

A NEW MODEL FOR ALLOCATING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

A better and more equitable way



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS

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A better and more equitable way



INTRODUCTION

A new model for allocating Special Education Teachers to mainstream schools has been introduced from September 2017.

Full details of the new allocation model are available at:

http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013_2017.pdf

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THE NEW MODEL ALLOCATES TEACHERS TO SCHOOLS BASED ON:

1. A Baseline allocation which reflects school size to ensure that every school has up-front resources to enable it to be an inclusive school and to put in place additional teaching support for students who need it.

And

2. Each school's educational profile based on three broad areas:

- the number of students with complex special educational needs
- the results of standardised tests
- the social context of each school taking account of disadvantage and gender

Allocations have now been made to all schools on the basis of their school profile.

THE NEW ALLOCATION MODEL WILL BRING ABOUT A NUMBER OF IMPROVEMENTS FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

- Schools are now provided with the necessary resources in advance so that all children with Special Educational Needs can be enrolled to schools and access additional supports on a needs basis.
- Parents will no longer have to source or pay for assessments in order for their child to receive extra teaching support in school and schools won't have to wait for these assessments to give children the extra teaching support they need.

- Children do not have to be diagnosed with a particular condition to qualify for extra teaching assistance.
- The new model gives greater freedom to schools to give extra teaching help to the pupils who most need it, regardless of their diagnosis.
- Schools do not have to give a set amount of time to pupils based on their disability category. They can give the most assistance to the pupils who need the support most and allocate resources based on needs.
- Schools will support pupils in the whole class group, in small groups, and individually. They will support pupils in different ways, as needed.
- Schools will be frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports to those pupils who need it without delay.
- The combination of a baseline allocation based on school size and profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which takes into account the actual level of need of pupils in each school.
- The introduction of the model enables teachers and external professionals to focus on identification of need to inform intervention as opposed to focusing on assessments for resource allocation purposes.
- 900 new special education teachers are being provided for schools under the new model so there will be more special education teachers in schools.

WHY HAS THE ALLOCATION SYSTEM CHANGED?

An expert Working Group, led by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), examined the system of allocating additional special education teaching supports to schools and made a number of recommendations to make this fairer.

The full Working Group Report is available at:

<http://ncse.ie/policy-advice>

The NCSE Working Group Report recommended changes to the allocation system because –

Previous System	This was unfair because:
<p>All primary and post-primary schools received additional Learning Support Teachers, to help students with learning difficulties, on the basis of the number of class teachers or the number of students in each school.</p>	<p>The need for learning support can differ from school to school, but the old system did not take account of the school profile, as it was mostly just based on school size. The new system looks at the profile for the school as well.</p>
<p>The previous system required a formal diagnosis of disability before resource teaching support was provided.</p>	<p>Many students were on long waiting lists for a formal professional diagnosis of disability which could sometimes delay their access to additional special educational teaching support.</p>
<p>Some parents had to pay large sums of money for private consultants to diagnose their children.</p>	<p>Access to additional special education teaching support should be equitable and should not depend on a family's ability to pay for diagnostic services.</p>
<p>Every student with the same category of disability received the same level of resource teaching support, irrespective of age or ability.</p>	<p>Students within the same category of disability may have very different needs for support. For example, one student with a physical disability may have very significant physical needs, such as mobility and other difficulties which require a high level of support, while another student may use a wheelchair and has very little need for additional support.</p>
<p>Health and educational professionals take significant time to diagnose a child's disability.</p>	<p>The emphasis was on diagnosis to determine eligibility for additional teaching resources with less focus on interventions and monitoring of outcomes.</p>

SOME QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



1. How will I know if my child can access additional support in school and how much support should he/she get?

Individual schools are best placed to decide who needs the highest level of support based on their assessment and monitoring of the learning needs of pupils in their own school.

Guidelines have been issued to schools to support them in allocating resources to pupils on the basis of need.

This helps schools to identify pupils for support at three different levels:

- classroom level where the main person involved is the class/subject teacher
- school support level where additional support teachers are involved and
- school support plus level where children with more complex learning needs may have an individualised programme in place.

Parents can learn more about the Continuum of Support at:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf

Decisions on how special education teachers are used will be taken at school level. Through normal class work, homework and general class interaction and school based assessment teachers are able to identify the students who are in need of additional support.

Schools make the decision on the level of support required to meet an individual's need based on a range of factors, including academic performance, social interaction, participation etc.

The amount of additional support provided will vary from student to student.

Schools use their resources in many different ways to provide as much support as possible for students. Additional teaching support can be provided in the ordinary classroom by the class teacher or through team teaching with a support teacher. It can also be provided through small group teaching both inside and outside the classroom or one to one teaching.

The intention is always that students with the greatest level of need are provided with the greatest level of support and that support addresses the student's identified learning needs.

2. What does the continuum of support provide for?

Pupils require different levels of support depending on their identified educational needs.

The continuum of support process recognises that special educational needs occur on a scale, from mild to severe, and from temporary to long term.

The level of need that a pupil has will inform how much extra help they may receive and how they should receive it, whether as extra help in the classroom, in small groups, or individualised help if they have high levels of need.

3. How will a school know how much support to give individual pupils from the overall allocation?

Guidelines have been prepared to assist schools to:

- Identify pupils who require support
- Prioritise pupils with the greatest level of need for extra help
- Plan individualised learning programmes
- Monitor and record progress

These guidelines are available at:

<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf>

4. Will schools be able to do this?

As with any change, it is perfectly understandable that some parents may have concerns that this system will provide the support their child needs. In order to test the model, the Department of Education and Skills conducted a pilot project over the course of the 2015/16 school year. The project was reviewed by the Inspectorate who published an in-depth report of the outcomes.

Parents may wish to read the published review which is available at:

<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Review-of-the-Pilot-of-a-New-Model-for-Allocating-Teaching-Resources-for-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs.pdf>

The pilot showed that schools are able to work this way. It indicated that there was a strong desire on the part of schools to utilise their resources as effectively as possible to support pupils.

It also found that schools were willing to try new ways of working and engage with support services.

It found that there are many very good and innovative practices already occurring in schools and that many schools were already working this way.

Many schools have developed targeted intervention strategies to meet the needs of pupils and to use resources effectively to support pupils, based on learning needs, as envisaged by the model.

The guidelines endorse many of the good practices already taking place in schools and gives schools confidence to work in new ways.

5. How will school principals and teachers make decisions about my child's education?

Assessment is central to good teaching and teachers use school based assessment to identify their students' learning needs.

Schools and teachers already use their own professional judgement to make decisions about students' learning and how best to use teaching resources to support that learning – through in-class support, group support or one to one support. They will continue to do so under the new model.

Schools have also received guidance from the Department of Education and Skills that builds on the continuum of support guidelines and assists schools to make the most effective use of their additional teaching resources in a way that is fair to students and promotes good outcomes for them.

The new model is intended to ensure that schools are resourced to provide support to all students who need additional help without the requirement to have a diagnosed disability.

Professional reports will continue to be available for students where the need for such reports is clear for health, social, or educational reasons.

Parents with a concern regarding their child's level of development may continue to seek a referral to the appropriate service for consultation assessment and guidance.

Where a parent has an assessment for their child which notes that they have a particular special educational need, or disability, they should still bring this to the attention of the school, as it may assist the school to decide how best to support the child.

6. My son already has a diagnosis of disability - will he automatically receive additional support or keep the support he already has?

Your son will receive support under the new model based on his level of need in the school setting. Using the continuum of support process, the school will identify how his needs may be met.

Under the new model your child will receive teaching support based on their learning needs rather than on a diagnosis of disability – this may be the same level of support, more support or less support.

Research indicates that this is a better way to allocate support because a category of disability on its own tells us very little about the level or type of support that a child needs in school.

Most children who had previously been receiving additional support under the previous allocation model will continue to receive support in school.

Support can, however, be provided in a variety of ways, such as group work, or individual work.

While the manner of support may change from time to time, pupils who continue to require support will still receive it in school.

7. I think my daughter has scored below average on the standardised tests; will she get support under the new allocation model?

The new model changes the basis for allocating additional special education teachers to schools.

For the first time, every student who scores below average (below STen score 4 or 3) on a standardised test of reading or mathematics, or in the equivalent lower performing Junior Certificate grades at post primary level, is included in building the school's overall educational profile and its need for additional teaching support.

You can learn more about what a STen score is and what it means at:

<https://www.ncca.ie/en/resources/standardised-testing>

However, there are several reasons why your daughter might score below average on a standardised test. For example, your daughter could have had an 'off' day when the reading or mathematics test was administered or may not have understood the test instructions.

If this was the case, the test result doesn't give a true picture of her ability. On the other hand your daughter could have a real difficulty with reading or mathematics which the standardised test result has picked up.

The first job of the school is therefore to identify the reason for your daughter's score on the standardised test. This will be done through reviewing her work and general class interaction, talking with previous teachers and with her parents and comparing her current score with previous scores and with other test results.

If, after further investigation, the school concludes that your daughter's low score was caused by a particular learning need or difficulty, then the school will consult with you regarding the best means of supporting your daughter's learning.

The results of standardised tests assist your school to identify your daughter's learning needs and to provide the appropriate support for her.

8. How will my child access professional support or an assessment where this is needed?

The new model introduces a different way of allocating additional teachers to schools. It is not changing how children access professional support or an assessment where this is needed.

Schools have access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for consultation, assessment and support. Further information is available in the NEPS parent leaflet:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_parent_leaflet.pdf

Other professional assessment and support will continue to be available through the Health Service Executive (HSE).

9. The new model means that each school can decide itself how much support my child receives. What if, as a parent, I don't agree with the level of support being given to my child?

Schools always had a role in deciding the level of support that was provided to children with certain learning difficulties and certain special educational needs e.g. dyslexia.

We know that schools can do this well. This will be extended to cover all special educational needs. A category of disability, by itself, does not identify how much support a child should receive – two students, with the same disability can need completely different levels of support.

Schools use their own knowledge of their students to allocate teaching supports and they can also call on a wide number of support services to assist them.

Under the new model, schools will continue to receive guidance when making decisions about supporting students' learning needs.

Under the new model, schools are advised in the Guidelines to engage in educational planning, including careful monitoring of progress, to ensure the appropriate level of support is being given to the child. This provides the best process for determining the nature and level of support for any individual pupil.

However despite these measures, you, as a parent, might still have concerns with the level of support being given to your child.

In that case you should discuss this first with your child's class /subject teacher or his/her support teacher. You could also discuss these issues with the school principal and if necessary at a later point if you continue to have concerns with the Chairperson of your Board of Management.

10. Will teachers have to develop support plans and will they be required to involve parents?

Yes, it is recommended that schools develop support plans for students who are receiving additional support. At the moment, many teachers of students with special educational needs devise individual learning plans for their students, and in many cases parents are involved in agreeing targets and ways in which they can support their children's learning.

Students' support plans contain information about goals set, progress to date, and learning outcomes. Teachers use the Continuum of Support including Student Support Files to guide assessment, planning, teaching and review. Schools will continue this practice under the new model.

The level of detail in a student's support plan should match the level of the student's learning need. For example, the learning plans would be expected to be more detailed for the student who requires small group or individualised attention and less detailed for student receiving in-class support only. Parents and students should be involved, as much as possible, in the development of the plan.

11. Will resources be maintained at existing levels?

Resources are being increased. An additional 900 teaching posts have been allocated to schools to support the introduction of the new special education teaching model and to ensure that no school experiences a reduction in its allocation.

The new model is intended to provide a better and fairer way to distribute the special educational teacher posts to schools. It has not decreased the allocation for any school, while over 1300 schools received extra allocations based on their school's profiles.

12. What happens if more students with complex special educational needs arrive in my child's school after all the teacher posts have been allocated?

Your school will have the same level of additional teaching resources in place for two years.

Schools have told us that generally there is not much change in their profile over this period of time and that they welcome the stability that a two-year fixed allocation will give to their school in terms of their staffing.

The Department of Education and Skills already has a process in place to consider the needs of schools with very significant levels of annual growth in their student numbers.

However, the new model will also allow for some additional support to be provided to schools where unplanned and exceptional circumstances arise, which could not have been anticipated in the school's educational profile.

Schools will be supported in managing their special education teaching allocations in the first instance through additional training or assistance.

Only in very exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the schools profile has changed very significantly since the allocation was made to the school, may an additional allocation of hours be required to be made to the school.

13. If the school does not receive an extra resource for my child will they still be able to enrol my child?

Yes. All schools have been frontloaded with special educational needs teachers based on their school profile. This means that all schools have sufficient resources to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, including new entrants.

The allocations of special education teachers are being provided on the basis that no child will be refused enrolment on the grounds that schools do not have sufficient teaching resources to meet that child's needs.

If your child is refused enrolment to a school you may appeal this decision to a Section 29 Appeal Committee. Details of how you can appeal this decision are available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enroll/>

14. What reassurance can parents be given that the new allocation model will work?

A review of the pilot of the new allocation model which was carried out by the DES Inspectorate showed that the new allocation model does work.

One of the really important messages in the report related to a specific fear that parents whose children previously had resource hours allocated to them might not understand if there was a change to the way their child was supported in school or if their children didn't receive the full allocation of individual resource hours on a one to one basis.

In fact that didn't happen. School principals told the Inspectorate that, in almost all instances, parents understood the manner in which the school was deploying its resources when this was explained and discussed with them. The important thing was that their child's needs were understood and that appropriate interventions were being put in place in school.

The Department of Education and Skills and the NCSE sought to ensure that schools and principals were prepared for the introduction of the model by providing comprehensive guidelines which were designed to assist schools in identifying the children who are in need of additional support and attention.

While the Guidelines provide principals with the necessary guidance to help them make good decisions, it is also important that schools consult with parents around their children's needs, on what supports are being provided and when reviewing progress.

15. How should schools engage with parents?

The Guidelines for Schools on Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Schools provide guidance to schools on how they should engage with parents in relation to the new allocation model.

An important aspect of the revised allocation model is that additional teaching supports are provided according to identified needs, rather than being based on a diagnosis of disability.

This gives schools greater flexibility in how they allocate special education teaching resources.

Effective communication and engagement with parents is critically important in moving towards a needs-based approach to the allocation of additional teaching resources.

This is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their child's needs, support plan, and are involved in regular reviews of progress.

The Guidelines advise schools that good parental engagement is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

This should be recognised by schools and is seen in the many good practices and initiatives schools use to promote parental involvement. Parental engagement is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their children's needs and strengths, on the supports and strategies being developed to support their children, and when they are involved in regular reviews of progress.

The Continuum of Support process and use of planning through the Student Support File provide valuable opportunities to engage with parents and for schools and parents to work together to respond to the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

In addition to consultation around the individual needs of their child, parents also value receiving good information on the nature and type of the special educational needs provision available in the school.

Schools should, where relevant and possible, consult with parents when developing and reviewing policies relating to the education of children with special educational needs.

This helps to ensure that parents understand the school's approaches and better enables them to support their children in transitioning through the school. It also brings benefits to schools as parents may be able to give schools some useful advice about their child's needs.

