



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 2025/26

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 2025/26 school year. SNA support is one of the central elements to the successful inclusion of students with additional significant primary 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 2025/26 school year.

This circular also sets out arrangements for the review of SNA allocation and deployment within schools, as part of a whole of school resource.

The Department also wishes to advise of a planned redeployment scheme for SNAs which is scheduled to commence in the 2025/26 school year.

2. The Role of the SNA

This Circular does not change the role of the SNA nor does it amend the existing employment terms and conditions of SNAs. The role of the SNA continues to be; to support the care needs of students; to assist classroom 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

<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 regularly review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of care 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. Allocation Arrangements for 2025/26 School Year

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will be contacting each school in the coming days and outlining each school's initial allocation for the upcoming school year.

5. NCSE SNA Reviews 2025/26

The NCSE will undertake SNA reviews during the 2025/26 school year. The reviews will be a holistic examination of the care needs in all settings within the continuum of provision in a school so as to ensure that SNAs are allocated to schools with students who have the greatest level of significant care needs.

All SNA posts in a school will be subject to review and the review will encompass the primary care needs of the student cohort along with a review of the deployment approach in the school to ensure it is appropriate and aligns with existing policy and the training needs of the school community.

The following outlines some examples of additional factors (not exhaustive) that would be taken into account when reviews are being undertaken.

- Prioritisation of schools which have not had a recent SNA review.
- Students transitioning to special class or special school placements from mainstream, particularly from within that school.
- Schools who have established or are establishing special classes.
- Changing demographics in the catchment area of the school,

This will enable the NCSE to compile a real time analysis of SNA deployment across the education system and the requirement nationally for SNA support in schools.

The NCSE will apply a very intensive focus on SNA reviews from the 1st of Sept 2025 for two primary reasons:

- 1) To ensure that any potential changes to the SNA posts in a school is flagged as early as possible to allow schools to plan in a timely and efficient way for the 2026/27 school year.
- 2) To support the initial introduction of an SNA redeployment scheme as outlined in section 6 below.

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 to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

In cases where schools consider they have a reduced level of care need and therefore the care needs of children in their school can be met from a reduced allocation, there will be a separate process administered through the NCSE. Schools should contact their local NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) to commence this process.

All SNA reviews when completed by the NCSE 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).

In addition to the three outcomes listed above, the NCSE may also recommend for a school to avail of appropriate training opportunities such as Professional Learning

on SNA deployment organised through the NCSE or to avail of alternative supports and/or training such as access to behavioural interventions, training to support universal design for learning, understanding neurodiversity and ensuring a regulation first neuro affirmative approach.

NCSE guidelines for schools will be available shortly to support the review process and will be available via the NCSE website.

6. Redeployment Scheme

As outlined in section 5 above where the NCSE SNA review identifies a reduction in care needs in a school this may result in a surplus of SNA(S) posts. It is crucial that this allocation is transferred to a school where an increased level of primary care needs has been identified.

It is important in these cases that a SNA(s) has the opportunity to be redeployed to a school where a vacant post arises.

This will facilitate retention of skilled and experienced SNAs in our education sector to support the best outcome for children with significant care needs in our schools. Work has commenced on a redeployment scheme for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). The Redeployment scheme will be operated by the (NCSE). It is intended that the SNA redeployment scheme will commence in the next school year to provide an opportunity to redeploy SNAs as the need arises for the start of the 2026/27 school year. The SNA redeployment scheme does not impact recruitment for this coming September.

When this scheme is introduced, it will be supported by specific training and webinars for schools.

7. 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>.

8. 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.

9. 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 the bottom of the page at the following link [SNA Review \(Mainstream\) – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service](#)

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.

10. Communications

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

The NCSE will also publish guidelines for schools in the coming weeks to outline both the review process and relevant timelines for 2025/26

Special Education

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