



Circular No: 0072/2025

To: Managerial Authorities, Principals and Teachers of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.

Enhancement to Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme provision

1. Purpose of this Circular and background

The purpose of this Circular, which supersedes Circular 0069/2022 and Circular 0070/2022 is to advise schools of the details of and the revised criteria to access support under the enhanced Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme. The scheme enables the provision of Irish Sign Language in-school support for students in mainstream schools who are Deaf and whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL.

The circular confirms details of how the scheme is being implemented, and outlines revisions to the criteria for the inclusion of students in the next phase of the scheme. The application process for the scheme is also detailed below.

2. Implementation of the enhanced scheme

The scheme supports the inclusion of students attending mainstream schools who are Deaf and whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL. It is designed to ensure that the students with the greatest level of need are supported through the scheme. The scheme is being implemented on a phased basis to allow for learning and improvements to be applied to the scheme following review. The review of the first phase of the scheme has informed its further development.

This scheme is in addition to the existing provision in place to support Deaf students whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL. This is in the form of the role of special needs assistant with ISL competency to support students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL. It is anticipated over time, the role of the special needs assistant with ISL competency will be replaced by the ISL Specialist Classroom Support (ISL-SCS).

Through the scheme, two roles were introduced to the education system to support students and the wider school communities. These are:

1. ISL- Specialist Classroom Support (ISL-SCS) role.
2. ISL Adviser role.



3. ISL Specialist Classroom Support

It is recognised that the primary educator in a school is the class teacher, who is qualified and registered with the Teaching Council. The ISL roles were put in place for students who are Deaf and whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL to support them in:

- Accessing the curriculum
- Developing and enhancing their ISL competency
- Participating in school life
- Achieving best educational outcomes, positive learner experiences
- Making progress in line with their ability.

The role of the ISL-SCS is to support the work of the class teachers and special education teachers and to complement other teaching and care supports provided for the students who meet the criteria, outlined at paragraph four below.

The focus of the ISL-SCS will be targeted to meet the needs of students attending a recognised mainstream school whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL and who meet the criteria outlined below.

The ISL-SCS works under the direction of the class/subject teacher and collaborates with the class/subject teacher, the special education Teacher (SET) and parents/guardians in the development, review, and implementation of Student Support Plans.

Collaboration at whole-school and class levels is required so that the role and responsibilities of class teachers, special education teacher(s) and the ISL-SCS are agreed and understood in order to create the most productive and inclusive learning environment possible for the child or young person.

The ISL-SCS takes the time, in collaboration with the relevant teacher(s) to understand and process the content, the context and the messages being delivered by the teacher thereby mediating the curriculum for the student whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL.

The ISL-SCS will convey the spirit and content of the communication occurring in the classroom to the student. They will mediate the curriculum for the student using ISL to improve the student's language and communication



skills and enhance their active engagement and participation with learning and school life.

4. Criteria for accessing the support of an ISL-SCS

The scheme is being expanded to support those students attending a mainstream school and who meet the following specific criteria:

- Confirmation that the student is Deaf after a medical assessment or an assessment for hearing aids, and,
- That Irish Sign Language is deemed the primary mode of communication and language for the student.

This confirmation can be provided by the Cochlear Implant Programme and/or a speech and language therapist, and in conjunction with the NCSE Visiting Teacher Service.

In the exceptional circumstances where two students in one classroom require the support of an ISL-SCS it is envisaged that one ISL-SCS will support both students.

5. Application process for ISL-SCS support for a student

Schools are required to follow the process outlined below in order to avail of the services of an ISL-SCS:

- School makes contact with the local special education needs organiser (SENO) for general advice
- School requests application form from isl@ncse.ie
- School completes application form and submits by email - this application must be supported by a report from an SLT and/or Cochlear Implant Team as outlined in the criteria above. The application will also be supported by the relevant visiting teacher.
- NCSE processes the application and approves the application as appropriate.

6. ISL Adviser Role

ISL Adviser is an employee of the NCSE and will be a member of the NCSE regional team. They will focus on the development of an inclusive environment



for students, which is achieved by upskilling the whole school community in ISL.

The primary functions of the ISL Adviser are varied. The ISL Adviser will:

- Support the development of a whole-school approach, in collaboration with school staff and the Board of Management, to meeting the needs of students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL.
- Provide a programme of professional learning for all members of the school community and support that community (including teachers, ISL-SCS, special needs assistants, other school staff and a student's peers) to meet the needs of students whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL.
- Support and upskill the school community (teachers, ISL-SCS, SNAs etc.) in ISL to enable them to support students to achieve best educational outcomes, have positive learner experiences and to assist this cohort of students to make progress in line with their abilities.
- Support the school and other professionals in planning for the effective transition of students using from one education setting to the next

Only ISL Advisers who are appropriately qualified with a relevant NFQ Level 8 qualification and who are fluent in ISL are appointed to this role. These are key requirements of the scheme.

7. Application process for ISL Adviser support

Where a school believes they can benefit from the support of an ISL Adviser in developing their approaches to meeting the needs of students whose primary mode of communication and language is ISL the application process is as follows:

- Schools apply for the ISL Adviser through the NCSE website.
[NCSE School Portal – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service](#)

8. Job Requirements

Given the importance of the role of ISL-SCS, the following requirements must be met by all applicants:



- A relevant National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 8 qualification or higher.
- A qualification in ISL based on the Common European Language Framework or equivalent
- A high level of proficiency in Irish Sign Language and an appropriate level of proficiency in English/ Irish
- Excellent oral language communication and presentation skills and the ability to write to a very high standard.

This is of critical importance to the Department and the NCSE and are key requirements of the scheme. Details of the job specification can be found on the NCSE website.

9. Operation of the enhanced scheme

The NCSE is responsible for coordinating supports for all students with special educational needs and the delivery of these new supports will be managed by the NCSE.

The ISL-SCS will be recruited by and an employee of the NCSE and will be deployed in a recognised mainstream school for the duration of the school year. The school principal or another person acting on behalf of the principal will manage the day-to-day work of the ISL-SCS. Guidelines are available to assist the school principal in this role.

The ISL Adviser will be an employee of the NCSE and will support the relevant schools that apply for their services.

This circular can be accessed on the Department's website: gov.ie - Special Education Section (www.gov.ie)

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