



**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 2023/24**

### **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 2023/24 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 2023/24 school year.

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

This Circular outlines arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in mainstream classes for the 2023/24 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. Primary care needs should continue to be interpreted in the context of Circular 30/2014

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

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. Allocation Arrangements for 2023/24 School Year**

Over the past two years an average of 1,000 additional SNAs have been allocated to schools, based on confirmed care needs. In 2022/23 school year, 1,165 additional SNA posts were allocated to schools and for the 2023/24 school year an additional 1,195 SNA posts will be allocated to schools which demonstrate a need for additional care supports. In mainstream classes, in excess of 1,050 SNAs have been allocated to schools over the last three years.

The following arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2023/24 will apply:

- a) The SNA allocations for mainstream classes in schools on 31 May 2023 will be the initial allocation for the 2023/2024 school year. However, where a school identifies a significant increase in care needs, additional resources can be provided to support the school, following engagement by the school with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). This will provide

greater certainty for schools in terms of resource planning for the 2023/24 school year.

- b) There is a process for schools, whereby if they consider their SNA allocation is in excess of the required care needs, to engage with the NCSE. Schools should contact their local NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) to commence the process.
- c) The exceptional review process undertaken by the NCSE will remain in place throughout the 2023/24 school year. As part of this, schools can seek a review of their SNA allocations which will result in one of the following outcomes:
  - i. No change in the level of care need identified (and no change in the resultant SNA allocation);
  - ii. Increase in the level of care need identified (which if significant would see an increase in the SNA allocations to the 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 targeted 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. Full details of the process will be issued to all schools prior to the start of the 2023/24 school year by the NCSE.

## **5. Appeal of the outcome of the Exceptional Review**

The NCSE has developed an appeal mechanism for schools that are not satisfied with the outcome of the Exceptional Review. Local special educational needs

organisers (SENOs) will provide information and clarification to schools on the outcome where requested.

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

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

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

## **7. Communications**

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

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