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**An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills**

**Circular 0030/2020**

**To: Management Authorities of all Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools**

**Special Needs Assistant Allocations for the 2020/21 School Year for Mainstream  
Classes in Primary and Post Primary Schools**

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of revised arrangements for the allocation of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support to mainstream classes in primary and post primary schools for the 2020/21 school year.

SNA support is one of the central elements to the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs in education, including mainstream classes, special schools and special classes.

The aim of this circular is provide certainty of SNA provision for students in mainstream classes, their schools, families and SNAs for 2020/21.

## **2. Background**

In December 2019, Government approved the national roll out of a new frontloading model for the allocation of Special Needs Assistant (SNAs) support to primary and post-primary schools for students in mainstream classes, with effect from the 2020/21 school year, as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM).

Unfortunately, due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 public health crisis, it is not possible to implement the new allocation model this year. Accordingly, a decision has been taken to defer the implementation of the new allocation model until the 2021/22 school

year. This will allow sufficient time for the necessary planning for the implementation of SIM and for the associated professional development to take place.

In light of this, revised arrangements for the allocation of SNA support for 2020/21 are being put in place as an interim measure for a period on one year.

### **3. Interim Allocation Arrangements for 2020/21 School Year**

The following arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2020/21 will apply:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations will be frozen, from the date of issue of this Circular, and will automatically rollover into the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school will receive an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of this Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts can continue in these posts for the next school year in the normal way.
- Schools may apply to the NCSE for additionality where they can demonstrate that the current allocation does not meet additional care needs within the mainstream classes in the school. Applications for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs, which cannot be catered for within existing allocations, will be dealt with by way of a review process, as set out under section 4 below.
- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, will not be necessary for this process.
- The role of the SNA to support the care needs of students in mainstream classes, as set out in Circular 0030/2014, remains unchanged.
- SNA allocations for special classes and schools are not impacted by this interim arrangement and SNA provision in these special education settings will continue to be allocated in the normal way.

### **4. Exceptional Review of Mainstream SNA Allocation 2020/21**

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

Following such a review and reprioritisation, it is expected that a small number of schools, e.g. developing schools, may not have a sufficient SNA allocation to meet the needs of their students. These schools can apply to the NCSE for an Exceptional Review of their allocation.

Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE will endeavour to respond to all applications for exceptional review received prior to 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020 by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and in that regard, it will prioritise applications from schools with no current SNA allocation and developing schools. Applications for an

Exceptional Review received after 22 May 2020 will continue to be processed once all other applications have been completed.

The exceptional review process for mainstream allocations will be available to schools throughout the 2020/21 school year.

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

The NCSE has developed an appeal mechanism for schools who are not satisfied with the outcome of the Exceptional Review. Local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) will provide information and clarification to schools on the outcome where required.

Where schools wish to appeal the outcome of the review, they must do so using the prescribed form provided by the NCSE.

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;
- review the information on which the Exceptional Review decision was made.

When the appeal is complete, the outcome will be communicated to the school.

Detailed information on the exceptional review appeals process and grounds for appeal is published on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

## **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 [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

## **7. Medical and Professional Assessments**

As detailed above, a diagnosis of disability and/or professional report will not be required in order for a student to access SNA support. However, medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a student's needs, including their care needs, the nature of difficulties that they have, and to inform relevant interventions.

Where parents have assessments or medical reports which outline the nature of care needs that students may have arising from a disability or special educational need, they should still bring these to the attention of schools in order to assist schools in planning how best to support the student.

The NCSE guidance on seeking an exceptional review provides further information on the types of information and supporting documentation that may be used where such assessments/reports are not available.

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

This Circular provides for temporary arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in mainstream classes for the 2020/21 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 one to support the care needs of students and to assist classroom teachers, and special education teachers, to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of DES Circular 30/2014. The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified special education teachers who may assist the subject/class teacher to provide additional teaching to students with special educational needs.

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

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

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.

## **10. Introduction of the Frontloaded SNA Allocation Model**

Further advice will issue in the course of the 2020/21 school year on the introduction of the frontloaded model with effect from September 2021. This will outline the overall approach, including the professional development and other supports to be made available for schools and teachers.

## **11. Information or queries on this Circular**

If you have any queries with regards to this Circular please contact:

[special\\_education@education.gov.ie](mailto:special_education@education.gov.ie)

This circular can be accessed on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

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**24 April, 2020**