



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

## **Special Needs Assistant Allocation 2024/25**

### **1. Purpose of this Circular and background**

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of arrangements for the allocation of special needs assistant (SNA) support to mainstream classes in primary and post primary schools for the 2024/25 school year. SNA support is one of the central elements to the successful inclusion of students with additional care needs in education, including mainstream classes, special schools and special classes. The aim of this circular is to provide certainty of SNA provision for students in mainstream classes and their families, SNAs, and schools, for the 2024/25 school year.

### **2. The Role of the SNA**

This Circular outlines arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in mainstream classes for the 2024/25 school year. The Circular does not change the role of the SNA nor does it amend the existing employment terms and conditions of SNAs. This Circular should be read in conjunction with existing SNA Circulars. The role of the SNA continues to be; to support the care needs of students; to assist classroom teachers and special education teachers and to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of DES Circular 30/2014

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

### **3. Role of Schools to Manage SNA Support**

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

It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Primary care needs should continue to be interpreted in the context of Circular 30/2014

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

SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or ETB in accordance with Circular 0071/2011

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2011/71.pdf> The work of SNAs should, at the principal's or teacher's direction, be focussed on supporting the particular care needs of the student/s and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.

The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified teachers to provide additional teaching to students with special educational needs.

### **4. Supports available to schools and SNAs**

The NCSE provides a comprehensive programme of teacher professional development seminars each academic year covering a variety of special educational needs topics and includes training in the deployment of SNA support. Schools are encouraged to identify their training needs each academic year and access NCSE TPL seminars which have been developed to address the unique training needs of principals and teachers working with students with special educational needs. The full range of NCSE TPL support can be found at <https://ncse.ie/tpl>

The NCSE provide a toolkit for schools to assist in the review, reprioritisation and redeployment of SNA support. The toolkit is available at <https://ncse.ie/special-needs-assistants>.

The NCSE toolkit is based on the continuum of support and contains templates aligned to the Student Support Plan and supports schools in the process of personalised pupil planning as required in Circular 30/2014

In addition, the NCSE SENO is available to schools to provide support and advice in relation to the deployment of SNA support and the role of the SNA.

NCSE guidelines for schools will be available shortly to support them with the review process.

## **5. Allocation Arrangements for 2024/25 School Year**

The following arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2024/25 will apply:

- a) The SNA allocations for mainstream classes in schools on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024 will be the initial allocation for the 2024/2025 school year.
- b) Where a school identifies a significant increase in care needs, additional resources can be provided to support the school, following a request for review by the school with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).
- c) A process for schools where they consider their SNA allocation to be in excess of the required care needs will be administered through the NCSE. Schools should contact their local NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) to commence this process.
- d) Any review by the NCSE can result in one of the following outcomes:
  - i. No change in the level of care need identified (and no change in the resultant SNA allocation)

- ii. Increase in the level of care need identified (which if significant would see an increase in the SNA allocations to the school)
- iii. Decrease in level of care need identified in the school (which if significant would result in a reduction in SNA allocations as the care needs of the children could be appropriately supported with less resources than are currently allocated). The SNA allocation will be adjusted at the end of the relevant school year.
- iv. The NCSE will undertake a rolling programme of reviews of SNA mainstream allocations which is strategic in nature and ensures that SNAs are allocated to schools with students who have the greatest level of significant care needs.

The NCSE may also recommend for a school to attend Professional Learning on SNA deployment organised through the NCSE TPL calendar.

## **6. Appeal of the outcome of the SNA Review**

The NCSE has developed an appeal mechanism for schools that are not satisfied with the outcome of the SNA Review. Local special educational needs organisers (SENOs) will provide information and clarification to schools on the outcome where requested.

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

## **7. Independent Examination of the Appeal Process**

Where a school is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal on the basis that the process was not followed, it can refer the matter to the Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC) which comprises an independent chairperson, a representative of school management bodies and a parent representative. The decision of the AAC is final.

Further information on this process will be available on the NCSE website following the publication of the NCSE guidelines.

## **8. Communications**

The NCSE will be writing out to all schools to advise them of their SNA allocation in the coming days, following which details will be published on the NCSE website.

**Frank Hanlon  
Principal Officer  
Special Education**

**May 2024**