes Circular 02/05 and the Post-Primary Guidelines for the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs (DES, 2005; 2007). In accordance with national and international best practice, a collaborative whole-school approach to meeting the learning and teaching needs of students who require additional teaching support is advocated in these publications.

The Steering Committee was very concerned that SNAs, who are not required to have additional educational qualifications or training, were spending so much time on an individualised basis with students with special educational needs. Best practice in providing for the education of students with special educational needs highlights the criticality of students having access to focused teaching in which their progress is regularly monitored and reviewed.

The Steering Committee considered that the current model of SNA support represented a significant investment of State resources and should only be provided where essential and required. One of the concerns raised in this Review was the lack of permanence of positions for SNAs. Concern was also raised about the inefficiency and expense of schools having to make SNAs redundant and subsequently these SNAs having to apply for positions in other schools.

In addition, some schools mentioned that a successful outcome for a student may result in the loss of a job for an SNA and that this was not the best incentive to ensure successful outcomes. The Steering Committee concluded that a model could be developed that would result in greater administrative efficiencies, provide greater employment certainty for SNAs and remove the situation whereby the SNAs' success at promoting a student's independence may result in the suppression of his/her post. However the Steering Committee concluded that the precise nature of any future support mechanism would have to be identified before such a model was put in place. The Steering Committee also considered that a Scheme based on a fixed budget could also be considered as part of this process but that care would need to be taken to ensure that appropriate levels of support were provided to students.

The position has been put forward by some focus group participants that the current SNA model does not represent the best use of State resources and that an alternative model could be found, which would better support students who require assistance. Based on the literature review, and the evidence compiled for this review, the group concluded that it is in the best interests of the student to receive learning and teaching support from personnel who are qualified to teach.

The Steering Committee concluded that a reassessment of the total provision for students with special education needs, including resource teachers and SNAs could produce a sustainable alternative model of support for these students. The Committee was aware, however, that developing and presenting an alternative model is not within the terms of reference of this particular review. It would also have considerably delayed the finalisation of this report. However the Steering Committee considers that such a model should be based on the principles that a pedagogical role is adopted by qualified teachers only.

Additionally the Steering Committee considers that meeting the needs of students with special educational needs can best be achieved through adopting a collaborative, whole-school approach to planning, implementing and monitoring students' education programmes. The Steering Committee advocates that a flexible approach is adopted to meeting students' needs and suggests that schools consider co-teaching strategies such as team-teaching, parallel teaching and station teaching, co-operative learning, the use of assistive technology and peer-support systems in meeting students' identified needs. A focus should continue to be placed on providing students with special educational needs with access to differentiated learning and teaching experiences based on their identified strengths and needs.

Conclusion: Future of the SNA Scheme

1. **The SNA Scheme has continued relevance for students with disabilities who have additional care needs**

2. **The possibility of the SNA Scheme achieving greater administrative efficiencies should be considered by the DES.**

3. **The Steering Committee recognises the views of some focus group participants that there may be students who do not have care needs under the SNA scheme, but who may require some form of additional support in the classroom.**

Recommendations : Future of the SNA Scheme

1. **The SNA Scheme has continued relevance for students with disabilities who have additional care needs provided that in future it operates within the parameters of the Scheme as recommended in this report.**

2. **Alternative employment models for SNAs that could achieve greater administrative efficiencies and provide greater employment certainty for SNAs should be considered by the DES.**

3. **A sustainable alternative model of school based support for students with special education needs, taking into account all of the supports available for children with special education needs, could be considered.**

4. **Allocation of SNA support should be linked to formal school policies on the deployment of SNAs.**

5. **Alternative models of support that promote students' socialisation such as peer- support should be considered.**

6. **The role of the SNA in Ireland should be restated to ensure that it includes the necessary duties that are required to support the care needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students and blind and visually impaired students.**

Potential Future Performance Indicators

Special needs assistants should be retained in the education system to meet the additional care needs of students arising from a disability in mainstream and special education settings. Special needs assistants should continue to have duties of a non-teaching nature and work under the direction of the class teacher/principal as envisaged by the objectives of the SNA Scheme.

However the expansion of the SNA Scheme beyond that envisaged in Circular 07/02 is a serious cause for concern and it is critical therefore that a range of performance indicators are developed to ensure that the Scheme operates within its officially prescribed parameters in the future. The Steering Committee has identified a range of performance indicators based on the findings of this Review and with reference to the programme logic model of the VFM process.

These performance indicators are related to inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts, and should constitute the monitoring basis upon which the SNA Scheme operates in the future. Table 7.1 below identifies these performance indicators and the performance measures that should be used to monitor these indicators. Those responsible for monitoring these indicators are also identified.

Table 7.1	Measuring the Performance Indicators of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme through the Programme Logic Model		
Individual Components of the Programme Logic Model	**Performance Indicators**	**Potential Performance Measures**	**Data Sources**
DES' Strategic Objective *Providing a range of resources and supports for students with special educational needs.*	*Number of students with special educational needs in different school sectors.*	**Ratio of students with special educational needs who are/are not attending school.**	**DES;NEWB; NCSE**
Programme Objective *The provision of a system of additional care support within educational contexts for students with special educational needs.*	*Number of students with special educational needs who require and have been allocated SNA support per school sector.*	**Establishing the extent to which the additional care support that has been allocated is warranted through ongoing monitoring and review processes.**	**DES NCSE**
Inputs (Budget) *Human and financial inputs to SNA Scheme.*	*Overall cost of programme including no. and grade of staff involved in administration of SNA Scheme*	**% change in cost of SNA Scheme annually. Ratio of SNA Scheme cost to Special Education/Schools/DES budgets.**	**DES NCSE**
Activities *Application, Allocation and Review Processes.*	*No. of applications processed; No. of successful applications; No. and % of schools applying and allocated SNA support in each sector.*	**Timeliness of the process at each stage. Improvements in systems and procedures including ICT, NCSE and DES processes.**	**DES NCSE**
Outputs *Number of SNAs in different school sectors.*	*Total no. of SNAs; No. of SNAs allocated per school sector; Total no. of schools allocated SNA support; No. and % of schools allocated SNA support per school sector.*	**% change in total no. of SNAs, no. of SNAs per school sector and no. of SNAs allocated per special educational need category annually.**	**DES NCSE**
Results *Number of students with special educational needs requiring additional care support who are being provided for.*	*No. of students with special educational needs allocated SNA support in each category of special need educational need and in each school sector.* *The manner in which providing for students' care needs is facilitating/not facilitating*	**% change in number of students with special educational needs per school sector annually and % change in number of students allocated SNA support per school sector annually. Success of schools in**	**DES NCSE**

	their educational placements.	**meeting students' additional care needs.**	
Impacts *Number of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the number no longer requiring support.*	*No. of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the no. that no longer require SNA support per school sector annually.*	*No. of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the no. that no. longer require SNA support per school sector annually.*	**NCSE**

The Steering Committee considers that those with responsibility for monitoring the performance indicators should continue to liaise and consult with each other in order to ensure that a cohesive and consistent approach to the operation of the SNA Scheme continues to be a feature of practice in the future. The group also considers that the application of these performance indicators and measures will assist in ensuring that the additional care needs of students with disabilities continue to be catered for in an effective and efficient manner.

Next Steps

The Steering Committee recognises the limitations of the VFM and Policy Review exercise in relation to the future role and development of the SNA Scheme.

The Committee has identified that disparities have arisen between what is expected of the SNA role and how the role currently operates in practice. The Committee has identified that supports are required for students with special educational needs in order to facilitate their education in an inclusive environment.

In this context, the Committee recommends that the potential for restating and remodelling the SNA Scheme should be explored taking into account the conclusions and recommendations of this report. These considerations might take into account the need for differentiated models of SNA support, clarification of the role of the SNA in a revised Departmental circular and revised monitoring processes with a view to addressing the key issues raised in this report.

A number of the recommendations of this report are being immediately addressed in the context of the decision taken by the Government, as part of the National Recovery Programme, to place a cap on the number of whole time equivalent Special Needs Assistant posts in schools. The recommendations which are immediately being addressed are those which specifically refer to the fact that the criteria for the allocation of SNA support under the present needs-based Scheme should be clearly restated and be subject to ongoing review. Also, the Government's recent decision to introduce a cap on overall SNA numbers means that the body which has responsibility for allocating SNA resources must now also take into account overall numbers and budgetary considerations.

The NCSE has issued a circular to all schools advising of the allocation process for the 2011/2012 school year. A key feature of the amended scheme will be to provide for an annual allocation of Special Needs Assistant support to eligible schools.

The DES will also consider suggestions from school management or parent representative organisations as to how the allocation of SNA resources can best be managed within the context of the overall limit on SNA numbers established.

Discussions are also currently ongoing between the DES and IMPACT/SIPTU, who represent SNAs in the education sector, in the context of the Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement. Discussions are taking place with regards to flexible deployment and improvements in efficiencies for the SNA grade. This relates to report recommendations that the allocation of SNA support should be linked to formal school policies on the deployment of SNAs and also regarding alternative employment models for SNAs that could provide for greater efficiencies

The implementation of efficiency aspects of the Agreement should bring greater clarity to the system and facilitate the improved utilisation of resources

The Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement also provides, in respect of SNAs, for a comprehensive review and revision of the existing employment terms and conditions to identify and remove any impediments to the provision of efficient and effective support for students with special care needs.

Further policy reviews of the SNA Scheme, taking account of the findings of this review, will explore the potential for remodelling the SNA Scheme, the need for differentiated models of SNA support, clarification of the role of the SNS in revised Departmental circular and revised monitoring processes with a view to addressing the key issues raised in this report.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

The Terms of Reference of Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative
Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme

1. Identify the objectives of the SNA Scheme and the role of an SNA.

2. Examine the relevance and continued validity of these objectives and role as they relate to the objective of the Department's Strategy Statement 2008-2010 concerned with providing a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs.

3. Define the outputs associated with the SNA Scheme and examine the duties allocated to and undertaken by in the context of the objectives of the Scheme.

4. Examine the extent to which the objectives of the SNA Scheme have been achieved and the effectiveness with which these objectives have been achieved.

5. Identify the level and trend of costs associated with the SNA Scheme and comment on the efficiency of the Scheme.

6. Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient/effective basis and make appropriate recommendations for change, if necessary.

7. Specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor the performance of the SNA Scheme.

8. A VFM Review should not, as a general rule, recommend an increased resource allocation for the programme concerned. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it is proposed to recommend such an increase to deliver better overall VFM, the Department's/Office's overall Steering Committee (or MAC) should be consulted in advance and should identify possible savings and/or additional income on other lower priority programmes (for the Department/Office concerned or another public body) that would be sufficient to meet the additional costs involved: full details of these offsetting measures should be included in the VFM Review report.

ANNEX 2

Membership of the Steering Committee, Editorial Committee and Data-Collection Group, External Assistants and Quality Assessor.

Membership of Steering Committee

Teresa Griffin, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills(Chair)
Mary Horan, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills (Replaced by Terry Reynolds, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills from June 2010)
Anne Killian, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills
Pádraig Maloney, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills
Breda Connaughton, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills
Eamonn Ward, Higher Executive Officer, Department of Education and Skills
Sé Goulding, Principal Officer, National Council for Special Education
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Mary Grogan, Senior Special Needs Organiser, National Council for Special Education.
Emer Hogan, Assistant Principal, Department of Finance
Máire Leahy, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service
Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills
Finn Ó Murchú, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills
Emer Ring, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills

Membership of Editorial Committee

Mary Horan, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills (Replaced by Terry Reynolds, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills from June 2010)
Breda Connaughton, Assistant Principal, Department of Education and Skills
Máire Leahy, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service
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Emer Ring, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills (Editor)

Membership of Data-Collection Group

Jennifer Doran, Head of Research, National Council for Special Education
Mary Grogan, Senior Special Needs Organiser, National Council for Special Education.
Máire Leahy, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service
Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills
Finn Ó Murchú, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Skills

External Assistants

Áine O'Neill, Lecturer, Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin
Professor Richard Rose, Northampton University.

Quality Assessor

Mr. Raymond Burke, Raymond Burke Consulting

ANNEX 3

Letter Announcing Child-Care Assistant Scheme 1979

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS,
(Department of Education),

BRAINSE AN BHUNOIDEACHAIS,
(Primary Branch),

SRÁID MHAOILBHRÍDE,
(Marlborough Street),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH. 1.
(Dublin, 1).

A Chara,

I am directed by the Minister for Education to inform you of the introduction of a scheme for the employment of Child-Care Assistants in special schools. The scheme will come into operation at the beginning of the 1979/80 school-year. The objectives of the scheme are to provide non-teaching assistance for class teachers and to create additional employment in full-time posts.

Your school is one of those to which a post has been assigned. Arrangements for the filling of the post must be made by the Board of Management, subject to the following:

(a) Child-Care Assistants must be recruited from the National Manpower Services Register and must either be unemployed or be seeking employment for the first time.

(b) the qualifications and conditions of employment will be as specified in the attached memorandum.

(c) the duties of the post will be as specified in Appendix A of the attached memorandum.

(d) a grant based on an incremental scale of £2040 x £76.50 - £3060 will be paid to the Board of Management. Each appointee will enter on the minimum of the scale.

(e) the terms of future National Pay Understandings will apply to the scale at (d), subject to any general arrangements that might apply to public sector pay.

(f)   the Department will refund to the Board of Management the employer's Pay-Related Social Insurance contribution. This amounts to 8.75% of gross pay.

(g)   the salary paid by the Board of Management may not be less than the grant payable at (d) above nor may it be supplemented by any local contribution.

The grant and employer's contribution will normally be paid quarterly, in advance, subject to the receipt from the Board of Management of an application on the approved form - copy attached. The initial application should be accompanied by a statement from the National Manpower Services Office, certifying that the appointee fulfills the conditions at (a).

If a Child-Care Assistant resigns from the post before the expiry of the period covered by the grant or if the post becomes vacant for any other reason, the Department may seek recoupment of such amount of the grant as was not paid in salary in accordance with the terms of this scheme.

Any enquiries should be addressed to the Special Education Section, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1. The telephone number is 01-717101, Extensions 210 or 54.

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CHILD-CARE ASSISTANTS EMPLOYED IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

QUALIFICATIONS

1. **Character**

   Each appointee must be of good character.

2. **Age**

   Candidates must be over 17 and under 56 years of age on
   1st September of the year in which they take up appointment.

3. **Education**

   Each candidate must have been awarded Grade D (or pass) at
   least, in Irish, English and Mathematics in the Intermediate
   Certificate Examination, in the Day Vocational Certificate
   Examination or in an examination of equivalent standard.

4. **Health**

   Candidates must be free from any defect or disease which
   would render them unsuitable to hold the post and be in a
   state of health such as would indicate a reasonable
   possibility of their being able to give regular and
   efficient service.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

1. The post is full-time and permanent.

2. On appointment, each Child-Care Assistant will be on
   probation for one year. At the end of the probationary
   period, the appointment may be confirmed, probation extended
   for a further period or services terminated as the Board of
   Management may determine. If the appointment is not
   confirmed, an increment may not be awarded.

3. The salary scale is outlined on the attached appendix.

4. Assistants will be required to work classroom hours and,
   in addition, to attend before and after school in order to
   help with preparation and tidying up of classrooms,
   reception and dispersal of children, etc. The hours of
   duty will be determined by the Board of Management.

5.   Holiday periods will normally be those which operate for teachers and children. However, assistants will be required to spend a couple of days at the start and finish of each term in the preparation and clearing up of equipment, etc.

6.   A guide to the duties appropriate to the post is attached - Appendix A.

7.   Sick Leave and Maternity Leave regulations are set out in Appendix B.

8.   The appointment will be terminable by one month's notice writing on either side, except in the circumstances envisaged in Paragraph 2.

9.   The retirement age is 65 but Child-Care Assistants may continue in employment until the end of the school-year in which they become 65 years of age.

10. The school premises will normally be the place of employment.

11. Due discretion is expected in matters of a confidential nature.

I have read the above conditions and I agree to carry out duties of the post to the best of my judgement and ability.

Signed _____

         (Child Care Assistant)

                    Date: _____

(This document should be retained by the Board of Management).

Work appropriate to Child-Care Assistants

Child-Care Assistants are recruited specifically to assist teachers. Their duties are assigned by the Principal Teacher * and their work supervised either by the Principal or by a class teacher. Those duties involve tasks of a non-teaching nature such as:

1. Preparation and tidying up of classrooms.

2. Assisting children to board and alight from school busses. In cases of exceptional difficulty, travel as escort on school buses may be involved.

3. Special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping manually handicapped children with typing or writing.

4. Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene.

5. Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks and similar activities.

6. Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils during assembly, recreation and dispersal periods.

7. Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom for one reason or another.

8. General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature.

Child-Care Assistants may not act either as substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class.

*   Circular 10/76: Duties and responsibilities of Principal Teachers.

Sick leave regulations.

Full pay (less appropriate deductions in respect of social welfare benefits) may be allowed during sick absence up to the following limits in any period of twelve months' service:

(a)   After three months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to six weeks in any period of twelve months' service;

(b)   after six months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to nine weeks in any period of twelve months' service;

(c)   after twelve months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to thirteen weeks in any period of twelve months' service. No sick pay will be allowed during the first three months' service.

Medical certificates must be furnished in all cases of continuous absence on the third day at the latest to the Board of Management. As a general rule, sick leave will not be allowed for a longer period than one week on any one certificate. Where, in the case of Child-Care Assistants on a Monday-Friday week, sick absence extends from Friday to Monday inclusive, a medical certificate must be furnished.

Child-Care Assistants are reminded that when they are being considered for confirmation of appointment (if they are on probation), full account will be taken of their health and of the extent and pattern of the sick absence. If any of these aspects is unsatisfactory the Child-Care Assistant concerned cannot be accepted as suitable.

The grant of sick leave will be subject to the following conditions in particular:

(i) that the absence is properly certified;
(ii) that there is no evidence of permanent disability for service;

Once sick pay has ceased owing to the expiration of the maximum
limit, it cannot be resumed during the same absence. Unpaid sick
leave does not count as service qualifying for further paid sick
leave.

Uncertified Sick leave

Sick leave for single or two-day absences in total not exceeding
seven days in any period of twelve months may be granted without
medical certificate. However, should the number of days' absence
without medical certificate in any period of twelve months,
reckoning backwards from the date of the latest absence, exceed
seven in the aggregate, any subsequent absence must be certified
until the balance is restored.

a sheoladh go dti
s reply to:
RÚNAÍ
aoin uimhir (quoting) ....

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS,
(Department of Education),

BRAINSE AN BHUNOIDEACHAIS,
(Primary Branch),

SRÁID MHAOILBHRÍDE,
(Marlborough Street),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH, 1.
(Dublin, 1).

REVISION OF MATERNITY LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILD CARE ASSISTANTS

(a) Maternity leave will consist of 14 consecutive weeks on full pay (less any Social Welfare allowance payable on foot of a Child Care Assistant's social insurance).

(b) Maternity leave will be granted irrespective of a Child Care Assistant's sick leave record and will not reckon as sick leave.

(c) A Child Care Assistant who intends going on maternity leave should submit, through the management authority of her school, a medical certificate confirming pregnancy and stating the expected week of confinement. If a woman who intends to claim maternity allowance under the Social Welfare Acts fails to submit a medical certificate in time, she may lose entitlement to maternity allowance from the Department of Social Welfare.

(d) A minimum period of maternity leave must be taken, beginning not later than four weeks before the end of the expected week of confinement, and ending not earlier than four weeks after the end of the expected week of confinement.

(e) Subject to the normal regulations, sick leave may be allowed during pregnancy.

(f) At the end of maternity leave a woman may, on application, be allowed up to 4 weeks' special leave without pay and/or any annual leave to which she is entitled at the time. Sick leave following maternity leave may be allowed within her normal entitlement where she is certified as unfit for work due to illness, whether or not the illness is connected with the confinement. Such sick leave should be allowed only where the management authority is fully satisfied that the Child Care Assistant intends to return to her position when fit to do so.

(g) Time off from duty may be allowed for attendance at ante-natal and post-natal clinics. Evidence of appointment or attendance at the clinic will be required by the Management Authority.

You are requested to bring the contents of this notice to the attention of the Child Care Assistant.

Special Education Section I

ANNEX 4

Appointment Ratios for Special Needs Assistants As Detailed in Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report (1993)

Category of Special Educational Need	Suggested Ratio of Number of Class Groups to	Ratio of Number of Students to as per SERC
Visual Impairment	4:1	32
Hearing Impairment	4:1	28
Profoundly Deaf	2:1	12
Mild General Learning Disability	4:1	44
Moderate General Learning Disability	2:1	16
Emotional Disturbance	4:1	32
Severe Emotional Disturbance (prior to 1998, students with Autism* were considered under this category of disability)	1:1	6
Physically Disability	1:1	10
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	3:1	21
Multiple Disabilities	1:1	6
Severe / Profound General Learning Disability	2:1	3
*Autism On 10 October 2000, it was approved by cabinet that two SNA posts would be allocated to classes for students with autism.	2:1	3

Press Release, Thursday 5th November 1998

Press Release

Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin TD

Major Initiative in Special Education Services.

"Move marks breakthrough for integrated education and children with autism"

Thursday, 5 November 1998

A major initiative in special education which provides the first ever automatic supports for many children with disabilities was today announced by the Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin TD. The initiative in particular marks a breakthrough for integrated education and children with autism.

The measures involved, which have been approved by Government, are aimed at ensuring that all children with a special educational need, irrespective of their location or disability, will receive the support they require to participate fully in the education system.

The measures, which extend across the entire spectrum of special needs will deliver extra teaching and child care services to all special needs children, whether in groups or in individual isolated settings.

The key measures announced by the Minister include:

- The introduction of a formalised system of special teaching support for all children attending schools on a fully integrated basis who have been assessed as having special educational needs.

- The introduction of a formalised system of child care support for all children with special needs, including those in special schools, special classes and ordinary schools, who have been assessed as requiring such support.

- Formal recognition of the distinct educational needs of all children with Autism whose condition so requires the introduction of a special student teacher ratio of 6:1 for such children, together with an automatic entitlement to child care support.

The Minister described today's announcement as a major breakthrough in the development of special education services. The most important element is, he said, that children with special needs attending ordinary schools will, for the first time ever have

automatic access to the special teaching support and, if necessary, the child care support they require to enable them to reach their potential within the education system.

While pointing out that he had prioritised special education in his allocation of teaching posts this year, the Minister said "For too long, the needs of many children with disabilities, particularly those in smaller groups or in isolated settings, have been supported in a reactive and entirely unsatisfactory manner. For too long parents have had to campaign tirelessly to give their children the chance to participate in and benefit from education."

"The measures which I am announcing today will address these past inadequacies by ensuring that each child, whether as part of a group or on an individual basis, will have an automatic entitlement to the level of teaching and child care support which their condition requires. Referring to children with autism, the Minister pointed to a major advance with his Department's formal recognition of the distinct educational needs of many of these children.

The decision means that special and distinct educational facilities will be made available to cater specifically for these children. The facilities in question will operate at a student teacher ratio of 6:1 and each group of six children will also have the support of a child care assistant.

It is expected that the measures announced by the Minister will cost almost £4 million in 1999.

In addition to these initiatives, the Minister announced that his Department has begun consultations on a range of other special needs issues.

ENDS

ANNEX 6

Circular 07/02: Applications for Full-time or Part-time Special Needs Assistant Support to Address the Special Care Needs of Children with Disabilities.

Circular SP ED 07/02

**CIRCULAR TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND
PRINCIPAL TEACHERS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS**

Applications for Full-time or Part-time Special Needs Assistant Support to Address the Special Care Needs of Children with Disabilities.

1. Introduction

Special Needs Assistants (SNA) are recruited specifically to assist in the **care** of students with disabilities in an educational context. They may be appointed to a special school or a mainstream national school to assist school authorities in making suitable provision for a student or students with special **care** needs arising from a disability. The allocation of special needs assistant support may be made on a full- or part-time basis (e.g. an hour or more per day), and may be shared by named students for whom such support has been allocated.

2. Duties of Special Needs Assistants

The duties of Special Needs Assistants are listed in Appendix I. Schools should note that the duties of Special Needs Assistants sanctioned by this Department are of a *nonteaching nature*. Individual students with a general learning disability would not typically require the services of a Special Needs Assistant. Schools with students who have special care needs arising from a disability and who also require additional academic input should consider applying for additional resource teaching provision.

3. Applications for a Special Needs Assistant should be considered where, for example, a student has a **significant** medical need for such assistance, a **significant** impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other students. Students' needs could range from needing an assistant for a short period each week, for example to help feed or change the student(s) or bring them to the toilet, to requiring a full-time assistant.

4. How do schools apply for a Special Needs Assistant post?

School authorities may apply for the services of a special needs assistant to assist in catering for a student or students with special **care** needs arising from a disability. Such an
application must be based on:

(a) a recommendation from the professional who assessed the child and who

diagnosed the child's special **care** needs;

(b) evidence that describes the child's special **care** need, the reasons why the support of a special needs assistant is necessary and the benefits (s)he would derive from such **care** support in a school setting;

(c) the signed certification of the professional who diagnosed the child's special **care** need.

The existence of a disability or syndrome does not necessarily mean that the student has a special **care** need. It must be remembered when considering making an application for the support of a special needs assistant that a balance must be struck between allocating necessary care support and the right of the child to acquire personal independence skills. For this reason, the professional who assessed the child is in the best position to advise on the amount of support (full-time or a specific number of part-time hours).

5. In some cases, schools now seeking Special Needs Assistant Support may already be in receipt of some part-time allocations of such support. In these situations, the Department will sanction a full-time post to replace the part-time hour allocations, where the total hours involved including those now being sought, warrant a full-time post.

6. Completed application forms SER 1 and SER 2 (copies enclosed) should be forwarded directly to:
Special Education Section 1,
Department of Education and Science,
Cornamaddy,
Athlone.

7. Enquiries relating to this Circular should be made to:

Special Education Section 1,
Telephone: 0902 - 74621 or (01) 8734700
Fax: 0902 - 76939
L. Kilroy,
Principal Officer February, 2002.

APPENDIX 1

Role of the Special Needs Assistant

Their duties are assigned by the Principal Teacher in accordance with Circular 10/76: "Duties and responsibilities of Principal Teachers" and sanctioned by the Board of Management. Their work should be supervised either by the Principal or by a class teacher. Those duties involve tasks of a *non-teaching nature* such as:

1. Preparation and tidying up of classroom(s) in which the student(s) with special needs is/are being taught.

2. Assisting children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort on school buses may be required.

3. Special assistance as necessary for students with particular difficulties e.g. helping physically disabled students with typing or writing.

4. Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene.

5. Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks and similar activities.

6. Assisting the teachers in the supervision of students with special needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.

7. Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom.

8. General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with *duties of a non-teaching nature. (Special Needs Assistants may not act either as substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class).*

9. Where a Special Needs Assistant has been appointed to assist a school in catering for a specific student, duties should be modified to support the particular needs of the student concerned.

Annex 7

Circular 15/05: Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants (Primary Schools)

Circular Letter   SNA 15/05

To: The Management Authorities of Primary Schools

Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants

I am directed by the Minister for Education and Science to inform you that following discussions at national level, revised arrangements have now been agreed regarding the terms and conditions of Special Needs Assistants () at primary level.

In that regard please find attached a revised contract of employment which should be offered to every Special Needs Assistant employed by your school and whose post is funded by the Department of Education and Science. Further copies of the contract can be downloaded from this Department's Website at www.education.ie under Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants. The original signed contract should be retained in the school by the managerial authority, and a copy given to the Special Needs Assistant.

New Appointments

The revised contract has regard to the fact that all newly approved Special Needs Assistant posts are related to the special needs of one or more students in respect of whom the posts are sanctioned, and may be utilised by the school having regard to the needs of those students and the duties of the post. **The practice of issuing child specific contracts should cease with immediate effect.**

Existing Staff

Special Needs Assistants already in service on child specific contracts and whose employment is continuing for the next school year should be offered the option of transferring to the revised contract or remaining on their existing contract. **The option of transferring to the revised contract is a <u>once-off</u>**

option and **must** be exercised on or before 30th September 2005. Those Special Needs Assistants who exercise the option of transferring to the revised contract will have their approved service as a Special Needs Assistant in the school reckoned for seniority purposes. Those Special Needs Assistants who do not exercise the option on or before 30th September 2005 will remain on their child specific contract and their future employment will continue to be dependent on the assessed needs of the child specified in the contract.

Review of allocation

The allocation of special needs assistant posts to your school will be reviewed on an annual basis. The employment of Special Needs Assistants may be reduced from full-time to part-time or terminated by way of redundancy where the allocation is reduced. The selection criteria for redundancy will be on a last-in first out (LIFO) basis in accordance with the agreement reached with the representatives of the grade concerned subject to the contractual arrangements already in place in the school. This means that, in the case of redundancy, unless the most junior SNA in the school has a written child specific contract that entitles her/him to remain in the school, her/his contract should be terminated on the basis that she/he is the most junior SNA in the school in terms of length of service.

Management authorities are requested to ensure that this circular letter is brought to the attention of all Special Needs Assistants including those on maternity leave, sick leave, etc.

P. Maloney,
Principal Officer.
August 2005.

Contract of Employment Form

CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS (Primary)

1. **Parties**

   1.1. This Contract of Employment is made the   day of   200 between the following parties:

       1.1.1.   Employer: Board of Management _____ (hereinafter called "the Board").

                Address:

       1.1.2.   Employee: _____

2. **Conditions of Service**

   2.1. The post is full time/part time and, subject to the clauses stated hereunder, your employment will commence on (date) _____ and will continue into the future unless and until terminated as hereinafter provided.

   2.2. You will be on probation for six months with effect from _____. At the end of the said period your appointment may be confirmed, probation may be extended for a further period not exceeding twelve months or your employment may be terminated as the Board of Management may determine. In the event that your performance is unsatisfactory during the probationary or extended probationary period, your employment may be terminated by one weeks notice.

   2.3. The salary scale for the post shall be in conformity with the salary scale applicable to as determined by the Department of Education and Science from time to time. Increments will be awarded after each year of satisfactory service in an approved post as a Special Needs Assistant in a recognised school.

   2.4. Salary will be paid fortnightly in arrears.

   2.5. You will be required to work normal classroom hours including class break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and dispersal of children etc. The hours of work will normally be from [   ] to [   ] daily during term time. Normal work break entitlements will apply in accordance with the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. The times at which these breaks are taken will be at the discretion of the Principal.

   2.6. The school premises will normally be the place of employment. However, there may be occasions when children with special needs are required to

attend at another venue outside the school, and in such cases, you may be required to accompany them to and from such venue.

2.7. Confidentiality. You are expected to maintain and treat all matters relating to school business and your work in the school as an SNA, as strictly confidential. Any breach of this requirement will be treated as a serious matter of misconduct.

2.8. The nature of the work to be performed by you at the direction of the Principal or other senior person acting on behalf of the Employer is as set out in Appendix 1 attached hereto.

2.9. The sick leave provisions pertaining to the post are as set out in Appendix 2 attached hereto.

2.10. The maternity leave arrangements pertaining to the post are as set out in Appendix 3 attached hereto.

You are required to comply with the terms of Circulars in relation to Special Needs Assistants which are issued by the Department of Education and Science from time to time.

2.11. Pension arrangements shall be in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Department of Education and Science in relation to pensions for Special Needs Assistants as determined from time to time. The terms of the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 shall apply in relation to retirement age.

2.12. Holiday periods will normally be those which apply to the schools to which the Special Needs Assistants have been assigned. In addition you are required to be available for a couple of days at the start and finish of each school term. These days (12 in total) may be combined at the discretion of school management to be utilised flexibly throughout the year for work appropriate to the grade including training. These days will not exceed five consecutive days and will immediately follow or precede school terms or occur within a couple of days thereof.

3. **Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures**

3.1. Grievance Procedure

You shall be entitled to invoke grievance procedures as are collectively agreed from time to time.

Disciplinary Procedure

Your employer shall have the power to suspend, to impose disciplinary sanctions and terminate your appointment in accordance with such disciplinary/dismissal procedures as are collectively agreed from time to time

You may be dismissed from _____ school for:

3.1.1.1.   Incompetence or poor performance;

3.1.1.2.   Misconduct (serious or persistent);

3.1.1.3.   Incapacity;

3.1.1.4.   Failure to carry out reasonable instructions;

3.1.1.5.   Any breach of trust; and

3.1.1.6.   Some other substantial reason.

4. Notice of Termination

4.1.   Except in circumstances justifying immediate termination of your employment by the Board you will receive the appropriate period of notice set out in the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts 1973-1991 as appropriate. Your employment may be terminated by way of redundancy. In such circumstances the terms of any collective agreement regarding redundancy will apply.

4.2.   Your employment may be terminated without notice for serious misconduct.

4.3.   When terminating your employment you are required to give four weeks notice.

4.4.   Nothing in this agreement shall prevent the giving of a lesser period of notice by either party where it is mutually agreed.

4.5.   At the discretion of the Board salary may be paid in lieu of notice.

5. Agreement

5.1.   I accept and agree to all of the above terms and conditions of my employment:

Signed: _____

           Special Needs Assistant

Dated: _____

Signed: _____

           Chairperson, Board of Management

Dated: _____

APPENDIX 1

Special Needs Assistants are recruited specifically to assist schools in providing the necessary non–teaching services to students with assessed educational needs. Their duties are assigned by the Principal acting on behalf of the Board of Management. Their work is supervised either by the Principal or another teacher as determined by the Principal. Those duties involve tasks of a non-teaching nature such as:

1.   Preparation and tidying up of classrooms.

2.   Assisting school children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort during school hours on school buses may be required.

3.   Special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping special needs students with typing or writing or computers or other use of equipment.

4.   Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene and being mindful of health and safety needs of the student.

5.   Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities.

6.   Assisting the teachers in the supervision of students during assembly, recreation and dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.

7.   Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom for one reason or another.

8.   General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature. (Special Needs Assistants may not act as either substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class or group of children).

9.   Participation with school development planning, where appropriate, and co-operation with any such changes with policies and practices arising from the school development process.

10.   Engagement with parents of special needs students in both formal and informal structures as required and directed by school management.

11.   Other duties appropriate to the grade as may be determined by the needs of the students and the school from time to time. Special Needs Assistants may be re-assigned to other work appropriate to the grade when special needs students are absent or when particular urgent work demands arise.

APPENDIX 2 - SICK LEAVE PROVISIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

1.   No sick pay will be allowed during the first three months' service. Subsequently full pay may be allowed during sick absence up to the following limits:

   a)   After three months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to six weeks in any period of twelve months' service;

b) after six months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to nine weeks in any period of twelve months' service;

c) after twelve months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to thirteen weeks in any period of twelve months' service.

2. Medical certificates must be furnished to the Board of Management in all cases of continuous absence by the third day of absence at the latest. As a general rule, sick leave will not be allowed for a longer period than one week on any one certificate. Where sick absence extends from Friday to Monday inclusive, a medical certificate must be furnished.

3. Special Needs Assistants on probation are reminded that when they are being considered for confirmation of appointment, full account will be taken of their health and of the extent and pattern of their sick absence. If any of these aspects is unsatisfactory, the Special Needs Assistant concerned cannot be accepted as suitable.

4. The grant of sick leave will be subject to the following conditions in particular:
   a) that the absence is properly certified:
   b) that there is no evidence of permanent disability for service.

5. Once sick pay has ceased owing to the expiration of the maximum limit, it cannot be resumed during the same absence.

6. Unpaid sick leave does not count as service qualifying for further paid sick leave.

7. **Uncertified Sick Leave:** Sick leave for single or two-day absences, not exceeding seven days in total in any period of twelve months, may be granted without medical certificate. However, should the number of days' absence without medical certificate in any period of twelve months, reckoning backwards from the date of the latest absence, exceed seven in the aggregate, any subsequent absence must be certified until the balance is restored.

Payment during sick leave will be **full salary provided that the following procedure is adhered to:**
If a Special Needs Assistant is absent on sick leave for more than three consecutive days, s/he must immediately complete a form for Disability Benefit (available from their general practitioner (GP)). This should be forwarded to SNA Payroll Section, Department of Education & Science, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, who then forward it to the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). **The claim must be submitted by SNA Payroll Section to reach the DSFA within seven days of the start of the illness hence there is an urgency to submit the claim form to ensure continued payment of full salary.**

APPENDIX 3

Circular SNA 13/05 - Maternity/Adoptive and Paternity Leave for Special Needs Assistants Refers - (File Format Word 163KB) .

Circular SNA 13/05 may be accessed on the Department of Education and Science website at www.education.ie under Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants.

Annex 8

Circular 12/05: Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants (Second-Level Schools)

Circular Letter SNA 12/05

**To: The Management Authorities of Secondary/Community
and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officer of each
Vocational Education Committee.**

**Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants employed in Second
Level Schools.**

I am directed by the Minister for Education and Science to inform you that
following discussions at national level, revised arrangements have now been
agreed regarding the terms and conditions of Special Needs Assistants at post-
primary level.

In that regard please find attached a revised contract of employment which
should be offered to, and signed by every Special Needs Assistant employed
by your Vocational Education Committee/ school and whose post is funded by
the Department of Education and Science. The revised leave arrangements are
effective from the date of this Circular Letter. Further copies of the contract
can be downloaded   from this Department's Website at www.education.ie
under Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants. The original signed
contract should be retained in the school by the managerial authority, and a
copy given to the Special Needs Assistant.

It should be noted that approved special needs assistant posts are related to the
special needs of one or more students in respect of whom the posts are
sanctioned, and may be utilised by the school having regard to the needs of
those students and the duties of the post. The allocation of special needs
assistant posts to your school will be reviewed on an annual basis. The
employment of Special Needs Assistants may be terminated by way of
redundancy where the allocation is reduced. The selection criteria for
redundancy will be on a last-in first out (LIFO) basis in accordance with the
agreement reached with the representatives of the grade concerned. Further
information on this matter will issue shortly.

P. Maloney,
Principal Officer.

July 2005.

CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS (Post Primary)

6. **Parties**

   6.1.   This Contract of Employment is made the   day of   200
           between the following parties:

       6.1.1.   Employer: Board of Management _____
                 (hereinafter   called   "the   Board").

                 Address:

       6.1.2.   Employee: _____

7. **Conditions of Service**

   7.1.   The post is full time/part time and, subject to the clauses as stated
           hereunder, your employment will commence on (date) and will continue
           into the future unless and until terminated as hereinafter provided.

   7.2.   You will be on probation for six months with effect from _____.
           At the end of the said period your appointment may be confirmed,
           probation may be   extended for a further period not exceeding twelve
           months or your employment may be terminated as the Board of
           Management may determine.   In the event that your performance is
           unsatisfactory during the probationary or extended probationary period,
           your employment may be terminated by one weeks notice.

   7.3.   The salary scale for the post shall be in conformity with the salary scale
           applicable to as determined by the Department of Education and Science
           from time to time.   Increments will be awarded after each year of
           satisfactory service in an approved post as a Special Needs Assistant in a
           recognised school.

   7.4.   Salary will be paid fortnightly in arrears

   7.5.   You will be required to work normal classroom hours including class
           break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to
           help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and
           dispersal of children etc. The hours of work will normally be from [   ]
           to [   ] daily during term time. Normal work break entitlements will
           apply in accordance with the provisions of the Organisation of Working
           Time Act 1997.   The times at which these breaks are taken will be at the
           discretion of the Principal.

   7.6.   The school premises will normally be the place of employment. However
           there may be occasions when children with special needs are required to

attend at another venue outside the school, and in such cases, you may be required to accompany them to and from such venue.

7.7. Confidentiality. You are expected to maintain and treat all matters relating to school business and your work in the school as an SNA, as strictly confidential. Any breach of this requirement will be treated as a serious matter of misconduct.

7.8. The nature of the work to be performed by you at the direction of the Principal or other senior person acting on behalf of the Employer is as set out in Appendix 1 attached hereto.

7.9. The sick leave provisions pertaining to the post are as set out in Appendix 2 attached hereto.

7.10. The maternity leave arrangements pertaining to the post are as set out in Appendix 3 attached hereto.

You are required to comply with the terms of Circulars in relation to special needs assistants which are issued by the Department of Education and Science from time to time.

7.11. Pension arrangements shall be in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Department of Education and Science in relation to pensions for special needs assistants as determined from time to time. The terms of the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 shall apply in relation to retirement age.

7.12. Holiday periods will normally be those which apply to the schools to which the Special Needs Assistants have been assigned. In addition you are required to be available for a couple of days at the start and finish of each school term. These days (12 in total) may be combined at the discretion of school management to be utilised flexibly throughout the year for work appropriate to the grade including training. These days will not exceed five consecutive days and will immediately follow or precede school terms or occur within a couple of days thereof.

2.13 You will also be required to work the month of June on examinations or other work appropriate to the grade including training.

8. Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures

8.1. Grievance Procedure

You shall be entitled to invoke grievance procedures as are collectively agreed from time to time.

Disciplinary Procedure

Your employer shall have the power to suspend, to impose disciplinary sanctions and terminate your appointment in accordance with such disciplinary/dismissal procedures as are collectively agreed from time to time

You may be dismissed from _____ school for:

8.1.1.1.   Incompetence or poor performance;

8.1.1.2.   Misconduct (serious or persistent);

8.1.1.3.   Incapacity;

8.1.1.4.   Failure to carry out reasonable instructions;

8.1.1.5.   Any breach of trust; and

8.1.1.6.   Some other substantial reason.

9. Notice of Termination

9.1.   Except in circumstances justifying immediate termination of your employment by the Board you will receive the appropriate period of notice set out in the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts 1973-1991 as appropriate. Your employment may be terminated by way of redundancy. In such circumstances the terms of any collective agreement regarding redundancy will apply.

9.2.   Your employment may be terminated without notice for serious misconduct.

9.3.   When terminating your employment you are required to give four weeks notice.

9.4.   Nothing in this agreement shall prevent the giving of a lesser period of notice by either party where it is mutually agreed.

9.5.   At the discretion of the Board salary may be paid in lieu of notice.

10. Agreement

10.1.   I accept and agree to all of the above terms and conditions of my employment:

Signed: _____
            Special Needs Assistant

Dated: _____

Signed: _____
            Chairperson, Board of Management

Dated: _____

APPENDIX 1 – DUTIES OF SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

Special Needs Assistants are recruited specifically to assist schools in providing the necessary non–teaching services to students with assessed educational needs. Their duties are assigned by the Principal acting on behalf of the Board of Management. Their work is supervised either by the Principal or another teacher as determined by the Principal. Those duties involve tasks of a non-teaching nature such as:

12.   Preparation and tidying up of classrooms

13.   Assisting school children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort during school hours on school buses may be required.

14.   Special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping special needs students with typing or writing or computers or other use of equipment.

15.   Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene and being mindful of health and safety needs of the student.

16.   Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities.

17.   Assisting the teachers in the supervision of students during assembly, recreation and dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.

18.   Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom for one reason or another.

19.   General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature. (Special needs assistants may not act as either substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class or group of children).

20.   Participation with school development planning, where appropriate, and co-operation with any such changes with policies and practices arising from the school development process.

21.   Engagement with parents of special needs students in both formal and informal structures as required and directed by school management.

22.   Other duties appropriate to the grade as may be determined by the needs of the students and the school from time to time. Special Needs Assistants may be re-assigned to other work appropriate to the grade when special needs students are absent or when particular urgent work demands arise.

APPENDIX 2 -SICK LEAVE PROVISIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

8. No sick pay will be allowed during the first three months' service. Subsequently full pay may be allowed during sick absence up to the following limits:

    a) After three months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to six weeks in any period of twelve months' service;
    b) after six months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to nine weeks in any period of twelve months' service;
    c) after twelve months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to thirteen weeks in any period of twelve months' service.

9. Medical certificates must be furnished to the Board of Management in all cases of continuous absence by the third day of absence at the latest. As a general rule, sick leave will not be allowed for a longer period than one week on any one certificate.   Where sick absence extends from Friday to Monday inclusive, a medical certificate must be furnished.

10. Special Needs Assistants on probation are reminded that when they are being considered for confirmation of appointment, full account will be taken of their health and of the extent and pattern of their sick absence. If any of these aspects is unsatisfactory, the Special Needs Assistant concerned cannot be accepted as suitable.

11. The grant of sick leave will be subject to the following conditions in particular:
    a) that the absence is properly certified:
    b) that there is no evidence of permanent disability for service.

12. Once sick pay has ceased owing to the expiration of the maximum limit, it cannot be resumed during the same absence.

13. Unpaid sick leave does not count as service qualifying for further paid sick leave.

14. **Uncertified Sick Leave:**   Sick leave for single or two-day absences, not exceeding seven days in total in any period of twelve months, may be granted without medical certificate.   However, should the number of days' absence without medical certificate in any period of twelve months, reckoning backwards from the date of the latest absence, exceed seven in the aggregate, any subsequent absence must be certified until the balance is restored.

     Payment during sick leave will be **full salary provided that the following procedure is adhered to:**
     If a Special Needs Assistant is absent on sick leave for more than three consecutive days, s/he must immediately complete a form for Disability Benefit (available from their general practitioner (GP)). This should be forwarded to SNA Payroll Section, Department of Education & Science, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, who then forward it to the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). **The claim must be submitted by SNA Payroll Section to reach the**

DSFA within seven days of the start of the illness hence there is an urgency to submit the claim form to ensure continued payment of full salary.

APPENDIX 3

[Circular SNA 13/05 - Maternity/Adoptive and Paternity Leave for Special Needs Assistants Refers - (File Format Word 163KB)](#)

Annex 9

The Allocation and Deployment of Support Staff to Schools in Ten European Countries

1. Who Caters for the Care Needs of Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools?	
Belgium	*Health personnel and therapists.*
Cyprus	*School assistants for students with special needs.*
Denmark	*The Educational Psychological Service Centres arrange for the care needs of students with special educational needs to be met in schools. These centres are situated in every municipality.*
England	*A teacher appointed as a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has particular responsibility for the co-ordination of provision for students with special educational needs. The SENCO reports to the head teacher and the school governing body. The SENCO also will normally be responsible for the management and the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs) or learning support assistants (LSAs). Some assistants specialising in special educational needs may also be known by titles other than TA/LSA, as these matters are decided locally.*
Italy	*Support teachers and support staff.*
Malta	*Learning support assistants.*
Netherlands	*In general the school is responsible for the care and the education of all students including those students with special educational needs. If students are assessed as having special educational needs, mainstream schools can get external support. Depending on the support required, a variety of personnel that includes the teachers themselves, teacher assistants, care assistants, medical assistants, speech therapists, physiotherapists may be assigned to meet the students' needs. In particular cases, it is possible for the parents of a student with special educational needs to request a person-bound budget funded by the VWS, which is another*

	department separate from the Ministry of Education e.g. a medical assistant or district nurse to provide for a catheter. A teacher may not provide such support in the Netherlands.
Slovenia	*Medical nurses, nurses who are not medical nurses, assistants for students with severe special general learning disabilities, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, medical doctors, specialists for sensory impairments, psychiatrists, the provision of technical support for the use of technical aids and support for the use of information and communication technology. In some cases a child has a personal assistant, but this is usually a student with very severe general learning disabilities. This is specific and under the control of the Ministry. In special programmes for students with severe general learning disabilities/severe motor disabilities, there are six students and one assistant.*
Sweden	*There are regular health-checks in childcare facilities and schools. Health service personnel and psychologists are available for staff, all students and parents to consult with. Co-operation with services other than the educational system, such as healthcare and training has to be approved of by, and involve the parents of the child concerned. A student with special educational needs can get support from a specialist teacher, a speech therapist, an assisting teacher (common concerning children with severe visual impairment) or a personal assistant. The student can get assistive technology such as a tape recorder, computer with assisting programmes (e. g. speech synthesizer, talking book, Braille display, tactile graphics), closed-circuit television (CCTV), magnification or low vision devices. Adapted teaching materials are also available*
Switzerland	*The social educators or the special education teachers cater for the care needs of students. The social educators are integrated in the social system whereas the special education teachers are integrated in the school system.*

2. **What is the Title and Role of Staff who Provide for the Care Needs of Students with Special**

Educational Needs?	
Belgium	*Health personnel and therapists.*
Cyprus	*Support staff is referred to as 'school assistants for students with special needs'. Their role is to provide for the care needs of students with special educational needs in relation to mobility, toileting, feeding, personal care, safety during lessons and break and to satisfy their special needs as they relate to schooling. The do not have a teaching role and do not have such qualifications. role is mainly to take care of the children in need, during their time at school. They are not teaching assistants, since they don't have such qualifications. They are mainly care assistants (toilet, eating, safety during lessons and breaks, etc).*
Denmark	*This staff is referred to as 'practical assistant' or 'personal assistant' and the role of staff is to provide for the care needs of students with special educational needs.*
England	*Learning support assistants are one of a group of assistants that come within the broader generic classification of teaching assistant. Some schools may also have higher level teacher assistants who have completed additional training, and who are expected to promote and support the inclusion of all students, including students with special educational needs, in learning activities.*
Italy	*Support teachers aid students in classrooms during lessons and support students with individual lessons also. Support staff aids students during other school activities such as recess periods, in refectories, bathroom and accessing and exiting the school.*
Malta	*Learning support assistants are appointed to cater for the education and personal needs of students with special educational needs.*
Netherlands	*The teacher is responsible for students' education. Different professionals may be assigned to support the teacher and the broad development of the child. Some schools work with care*

	assistants, especially in schools with students with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.
Slovenia	*Staff members provide assistance and care for the student and the family and work as members of the team involved in the evaluation of the student's programme.*
Sweden	*At the national level The National Board of Health and Welfare are responsible. At the local level the municipalities are responsible. The municipalities are responsible for providing and operating health services. Municipal childcare, pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school-board. Several of these activities are often integrated with the staff organising joint work together. This facilitates a complete view of each student. It is common practice to provide for the students' needs in close co-operation with their parents.*
Switzerland	*There are different levels of training provided for social educators, who accordingly have different titles and different roles. Training at university level provides for 'social educators' and 'caretakers of people with special educational needs'. This staff works in asylums, workshops, daycare centers and centers where people live throughout the year. The social educators provide assistance to children, young people and adults who are in a difficult situation. The social educators also help people manage and overcome their daily living matters and leisure. The social educators help people to satisfy their ordinary needs e.g. food, basic needs, travelling and they encourage people to develop their social contacts and to improve or preserve their autonomy. An apprenticeship level of training provides a worker with the title of 'worker in the field of social education'. Such staff accompanies children, the elderly or people who have impairments related to physical and mental matters and who require particular assistance in order to accomplish daily activities. In any given structure, the workers in the field of social education play a subordinate role, whereas the social educator can manage a team, be responsible for one or more people with impairments or the management of a group of disabled people. Teachers in special education work with children, young people or adults who have special educational needs and who need special care in order to ab;e to acquire their education. Teachers in special education promote the development of*

	students in the scholar field during their study time.

3. How are the Care Needs of Students with Special Educational Needs Identified and by Whom, e.g. psychological assessments and reports or occupational therapy assessments and reports?	
Belgium	*Health personnel and therapists.*
Cyprus	*District committees are in charge of the identification and assessment of students with special educational needs. They decide whether a student is considered to have special educational needs and what his/her needs are. The committee will assign a multi-disciplinary group of experts to assess the student in order to identify his/her needs and the committee bases its decision on the suggestions of this team.*
Denmark	*Teachers, psychologists and parents identify the care needs of students.*
England	*In early years, health visitors or general practitioners may, as part of their routine, identify children's care needs. In school, the classroom teacher or special educational needs co-*

	ordinator (SENCO) may through observation and monitoring identify students who require additional assistance. This could involve differentiated teaching, some additional adult assistance from a teaching assistant (TA) /learning support assistant (LSA), perhaps in a small group or using particular equipment, such as a computer. Parents may also raise concerns with the class teacher or SENCO. Schools are expected to take account of the guidance contained in the statutory Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and adopt a graduated approach involving School Action and School Action Plus. If a student continues to experience difficulty, the parents and/or the school can request the local authority (LA) to carry out a formal statutory assessment. This involves the LA seeking advice from a number of professionals, including the student's school/teachers, an Educational Psychologist, health professionals (including doctors and therapists), social services and other relevant individuals whose advice is considered appropriate. If following assessment, the LA decides that the student's needs are such as to require a formal Statement of Special Educational Needs, then a statement details the student's needs and the kind and level of support the student should receive. This support could include money, staff time (such as the support of a dedicated TA/LSA), specialist support such as a speech and language therapy or access to specialist equipment.
Italy	*A student's care needs are identified by a medical team in the local health board at a request signed by the parents and confirmed by the school principal. Subsequently the student's requirements are established by a didactical team composed as required by law of the school principal, parents , the student, the teacher team of the class attended by the student and relevant specific specialists in accordance with the diagnosis. This group decides how many hours of support the student needs and in what way the support should be allocated e.g. an individual plan of learning and assessment and an agenda of co-operation with specialists at the nearer medical centre.*
Malta	*The physiotherapist, speech therapist, occupational therapist or any professional working with the students.*
Netherlands	*The needs of the students are determined by an independent commission of indication. This*

	commission consists of the director of the board, a medical doctor, a social worker and an orthopedagogue. Generally the assessment consists of examining somatic/medical aspects, cognitive development, specific developmental aspects (language development, communication, concentration, motivation, etc.), social-emotional development (behaviour, emotional stability, independence, etc.), as well as profiling the family situation, neighbourhood and/or cultural background. At a school level, a multi-disciplinary team can identify specific care needs and can give suggestions for further actions. Again, it depends on the specific needs of the student and the educational setting.
Slovenia	*Every student has an individual programme with the co-operation of parents. The programme prescribes the support, which the student must have e.g. physiotherapy/occupational therapy. Prior to including the student in the school, the multi-disciplinary team provides advice with regard to the different supports required.*
Sweden	*The care needs are identified by regular health-checks. Involved in the health-checks are e. g. the school-doctor, the school-nurse, the psychologist and/or the curator.*
Switzerland	*Until the beginning of this year, students were assessed by according to criteria established by the Swiss national invalidity insurance. If one student met the criteria established by the insurance, the insurance and the canton where the student lives would each pay for 50% of the costs related to the care. Since January 1st 2008, the national invalidity insurance no longer pays for the costs related to special education teaching. An agreement has been found between the twenty-six cantons and a standardised assessment procedure has been developed to in order to determine students' individual special educational needs. This procedure provides the possibility of taking into account the environment in which the student is in and is based on the ICD-10. Professionals conducting these assessments according to this procedure are chosen by the cantons and may include physicians, speech and language therapists, psychologists, psychomotorists and early childhood specialists.*

4. How are Care Resources Allocated ?	
Belgium	*A number of hours are allocated through a subsidy based on the number of students with special educational needs.*
Cyprus	*The Ministry of Education and Culture finances the local authorities. They are employed on a ten month basis and are re-employed the next school year, only and if all partners (teachers, parents, children) are satisfied with their work.*
Denmark	*The care resources are allocated by the municipality.*
England	*The allocation of additional resources is quantified in the student's Statement of Special Educational Needs.*
Italy	*According to the diagnosis, the didactical team identifies the quantity of hours of support within the classroom, the hours of individual learning and activity and the specialist support required.*
Malta	*The allocation of resources is dependant on the needs of individual students.*
Netherlands	*It depends on the specific needs of the student. Some resources are paid for by the schools, some by care organisations, some by municipalities and some by parents .*
Slovenia	*In special and regular schools there is usually a medical nurse and a nurse who is not a medical nurse is allocated to classes where there are students with special educational needs. In specialised institutions there are assistants to assist with mobility needs for students with more severe special educational needs.*
Sweden	*The municipalities have the major financial responsibility. A national tax transfer system, which is used to enable the municipalities to fulfil their responsibilities often means additional financial*

	support is allocated to the municipalities.
Switzerland	*According to the standardised assessment procedure, each canton will determine the resources allocated and the money given, depending on the offer, which exists in that particular canton. If the allocated resources are more or less the same in every canton, the care given to a student in his or her canton can vary according to the money allocated by the canton in which the care is given, the possibilities of the care taking place and geographic isolation or the available nearby specialised services. If the care required is not directly related to teaching, the number of social educators allocated is determined according to the number of students with special educational needs. Most of the time, the teams are composed of trained personnel and personnel who are training for the job.*

5. Are Care Resources Ever Withdrawn and if So, on What Basis?
Belgium — *If there is no longer a student who requires care the subsidy allocated to employ staff is withdrawn.*
Cyprus — *Usually not. Students who are provided with assistants tend to get very dependent on them and the support is difficult to remove.*
Denmark — *Every decision concerning educational or practical assistance to the student has to be revised once a year.*
England — *A student could have a Statement of Special Educational Need for the whole of their school life, or for just part of it. Through a series of annual reviews, the Local Authority (LA) may decide that a student can continue to make progress with the extra assistance that the school itself can provide, and the LA then ceases to maintain the Statement, and in effect withdraws any additional resources it has provided.*
Italy — *Italian law prescribes the inclusion of students with special educational needs in common and regular classes without any distinction and therefore schools have resources available to them for*

	the requisite supports.
Malta	*The care resources can be withdrawn if there is no longer need for this support according to a professional report or at the request of the student's parents.*
Netherlands	*Care resources are often allocated on a temporary basis depending on the level of support required. Sometimes support is needed for a short time and sometimes for the duration of the student's life. Care resources are withdrawn if they are used for another purpose other than that for which they were initially allocated.*
Slovenia	*This system is part of the public health system of health insurance in the country and is provided as needed.*
Sweden	*It is up to the municipalities to decide how the resources are used, but they are responsible for providing health care at a certain level.*
Switzerland	*Generally the level of allocated resources remains stable. However there is disagreement between those who believe that trained personnel should continue to provide the special education curriculum for students with special educational needs and those who believe that untrained personnel should provide this curriculum, due to financial shortage.*

6. **How is the Care Resource Role Supervised and Managed?**	
Belgium	*By individual schools and inspection.*
Cyprus	*By the school principals.*

Denmark	*The school leader supervises and manages the care resource role.*
England	*The Local Authority (LA) is responsible for providing and managing any resources specified/quantified in a Statement of Special Educational Needs and must review that statement at least once a year, but can review it more often if it is deemed necessary. The LA must inform the parents of the identity of the named officer who will liaise with them over all arrangements relating to the statutory assessment and the making of a statement. If a parent believes that the LA or its school is failing to provide what is specified within the Statement, they can appeal to the independent Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal. If a student does not have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, but is receiving additional support from within the school's own resources, then the management of those resources is a matter for the school itself.*
Italy	*The care resource is supervised and managed by the school principal and the didactical team in the school.*
Malta	*By a teacher appointed as an inclusive education co-ordinator (INCO) and by school management.*
Netherlands	*Within special schools, it is the responsibility of the schools. Sometimes special support (care) is arranged by parents themselves. Then it should be supervised by the parents and/or the organisation which they are working for. If it is about resources, some materials are paid for by education, other materials are paid by for by care.*
Slovenia	*The care resources are supervised and managed in accordance with medical criteria.*
Sweden	*At the national level, The National Board of Health and Welfare is responsible. At the local level the municipalities are responsible. The municipalities are responsible for providing and operating health services. Municipal childcare, pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school-board. Several of these activities are often integrated with the staff organising joint work together. This facilitates a complete view of each student. It is common practice to provide for the students'*

	needs in close co-operation with their parents.
Switzerland	*The supervision and management of the care role depend on the type of institution involved and the kind of people being cared for. Institutions receive a certain amount of money, which is managed by the executive director according to the needs involved.*

7. **Apart from Teachers and Administration Staff, are Additional Staff Members, e.g. Paraprofessionals or Teaching Assistants, Appointed to Provide Support in Schools for Students with Special Educational Needs?**	
Belgium	*Health Personnel and Therapists.*
Cyprus	*School assistants for students with special needs.*
Denmark	*Not at present. However the Finnish model is being looked at as it is considered a possibility that this model contributes to Finland's performance in PISA studies.*

England	*Learning support assistants are one of a group of assistants that come within the broader generic classification of teaching assistant. Some schools may also have higher level teacher assistants who have completed additional training, and who are expected to promote and support the inclusion of all students in learning activities.*
Italy	*Support staff provide support for the care needs of students with special educational needs. Also voluntary associations paid by the Municipal Board provide support in relation to transport, books and food.*
Malta	*Learning support assistants*
Netherlands	*Yes, it depends on the support required.*
Slovenia	*In special and regular schools there is usually a medical nurse and a nurse who is not a medical nurse is allocated to classes where there are students with special educational needs. In specialised institutions there are assistants to assist with mobility needs for students with more severe special educational needs.*
Sweden	*Yes, for example personal assistants.*
Switzerland	*There are teaching assistants almost everywhere in Switzerland. Generally they have a training in pedagogy and want to become specia education teachers. In some cantons, people with no specific training are allocated to teachers to help them within integrated teaching.*

8. If yes to Q7, please describe the role of these staff members?	
Belgium	*These staff members provide for the care needs of the students through withdrawing them from classes as required.*
Cyprus	*School assistants for students with special needs provide for the care needs of students with special educational needs in relation to mobility, toileting, feeding, personal care and to satisfy their special*

	needs as they relate to schooling.
Denmark	*The role is presently being reconsidered.*
England	*The role and deployment of support staff in schools is a matter for the schools themselves.*
Italy	*Support staff aids students during other school activities such as recess periods, in refectories, bathroom, assembly and dispersal periods.*
Malta	*Supporting and collaborating with the class teacher and other colleagues. Under the guidance of the class teacher, assisting in the education of all students in the class, in particular students with special educational needs so that their individual curricular entitlement is ensured and their learning needs are catered for. Duties include involvement in developing and implementing students' Individual Educational Programmes, assisting in the preparation of educational materials, participating in individual students' transition programmes, promoting an inclusive community of learners, participating in hydrotherapy, multi-sensory and sensory integration sessions, supporting students during activities held outside the school premises, encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects, supporting students with personal care, hygiene, feeding and mobility needs and engaging in transport-related duties.*
Netherlands	*Care assistants are responsible for the student's care needs. Teacher assistants can assist in teaching and can cater for some care needs also. Specialised assistants can provide support for specific care activities e.g. medical support.*
Slovenia	*This is in legislation and part of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Education.*
Sweden	*The role is to support the student that he/she can be as independent as possible.*
Switzerland	*The role of teaching assistants is to assist the teacher. The role of personnel who assist the teacher is to ensure that students who are integrated can follow the curriculum. Those personnel who*

	provide non-specialised assistance should increase students' autonomy and improve their social participation.

9. **What System is in Place for Allocating these Staff Members?**	
Belgium	*Staff members are employed by the Minister and their timetables are determined by the number of students with special educational needs for whom support is required.*
Cyrpus	*There is an employment committee for each school, which hires this personnel through an interview procedure. The required qualifications are a high-school diploma. This committee comprises a member of the local educational authority, school staff, the liaison officer and the family of the student.*
Denmark	*Students access special education resources as required and up until now these resources have been allocated by the Educational Psychological Service Centres. However this is currently being reconsidered.*
England	*If following assessment, the Local Authority decides that the student's needs are such as to require a formal Statement of Special Educational Needs, then a statement details the student's needs and the kind and level of support the student should receive, which could include the support of a dedicated teaching assistant/learning support assistant.*
Italy	*This depends on the level of the school. At primary level, the municipal board pays for any additional support required, at post-primary level, the Provinces are responsible and at secondary-level, the Regional Office. The local Health Board also co-operates in supporting the health development of the student.*

Malta	*Students are required to have a Statement of Needs.*
Netherlands	*If a student meets the criteria of the student-bound budget, parents and students can choose a school, special or mainstream, and take part in decision making on the best way to use the funds to meet the student's needs. Peripatetic supervision provides for the provision of additional support to enable students with special educational needs attend mainstream schools. This supervision is provided by teachers from special schools. The kind of staff members allocated depends on the type of school and the needs of the students within the school. A special school for students with physical and/or intellectual disabilities has different professionals within the school then a school for students who are blind. The organisation of support in mainstream schools differs from special schools. Some staff members are working for a school, some are working for a hospital and a care assistant is allocated in a different way than a speech therapist or a physiotherapist.*
Slovenia	*The education and medical staff work together under the same director. The support system is under the Ministry of Health.*
Sweden	*The municipalities have the major financial responsibility. A national tax transfer system, which is used to enable the municipalities to fulfil their responsibilities, often means additional financial support is allocated to the municipalities.*
Switzerland	*The institution decides on the number of people who are hired, depending on the jobs, the budget and the needs. Personnel who assist teachers are allocated on the basis of a pedagogic report made by the inspector in charge of special education. In addition a medical report can be asked for. The personnel who help teachers do not have any specific training.*

Annex 10

Details of Circulars, Letters and Guidelines Related to Child Care and Special Needs Assistants issued by the Department of Education and Science from 1979

Circular No., Letter/Guideline	Date of Issue	Description of Circular/Letter/Guidelines
Department Letter	August 1979	Letter sent to special schools advising of the introduction of a Scheme for employment of Child-Care Assistants.
Circular 27/81	August 1981	Circular to Boards of Management of National and Secondary Schools advising of the restriction in public service numbers.
Department Letter	October 1981	Advice to Management of Special Schools directing attention to Circular 27/81 and stating that no Child-Care Assistants should be appointed without prior Departmental approval.
Department Letter	1999	Letter to schools advising that Special Needs Assistants () may be appointed to special school/mainstream schools. The role and duties of an SNA are identified and the SNA application procedure detailed.
Guideline Note for Inspectors	1999	Guideline Note for Inspectors when considering applications for special needs assistants.
Circular 07/02	February 2002	Circular to Boards of Managements and Principals of National Schools advising of the new application procedure for Special Needs Assistant posts.
Guideline Note for Inspectors	2002	Guideline Note for Inspectors when considering applications for special needs assistants.
Department Letter	October 2002	Revised procedures for applications for resource teaching and Special Needs Assistant support to National School Management.
Circular 03/03	2003 (updated August 2007)	Circular to the Board of Managements and Principals of National Schools outlining how to advertise a post, the interview and selection process and the vetting process and contract of employment.
Circular SP.ED. 24/03	September 2003	Circular to Board of Managements and Principal Teachers of National Schools advising of the arrangements for processing applications for teaching and Special Needs Assistant support for the 2003/2004.
Circular PEN 02/04	April 2004	Pension Scheme for Special Needs Assistants in Primary Schools.
Circular Letter Pay 15/04	June 2004	Circular to Boards of Management, Principals and all staff paid on Department of Education and Science payrolls relating to policy and procedures for dealing with overpayment of salary/allowances.
Circular PPT/07/04	August 2004	Circular to Vocational Educational Committees setting out rules governing brief absences of Special Needs Assistants related to compassionate leave, force majeure leave, jury service, marriage leave, unpaid leave etc.
Circular Pay	August 2004	Circular to Primary, Secondary, Community and

SNA 18/04		Comprehensive schools setting out rules governing brief absences of Special Needs Assistants related to compassionate leave, force majeure leave, jury service, marriage leave, unpaid leave etc.
Circular SP 13/04	September 2004	Circular to Management of National Schools relating to the allocation of teaching and Special Needs Assistant resources.
Circular Pay PD 31/04	December 2004	Circular to Management Authorities and Principal Teachers of Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools in relation to New Arrangements for Payment of Special Needs Assistants from 1 January 2005.
Circular SP ED 01/05	January 2005	Circular to Management Authorities of National Schools advising of the establishment of and the transfer of certain functions to the National Council for Special Education.
NCSE 01/05	January 2005	Circular to Management Authorities and staff of Primary Schools advising of the establishment of and the transfer of certain functions to the National Council for Special Education.
NCSE 02/05	January 2005	Circular to Management Authorities of Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees
Circular PEN 14/05	May 2005	Revision of spouses' and children's pension Scheme option to join the revised Scheme.
Circular SNA 12/05	July 2005	Circular letter to Boards of Management of Secondary/Community & Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Office of Vocational Schools re Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants employed in Second Level Schools.
Circular SNA 13/05	July 2005	Circular to Management Authorities, Principal Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in Primary and Post-Primary Schools in relation to Maternity/Adoptive and Paternity Leave for Special Needs Assistants.
Circular 15/05	August 2005	Circular to Management Authorities of Primary Schools in relation to a Contract of Employment for Special Needs Assistants
Circular Pay 0005/2006	January 2006	New Arrangements for Payment of Substitute (Casual and Non- Casual) Special Needs Assistants from 1 January 2006
Circular 0058/2006	May 2006	Circular to Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in Primary and Second-Level Schools in relation to terms of redundancy arrangements for Special Needs Assistants.
Circular 0059/2006	May 2006	Circular to the Boards of Management, Chief Executive Officers, Principal Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in Primary and Second Level Schools in relation to determining the seniority of special needs assistants.
Circular	June 2006	Circular to the Management of Authorities of all Primary

0094/2006		Schools, The Management Authorities of Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools, The Chief Executive Officer of each Vocational Education Committee in relation to new Arrangements for the Vetting of teaching and non teaching staff.
Circular 0111/2007	December 2007	Special Needs Assistants' Payment Arrangements for July and August 2008 and subsequent years.
Circular 0004/2008	January 2008	To Chief Executive Officers, Principal Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in Vocational Educational Committee Schools in relation to Special Needs Assistant Payment arrangements for July and August Annually.

Mainstream School Special Needs Assistant Profile Form

SCHOOL SNA PROFILE FORM (to be completed by Principal in cases of all new applications for SNA support)

County:	*School:*	*Principal:*	*Roll No:*

Table 1. Current SNA Staffing in the school

SNA post reference number *(to be assigned by SENO)*	Status of post (part-time hours, full-time - infant classes, full-time - full school day)	Number of hours per week	Name(s) of student(s) assisted	Class level/year 2008/09	Quantity of additional teaching hours availed of by student(s) (if relevant)	Name of SNA	**Current care needs** of student as per Cir. 07/02 *It is important to acknowledge diminishing care needs and encourage inclusion of student in mainstream class activities*
1							
2							

3						

Please make further copies if necessary

Table 2. Student for whom application has been made to the NCSE for SNA support

Student's name	Class 2007-2008	Quantity of additional teaching hours availed of by this student (if relevant)	How have this students **care needs** been addressed to date?	Is there capacity from within current SNA allocation to school to meet student's care needs?	Briefly outline care needs cited in professional report – only cite care needs consistent with the terms of Circular 07/02

Table 3. Students who meet the criteria for SNA support under Category 4/5(Emotional/Severe Emotional Difficulties)

1. In the situation where SNA support is being sought to address behavioural difficulties, has the advice of NEPS or other professional been sought? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

2. Has a behavioural management programme been implemented? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

3. Has the school Discipline Code been followed in this case? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

4. Have incidents been recorded that clarify nature, frequency and intensity of misbehaviour? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
   (If so please attach)

5. Have parents/guardians been notified on these occasions? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Appendix 6

<u>SCHOOL SNA PROFILE FORM</u> Special Schools/Special Class(es)
(to be completed by Principal for each individual special class)

County:	*School:*	*Principal:*	*Roll No:*

Table 1. Current SNA Staffing <u>*as per*</u> SERC recommendation   Class Teacher: _____

SNA post reference number *(to be assigned by SENO)*	Status of post (part-time hours, full-time - infant classes, full-time - full school day)	Name of SNA (s)	Names of students assisted/or name of class	Name/Disability Designation of class(es) (should correspond to class list names)	**Current care needs** of students as per Cir. 07/02 *(a general description of the range of care needs of students in class is sufficient. It is not necessary to describe individual student care needs.)*
1					
2					

Please make further copies for each special class

Table 2. Please complete for <u>each</u> student allocated SNA support to address <u>behavioural difficulties</u>

1. In the situation where SNA support is allocated to address behavioural difficulties, has the advice of Psychology or other professional been sought? ❏ **Yes** ❏ **No**

2. Has a behavioural management programme been implemented? ❏ **Yes** ❏ **No**

3. Has the school Discipline Code been followed in this case? ❏ **Yes** ❏ **No**

4. Have incidents been recorded that clarify nature, frequency and intensity of misbehavior? ❏ **Yes** ❏ **No**
   (If so please attach)

5. Have parents/guardians been notified on these occasions? ❏ **Yes** ❏ **No**

NAME OF STUDENT	Professional intervention from:	Outcome of intervention e.g. Professional report making recommendations, Individual Behaviour Plan etc.

Table 3. Current SNA allocation(s) in excess of SERC (i.e. individual/group) other than the students listed in Table 2

Student's name/class for which allocation was granted	Name of SNA	Date of sanction of additional support for this student/group of students	Rationale cited in professional report(s) justifying additional support over and above SERC ratios	Has there been a reduction in care needs of the student/group of students since the original allocation?	Please explain why the class SNA(s) support is/are **not** sufficient to meet the care needs of this student/group of students
1.					
2.					

Please make further copies as required

(SENO to complete)   **OBSERVATION RECORD**

County:	*School:*	*Roll Number:*
Date of visit to the school:		Category of Assessed Disability: _____
Student's name: Date of Birth: PPS No.: Student's class level:		Date of Professional Assessment _____

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED

Care needs specified in professional's report:

Care needs observed during school visit:

☐   Significant impairment of physical function.
☐   Assistance with feeding, toileting and personal care.
☐   Mobility and access issues.
☐   Behaviour dangerous to self or others. *(Attach copies of incident reports)*
☐   Communication and social difficulties which seriously inhibit capacity to relate to others, understand or control their environment.
☐   Assistance required with Assistive Technology.
☐   Assistance required boarding and alighting buses.
☐   Classroom withdrawal for safety or medical reasons.
☐   Other. _____

Evidence of Care needs reported by staff:

Level of independence observed:

☐   student attends to lunch, personal care independently
☐   student behaved appropriately in class/yard.
☐   student communicated needs to supervising adult.
☐   student participated appropriately in class.
☐   Student used Assistive Technology independently
☐   Other:_____

Note: Reviewer should consider if an allocation of SNA support will serve to enhance or diminish a student's

inclusion in class activities and access to education.

For example, consider how an allocation of SNA support will affect opportunities to

- **acquire independence skills,**
- **develop language skills through interaction with other students,**
- **engage in age-appropriate socialisation with peers,**
- **to develop study skills,**
- **develop organisations skills for work or life,**
- **develop self confidence and self-reliance**

_____

DECISION

Based on *all* the information made available to me, I am of the view that this student requires access to SNA

support: ☐   ☐

Specify:

Yes   No

If "no" please specify why: _____

LEVEL OF SUPPORT –

☐ **Individual Access to SNA support**

☐ **Access to shared SNA support**

☐ **Number of hours recommended:** _____

What is the school's plan in terms of expected outcomes and diminishing care needs?

REVIEW DATE:

Checklist for Observation

☐ **Professional Report(s)**   ☐ **conversation with parent(s)**   ☐ **conversation with princip**

☐ **conversation with class teacher**   ☐ **conversation with SNA**   ☐ **incident book/repor**

PARENT(S) VIEW:

CONCLUDING COMMENTS: *(may include duration/location of observation if relevant)*

Signed:

Date: